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## Prehistoric Burial Sites Unearthed in Mulugu

A team from the Department of Heritage, Government of Telangana, has identified a significant cluster of prehistoric burial sites in Mulugu district, following information provided by residents of Motlagudem village. Acting on the directions of Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, a technical team led by Acharya Arjun Rao (Director), Dr P. Nagaraju (Deputy Director) and A. Raju (OSD) conducted a field visit to the area.

## Amaravati Bill a 'Win for Farmers', Says Renuka Chowdhury

Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury on Thursday said that the introduction of the bill granting statutory status to Amaravati in the Rajya Sabha represents a significant victory for farmers in the region. Participating in the discussion, she pointed to prolonged uncertainty over the capital of Andhra Pradesh, which she said had adversely affected investment in the state. "There has been ambiguity regarding the capital for the past 12 years, leading to a withdrawal of investments," she noted. She also took aim at the Central Government, accusing it of failing to honour commitments made during the state's bifurcation.

## Russian Deputy PM meets PM Modi

New Delhi, April 2

India and Russia on Thursday signalled a renewed push to deepen their time-tested strategic partnership, with a flurry of high-level engagements spanning executive, economic and parliamentary domains, underscoring the resilience of bilateral ties amid a shifting global order.

technology and industrial partnerships — areas that have remained central to India-Russia engagement despite geopolitical headwinds.

Parallel to the executive-level talks, parliamentary diplomacy gained fresh momentum as a high-level Russian delegation led by Vladimir Yakushev called on Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla at Parliament House.

Welcoming the delegation, Birla emphasised that India-Russia parliamentary ties are poised to deepen through "renewed dialogue and cooperation", highlighting the enduring nature of a partnership rooted in mutual trust and strategic convergence.

He pointed to sustained high-level political exchanges between Prime Minister Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin as a key driver of bilateral momentum, opening new avenues for cooperation in both traditional and emerging sectors.

Significantly, both countries underscored the importance of leveraging multilateral parliamentary platforms such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, BRICS parliamentary forum and the G20 to address global challenges through coordinated legislative diplomacy.

Yakushev described the India-Russia strategic partnership as "of utmost importance" to Moscow, reaffirming Russia's commitment to expanding cooperation across trade, energy and technology sectors. He also extended an invitation to Birla to visit Russia and resume formal parliamentary exchanges.

## Naidu asks officials to prioritise small contractors

Amaravati: Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday reviewed the clearance of pending bills inherited from the previous government, focusing on dues to employees, retirees, and contractors. The Chief Minister directed that small contractors be given priority in bill settlements, stressing the need to ease financial pressure on those dependent on timely government payments.

At a meeting with Finance Department officials, the Chief Minister sought details on the status of pending payments and the implementation of previously issued directives for settling employee-related dues.

The Chief Minister directed that small contractors be given priority in bill settlements, stressing the need to ease financial pressure on those dependent on timely government payments.

Officials informed him that payments are being processed based on fund availability after completing preliminary groundwork.

Officials told Naidu that measures have been initiated to release pending bills totalling Rs7,358 crore. Of this, Rs 1,848 crore in Provident Fund arrears has already been credited directly to employees' accounts. In addition, Rs76 crore under the Group Life Insurance scheme has been disbursed, benefitting 4,793 individuals. The Chief Minister was given to understand that payments are underway for Rs3,411 crore in gratuity arrears, Rs1,800 crore towards pending leave encashment for retired employees, and Rs223 crore relating to surrendered leave benefits in the Police Department. These dues are expected to be cleared within

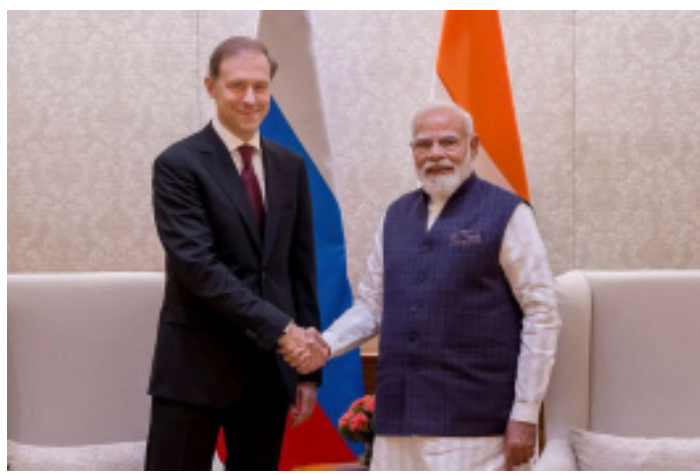


the next two days. Officials described the disbursement as one of the largest single-tranche releases for employees after the one for the 'Thaliki Vandanam' scheme, aimed at providing immediate relief.

The Chief Minister directed officials to ensure that all categories of pending bills are cleared in a time-bound manner, prioritising employee-related dues while aligning payments with available financial resources.

During the review, officials briefed the Chief Minister on issues faced by employees during the previous administration, including delays in accessing their own funds. The discussion also touched upon concerns raised earlier regarding diversion of employee funds and related disputes.

Naidu also reviewed pending payments to contractors who had executed works and supplied materials to government departments. Officials said Rs614 crore in arrears has been cleared for small-scale contractors.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov in New Delhi, as the two sides advanced discussions under the framework of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation.

The IGC meeting, co-chaired by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Manturov, focused on expanding collaboration across key sectors including trade, energy,

## Defence exports up by 62%, reach Rs 38,000 crore

New Delhi, April 2

Export of defence equipment, items and systems touched an all-time high of Rs 38,424 crore in the financial year 2025-26, amounting to a rise of Rs 14,802 crore (62.66 per cent), over the previous fiscal's exports of Rs 23,622 crore.

Defence public-sector undertakings (DPSUs) and the private sector have contributed 54.84 per cent and 45.16 per cent, respectively, to the exports, the Ministry of Defence said on Thursday.

The growth in defence exports has happened even as India continues to be the world's second-largest importer of weapons. It accounted for 8.3 per cent of global arms sales for a five-year block (2021-2025), according to a report titled, Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2025, released last month by international think-tank, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

On Thursday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh lauded the export performance and added that India was marching ahead towards becoming a global manufacturing hub for defence equipment.

Defence PSUs' exports surged by 151 per cent in comparison to the previous year, while private firms also recorded an increase of 14 per cent. In terms of value of contribution, the private sector accounted for Rs 17,353 crore worth of defence exports, while DPSUs contributed Rs 21,071 crore. Their respective figures in the previous financial year stood at Rs 15,233 crore and Rs 8,389 crore.

The figure indicates an increase by around three times in the last five years. The Ministry of Defence said, "The rise in exports highlights the increasing global



acceptance of Indian-made defence products and the sector's growing integration into the international supply chains."

India is exporting defence equipment to more than 80 countries as of FY2025-26, while the number of Indian exporters has reached 145.



## Will bomb Iran back to stone age: Trump

WASHINGTON, APRIL 2

US President Donald Trump has issued a fresh threat against Iran, saying it will be hit "very badly" over the next two-three weeks if there is no peace deal.

He said the Strait of Hormuz would open naturally after the conflict, indicating that the opening of the critical waterway — impacting crude and gas prices — was not an immediate military objective for Washington DC.

Another European country, Austria, has denied the US permission to use its airspace for military operations against Iran. Italy, Spain and France have already barred their airspace.

Trump, during an address to the nation on Wednesday night, dwelled on the ongoing Operation Epic Fury against Iran, saying, "We are on track to complete all military objectives shortly, very shortly. We are going to hit them extremely hard over the next two-three weeks."

The US, he said, would continue until the objectives were fully achieved. "We are going to bring them back to the stone age where they belong. During this period of time, if deals are not made, the US has eyes on key targets, Trump said, adding that "if there is no deal, we are going to hit all their power plants. Very hard and probably simultaneously".

Reacting to Trump's threat of bombing Iran back to the stone age, Tehran termed his remarks "ignorance, not strength", adding that it was 7,000-year-old civilisation and "cannot be destroyed by bombing".

The Iranian mission to the UN in New York said, "Iran's civilisation spans more than 7,000 years, whereas the US is barely 250 years old."

Trump, however, said discussions were going on. Iran's Foreign Minister Sayed Abbas Araghchi had yesterday acknowledged receiving direct messages from Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff.

On the blockade of Hormuz by Iran that has led to a spike in crude oil and gas prices, Trump chided the nations who source oil from the Persian Gulf saying, "Go to the strait and just take it, use it for yourself...the hard part is done, so it should be easy".

He said, "In any case, when the conflict is over, the strait will open up naturally. It'll just open up naturally."

"So to those countries that can't get fuel, buy oil from the US. We have plenty," the US President said.

On Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium, Trump said if Iran tried to get near the nuclear dust (enriched uranium), "we have it under intense satellite, surveillance and control. If we see them make a move...we will hit them very hard."

French President Emmanuel Macron has said the US-Israeli attacks on Iran will not resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, calling for diplomacy instead. "If there is no framework for diplomatic and technical negotiations, the situation can deteriorate again in a few months or a few years," said Macron.

The French President also dismissed a proposed military operation to open the Strait of Hormuz, saying it was "unrealistic".

In Washington DC, Trump, speaking about the Iranian regime, said "a regime change was not our goal, we never said change, but regime change has occurred because their leaders are dead". The new group is less radical and much more reasonable.

The US, he said, had not hit Iran's oil "even though that's the easiest target" because it would not give them even a small chance of survival or rebuilding. He slammed the Iranian regime, saying they continued their quest for nuclear weapons. "They wanted to produce as many missiles as possible and with the longest range possible," he said.

"They had no intention of bending, they pursued nuclear weapons. They were also rapidly building a stockpile of conventional and ballistic missiles," Trump said.

Trump said many Americans were concerned over the recent rise and gas prices.

Meanwhile, the commander of the US Central Command, Brad Cooper, released a brief statement reiterating the US stance on its military operations in Iran. "We are making undeniable progress," Cooper was quoted as saying in a CENTCOM post on X.

## Parties welcome Amaravati as sole capital of AP: HM Anitha



Anakapalli: Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha mentioned that political parties across India are extending their support to Amaravati as the rightful and sole capital.

Addressing the media in Anakapalli on Thursday, the minister highlighted the extraordinary resilience of Amaravati farmers, who waged a relentless battle for nearly 1,631 days. She noted that their struggle was marked by immense hardships and repeated humiliation, yet their determination never wavered.

Anitha lauded the farmers' spirit, calling it a symbol of courage and democratic resistance. She asserted that with legal sanctity now secured for Amaravati, the capital status is irreversible and cannot be altered by any political force.

Recalling the historic foundation-laying ceremony of Amaravati, the Home Minister spoke about how sacred waters from temples across the country were brought to the site. "Amaravati is not just a capital city, it is a symbol of heritage, faith and collective aspiration," she remarked.

Further, the Home Minister criticised former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for making uninformed statements regarding Amaravati. She alleged that his remarks have become increasingly meaningless, drawing public ridicule, and claimed that people are no longer considering his words seriously.

Speaking on the occasion, District In-charge Minister Kollu Ravindra and Assembly Speaker Ch Ayyanna Patrudu expressed immense delight as Parliament approved the bill granting legal status to Amaravati as the sole capital of Andhra Pradesh.

# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### India's undertrial crisis demands urgent prison reforms

An alarming 70% of India's prisoners are undertrials — most of them languishing in jails for periods beyond the prescribed punishment applicable for cases they are charged with. This exposes serious lacunae in the criminal justice system. No wonder India's prisons are largely overcrowded. The sub-human conditions in several prisons often drive many undertrials to suicide. Several studies have suggested that delays in investigation, a shortage of judges, and lack of access to legal aid due to poverty are the main reasons why undertrials end up spending a long time in prisons. There are 3.6 crore pending criminal cases in district courts, 17.5 lakh cases in high courts and 14,667 cases in the Supreme Court. The seriousness of the problem can be gauged from the fact that the judge-to-population ratio in India is estimated at 21 judges per million people, which is less than half of what the Law Commission recommended in its 120th report. Against this backdrop, the apex court's recent observation that "incarceration without trial amounts to punishment" must serve as a wake-up call for policymakers to take up prison reforms. The Supreme Court made some scathing observations while granting bail to an accused who spent two years in jail awaiting trial. The court has rightly reaffirmed a foundational principle: liberty cannot be held hostage to procedural delays. Earlier in March, the Delhi High Court gave bail to two men accused in a case under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), observing that they had already been behind bars for over four years.

### One Rule for Asifabad, Another for Mancherial — Is This Administrative Negligence?

Indian Chronicle. Jade Srinivas. April, 02. The newly implemented "Mana Isuka Vahanam" (sand booking) website/app, which came into effect from April 01, is drawing strong criticism in Asifabad district. Instead of benefiting the public, the system is reportedly creating serious difficulties, especially for people living in remote, tribal, and backward areas. A major concern is the lack of awareness. Authorities have introduced the new digital system without conducting proper awareness programs at the ground level. As a result, many people — particularly farmers, laborers, and tractor owners — are struggling to understand how to use the app, complete online procedures, or obtain the required Demand Draft (DD). Another key issue is the huge disparity in DD charges between districts. In Asifabad district, the DD for one sand tractor is fixed at ₹775, whereas in the neighboring Mancherial district, it is only ₹400. This significant difference has raised serious questions about fairness and equality. People are asking why two districts within the same state are being treated differently. Asifabad is already considered a backward district where many people face financial hardships. Imposing higher charges in such an area places an additional burden on the public. Small contractors, farmers, and daily wage workers are the worst affected, as they cannot afford such high costs. This situation has led to growing dissatisfaction among the public. Many are questioning whether this reflects negligence on the part of district authorities. Concerns are being raised about whether decisions are being made without considering the ground realities and the economic condition of the people. Key Demands from the Public: "Conduct proper awareness programs on the 'Mana Isuka Vahanam' system at the village level." "Reduce the DD charges in Asifabad district immediately." "Ensure uniform pricing across districts, similar to Mancherial." "Provide special concessions for remote and backward areas." "People are urging the district administration to respond quickly and resolve the issue. If not addressed soon, there is a possibility that the issue may escalate into a larger public protest. Immediate action is necessary to ensure fairness and justice for the people of Asifabad.

### Science and technology should be brought closer to the people



Special focus on the development of scientific knowledge... MLA 'Nayini' Devulapally Srinivas, Warangal Bureau (Hanamkonda), April 2 (Indian Chronicle): Warangal West MLA Nayani Rajender Reddy said that science and technology should be made accessible to the public and that the Congress government is placing special emphasis on the development of scientific knowledge. On Thursday, he visited the Regional Science Center near Hunter Road Zoo Park along with KUDA Chairman Inagala Venkataram Reddy and District Collector Chahat Bajpai, and conducted a comprehensive review of the conditions there. The MLA paid special attention to the functioning of the science center, the use of scientific and technological equipment, and building facilities. "Expressing anger over non-functioning equipment in the center, the MLA issued clear instructions to officials to repair them immediately and make them useful for the public. He stated that modernization of the center is essential to bring science and technology closer to the people." Responding positively to the new equipment and facilities proposed by the State Science and Technology Council, the MLA suggested that the necessary proposals be submitted immediately.

## Three Arrested for Obtaining Bank Loans Using Fake Gold Ornaments



Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau April 2, (Indian Chronicle): Kalluru Division ACP Vasundhara Yadav reported that a case has been registered against four individuals for pledging fake gold ornaments to secure bank loans at the Telangana Gramina Bank in Enkour police station limits. Out of the four accused, three have been arrested and remanded. According to the complaint filed by the bank branch manager, K.V. Prashanth Reddy, a case was registered at Enkour Police Station and an investigation was initiated. During the probe, it was found that in 2024, the bank's gold appraiser, Sripathi Satish (A1), along with Sripathi Mounika (A2, absconding), Ramachandru Jayamma (A3), and Ramachandru Naresh (A4), conspired to pledge fake gold ornaments weighing approximately 242.25 grams as genuine. "By doing so, they managed to obtain gold loans amounting to ₹9,53,000. As the loans were not repaid, the accounts were later classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs). When the bank initiated auction proceedings, the pledged ornaments were found to be fake." Following this, the police arrested Sripathi Satish, Ramachandru Jayamma, and Ramachandru Naresh and produced them before the court. The fourth ?????, Sripathi Mounika, is currently absconding. "ACP Vasundhara Yadav warned that strict legal action will be taken against anyone involved in such fraudulent activities."

## Drinking water shortage looming in the tribal belt of erstwhile Adilabad district

S. Harpal Singh, Adilabad, April 2. If you see heavy water rigs criss-crossing an area, it only means that there is drinking water shortage in that given area. The rigs that are seen operating in the rural areas of erstwhile united Adilabad district at present indicate that the tribal belt is likely to face acute shortage of drinking water in near future. "Yes, the situation is already critical as the groundwater level is plummeting rapidly in the tribal belt. In some villages like Netnur in Jainoor mandal of Kumram Bheem Asifabad district groundwater level has crossed the 300 ft mark," revealed Ramesh of Ashwini Borewells, Indervelli. "Under conditions which could worsen as the summer season progresses, the shortage could have a telling effect on the normal routine of the poor tribals. The Adivasi women would be forced to collect water from distant sources early in the morning." The government is taking steps for supplying drinking water through the Mission Bhagiratha scheme. This scheme, however, is not operating well in certain hilly areas. "The only dependable recourse to get their supply of potable water for the tribals is through purchasing it from the purified water vendors. "There is no shortage of such vendors in tribal mandal headquarters," Ramesh pointed



out. "The purified water supplied in plastic cans, nevertheless, is not preferred by all tribals. They fetch pots of water from functional borewells located in neighbouring villages or by the side of the road even at a distance of 2 km.

## Jagadishwar is the foundation stone for government employees



Fourth-class employees' union district president Aruna honors Jagadishwar, elected as state president. Jagithyal Correspondent, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): Aruna, president

of the fourth-class employees' union, Jagithyal district, praised Maram Jagadishwar, state president of the TNJGOs union, as the foundation stone for TNJGOs and fourth-class employees. On the occasion of Jagadishwar's unanimous re-election as state president of the TNJGOs union, members honored him with a garland at the TNJGO Bhawan in Karimnagar. "Aruna said Jagadishwar is the only leader who always works for the resolution of employees' problems and his services are unforgettable. She stated that they will support Jagadishwar in all ways on behalf of the fourth-class employees of Jagithyal district." The event was attended by Ummadi Narayana, secretary of Jagithyal district; Pili Srinivas, co-president; Chirra Satish Kumar, treasurer; G. Raju, Jagithyal town president; Kadapa Bhagya, town vice-president; MD Akhtar, Korutla taluk president; Korra Krishna, secretary; Kommu Prakash, Dharmapuri taluk president; Dikonda Rajitha, secretary; SK Javed, Metpalli taluk president; N. Dilip, secretary; and fourth-class employees.

## "Sarvai Papanna's services are a guiding light for the current generation"

District Additional Collector B.S. Latha, MLA Sanjay Kumar Jagithyal Correspondent, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): District Additional Collector B.S. Latha and Jagithyal MLA Dr. Sanjay Kumar stated that Sardar Sarvai Papanna Goud's services are a guiding light for the current generation. On Thursday, at the Integrated District Collectorate, as per the state government's orders, the District Backward Classes Development Department officially organized Sardar Sarvai Papanna Goud's death anniversary program. The District Additional Collector B.S. Latha and Jagithyal local MLA Dr. Sanjay Kumar participated in the event, lit a lamp, and paid their respects by offering flowers to Sardar Sarvai Papanna Goud's portrait, urging everyone to strive for his goals. "District Additional Collector (Revenue) B.S. Latha and MLA Sanjay Kumar spoke, saying that Sardar Sarvai Papanna Goud's struggle is an inspiration to everyone, and his services to society are commendable. They noted that he was a great leader who worked tirelessly for social justice and equality. Sardar Sarvai Papanna Goud's services



will serve as a guiding light for the current generation. The event was attended by BC Development Officer G. Sunitha, Collectorate AO Hakim, district officials, District Goud Association President Chandra Sekhar Goud, Goud Association representatives, BC, SC, ST community representatives, other public representatives, and others.

## A warrior who fought relentlessly for the self-respect of Bahujans — Former Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): Former Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen attended the death anniversary program organized by Uppal Sardar Sarvai Papanna Committee members Neredham Bhaskar Goud and Satyaraj Goud at Nova Banquet Hall in Chilkana Division. On the occasion, she paid floral tributes to the statue of Sardar Sarvai Papanna. "Speaking at the event, Geetha stated that Sardar Sarvai Papanna was a warrior who fought throughout his life for the self-respect of Bahujans and the welfare of oppressed communities. She praised him as a great social revolutionary and said that his legacy should be passed on to future generations. She also mentioned that the KCR government had officially organized the birth and death anniversary celebrations of Sardar Sarvai Papanna to honor his contributions. "BRS state leaders Bannala Praveen Mudiraj,



Kokonda Jagann, Balakrishna Goud, Jalli Mohan, Masha Shekhar, Sakinla Prasad, Ravinder Goud, Gnaneshwar, Naveen Goud, Shyam, Balu, and others participated in the program.

## Belt Shops Mushrooming — A Threat to Youth and Society

Indian Chronicle. Jade Srinivas. April. 03. Illegal belt shops are rapidly increasing in Rebbena mandal, spreading across villages like mushrooms. Locals say that nearly 7-8 belt shops are operating in each village, highlighting how serious and uncontrolled the situation has become in rural areas. "Liquor that is supposed to be sold only through authorized wine shops is now easily available in these belt shops. This has made alcohol accessible to youth and even minors at any time—day or night. As a result, many youngsters are falling into addiction at an early age, turning parents' hopes into disappointment. Daily wage workers and poor families are also being severely affected, both economically and socially. Allegations of Door Delivery of Liquor People allege that licensed shop owners are supplying liquor directly to belt shops in villages using vehicles and selling it at higher prices. Despite being illegal, this practice continues openly without fear. "Sale of Liquor to Minors There are serious allegations that some wine shops in Rebbena mandal are violating the law by selling liquor even to minors. Parents express deep concern that, for profits, the future of children is being put at risk and the younger generation is being pushed towards addiction. "Criticism on Excise Department" Despite all these ongoing issues, the Excise Department officials are being accused of negligence. Locals claim that even after submitting video evidence of liquor being sold to minors, no action has been taken. People allege that authorities are turning a blind eye to illegal belt shops. "Public Demand" Residents are demanding immediate action from the Excise Department to curb illegal liquor sales, shut down belt shops, and strictly prevent the sale of alcohol to minors. They urge authorities to act promptly to protect the future of the younger generation and restore order in villages.

## Low-Cost Robotic Knee & Hip Replacement Surgeries at Yashoda Hospital, Hyd



Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau April 2, (Indian Chronicle): At a press conference held at Yashoda Medical Centre, Khammam, renowned joint replacement surgeon, arthroscopy and trauma specialist Dr. Abhishek Buri from Yashoda Hospital, Somajiguda, Hyderabad, shared important details about advanced robotic joint replacement surgeries. "Dr. Buri, who has over 15 years of experience in robotic knee and hip replacement procedures, stated that patients from the Khammam region—P. Surochana, T. Devachamma, who were suffering from severe knee pain, and B. Raju, who had hip pain—recently visited Yashoda Hospital, Somajiguda. After thorough surgical evaluation, they were provided treatment using advanced technology at an affordable cost. "He explained that once knee or hip replacement surgery is performed, the implant can last for approximately 30 years, eliminating the need for repeated surgeries in most cases. Patients are advised to undergo physiotherapy for about one month after surgery. "Depending on a patient's physical fitness, both knees can be replaced in a single surgical session. Addressing common fears, Dr. Buri reassured that there is no need to worry about surgical failure, as patients can typically stand and walk within 24 hours after the procedure. "To make follow-up care more accessible, patients no longer need to travel to Hyderabad for consultations. An MS (Ortho) specialist doctor will be available at Yashoda Medical Centre, Khammam, on the first Thursday of every month, benefiting people from nearby areas. "The event was attended by Dr. G. Vikram Kumar, Sridhar Rao, Bala Krishna, Naveen, and Nagarjuna.

## Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Participates in Special Pooja at NGRI Abhaya Anjaneya Swamy Temple



KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): On the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Parameshwar Reddy participated in special prayers at the NGRI Habsiguda Abhaya Anjaneya Swamy Temple. He prayed for the blessings of Lord Hanuman to be upon the people of the Uppal constituency. "He expressed that those who worship Lord Hanuman will be blessed with all kinds of prosperity and well-being. He also appreciated the arrangements made by the Abhaya Anjaneya Swamy Temple Committee on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti. "The event was attended by EO Venkanna, priest Ravindra Sharma, Bazaar Pandu Goud, temple committee members Bikumalla Anjaiah Gupta, Eega Anjaneyulu, Tummala Devi Reddy, Busam Raghunath Reddy, Varkala Madan Goud, Kadapa Nursing, Kishan Naik, Santosh Kumar, Raghavender, Bheem Sen, and Congress leaders Vallapu Srikanth Yadav, Sunku Shekhar Reddy, Manda Muralikrishna Reddy, Sachin, Chintu, and others.

## M.A. Jaleel Pasha Appointed as District Congress General Secretary in Medchal-Malkajgiri



“Kishore Vaddepalli, Uppal, April 2 (Indian Chronicle) M.A. Jaleel Pasha, a resident of Ramanthapur,

has been appointed as the District General Secretary of the Congress Party in Medchal-Malkajgiri district. The appointment order was issued by Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President B. Mahesh Kumar Goud. “This appointment was made based on the recommendation of Medchal-Malkajgiri District Congress Committee President Thotakura Vajresh Yadav. Speaking on the occasion, M.A. Jaleel Pasha expressed his sincere gratitude to TPCC President Mahesh Kumar Goud for placing trust in him and appointing him to the post. He also thanked Thotakura Vajresh Yadav for recommending his name, as well as Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy for their support. He assured that he would work diligently to uphold the party’s reputation and successfully carry out any responsibilities assigned by the party leadership. He stated that this position brings greater responsibility upon him and that he would strive to fulfill it effectively. Jaleel Pasha further said that he would work towards ensuring the victory of Congress candidates in the upcoming Greater elections. He added that he has strong connections across all divisions in the constituency and would utilize them to strengthen the party, following the directions of the leadership. “He concluded by stating that his appointment is a clear example that the party recognizes and rewards those who work sincerely for it.

## "Kondagattu Temple echoes with Rama's name “Crowds of Diksha Swamis flock to Kondagattu “Collector, SP inspect festival arrangements



Jagityala Correspondent, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): The Kondagattu Anjaneya Swami Temple was thronged by devotees and Hanuman Diksha Swamis from Jagityala district and surrounding areas like Karimnagar, Mancherial, Nirmal, Adilabad, Nizamabad, Peddapalli, and Siricilla. On Thursday, thousands of Diksha Swamis walked up the hill to Kondagattu to offer prayers to the deity and break their fast on the occasion of Chinnah Hanuman Jayanti. The hill resounded with the chanting of Rama’s name by the Hanuman Diksha Swamis. “Devotees from various districts walked to the temple to offer prayers and fulfill their vows. The authorities made arrangements to ensure the

comfort of the devotees, including shade, queue lines, and drinking water facilities. A team of 900 police personnel was deployed to prevent untoward incidents. “District Collector B. Satyaprasad and SP Ashok Kumar inspected the festival arrangements, including the facilities provided to devotees, the breaking of fast by Diksha Swamis, and the surroundings of the temple and koina (temple tank). They also monitored the arrangements through CCTV cameras installed in the temple area. Temple EO Anjana Reddy constantly monitored the situation. The police force, led by SP Ashok Kumar and DSP Raghuchander, maintained security arrangements.

## Welfare schemes that did not stop even during the financial crisis



“--- MLA Nayini Rajender Reddy, City Mayor Gundu Sudharani, and District Collector Chahat Bajpai attended the ward meeting “Devulapalli Srinivas, Warangal Bureau (Hanumakonda), April 2 (Indian Chronicle): Warangal West MLA Nayini Rajender Reddy said that even during the financial crisis, the Congress public government has continued governance among the people without halting welfare schemes. He stated that many changes have been brought through the 99-day progress governance plan. “As part of the 99-day action plan under “Praja Palana – Pragati Pranalika,” ward and village meetings are being held across the state. In this context, MLA Nayini, City Mayor Gundu Sudharani, and District Collector Chahat Bajpai participated in the 29th division ward meeting held on Thursday. The program began with the state song, and during the event, the MLA directly interacted with beneficiaries to gather their opinions on the welfare schemes being implemented in the ward. He explained the development and changes taking place within the GWMC limits through the 99-day plan. “Later, MLA Nayini said that when the government assumed office, the state was in a severe financial crisis, but they are efficiently managing past debts and implementing

promises made to the people. He stated that the Congress government is ensuring equal justice to all sections of society without any political discrimination in development and welfare programs. He emphasized that from the time of YS to the current Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the Congress government has been working with determination for the upliftment of the poor. He added that monitoring is being carried out to ensure every scheme is implemented at the grassroots level. “He said that programs like free bus travel for women under the Mahalakshmi scheme, 200 units of free electricity, and construction of Indiramma houses are being successfully implemented. He also mentioned that fine rice distribution is being carried out uniquely in the country, and quality food is being provided to students from schools to colleges. He clarified that significant improvements in infrastructure and services have been achieved in the city through the 99-day plan. After the program, he inspected a government school under construction locally and gave suggestions to officials regarding the progress of the work. “Former corporator Buddha Jagan, division president Poorna, leaders Vijay, Shweta, Roshan, and officials, among others, participated in the program.

## Grand Inauguration of the 8th Annual Celebrations of Sri Sri Sri Katta Maisamma Temple

— Former Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkatrao Attends as Chief Guest “KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): “The first day of the 8th annual celebrations of Sri Sri Sri Katta Maisamma Temple, located on the main road in Ramanthapur, was conducted with great devotion and grandeur. On this occasion, special rituals were performed in a magnificent manner at the temple. “From early morning at 5:00 AM, rituals such as Abhishekam, Kalasha Aradhana, and the Ammavari Moola Mantra Homam were carried out, enhancing the spiritual enthusiasm of the devotees. The temple was filled with devotees, creating a vibrant and devotional atmosphere. “Former Corporator of Ramanthapur Division, Bandaru Srivani Venkatrao, attended the event as the chief guest. She offered prayers to the Goddess and participated in the special rituals. She expressed her wish that the divine blessings of the Goddess always remain upon the people of the division and that every family be blessed with peace and prosperity. Among others who participated in the event were Acharya Pulimamidi Naveen, Temple



Committee President Komirishetty Ramesh, and members Gade Srinivas, Mangu Rana Pratap, Prashanth, Nishanth, and others, who contributed to the successful organization of the Program

## S.B.I.T. Successful Blood Donation Camp in “\* Donate Blood .. Become Life Donors - D.Yum and H.O. Dr. Rama Rao\*“



Khammam S.B.I.T. The Mega Blood Donation Camp organized on Thursday as part of Arohan and College Anniversary which is being held on 3rd and 4th of this month in the college was a success. About 150 students participated in this blood donation camp organized by College Secretary and Correspondent Dr. G. Dhatri himself started by donating blood. First the guests started the program by lighting the lamp. On this occasion, the chief guest of the program was D.Yam. And H.O. Rama Rao said that donating blood is donating life. He said that by donating blood to those who are in danger, their lives will be saved. He said that three people can be saved with one blood packet. Everyone below 60 years of age is eligible to donate blood. He said that three people can survive with one packet of blood. He explained that by donating blood once in 3 months, new blood will be produced and become healthy. However, various misconceptions have come to their attention in the context of blood donation and they are simply far from the truth. They called upon the youth not to believe any misconceptions and to donate blood once every 3 months as a movement. He said that when new blood comes, there is a possibility that diseases like B.P. and sugar will not spread. Recognizing this, the youth should donate blood and raise awareness among others to help them donate blood. Later, Chairman of the college, Gundala Krishna, who presided over the meeting, said that the students of their college are leading in service. In this he said that the services rendered by them during the flood of Khammam city along with epidemics like Corona will stand forever. Similarly, on the



occasion of the College Arohan, it was explained that food was donated in many mental and old age homes. He said that he is very proud of his students who are moving ahead with social consciousness and service spirit. They said that they will carry out such service programs in future as well. He revealed that a team has been formed in his college for this purpose. Later, about 100 students donated blood and provided that blood to the blood bank of the government hospital. Meanwhile, the college management and teachers congratulated the youth who donated blood along with the guests. “In this program D.C.H.S. Dr. Rajasekhara, Principal of Government Medical College Dr. Rajeshwar, Renowned Doctors Narendra, Government Hospital Blood Bank Medical Officer Yn. Sandeep, College Vice-Chairman K. Sri Chaitanya, Principal Dr. G. Rajkumar, Academic Directors Gundala Praveen Kumar, Gandham Srinivasa Rao, Dr. A.V.V. Shiva Prasad, heads of various departments, teachers, students and others participated.

## Bhudan, five vehicles of government land encroachers seized...

“Legal action for attachment of illegal immovable properties: Commissioner of Police “Police Commissioner Sunil Dutt said that legal action has been taken for the attachment of immovable properties worth around 45 lakhs, which were illegally collected from poor people by encroachment of Bhudan and government lands. He said that five vehicles worth 10 lakh 40 thousand have already been seized from the accused. “The police commissioner said that cases have been registered at Khammam Khanapuram Haveli Police Station and other police stations against those accused of illegal business and encroachment on Bhudan and government lands in the Velangmatla revenue area under Khammam Urban. According to the details disclosed in the investigation, the accused who were taken into police custody by the Baganga Khanapuram Haveli police in the investigation were 1) Balli Srinivas @ Srinu, 2) Poleboina Mutiah, 3) Koppera Venkanna, 4) Talluri Krishna, 5) Kunja Krishnaiah @ Krishna, 6) Kalli Rama Chandraiah, 7) Banala Lakshmanachari. He pleaded guilty to the crime of spending Rs 2,88,38100/- collected from 1549 poor people (victims) on court expenses, rallies, surveys, electricity, water and other facilities for temporarily constructed houses in Bhudan Vinoba Navodaya Colony and the rest of the money was used for self-interest and acquisition of immovable properties. “1) Talluri Krishna, one tractor no. AP 20 TA 1363, Kaviraj Nagar, Road No. 1 on an area of 64.54 yards on a house at a cost of Rs. 19 Lakh 90 thousand and constructed the first and second floors. “2) Banala Lakshmanachari, Hero Deluxe Motorcycle no. TS-05-ER-1100, purchased. “3) Same as Mutiah, Tata Magic vehicle no. TS-28-T-2868, Tata Intra Trolley Vehicle No. TS-04-UE-6290, “5) Koppera Venkanna, Splendor Motorcycle Motorcycle no. TS-29-B-8489, “House land worth 10 lakhs, spent on his son’s education. “6) Chippalapalli Veeriah, 4 lakh 48 thousand seven hundred and forty four rupees in cash, 10 lakh rupees were kept with Ponneboina Baby of Enkur, who spent some money on their party meetings during the election, and for the Husna Bad party meeting about Rs. They



admitted that they had spent 10 lakhs and used it for other expenses and self-interest. “After custody, the accused were sent back to judicial remand today. “The value of fixed assets is approx “1. Vehicle (5) : Rs.10,40,000/- “2. Value of house : Rs.19,90,000/- “3. Location of Houses : “Rs.10,00,000/- “4. Cash in Bank Account : Rs.4,48,744/- “Total value of the goods is approximately : Rs.44,78,744/- P.R.W.O

## No compromises in development and welfare

... Parakala MLA ‘Revuri’ “Devulapally Srinivas, Warangal Bureau (Sangem), April 2 (Indian Chronicle): Parakala MLA Revuri Prakash Reddy said that officials, public representatives, and villagers should participate in the Praja Palana-Pragati program, which the Congress public government is undertaking very prestigiously. “He said that the welfare schemes of the Congress public government should be widely taken to the people, and that issues in villages would be identified through Gram Sabhas and resolved immediately. “As part of the Praja Palana-Pragati program, MLA Revuri attended a Gram Sabha held on Thursday at the Rythu Vedita in Gavicherla village of Sangem mandal, organized under the leadership of village Sarpanch Bashipaka Sadayya. Earlier, officials explained to the villagers the development and welfare schemes undertaken by the Congress public government. They also played the message of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. Beneficiaries of various schemes were made to speak at the Gram Sabha. Later, several village issues were brought to the MLA’s attention. “Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that Gram Sabhas are being organized to discuss and implement village issues in the presence of the people, and urged villagers to make proper use of them to resolve their problems. He stated that the Congress public government gives high priority to development and welfare, and that its goal is for every family to achieve economic growth. “He mentioned that schemes such as Rythu Bharosa,



Indiramma Houses, Mahalakshmi scheme, 7500 gas subsidy, Gruha Jyothi, bonus for fine paddy, Kalyana Lakshmi, CMRF, loans and interest-free loans to self-help groups through Indira Mahila Shakti, Indiramma sarees, and new ration cards are being implemented. He also said that the Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme will be introduced in case the head of a household passes away, and that breakfast schemes, crop diversification, and natural organic farming are being encouraged. “He stated that welfare schemes worth over 75 crore have been provided to Gavicherla village, and that a Farmers Producer Organization is being set up for farmers. MLA Revuri emphasized that the credit for delivering development and welfare schemes beyond party lines belongs to the Congress government. Public representatives, officials, party workers, and villagers participated in the program.

# BCs Must Unite for Political Empowerment to Fulfill Sardar Sarvai Papanna's Ideals: Nertham Bhaskar Goud



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, April 2 (Indian Chronicle):”“The 316th death anniversary of Sardar Sarvai Papanna was observed with great reverence at Chiluka Nagar in Uppal constituency. On this occasion, Uppal constituency BC JAC leader, former BRS state secretary, and Telangana movement activist Nertham Bhaskar Goud attended as the chief guest and paid floral tributes to the statue of Sardar Sarvai Papanna. “Speaking at the event, he described Sardar Sarvai Papanna as a symbol of self-respect and an inspiration for the Bahujan community. He praised Papanna as a warrior who united backward classes and conquered the Golconda kingdom. He called upon BC communities to take inspiration from Papanna and move forward with unity and political awareness to achieve a rightful share in governance.”Bhaskar Goud criticized the present Congress government, alleging that it failed to release the promised ₹100 crore welfare fund for BCs. He demanded the immediate release of the job calendar and

accused the government of deceiving BCs on the promise of implementing 42% reservations. He expressed concern that the budget has done injustice to BC communities and stated that none of the promises made to them have been fulfilled so far. He urged the government to honor its commitments and safeguard the self-respect of BCs. “He further emphasized that Sardar Sarvai Papanna fought tirelessly for the welfare of backward classes, and to realize his ideals, BCs must unite and strive for political empowerment.”The program was presided over by Satyaraj Goud. Several leaders and members including former corporator Geetha Praveen Mudiraj, Panjala Shruvan, Naveen Goud, SC/ST association Chilkkanagar president Masa Shekhar, BC JAC leaders Venkatesh, Telangana Sampath, Raj Kumar Goud, Paramesh, Naresh, Ravinder Mudiraj, Mohan, Narsing, Anjantha Goud, Venkatesh Goud, Prasad Goud, Keshavulu, Upender Goud, Mehboob, Nagaraj, and others participated in the event.

# Day Special Action Plan Launched for Public Welfare: Additional Collector Dr. P. Srija.



Insurance Scheme, which aims to provide insurance coverage of ₹25 lakh to every household. “She further explained that several welfare initiatives are being implemented, including distribution of new ration cards, Indiramma housing scheme, and interest-free bank linkage loans for women self-help groups. Development activities undertaken by various departments in the village are also being discussed in the Gram Sabha.”Dr. Srija said that under the Prajapalana Pragathi Plan, the government has taken up a 99-day special action programme, which will continue until June 12. Various departments such as health, road safety, women welfare, youth and sports, drinking water supply, and agriculture will implement multiple activities during this period. “As part of the health department initiatives, special health camps will be conducted, and measures will be taken to prevent water stagnation in villages. She also mentioned that from April 13 to 18, awareness programmes on road safety will be conducted under the “Arrive Alive” campaign, and accident-prone black spots will be identified and repaired.”She advised that a proper development plan should be prepared for villages, keeping in mind the funds available from both central and state governments, and prioritizing projects for the next five years. She emphasized that welfare schemes should effectively benefit the eligible beneficiaries. “Dr. Srija also directed officials to form Village Child Welfare Committees under the leadership of ANMs, ASHA workers, parents, sarpanch, deputy sarpanch, and public representatives. These committees will focus on preventing child marriages, ensuring school education for all children, and providing proper nutrition.”She also stressed the need to resolve issues in government schools. To address the monkey menace near schools, she suggested installing solar fencing in a phased manner using ₹????? funds. “Highlighting the importance of children’s future, she urged parents to ensure that children stay away from drugs and avoid consuming outside junk food and chocolates.”Later, details of beneficiaries who received benefits under various government welfare schemes were displayed in the Gram Sabha, and feedback was collected from them. “The programme was attended by Bonakal MPDO Ramadevi, Tahsildar Ramadevi, Mushtikuntla Sarpanch Pillalamarri Nageswara Rao, Panchayat Secretary S.K. Saidulu, AEO Triveni, and officials from various departments.”

Village Child Welfare Committees to be Formed for Monitoring Children’s Well-being. “Call to Successfully Implement Prajapalana Pragathi Programme.”Arvapalli Nagesh Khammam Bureau April 2, (Indian Chronicle): “Additional Collector (Local Bodies) Dr. P. Srija announced that a 99-day special action plan is being implemented for public welfare. “She participated in the Prajapalana Gram Sabha held in Mushtikuntla village of Bonakal mandal. “Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Srija said that the Gram Sabha was organized to create awareness among people about various welfare schemes being implemented and those proposed by the government. She stated that the government is planning to introduce the Indiramma

# Establishment of a Library Public Reading Room Chairman Veerababu Takes the Lead in Sharing Knowledge Chairman Pasupuleti Veerababu: Dedicated to the Development of Libraries.

Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, April 02, Indian Chronicle: As part of the “Praja Palana Pragathi Plan” (People’s Administration Progress Plan)—a 99-day action agenda initiated by the District Library Corporation of Bhadradi Kothagudem—a new library and public reading room had been established within the Gram Panchayat premises in Sarvaram village, Sujathanagar Mandal. Library Chairman Pasupuleti Veerababu took exceptional initiative to secure the sanction and establishment of this public reading room. Pasupuleti Veerababu remarked that libraries are akin to temples. He emphasized that utilizing libraries plays a pivotal role in transforming an individual into a thoughtful member of society, serving as a pathway for students to lay strong foundations for their future. He further asserted that libraries—and the books housed within them—play a crucial role in helping individuals cultivate a virtuous character within society. Demonstrating immense initiative, he personally oversaw the arrangements for the establishment of the library. Library Secretary K. Karuna Kumari provided invaluable assistance and cooperation in setting up the public reading room. Sarpanch Sunitha expressed her delight, stating that she was extremely happy to see a library established in Sarvaram. He stated that the task is not complete merely by establishing libraries; rather, they attain true significance only when the citizens and villagers actually utilize them. Mr. Veerababu urged donors to come forward for the development of libraries, encouraging them to contribute books and thereby contribute to the progress of society. Speaking on the occasion, TPCC General Secretary Naga Seetharamulu remarked that the developmental work undertaken by Mr. Veerababu in the library sector has earned



a commendable reputation across the state, and he praised the initiative of establishing libraries as a highly laudable effort. This event saw the participation of Sarvaram Sarpanch Sunitha, former Cooperative Society Chairman Manda Veera Hanumanth, former Market Committee Chairman Rambabu, Office In-charge Naveen Kumar, village elders, and local residents in large numbers, contributing to its resounding success.

# Mega Annadanam Program Organized by Vayuputra Youth Association on the Occasion of Hanuman Jayanti— Ramantapur Division President Mohammed Rafeeq Attends as Chief Guest



KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, April 2 (Indian Chronicle): “Srinagar Colony crossroads in Ramanthapur was filled with devotional fervor on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti. A grand annadanam (free food distribution) program was organized by the Vayuputra Youth Association to mark the auspicious festival. Mohammed Rafeeq, President of the Ramanthapur Division Congress Party, attended the event as the chief guest. He formally inaugurated the

annadanam and personally served food to the devotees. “Speaking on the occasion, Rafeeq said, “With the blessings of Lord Hanuman, the spirit of service should grow in society. Such annadanam programs reflect the greatness of our culture.”Members of the Vayuputra Youth Association, including Shivakumar, Veeraswamy, Ramakrishna, Mallesham, Seenu, Narsing, Sai, and others, conveyed their Hanuman Jayanti greetings and successfully organized the event in a grand manner.

# Expedite the Resolution of Pending 'Bhubharathi' Applications—Strict Action Against Illegal Sand Transportation: District Collector Ankit.

“Kukkadapu Naresh Kumar, Bhadradi Kothagudem Staff Reporter, April 02, Indian Chronicle: District Collector Ankit directed officials to prioritize the resolution of land-related issues within the district and to swiftly resolve all applications currently pending under the ‘Bhubharathi’ scheme. On Thursday, he held a review meeting with officials from relevant departments at the IDOC office conference hall, accompanied by Additional Collector D. Venugopal. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector instructed officials to submit a comprehensive report detailing the status of all pending ‘Bhubharathi’ applications. He noted that a significant number of complaints regarding land-related issues are being received from remote areas during the ‘Prajavani’ grievance redressal program and emphasized the need to undertake special measures to resolve them. He further directed officials to enhance coordination among the relevant departments and to prioritize the resolution of every single issue. He instructed officials to prepare comprehensive reports regarding the SIR mapping process, categorized by both BLO (Booth Level Officer) and Mandal (administrative block). He also directed that specific targets be assigned to each BLO and that measures be taken to ensure these tasks are completed within the stipulated timeframe. Regarding the upcoming Census, he advised that all necessary arrangements be finalized, the process of creating IDs for Tahsildars be expedited, and a special officer be appointed to oversee the Census operations. Taking cognizance of the complaints regarding illegal sand transportation within the district, he reviewed the measures currently being implemented for the management of sand reaches. He issued a stern warning that strict action would be taken against anyone found illegally trans-



porting sand under the pretext of the ‘Indiramma Housing scheme. He announced that he would conduct surprise inspections of sand reaches and directed officials to submit details regarding the cases registered to date. He also sought comprehensive information regarding the progress of land acquisition for development works within the district, as well as details concerning pending court cases. He stated that, in the coming week, he would hold a comprehensive review meeting with all the Tahsildars in the district to discuss topics such as Bhubharathi, Prajavani applications, SIR mapping, census operations, and land acquisition. He directed officials to be prepared with all the necessary information for this meeting. CPO Sanjeeva Rao, Election Superintendent Ranga Prasad, E-Section Superintendent Swarnalatha, AD (Mines) Dinesh, Land Acquisition Officer Yasin, officials from relevant departments, and others participated in this meeting.

# Additional Collector (Local Bodies) Dr. P. Sreeja stated that everyone should strive to fulfill the ideals of Sarvai Papanna Goud. She participated in the death anniversary program of Sarvai Papanna Goud held on Thursday .



Kodi Lingayya, Pagadala Nagaraju, Sheikh Shakeena, Ambala Venkateswara Rao, Thodeti Durgaprasad, Perugu Venkataramana Yadav, Jakkula Venkataramana, Bellamkonda Sharath, Bandi Nageswara Rao, Pelluri Vijay Kumar, Ramana Kumar, Ravi Kumar, Koppelli Srinivas, Sammayya, Badapatla Sudarshan, Yadala Nageswara Rao, Jyothsna Naik, Battini Raju, Murali Krishna, Gangaraju, Ramakrishna, Madhavi, Satish, Muthyala Rao, Veeraiyah, Mogalaiah, Chander Rao, and others, along with BC community leaders and officials.

# Distribution of Cool Drinking Water by Samata Sainik Dal

“Indian Chronicle. Jade Srinivas. April. 02” “Under the leadership of the Komaram Bheem Asifabad district unit of Samata Sainik Dal, cool drinking water was distributed to the public at fair price shops in Wankidi mandal headquarters, keeping in view the summer season. This service program was organized to provide relief to people from the intense heat. On this occasion, Samata Sainik Dal Ramji Sakpal Regiment Commanders Marshal Sajan and Marshal Swagat stated that the organization is always at the forefront in serving the people. They emphasized that the Dal actively participates in addressing public issues and carrying out social service activities. The program was attended by District President Marshal Durgam Sandeep, Ambedkar Youth Association General Secretary Vijay, organizers Roshan and Pratap, community elders Rajeshwar and Shyam Rao, marshals Chanti, Prashanth, Rajkumar, Akash, Wankidi Deputy Sarpanch Deepak, Ward Member Namdev, and others. “Enough of a life of slavery – let us rise as the self-respecting children of Babasaheb.” “Join Samata Sainik Dal – let us work together for a self-respecting India.” “Jai Bhim!



“Avnreddy Khammam Town Reporter April 2, (Indian Chronicle): “On this occasion, she, along with State Warehousing Corporation Chairman Rayala Nageswara Rao, paid floral tributes to the statue of Sarvai Papanna Goud at Tank Bund. “Speaking at the event, the Additional Collector said that Sarvai Papanna Goud’s struggle for social justice and equality serves as a guiding light for present and future generations. She added that his efforts for the upliftment of marginalized communities are truly exemplary. “Leaders from BC associations and various dignitaries attended the program, including Telangana District Gouda Association President Katti Nehru Goud, Bachu Vijay Kumar, Nuthi Satyanarayana Goud (DCC President), Puvvala Durgaprasad, Amaragani Venkanna, Vaddeboyina Narasimha Goud, Markam Lingayya Goud, Udugu Srinivasa Goud, Dr. Srinivasa Goud, Dr. Rajasekhara Goud,

## Oil for rice: Punjab exporters call for barter deal with Iran amid trade disruptions



GNS News Agency, April 2

With the war in West Asia disrupting India's rice exports, exporters in Punjab have renewed calls for an urgent barter trade arrangement with Iran—proposing crude oil imports in exchange for rice shipments settled in Indian rupees—as a practical way to safeguard trade and reduce financial stress. The demand has gained fresh urgency after rumours that a vessel carrying an Indian rice consignment was struck by a drone near Dubai port, triggering fears over the safety of shipments moving through volatile West Asian routes. The Punjab Rice Millers Exporters Association (PRMEA), in a written representation sent to the Union Commerce Ministry on Thursday, highlighted that the on-going geopolitical instability has severely disrupted India's rice trade, particularly in the Gulf and West Asian markets that account for over 80 per cent of basmati

exports. Representatives warned that without immediate intervention, the crisis could spiral into a major financial setback for exporters dealing in high-value basmati rice. India exports over 6 million tonnes of basmati annually, valued at over Rs 55,000 crore, to more than 150 countries.

Ashok Sethi, director, PRMEA, said the recent unconfirmed reports of the drone strike have not only heightened risk perception but also raised serious concerns about cargo safety, insurance liabilities, and delivery timelines. Many consignments worth 60,000 tonnes are already stranded at ports or stuck at sea, with shipping schedules thrown off balance due to security concerns in the region, he added. Exporters are also grappling with sharply rising logistics costs. Freight charges, marine insurance premiums, and port handling expenses have surged, significantly impacting profitability. Exporters believe that a barter mechanism with Iran could serve as a dual solution—reviving a key export destination while simultaneously addressing India's crude oil requirements. "This can stabilise exports, reduce payment risks, and ensure continuity in trade even during geopolitical uncertainty," an industry source said, stressing that the move could cushion exporters against mounting losses. Alongside the barter trade proposal, exporters have urged the Centre to implement urgent relief measures, including waiver of bank interest during the crisis period, financial subsidies to offset losses, protection and insurance cover for stranded consignments, and support to manage rising shipping and logistics costs.

## No Detailed Project Report given for Delhi-Rohtak-Hisar, Delhi-Faridabad-Palwal RRTS corridors: Centre

GNS News Agency, April 2

Delhi-Rohtak-Hisar RRTS update: Centre confirms no DPR submitted for proposed corridors, raising questions over timelines and project progress. (Image: NCRTC) Delhi-Rohtak-Hisar RRTS update: Centre confirms no DPR submitted for proposed corridors, raising questions over timelines and project progress. (Image: Express Photo/File) Rapid Rail project in India, RRTS project details: The Centre on Thursday stated that no Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the Delhi-Rohtak-Hisar and Delhi-Faridabad-Palwal RRTS (Regional Rapid Transit System) projects has been submitted by the state government. Currently, only 82.15-km-long Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor is operational. It was sanctioned by the centre in March 2019.



In a statement in Lok Sabha on Thursday, Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar said: "Presently, no Detailed Project Report (DPR) for RRTS connectivity between Delhi-Rohtak-Hisar and Delhi-Faridabad-Palwal has been submitted to Central Government by concerned State Government(s)." The Union Minister was responding to queries raised by Lok Sabha MP Deepender Singh Hooda, who sought details on plans to develop RRTS corridors connecting Delhi-Rohtak-Hisar and Delhi-Faridabad-Palwal, in view of rising commuter demand, population growth and increasing economic activity in the region. According to the 'Functional Plan on Transport for NCR-2032', the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) identified eight RRTS corridors to connect various important towns of NCR with semi-high speed rail based commuter transit system in order to improve rail based connectivity in NCR. These are as follows: However, the Task Force appointed by the erstwhile Planning Commis-

sion of India (now NITI Aayog) had prioritized following three RRTS corridors for implementation: The Namoo Bharat trains are designed for high speed of 180 kmph, with an operating speed of 160 kmph. "Extension of RRTS corridors benefits include improved regional connectivity, decongestion of roads, reduction in carbon emission, generation of skilled and unskilled jobs and reduced travel time," the Union Minister said. Anish Mondal is a journalist with over nine years of experience covering the railways and roadways. Currently a member of the Indianexpress.com editorial team, Anish specializes in high-impact sectors. Professional Journey Anish began his career at the public broadcaster Rajya Sabha Television (now Sansad TV), where he developed a foundational understanding of legislative processes and national governance. In 2018, he transitioned to digital financial journalism at FinancialExpress.com, spending nearly six years refining his expertise in market trends and corporate reporting.

## Above-normal heatwave days, wetter April likely in Northwest India; IMD issues seasonal outlook



GNS News Agency, April 2

The Chandigarh office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Wednesday projected above-normal heatwave days across Northwest India, including Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and parts of Rajasthan, for the 2026 hot weather season (April to June). Surinder Paul, Director, IMD (Chandigarh), said, "According to the seasonal outlook, maximum temperatures during April-June are likely to remain below normal in most parts of Punjab and Haryana, offering some early-season relief. However, minimum temperatures are expected to remain above normal, indicating warmer nights and increased discomfort levels. For April specifically, day temperatures are likely to remain near normal, while nights could be warmer than usual across the region." Despite relatively moderate daytime temperatures in the early phase, the IMD has warned that heatwave

conditions are expected to intensify as the season progresses, with above-normal heatwave days predicted across Northwest India. This could pose risks to public health, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and outdoor workers, and may also put pressure on water and power resources.

In contrast, April rainfall is expected to be above normal across much of the country, including Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and adjoining areas of Rajasthan. The forecast indicates light to moderate rainfall activity at frequent intervals, which may provide temporary respite from heat but could also impact standing crops and harvesting activities.

For Punjab and Haryana, this mixed weather outlook carries both opportunities and risks. While intermittent rainfall may benefit soil moisture levels, experts caution that untimely rains and gusty winds during April could affect wheat harvesting, which typically peaks during this period. Similarly, in Rajasthan, especially in the northern districts, variability in rainfall and rising heat conditions may influence crop yields and water availability. The IMD has advised state governments and local administrations to enhance preparedness, like ensuring adequate drinking water supply, strengthening heat action plans, and creating awareness among the public. People have been urged to stay hydrated, avoid peak heat exposure, and follow official weather updates. Overall, the 2026 summer season for Northwest India is shaping up to be a blend of early rainfall activity and increasing heat stress, requiring careful management in both agricultural and public health sectors, said IMD officials.

## Mumbra man opens fire on 3 men after claiming they stalked his 'sister', 1 killed

GNS News Agency, April 2

The Mumbra police in Thane arrested a 51-year-old man for allegedly firing three rounds from a country-made revolver, killing one man and injuring two others Thursday. The accused, identified as Jayan Shivanandan Nair, told the police that he opened fire on them since they had been stalking a woman he considered his sister. The shooting victims, identified as Abdul Shaikh, Akbar Ahmad and Sameer Shaikh, were rushed to the Kalsekar Hospital, where Akbar was declared dead. The police arrested Nair at the crime scene, seizing the firearm, and booked him under murder charges. Mumbra Senior Inspector Anil Shinde said the shooting took place near the Bismillah chawl behind Sumantai Hindi School, where the accused resided. The accused told the police that the woman, whom he considered a sister and who also lived in the same chawl,

was being harassed by the three men who would stalk her whenever she passed by. She told this issue to Nair, and when the harassment occurred again Thursday, he allegedly went to his house, retrieved a firearm, and fired three rounds. After the gunshots struck the three men, a commotion ensued in the area. Residents quickly transported the injured men to Kalsekar Hospital and alerted the Mumbra police. A police team arrived at the scene, detained Nair, and later arrested him in connection with the murder case. A police officer said two of the injured men admitted to the hospital are reported to be stable. The officer also said that Nair has no prior criminal record and works as a labourer. The police are now investigating how Nair obtained the firearm and what his intentions were. An officer said they will also record the statements of other residents in the area to verify the accused's claims.

## Wheat flour sold as 'Ayurvedic' medicine: Karnataka Police arrest Delhi man for selling fake weight-loss powder



GNS News Agency, April 2

The Tumakuru police in Karnataka have busted a racket involved in the manufacture of fake weight loss powder and other products, and arrested a Delhi-based man for allegedly producing and selling spurious Ayurvedic goods using duplicate branding, the police said on Thursday. The police have also booked his sons, who were his associates, based on an investigation in a case where Dhanalakshmi, the owner of 'Jeeni Slim Powder', alleged misuse of her firm's trademark on August 14, 2025. According to the police, the accused were selling counterfeit

weight-loss products online under the name 'RK Traders', posing potential health risks to consumers, including teenagers.

The investigation team conducted a raid on a Delhi warehouse on March 27 and seized large quantities of fake Jeeni products, along with counterfeit Ayurvedic tablets, cosmetic creams, and powders. "The products were being manufactured without approvals from regulatory authorities. In several instances, ordinary wheat flour was packed and sold as 'Jeeni Slim Powder' and other Ayurvedic products using fake labels," a police officer said. Investigations revealed that the accused had been operating under multiple firm names, including RK Traders, MK Traders, and MHK Traders, for nearly one-and-a-half years. A special team under the supervision of Superintendent of Police K V Ashok traced the operation of the accused to the warehouse in Shalimar Bagh in New Delhi. The prime accused, Rajeev Khanna, 56, was arrested in Delhi on March 28 and produced before a court in Rohini, where a transit warrant was obtained to bring him to Karnataka. He was later produced before a court in Sira and remanded to police custody for further interrogation. His sons, Himanshu Khanna, 29, and Manan Khanna, 25, have also been named as accused and are suspected of having assisted in the operation.

## Himachal Assembly passes Bill barring disqualified MLAs under anti-defection law from pension benefits; BJP terms govt's move 'ill-motivated'

GNS News Agency, April 2

On the last day of the Budget Session, Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha Thursday passed the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly Members (Allowances and Pension) Amendment Bill, 2026, which proposes that legislators disqualified under the anti-defection law will no longer be entitled to pension benefits. The Bill was passed after an intense debate, with the Opposition BJP terming it "retrospective, targeted, and ill-motivated," while the ruling Congress defended it as a necessary step to curb defections and uphold democratic values. CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu had introduced the Bill Wednesday.

Participating in the discussion, BJP MLA Randhir Sharma alleged that the amendment was aimed at selectively targeting a handful of legislators. He argued that the move was designed to deny pension benefits to "three to four members" who had either joined or supported the BJP. Sharma maintained that any such amendment should be in the larger public interest rather than directed at specific individuals. He further contended that the MLAs in question had already been "punished" through disqualification from the House, and additional penalties in the form of denial of pension were unjustified. He also pointed out that the matter was not fully settled legally, noting that the MLAs concerned had not pursued their case further in the Supreme Court. Urging the government to reconsider, Sharma demanded that the amendment be withdrawn.

Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur echoed these concerns, calling the Bill a blow to democratic principles. He said that the amendment was being brought with retrospective intent to target those who had differences with the chief minister and had distanced themselves from the Congress in 2023. Thakur further said that the FIRs had been lodged against the dissenting MLAs and that their families were also being targeted. He pointed out that a similar Bill had earlier failed to secure approval. BJP MLA Trilok Jamwal also opposed the Bill, asserting that legislation of this nature cannot be applied retrospectively and describing it as punitive in character.

Defending the amendment, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan said the Bill was aimed at curbing defections and preserving the sanctity of democratic institutions. Referring to the political developments during the 2024 Rajya Sabha elections, he described the episode as "an embarrassment for the entire state." Chauhan accused the BJP of encouraging defections and alleged that attempts akin to "Operation Lotus" had failed in Himachal Pradesh. He said that MLAs were disqualified for defying the party whip and remaining absent from the House despite directions.

He also referred to an unprecedented protest by three Independent MLAs, who had sat in protest before the Speaker demanding acceptance of their resignations, and alleged that the BJP was attempting to promote such practices. Revenue Minister Jagat Singh Negi also criticised the BJP, urging it not to adopt "double standards" on the issue. He noted that the anti-defection law itself was introduced by the Congress and said the six MLAs who crossed-voted had originally been elected on the Congress ticket. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu backed the



Bill, stating that the state had witnessed how "democracy was sold" during recent political developments. He asserted that the amendment was not aimed solely at the Congress but was intended to protect legislators across party lines, including those from the BJP.

Sukhu clarified that, unlike the earlier 2024 Bill, which had a retrospective element, the present amendment was "progressive" and would apply to current and future MLAs. He emphasised that the objective was to ensure that no elected representative—whether from a political party or an Independent—engages in defection. He also recounted instances where three Independent MLAs had travelled from Delhi to submit their resignations, highlighting what he described as questionable political conduct. Intervening in the debate, the Speaker clarified that the Bill was not retrospective in nature, as it would apply to members of the current 14th Legislative Assembly and future assemblies. He added that the present Assembly had not yet completed its term.

The Speaker also referred to Supreme Court judgments that have strengthened the anti-defection law and mentioned that he was a member of a committee constituted by the Lok Sabha Speaker to further examine the issue. The chief minister had introduced the 2026 Bill on Wednesday after withdrawing the earlier Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly Members (Allowances and Pension) Amendment Bill, 2024, which had been passed by the House but did not receive the Governor's assent. Under the new Bill, only those MLAs of the current 14th Legislative Assembly and future assemblies who are disqualified under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution will be denied pension benefits. The earlier version had proposed a broader, retrospective application.

The amendment seeks to align state law with the anti-defection provisions of the Constitution, with the stated aim of discouraging political defections and safeguarding the public mandate. The move comes in the backdrop of the 2024 Rajya Sabha elections, during which six Congress MLAs cross-voted, leading to the victory of BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan. Once implemented, the amendment will render disqualified MLAs such as Chaitanya Sharma and Devender Bhutto ineligible for pension. However, disqualified legislators who have served multiple terms—including Sudhir Sharma, Inder Dutt Lakhnpal, Ashish Sharma, Hoshiyar Singh Chambaly, Ravi Thakur, K L Thakur, and Rajendra Rana—will continue to receive pension benefits for their previous tenures.

## Lt Gen Pushpendra Pal Singh takes over as Western Army Commander

GNS News Agency, April 2

Lieutenant General Pushpendra Pal Singh, formerly the Vice Chief of the Army Staff (VCOAS), has today assumed command as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Command. He succeeds Lieutenant General Manoj Kumar Katiyar, who superannuated on March 31. An officer of the Parachute Regiment (Special Forces), Lieutenant General Pushpendra Pal Singh was commissioned into 4th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (Special Forces) in December 1987. He is an alumnus of the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun and Lucknow University.

With a career spanning nearly four decades, the General Officer has held a wide spectrum of command and staff appointments. He has commanded formations in high-altitude and sensitive operational sectors along both the Northern and Western borders. His operational experience includes participation in Operation Pawan, as well as multiple tenures in counter-insurgency operations along the Line of Control and the International Boundary.

Prior to his appointment as VCOAS, he served as Director General Operational Logistics (DGOL) at Army Headquarters, where he played a key role in enhancing operational mobility, logistics integration and sustainment capabilities. As VCOAS, he contributed significantly to force structuring, capability development and overall operational



preparedness of the Indian Army.

The General Officer has attended the Defence Management Course at the College of Defence Management, Secunderabad and the Advanced Professional Programme in Public Administration at the Indian Institute of Public Administration. He holds a Master's degree in Philosophy from Panjab University. On assuming command, Lieutenant General Pushpendra Pal Singh reaffirmed his commitment to sustaining high operational readiness, fostering innovation and ensuring the welfare and morale of all ranks. The transition underscores continuity in leadership and the Indian Army's steadfast commitment to operational excellence and national security.

## 'Pernicious state of affairs in society': Allahabad HC seeks probe into 'honeytrap' gangs

GNS News Agency, April 2

Allahabad HC The bench was hearing a writ petition filed in one such incident in Bijnor district by a woman and three others, including two police constables and a local politician. Expressing serious concern over gangs using women to 'honeytrap' men and extorting money through blackmail, a division bench of the Allahabad High Court has sought a thorough investigation to trace such gangs operating and targeting innocent people. "If offences like these are permitted to continue, it would become difficult to live in a decent world," the bench of Justices J J Munir and Tarun Saxena observed on March 30 while issuing the direction to the Uttar Pradesh government; Additional Chief Secretary, Home Department; Director General of Police; and Inspector General (IG) of Meerut Zone. The bench was hearing a writ petition filed in one such incident in Bijnor district by a woman and three others, including two police constables and a local politician. The four were allegedly part of a honeytrap gang that targeted a local businessman through the woman. All four accused had approached the court seeking relief in the case lodged against them. The counsel for the petitioner also prayed for withdrawing the petition, and the bench allowed it.

But the division bench observed, "... This is a matter which discloses a very pernicious state of affairs in society. The first petitioner [the woman accused] reached the third respondent [the alleged victim of honeytrap] over his WhatsApp and honey-trapped him, doing sweet talk. She called him over to a certain place in Bijnor, took him to a hotel, where she had carnal relations with him." The bench further observed, "During the escapade, she captured some video clips of the informant and resorted to blackmail. The other petitioners, who are said to be in connivance with the first petitioner, all men, are policemen. They are petitioners nos. 4 and 5, Lalu Yadav and Punit Tyagi. Petitioner no. 3 in this case, Shahbej alias Shanu, is a ward member [local politician], who was also involved with the first petitioner in the crime." After the video was captured, it was passed on



to the third petitioner [politician], who called the informant [the victim] to his place, where the two policemen were also there. They inquired if the informant... knew the first petitioner and showed him the video clip that had been deceitfully captured," the court observed. The man was then told that the woman wanted Rs 10 lakh, but it could be settled at Rs 8 lakh. The man said he was under great anxiety, mixed up with emotions of fear and shame. As the blackmailing progressed, he did not part with money but reported the case to the police, the court stated in its observation.

The bench further observed, "This is a very serious matter. While we accept the petitioners' [the accused] prayer to withdraw this writ petition, we are of the opinion, on our own motion, that it requires thorough investigation to be undertaken by the Inspector General of Police of Meerut Zone. He shall alert the entire district police chiefs in the zone to maintain strict vigil if a gang of this kind is operating, or other gangs are also operating, blackmailing innocent people by utilising women for springing a honey trap, or in some other way, bringing about the same results." The petition is dismissed as withdrawn, but without the directions that we have made above, the bench stated in its order. It also directed the Registrar (Compliance) to communicate the order to the DGP, UP, Lucknow, the Inspector General of Police, Meerut Zone and Additional Chief Secretary (Home).

## '13 bombs' threat: Punjab and Haryana High Court targeted in AI-generated threat mail

GNS News Agency, April 2

A day after two men hurled a "crude bomb" at the BJP's Punjab office in Chandigarh, a major security alert was sounded in the city following a bomb threat email warning that "13 bombs" would explode on the premises of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Sources said the high court authorities received the Hotmail email at around 6 am. According to police sources, the email was sent from an ID identified as "Sourav Biswas" to an official high court email account, with the subject line "Dravida Nadu Government-in-Exile".

Police sources said the email's content appeared to have been translated into Hindi using an AI-based application. The message contained a lengthy, structured write-up claiming to represent a so-called "government-in-exile" and associated groups, outlining their ideology and alleged objectives. The email named certain organisations, such as TNLA and TNRT, and listed a range of allegations against central institutions, enforcement agencies, and political groups. It accused authorities of targeting minorities, misusing laws, and suppressing dissent. The sender of the email has also made claims about financial irregularities, alleged influence over media narratives, and even referenced narcotics networks in southern India involving influential entities, attempting to build a broader political context around the threat.

Following the alert, police teams, bomb disposal squads, and other security agencies were rushed to the High Court complex. The entire area was cordoned off, and



an extensive search operation was launched. Entry and exit points were strictly monitored, with additional frisking and surveillance measures implemented. Senior officials said multiple teams, including dog squads and forensic experts, were deployed to ensure no suspicious object was left unchecked. CCTV footage from the complex and surrounding areas is also being reviewed as part of the precautionary measures. Police officers said that while the authenticity of the threat is yet to be confirmed, they are not taking any risks. A cyber investigation has also been initiated to trace the sender and determine the origin and credibility of the email. The city has witnessed similar incidents in the past. Recently, several schools received hoax bomb threat emails, while the District Court Complex was also targeted earlier. Even the High Court has previously received such threats, later found to be non-credible.

## Trainee was driving KSRTC bus that killed toddler in Haveri; probe ordered



GNS News Agency, April 2

A day after a toddler was killed and four others were injured after a government bus rammed into pedestrians at the Haveri bus stand in Karnataka, the police said on Thursday that a trainee was driving the vehicle at the time. A departmental inquiry has been initiated. The deceased, two-and-a-half-year-old Hazrat Ali Ismail Raichur from Savanur, was rushed to the Karnataka Medical College and Research Institute but died on the way.

According to the Haveri traffic police, the incident took place around 7 am on Wednesday when the driver, identified as Manjunath R, was attempting to park the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus ahead of its scheduled trip to Lakshmeshwar. "Preliminary inquiry suggests the trainee driver may have mistaken the accelerator for the brake and pressed it, causing the bus to lurch forward into people standing on the platform," a police officer said. The police added that the bus was a night-service vehicle being moved to the platform for its first trip of the day. The injured were identified as Vasudev Gurunathappa Utaleker, 44, his wife Kavyanjali, 39, their daughter Harsha, 6—all from Bankapur—and Arbaz Khan Saudagar, 13, from Savanur. They were treated at the Haveri District Hospital and later discharged. Officials said the driver had been inducted into service around eight months ago and was undergoing training. A case has been registered at the Haveri traffic police station under sections 281 (death by negligence) and 125(A) (acts done rashly or negligently that endanger human life or personal safety) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

## 'Last opportunity': Delhi HC tells AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, 20 others to respond to ED plea in excise policy case

GNS News Agency, April 2

The Delhi High Court Thursday granted Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convenor Arvind Kejriwal and 20 others a "last opportunity" to respond to the Enforcement Directorate's plea before the court, seeking expungement of adverse remarks made against the agency by a trial court while discharging the accused in the alleged "liquor policy scam" case. The HC had sought a response from the 23 accused in the case, including former CM Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia, among others, on March 10. However, only two, Abhishek Boinpally and Vinod Chauhan, have filed their responses so far. The court recorded in its order that while the respondents were granted further time on March 19 to file their responses to the ED's plea and the remaining respondents are seeking further time, "last opportunity is being granted" to them for filing their responses by April 22. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma noted that failure to file responses by April 22 will mean their opportunity to respond to the ED's plea will "automatically stand closed". Justice Sharma also noted that the arguments in the case will be

heard on the next date of hearing on April 22. While the 23 accused were discharged in the CBI case by a trial court last month, the ED case accusing them of money laundering remains pending before a trial court. The CBI, however, has a challenge against the discharge order of the trial court pending before the Delhi HC. The ED, in its plea, has taken objection to 18 paragraphs in the trial court's nearly 600-page verdict. While the trial court was dealing only with the CBI case, the ED has objected to instances where the trial court, in its judgment, had referred to allegations under PMLA. These include instances where the trial court, in its judgment, observed: "... When such allegations are sought to be re-characterised or 'dressed up' as CBI cases or PMLA proceedings, an additional and more serious constitutional concern arises," and "if investigative agencies such as the CBI or enforcement authorities under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) were permitted to enter the electoral arena merely on allegations of 'cash spending', 'illegal funding', or 'unaccounted expenditure', the inevitable consequence would be the criminalisation of electoral competition."

## A routine check, moving jute bag: How 16 Indian Softshell turtles were rescued in Greater Noida

GNS News Agency, April 2

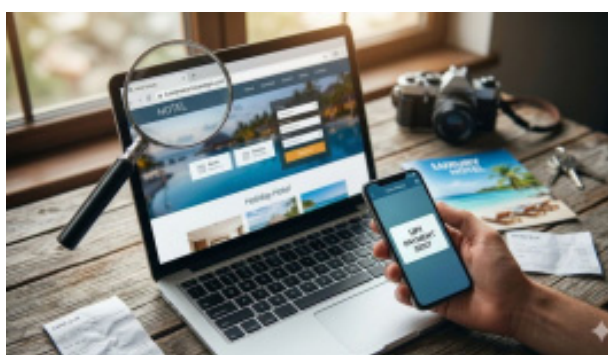
What was meant to be a routine check in Jharcha, Greater Noida, took an unexpected turn on Wednesday evening. A police team was on the lookout for suspicious persons when they spotted a man on a scooter, carrying a rather heavy jute bag that appeared to be moving. The team stopped the man, asked him to open the bag — and found 16 turtles inside. Police said these are Indian Softshell or Gangetic Softshell Turtles, which fall under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 — the most protected category under Indian wildlife law — and were being smuggled to markets in Delhi, from where they would reach international markets. Police added that the turtles fetch between Rs 40,000 and Rs 1 lakh each on the black market. Jarcha Station House Officer, Kailas Nath, told The Indian Express that the accused has been identified as Gagan (22), a resident of Haryana's Panipat. Police also seized the two-wheeler he was using to smuggle the reptiles. Nath said that it was a routine check in Jarcha, which lies at the trisection of Hapur, Bulandshahr and Gautam Buddh Nagar, when police spotted Gagan driving with a heavy bag. "We are investigating if Gagan had other associates working with him. He lived in Jarcha and would trap turtles from Samana Canal and nearby ponds before selling them in Delhi. A net used to catch the turtles was also recovered from his posses-



sion," said the SHO. According to police, the forest department was alerted and the turtles were rescued.

"The turtles, believed to be Indian Softshell or Gangetic Softshell Turtles, are predominantly found in the Ganga river system and carry significant value in international black markets, with their price running into several lakhs of rupees," said officials. The SHO said the demand for these turtles is particularly high in Nepal and China. "If it has 20 claws, the international price is Rs 1 lakh. We have registered an FIR against Gagan under relevant sections of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972," Nath said.

## Summer vacation alert: How fake luxury resort websites stole Rs 6 lakh from travellers



GNS News Agency, April 2

Planning a summer getaway? Your search for the perfect hotel could lead you into a digital trap. The Mysuru Cyber, Economic, and Narcotics (CEN) crimes police station registered an FIR on March 27 after cybercriminals allegedly impersonated a luxury resort's website to defraud customers of Rs 6 lakh. The complaint, filed by Aiyappa Alamanda of The Windflower Resorts and Spa, alleged that fraudsters created multiple websites that closely mimicked the resort's official portal. These fake sites were allegedly listed on 'Google Business', causing them to appear at the top of search results. The fraudsters also created fake email IDs and contact numbers to make the portals look genuine,

as per the complaint.

According to the police, at least eight customers were cheated after being pressured to make immediate UPI payments. Fraudsters allegedly claimed that rooms were filling up rapidly during the peak summer season, prompting travellers to skip essential verification steps in their rush to secure a booking. "The damage was done before the fake websites were eventually taken down following the FIR," a police officer said. In Bengaluru, G K Mithin Kumar, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northeast), confirmed receiving similar complaints and urged travellers to be hyper-vigilant. "The customers must verify the website URL before booking and need to avoid unrealistic deals and must contact hotels before booking," he added. Every year, families plan short vacations after school examinations, typically searching for hotels on Google and transferring advance payments online to confirm bookings. During peak seasons like summer holidays, hotels fill up quickly, and in the rush to secure rooms, travellers often skip essential verification steps, a vulnerability that cybercriminals are actively exploiting. Cybercriminals frequently register fake websites in the names of well-known hotels and resorts, listing convincing contact numbers to appear legitimate. Travellers should treat the following as red flags: unusually large discounts, vague or suspicious claims, and pressure to pay immediately, a police officer said.

## 'Sahibganj link': Minors paid Rs 5,000 to steal phones at Bengaluru IPL match, linked to Chennai stadium thefts



The Bengaluru police investigation has revealed a "Jamtara-style" operational model where minors from Jharkhand's Sahibganj are recruited as pickpockets for high-density events across India.

GNS News Agency, April 2

A group of seven minors apprehended by the Bengaluru police, along with an adult handler, for stealing 29 mobile phones in the city, including several at the inaugural IPL 2026 match at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on March 28, were part of a 'Sahibganj' gang involved in phone thefts at crowded places around India, a police probe has revealed. According to police sources, the minors, who hail from the Tinpahar region of Jharkhand's Sahibganj district, were paid Rs 5,000 each to steal phones at crowded locations. The gang operators also covered their travel, food, and accommodation.

"This is like a Jamtara gang (which is linked to cyber crimes) involved in stealing phones but operating from the Sahibganj area of Jharkhand. We cannot rule out the possibility of stolen phones being used for cyber crimes," a Karnataka Police officer said. Investigators said the "Sahibganj gang" has been active since around 2012, with multiple reports of phone thefts at large events across the country. Sources added that members of the same network had struck a year earlier, stealing 38 mobile phones on March 28, 2025, in and around Chennai's Chepauk Stadium during an IPL match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Chennai Super Kings. "The same gang involved in the recent mobile phone thefts in Bengaluru during the inaugural IPL match is suspected to have struck at the IPL season last year in Chennai. The gang members on the field may have been different, but they have the same origins," said a Karnataka Police source familiar with the investigations in Bengaluru and Chennai. "We have sent a police team to Chennai to collect details of the gang from the 2025 probe," the source added.

The Bengaluru police investigation into the mobile thefts during the March 28 IPL match revealed that a handler

brought the minors to the city for the local operation. The alleged "mukhiya" has been identified as Shubham Kumar, 26, also from Sahibganj. He was arrested based on information provided by the minors, who were first apprehended on the night of March 28 following multiple theft complaints at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. "He coordinated and directed the movement of the minors brought to Bengaluru for the thefts," a police source said. "The minors were brought to Bengaluru through different modes. Some legs of the journey from Jharkhand to Bengaluru were by flight from Patna and other stretches were by road or train. The entire funding was under the gang's care. They were warned of punishments if they did not meet a minimum target of five phones during the theft operation. It is an organised crime," the source added.

While the gang is reported to have bought IPL tickets on the black market to commit thefts during the 2025 IPL season, they allegedly pickpocketed "complimentary" tickets for some of the premier spectator stands at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, the police said. Of the 29 phones recovered by the Bengaluru police, 14 were iPhones. "They did not just operate at the stadium. They operated around the stadium, at the crowded metro station, and in the surrounding areas to steal tickets and phones," the source said. The police suspect the same network was behind a series of thefts during IPL 2025. The "Sahibganj gang" allegedly stole 74 mobile phones during matches in Bengaluru (March 22) and Chennai (March 28). In Chennai, the police acted on as many as 20 complaints received of mobile phone thefts at the Chepauk Stadium during the IPL match and tracked suspects to hotels in Vellore using CCTV footage two days after the robberies. They arrested our adults and apprehended four minors.

Later, the probe in Chennai also led to the arrests of four more people and the recovery of more phones. The gang, which hailed from Sahibganj, entered the Chepauk stadium using black-market tickets, the Chennai police said last year. The Chennai police also said the gang had struck at the Chinnaswamy Stadium earlier that season, though those incidents were not widely reported. Those arrested from the "Sahibganj gang" for the mobile thefts in Chennai were Rajkumar Noniya, 25, Akash Noniya, 24, Vishal Kumar Mahto, 24, Gobind Kumar Noniya, 23, Sonu Kumar Chauhan, 19, Dev Kumar Noniya, 20, and Bittu Kumar Singh, 18. In 2025, the Chennai police registered a First Information Report (FIR) at the Triplicane Police Station regarding phone thefts at the Chepauk Stadium and surrounding areas. After the arrests of the "Sahibganj gang" and recovery of phones, a magistrate's court facilitated the return of several devices to victims. However, on June 4, 2025, a metropolitan magistrate granted default bail to the accused after the police failed to file a chargesheet within 60 days. The case is currently awaiting trial, and the accused have not appeared in court despite summons issued on February 19 and March 23, 2026. One of the accused in the Chennai case, Rajkumar Noniya, was arrested again in September 2025, along with Suraj Kumar Noniya, 35, and a 17-year-old, for allegedly carrying out thefts at a fish market at Marina Beach. The Chennai police described the gang as nomadic, moving from city to city and typically staying in one place for about a week. During IPL 2025, members reportedly stayed in lodges in Vellore while carrying out thefts in Bengaluru and Chennai.

## Burkina Army, jihadists killed more than 1,800 civilians since 2023



and VDPs between January 2023 and April 2025, while JNIM was responsible for at least 582 deaths in 24 attacks over that same period. The rights watchdog said its report was based on verification and analysis of open source information — including photos, videos and satellite imagery — along with interviews with more than 450 people living in Burkina Faso, Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Mali. "In one of the deadliest attacks, "Burkinabe military and VDPs killed hundreds of civilians in at least 16 villages and hamlets north of Djibo over several days" in December 2023," HRW said.

"Many survivors described the killings as 'butchery' and said they were left with deep psychological wounds," the report noted. HRW also accused the JNIM of targeting civilians who refused to submit to its authority or whom it accused of supporting government forces. In August 2024, in the VDP-stronghold town of Barsalogo, JNIM fighters "shot dead at least 133 people and injured more than 200 in fewer than two hours", the report said.

As transitional President and Army commander, junta chief Traore "should be impartially investigated for criminal liability for all abuses by the Burkinabe military and VDPs documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility," HRW said. "Six other leaders, including Burkina Faso's Ambassador to Washington and former Defence Minister Kassoum Coulibaly, current Defence Minister Celestin Simpore and Army major general Moussa Diallo, should also be investigated for their role," HRW said. The rights group also called for JNIM's leadership, including supreme leader Iyad Ag Ghaly and second-in-command Amadou Kouffa, as well as Burkina's JNIM country leader Jafar Dicko and his brother Ousmane Dicko to be investigated for criminal liability for JNIM abuses. HRW also called on Burkina Faso's partners and donors to impose sanctions and to refrain from cooperating with the country's Army.

Burkina's ruling junta led by Captain Ibrahim Traore that took power in a September 2022 coup has been unable to stem violence waged by jihadist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, which have caused thousands of deaths over the past decade, according to a report released by Human Rights Watch (HRW), on Thursday (April 2, 2026). According to the HRW, the Army relies on the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP), made up of civilian volunteers recruited to aid in the fight against jihadists.

"The Army, VDP and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, an Al-Qaeda affiliate known by its Arabic acronym JNIM, have killed "at least 1,837 civilians in 11 regions of the country between January 2023 and August 2025", including dozens of children, in 57 incidents," HRW said. "The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) should open a preliminary examination into war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all parties to the conflict in Burkina Faso since September 2022," the report said.

Of the total killed, HRW found that at least 1,255 civilians were killed in 33 incidents carried out by the military

## U.S. Venezuela: America lifts sanctions on acting President Delcy Rodríguez



GNS News Agency, April 2

The U.S. on Wednesday (April 1, 2026) lifted sanctions on Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, according to an Office of Foreign Assets Control entry on the Treasury Department website. The newly announced sanctions relief is the latest U.S. recognition of Ms. Rodríguez as a legitimate authority in Venezuela ever since the U.S. military captured her predecessor, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife on Jan. 3 in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

The pair have since been taken to New York to face drug trafficking charges and both have pleaded not guilty. The move allows Rodríguez to more freely work with U.S. companies and investors. Without explicitly mentioning the sanctions targeting her, Ms. Rodríguez, in a statement, expressed hope for U.S.-Venezuela relations.

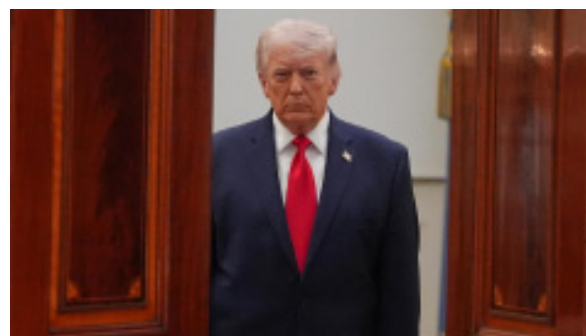
"We value President Donald Trump's decision as a step toward normalizing and strengthening relations between our countries," she said on her Telegram channel after the Treasury's announcement. "We trust that this progress will allow for the lifting of current sanctions against our country, enabling us to build and guarantee an effective bilateral cooperation agenda for the benefit of our people." Ms. Rodríguez and her brother, Jorge Rodríguez, were hit with U.S. sanctions during Mr. Trump's first term

for their role in allegedly undermining Venezuelan democracy.

The siblings — along with other members of Mr. Maduro's inner circle — were added to the Treasury's list in September 2018, months after Mr. Maduro won re-election in a contest widely considered a sham because opposition politicians and parties were banned from participating. "Maduro has given Delcy Eloina Rodríguez Gomez and Jorge Jesus Rodríguez Gomez senior positions within the Venezuelan government to help him maintain power and solidify his authoritarian rule," Treasury said in a statement at the time. The current Trump administration, however, chose to work with Delcy Rodríguez, instead of Venezuela's political opposition, after Mr. Maduro's ouster. She has since led Venezuela's cooperation with the administration's phased plan to turn the country around, pitching her oil-rich nation to international investors and opening the nation up to private capital, international arbitration, and scrutiny.

Last month, the administration recognized her as the "sole Head of State" of Venezuela in an ongoing civil case in U.S. federal court. The U.S. has lifted sanctions on major Venezuelan industries. In March, Treasury issued a broad authorization allowing the state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., or PDVSA, to directly sell Venezuelan oil to U.S. companies and on global markets, a massive shift after Washington for years had largely blocked dealings with Venezuela's government and its oil sector. In the hours after the Jan. 3 operation, the country's ruling-party-loyal high court declared his absence "temporary," effectively eliminating the need for a speedy election and preserving the protections the office grants him under international law. The court ordered Rodríguez to take office for up to 90 days with the possibility of extending it to six months if approved by the National Assembly, which is also controlled by the ruling party and presided over by her brother.

## What Trump's speech says about his war on Iran | Analysis



seemed to have strengthened Iran's resolve to stand up to the U.S.

On February 28, when he launched the war, Mr. Trump outlined five broad objectives: to "raze" Iran's missile industry "to the ground"; to "annihilate" Iran's Navy; to ensure that Iran's "proxies" could no longer "destabilise" the region; to prevent Iran from ever obtaining a nuclear weapon; and to bring about regime change. "When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations," he said at the time. In his April 1 address, Mr. Trump claimed the U.S. was now completing all of these objectives.

The ground reality, however, tells a different story. Despite a month-long campaign by the U.S. and Israel, Iran continues to strike Israel, which is more than 2,000 km away, with ballistic missiles, and target American bases in the Persian Gulf region. Mr. Trump has claimed that he has annihilated Iran's navy, but he is not willing to send American troops to reopen the Strait of Hormuz—no country, even Britain, America's closest ally in Europe, wants to join this war. In fact, the U.S. Navy has stayed away from the Persian Gulf, where Iran still takes shots. Israel is bombing Iran while carrying out a ground invasion in Lebanon against Hezbollah, an Iranian ally. But Iran and Hezbollah continue to launch coordinated attacks. Last week, Yemen's Ansar Allah (better known as Houthis), another Iranian ally, launched a ballistic missile at Israel, formally joining the war. The Houthis, who rule almost half of Yemen, have the capability to shut the Bab el Mandeb Strait, a chokepoint between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. If the Strait is closed, traffic through the Suez Canal will be disrupted. And if the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Bab el Mandeb are closed at the same time, it would be catastrophic for the global economy. And Mr. Trump's last objective, regime change in Iran, remains distant. He now claims that regime change has already occurred, which is not a serious argument. The assassination of Ali Khamenei did not alter the state structure of Iran. If anything, it has strengthened elite cohesion within the Islamic Republic and further elevated the IRGC's standing in the system. What Mr. Trump can do is continue bombing Iran, which is what he threatened to do in his speech. He is using the threat of extensive strikes, including at civilian infrastructure, as an added layer of pressure to force Iran to shift its position and make a deal. But if Mr. Trump follows through on his threats, Iran is likely to retaliate by attacking energy infrastructure across the Persian Gulf, driving up fuel prices further. Iran maintains, at least publicly, that it was in talks when the U.S. bombed the country. In the words of Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Tehran is not ready for a ceasefire. With Mr. Trump lacking an exit path and Iran prepared to absorb the costs and play a longer game, the war is likely to drag on, with serious implications for the Persian Gulf and the broader global economy.

Before U.S. President Donald Trump delivered his national address on the evening of April 1 in the White House, Iran and Hezbollah launched heavy missile attacks at Israel. While Mr. Trump was speaking about America's achievements in the war, including degrading Iran's missile capability, missile alerts were issued in the UAE. After Mr. Trump concluded his speech, Iran launched another salvo of missiles at Israel. There was much speculation on what Mr. Trump was going to say in his first primetime national address since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28. Some said he would escalate with a ground attack, while others said he would chicken out or issue a timeline to wind up operations. But the U.S. leader did not say anything new. The speech was largely a reassertion of the claims he has been making over the past few weeks. He said the U.S. was "on track to complete all of America's military objectives shortly". He also said the U.S. was going to hit Iran "extremely hard" over the next two to three weeks. "We are going to bring them back to the Stone Ages."

Mr. Trump said discussions were under way and asked the Iranians to make a deal. "If there is no deal, we are going to hit each and every one of their electric-generating plants very hard and properly simultaneously." He said the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman that has been taken control of by Iran after the war, is not America's problem. He had earlier asked America's allies to send ships to reopen the Strait — which nobody is willing to do. He also indicated that he was not considering a ground operation to seize Iran's enriched uranium because it's buried deep underground. "It would take months to get near the nuclear dust," he said, adding that U.S. satellites are monitoring Iran's nuclear sites. While the main objective of the speech appeared to make the case for the war to the American public, it also underscores the limited options Mr. Trump has in winding down the conflict. In the speech Mr. Trump praised the Venezuela attack earlier this year. But in Venezuela, U.S. troops went in and got out with President Nicolas Maduro, handing the country to his Vice-President who is willing to work with Washington. But in Iran, the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

## Trump says Iran president requests ceasefire, Tehran says 'false'

GNS News Agency, April 2

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Iran's president had asked for a ceasefire, but ruled out any truce until the vital Strait of Hormuz was reopened for crucial energy shipments. But his assertion was flatly denied by Iran, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei rejecting it as "false and baseless". Trump made the remarks ahead of a prime-time speech at 9:00 pm (0100 GMT Thursday) - his first since US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28 ignited a regional war and sparked a global energy crisis. Tehran has insisted there are no ongoing negotiations to end the war, and launched fresh missile attacks on Israel and US-allied Gulf nations on Wednesday, as AFP journalists reported massive explosions in the Iranian capital. But ahead of his national address, Trump said that Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian had asked for a truce. "We will consider when Hormuz Strait is open, free, and clear. Until then, we are blasting Iran into oblivion or, as they say, back to the Stone Ages!!!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. Trump's tone has seen-sawed between combative and conciliatory since the war began.

Late on Tuesday, he said that the month-long conflict could be over in "two weeks, maybe three." Pezeshkian had said Iran had the "necessary will" for a ceasefire, but only if its foes guaranteed that hostilities would not return. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said Wednesday that the Hormuz, a narrow strait through which one-fifth of the world's oil normally passes, would remain closed to the country's "enemies". The Guards also confirmed they hit an oil tanker in the Gulf they said belonged to Israel. A British maritime security agency said the vessel was struck off Qatar, reporting damage but no casualties.

An airport in central Iran was damaged in an attack on Wednesday evening, the deputy provincial governor of Isfahan province, told local news agency of Mehr. Iranian media also said steel complexes in central and southwest Iran were damaged in separate attacks. An AFP journalist reported huge explosions in Tehran on Wednesday afternoon and earlier strikes near the former US embassy, now a symbol of decades of US-Iranian tensions. The Israeli military confirmed it struck Tehran, while emergency services in Israel said an Iranian missile attack wounded 14 people, including an 11-year-old girl. Israel also said its air defences had responded to a missile fired from Yemen -- the third attack by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels since they entered the war over the weekend. In Lebanon, seven people were killed in strikes around south Beirut, the health ministry said Wednesday, with the Israeli military saying it had struck a senior Hezbollah commander. A Lebanese security source and a Hezbollah source both told AFP that the strike had killed Hezbollah's top commander for Iraq military affairs. AFP correspondents at the scene saw a blackened, debris-strewn street.

"Nobody knows what's happening," resident Hassan Jalwan told AFP, adding that "displaced people have been sleeping in the open" in the area. Israel launched broad strikes and a ground offensive against Lebanon after attacks on March 2 by the Tehran-backed militant group Hezbollah. The Lebanese health ministry said Wednesday that Israeli attacks had killed more than 1,300, among the thousands reported killed across the region since the war began, mostly in Iran. Iran has also carried out retaliatory attacks on nations in the Gulf it says have been launchpads for strikes. A Bangladeshi national was killed on Wednesday by falling shrapnel from an intercepted drone in the United Arab Emirates. Strikes in Kuwait caused a large fire in fuel tanks at its international airport, Bahrain's interior ministry said a fire broke out at a business facility, and Saudi Arabia said several drones were intercepted. Meanwhile, a drone strike caused a massive fire at the storage facilities of an engine oil firm in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan. "Every day, we hear the sound of drones," Waad Abdulrazaq, a 31-year-old truck



driver, told AFP near Iraq's Erbil international airport.

"We hear them in the morning, and we hear them at night. We can no longer sleep or live in peace." Optimism sparked by Trump's comments on the timeline for the end of the war pushed oil prices down Wednesday, and stock markets rallied in Europe and Asia.

But Iran's chokehold on Hormuz, through which Gulf oil and gas exports reach global markets, has sent energy prices soaring and unleashed global economic turmoil. Average US gasoline prices topped \$4 a gallon for the first time in four years this week, while European inflation spiked and governments around the world started to unveil support measures. "We're a small outfit," driver Nicolas Barthes told AFP at a protest against soaring fuel prices in the French city of Toulouse. "The additional diesel cost for me this month is EUR15,000, and we're not managing to pass all of that on." Susannah Streeter, chief investment strategist at Wealth Club, said prices were still about 50 percent above pre-war levels, showing "scepticism still remains about Trump's claims of progress". Trump has criticised allies for not helping in the war, and President Emmanuel Macron repeated Wednesday that France would not take part. Britain said Wednesday that it would host a meeting of about 35 countries this week to discuss how to reopen the strait. Washington has not said who it is speaking with in Iran, which has denied it is in talks. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Al Jazeera he still receives messages from US envoy Steve Witkoff, "directly, as before, and this does not mean that we are in negotiations". Trump threatened earlier this week to "obliterate" Iran's oil wells, its main Kharg Island export terminal, and possibly water desalination plants if the Islamic republic didn't make a deal.

## Iran's Parliament commission approves Hormuz toll plan: state TV

Iranian state media reported Monday (March 30, 2026) that a parliamentary commission had approved plans to impose tolls on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway vital to oil and gas shipments that has been effectively closed due to the war in West Asia. Citing a member of the Parliament's security commission, state TV said the plan involved, among other things, "financial arrangements and rial toll systems" and "implementing the sovereign role of Iran", as well as cooperation with Oman on the other side of the Strait. It also included the "prohibition of Americans and the Zionist regime from passing through", as well as a ban on other countries imposing sanctions on Iran. Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the Strait of Hormuz in peacetime.

## Satellite images begin to show damage wrought by war on Iran and retaliatory attacks



The images come from Planet Labs PBC, a San Francisco-based firm used by media outlets, including The Associated Press. Planet Labs has put a two-week delay on its imagery becoming public, citing concerns its imagery could be used by "adversarial actors." High-resolution images also have been published by competing firms. Other providers, like the U.S. Geological Survey, have been publishing lower-resolution imagery as well that's been useful.

The United States and Israel have been striking a wide variety of targets, including leadership figures in Iran, military bases, missile and air defense sites and positions of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and its volunteer force, the Basij. Iran has responded with drone and missile fire targeting Israel and nearby Gulf Arab nations. Here's a look at what's visible in a selection of Planet Labs' pictures, as well as others. Some of the most dramatic images from Planet Labs so far have been in Bandar Abbas, home to a major Iranian military port next to the crucial Strait of Hormuz connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

A satellite view shows the Bandar Abbas harbour after a strike amid the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, Iran, March 2, 2026. A satellite view shows the Bandar Abbas harbour after a strike amid the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, Iran, March 2, 2026. | Photo Credit: 2026 Planet Labs PBC via ReutersImages taken on March 2 show ships ablaze at the port. The U.S. military's Central Command has been targeting Iran's naval assets and says it has sank or damaged more than 100 Iranian vessels so far in the war.

Planet Labs' images from March 6 show damage to several buildings at the Parchin military base outside Tehran, Iran's capital. Israel's military said its Parchin strikes hit "infrastructure used for the production of essential components for the development of various weapons." The site has been linked to Iran's ballistic missile program as well. The island kingdom of Bahrain, home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, has seen heavy Iranian fire targeting both military bases and oil installations. A March 1 image by Planet Labs shows a major building at the base destroyed, as well as two radomes — geodesic domes covering radar antennas — likely by Iranian missile and drone fire. A later, March 6 Planet Labs photo showed another building damaged. A satellite image shows smoke rising from the U.S. Fifth fleet naval base, after Iranian strikes, in Manama, Bahrain, March 1, 2026. The Navy has not offered a clear breakdown in the damage done so far at the base, but Iran has repeatedly claimed to have attacked it. Online videos also show incoming fire targeting the base. During the 12-day war in June, Iran attacked and destroyed a similar radome at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, used for secure communications. An Iranian attack targeted Qatar's Al Udeid

Air Base and caused damage there. This March 15, 2026, satellite photo from Planet Labs PBC shows damage after an Iranian attack at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. This March 15, 2026, satellite photo from Planet Labs PBC shows damage after an Iranian attack at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. | Photo Credit: 2026 Planet Labs PBC via APA March 1 photo from Planet Labs shows damage to one of the buildings at the massive air base serving as the forward headquarters of the U.S. military's Central Command, which is prosecuting the war. Qatar and the U.S. have not acknowledged the damage.

An Iranian attack also targeted Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base and caused damage there, according to a March 15 photo. Satellite images, taken March 15 by an Airbus Defense and Space Pléiades Neo satellite and analyzed by the AP, show damage at Abu Dhabi's Al Dhafra Air Base. Damage can be seen at one set of hangars to the northwest of the facility. Another hangar to the southeast of the facility appears shredded by fire, with an adjacent hangar sustaining roof damage. It's unclear what was in the hangars.

A damaged U.S. Boeing E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control aircraft following an Iranian strike on the airbase, amid the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran, at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia in this picture obtained from social media released on March 29, 2026. A damaged U.S. Boeing E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control aircraft following an Iranian strike on the airbase, amid the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran, at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia in this picture obtained from social media released on March 29, 2026. | Photo Credit: SOCIAL MEDIA via Reuters

Al Dhafra typically hosts some 2,000 American troops and has served as a major base of operations for everything from armed drones to F-35 stealth fighters in recent years. The U.S. military for years only vaguely referred to Al Dhafra as a base in "southwest Asia" before the UAE became more willing to acknowledge the American presence there. In Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, there's damage seen at France's Camp de la Paix naval base. Satellite images from March 3 show damage to two large hangarlike buildings at the facility. The base is near Zayed Port, in Abu Dhabi, and close to its Cultural District that includes the Louvre Abu Dhabi and other major museums both open and still under construction. Smoke billows from Zayed port after an Iranian attack, following United States and Israel strikes on Iran, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, March 1, 2026.

Smoke billows from Zayed port after an Iranian attack, following United States and Israel strikes on Iran, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, The U.S. Geological Survey's Landsat satellites also have been key in spotting major fires. Imagery from Landsat taken on Monday showed a fire at Dubai International Airport after an Iranian drone strike set a fuel tanker ablaze at the world's busiest airport for international travel, causing a plume of noxious black smoke. This satellite image taken by a U.S. Geological Survey Landsat satellite shows a fire days after a suspected Iranian attack targeting the port in Salalah, Oman, on Monday, March 16, 2026. This satellite image taken by a U.S. Geological Survey Landsat satellite shows a fire days after a suspected Iranian attack targeting the port in Salalah, Oman, on Monday, March 16, 2026. | Photo Credit: U.S. Geological Survey via AP Another fire was also seen on Monday at Oman's southern port in Salalah, which came under attack from suspected Iranian drones on March 11, though Tehran has denied launching them in its campaign targeting Gulf Arab states. The fire apparently has been burning since then.

## India can cater to 30 crore PNG connections with its domestic LNG production itself: PNGRB Secretary



India can comfortably cater to the demand of as many as 30 crore domestic piped natural gas (PNG) connections even if it were to solely rely on its domestic production of liquefied natural gas (LNG), according to Anjan Kumar Mishra, Secretary at the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB). Speaking to The Hindu on the sidelines of industry body PHDCCI's Hydrocarbon Summit, Mr. Mishra said India currently had approximately 1.1-1.2 crore active domestic PNG connections. These connections consumed 3 million metric standard cubic meters per day (MMSCMD) of the natural gas.

India's current production of natural gas was about 90 MMSCMD. Therefore, India could comfortably cater to about 30 crore connections solely with its domestic production of natural gas itself, Mr. Mishra said. "Even if we are just reserving the [domestic natural gas] production for domestic PNG, we should be able to make provisions for 30 crore connections," Mr. Mishra said. "So, even if you scale up to say 2 crore, or 5 crore, we are totally sufficient with respect to our domestic consumption."

LPG pressure With escalating tensions in West Asia, the government has sought to institute mechanisms for an accelerated and incentivised transition to piped gas. The objective is to ease some pressure off the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), supplies of which have been affected. Mr. Mishra said the government and the PNGRB were trying to significantly scale up the number of connections added every day. This was inclusive of new connections and re-activating dormant ones. "We are trying to achieve 20,000 connections every day," he said. "At present, we are hovering around 8,000-9,000 connections per day; we are definitely trying to scale the level," Mr. Mishra said.

He further noted that, with permissions being accorded on a "war footing" by the government, municipal corporations, among other entities concerned, had played an active role in the attempt to reach the target. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, in a gazette notification dated March 24, had introduced norms to help accelerate the uptake of and transition to PNG. The norms sought to address structural delays in approvals and access to land and accorded provisions for deemed approvals, among other things. "Capex not an issue" Addressing concerns about the requirement of additional capital expenditure amid the expedited push for PNG and pipeline expansion, Mr. Mishra said the accelerated push would provide the city gas dis-

tributors (CGDs) an opportunity to infuse their available capital more rapidly. "They [CGD companies] were having the capex ready with them but they were not able to expand and infuse the capital because of varied permissions," he stated. "We are expediting the permissions and they would be able to infuse the capital. Moreover, the economics also works because when they have more connections, more revenue would come and they would be able to spend more."

## Israeli strike on Beirut kills senior Hezbollah commander

Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander on Wednesday (April 1, 2026), two sources told AFP, in a Beirut strike that Lebanon's Health Ministry said killed seven people. A Lebanese security source and a Hezbollah source told AFP that the commander, Youssef Hashem, had been responsible for the group's military affairs in Iraq and was in a meeting inside a tent when Israel struck.

Israel's military said Hashem was Hezbollah's commander for its south Lebanon front. Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war in early March when the Tehran-backed Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel to avenge a U.S.-Israeli attack that killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Israel has responded with massive strikes across Lebanon and a ground offensive. A source close to Hezbollah said Hashem is "the highest-ranking official to be targeted since the start of the war." Another Hezbollah member, Mohammad Baqir al-Nabulsi, was also killed in the strike on the Beirut area of Jnah, the group said.

"Sleeping in the open" Several large blasts were heard across the city on Wednesday (April 1, 2026) and a column of smoke was seen rising from Jnah, which is home to apartment buildings, cafes and shops. Hassan Jalwan, who lives nearby, told AFP he heard "big explosions" overnight. "Nobody knows what's happening," he said, adding that "displaced people have been sleeping in the open" across the area. Lebanese authorities say the war has forced more than one million people from their homes. An earlier strike on a car in Khaldeh, just south of the capital, late on Tuesday (March 31, 2026) killed two more people and wounded three, the health ministry said. An AFP correspondent there saw a charred vehicle and paramedics taking a wounded person away on a stretcher. Lebanese state media also reported a strike early on Wednesday (April 1, 2026) on the Hadath district near Beirut's southern suburbs, which has largely emptied of residents following repeated Israeli strikes. State media said Israeli artillery and airstrikes also hit Lebanon's south and east. In the south near the border, Israel has said it intends to reoccupy a swathe of Lebanon to create what officials have called a buffer zone to push back Hezbollah. Israel already occupied southern Lebanon for around two decades until 2000.

## A West Asia security rethink amid America's role



As the United States and Israel-led war against Iran enters its second month — with conflicting viewpoints from Washington DC and Tel Aviv on what the aims of this conflict are and under what conditions they intend to seize their respective military operations — regional countries in West Asia are re-thinking their security future. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz along with Iran's "scorched earth" policy of striking any targets across the Persian Gulf even remotely attached to American interests is leading to demands for a strategic reset. U.S. President Donald Trump's view that he and his team were surprised that Gulf states were targeted by Tehran as a response to the U.S.-Israeli military strikes has surprised many. For a long time, Iran has said that if it was targeted and the regime's collapse made a state aim, the conflict would become regional. However, regional security has always been a minefield as far as interests are concerned; some tough questions and issues will have to be navigated, the trailers of which are visible today.

Pakistan's attempts to claw its way back in Pakistan's attempt to insert itself as a mediator between Iran and the U.S. has, as expected, ruffled feathers in India. For Islamabad — or more accurately Rawalpindi, given self-anointed Field Marshal Asim Munir's central role in the country's political direction — the access it has built with Mr. Trump over the past year provides it an opportunity to further strengthen this relationship. However, more importantly, this is also an opportunity for Pakistan to reorient itself toward West Asia's Islamic identity, as it was often on the peripheries of this identity due to its long-standing economic troubles. The Iran conflict has provided Pakistan's leaders the rare opportunity to break through some of these shackles; its position as the only Muslim-majority country with a nuclear weapon, is one in demand as of today. The fact that Pakistan hosted the Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, last week, as a consortium, and attempted to leverage its access to Tehran as a neighbouring state highlights its exploration of new security arrangements that are more rooted in regional and Islamic cooperation. Stirrings within the Gulf Countries such as Ku-

wait, which has also been on the receiving end of Iranian aggression, have gone ahead and even criticised constructs such as the Arab League. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrar Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in an address to other Arab Foreign Ministers, has said that the League has struggled to address the fast-moving challenges being faced.

The leaders of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar have also met to commit to deepened security cooperation. Until a few years ago, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were fundamentally at odds, with Riyadh imposing an economic blockade on Qatar over regional geopolitical differences. Today, everyone in the Arab construct, from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to Kuwait and Bahrain, is looking to side-step their own intra-Gulf differences, of which there are many, to manage these immediate challenges. Many of these Gulf states had built insurance ecosystems with Iran, either through economic cooperation, or in Saudi Arabia's case, a very public détente brokered by China in 2023, bringing the Shia and Sunni seats of power to a level of normalisation for the first time since 2016. But these "new" regional security ideations will continue to have fundamental problems. For example, while Iran's actions are shaping responses today, Israel's display of unfettered dominance of air power from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf will also create anxieties. Israel's strike against Hamas in Doha, Qatar, in 2025, was a testament to this thinking. In addition, the Arab state's relationship with the U.S. will also come under the spotlight. While security cooperation is expected to increase, the Gulf states may have to be operationally more agile and unilaterally active instead of exclusively banking on the U.S.

The U.S. has fallen short From the 2019 drone attack on Saudi oil facilities by the Houthis to the current conflict, direct American involvement in protecting the Gulf states has clearly not been sufficient. Recent comments by the White House that the Trump administration could ask its Gulf partners to commit finances to help cover the cost of the conflict with Iran raise further questions about what the U.S. role in regional security will be. A high level of American energy self-sufficiency means that Mr. Trump has actionable leverage. However, more than the supply of oil and gas, it is the management of international pricing that remains hugely volatile. After this war, the West Asian security architecture will face hard questions. Beyond the role of the U.S., can a fool-proof system be created without Iran's buy-in? Will hedging security demands to Asian countries, including India — the main buyers of oil and gas — in the coming decades, be a successful tactic in matters of security? Can the Gulf act unanimously to pursue a common security aim despite internal fractures?

## Iran vows 'crushing' attacks on U.S. and Israel after Trump's threats



Iran on Thursday (April 2, 2026) threatened "crushing" attacks on the U.S. and Israel, firing missiles at Tel Aviv after U.S. President Donald Trump vowed to bomb the Islamic republic "back to the Stone Ages." The war, which erupted more than a month ago with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran, has spread throughout the Middle East and roiled the global economy, impacting hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

In a prime-time White House address, Mr. Trump said the U.S. was "very close" to achieving its objectives but warned attacks would intensify if Iran did not reach a negotiated settlement. "Over the next two to three weeks, we are going to bring them back to the Stone Ages, where they belong," said Mr. Trump in a 19-minute speech. Iran's response was immediate, with Israeli air defences pressed into action and police responding to "several" impact sites, as four people were reportedly injured in the Tel Aviv area. The Iranian military command centre Khatam Al-Anbiya put out a statement carried on state TV warning the U.S. and Israel to expect "more crushing, broader, and more destructive actions." "With trust in Almighty God, this war will continue until your humiliation, disgrace, permanent and certain regret, and surrender," said the statement.

The latest attacks came as Jewish Israelis were celebrating Passover, which some were forced to do underground. "This is not my first choice," said a writer who gave his name as Jeffrey, at a meal organised in a bunker in Tel Aviv. "But at least in the shelter, we can sit here and just ride it out," he added. "Resist until the end"

Mr. Trump has recently raised the possibility of a deal to end the war, which has pushed up fuel prices in the U.S. and around the world, and pushed down his approval ratings. He said talks could be possible with Iran's new leadership, which he described as "less radical and much more reasonable" than their predecessors. But Tehran has dismissed Washington's ceasefire overtures, describing U.S. demands to end the conflict as "maximalist and irrational." "Messages have been received through intermediaries, including Pakistan, but there is no direct negotiation with the U.S.," said Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei, quoted by the ISNA news agency on Thursday. Mr. Trump warned that if no agreement with Tehran was struck, Washington had "our eyes on key targets including the country's electric generating plants." Pro-government Iranians voiced defiance as they marched in Tehran at the funeral of a Revolutionary Guards naval commander killed in an Israeli strike. "This war has lasted a month. However long it takes, we will continue," said Moussa Nowruz, a 57-year-old pensioner. "We will resist until the end."

The country's Health Ministry said the Pasteur Institute of Iran, a century-old medical centre in Tehran, had been extensively damaged in a strike. In Lebanon, militant group Hezbollah said its fighters launched drones and rockets at northern Israel on Thursday, with the Israeli military's Home Front Command saying air raid sirens were activated. A day earlier, Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander, two sources told AFP, in a Beirut strike that the Lebanese Health Ministry said killed seven people. Authorities in Lebanon say Israeli attacks have killed

more than 1,300 people in the country since war erupted between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah on March 2. Oxygen for volatility'

The conflict has drawn in Gulf countries once seen as a safe haven in a volatile region, with air defences in the United Arab Emirates responding to missile and drone threats on Thursday. Mr. Trump vowed the U.S. would not allow allies in the region — Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain — to "get hurt or fail in any way, shape or form." The war has highlighted the importance of the Strait of Hormuz, a shipping lane through which one-fifth of the world's oil usually passes. Iran's Revolutionary Guards have vowed to keep it shut to the country's "enemies" while Mr. Trump has made reopening it a condition for a ceasefire. China is a major importer of oil through the vital waterway and the Foreign Ministry in Beijing blamed the U.S. and Israel for being the "root cause" of disruption. Britain will lead a summit of 35 countries later on Thursday to discuss how to restore freedom of navigation in the strait. Mr. Trump's speech did nothing to reassure markets, as oil prices spiked and stocks tumbled. The World Bank's Managing Director Paschal Donohoe told AFP his institution was "extremely concerned" about the war's impact on inflation, jobs and food security.

## Iran army chief warns against US invasion

Dubai: Iran's army chief warned Thursday that should the US military land in the Islamic Republic, "not a single person" will survive among the invaders. Maj Gen Amir Hatami made the comment in a piece aired by Iranian state television. "The shadow of war must be lifted from our country and there must be security for everyone, because it is not possible for places to be safe and our people to be unsafe," he said. Irish premier criticises Trump's bombastic rhetoric on Iran

Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin criticised Trump's vow to bomb Iran "back to the Stone Age". Martin said the rhetoric was unacceptable and the Iranian people who are playing no role in the war are entitled to safety. "Every person involved in war has to prioritize civilian protection and innocent civilians," he told Newstalk radio. "We all know that the Iranian regime was a very oppressive one. But this war is creating death, destruction to people in Iran who had no act or part in the regime." Martin said it was wrong to threaten civilians, but it was unclear if Trump's threats were aimed at people or infrastructure.

"(We) could be forever trying to interpret President Trump in terms of what he said and what actually gets done, and that's always been the feature," he said. Iran military spokesman insists Tehran has hidden stockpiles A spokesman for Iran's military, reacting to US President Donald Trump's speech, insisted Thursday that Tehran maintains hidden stockpiles of arms and munitions.

Lt Col Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesman for the Iranian military's Khatam Al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, made the comment. "The centres you think you have targeted are insignificant, and our strategic military productions take place in locations of which you have no knowledge and will never reach," he claimed. Israel and the United States have hit thousands of targets in the weeklong war, targeting military bases, missile launchers and other sites. Iranian missile fire has dropped, though Tehran is still able to mount attacks. Former Iranian foreign minister reportedly wounded in airstrike An airstrike has severely wounded a former Iranian foreign minister who once suggested Tehran could seek a nuclear weapon, Iranian media outlets reported. The attack on Wednesday wounded Kamal Kharazi, 81, and killed his wife, the reports said.

## Iran protests: Trump says Iran wants to negotiate, death toll reaches at least 646



EMS News Agency, Jan 16

The death toll from Iran's nationwide protests has reached at least 646 people killed, activists said Tuesday (January 13, 2026), with the number expected to rise further. The toll comes from the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which has been accurate throughout multiple years of demonstrations. It relies on a network of activists inside Iran that confirms all reported fatalities.

With communications blocked in Iran, the AP has been unable to independently confirm the group's toll. Iran's government has not provided casualty figures for the demonstrations. Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump said Iran wants to negotiate with Washington after his threat to strike the Islamic Republic over its crackdown on protesters in nationwide demonstrations. Iran had no direct reaction to Mr. Trump's comments, which came after the foreign minister of Oman — long an interlocutor between Washington and Tehran — travelled to Iran this weekend. It also remains unclear just what Iran could promise, particularly as Trump has set strict demands over its nuclear programme and its ballistic missile arsenal, which Tehran insists is crucial for its national defence. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to foreign diplomats in Tehran, insisted "the situation has come under total control" in remarks that blamed Israel and the US for the violence, without offering evidence. "That's why the demonstrations turned violent and bloody to give an excuse to the American president to intervene," Araghchi said, in comments carried by Al Jazeera. The Qatar-funded network has been allowed to report live from inside Iran, despite the internet being shut off. However, Mr. Araghchi said Iran was "open to diplomacy." Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said that a channel to the US remained open, but talks needed to be "based on the acceptance of mutual interests and concerns, not a negotiation that is one-sided, unilateral and based on dictation." Meanwhile, pro-government demonstrators flooded the streets on Monday in support of the theocracy, a show of force after days of protests directly challenging the rule of 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iranian state television aired chants from the crowd, which appeared to number in the tens of thousands, who shouted "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!" Iran's attorney general has said prosecutors will levy such charges against protesters, which carry the death penalty. Trump acknowledges proposal for talks. Mr. Trump and his national security team have been weighing a range of potential responses against Iran, including cyberattacks and direct strikes by the U.S. or Israel, according to two people familiar with internal White House discussions who weren't authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The military is looking at it, and we're looking at some

very strong options," Trump told reporters on Air Force One on Sunday night. Asked about Iran's threats of retaliation, he said: "If they do that, we will hit them at levels that they've never been hit before." Mr. Trump said that his administration was in talks to set up a meeting with Tehran, but cautioned that he may have to act first as reports of the death toll in Iran mount and the government continues to arrest protesters. Cars burn in a street during a protest over the collapse of the currency's value, in Tehran, Iran, January 8, 2026. Cars burn in a street during a protest over the collapse of the currency's value, in Tehran, Iran, January 8, 2026. | Photo Credit: via Reuters "I think they're tired of being beat up by the United States," Mr. Trump said. "Iran wants to negotiate." Iran, through the country's parliamentary speaker, warned Sunday that the U.S. military and Israel would be "legitimate targets" if Washington uses force to protect demonstrators. Those abroad fear the information blackout is emboldening hard-liners within Iran's security services to launch a violent crackdown. Protesters flooded Tehran's streets and its second-largest city on Saturday night into Sunday morning. Online videos purported to show more demonstrations Sunday night into Monday, with a Tehran official acknowledging them in state media. At 2 p.m. on Monday, Iranian state television showed images of demonstrators thronging Tehran toward Enghelab Square, or "Islamic Revolution" Square in the capital. It had been airing statements all morning from Iranian government, security and religious leaders to attend the demonstration. It called the rally an "Iranian uprising against American-Zionist terrorism," without addressing the underlying anger in the country over the nation's ailing economy. State television aired images of such demonstrations around the country, trying to signal it had overcome the protests. Fear pervades Iran's capital. In Tehran, a witness told the AP that the streets were empty at the sunset call to prayers each night. By the Isha, or nighttime prayer, the streets are deserted. Part of that stems from the fear of getting caught in the crackdown. Police sent the public a text message that warned: "

Given the presence of terrorist groups and armed individuals in some gatherings last night and their plans to cause death, and the firm decision to not tolerate any appeasement and to deal decisively with the rioters, families are strongly advised to take care of their youth and teenagers." Another text, which claimed to come from the intelligence arm of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, also directly warned people not to take part in demonstrations.

The witness spoke on condition of anonymity due to the ongoing crackdown. The demonstrations began December 28 over the collapse of the Iranian rial currency, which trades at more than 1.4 million to USD 1, as Iran's economy is squeezed by international sanctions in part levied over its nuclear programme. The protests intensified and grew into calls directly challenging Iran's theocracy. Video shows corpses outside capital. Meanwhile, video circulating online purports to show dozens of bodies in a morgue on the outskirts of Iran's capital. People with knowledge of the facility and the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency said Monday that the video shows the Kahrizak Forensic Medicine Centre. In the footage, people are seen walking by dozens of bodies in bags laid out in a large room, attempting to identify those there. In some cases, bodies can be seen lying outside on blue tarps. A large truck can be seen in part of the footage.

## Tensions flare in Minnesota as protesters, federal agents repeatedly square off



Days of demonstrations against immigration agents left Minnesota tense on Tuesday (January 13, 2026), a day after federal authorities used tear gas to break up crowds of whistle-blowing activists, and State and local leaders sued to fight the enforcement surge that led to the fatal shooting of a Minneapolis woman. Confrontations between federal agents and protesters stretched throughout the day and across multiple cities on Monday. Agents fired tear gas in Minneapolis as a crowd gathered around immigration officers questioning a man, while to the northwest in St. Cloud, hundreds of people protested outside a strip of Somali-run businesses after ICE officers arrived.

Later that night, confrontations erupted between protesters and officers guarding the federal building being used as a base for the Twin Cities crackdown. With the Department of Homeland Security pledging to send more than 2,000 immigration officers into Minnesota in what Immigration and Customs Enforcement has called its largest enforcement operation ever, the State, joined by Minneapolis and St. Paul, sued the Trump administration on Monday (January 12, 2026) to try to halt or limit the surge. The suit filed says the Department of Homeland Security is violating the First Amendment and other constitutional protections. It accuses the Republican Trump administration of violating free speech rights by focusing on a progressive State that favours Democrats and welcomes immigrants. "This is, in essence, a federal invasion of the Twin Cities in Minnesota, and it must stop," State Attorney General Keith Ellison said at a news conference.

Homeland Security says it has made more than 2,000 arrests in the State since December. The days after Renee Good was shot in the head by an ICE officer while behind the wheel of her SUV have seen dozens of protests or vigils across the U.S. to honour the 37-year-old mother of three and to passionately criticise the Trump administration's tactics. In response to Monday's (January 13, 2026) lawsuit, Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin accused Minnesota officials of ignoring public safety. "President Trump's job is to protect the American people and enforce the law — no matter who your Mayor, Governor, or State Attorney General is," Ms. McLaughlin said. The Trump administration has repeatedly defended the immigration agent who shot Good, saying she and her vehicle presented a threat. But that explanation has been widely panned by Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and others based on videos of the confrontation. The government also faces a new lawsuit over a similar immigration crackdown in Illinois. More than 4,300

## U.S. sends more agents to Minneapolis despite furore over woman's killing



U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said on Sunday (January 11, 2026) that hundreds more federal agents were heading to Minneapolis, brushing aside demands by the city's Democratic leaders to leave after an immigration officer fatally shot a woman protester. In multiple TV interviews, Ms. Noem defended the actions of the officer who shot and killed 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good, whose death has sparked renewed protests nationwide against President Donald Trump's aggressive immigration crackdown.

Ms. Noem reiterated her claim that Ms. Good's actions in the Midwestern city on Wednesday (January 7) amounted to "domestic terrorism," and that the agent acted in self-defence when he fatally shot Good in her car. Prominent Democratic officials, including Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, have strongly disputed this narrative, saying viral footage from the scene shows Good's vehicle turning away from the agent and posing no threat to his life. Ms. Noem, when pressed repeatedly by CNN about how she could make such definitive statements while an investigation into the incident had just begun, insisted she and the administration were in the right. "Why are we arguing with a president who's working to keep people safe?" she said. Speaking separately to the conservative Fox News network, Ms. Noem said hundreds more officers will arrive on Sunday (January 11) and Monday (January 12), to allow immigration agents "that

## If data is the new oil, what does that make data centres?



Many think the idea of 'dumping' in global trade is a red herring. The reason is obvious: if country A is able to dump certain goods in country B, it's not because A has smuggled them in. It's because someone in country B was interested in receiving those goods, and B's laws allowed for them to be imported. This said, it's possible to argue that dumping is a legitimate concern, and not a red herring, if a country's government and its people are at odds on a policy yet the government enforces it to pander to a few commercial interests — a situation not unheard of in modern democracies. India in particular has seen this often with its national and international commitments as well as its domestic priorities, ranging from including commercial plantations in forest surveys to pad afforestation numbers to importing oil for cultivating itself as a growth market for global fossil fuel producers forced to move away from richer countries that are decarbonising.

Good versus bad data centres Today, data is the new oil, and it's possible the country is at similar risk of being 'dumped' with poorly designed data centres making inefficient use of energy, guzzling large quantities of water, and polluting the environment. To be sure, data centres are not implicitly bad and can be run efficiently, and in the larger scheme of things be a net benefit for the national economy.

But ensuring they have precisely that effect requires every data centre to be located in a place where power supply is reliable as well as where the project pays for required grid upgrades. The centre should also be designed for high utilisation, meaning the servers should not be idle; this requires properly estimating the capacity and scheduling workloads. Second, the centre must incorporate efficient cooling as a core component rather than as an afterthought, including in the form of efficient airflow management and allowing higher inlet temperatures within the established thermal envelopes and reducing the demand for mechanical cooling. In fact, where it's feasible, centres should also use naturally cool ambient air or water and, for intensive AI workloads, use liquid cooling. At the same time, they should minimise their dependence on potable water and use recycled water where available, and minimise the use of backup power. Finally, the data centre should measure every relevant parameter that it's expected to optimise over time. Conversely, a bad data centre is often one that's efficient on paper but inefficient on the ground because it's been installed in the wrong place and/or with the wrong design. For instance, it could be located in a water-stressed area and be designed to use evaporative cooling, which requires a lot of water. Or it could be running older cooling setups without basic airflow controls, thus increasing the energy overhead. Google's proposed Cerrillos data centre in Santiago, Chile, offers a real-world example. Local opposition to the project focused on the project's consequences on an increasingly water-stressed region. A Chilean environmental court subsequently required Google to account for the effects of climate change on the aquifer and to consider alternative cooling methods, causing the Big Tech company to switch to an air-cooled design. Brooking resistance India is widely cited as a market with great potential to host these facilities. While the U.S. is far ahead of India, it has also started to show outward signs of popular resistance to these facilities. India can learn from this to avoid taking on a bad proposition itself, especially when local governments are prepared to cut corners and developers try to hide behind opaque contracts. Of late, a surge in proposals for data centres in the U.S. has met with organised local resistance, with municipal boards having to decide whether energy- and water-intensive facilities fit their zoning rules and residents anxious that the projects will endanger property values and local water supply. In North Carolina, a mayor signalling that a proposal for a data centre would fail unanimously, prompted developers to rescind it even after it promised environmentally friendly features. In

are working in Minneapolis to do so safely. "If protesters conduct violent activities against law enforcement, if they impede our operations, that's a crime, and we will hold them accountable to those consequences," Ms. Noem told "Sunday Morning Futures". "Extremely politicised" Meanwhile confrontations between federal agents and protesters continued on Sunday (January 12) in Minneapolis, with officers seen using pepper spray against people holding signs outside an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in the city. Ms. Noem accused Democrats of encouraging violence against immigration officers. "These locals, if you look at what Governor Walz has said, if you look at what Mayor Frey has said, they've extremely politicised and inappropriately talked about the situation on the ground in their city," she told CNN's "State of the Union". "They've inflamed the public. They've encouraged the kind of destruction and violence that we've seen in Minneapolis the last several days," she said. Since Wednesday's (January 7) shooting, thousands of people have demonstrated, largely peacefully, in several cities across the country, including Minneapolis, where 29 people were detained and then released on Friday (January 9), according to police.

The protesters have demanded a full investigation into the circumstances of the deadly encounter. Democratic officials are particularly critical of the fact that local authorities have been excluded from the investigation, which is being conducted by the FBI. "It should be a neutral, unbiased investigation where you get the facts," Mr. Frey told CNN. He also described as legitimate activists' actions to disrupt immigration enforcement operations, such as one in which Good was involved. "You need to enforce laws, of course, but there's also a requirement that you carry out laws and carry out enforcement in a constitutional way," Mr. Frey added. "We've got pregnant women getting dragged through the street. We've got high schoolers just getting — American citizens, by the way — getting taken away." On Sunday (January 11), agents were carrying out Mr. Trump's immigration crackdown and were seen detaining people in residential areas. People were also seen laying flowers at makeshift memorials honouring Good. The federal security operation in Minneapolis occurred amid a highly politicised fraud investigation in Minnesota.

another town in Minnesota, a proposal for a large data centre was put on hold after residents complained about the inadequacy of the environmental review. They said local officials and utilities had known about the proposal for nearly a year before disclosing it, with the secrecy intensifying the conflict. Industry groups and consultants have said that such pushback is increasingly becoming the norm but that it has also been pushing developers to rethink how early and how transparently they need to engage communities. Given these issues, it's salient that countries in the Global South have poor zoning in practice, a less than satisfactory record of governments involving community members in planning construction projects, lacklustre enforcement of environmental regulations, and aspirations of growth in the IT sector. When the capital for data centre projects faces sustained, organised resistance and local approval processes that are more participatory, it can be more tempting to look for jurisdictions where land is cheaper and political friction is lower. Data centres can't be dumped anywhere — they still need reliable power, network connections, minimally uncertain land titles, and geopolitical predictability — but it's possible the most resource-intensive and least locally beneficial ones could disproportionately target places where the costs can be more easily externalised. Many governments are in fact explicitly courting data centres as a part of their AI or IT industrialisation strategy through land and power concessions and expedited clearances. In India itself, multiple State policies offer sizable fiscal and infrastructure incentives and promise streamlined approvals. Latin America like the U.S. has already had multiple disputes where communities have argued that governments advanced projects without proper environmental review, particularly in water-stressed areas. Many cases in Chile have been particularly emblematic, leading to vehemently contested litigation and protests. It hasn't helped that while data centres are capital-intensive, they're also relatively low on permanent jobs, leaving governments without one of their favourite bargaining chips. India itself is a reasonably high-risk candidate for 'data dumping'. The country is actively positioning itself as a major data-centre hub and multiple independent forecasts have projected rapid capacity growth in this decade. JLL projected it would expand by around 77%, reaching 1.8 GW by 2028. Ratings agency CRISIL said it would increase to 2.3-2.5 GW by the end of the 2028 fiscal. Colliers has predicted that capacity is likely to surpass 4.5 GW by 2030. The policy environment is also swimming in incentives at present. Together with relative geopolitical stability and a large domestic market, India seems like a more credible market for global firms than many other alternatives. Compounding the 'dumping' risk is the fact that the chief externalities are also unusually pronounced. Many basins and cities in the country are already highly water-stressed. The consequences of the power system are similarly non-trivial, with large, clustered loads requiring grid upgrades and clearer rules about which consumer type will pay what rate. And as for environmental regulation: the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Supreme Court, and the National Green Tribunal have all recorded several lacunae in institutional mechanisms, post-clearance monitoring, and in enforcing mitigation measures. This doesn't mean India will inevitably become a dumping ground, however, for three reasons. First, hyperscale data centres still demand substantial grid capacity, substations, fibre-optic routes, etc. so they can't be set up to the exclusion or ignorance of what the existing system can handle, which in turn could force public sector coordination even in areas with weak zoning. Second, India has relatively strong judicial and tribunal pathways compared to many peer states. Even if they're imperfect and often slow, they've been known to create credible deterrence pressure. Third, India has strong and vocal civil society organisations. Given that the answer is not to ban data centres but for developers to engage with local governments and communities at a very early stage of the project, here are some signs of potentially bad governance that citizens can watch for: (i) Incentives that race to the bottom: this includes large land and power subsidies, accelerated permits, exemptions from routine building and environmental processes, and loose sustainability requirements. Zoning rules must designate data centres as heavy infrastructure and must come with buffer areas and noise limits. (ii) When a jurisdiction adds large power loads quickly without clear rules about costs, data centres can avoid paying for upgrades to the grid and instead push that expense to households. Data centres must disclose the expected peak load, their water sources, method of cooling, and times of day when they use backup generators.

## X Corp acknowledges obscene Grok AI content, assures compliance with Indian law

New Delhi: Elon Musk-run X Corp has acknowledged the presence of obscene imagery on its platform, mostly created by its Grok AI, stating that it will comply with Indian laws and remove such content. According to government sources on Sunday, the platform has blocked around 3,500 pieces of content and deleted more than 600 accounts in question. Sources further said that from now on, "X will not allow obscene imagery." Earlier, X Corp, which runs the social media platform X, submitted a written response to the Government on the latter's notice to the company on the generation of "non-consensual sexual content by its Grok AI chatbot." The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) cracked down on X Corp for failing to prevent the generation and circulation of obscene, nude and indecent content on its platform. The government had directed X Corp to send an action taken report (ATR) "towards immediate compliance for prevention of hosting, generation, publication or transmission, sharing or uploading of obscene, nude, indecent and explicit content through the misuse of AI-based services like 'Grok' and XAI's other services" within 72 hours. The government directive states that "non-compliance with these requirements shall be viewed seriously and may result in strict legal consequences against your platform, its responsible officers and the users on the platform who violate the law, without any further notice, under the IT Act, the IT Rules, the BNS, the BNS and other applicable laws". The ministry directed X to conduct a comprehensive review of Grok's technical and governance frameworks to prevent the generation of unlawful content. It said Grok must enforce strict user policies, including suspension and termination of violators. All offending content should be immediately removed without tampering with evidence, it said. X Corp said it continues to take action against illegal content on its social media platform, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), and is working with local governments and law enforcement agencies as necessary.

## Govt gives full customs duty exemption on critical petrochemical products till June 30



conflict, industries have faced cost pressures and sourcing gaps for ensuring smooth supplies for production. From shortage of gas availability for car paint shops to technical grade urea in the automotive value chain to increase in price of sulphuric acid — a critical input in fertilisers — to glass and other packaging materials, the supply chains for many industries have been disrupted. Domestic petrochemical production has been hit due to the government-mandated diversion of important feedstock streams—butane and propane—to maximise the production of LPG, a critical fuel on which crores of Indian households depend. Moreover, the government has also restricted natural gas supplies to petrochemical plants and refineries in a bid to ensure that high-priority sectors get adequate natural gas supplies. As much as 90% of India's LPG imports and around 60% of liquefied natural gas imports came from West Asia via the Strait of Hormuz.

The government has been taking a series of measures to address the supply-chain bottlenecks. On Friday, the Centre had increased the allocation of commercial LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) to states and union territories by another 20%, bringing the total to 70% of the pre-crisis level, to meet the requirements of industries. The additional allocation was meant for labour-intensive industries and those providing support to other essential sectors, with priority to steel, automobiles, textiles, dyes, chemicals and plastics. Special priority is being given to process industries or those requiring LPG for specialised heating purposes that cannot be substituted by natural gas. Also, the government has made it mandatory for commercial and industrial consumers of LPG to register with public sector fuel retailers, and also apply for a piped natural gas (PNG) connection to become eligible to get commercial LPG, with exceptions for industries where LPG is used for special processes or purposes and cannot be replaced by natural gas. On Wednesday, the government announced a one-time concessional measure for manufacturers in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for one year allowing eligible manufacturing units in SEZs to undertake sales to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) at concessional rates of duty. Before that, the Reserve Bank of India extended an earlier concession for exporters by allowing pre- and post-shipment export credit to run for up to 450 days for all disbursements made till June 30. In November last year, the RBI had extended the credit window from 270 to 450 days for loans sanctioned up to March 31, 2026 in view of the impact due to the US tariffs.

With an aim to reduce cost pressure for downstream sectors and key industries using petrochemical products as primary inputs amid the ongoing West Asia war, the government has given full customs duty exemption on critical petrochemical products till June 30. "In light of the ongoing conflict in West Asia and the consequent disruptions in global supply chains, the Government of India has decided to provide full Customs Duty exemption on critical petrochemical products till 30th June, 2026," the Ministry of Finance said in a statement. This measure has been taken as a "temporary and targeted relief" in order to ensure continued availability of critical petrochemical inputs for domestic industry, reduce cost pressures on downstream sectors, and safeguard supply stability in the country, the Ministry said.

Exemption is expected to be helpful for sectors dependent on petrochemical feedstock and intermediates such as plastics, packaging, textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automotive components, and other manufacturing segments. "This will also provide relief to consumers of final products," the Ministry said. The customs duty exemption for petrochemical products for three months is expected to have a revenue loss of Rs 1,800 crore for the government, an official said. Since the global geopolitical and economic situation is dynamic, the revenue implication figure is not final and needs to be seen in that context, the official added. About 40 petrochemical products have been given the customs duty exemption including anhydrous ammonia, toluene, styrene, dichloromethane, methanol, acetic acid, ammonium nitrate, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), polyols, polycarbonates, polyurethanes, and poly butadiene, styrene butadiene.

With an increase in crude oil prices following the Israel-US strikes on Iran on February 28 and the continuing

## Indian stock markets fall 2% as Trump drives up threats on Iran

The Indian benchmark stock indices continued their topsy-turvy journey, falling 2% early on Thursday after gaining over 1% in the previous session as comments by US President Donald Trump again escalated fears of the war in West Asia intensifying. Crude oil prices were back above \$105 per barrel. Both the National Stock Exchange's Nifty 50 index and the BSE's Sensex index were down around 1.9% at around 9:50 AM. All sectoral indices of the NSE were deep in the red, with pharmaceuticals and healthcare losing over 3% and being the worst hit. These sectors, usually categorised as defensive and relatively stable during uncertainty, have fallen by around 8% since the war in West Asia began, compared with an 11-12% fall in the benchmark indices. The Nifty VIX, which measures market volatility, rose 4% and remained at its highest levels since the COVID-19 period. As long as VIX levels stay elevated, any gains are usually to be one-off and unlikely to be sustained.

The fall on Thursday comes after Trump said the US is close to a conclusion of its objectives in West Asia and threatened to strike hard at Iran. "We are going to hit them extremely hard over the next two or three weeks. We will bring them back to the Stone Age," Trump said in an address, dashing hopes of longer-term peace raised by earlier comments about ending military attacks on Iran within 2-3 weeks. "By saying core strategic objectives are nearing completion in the Iran War, Trump signals near-term finality to the West Asian crisis. In next 2 to 3 weeks, either the escalation could increase substantially, including an attack



on Iranian power and crude facilities, or some deal could be achieved. Uncertainty will prevail in the near term with crude oil prices remaining firm," said Garima Kapoor, deputy head of research and economist at Elara Capital. Experts also remain unconvinced by Trump's statements. "President Trump's statement that 'we will finish the job in two to three weeks' cannot be taken at face value since the president has been notoriously inconsistent in all his views. He can change his position anytime," according to VK Vijaykumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services. Post Trump's speech, the futures of the US benchmark indices fell around 1%. Among Asian peers, the South Korean and the Japanese markets fell as much as 4% early in the day. The Chinese and the Hong Kong markets are also trading lower.

## India holds 8.52 million tonnes of rare earth resources



facturing capacity in India, supported by sales-linked incentives of Rs 6,450 crore over five years and a capital subsidy of Rs 730 crore, the minister highlighted. He further stated that the government has also set up a rare earth permanent magnet plant in Andhra Pradesh for annual production of three tonnes of samarium cobalt magnets used in defence and atomic energy applications. "Complementing these efforts, the Union Budget 2026-27 has announced dedicated rare earth corridors in Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu," according to him. Rare earth permanent magnets are critical components in electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, high-end electronics, aerospace equipment, and defence systems.

New Delhi: India holds rare earth oxide resources of approximately 8.52 million tonnes, but remains dependent on imports for rare earth magnets and related products due to low-grade domestic deposits, regulatory constraints and a limited processing industry, the Parliament was informed on Thursday. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology, Dr Jitendra Singh, said the Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research has identified 7.23 million tonnes of total rare earth oxide equivalent contained in monazite deposits across Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

An additional 1.29 million tonnes of rare earth resources have been identified in hard rock terrains in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Despite these reserves, India's dependence on imported rare earth magnets persists on account of three structural constraints: domestic ore grades are significantly low at 0.056-0.058 per cent and are tied to radioactivity, making extraction complex and expensive; mineable reserves are limited due to coastal regulation zone rules, forest cover, and mangrove restrictions; and the country lacks a midstream rare earth value chain for manufacturing metals, alloys, and magnets from refined oxides. To address this gap, the Union Cabinet in November 2025 approved a scheme to promote the manufacturing of sintered rare earth permanent magnets, with a total financial outlay of Rs 7,280 crore.

The scheme targets the establishment of 6,000 metric tonnes per annum of rare earth permanent magnet manu-

## Designed in backdrop of US tariffs, SEZ sops come into effect amid West Asia conflict



As the West Asia war entered its fifth week, the government on Wednesday implemented concessions for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) announced during the Union Budget 2026-27. SEZ manufacturers have been facing pressures amid global geopolitical tensions and the US tariff impact from last year. This "one-time concession" will remain in place from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2027, the government said. "... to address the concerns faced by the manufacturing units in the SEZs due to ongoing global trade disruptions, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) today introduced a special one-time relief measure to facilitate sales by eligible manufacturing units in SEZs to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) at concessional rates of duty," the Ministry of Finance said.

The relief given to SEZs has excluded select sensitive sectors "to safeguard domestic industry", the Ministry said. "Certain sensitive sectors, especially where domestic industry needs protection or where tariffs are already low, are kept outside the relief measure. This shows that the government is being selective and cautious, rather than opening the domestic market completely," a Finance Ministry source said.

SEZs enjoy various tax benefits, including duty-free imports and domestic procurement and employ over 31 lakh people in various labour-intensive sectors. Broader SEZ reforms have been in discussion between the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Finance for years, as units have not performed as expected. Official data shows that over 450 units have closed in the last five years till FY25 in seven SEZs across the country. However, Finance Ministry sources said this measure should be viewed strictly as a one-time relief, with no implied commitment toward institutionalisation or expansion. "The Department of Commerce is simultaneously working on a broader framework on harmonisation of various export promotion schemes with a key focus on enhancing exports," the source said. Former trade officer, Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative, said the benefit covers a wide range of products — from chemicals and fertilisers to textiles, footwear, and machinery. However, petrol and diesel are excluded, with only limited refinery products like petroleum coke included, he said. Under the notified concessions, the Ministry said SEZ units claiming benefit under this relief window should have commenced production of goods on or before March 31, 2025 and that the goods manufactured by such units, for which benefit is claimed under this relief window, should have undergone value addition of a minimum 20% over the inputs.

"The emphasis on exports by SEZ units shall remain. DTA sales at concessional rates by the eligible SEZ units shall not be more than 30% of the highest annual Free on Board (FOB) value of exports in any of the three immediately preceding financial years. The relief window will be implemented through CBIC's automated system, and the assessment of bills of entry for DTA clearances under this relief window will be done under the faceless assessment mechanism," the ministry said. Experts said the impact of the measure is likely to be modest. "The duty cut is small — around 1 percentage point for many products. The absence of any relief on IGST further limits the incentive. In addition, the requirement of at least 20% value addition and the cap of 30% on domestic sales restricts flexibility for SEZ firms. The exclusion of petrol and diesel further weakens the policy, particularly for refinery-linked SEZs. If the objective is to boost domestic supply, stronger measures — such as restricting exports of petrol, diesel and ATF, as practised by countries such as China and Singapore — may be needed," Srivastava said. A government official said by allowing SEZ units to sell up to 30% of their export turnover in the domestic market, the one-time relief window introduces a calibrated and controlled flexibility, which will ease the pressure faced by the existing units in SEZ due to global trade disruptions. "This 30% cap is critical — it ensures that SEZs remain primarily export-focused, while still providing a meaningful buffer against global demand shocks. This domestic sales enablement would act as a stabilisation mechanism for manufacturing operations. The impact of this one-time relief extends beyond individual firms. Stable production supports employment continuity and sustains the broader industrial ecosystem. Ancillary industries such as logistics, raw materials, and services would also benefit from predictable demand and steady operations, improving overall economic resilience," the official said.

Nearly 466 units have closed in the last five years till FY25 in seven SEZs across the country, according to data shared by the Commerce and Industry Ministry in a written response to a Lok Sabha question in December last year. The official data showed 100 units shut shop in FY25 alone, most after FY22 when Covid-19 resulted in the closure of 113 units. The employment in SEZs also declined to 31.77 lakh in FY25 compared with 31.94 lakh during the previous financial year.

Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry, said, "Amid ongoing global trade uncertainty, evolving tariff measures, and persistent supply chain disruptions, businesses, particularly MSME exporters, continue to face operational as well as demand-side challenges. The continuation of policy measures to create predictability is important in these difficult times." Krishan Arora, Partner and Leader, Indirect Tax and India Investment Advisory, Grant Thornton Bharat, said that the recent SEZ notification is a critical turnaround in the backdrop of that much-awaited Budget commitment. "This relaxation provides cushion to the industry from inevitable outside shocks, permitting these units to smoothly shift towards the domestic market and resolving undercapacity challenges. At the same time, the domestic industry also benefits by exploiting available capacity of SEZ and shall have reduced reliance on imports, which are getting both delayed and expensive, owing to the war era global economy is currently grappling with," Arora said.

## From tulips to rhododendrons: India's top 7 flower destinations for April

April is one of the most rewarding months to explore India's floral landscapes. As winter recedes and summer gently sets in, valleys, hills, and gardens burst into colour, making it an ideal time for nature lovers, photographers, and slow travellers. From Himalayan blooms to southern garden cities, here are seven destinations where flowers take centre stage in April.

Srinagar April is prime time for Asia's largest tulip garden, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden. Rows of colourful tulips in red, yellow, and pink create a surreal landscape against the backdrop of Dal Lake and the Zabarwan hills. The annual tulip festival also adds a cultural touch with local crafts and Kashmiri cuisine. Ooty Known as the "Queen of Hill Stations," Ooty begins to bloom beautifully in April. The iconic Government Botanical Garden showcases thousands of plant species, including exotic flowers and rare ferns. The cool weather and rolling tea gardens make it a refreshing escape from rising summer temperatures. Munnar

While Munnar is famous for its Neelakurinji bloom (which occurs once every 12 years), April still offers lush greenery and scattered wildflowers across tea plantations. The Eravikulam landscape comes alive with fresh blossoms, and the mild climate makes it ideal for scenic walks and photography. Tulip Garden, Srinagar Tulip Garden, Srinagar (Photo: Wikipedia) Gangtok April is peak rhododendron season in Sikkim. The hills around Gangtok transform into a mix of red, pink, and white blooms. A visit to the



Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary offers a display of these flowers set against snow-capped peaks. It's a paradise for both botanists and casual travellers.

Kodaikanal Often called the "Princess of Hill Stations," Kodaikanal is dotted with blooming flowers in April, especially in parks and forested trails. The famous Bryant Park showcases seasonal flowers in full glory, while the surrounding hills offer quiet spots filled with wild blooms and misty charm. Bengaluru In April, Bengaluru's tree-lined streets erupt in colour with blooming gulmohar and jacaranda trees. The city's green spaces, especially Lalbagh Botanical Garden and Cubbon Park, are perfect for witnessing seasonal flower displays without leaving an urban setting.

## 'Think twice before biting the sticker': FSSAI issues urgent warning to peel fruits, vegetables before eating them

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has issued a fresh warning against consuming fruits and vegetables with stickers applied to them. The statutory body under the administration of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, highlighted that the adhesive residue left behind by these stickers is not fit for consumption and poses a health risk. "Think twice before biting the fruit sticker! While fruit and vegetable stickers are common, the adhesives used to keep them in place can leave behind residues that aren't meant for consumption," they mentioned in caption of their latest social media post. To ensure the highest standards of food safety and hygiene, they also recommended peeling fruits and vegetables with stickers. Dr Brunda MS, Senior Consultant — Internal Medicine, Aster CMI Hospital, Bangalore, explained that these stickers are used only for labelling and may contain glue, ink, and other materials that are not safe to eat. "If a person accidentally consumes a small piece, it is usually not very harmful, but it is still not recommended," she said. According to her, the chemicals present in the adhesive or ink can sometimes irritate the stomach or throat. "Some people may feel mild discomfort, nausea, or slight digestive issues after swallowing such materials. In rare cases, especially in children or older adults, there could be a small risk of choking," she elaborated. Why FSSAI says to peel fruits and vegetables before you eat Wash your veggies thoroughly. (Source: Freepik) Dr Brunda also pointed out that regularly consuming such non-food items may also expose the body



to unwanted chemicals over time. "It is important to understand that even if the glue is labeled as food-grade, it does not mean the sticker is meant to be eaten," she reiterated, adding that washing fruits and vegetables properly and removing stickers before eating can help avoid this risk. Keep the fruits and vegetables bought from vendors in the packets themselves in an isolated place. Wash the fruits and vegetables thoroughly or put a drop of 50ppm chlorine in warm water and dip them in it. Wash them with potable or clean drinking water. Do not use disinfectants, cleaning wipes or soap on fresh produce. Keep the fruits and vegetables that require refrigeration in the refrigerator.

## ‘Playing so many times online and offline has made winning with black pieces normal’ – Bibisara Assaubayeva



GNS News Agency, April 2

After four rounds, Kazakhstan GM Bibisara Assaubayeva leads the women's Candidates with 2.5 points, jointly with Anna Muzychuk. But it is her win in Round 3 playing black, and a risky line at that, that has left an early impression on the tournament where she features for the first time. The win against Zhu Jiner, a tournament favourite, came from an unusual Rook to g8 ploy, where Sarah didn't quite develop all the pieces, but hung on to secure the bold win, backing herself despite being tracked by doubts.

"It feels good because I like this position line, but in some moments I don't like my position. I regretted a little bit because I saw some other games where they had normal positional games. But in general it's a good decision to play this kind of risky position," she told Lichess after Round 3. It was a throwback to 2023 against Aryan Tai at Norway Chess, and when Lichess reminded her of the precedent, Bibisara said, "I think I saw that game but not sure. It was

an interesting idea. Just to play something new because it's very risky. I didn't develop my pieces but I had some ideas to attack with the black king, and it's interesting that my pawn on b3 are the reasons why I won the game but no one wants to take risks during match."

While Jiner held a strong position coming out of the opening, Bibisara adopted a sharp line in retailation, advancing kingside pawns in a Sicilian structure with the idea of playing Rg8 and pushing the g pawn, according to Chessbase.com. Jiner seemed in control but was tactically ambushed into a corner, and got mired in complications, eventually losing playing white. "Things went little out of control but when I played d5 (anti-positional) and she made mistakes, I felt good about my position," Sarah said. The Kazakh stressed that she needed to play something wild right that moment or white was coasting. "For white it was going to be easy to continue. They can play c4, c3, take on b3. For me it's very hard to play some moves. So I thought I need to do something and I did." Bibisara would concede though it wasn't as tough manoeuvring black as it was made to be, in what is ending up as a common trend at this Candidates. Kateryna Lagno also won a rollercoaster against Chinese Tan Zhongyi, with the Ukrainian-born Russian playing black. Chessbase called her 'knight sacrifice underpinned by a remarkable queen sacrifice' striking after time controls led to blunders. On the 22nd move, Lagno counterplayed with Ne3+ after a Tan blunder, bringing in a win after many crests and troughs for black. Bibisara when asked how black was copying after her stunning win told Lichess, "I don't think it changes anything but it's always pleasant to win with black. We play with all opponents, online and offline. So it's just a normal game nowadays."

## ‘Are we Mossad agents in Iran?’: Hikaru Nakamura rips into FIDE for excessive anti-cheating measures at Candidates



GNS News Agency, April 2

World No. 2 and the highest-rated American Grandmaster, Hikaru Nakamura, has expressed his displeasure with FIDE, the world chess governing body, over what he calls excessive anti-cheating measures at the 2026 Candidates Tournament in Cyprus. Speaking on his YouTube channel alongside Norwegian GM Jon Ludvig Hammer and Luxembourg's WIM Fiona Steil-Antoni, Nakamura vented his frustration, calling the entire process of excessive checking "complete nonsense."

"My general view about the whole topic of delay, cheating over-the-board, and all this stuff is that I frankly think it's nonsense," Nakamura said. "Considering the amount of machines they have to scan the players in the room, it's all

complete nonsense. I really do." The highest-rated player at the World Championship challenger event, taking place on the small Mediterranean island of Cyprus, Nakamura took a dig at FIDE by sarcastically asking if the players were Mossad agents in Iran.

"It's not that I have any problems with it. I just think that the fears some players have expressed are completely overblown. I'm just going to be honest... They scan us before the game. They scan us after the game. They have the metal detector. They have a variety of other separate scanners. I mean, who are we? Are we like Mossad agents inside Iran or something? Come on, we're chess players! Let's be real," he continued. When asked if he had raised his concerns with FIDE, Nakamura said he had not. "FIDE? No, of course, I haven't voiced this opinion to FIDE. I don't really see a reason to. When I look at FIDE or the things being done, I really have no point in arguing with them or saying anything." "My general view is that it's all overblown. At a smaller open tournament where you don't have all these scanners and equipment, I can understand the concerns. But at an event like this, where everybody is in a room, there are arbiters watching everyone, and cameras on everyone... I mean, without inside help, nothing can happen." Nakamura opened his campaign in what is his fourth Candidates with a loss to compatriot Fabiano Caruana in the opening round. He then shared spoils with Anish Giri, Andrey Esipenko and Wei Yi to sit with 1.5 points from four rounds.

## Why Iraq's World Cup success would be celebrated in Europe

GNS News Agency, April 2

From Malmo to Liverpool, Grimstad to Malmo, Iraq's qualification to the World Cup in North America was celebrated in different European cities. Half of Iraq's players that featured were either born or raised in Europe. Most have a familiar story to tell. Of migration post the Iraq war at the stroke of the century and reconnection with the country of origin through football. Ali Al-Ahamadi, who netted their first goal against Bolivia, was born in Maysan. When his teenage mother was pregnant, his father, a lawyer was part of a group that staged a peaceful protest against then president Saddam Hussain. The group was arrested and dumped in a prison. But using his contacts, he somehow managed to get released. But he knew his future was bleak and fled to the neighbouring country of Jordan soon after his birth, from where he sought asylum in the UK.

Years later, Al Ahmadi recounted the journey to BBC. "Through a few different people they were able to contact the Iraqi embassy in the UK," he recounted. "They explained their situation, saying: 'Listen, there are people here being tortured - brutal stuff that you wouldn't expect in this day and age'. My dad could tell you what he saw. The thing he says to me is the fact that we are here now and is a testament to how much he cares about us as a family," he detailed.

Her mother couldn't speak English. She had to discontinue her education. As if adjusting to a different culture was tough enough, his father couldn't find a job and ended up doing odd tasks. "Some days we did not really have anything to eat, but my dad would bring as much as he could for us." The area he grew up in was rough. "On top of that I was thrown into quite a rough area. Growing up playing on the streets, you get to see all of it. You get drawn into it sometimes. I have had periods where I was hanging around with the wrong group of kids - staying out late, causing trouble," he would say.

Then, football came into his life. The 24-year-old forward discovered he had a forward's instincts. At 13, local club Tranmere Rovers, enrolled him into their academy after watching him in a school tournament. Nine years later, Ipswich City, then in the Premier League, signed him. Then came the national call-up and he had no hesitation in embracing it. Now, he will feature in the World Cup. Midfielder Marko Farji's parents moved just before the uprising. Of Kurdish descent living in Sulaymaniyah, his parents faced suppression and left home with just a bag of clothes to Jordan. Months later, they found refuge in Norway. He designed the assist that led to Aymen Hussein's winner in the 53rd minute. He turns up for the Serie B side Venezia.

Left-back Merchas Doski's parents migrated from



Zakho in Northern Iraq in the late 90s. He spent his childhood in Hanover. Initiation to football was natural, but his parents used to insist that should he represent a country, it should be Iraq. One of the leaders on the ground," he told FIFA before the game: "On Tuesday I will put on the shirt and do it for all 46 million Iraqis. I've got to make my family and the people of Iraq happy." "It's not been an easy journey for me to get to this point. Every young boy who played on the streets like I did has always seen the great players that have played at the World Cup," added Doski, who plies his trade in the Czech Republic.

His full-back counterpart, Hussein Ali, is equally combative. Bred in Malmo, his father is Iraqi and mother Syrian. His father left the country during the Gulf War of the late 80s and early 90s. He spent several years in Syria, where he married his mother. Stories from his father have made him detached to politics. "I don't know exactly how or why I have never concerned myself with politics," he told Swedish newspaper LC. His midfield partner Amir Al-Ammari is from Sweden's Jönköping. He qualified to represent Iraq through his father's side, while his mother is Palestinian. The central midfielder Aymar Sher had represented Sweden in U-19 tournaments but decided to join the country he was born in. His father was a football tragic and named him Aymar on his favourite footballer, the Argentine forward Pablo Aimar. "It was 2002, the year I was born, Pablo Aimar was one of the best players in the world, he was my father's favourite player," Sher told FIFA. "It was when Valencia won La Liga that year, so my father convinced my mother to name me after him, so of course it's a fun story to have." "Winger Youssef Aymn is from Germany's Essen and had spent time at Borussia Dortmund's famous youth academy. His father was the captain of a local club in the Sulaymaniyah Province in the Kurdistan region. So with Iraq migrant households in Germany, Sweden and Norway celebrated the night Iraq qualified for the World Cup after 40 years, before the wars scarred the country and scattered the families.

## India end 28-year wait, lift 2011 ODI World Cup at Wankhede

GNS News Agency, April 2

Fifteen years ago on this day, India lifted the ICC ODI World Cup in 2011 at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, ending a 28-year wait for the title. The victory marked the country's first World Cup triumph since 1983 in a night that would go on to shape Indian cricket for the next decade and a half.

The 10th World Cup final between India and Sri Lanka was the first time these two sides had met at this stage of the tournament. India won by six wickets, becoming only the third team to have won the World Cup more than once. Before the final, India and Sri Lanka had faced each other seven times in World Cup history, with Sri Lanka leading the head-to-head record with four wins, two defeats, and one no-result. It was also the first time that two Asian teams had contested a World Cup final. After Sri Lanka won the toss and elected to bat first, Zaheer Khan opened his account with three consecutive maidens and the scalp of Upul Tharanga, finishing a spell of 5-3-6-1. The visitors had gathered 63 runs in the Powerplay. Mahela Jayawardene turned out to be the star performer for Sri Lanka, scoring 103 runs off 88 balls and sharing a 66-run partnership with Thisara Perera as Sri Lanka posted 274 for 6. Handed the highest total ever chased in a World Cup final, India gradually found momentum after the early dismissals of openers Virender Sehwag and Sachin Tendulkar. The first ball always makes your heart race... and that night, it never stopped. 15 years later, it still stays with us. We all grew up as a bunch of young cricketers, united by one dream. To win the World Cup for India.

After Tendulkar departed for 18, the now-India captain Virat Kohli walked in and scored 35 runs in the final. Gautam Gambhir then brought the momentum back with a crucial knock of 97 runs. Promoting himself to No. 5, MS Dhoni came into the final on the back of poor form and with India's chase off to a shaky start. The wicketkeeper-batsman



played a sensational innings, scoring 91 runs off 79 balls. Dhoni was named Man of the Match and sealed the World Cup with a towering six. He combined with Gambhir for a 101-run partnership. The BCCI awarded each member of the World Cup-winning squad a cash prize of Rs 1 crore, while coach Gary Kirsten and his support staff received Rs 50 lakh each. The selectors were given Rs 25 lakh each. The tournament was co-hosted by India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. It was the third time the World Cup had been played in the Indian subcontinent. Fourteen teams, including four associate nations, were vying for the trophy.

Since that famous night in Mumbai, Indian cricket has only grown in stature. The women's team lifted the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in 2025, while the men's side added two T20 World Cup titles to their cabinet in 2024 and 2026. The Men in Blue were also triumphant at the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy. Yet for many fans, the 2011 final remains the one that started it all, the night MS Dhoni's six brought a nation to its feet with iconic words from Ravi Shastri from the commentary box: "Dhoni finishes off in style. India lifts the World Cup after 28 years. The party starts in the dressing room."

## India's S8UL and GodLike Esports selected for 2026 Esports Club Partner program as India emerge as key growth region

GNS News Agency, April 2

The Esports Foundation (EF) has selected S8UL and GodLike Esports, two of India's leading esports clubs, for its 2026 Club Partner Program. They join 40 global organisations in a \$20 million (approx. INR 189 crore) annual initiative aimed at building a sustainable and connected esports ecosystem. Now in its third year, the program provides participating clubs with up to \$1 million (approx. INR 9.4 crore) in funding, along with strategic support and international exposure leading up to the Esports World Cup (EWC) 2026.

S8UL made history last year as the first Indian organisation selected for the program. The four-time Esports Awards winner has since expanded its global presence across competition and content. S8UL competed at EWC 2025 in Apex Legends, Chess, and EA FC. GodLike Esports now joins S8UL as the second Indian club in the program. Both organisations will roll out initiatives, including content, creator collaborations, fan campaigns, watch parties, and community events to bring Indian fans closer to the EWC.

Since its launch in 2023, the program has invested over \$100 million (approx. INR 948 crore) into clubs worldwide, supporting development across competitive operations, marketing, and fan engagement. In 2025 alone, participating clubs delivered more than 330 million campaign views and engaged over 10 million fans through 370 initiatives. More than 130 watch parties were hosted globally, while the Superfan program brought over 2,000 fans to the EWC 2025 arenas in Riyadh. The selected 2026 clubs reach a combined audience of over 300 million fans across North America, Europe, MENA, China, Korea, Southeast Asia, India, and Latin America. For India, this marks a significant step forward. S8UL's inclusion last year allowed Indian players like Nihal Sarin to compete under their banner in chess. Now with GodLike also on board, Indian esports continues



to gain ground on the world stage. The program aims to provide financial stability to professional esports organisations, helping them expand into new titles and grow global fanbases rather than relying solely on prize money. The Foundation recently identified India as a key growth region for the 2026 Club Partner Program. In a conversation with The Indian Express earlier this year, Mike McCabe, Deputy CEO of Esports World Cup Foundation (EWC) had said that the EWC was evaluating the Club Partner Program in India and acknowledged the region's significant growth potential. When asked about the possibility of a dedicated Indian qualifier slot and how the EWC views the Indian audience, McCabe replied: "Last year, we had our first Indian club in our Club Partner Program, and it worked out very well.

We're currently evaluating applications for 2026 and will announce the team in the coming weeks. It was a very positive first year. What struck me personally, and the team more broadly, was the incredible passion of Indian fans and how vocal they were in supporting their clubs... It was amazing," he had said to this newspaper.

## Sameer Rizvi's coming-of-age knock: The four people who built his innings before he faced a ball

GNS News Agency, April 2

Tankeeb Akhtar is a failed cricketer who couldn't let go of the game. When he saw talent in his young nephew Sameer Rizvi, whose match-winning 70 not out got Delhi Capitals off to a winning start in the IPL on Wednesday, he wanted the boy to play for India. Sameer's father Haseen wanted him to stop. "Mat bigaad usey, khud ki tarah mat bana, cricket se kya mila tujhe." "Don't spoil him. Don't make him like you. What did cricket ever give you?"

For years, Tankeeb was not welcome in his sister's house. He kept coming to the ground instead — with his nephew. "If I think, maybe there would be barely 14 days in the past 14 years when Mamu wasn't with me at the ground," Sameer would tell this newspaper. The brother-in-law relented when Sameer, at sixteen, made his Ranji Trophy debut for Uttar Pradesh. Haseen had suffered a brain haemorrhage days before it. When Chennai Super Kings paid Rs 8.40 crore for the uncapped boy from Meerut, Tankeeb says his brother-in-law held his hand and wept. "Itna paisa is umar mein, thoda dar lag raha hai mujhe." So much money at this age. A little frightening. "As a coach my role is over. My job now is to keep his feet on the ground."

The feet went first to Chennai. Rizvi's first IPL camp. A simulation match. After the game, Dhoni walked up to him. Not the other way around. "He said everyone is nervous in their first season. But what matters is what pressure you're taking. Game ka pressure lena hai. Situation ka pressure lena hai. Audience ka ya apne price tag ka — ye pressure nahi lena," Rizvi recalled to News24Sports.

At 8.40 crore, the most famous finisher in cricket was telling a twenty-year-old to forget the number. When Rizvi's shuffle was causing his knee to bend too much, Dhoni showed him the correction himself. At Delhi Capitals, KL Rahul sat Rizvi down for long conversations. The advice was: practice harder than you play, because then matches become easy. In T20 cricket, you need shots in every direction. Rizvi practiced. He added the sweep. The switch hit. Shots for the middle overs when spinners operate. "Mujhe spinners ko maarna kaafi pasand hai." The patience he would show in Lucknow wasn't passivity. It was preparation.

Rizvi prays before every match. "Mein namaz padh

ke hi match khelne jaata hoon. Mind bilkul shaant rehta hai," he told News24Sports. He compares it to meditation — the mind empties, good thoughts arrive, the noise goes quiet. During both IPL seasons, Ramzan fell mid-tournament. He kept the rozas on practice days. On match days the franchise let him manage it his way.

On a memorable evening in Lucknow, Delhi Capitals were chasing 142 against Lucknow Super Giants. Shami got Rahul caught on the first ball. Nitish Rana fell at slip. Nissanka and Axar went in the same over. Twenty-six for four in the fifth over. The man who had spent hours teaching Rizvi those shots was already in the pavilion. Rizvi walked in at number four. Namaz presumably done. Mind quiet. For thirteen balls, there were no boundaries. The wicket had movement. Fast bowlers on top. He spoke to Tristan Stubbs at the other end. Overs left. No need to rush. Then a loose delivery arrived. He put it away. "When you're quiet for the first 10-12 balls, that one boundary really helps you settle," he said after the match. The jail-break moment had arrived with a ramp shot for six over third man off a short pacy ball from Anrich Nortje. Seventy off 47 balls and an unbroken 119-run stand with Stubbs arrived as the chase finished with a six at the start of the eighteenth over. It was built, not blazed. Rizvi absorbed Shami. He waited for the spinners. When they came, he was ready — the shots Rahul had told him to practice, the calm Dhoni had told him to find, the intent Tankeeb had spent fourteen years building. After the match, he was honest. "Consistency is something I want to work on. This was my first innings of the season." His dream is older than his career. "Mera sapna to yahi hai ki India khelna hai. Lekin do chaar match nahi. Kaafi lambe samay tak India khelna hai (My dream is to play for India. Not 2-4 matches. For a long time)," he told News24Sports. A long time. Like Virat Kohli? "Haan, keh sakte hain (Yes, you can say that)."

Four people made last night possible. A mamu who was banned from a house for believing in a boy. A coach in Lucknow who gave that boy a debut at sixteen. A captain in Chennai who told him to forget his price tag. A senior player in Delhi who said practice every shot. Tankeeb would have watched. Fourteen years at the ground, the boy proved him right.

## Vaazha 2 movie review: Hashir and gang are impressive in a sequel that far outshines its predecessor



**Vaazha 2 Movie Review:** The easiest way to deal with a tense, messy situation is to point fingers. Is it the right thing to do? Only if the person in the wrong points the finger at themselves. However, there are quite a few situations in which right and wrong are arbitrary. While it may be easy to shun and denounce someone who has made a mistake, without dialogue that maps the reasons why they did so or what slowly led them down that path, a blame game is just escapism to avoid being called out for one's in/actions.

Where debut director Savin SA's Vaazha 2 succeeds is by bringing all of them under one umbrella during a thunderstorm, allowing them to pour out all that's in their hearts so the downpour can wash it away. But that doesn't mean the movie gives everyone a free pass; it still holds them accountable for their mistakes. In fact, that's one of the reasons Vaazha 2 is a far, far better film than its predecessor. Unlike Vaazha (2024), which bluntly glorifies manchildren, including their irresponsibility and carefree attitudes that often harm others, Vaazha 2 presents a more sensible, sensitive tale that shows consideration and compassion to those who deserve it.

Hashir and Alan have been friends since childhood, and even in high school, they are inseparable. While they are constantly at loggerheads with Ajin and Vinayak, their dynamic changes slowly — well, literally over their mutual love for Mohanlal. The four are basically loafers, and due to their overt curiosity and disregard for others, they do pretty much everything kids their age shouldn't. But at one point, things get out of hand, and they become embroiled in a major issue at school that ends in a massive altercation. Although they, with their parents' help, manage to resolve everything, it leaves a blemish on them. As they begin efforts to break free from their past and rebuild their lives, the harshness of reality slowly comes searching for them. In that moment, no parent or friend's help proves handy, as they must fend for themselves.

Although the opening sequences showing Hashir and Alan's childhood are pretty templated and far too generic, once the focus shifts to their high school era, Vaazha 2 picks up pace. Unlike quite a few recent coming-of-age comedy dramas, including Vaazha, that cashed in heavily on nostalgia, particularly in scenes set in the past, Vaazha 2 features authentic moments anchored in its backdrop. Even if not all of them may be great, they at least exude freshness. Watch Vaazha 2 trailer here: In fact, it almost feels like Vipin Das (director of Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey and Guruvayoor Ambalanadayil), who has penned both movies in the franchise, took the criticisms the first part received to heart and has tried not to repeat the same mistakes, at least in the spirit of the story. While the predecessor presents its central gang as "victims" and depicts those around them who aren't on their side bluntly as unempathetic, even though the former are clearly in the wrong most of the time, Vipin doesn't repeat that pattern in Vaazha 2. Instead, he shows how circumstances unfold and snowball, with some adding fuel to the already burning fire, thereby derailing people's lives, exacerbated by impulsive actions.

For instance, at one point, Hashir and the gang end up in the police station after the aforementioned fight, during which they were under the influence of narcotics. Unlike their parents and teachers, who were squarely focused on blaming the kids, the cop Xavier (Alphonse Puthren, in a role that mirrors Basil Joseph's in the first installment) tries to unravel what pushed them into that situation. He realises that the lack of spaces and opportunities to play and hang out like kids their age — due to their inconsiderate parents and teachers — led them to camp more often at a nearby juice shop run by a drug dealer. Now, it's easy to blame the

kids for using drugs and close the chapter, but should we do just that? Isn't it unfair that Mujeeb (Vijay Babu), a judgmental teacher who constantly chews paan in school, police children who use intoxicants?

Going beyond the typical "mata, pita, guru, daivam" adage, which unfairly gives these figures an upper hand, thus positioning them above scrutiny, Vaazha 2 problematises the habit of teachers blowing even teen romances and the small mistakes kids make out of proportion, thus traumatising them forever. If only they listened to Boo (Jenny Rainsford) in Phoebe Waller-Bridge's Fleabag, "That's the very reason why they put rubbers on the end of pencils... because people make mistakes." Unlike Vaazha, the second installment has its heart more or less in the right place. However, that doesn't mean Vipin Das' writing is extraordinary. In fact, despite having far better material, the writer has failed to flesh it out adequately. One of the biggest drawbacks of the narrative is the overstretching of several moments, particularly the comedic ones. For instance, there's a scene when Hashir, Alan, Ajin, and Vinayak go to see Mohanlal's Lucifer (2019). As chaos erupts in the theatre, a police officer (Krishna Prasad) enters and tries to bring order with an iron fist. But in the darkness, people start booing and cursing him. Although the moment is initially hilarious, it goes on for unnecessarily long, draining all the fun by the time it ends, leaving the scene tedious. At the same time, the misjudgment in the placement of certain jokes, such as the Premam (2015) climax reference in Alphonse's intro, spoils the emotion built up to that point.

While the first half is well-paced, the second half nosedives, owing to too many dialogue-heavy scenes in which many lines come across as preachy. Also, Vipin's typical overreliance on popular memes, too, has played spoilsport here, as they sound forced far too often. However, Vaazha 2 works better than its predecessor in the emotional moments since they aren't overtly melodramatic or crafted to go viral later as reels. Instead of individual moments, Vipin has focused more on the gradual progression of the story while developing emotions organically along the way. Although the story has an arc, it meanders aimlessly in the second half, oscillating between the four friends without coherently developing. Even the many characters introduced early on go totally missing towards the end, with the most notable example being the compassionate teacher, Manoj (Aju Varghese), leaving them purposeless. Amid all this, Savin manages to keep viewers hooked, thanks to the vibrancy he has brought to the visuals. The fight scene leading to the interval, in particular, is extraordinary and brilliantly choreographed, ensuring a sense of naturalness, and thanks in major part here to editor Kannan Mohan, who displayed brilliant work in the predecessor too. Most of the time, Savin gives the impression that he has understood the soul of Vipin's script, and the choreography of the scenes highlights that well. Even in emotional moments, he doesn't go overboard to make it a tearjerker. Akhil Lailasuran's cinematography also contributes significantly to these efforts. Had the movie been trimmed a bit more, it would have been a far better experience.

Nonetheless, it's impossible not to mention that this is how a sequel should be. Instead of simply drawing from the first part and milking all that made it what it is, the makers of Vaazha 2 have treated the story as freshly as possible. Of course, the fact that this installment revolves around a fresh set of characters and can only be described as a spiritual sequel to its predecessor is there. But regardless, the makers have clearly tried their best to ensure that similarities between the movies are not many, even if not nil. The music also deserves commendation. While the makers could have easily used hit tracks from Vaazha, they refrain from doing so until the very end. That's why, when Parvathish Pradeep's "Makane" finally plays at the right moment, after teasing for long, it hits a home run.

Also, Savin and Vipin could have easily ruined the movie by bringing in the central gang from Vaazha and capitalising on them. Had they appeared even in the climax, all that the makers built towards in Vaazha 2 would have gone to waste. Instead, Ajo (Siju Sunny), Vishnu (Amith Mohan Rajeswari), Moosa (Joemon Jyothis), Abdul Kalam (Anuraj OB) and Vivek (Saaf) appear at the tail end when everything has been wrapped up, and along with them, we hear Electronic Kili's iconic "Eyy Banane," making it a cherry on top. While Hashir, Alan, Ajin, and Vinayak (playing characters named after themselves) are perfect in their roles — with Alan being particularly impressive — it's almost impossible to assess their acting potential from this one movie, since they largely portray their public personas, which carry many elements of their real selves.

## Amitabh Bachchan rehearsed for months before shooting for the first episode of KBC, shot the first ad in the UK, recalls Tarun Katial



Amitabh Bachchan was going through a rough patch when he was approached to host Kaun Banega Crorepati, which went on air in the year 2000. His films weren't clicking with the audience like they used to, and his company, ABCL, had suffered significant financial losses. So much so that his company went bankrupt, and Bachchan himself was under a lot of debt. At the time, the idea of hosting shows on television wasn't as popular as it is today, and in those days, film stars often maintained their distance from the small screen. In a recent interview, Tarun Katial, who was working with Star Plus at the time, said that Big B wasn't keen on taking the project at first and had to be convinced over many months.

In a chat shared on TheSellSide's YouTube channel,

Tarun said, "It took us a significant amount of time working through the details with Mr Bachchan to be able to convince him. There were many times when he said that he wasn't really keen." He shared that around the same period, Bachchan made a few trips to the UK and realised that the original show Who Wants To Be A Millionaire was a huge phenomenon, and that made him interested.

"Lucky for us, Mr Bachchan took a few trips to the US and the UK and got exposed to Who Wants To Be A Millionaire there and realised how big the phenomenon had become in the West and that really convinced him to make the move. He realised it was worth doing," he said and added that Big B "agreed over a period of time." To keep the show as close to the original, the makers shot the first promo in the UK. Although Amitabh Bachchan was a huge star at that time, he still made time to rehearse every single day, that too for months, before he actually shot for the first episode. "He used to come to the basement of our office and rehearse every single day for many months before he did the first shoot," he said.

Previously, during the show's 100th episode Bachchan recalled the time when he started working on Kaun Banega Crorepati during his difficult times. "At that time, I had no idea what would happen. People would warn me that moving from the big screen to the small screen would harm my career. But circumstances compelled me to take this on. You see, I wasn't getting any films at that time, but after the show premiered, the kind of reactions I received made me believe that the world was with me," he said.

## Shefali Shah recalls the time Ranveer Singh lifted her on stage at Screen Awards; Dhurandhar actor 'overwhelmed by her kindness'



Ahead of the Chetak Screen Awards 2026 ceremony on April 5, Shefali Shah took to her Instagram handle to go down the memory lane. She posted a video from the Screen Awards ceremony in 2016, when she received the Best Ensemble Cast award for Zoya Akhtar's 2015 family drama Dil Dhadakne Do, alongside co-star Ranveer Singh, who played her son in the movie.

In the video, hosts Karan Johar and Kapil Sharma announced the winner, post which Ranveer escorted Shefali to the stage to accept the Best Ensemble Cast award on their team's behalf. After Ranveer prompted Shefali to match bhanga steps with him to the beats of the popular track from the film, "Gallan Goodiyan," she whispered something in his ear. Ranveer then lifted Shefali up and walked across the stage, as she was taken by surprise. Ranveer's wife, Deepika Padukone, seated in the audience, smiled and clapped at Ranveer's playful gesture. In her Instagram caption, Shefali Shah recalled how her first encounter with Ranveer Singh before the shoot of Dil Dhadakne Do was quite similar. She wrote, "I was at the dance rehearsal of Galla Gudiyan in a studio in Bombay, all the actors were pouring in while I stood at the side, trying to be invisible,

giving awkward smiles and greeting all. And suddenly, from behind, I get lifted off the ground by trespassing arms. I was ready to snap when I heard a super excited voice gushing, 'Shefu, let's make a kick ass film.'... it was Ranveer. This was our very first interaction. And just like that, we became a team. That's Ranveer, and that's why I adore him so much. He has no filters. His ability to feel emotions and express them in all honesty is absolutely childlike."

"His energy, enthusiasm and warmth are infectious. His passion for people, for anything he does, is infallible. Ran (I call him that out of affection) he treats you like you are important, and that's very heartwarming. He's 100% a team player. He knows the importance of every character, & he knows when to step back & just be a support to someone else, and that takes immense security & a deeper understanding that a film is a collaborative effort, not a certificate of individual achievements," added Shefali. Shefali Shah then recalled how after the release of Dil Dhadakne Do, Ranveer Singh visited theatres "on the sly" and complimented Shefali for her work in the film generously. "And his compliments, or rather nothing about him, is contained. He's not polite, politically correct, formal, or put on. He is absolutely genuine, someone who feels immensely and expresses it unabashedly as a person and as an actor," Shefali remarked.

Shefali Shah also returned the favour by heaping praises on Ranveer Singh's acting skills. "If he's in a film or even an ad, I'll watch it just for him. He is simply one of the finest actors there is, and consistently so. His performances are so layered, and yet he makes it seem so simple and effortless. And that's the beauty. Not once do you see Ranveer Singh the actor or his impeccable craft." "All you see is his honesty, vulnerability, and rawness. And All you see is the character. Whether it's Bajirao, Kapil Dev, Khilji, Jaskirat, or Hamza," she added, referring to Ranveer's memorable performances in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2015 period drama Bajirao Mastani, Kabir Khan's 2021 period sports drama 83, Bhansali's 2018 period war drama Padmaavat, and Aditya Dhar's blockbuster spy thriller franchise Dhurandhar, respectively. "Ranveer is pure heart and sheer madness. And that is exactly where his magic lies," wrote Shefali, concluding her Instagram appreciation post. Ranveer Singh took to the comment section and responded, "I'm at a loss of words, Shefu. I am overwhelmed with your kindness (red hearts and folded hands emojis)." Shefali then replied to him, "@ranveersingh mean every word (red heart and smile emojis)."

## Mammootty and Mohanlal's Patriot hits a roadblock: Why this year's biggest Malayalam film just got delayed

It has been a bumpy few days for one of Malayalam cinema's most anticipated releases, Patriot. The political thriller that brings Mammootty and Mohanlal together on screen for the first time in over a decade, has been officially postponed from its original April 23 date. The film will now release worldwide on May 1.

On Tuesday, producer Anto Joseph shared a statement on Instagram confirming the delay. The message was straightforward: the makers are working to present the film with the "highest possible quality," but unforeseen circumstances made it difficult to meet the original schedule. The new date was on Wednesday confirmed by Mammootty and Mohanlal through their social media accounts, making it official. Reports also indicated that the film had been blacklisted by the exhibitors' union in Kerala, which had already signaled a possible delay, adding an unexpected layer of industry friction to an otherwise smooth promotional run.

Patriot brings Mammootty and Mohanlal together after more than ten years. They were last seen together in Kadal Kadannoru Maathukutty in 2013. That alone has been enough to keep anticipation high, regardless of the release date uncertainty. In the film, Mammootty plays Dr. Daniel James, while Mohanlal plays Colonel Rahim Naik. The story follows a retired JAG officer who gets falsely accused of espionage and sets out on a secret mission to restore his reputation while protecting the country. Mohanlal plays an experienced soldier who joins him, while Fahadh Faasil's character adds tension and complication to the narrative. The film is written and directed by Mahesh Narayanan. The cast also includes Nayanthara, Kunchacko Boban, Rajeev Menon, Revathy, Grace Antony, Zarin Shihab, Sreeparvathy, Geethi Sangeetha, Jinu Joseph, Danish Husain, Shaheen Siddique, Sanal Aman, and Prakash Belawadi. Music and background score are com-



posed by Sushin Shyam.

Even as the release date shifted, the promotional momentum has not slowed. The official trailer is set to launch on April 4, with the two stars attending separate events simultaneously across Kerala. Mammootty will be present at Ragam Theatre in Thrissur, while Mohanlal will attend the launch at Kavitha Theatre in Ernakulam, bringing the film to fans in both cities at the same time. The postponement comes months after the film's teaser was unveiled on October 2 last year, which generated significant interest. It opened with a voiceover reflecting on leaders who manipulate people through faith, and introduced Mammootty's character as someone involved in a covert operation, hinting at a larger conspiracy.

What is at stake?

Patriot carries real weight for Malayalam cinema. A film of this scale, with this cast, directed by Mahesh Narayanan, does not come along often. The short delay to May 1 gives the makers a few more days to finish the film on their own terms, and fans a few more days to wait for something they have been looking forward to for a long time.

## Bhooth Bangla release postponed to April 16 amid Dhurandhar success



Mumbai: The makers of the upcoming horror-comedy film 'Bhooth Bangla' starring Akshay Kumar, have decided to move its release date. On Thursday, co-producer Ektaa Kapoor took to her Instagram, and shared a creative notifying her followers of the change in the release date of the film. The makers decided to push the release of the film owing to the exceptional performance of the Ranveer Singh-starrer 'Dhurandhar: The Revenge'.

Ektaa Kapoor shared, "After a collective call with our distributors and the exhibitors, we have decided on a

new release date for 'Bhooth Bangla', 16 April, with the first show starting at 9 pm. 'Dhurandhar: The Revenge' performing exceptionally well is heartening news for our film industry and the exhibitors feel that this shift will allow both films the space, focus and attention they deserve. The 'Bhooth Bangla' team looks forward to welcoming you in cinemas on April 16, 9 pm onwards". The film, which was earlier set to debut in theatres on April 10, will now bow in cinemas on April 16, 2026. The film also stars Wamiqa Gabbi, Paresch Rawal, Tabu, Rajpal Yadav, Jisshu Sengupta, and Mithila Palkar. 'Bhooth Bangla' marks the much-awaited reunion of Akshay Kumar and Priyadarshan. The duo has previously delivered several iconic comedy hits that remain fan favorites, making this collaboration particularly exciting for audiences. Known for their impeccable comic timing and chaotic storytelling, their coming together again has raised expectations for another memorable entertainer. The film is presented by Balaji Motion Pictures, a division of Balaji Telefilms Ltd, in association with Cape of Good Films. Produced by Akshay Kumar, Shobha Kapoor, and Ektaa R Kapoor, and directed by Priyadarshan, the film is set to debut in cinemas on April 16, 2026. With the film moving its release date, 'Dacoit' starring Adivi Sesh, Anurag Kashyap, and Mrunal Thakur, is set to have a solo release on April 10, 2026. The film is produced by Supriya Yarlagadda.