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## EDITORIAL POLITICAL CRISES

### Exodus at ISRO

The exodus of senior scientists from the state-owned ISRO is a matter of concern, particularly at a time when the space research organisation has several ambitious projects on hand. Over 100 scientists and engineers have either resigned or taken voluntary retirement in recent months, triggering a debate about talent retention in India's premier space agency. The brain drain coincides with the emergence of private players in the space sector. If ISRO wants to retain its best minds, it must modernise career pathways, reward innovation, and create a desirable workplace. The shift of talent to the private sector threatens to erode the institutional strength and legacy of ISRO. The introduction of remedial measures after the scientists' exit is unlikely to stem this trend. One of the most sustainable strategies for strengthening a legacy institution like ISRO is to attract and retain the best talent by offering competitive remuneration and an inspiring work environment, professional autonomy, recognition of merit and clear avenues for career advancement. As per reports, dozens of senior scientists working at the UR Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and other key units of the national space agency have either resigned or taken premature retirement. Many of them were working on flagship programmes such as Gaganyaan (human spaceflight), Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) and the Bharatiya Antriksh Station. The situation has become so alarming that the Department of Space has decided to clamp down on the exodus, directing that those associated with critical missions will not be allowed to leave ISRO until the completion of these projects.

The exodus is clearly linked to the rise of private sector space companies in the past few years. Many of the space startups were founded by former ISRO personnel. As a result, experienced scientists are finding attractive alternatives that simply did not exist a decade ago. The compensation gap between government service and the private sector has widened considerably. Government organisations operate within rigid bureaucratic promotion structures. As a result, career advancement often depends on seniority and administrative processes, while private firms offer faster growth, leadership opportunities, and the ability to take ownership of projects at a relatively young age. For decades, ISRO was virtually the only destination for aerospace talent in India. Today, it serves as the training ground for an expanding national space ecosystem. Under-utilisation of funds, reduced budgetary allocations, delays in filling vacancies and the entry of the private sector are all contributing to the serious situation at ISRO. On top of this, there have been a series of failures involving workhorse rocket PSLV and massive delays in challenging missions like Gaganyaan. The centralisation of decision-making and growing bureaucratic as well as political interference also do not augur well for the functioning of a large mission-oriented scientific agency. The net result is low morale and growing disenchantment in the scientific workforce.

## Former MLA NVSS Prabhakar Watches 136th Episode of 'Mann Ki Baat'

**Calls Upon Every Citizen to Contribute Responsibly Towards Building a Developed India**

“UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Former Uppal MLA NVSS Prabhakar watched the 136th episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme, organised under the leadership of BJP leader and Shakti Kendra In-charge Sheelam Somasekhara Goud at VMH School premises, Indranagar, Ramanthapur, under Booth No. 282."Speaking on the occasion, NVSS Prabhakar said that Mann Ki Baat is a remarkable platform that promotes the spirit of service, national consciousness, and social responsibility among the people of the



country. He stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly interaction with citizens, where he shares inspiring stories, achievements, and ideas that contribute to nation-building, serves as a great source of motivation for every Indian. "He urged every citizen to perform their responsibilities with dedication and commitment in the collective effort to build a Viksit Bharat (Developed India)." The programme was attended by Ramanthapur Division President Vangala Santosh Gupta, BJP leaders Muttineni Jagadish, Revu Narasimha Kuruma, Vallapu Jagan Yadav, Thalla Balakrishna Goud, Kompally Upender, Krishnamurthy, Sanjay Patel, Ravindra Reddy, Palugula Anjaiah Patel, Venkanna Goud, Upender Yadav, Shailender, Prabhulingam, Konda Satish Gupta, Thammali Ravi, Vempati Ram Raj, Ramabrahmam, Murali, BJP Mahila leader Keerthi, Shakti Kendra In-charges, Booth Presidents, party workers, family members, and a large number of local residents.

## Uppal Congress In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy Inspects Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Voter List Drive in Kushaiguda Division

“UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy inspected the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) programme for the electoral roll conducted by the Kushaiguda Division Congress Com-



mittee near Sai Baba Temple in Sai Nagar Colony on Sunday. During the visit, he reviewed the process of new voter registrations, corrections, address changes, and inclusion of eligible voters in coordination with the local

Booth Level Officers (BLOs). Later, under the leadership of Kushaiguda Division Congress President Koukutla Prakash Reddy, an awareness programme was conducted to educate residents about the importance of exercising their voting rights. Addressing the gathering, Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy urged every eligible citizen to ensure their name is included in the electoral roll and advised those requiring corrections or modifications in their voter details to submit the necessary application forms. Application forms were also distributed to the public during the programme. He emphasized that every vote is precious in safeguarding democracy and appealed to all eligible citizens to come forward and actively exercise their constitutional right to vote. The programme was attended by Kushaiguda Division Congress President Koukutla Prakash Reddy, former Corporator Singireddy Dhanapal Reddy, Coordinator Sitaram Sujith Reddy, Srinivas Gupta, Hira Lal Naik, Kranthi Kumar, Anil Yadav, Vinod, Shyam, Rakesh, Senior Mahila Congress leaders Neeraja Reddy, Rama Reddy, Aruna Naik, Varalakshmi, Girija, Youth Congress President Charan Chari, General Secretary Saketh Goud, Eshwar, Rakesh, Gani, Gaddala Vamsi, along with residents of Sai Nagar Colony, Congress party workers, and local leaders, who participated in large numbers and made the programme a success.

## Boduppall Bonalu Jatara to be Celebrated Grandly on August 23 Village Elders Resolve to Organise the Festival in a Traditional and Grand Manner at Bangaru Maisamma Temple

“BODUPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): A key meeting on the organisation of the annual Bonalu



festival was held on Sunday under the leadership of village elders at the Sri Sri Sri Bangaru Maisamma Temple in Boduppall Division of the Boduppall Circle under the Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation. "During the meeting, village elders, public representatives, and local dignitaries unanimously resolved to celebrate the Boduppall Bonalu Jatara in a grand and traditional manner on Sunday, August 23, 2026." The participants decided to ensure that the festival is conducted with devotion and in accordance with

tradition, while making all necessary arrangements for the convenience and safety of devotees. They also appealed to people from all sections of society, including youth, women, public representatives, and community leaders, to work together for the successful conduct of the festival. "Among those present were Medchal-Malkajgiri District Congress Committee (DCC) President Thotakura Vajresh Yadav, former City Congress President and Corporator Pogula Narasimha Reddy, former Mayor Thotakura Ajay Yadav, Boduppall Division Congress President Bommaku Kalyan, Chengicherla Division Congress President Pogula Dileep Reddy, Bommaku Ramesh, Narsing Rao Gupta, Veerachari, Rasala Venkatesh Yadav, Pogula Veera Reddy, Rapolu Shankaraya, Mahender Yadav, Cheerala Narasimha, Ponnamm Ravi Goud, Pullakandla Janga Reddy, Danagalla Yadagiri, along with leaders of various political parties, village elders, and local dignitaries." The meeting concluded with a unanimous decision to organise the Boduppall Bonalu Jatara with the active support and participation of all sections of society, ensuring that the festival is celebrated in a traditional, devotional, and grand manner.

## Quality Concerns Raised Over Road Works Initiated After Lokayukta Intervention in Uppal Bhagayath HMDA Layout

**Residents Demand Strict Quality Standards in Rs 9.60 Crore Blacktop Road Project**

“UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Residents of Uppal Bhagayath HMDA Layout and the Uppal Bhagayath Welfare Association have expressed serious concern over the quality of the ongoing blacktop road construction works in the colony. They alleged that the works, which were initiated following the intervention of the Lokayukta after years of public struggle, are not being executed as per the prescribed quality standards. "According to the Welfare Association, residents had been fighting for several years for basic civic infrastructure in the layout. Despite submitting repeated representations to the concerned government departments, no action was taken, forcing the association to approach the Lokayukta. Following the complaint, Lokayukta representatives visited the layout, inspected the prevailing conditions, and questioned officials of the HMDA and GHMC regarding the long-pending civic issues. Subsequently, the government initiated several development and sanitation works in the colony. As part of the development programme, funds amounting to ₹9.60 crore were sanctioned for the construction of nearly 10 kilometres of blacktop roads. However, residents alleged that the contractor is carrying out the work negligently and that the concerned engineering officials are failing to supervise the project properly. They claimed that blacktop is being laid without adequately cleaning and preparing the road surface, with old stones, gravel, and debris being left in place. They further alleged that mandatory engineering and technical standards are not being followed. Residents also expressed concern that most of the work is being carried out during night hours, making it difficult for the public to monitor the quality of construction." The Welfare Association stated that it is unfortunate that development works secured through the Lokayukta's intervention are now being compro-



mised due to poor execution. It demanded that the authorities immediately inspect the ongoing works, conduct quality tests, and ensure that any substandard work is redone in accordance with prescribed norms. "The association also urged the government to take appropriate action against the contractor as well as the officials responsible for inadequate supervision. Residents appealed to the authorities to ensure that every rupee of public money is spent on quality infrastructure and that the hard-earned development achieved through years of public struggle is not wasted.

## Financial Aid of Rs 1.06 Lakh Extended to Ailing Classmate

"Manthani Peddapalli District, July 26 (Indian Chronicle): "The 1988–89 SSC batch students of Manthani have once again demonstrated the enduring strength of alumni bonds. Upon learning that their classmate, Mohan, was battling a serious illness, the "Mantrapuri Cheyutha" alumni team responded immediately. "Uniting for the cause, the batch members pooled together a financial assistance package of ₹1,06,500 and handed it over to him. Despite residing in different locations and pursuing diverse professions, members of this batch have consistently stayed connected over the years. The "Mantrapuri Cheyutha"

group has earned a reputation for stepping up whenever a classmate is in distress. "Batch members emphasized that behind this financial help lies more than just money—it represents deep friendship, a collective spirit, and a shared responsibility toward one another. By translating their school memories into meaningful support, they have sent an inspiring message to society. "Representatives of the 1988–89 batch stated that they remain committed to extending support to those in need in the future under the same spirit. The unity displayed by this school batch stands as a benchmark for alumni groups everywhere.

## Former MLA Peddi Sudarshan Reddy Shifted to Hyderabad After Massive Heart Attack Malkajgiri Traffic Police Create Green Corridor on Uppal Ring Road

**-----Ambulance Reaches Hospital Swiftly Under the Supervision of Traffic Inspector Nagaraju; Police Services Widely Appreciated**

“UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Former Narsampet MLA from Warangal district, Peddi Sudarshan Reddy, suffered a severe heart attack and was shifted from Warangal to Hyderabad for emergency medical treatment. "After providing initial treatment at a local hospital in Warangal, doctors advised that he be shifted to a corporate hospital in Hyderabad for advanced medical care. Considering that every minute was crucial to save the patient's life, the police immediately sprang into action and established a Green Corridor along the Uppal Ring Road and the entire ambulance route. "Traffic movement was completely regulated along the route, ensuring a clear and uninterrupted passage for the ambulance without any delays. Under the supervision of Uppal Traffic Inspector Nagaraju, traffic police personnel, in coordination with the local police, efficiently managed the route, enabling the ambulance to reach the Hyderabad hospital in the shortest possible time. "The swift operation once again demonstrated the life-saving importance of Green Corridors during medical emergencies. The timely and professional response of the traffic police drew appreciation from the public and public representatives alike. On the occasion, the Malkajgiri Traffic Police appealed to motorists to immediately give way whenever they hear an ambulance siren. They emphasized that every second is precious during emergencies and urged the public to follow traffic rules and prioritize ambulances, thereby becoming partners in saving lives.

## SIR Help Centres Must Function Smoothly to Facilitate the Process: Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy Calls on Congress Cadre

“UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Former Uppal Division Corporator Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy urged Congress workers to work dedicatedly to ensure that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process is carried out smoothly and efficiently. "On Sunday, she inspected the SIR Help Centre established



by the Uppal Congress Party at Kuruma Nagar, Uppal. Speaking on the occasion, Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy said that genuine voters should not face any inconvenience or loss due to the SIR process. She advised party workers to coordinate closely with the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and extend all necessary assistance to voters during the revision process. "Among those present were Lingampalli Ramakrishna, Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Durgam Naveen Yadav, Govind Kumar Swamy, Sandeep, P. Ramachander, Govindu, T. Malleesh, Madhu, Akku Ravi, T. Srinivas Reddy, T. Vijaya Singh, Satyanarayana Chary, Raj Kumar, Rajayya Goud, Govind Komarayya, Manga Seenu, P. Mahender, Kumar, Poola Chandu, Vimal Balu Yadav, Ramesh Yadav, K. Beerayya, Satish Kumar, BLOs of Booth Nos. 337 and 338, Durgam Renuka, L. Aruna, and other leaders and workers of the Uppal Congress Party.

## Inspection of New Children's Play Equipment, Watchman's Room at Bank Colony Park; Inauguration Soon by MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy; BANNALA PRAVEEN MUDIRAJ

“UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): BRS State leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, along with GHMC officials and the contractor, inspected the newly constructed watchman's room and the children's play equipment being installed at Bank Colony Park in Beerappagadda Division. "Speaking on the occasion, Praveen Mudiraj recalled that the foundation stone for the watchman's room and children's play equipment was laid in May this year in the presence of Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy. "He said the park attracts a large number of residents from nearby colonies for morning and evening walks, use of the open gym, and recreational activities. Since many children also visit the park regularly, former Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj had requested the MLA to provide modern play equipment for them. Responding to the request, the MLA sanctioned funds, enabling the project to be taken up. Praveen Mudiraj further stated that a dedicated watchman's room is being constructed to improve security in the park and address issues caused by anti-social elements. He informed that both the children's play equipment and the watchman's room have now been completed and will soon be inaugurated by MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy and opened for public use. "Bank Colony Park is becoming a place that promotes health for senior citizens and joy for children. We will continue our efforts to provide more public amenities for the benefit of local residents," he said. Contractor Malleesh, GHMC officials, and others were present during the inspection.

## Fish Pond Turns into a Fair-like Scene in Nelakondapalli“Over 20 tonnes of fish allegedly looted; hundreds join fishing spree

“Khammam Nelakondapalli July 26 Indian Chronicle:““A village pond at Bairavunipalli in Nelakondapalli mandal of Khammam district witnessed chaotic scenes as hundreds of people participated in a massive fishing spree following a dispute among members of the local Fishermen Cooperative Society.“According to society members, more than 20 tonnes of fish were allegedly taken away by outsiders after disagreements within the cooperative. The incident began on Saturday and escalated on Sunday when people from nearby villages rushed to the pond after learning about the situation.“Residents from Ajay Thanda, Cheruvumadharam, Bairavunipalli, Nachepalli, Kothur, Nelakondapalli, Mangapuram Thanda and surrounding areas entered the pond to catch fish. Witnesses said the pond and its bund resembled a fair-ground, with hundreds of people taking part in the fishing.“Many of the fish weighed between 5 and 7 kilograms each and were reportedly sold on the spot for ₹100 to ₹120 per kilogram.“The fish had originally been supplied free of cost by the government for stocking the pond.



Despite the large-scale removal of fish, both groups involved in the dispute remained silent over the incident.“Adding to the controversy, some public representatives who are members of the cooperative reportedly purchased fish from those involved in the catch.

## Mentally Unstable Youth Suffers Electric Shock After Touching Transformer in Nelakondapalli

“Khammam Nelakondapalli July 26 Indian Chronicle:“ “A mentally unstable youth sustained serious injuries after coming into contact with an electricity transformer in broad daylight at Mangapuram Thanda in Nelakondapalli mandal of Khammam district on Sunday.“According to local residents, the youth, identified as Nageswara Rao, has been suffering from mental illness for some time and has been engaging in dangerous behaviour. On Sunday, he reportedly ran through the area before grabbing a live electricity transformer while onlookers watched in shock.“Hearing his cries after he received an electric shock, local residents acted quickly. Using sticks, brooms and other non-conductive objects, they managed to separate him from the transformer, preventing a more serious tragedy.“The victim suffered severe burns to his hands and heavy bleeding. Residents immediately alerted the 108 ambulance service, whose medical team provided first aid at the scene before shifting him to a hospital in Khammam for advanced treatment.“Locals said the youth has been involved in similar dangerous incidents every month due to his mental health condition, lack of proper medication and absence of family support. They appealed to voluntary organisations and charitable groups to come forward and provide him with the medical care and assistance he urgently needs.“[5:23 PM, 7/26/2026] +91 96187 88997: End



## Grand Tribute Paid to Kargil Martyrs: BJP Minority Leader Syed Mohiuddin



“Khammam Nelakondapalli, July 26 Indian Chronicle:““BJP Minority District Leader Syed Mohiuddin paid rich tributes to the brave soldiers who laid down their lives in the Kargil War. Speaking at a press conference held at the mandal headquarters on Sunday, he said Kargil Vijay Diwas stands as a symbol of the courage, sacrifice, and patriotism of the Indian Armed Forces.“He recalled that during the Kargil War of 1999, the Indian Army launched Operation Vijay to drive out Pakistani soldiers and infiltrators who had illegally occupied Indian territory in the Kargil and Dras sectors of Ladakh. The conflict began in May 1999 and continued for nearly 60 days.“Mohiuddin stated that on July 26, 1999, the Indian Army successfully recaptured the occupied peaks and proudly hoisted the Indian tricolour, marking a historic victory. He noted that more than 527 Indian soldiers sacrificed their lives in defence of the nation during the war.“He said that every year on July 26, the nation observes Kargil Vijay Diwas to honour the supreme sacrifice of these brave soldiers. On the occasion, the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, and the chiefs of the Armed Forces pay homage to the martyrs at the National War Memorial in New Delhi and the Kargil War Memorial in Dras.“Mohiuddin said Kargil Vijay Diwas reminds every Indian of the unmatched bravery, patriotism, and dedication of the country's armed forces who fought to safeguard the nation's sovereignty.“He concluded his address with the slogan: "Bharat Mata Ki Jai!"

## BJP Leaders and Senior Citizens Watch ‘Mann Ki Baat’ Live in Nacharam

“Nacharam, Indian chornical, July 26:““Under the leadership of BJP Yuva Morcha leader Ellagoni Abhishek Goud, senior citizens and local residents of Nacharam gathered together to watch Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme live.“BJP leaders Mallela Narsing Rao, Mohan Reddy, Pratap Reddy, Sai Goud, Venkatesh M., and G. Yadagiri Goud participated in the programme.“Senior citizen members Premraj, Saibaba, Savitri, and Suvarna, along with local residents Madhusudan Reddy, Harinath Reddy, Narsi Reddy, and several others, also took part in the programme.“On this occasion, the senior citizens and local residents watched Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme with great interest and listened attentively to his address to the people of the country.



## SIR Voter Revision Help Centre Set Up in Medipally Division: TUNGATHURTHI RAVI



filling out the forms. Many citizens made use of the facility and successfully completed and submitted their applications to the BLOs.“He also expressed his gratitude to the concerned officials, BLOs, and Booth Level Agents (BLAs) for extending their support and helping voters through the SIR help centre.“The programme was attended by Medipally Division SIR in-charges Bal Reddy, Satyanarayana, Komalatha, and Rakesh, along with Congress leaders Ramesh, Sudarshan Reddy, Amarnath, Venkatesh Goud, Pranay, NNK Durga, Thanda Parameshwari, Srilatha, Saritha, and others.

““MEDIPALLY , JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): A help centre was set up today at Sai Priya Nagar, Road No. 1, in Medipally Division (Division No. 9) of the Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation to assist the public with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls.“A large number of residents from various colonies in the division visited the help centre, filled out their voter revision forms, and submitted them to the respective Booth Level Officers (BLOs).Speaking on the occasion, Tungathurthi Ravi, President of the Medipally Division Congress Party, said that the SIR process is very important for every voter. He stated that the help centre was established to assist people who had doubts or difficulties while

## Extensive SIR Awareness Campaigns Conducted in HMT Nagar Division Special Campaign Aimed at Protecting People's Right to Vote – Saizen Shekhar

““Nacharam, Indian Chornical, July 26: ““ BRS Party State Leader Saizen Shekhar stated that extensive awareness programmes are being conducted across HMT Nagar Division to educate the public about the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) programme undertaken by the Election Commission.“He said that a special auto has been arranged to create awareness among the public about the SIR process and the importance of enumeration application forms. Through microphone announcements, extensive campaigns are being conducted across various colonies and slum areas of the division.“Saizen Shekhar stated that direct awareness is being created among the people to ensure that every eligible voter protects and exercises their right to vote.“He further said that, as per the directions of Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, special help desks have been set up under the leadership of the BRS Party to assist people who are facing difficulties in filling out the enumeration application forms. Assistance is also being provided to help citizens identify their names in the 2002 electoral rolls.“He stated that, as a result of these awareness programmes, many people who were previously unaware of the SIR



process are coming forward and taking the necessary steps to safeguard their right to vote.“Saizen Shekhar appealed to all eligible voters to make use of the SIR process and take the necessary steps to protect their right to vote.“Vital Yadav, Vemula Maraiiah, Katta Buchanna Goud, Chandrashekar, Pentaiah, Ganesh, Srinivas, Narasimha, Ashok, Aruna and others participated in the programme.

## SIR Help Desk Set Up at Habsiguda Street No- 1 Organised under the leadership of Habsiguda Division President KANDI SHRAVAN KUMAR REDDY

““UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): Following the directions of Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, an SIR (Special Intensive Revision) Help Desk established at Habsiguda Street No. 1 was visited today by Habsiguda Division President Kandi Shraavan Kumar Reddy.“Speaking on the occasion, Shraavan Kumar Reddy urged residents of the division to make full use of the help desk. He emphasized that every citizen should protect their democratic right to vote by actively participating in the SIR process.“He instructed Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and Congress Booth Level Agents (BLAs) to visit every household, assist voters in filling out the SIR Enumeration Forms, and collect the forms that have already been completed. He also personally helped several voters fill out their enumeration forms and reviewed the progress of the SIR drive booth-wise.Former Habsiguda Division President Gannaram Vijay Kumar, senior leaders Chintala Baburao, Murali Krishna Mudiraj, Raju Naik, Malu Naik, Gundu Rajanna, Ganga Yadav, Dharma Raju,



Ramu, Youth Congress President Vasu Naik, Lakshmi Narayana, Kumar, Sai Kumar, Sai Kiran, Suman Naik, Mahabooob, and several other party leaders and workers participated in the programme.

## Kotha Kishore Goud, Pogula Dileep Reddy Review SIR Process in Sri Lakshmi Nagar Colony

““BODUPPAL, JULY26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process is progressing actively in Sri Mahalakshmi Nagar Colony under the Boduppall Circle of the Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation.“Medchal District B-Block General Secretary Kotha Kishore Goud and Chenchalguda (Chengicherla) Division Congress Party President Pogula Dileep Reddy participated as chief guests and reviewed the ongoing SIR process.Addressing the gathering, they said that every eligible citizen should have the right to vote and instructed Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and Booth Level Agents (BLAs) to create greater awareness among voters about the revision process. They appealed to all voters to actively participate in the SIR exercise and submit their completed SIR forms within the stipu-



lated deadline.Among those present were Chengicherla Division Congress Party General Secretary Samatha Yadav, former Boduppall Youth Congress President and Sri Lakshmi Nagar Colony President Asarla Beerappa, NIN Colony President Mekala Srinivas Goud, Shubodayam Colony President Chiranjeevi, Congress leaders Srihari, Mahesh Goud, Yakub, members of the colony associations, Youth Congress leaders, and local residents.

## Hyderabad Police Push Safe Hiring to Prevent Domestic Theft

““Hyderabad correspondent, July 26 (Indian Chronicle): Reinforcing its commitment to crime prevention through public participation, Hyderabad City Police



have launched an intensive awareness drive urging citizens to adopt safe hiring practices while employing domestic workers. The initiative comes after an analysis of 565 servant theft cases registered across the city over the past two years, prompting the department to focus on prevention rather than post-crime investigation. Police teams are reaching out to residents, gated communities, apartment complexes, offices and commercial establishments, advising employers to verify the identity and antecedents of domestic staff before recruitment. Officials said simple precautions, including police verification and proper documentation, can significantly reduce the risk of household thefts. Hyderabad City Police Commissioner V.C. Sajjanar stressed that community awareness is the strongest tool against such offences. "The best policing is preventing crime before it happens. Every employer should treat police verification as an essential security measure, not merely a formality. A few minutes spent verifying credentials can prevent substantial financial loss and enhance the safety of families," he said.“Police observed that busy professionals, elderly persons living alone and families relying on domestic help without adequate background checks are more vulnerable to such crimes. They also cautioned that organised criminal networks have, in some cases, attempted to gain access to

homes by posing as domestic workers, making verification indispensable. The department has appealed to Resident Welfare Associations, apartment managements and employers to maintain proper records of domestic staff, issue entry passes wherever required and ensure surveillance systems remain operational. Citizens have also been urged to report any suspicious activity immediately through Dial 100 or the Hyderabad City Police WhatsApp Helpline.“Officials said the campaign reflects Hyderabad Police's proactive approach to building a safer city, emphasising that responsible hiring and active public cooperation remain the first line of defence against domestic theft.

## Bharatanatyam Performance Enthralls Audience at Uppal Mini Shilparamam

““UPPAL, JULY 26 (INDIAN CHRONICLE): As part of the weekend cultural programmes at Uppal Mini Shilparamam, a captivating Bharatanatyam recital was presented on Sunday evening by the disciples of Aikyatha Vimal.“The students performed a series of classical dance pieces, including Ganesha Pancha ratnam, Pushpanjali, Ranga Puja, Mallari, Sri



Chakra Raja, Sri Hari Stotram, Deva Devam Bhaje, Sharade Karunanidhi, Krishnashtakam, Alarippu, and Rama Janardana, showcasing their grace, rhythm, and devotion.The performances by Sahasra, Jayashree, Bhuvu, Tejashree, Pamika, Shreshtha, Shivatmika, Adhya, Lalitya, Karthik, Khushi, Dainika, and Kshetra, along with other young artists, received enthusiastic appreciation from the audience for their impressive expressions and skilful presentation.

## CBI arrests 2 former bank officials in Rs 504-crore IDFC First fraud

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested two former bank officials in connection with the alleged misappropriation of Rs 504 crore belonging to eight Haryana government departments through fraudulent fixed deposits and bank transactions. Those arrested are Shamim Dar, then Area Head of IDFC First Bank, and Charanjeet Singh Randhawa, then Branch Manager of AU Small Finance Bank's Mohali branch. According to the CBI, the two accused played key roles in facilitating the opening of bank accounts and processing fraudulent transactions through which public funds were diverted. The agency said it had collected incriminating evidence against both during the course of the investigation. The accused were arrested on Tuesday and are being produced before the Special CBI Court in Panchkula.

The CBI took over the probe from the Haryana State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau at the request of the state government. The agency is investigating the alleged fraud at IDFC First Bank's Sector 32 branch in Chandigarh, where Rs 504 crore belonging to eight Haryana government departments was allegedly siphoned off through

## NIA arrests Trinamool councillor Sakir Ali in 2023 Ram Navami violence case

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Tuesday arrested Trinamool Congress (TMC) councillor Sakir Ali in connection with the widespread violence that erupted during the 2023 Ram Navami processions in Rishra, Hooghly. Ali, a TMC councillor representing Ward No. 4 of the Rishra municipality, was taken into custody following an early morning raid at the residence of his wife, former Arambagh TMC MP Aparupa Poddar. According to NIA sources, Ali is accused of inciting clashes and orchestrating targeted violence. His arrest follows a prolonged, comprehensive investigation and subsequent statements provided by previously arrested co-accused.

An NIA team, flanked by Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel, reached Poddar's residence Tuesday morning to execute a search warrant. While Ali was initially detained for questioning at the scene, investigators arrested him after noticing significant discrepancies and contradictions in his statements. The NIA revealed that advanced forensic and digital evidence trails were instrumental in cracking the conspiracy. Investigators utilised tower dumping and comprehensive call detail records (CDRs), CCTV footage from around the crime scenes, and geospatial

forged or non-existent fixed deposits and debit notes before being routed to shell entities. So far, the CBI has chargesheeted 17 accused in the case, including six officials of IDFC First Bank and AU Small Finance Bank, three Haryana government officials, two companies, and six private individuals. The agency is also investigating two other cases transferred from the Chandigarh administration — one relating to Chandigarh Smart City Limited (CSCL) and the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, and another involving the Chandigarh Renewable Energy and Science & Technology Promotion Society (CREST). The CBI has filed chargesheets in both cases. In the CSCL case, it has chargesheeted five bankers, one CSCL official and one private individual. In the CREST case, it has chargesheeted five bankers, two CREST officials, four private individuals, and two companies. The agency said it remained committed to bringing all those responsible to justice and tracing the complete trail of the misappropriated public funds.

analysis of viral social media videos. The agency noted that the evidence strongly points to a pre-planned conspiracy designed to disrupt public order. The arrest comes amid a series of central agency operations targeting local TMC leaders and municipal councillors across West Bengal over the past few weeks. The NIA is expected to produce Sakir Ali before the designated special court shortly to seek transit remand and extended custody for deeper custodial interrogation. In April 2023, communal tensions flared up across several parts of West Bengal during Ram Navami celebrations, with major disturbances reported in Howrah, Dalkhola, Shibpur, Serampore, and Rishra. In Rishra, a massive clash erupted as a Ram Navami rally, joined by senior BJP leader and then-national vice president Dilip Ghosh, passed near the Wellington Jute Mill after originating from Bangur Park. The procession was suddenly met with heavy stone-pelting, arson, and widespread vandalism. Security forces escorted Ghosh and other political leaders to safety, but the area remained volatile under a heavy police blanket for several days. At the time, the BJP accused both Sakir Ali and Aparupa Poddar of making highly provocative, inflammatory remarks that triggered the tensions.

## Gurgaon sealing drive: Displaced tenants turn to AI platform, brokers to find new homes

When a college friend living in a rented 1 BHK in Gurgaon's DLF Phase 3 called him saying his building had been sealed and he had just hours to move out, Jatinder Madaan, an engineer with a background in Computer Science, thought he was dealing with a one-off emergency. Instead, the conversation, he recalled, showed him a bigger problem unfolding across Gurgaon — tenants packing their belongings while attending office calls, calling brokers one after another, and scrolling property websites to find a place to stay.

Around the same time, Deepti Verma, a Gurgaon-based luxury floors realtor, found her phone flooded with calls from students and young professionals suddenly forced to look for accommodation. Hearing stories of first-time renters trying to arrange housing overnight, she decided to launch a zero-brokerage initiative to help affected youngsters under 25 find short-term stays. As the sealing drive across DLF Phases 1-5 forced tenants to find new homes quickly, people are stepping in to help. Residents, entrepreneurs and brokers are creating support networks — from a community-run AI rental platform that shares housing leads to temporary accommodation arranged through personal contacts and local networks. AI platform for rentals

Madaan, 27, launched the free community-driven AI platform where displaced tenants can post housing requirements, users can share rental leads and homeowners can list available properties. The platform also allows users to recommend brokers. On how it works, he said users can post a query about a locality (and available homes there) for others to address. Madaan said the initiative is not meant to replace existing brokers or property portals. "We will not take money for the service. So far, we have around 10 listings and over 50 users, including displaced tenants and

some brokers who know of available properties," he said. "We conduct checks for onboarding users and verifying listed properties. Users should have stayed in a property to list it... we also check where tenants work and verify brokers' backgrounds. We cannot visit every property physically, but users can report a property — if they flag it as illegal or that it has issues, we delist it." Madaan said the platform currently uses AI to organise information. "Soon, we will automate it based on community-driven inputs." He said more verification features, including cross-checking the list of illegal properties with official records, are being developed. He added that four people are close to finalising new accommodation now, and have visited the properties listed. The housing scramble has also prompted individual brokers to offer temporary support. Speaking to The Indian Express, Deepti said seeing the plight of young women being forced out of their homes at short notice prompted her to step in. "I have arranged temporary accommodation for three girls. I am in constant touch with homeowners and even the local gurdwara to help some of them stay for a while at a nominal cost," she said. The Gurgaon Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) is set to intensify its sealing of unauthorised commercial establishments from Wednesday. The crackdown, led by District Town Planner (DTP) (Enforcement) Amit Madholia, is based on directives from the Punjab and Haryana High Court, aimed at curbing zoning violations and unauthorised commercial activities in residential areas. Last Thursday, a team of officials from the Gurgaon DTP pasted notices outside alleged illegal paying guest (PG) accommodations and guesthouses, and also slipped copies into rooms of tenants. According to the public notice, the official deadline to secure new housing and avoid the inconvenience of the sealing action is June 30.

vertebrate family tree.

When the restoration is complete, it will be the largest exhibited in a museum anywhere in the world, said Tomasz Sulej, a paleontologist and professor at the Institute of Paleobiology at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Its skeleton weighs 1,300 kilograms (2,865 pounds). Sulej and his colleague Wojciech Pawlak from the Faculty of Geology at the Warsaw University are credited with discovering the skeleton in southern Poland in 2023 and coming up with the idea to invite volunteers to help with its restoration. Sulej says there are no other known Mastodonsaurus skeletons this large anywhere else in the world, and the discovery promises to help scientists learn more about the species. "The structure of the body is different from what we knew so far," he said. "This is information that is completely new to the scientific world." Other Mastodonsaurus skeletons have been found elsewhere, including in Germany and Russia, Sulej said, but they are around 2 to 3 meters (6½ to 10 feet) long. A chance to reflect on the past and future Dorota Serafin, a 51-year-old manager from Warsaw who volunteers for the project, said working with the skeleton of an ancient animal is an experience that is at the same time "relaxing and philosophical, even mystical." Serafin said she plans to return for other sessions and eventually bring her family to Copernicus when the restored skeleton is exhibited, which is expected to happen in October or November. In addition to the startling experience of touching the remains of an animal that lived hundreds of millions of years ago, contact with the Mastodonsaurus offers an opportunity to reflect on the future, those involved in the project said. The amphibian inhabited Earth's waters after the largest known mass extinction and just before the dinosaurs appeared. As humanity contemplates the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change, Sulej says the story of the Mastodonsaurus offers some hope.

## ‘Sacked for speaking truth’: BJP leader of 43 years expelled

A day after being expelled from the BJP for six years, the party's former spokesperson in Karnataka, M G Mahesh, said he was "shocked" at the disciplinary committee's decision as he had only spoken "in the party's interest". Mahesh's expulsion followed an internal meeting where he blamed the Karnataka BJP leadership for mismanagement during the recent MLC elections. On June 19, a day after the Karnataka MLC elections were held, a BJP party meeting was held virtually. "During the meeting, I shared public opinion related to the recent MLC elections and cross-voting. The sole intention was to address the ongoing problems within the party, and it was an internal meeting. I am shocked that I have been expelled by the party for speaking in the interest of the party," Mahesh said.

The results of the Karnataka MLC elections showed that at least six of the 63 BJP MLAs had cross-voted in favour of the Congress candidates, and one cast an invalid vote. According to the sources, Mahesh accused the national general secretary and the party's state in-charge, Radha Mohan Das Agarwal, of not taking cognisance of the elections. "The whip was issued only after 23 votes were cast. He also complained that the state leadership failed to attack the ruling government over irregularities," a source who attended the meeting said. A BJP leader said Mahesh also raised objections to fielding former Congress leader R Raghunath for the MLC elections, and not leaders who have been working with the party for decades. On June 22, Mahesh received a notice from the state BJP unit, which alleged that he had abused senior party leaders in the meeting and made derogatory allegations, and sought an explanation. On June 26, Mahesh responded to the notice. Days later, he was expelled. Saying he is still in shock, Mahesh said that he would continue to follow the party's ideology. Mahesh joined the BJP in 1982 and has been a prominent party worker in the Mysuru region. An RSS ideologue, Mahesh played a key role in organising events for

the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, Ekta Yatra, etc in the Mysuru region. Post the MLC elections, the infighting within the Karnataka BJP has come to the fore. In a viral audio clip, former Union minister and former chief minister D V Sadananda Gowda is purportedly heard urging someone to wait till state BJP president B Y Vijayendra's term ends. In the clip, a man purported to be Gowda can be heard saying: "He completes his three-year term in November. If we wait two more months, his tenure will end, and no one can complain. July, August, September, October... kick him out." Gowda has denied that the voice in the clip is his. Gowda has also been embroiled in a row with BJP MLA S R Vishwanath. Calling Vishwanath a "land grabber",

Gowda alleged that the BJP MLA served under the directions of the late underworld don Muttappa Rai before entering politics. His statement came days after Vishwanath said that no one from the coastal Karnataka region belongs to the Vokkaliga community. Gowda is from the Dakshina Kannada district. In another controversy involving Vishwanath, he and Chikkaballapur MP Sudhakar clashed over organising Kempegowda Jayanthi celebrations last week. While Vishwanath has been organising the celebrations in Yelahanka, this time, in a first, Sudhakar also held the event in the same region. "Sudhakar has been dividing BJP party workers.

I challenge Sudhakar to contest from Yelahanka, or I will challenge him in Chikkaballapur," Vishwanath said. To this, Sudhakar hit back, "If he has the guts, let him come to Chikkaballapur on any party ticket. I am ready to contest from Yelahanka. I am a BJP worker, and I will do what my party says." In the 2023 Assembly elections, Sudhakar was among the sitting ministers who lost. He lost the Chikkaballapur seat to Congress candidate Pradeep Eshwar. A year later, when Vishwanath was trying to get a ticket for his son, Sudhakar bagged a Lok Sabha ticket and won the elections.

## Rats, cockroaches, rotting food: FDA suspends six Mumbai eateries in hygiene crackdown

Rats in kitchens, cockroach infestations, foul odour, leaking refrigerators and expired food products were among the serious hygiene violations that prompted the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to suspend the licences of six food establishments in Mumbai including a posh eatery in South Mumbai during an enforcement drive. The action followed inspections conducted between June 26 and 28 under a special campaign ordered by Food Safety Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe to crack down on food safety violations and the illegal trade in banned food products.

The six Mumbai establishments were found to be in serious violation of the Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011, and provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act. Among those facing action was Flint & Waarsa, operated by Aditya Birla New Age Restaurants and Cafe Pvt Ltd at the NCPA in Nariman Point. During an inspection on June 27, officials detected misbranded food products, collected five samples for laboratory analysis, seized products worth ₹11,350 for incorrect labelling and destroyed expired food items valued at ₹16,201. At M.K. Bakery in Borivali East, inspectors found food production continuing despite renovation work being underway. The premises were also found to be unhygienic. Two food samples were collected, while products worth ₹8,100 were seized for labelling violations. Hotel Shree Krishna (Suiji Bar and Restaurant) in Bhandup West was cited for multiple deficiencies, including refrigerators without temperature display systems, a rusted and leaking kitchen refrigerator and poor overall hygiene standards. Inspectors visiting Hotel Gopal Krishna in Santacruz East found a rat inside the premises, a foul smell emanating from the kitchen and garbage accumulation in drainage lines, along with several other food safety vio-

lations.

At Karak Enterprises Pvt Ltd in Andheri East, officials reported a heavy cockroach infestation, absence of insect-proof mesh, failure to conduct mandatory medical examinations of employees, peeling walls and ceilings, inadequate customer grievance mechanisms and refrigeration equipment that was unable to maintain safe food temperatures. The sixth establishment, Ace Clubs and Resorts Pvt Ltd (Madras Diaries) in Bandra West, was found to have failed to maintain prescribed hygiene standards and lacked mandatory food testing records and statutory documentation. Across Maharashtra, the FDA carried out 31 raids, seized prohibited items such as pan masala and gutkha worth ₹34.87 lakh, arrested 19 people involved in the sale, distribution and transportation of banned products, sealed one establishment and confiscated three vehicles. The enforcement drive also targeted the illegal trade in banned food products.

In addition to seizures worth ₹34.87 lakh, the FDA initiated criminal proceedings that led to 19 arrests, the sealing of one establishment and the seizure of three vehicles allegedly used in the illicit trade. Appealing to consumers to remain vigilant, the FDA urged citizens to report suspected food adulteration or hygiene violations through the FoSCoS portal, the Food Safety Connect mobile application or its toll-free helpline. Mundhe said the department would continue stringent enforcement measures to ensure consumers have access to safe and compliant food products. "The manufacture or sale of fake, unlicensed or misleading products, or any activity posing a threat to public health, will not be tolerated. Strict legal action against violators will continue," he said.

## IAS officer faces probe after ‘shoving, trying to slap’ BJP leader in UP

The Jalaun district administration has ordered a probe after IAS officer Rinkoo Singh Rahee was accused of allegedly shoving a block pramukh and attempting to slap him during an inspection of the latter's cold storage facility. Rahee, a 2022-batch IAS officer and the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Jalaun, has denied the allegations and called them false and misleading. The incident occurred on June 23, but came to light on Monday after BJP leader Ram Raja Niranjana, 57, who is the Block Pramukh, released CCTV footage. In his complaint to the District Magistrate, Niranjana accused Rahee of alleged misconduct during an inspection of the cold storage facility in which he is a major shareholder.

CCTV footage, a confrontation Speaking to The Indian Express, Niranjana said a joint inspection team led by Rahee visited the cold storage facility at Mitara Orai village, and the SDM asked whether there were any shortcomings. "I told him he had come to inspect the premises and that if he found any deficiencies, we would rectify them immediately," Niranjana said. He claimed the SDM then directed staff to switch on the fire pump. "The pump is connected to a four-inch pipeline that carries water over nearly 250 feet, so it naturally takes a few minutes for the line to build pressure. Soon afterwards, the SDM asked me to produce all relevant documents within two-and-a-half minutes. I requested him to come into the office... but he refused," Niranjana alleged. Niranjana said a director of the facility, Rajesh Shukla, had gone to supervise the fire pump operation. "I called him and asked him to bring the documents... Meanwhile, the SDM began recording the proceedings on his mobile phone, and one of my employees also started filming the inspection. During this time, the SDM said the two-and-a-half minutes had expired. I told him the documents were on their way," he said. "At that point, the SDM allegedly tried to slap me... and pushed me," Niranjana alleged. "The CCTV footage captures the entire incident. It also shows that as soon as the pipeline was filled, the fire pump began discharging water at full pressure," he added. Niranjana further alleged that the SDM returned 18 minutes later after allegedly having "publicly humiliated" him in the presence of more than 50 farmers and labourers who had gathered at the facility. Singh denied the allegations, claiming the footage circulated publicly was incomplete and that it would be inappropriate to draw conclusions based on short video clips. He said Niranjana brought his mobile phone "excessively close" while recording the inspection. "The phone was merely moved aside to avoid any untoward incident or unpleasant situation. This.. is being wrongly portrayed as a

slap or physical assault," he said. Responding to the allegation of a push, Rahee said Niranjana had come into "inappropriate physical proximity", making it necessary to maintain a safe distance. "The immediate response was simply to create physical space..." he said. BJP Jalaun district president, Urvija Dixit, said Niranjana is associated with the party but does not hold any organisational post. DM Rajesh Kumar Pandey ordered an inquiry by a two-member committee. Additional District Magistrate Rajeev Raj, a member of the panel, said notices had been issued to both the Block Pramukh and Rahee, asking them to record their statements. He said the committee will also record statements of bystanders seen in CCTV footage. In April, while posted with the Board of Revenue in Lucknow, he wrote to the President of India seeking a "technical resignation" and requesting repatriation to his previous service, alleging that he has been kept away from field work for long. In the seven-page letter, Rahee had claimed the prevailing administrative ecosystem resists reforms and expressed concern that being kept away from meaningful field exposure during early IAS years hampers administrative learning and effectiveness.

## Rupee falls 15 paise to 94.65 against US dollar on strong greenback

Mumbai: The rupee depreciated by 15 paise to close at 94.65 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as a strengthening greenback overseas and risk-averse investor sentiment weighed on the local unit. Forex traders said the rupee slipped to 94.58 against the US dollar, driven by month-end corporate import demand and lingering risk-off sentiment. However, relatively stable global crude prices and anticipated central bank interventions supported the currency and restricted the slide. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.60 against the American currency and finally closed for the day at 94.65 (provisional), registering a decline of 15 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee pared initial gains and settled lower by 6 paise at 94.51 against the dollar. "The Indian rupee depreciated for the third consecutive session, weighed down by persistent safe-haven flows into the greenback and strong corporate dollar demand.

## 2,000 volunteers join a painstaking effort to restore massive skeleton of prehistoric predator

Warsaw: Volunteers armed with chisels, brushes and protective goggles chip away at rock encasing the bones of a massive prehistoric amphibian in a glass-walled laboratory on the ground floor of Warsaw's Copernicus On the other side of the wall, visitors watch the work unfold on the bones of the nearly six-meter (20-foot)-long skeleton. Children point with excitement while parents contemplate the creature the massive bones once belonged to. The painstaking restoration is part of an unusual public

science project. More than 2,000 volunteers are helping Polish scientists restore the skeleton of the Mastodonsaurus, a fearsome aquatic predator from around the dawn of the dinosaur age. The work is meticulous. Bone must be separated from surrounding rock millimeter by millimeter with a pneumatic chisel, whose needle gently breaks away rock while ultraviolet light reveals where the bone ends and the surrounding rock begins. The volunteers are managers, cleaners, tattoo artists — not geologists or paleontologists. They receive training and special protective gear, before they begin two-hour-long chiseling sessions under supervision. "I imagine that those bones were lying underground for 240 million years and I am the first human on earth to touch them," said Tatjana Kozzyk, the coordinator of the volunteer teams. "I'm still trying to wrap my head around this experience." An ancient aquatic predator

One of the largest amphibians ever to exist, the Mastodonsaurus lived about 240 million years ago during the Middle Triassic, while the earliest dinosaurs were appearing but before they came to dominate Earth. It was an underwater ambush hunter, preying mainly on fish and smaller amphibians. Scientists believe it could grow to nearly six meters (20 feet) in length. It had a broad, flat head, long jaws and sharp conical teeth, its appearance resembling a crocodile's, though it belonged to a different branch of the

# The invisible struggle: Addressing the plight of deserted women in India



Marriage, a cornerstone of societal structure, is traditionally viewed as a fundamental institution, not only forming the bedrock of family life but also defining social roles and statuses. However, the phenomenon of desertion, the abandonment of a spouse without justifiable cause, starkly contradicts these ideals, leaving a trail of vulnerable women in its wake. A deserted woman, defined as one whose husband has denied marital co-existence, faces a unique set of challenges often overlooked in broader discussions of women's empowerment.

While India's Draft National Policy for Women (2016) acknowledges the vulnerabilities of various categories of women, including divorced, separated, and widowed, it fails to adequately address the specific plight of deserted women. This omission is not a mere oversight but reflects a systemic negligence that perpetuates their marginalisation. Despite the wealth of data on India's female population, the absence of reliable figures on deserted women renders policy responses speculative and ineffective. The 2023 survey conducted by the CEO of Zilla Parishad, Ahilyanagar district, Maharashtra, revealing that 4,582 out of more than one lakh single women were deserted, underscores the magnitude of this overlooked crisis. These women, abandoned without the legal certainty of divorce, exist in a judicial and social limbo, their voices lost in the formal policy discourse. While they may be included in general welfare schemes, the lack of a clear definition leads to fundamental lacunae in India's gender-sensitive policymaking, perpetuating their socio-economic and psychological marginalisation. Historically, India's legal and social institutions have been anchored in the normative understanding of marriage, with legal systems primarily focussed on its preservation. In a patriarchal society, the onus of maintaining this relationship falls heavily on women, making them particularly vulnerable to the fallout of marital discord. The stark contrast in treatment between divorced, widowed, and deserted women highlights this disparity. Divorced women have legal entitlements, and widows receive social and official acknowledgment and assistance. Deserted women, however, are caught in a paradoxical situation, ineligible for the benefits afforded to either group. This discrepancy necessitates a re-evaluation of gendered hierarchies and a more nuanced approach to gender-sensitive policymaking. The challenges faced by deserted women extend far beyond the legal realm, encompassing socio-economic and psychological dimensions. Economically, they struggle to achieve financial stability, often facing social ostracism that limits employment opportunities. Forced into poorly paid or irregular jobs, they lack access to credit, shelter, and essential welfare programmes. Their vulnerable economic situation is exacerbated by limited skills and education, rigid social norms, and a lack of support systems. Psychologically, the impact of desertion is devastating. These women endure severe emotional trauma, characterised by low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. The stigma of being deserted, coupled with familial and com-

munity rejection, leads to social isolation and hinders their reintegration into society. In rural areas, where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, these challenges are compounded by factors such as caste, religion, and geographic location.

The lack of targeted State welfare measures further exacerbates their plight. Stringent criteria for social welfare benefits, such as residency requirements, create insurmountable barriers for women who have migrated in search of sustenance. Inter-State disparities in welfare provisions leave many deserted women excluded from essential support. Housing is another critical area of concern, with significant gender disparities in property ownership. While recent initiatives such as PMAY-G mandate joint ownership, many properties remain solely in the husband's name, leaving deserted women without a secure social safety net. Similarly, while some States have categorised deserted women for ration card benefits, a lack of uniformity at the Central level hinders their formal recognition as eligible beneficiaries. Even well-intentioned schemes such as the Swadhar Greh Scheme often fail to deliver tangible benefits owing to budgetary constraints and implementation challenges. Limited access to property, low literacy rates, and childcare responsibilities further reduce their bargaining power in the labour market. While schemes such as MGNREGA have identified deserted women as a special category, these measures are insufficient to address their comprehensive needs.

The pervasive lack of awareness regarding legal rights and personal agency compounds these obstacles. Despite the existence of laws designed to protect deserted women, prohibitive legal fees, procedural complexities, and social stigma deter many from seeking justice. Even with free legal aid, many deserted women do not file maintenance cases or receive minimal support. Studies, like the one from Sakhi: One Stop Centres in Maharashtra, show that even when cases are filed, outcomes are uncertain and prolonged. These challenges highlight the need for legal reform and sociocultural advocacy. Rules that edge out women from employment for getting married are 'coarse', unconstitutional: Supreme Court

Addressing the plight of deserted women requires a comprehensive policy intervention. Integrating them into State welfare measures and expanding empowerment initiatives through self-help groups (SHGs) are crucial steps. Improving legal literacy through dedicated legal support centres is equally essential. Community support networks and free counseling are needed to address their psychological needs. Expanded access to healthcare and insurance coverage will provide a safety net against economic- and social instability. A formal national institution dedicated to the care of deserted women would ensure uniform policy implementation and recognition of their specific needs. Legal reforms are necessary to expedite processes and remove administrative barriers. Simplifying procedures and enforcing existing legislation are key goals. Organisations such as CORO India and Ekal Stri Sangahtana are working to bring awareness to the plight of single women. Women's rights organisations must continuously challenge and transform the socio-cultural beliefs that marginalise deserted women. The plight of deserted women underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to women's empowerment. Their legal invisibility and socio-economic vulnerability highlight a critical deficiency in current gender-sensitive policymaking. A multi-pronged strategy encompassing legal reform, policy innovation, and grassroots advocacy is essential. Excluding deserted women from the policy narrative is a moral and practical failure that demands urgent correction.

# Caught between the warp and weft of business and life



In name, Akkalkot road falls in an industrial area. But the 4-5 km potholed road, in Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) in Solapur district, is deserted. The factory units, spread across 216 hectares of the industrial area, resemble homes with white rangolis outside each gate. In the quiet afternoon, the only sound is the khat-khat of power looms, bearing testimony to still-running textile industry of the area. Here, 600-700 units operate with about 10 people in each, weaving textile for Solapuri chaddars and towels. Chaddars are used in daily life for everything from a floor spread to a blanket. In his Solapur home Govind Zanwar, 54, who produces bamboo towels now after switching out of the chaddar, says there are many reasons for its decline. Besides a change in customer tastes, cheaper synthetic textiles flooding the market, and the increased cost of production, he ascribes the downfall to the lack of innovation in design. "Aesthetics matter and the chadar features loud colours. There is scope for a revival, but it will be difficult," he says. Zanwar, who lives in a joint family of Marwaris, who were initially trading in cloth, got into the production of chaddar and towel about 15 years ago. His daughter and son do not want to get into the business, and are looking at careers as professionals in corporate jobs.

In 2005, the jacquard chaddar made from cotton yarn got the Geographical Indication (GI) stamp, an Indian government certification that a particular craft originated in an area. That year, the Geographical Indications Journal, a government document issued for GI tags, had listed at least 15,000 handlooms and power looms operating in Solapur, employing over 2 lakh people, all producing the Solapuri chaddar. In 2004, the journal reports that exports amounted to ₹500-600 crore. Now, only 600-700 looms remain, according to data from the Textile Development Foundation (TDF), an association of manufacturers established in 1995 in Solapur. Exports have grown to ₹800-1,000 crore, as per estimates by an industry expert. The government does not have current figures.

Shriniwas Bura, 59, a textile engineer who worked in a corporate office in Mumbai, and then returned to start Bravo Kids School to train a generation to think independently and like entrepreneurs, is also the founder of TDF. He points out that chaddar production started declining from the year 2000. He blames the government and manufacturers for the downfall. "The government ignored the industry, while the producers failed to innovate. We realised only when external players from Haryana's Panipat captured our chaddar market. Now made-in-China towels are posing a danger to our towels," Shriniwas says, going through old records, covered in dust. He says Haryana producers use synthetic fibres and claim they are cotton.

Pentappa Gaddam, 65, a manufacturer and the president of the Solapur Zilla Yantramag Dharak Sangh (SOZIYA), an association that represents the community's needs to the government, says, "We complained to the government about the duplication, but no one listened to us." The association last complained eight years ago in letters, and has since stopped, since the number of producers has come down. In a grey building in Siddheshwar Nagar, Suraj (name changed to protect privacy), 53, sits in his cramped office surrounded by piles of brightly coloured cotton towels. He is a third-generation producer, who owns 12 power looms operating in two shifts. "We all are working for survival. Forget bringing the next generation into the business. I am working at a 5% margin in towels; earlier it was 20%." He has had to shift from the Solapuri jacquard chaddar to towels, because there is barely any demand for the chaddar any more. Suraj's voice is drowned in the noise of the thana-bana (warp-weft) coming together to form cloth. It is Tuesday, the day he pays out weekly wages before the weekly day off on Wednesday. Suraj belongs to the Padmashali community of weavers, who repeat a legend, where people from the community made a piece of cloth from padma tantu (lotus fabric) for Lord Vishnu THEN?. Around 1877, when Solapur's first mill — Solapur Spinning & Weaving Mills — was established, they migrated here from Karimnagar, Warangal, and Siddipet, now in Telangana. It wasn't just about job opportunities, but also to escape the drought in those areas. "We are able to sustain ourselves today only because our past generations built the foundation. We own the land, so we don't take its value into account while pricing products. If we do, we will run into losses," says Siddheshwar Gaddam, 61, the owner of a chaddar and towel factory, and the third generation in the business. His grandparents worked in mills like Jam Mill, Laxmivishnu Mill, and others, which collapsed in the 1950s. They purchased looms at a low price and started small units, becoming self-employed and giving employment to others. "From grey cloth, they shifted to chaddar, and 15 years ago we started with towels, as it had an international market."

Many like Suraj and Siddheshwar have quit manufacturing Solapur chaddar and shifted to towels. Suraj asks, "When Prime Minister Narendra Modi is saying 'go local', why is the government not banning Chinese products." The decline of the Solapur chaddar is also tied to economic growth and a rise status among customers.

Gurubai is lost between the warp and the weft, as she carefully winds thread on the bobbin. Spreading her hands out as she speaks, she says, "I don't know how old I am; maybe 50. I came to Solpaur when I got married and started working with the chaddar. I was 15 then." She wears a shirt over her saree, so that the cotton dust doesn't stick to her body and clothes. "It gets itchy," she adds. She earns ₹800 to 1,000 every week for a 12-hour shift, and fears losing her job, because she knows no other work. Some months though, her salary just about pays her medical bills. Her work involves concentration and the use of her eyes, back, and hands. When these body parts ache, she takes an injection to deal with the pain.

Shridhar Gudheli, 48, a member of the labour union associated with the right-wing-politics Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), pointed out that workers don't have uniforms or safety gear, characteristic of informal work in India. He started as a worker, but now he fights for the rights of workers. "The wages were last increased in 2022. Business owners will tell you the market is tight, just to avoid a wage increase," he says. On their lunch break, a group of power loom workers, all in their 30s and 40s, sit under a tree and open their tiffin boxes. They are covered in cotton dust. All the workers were in their late 30s to 40s, covered

with cotton dust. Nagesh Usapoyal, 43, a third generation chaddar maker says, "I rode a cycle yesterday; I am still riding a cycle today. That is us, the textile industry workers." He dusts off cotton threads from his torn brown vest and folded pants. Usapoyal says he earns ₹8,000 a month. Laxman Kusma, 35, is at the managerial position as he is a college graduate, but earns the same amount as a weaver. His work is to manage the weavers and look after the factory in the absence of the owner. Sitting on his bike, Laxman says, "I work double shift. In the morning I deliver milk for ₹250 a day. I come to the factory at around 8 and leave at about 7 in the evening." SOZIYA has been demanding civic facilities like water, smooth roads, drainage lines, a fire unit, and low rates of interest on loans.

The decline of the Solapur chaddar is also tied to economic growth and a rise status among customers. As incomes increase, people migrate from the chaddar to branded bedsheets that arrive in plastic packaging. Plastic mats have taken over from floor seating.

"With the chadar, washing is problematic, and our product was perceived as a poor man's commodity," says Govind Bura, 57, a manufacturer, and Shriniwas' brother. Today, labourers prefer the towel, and those who have the chaddar say it lasts at least five years, so there are few repeat buyers. Solapur holds a geographically strategic position as it is situated in the southeastern part of Maharashtra.

Manufacturers talk about the fact that Solapur receives water only once every five days, so it's difficult for a water-intensive industry to run. For 1 kg of yarn, 60 litres of water is needed. Currently, the producers use tanker water. "Many shifted to recycled hosiery waste yarn as it is already dyed, which doesn't require water, says Zanwar. SOZIYA has been demanding civic facilities like water, smooth roads, drainage lines, a fire unit, and low rates of interest on loans. District Industries Centre (DIC) officer Santosh Kolte says, "We are aware of the water issue. The work of setting up a new pipeline has been in progress." DIC's job is to take care of Solapur's needs. In his home-balcony office, Ashok Indapure, a trader who commissions goods and sells them on Amazon.in, says, "Solapur Government Polytechnic College discontinued textile-related courses as the students did not opt for the course, given the outdated syllabus." He feels if the Maharashtra State Board of Technical Education (MSBTE) sets up diploma courses it may help. A few mill owners blame politicians for ignoring Solapur, a city of migrants with people who speak Marathi, Telugu, and Kannada. There is also a mix of Hindus and Muslims, preventing politicians from creating religion- and caste-based vote banks. One producer says, "Baramati had Sharad Pawar who made sure the region developed. We had Sushil Kumar Shinde (a former chief minister), but he did not have the political will to do anything."

Solapur holds a geographically strategic position as it is situated in the southeastern part of Maharashtra, bordering Karnataka and a six-hour road ride from Telangana. The textile industry flourished in this area because of train connectivity. "But we needed an upgrade with airline connectivity," says Shriniwas, adding that there has been an airport here for 30 years, but it has been mostly non-operational. The closest international airports are Pune and Hyderabad, both a five-hour drive away. "Buyers from other countries avoid travelling here, as they have to take various modes of transport to reach here."

Charwak Burgul, whose 2,200 square foot unit was started in 1987 by his father, says for any textile-based industry to survive generations, there must at least be a 10% year-on-year growth, so there is a cushion for the bad years. His margins have dropped from 25% WHEN to 10%. To cut the cost of production, manufacturers shifted from power looms to shuttle-less looms in 2010 or so. The speed is high and gives four times the output compared to the power loom, and requires limited manpower. Charwak runs a full-fledged chaddar production unit with 10 power looms and 20 rapiers. "This is our legacy, we have to keep it alive somehow," he says, while walking through rows of power looms that can produce 10 chaddars a day, unlike the rapiers that do double. He claims Solapur is the only place in India where everything from the doubling of yarn (twisting two yarns) and dyeing to the winding (hanks transferred to bobbins) and warping (yarn transferred to beam) is done under one roof. For the towel, the process is the same, with the dyeing being done after weaving. The entire process takes 15 days. The most common sizes are 48x90 inches, 54x90 inches, and 60x90 inches. Charwak has tried to innovate by creating wall hangings, portraits, and bags, but he is unsure of where to find a market. Youth and women in factory leadership are uncommon. Amit Bura, 25, is one of the few who has taken up his father's trade, but he does not see the Solapur chaddar as a profitable business. "We are experimenting with other products. We tried bottle-making

# Fire, fidelity and an inhuman heritage

In Europe, Christian clergy burnt alive women suspected of being Satan-worshipping witches. In Arabia, the 'People of the Ditch' were martyrs who chose death by fire rather than giving up Islam. The theatre of death in matters of faith is very much part of human culture. The practice of Sati — burning of Hindu widows — needs to be seen in this context. In 1829, the East India Company passed a law banning Sati. Christian missionaries had long highlighted this practice in European circles to argue that, despite its lofty philosophy, India was a barbaric land in need of civilisational rescue.

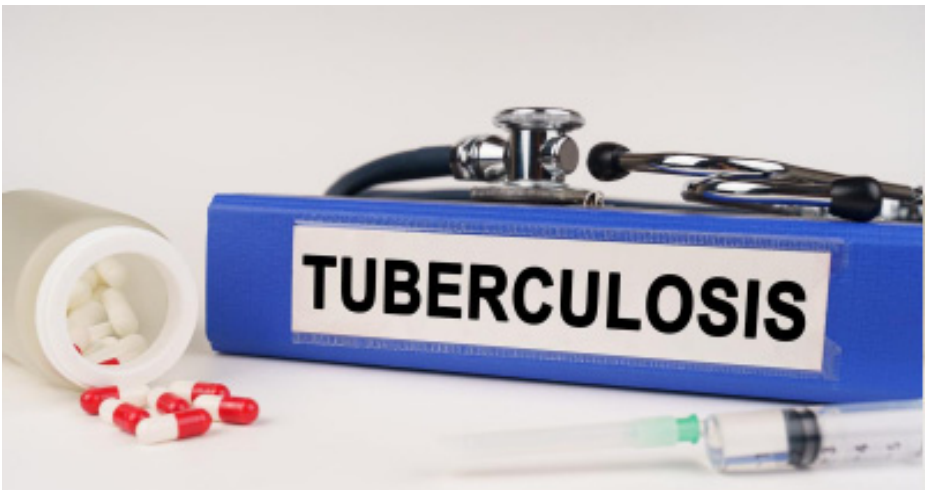
Defying this ban, a decade later, the Sikh controlled lands saw the burning of four Rajput queens and seven slave girls on the funeral pyre of Raja Ranjit Singh. A Kangra miniature painting was commissioned to commemorate this event. In 1861, Michael Madhusudan Dutta wrote his famous ballad Meghnad-Badhi that valorised the sati-hood of Prameela, widow of Indrajit, daughter-in-law of Ravan, a story with roots in the 700-year-old Telugu Ranganatha Ramayana. Even Hindu social reformers, known for supporting the ban against Sati, praised this Bengali ballad as a literary masterpiece.

No one knows when the pan-Indian practice of warrior widows burning themselves with (sahagamana) or without (anugamana) the corpse of their husband came to be known as 'sati' — a word that means the chaste wife. The inhuman practice was strongly linked to the belief in fidelity-magic; that a woman who thinks of no one but her husband had supernatural powers. She could collect water in unbaked pots, as in the story of Sati Renuka; she could stop the sun from rising, as in the story of Sati Shilavati; she could turn the Hindu Trinity into her babies, as in the story of Anasuya. Sati Savitri even saved her husband from the jaws of death. So, it was assumed that a chaste wife would protect her warrior husband from death.

# Sharpening India's anti-tuberculosis fight

The omnipresence of tuberculosis (TB) in the pages of history and literature is testimony to how the disease has plagued generations across the world and continues to be a major problem even today. India bears over a quarter of the global TB burden. Political will in India has helped drive a great deal of progress in the fight against the disease. For example, in 2023, addressing the big challenge of 'missed' TB cases, 25.1 lakh patients were diagnosed in India as having TB, highlighting strengthened case finding efforts. However, as we work toward the goal of TB elimination — the Prime Minister has urged citizens to work towards TB elimination — we must look to innovate and deploy proven technologies and tools at our disposal. Regimens and issues: The first low-hanging fruit that I believe must be invested in urgently is new shorter regimens for drug-resistant TB. It has been encouraging to learn that India will soon introduce the World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended shorter regimen for drug-resistant TB. The current regimens on offer are long and arduous, requiring patients to consume nearly 13 to 14 tablets every day if they are on the shorter nine to 11-month regimen, or four to five tablets every day if they have been put on the 18 to 24 month longer regimen. The treatment is physically and psychologically draining and has severe side effects, such as loss of hearing, and even psychosis.

Moreover, a problem with such an extended treatment regimen that requires



regular visits to a TB clinic for nearly two years is loss of employment, driving many families into poverty. In 2022, WHO recommended the shorter, safer and more effective regimens called BPaLM for all drug-resistant TB patients, and there is a lot of recent data that show this regimen to be more effective with better compliance. With only three to four tablets every day, patients can complete their treatment within six months, with minimal side effects. The success rates of this regimen are also reported to be higher — 89% as compared to the 68% treatment success rate reported in the country in the 2023 India TB Report. Given its efficacy, close to 80 countries around the world have already procured the BPaLM regimen and about 20 of the highest burden countries are already rolling it out.

Research indicates that savings from implementing this regimen will be between 40% to 90% of the cost of current treatment regimens, and that an immediate transition to BPaLM could result in an annual saving of ap-

proximately \$740 million (or approximately ₹6,180 crore) for health systems globally. This is a more effective and safer solution to treat drug-resistant TB and we must work on expediting access to this regimen to all eligible patients across the country. Making the best use of new treatments: The next question is this. How do we go about diagnosing more people with TB so that they can benefit from these game-changing new treatments? The answer lies in making sure that we are screening and testing quickly and efficiently to reduce delays in accurate diagnosis. For this, a proactive approach is essential. It is time we modernised and used health datasets, which include GIS mapping, to identify vulnerable populations such as those with comorbidities (for example, malnutrition, diabetes and HIV), former COVID-19 patients, and at-risk communities in slums, prisons, or those who are homeless. Targeted multi-disease focused screening drives can then be conducted to detect TB cases early, even

among those without typical symptoms. In fact, recent evidence highlights that a significant number of people with pulmonary (i.e., lung) TB may not exhibit recognisable symptoms such as cough, fever, weight loss, or night sweats.

The National TB Prevalence Survey (2019-21) highlights the importance of chest X-rays, which detected 42.6% of cases that would have otherwise been missed. Leveraging advancements in technology, portable X-ray machines equipped with AI-driven tools can significantly reduce diagnostic delays, especially in remote and under-resourced areas. Further, there is a critical need to expand the use of rapid molecular tests over less sensitive microscopy methods for faster detection and drug resistance profiling. This shift is crucial in promptly identifying TB cases and determining appropriate treatment options. In short, by proactively identifying at-risk populations and investing in and leveraging advanced/innovative diagnostic technologies,

# Indians deported from U.S. | Waiting for life to happen



Balwinder Singh, 55, a resident of Manawala village in Amritsar district, who received a call from an unknown number informing him that his younger brother, Sukhdev Singh, 35, was in a detention camp in Texas, U.S. In agrarian Punjab, which shares the border with Pakistan, parents encourage youth to migrate in the fear that they may take to drugs. Sitting on a beige velvet sofa in his two-storey house at Lopoke village in Punjab's Amritsar district, Vishal Sharma, 38, turns the pages of his passport, tracing the stamps of various countries with his fingers. He looks longingly out of his window at a replica of the Statue of Liberty in his village bordering Pakistan. In 2023, Sharma and 275 others, who had left home to live the 'American dream', were deported to India after they had tried to enter the U.S. illegally. Now, he lives in the village of his birth, practising farming with his elder brother. In a statement made in Parliament on February 6 this year, S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, said since 2009, the U.S. has sent back 15,756 illegal Indian immigrants. This was after a U.S. military plane landed at the Amritsar airport with 104 illegal immigrants in handcuffs. With a sullen face, Sharma says ever since his return, he has been trying to make peace with the fact that he will no longer be able to work in the U.S. "There are no legal restrictions on my movement, but having seen so many people being deported in the past few weeks, there is no way I'm going to ever make it through," he says. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, there were 2.2 lakh Indians living as illegal immigrants in the country in 2022. The despondence in Sharma's voice is partly from seeing three flights carrying deportees from the U.S. land in India in the past three weeks and partly from knowing that other than the illegal 'donkey route', it is unlikely that he can reach the U.S. legally. "I have to accept that this is how my life will be: farming, a shared income with siblings, and a life limited to this village," he says. Like many around him, Sharma dreamt of a life in a developed country in the West since his early adulthood days. "Initially, it was the fascination of a foreign land, then it was earning in dollars, and now it is about respect and the promise of a better future for me and my family," he says. Parents of youth in Punjab urge them on, fearful that the State's drug problem will reach them. Pointing towards the houses in his neighbourhood — some sprawling mansions, others with thatched roofs — he says everyone around him only aims to move abroad, sometimes through scholarships to study and sometimes on work visas. Then there is the 'donkey route' that involves unregistered agents taking people through different countries, landing up at the U.S. border, where they cross over on land. Being a high school graduate from a government school with a low score in the International English Language Testing System that gauges the English proficiency of non-native speakers, Sharma was sure that his pathway to the U.S. was not through higher education. "Some of my friends had started working there as drivers and managers at grocery stores. I too wanted a job like them and earn as much," he says. He began to check with his friends' agents about the possibility of moving and the associated costs. Every friend had a different agent, and each agent had a different route to take him to the U.S. border. "Some suggested going through the Panama forest, some through layovers in multiple countries on tourist visas, some even promised the direct route via a work visa," he says. In 2023, he sold a killa (about an acre) of the land he had inherited to fund his dreams. The agent first flew him to Thailand on a tourist visa. Then over the next few months, he sent him to Vietnam multiple times, again on a tourist visa, promising that once he was there a work visa for the U.S. would be granted. "I spent weeks in Vietnam, Thailand, and Egypt, waiting for a way to reach the U.S., but each time I would have to come back to India because the agent could not get the visa and my tourist visa would expire in those countries," he says. After multiple such trips, a Dubai-based agent assured Sharma that he could avoid the 'donkey route' by taking a private flight from Dubai to Nicaragua, a central American country. "The private flight left on December 22 (in 2023) from a small, not very popular airport in Dubai. It was stopped in France, where it had a layover. From there the flight was turned back to Mumbai," he says. When the flight landed in Mumbai, Sharma realised that the ₹10 lakh he had spent on staying in multiple countries waiting for a visa to the U.S. was for nothing. "The agent stopped taking my calls. The flight back had Punjabis, Gujaratis, and Haryanvis. The police had started investigat-

ing it as a human trafficking case on the order of the Indian government," he says.

Sharma gestures towards a cowshed. He helps his brother with farming and takes care of buffaloes. "We spent over ₹2 lakh on the buffaloes and one has broken his leg. Farming has diminishing returns," laments Sharma. He adds that no father wants to get his daughter married to a man who lives in a village with no prospects of going abroad. "With my education, I can only get a job that will pay ₹10,000 to ₹12,000 (a month) here. Who will marry me?"

Caught for re-entry This feeling of being stuck in rural, agricultural Punjab since being deported is common across homes. Gursharan Singh, 22, a resident of Mehoka village in Amritsar district, was deported in 2023. His brother has been working in Spain as a farm labourer for eight months now. "In Spain, he makes ₹90,000 a month. Here, we sowed gobi (cauliflower) that sold at ₹50 per kg. Now, it is being sold at ₹1.50 per kg (in the wholesale market), yet we are supposed to continue staying here, content with our earnings," he says, resentfully. Gursharan's mother Rajwant Kaur, 55, says, "Dollar kamana bhi bhagya mein hona chahiye, warna kyu itne sare dunki se chale gaye aur yeh pakda gaya (To earn in dollars is a matter of destiny; why else would so many successfully enter the country by taking the donkey route and he be caught)." Gursharan was caught on the U.S.-Mexico border. After being deported, many have settled back into life as they knew it. Some reattempt entry, sometimes ending up in deportation camps. A month ago, Balwinder Singh, 55, a resident of Manawala village in Amritsar district, received a call from an unknown number. All he could make out from the man who spoke with a foreign accent was that his younger brother, Sukhdev Singh, 35, was in a detention camp in Texas, U.S. "Sirf naam aur location pata laga; baki kaisa hai, aur ab kya hoga kuch pata nehi laga (I only got to know the name and location; I was not told how he is and what will happen now)," says Balwinder. Sukhdev, who had been working as a carpenter in Dubai for close to a decade earning ₹50,000 a month, had been attempting to go to the U.S. for a few years. His family did not know of his aspirations or plans. "One day, he told me that he wanted to sell his portion of the land and buy a car," says Balwinder. "Mujhe laga Dubai mein hi business karega, toh maine ek killa zameen beth diya (I thought he would start a business in Dubai, so I sold some part of the land)," he says, adding that the deal fetched him ₹30 lakh. Sukhdev, his wife Rajneet Kaur, 32, teenage son, and infant daughter then boarded the Nicaragua-bound flight from Dubai, which was turned back to Mumbai in 2023. He was grief-stricken, but determined to return again through the illegal route. Kaur did not know this. "He never shared his plans with me. He confides in his older brother, so when he left in August 2024, I did not know he was going to 'Amrica'," she says. She is worried about the situation her husband is in, but sitting in her asbestos-roofed home amid green fields in Manawala, Kaur is unable to understand the ground realities of a detention camp in Texas. "Ab itna kharcha ho gaya hai toh kuch kamakar hi wapis aye (Now that so much has been spent, he might as well earn some money and come back)," she says. Balwinder hopes Sukhdev can stay on in the U.S. "Here I can hire a farm labourer for ₹300 a day and get work done. He does not have to lend me a hand. Anyway, earnings are going down with every harvest season. How much will he even make here?" High prices to pay

Meanwhile, 10 km from Sukhdev's house, Sarwan Singh, 26, working on a rented field in Chogawan village, says the youth in India, especially in Punjab, have no option but to go abroad. "My brother, a 12th pass, tried finding a job," he says, referring to his sibling's highest education as being a school graduate. "He got a job in a cloth mill where he was offered ₹8,000 a month. He then tried starting a dairy farming business, but it did not take off. Now with two unmarried sisters and ageing parents, what other option do we have?" Sarwan says. His brother, Nishant Singh, 24, like many in his village, joined a 'chain' of people who helped each other migrate to the U.S. and Canada, all illegally. "One friend had been working as an Uber driver there and another in a shopping mall.

They told us that they were making ₹4 lakh-₹5 lakh a month," Sarwan says, standing in his field, where a Canadian flag is painted on a cement water tank. As he pauses to utter his next sentence, a four-wheeler zips past, blaring Cheema Y and Gur Sidhu's song 'Trump', which went viral on social media. Smirking at the lines "Jattan deputation nu rok sake na Trump (Trump can't stop the sons of the Jats)", Sarwan says he hopes that his brother is not sent back home. Teary-eyed, he looks at his harvest and says sometimes there is flooding, sometimes the government does not buy the grain at a rate that will secure farmers a profit. Then there is the ever-increasing rent of land, making it difficult for any small-scale farmer like him to save any money, he says. "The rent for an acre is ₹70,000. In addition, there are other fixed costs. I hardly get anything to take back home. If my brother comes back after spending over ₹40 lakh, how will we even pay back the loan?" he says. He knows his brother could well be on the next flight out of the U.S. Each time the phone rings and he sees an unknown number, he is anxious.

found that 10 out of the 15 parameters in the study are showing signs of disturbing distress. Let me share a personal experience. On December 23 last year, I was in the beautiful Harsil valley in Uttarakhand with my family. In the afternoon, there was a snowfall, which lasted for 10 hours. The roads were covered with a thick layer of fresh snow and traffic had to be suspended. Residents said early snowfall suggested ample snow in winter. However, the season was unusually warm. On January 26, the temperature in Delhi was 23.9 degrees. Delhi and the northern plains of India experience severe cold and fog conditions during this time. In the south, Bengaluru had a similar climate shock. Temperatures touched 35 degrees in February, which is unheard of. The country's financial capital, Mumbai, too suffered from heat early this year. Temperatures rose to 38 degrees and warm winds created discomfort. The climate crisis is also affecting the seas and oceans. Sea levels are rising across the globe. Glaciers are retreating and the seas are warming. Some fear that cities such as Mumbai, Karachi, Dhaka and many more coastal towns will see sea ingress in the coming decades. We shouldn't forget that close to 10% of the global population lives in places that are not even five metres above the high tide line in coastal areas. If the situation keeps deteriorating, close to 100 million people will have to relocate. The world is already feeling the stress of migration due to reasons other than the climate crisis. Some of the steps taken to mitigate the menace have been partially successful.

## West Bengal's education policy conflict: PM-SHRI scheme, funding issues, and NEP 2020 disagreements



Along with Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala have not signed on to the Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme of the Union government. While the three language formula of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a problem as far as the Tamil Nadu government is concerned, in West Bengal, the concerns are more to do with funding and branding, according to officials there. A major point of conflict between the West Bengal and Union government is the withholding of West Bengal's share of funds under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan program (SSA) by the Central government, in light of the Mamata government's refusal to join the PM-SHRI scheme which was rolled out in September 2022. PM-SHRI seeks to overhaul and upgrade government schools as model or exemplar schools whose blueprint rest of the schools could follow.

The Union ministry's official document in this matter states that the SSA is aligned with the recommendations of the NEP'20 and the "PM-SHRI scheme supplements the efforts of Samagra Shiksha." As of 2024, a total amount of ₹7,853.65 crore was approved for West Bengal under the SSA during the last five years (2019-20 to 2023-24). Of this, ₹6,049.56 crore has been released to the State. Some ₹1,804.09 crore is still pending. In this regard, West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu said, "Such a decision by the Central government is highly illegal, undemocratic, and shows an arbitrary attitude. Despite the approval of the Finance Ministry and the permission of the Internal Finance Department of the Education Ministry, how did the Education Ministry withhold the due money? The money for this project has been withheld to fulfill political objectives and interests." While Mamata Banerjee and Bratya Basu have given various reasons for not signing the PM-SHRI MoU with the Centre, a senior state education official said there are two key objections: nomenclature of the scheme and the financial share of the State. Education falls under the concurrent list, with the Centre and the State sharing the budgeting responsibility in a 60:40 ratio, respectively, for PM-SHRI. According to a senior official who wished to remain anonymous, the Mamata Banerjee-led government is facing challenges in meeting its 40 percent share of the scheme's funding. "The Central Government never releases funds to us on time, which is causing financial strain in many departments. We actually cannot afford the 40% budget of the PM-SHRI, and the State government also has to fund its own initiatives too," he said. "If the State is also going to contribute 40% of the funds, then why shall the programme be named after the Prime Minister?" he continued. Officials from West Bengal went to New Delhi for consultations in 2024 but the deadlock persisted. The Chief Secretary, Education Secretary, and the Education Ministry subsequently wrote to the Central government, seeking clarification on why funds to West Bengal were not being released. Meanwhile, to address the ongoing disagreements, the West Bengal government established a 10-member committee on April 7, 2023, to develop a 178-page State Education Policy (SEP) in 2023, proposing significant amendments to the Centre's

existing NEP'20. The NEP'20 advocates a three-language policy which means, besides the mother tongue and English, the third language could be any Indian language, not necessarily Hindi, unlike the education policies of the previous Congress and UPA governments. West Bengal's SEP'23 takes a flexible approach leaning towards the State — much emphasising on the language of the medium of instruction, English, along with Hindi or any other regional language as optional.

The SEP'23 suggests that the three-language formula is to be introduced in schools for the students of classes 5 to 8, and the first language (mother tongue) would be the medium of instruction of the school - Nepali in Nepali medium school or Urdu in Urdu medium school. The second language may be English (in non-English medium) or any language other than the first language, depending upon the choice of the student. The third language may be any other language opted for by the student other than the first and second languages. As per SEP'23, the three-language formula shall be applicable for the upper primary level only, as the language learning ability in the primary stage should not be burdened. The West Bengal government wants to retain the existing 4+4+2+2 model, emphasizing local needs and maintaining continuity in the state's educational framework, in contrast to the Centre, which proposes a 5+3+3+4 school structure, focusing on foundational, preparatory, middle, and secondary stages. When it comes to autonomy in governance, the NEP'20 leans towards a centralised approach, proposing uniform guidelines for curricula, teaching methodologies, and assessment patterns across states. In contrast, SEP'23 emphasises state autonomy, advocating greater control over curriculum design, teacher training, and evaluation methods. The state argues that this flexibility allows it to preserve its cultural heritage, address regional educational needs, and implement policies that resonate more closely with local aspirations.

Stress on Bengali language The SEP'23 recommends introducing Bengali as a subject from Class I to Class XII for students in non-Bengali medium schools, with a suitable curriculum and syllabus to be developed accordingly. Additionally, the 10-member committee suggests that the curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks for other mediums of instruction approved by the government should be prepared in their respective languages, ensuring inclusivity and linguistic diversity. What's on ground The West Bengal government in May 2023 announced the implementation of NEP'20 in colleges run and aided by the State from the academic year 2023-24. A press release of May 2023 says that a four-year undergraduate level programme will be introduced. "They shall be awarded degrees in accordance with the UGC National Curriculum and Credit Framework [NCCF] for UG-level programmes," it continued. The guidelines said that the universities are to follow a flexible undergraduate of three-year and four-year degree programs featuring multiple exit options, allowing students to earn a certificate after one year, a diploma after two years, a bachelor's degree after three years, and a bachelor's degree with research after four years. Mr. Ikbāl Ansari, Assistant Professor (English) from Berhampore Girls' College, Baharampur, West Bengal told The Hindu that nearly all universities and colleges in the State have adopted the NEP'20 guidelines, with regular workshops being organised for staff to enhance their understanding of the new education framework. Mr. Ikbāl highlighted the challenges and said, "As it is still in an experimental process, students are unable to understand the syllabus of the course and are not clear what they are going to do in the 7th and 8th semester (4th additional year). The university has failed to clear the confusion of students. Only after a batch graduates will we truly understand the situation with the eighth semester," he continued.

## Another city split into green and saffron

At the centre of Sambhal city lies the white-and-green, four-minaret Shahi Jama Masjid, a grand 16th century structure, built during Babar's reign. It is Tuesday morning (November 26, 2024), two days after violence broke out in the three lanes that converge on the green-domed structure. In the central lane, from where the people allegedly surged, all the houses are locked. The wires to CCTV cameras have been yanked out. The mosque bears witness to the violence — freshly marked gashes scar its paint, and cane rods and broken concrete dot its entry slope. A couple of homes down the lane running perpendicular to the mosque show some stirring of activity. A municipal truck comes around to clean the drains and collect garbage. A middle-aged man in a skull cap and a white kurta-pyjama peeps out of his house, leaves his dustbin out, and quickly goes back in, locking the door behind him.

There is some construction work in a couple of plots, but unlike in Delhi, just 160 kilometres away, where GRAP IV regulations have disallowed building work because of high pollution levels, in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal, most lanes are deserted. The fear is palpable. In contrast, on Kot Purvi, the lane running parallel to the mosque on its eastern side, the shops are open. People read newspapers; poojas are being conducted — it's business, almost as usual. Here, almost every house has a saffron flag and wall paintings of Hanuman, Shiva, or Ganesha.

Kot Garbi, the main market that sees the maximum activity in the city, is shut. Most of the boards indicate they are Muslim-run. The police have put a ban until November 30, on the entry of any "outsider, social organisation, or public representative", thereby restricting political leaders from visiting. The city is a fortress now, with at least 10 police personnel every 100 metres or so. The government suspended the Internet for a week. In 2023 India had the dubious distinction of leading the world in mobile and broadband shutdowns, as per a study by Access Now, a non-profit that works on digital rights. In October, when communal violence broke out in Bahraich in eastern U.P., the Internet was disconnected. What most people across India saw of Sambhal city on Sunday, November 24, were images of violence: tear gas, stone pelting, firing, arson. In the videos that went viral, the police were seen pulling children out of the crowd that had gathered after a second survey was conducted at the mosque, to determine whether under it was a temple of Harihar, considered the reincarnation of the Hindu gods Shiva and Vishnu.

The wuzu khana in the mosque, the ablution tank used before prayer, had been drained, allegedly to check the depth, leading to rumours of the mosque being dug up. On Sunday (November 24, 2024), as the crowd built up during the survey that took a couple of hours in the morning, Zafar Ali, the President of the Shahi Jama Masjid committee, realised that everyone, including the people and the police, was on edge. "I went outside to try and convince people that the mosque was not being broken, and while many left after being reassured, there were still some who stayed on, enraged," he says. He realised that in case of even a slight skirmish, both the people and the police would react. In the violence that

ensued, four, including a 17-year-old boy, were killed and many were injured. Of the 2,500 people who were booked in seven first information reports (FIRs), 300 have been identified, including the Samajwadi Party's (SP) MP Zia Ur Rehman Barq and MLA Iqbal Mahmood's son, Sohail Mahmood. The shut homes on the lane adjacent to the mosque at Sambhal on November 27, 2024. While the SP has said that Barq was in Bengaluru at the time, the U.P. police have alleged in the FIR that he delivered a "provocative speech" on November 22 in the mosque, and incited people through WhatsApp.

Sohail, according to the police, incited the crowd at the time of the survey. People have been booked on charges of rioting, assault on public servants, promoting enmity, and damaging public property. Two women were arrested for allegedly throwing stones from their rooftops. Similar to the protests in 2020 against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, the U.P. government has decided to make protesters pay for damage to public property. Posters of 'stone pelters' — who police claim to have identified through CCTV records — will be displayed at public places. Sambhal police say the mob attacked them with batons, hockey sticks, firearms, and tear gas shells. The police took Ali's phone and had called him in for questioning. A police officer says Ali had "leaked information" regarding the second survey to the people, leading to the violence. However, civil court orders are public documents. Huddles of fear Naeem, 28, had a sweet shop in Fatehullah Sarai, about a kilometre away from the main mosque. "The oil to fry the samosas was over, so he left to buy oil from a wholesale market near the Shahi Jama Masjid, at around 8 a.m.," says Ishrat Jahan, 25, a neighbour, who now speaks on the family's behalf, after media harassment. Naeem was to then head to the sweet shop for a regular business day. "In the afternoon, we got a call saying his body had been found on the road," Jahan says. He had bullet injuries near his chest, with entry and exit wounds, indicating a shooting at close range, say the police. The Commissioner, Aunjaneya Kumar Singh and Sambhal District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya, claim that at about 11 a.m. the mob began pelting stones from three directions. "Police used tear gas and rubber pellets to control the crowd. The mob set fire to three cars and a bike, and began firing with country-made pistols," says the Superintendent of Police Krishan Bishnoi. In the chaos, he says the police PRO was shot in the foot, a Deputy Collector had a fracture, and the circle officer was injured, along with 20 other officers. Singh notes that most in the crowd were "young, unaware of the consequences, and influenced by provocateurs". The Deputy Inspector General of police Muniraj G., says that children were used by the mob to throw stones. In his two-bedroom house, with a seven-foot courtyard, Tehzeeb, 22, Naeem's wife, observes iddah, a period of mourning after a husband dies. North India's winter is not yet bone-chilling, though the atmosphere is heavy with gloom. She has four children, all below 12. "He had dreams to make them doctors or engineers," Jahan says. The rice and potatoes cooked for a meal rot in a basket. Naeem's mother wakes up, screaming for her dead son.

## Health implications of climate crisis in India

Doctors at the Gorakhpur All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) are a worried lot. The number of hydroa vacciniforme patients is increasing each passing day. This skin disease is caused by exposure to strong sun. Usually, it is reported from people living in the desert where the sun is harsh all year round. Gorakhpur is in the terai (Himalayan foothills) of Uttar Pradesh (UP). The signal is clear, human skin is progressively unable to bear the extreme heat of the sun. The doctors at AIIMS Gorakhpur have extensively analysed patients' data for the days between April and August 2024. They found that between April and August 2024, there were 39 days when the day temperature crossed 40 degrees. However, the AIIMS data show that Gorakhpur and adjoining areas experienced temperatures above 40 degrees for just six days in 2021. This year's forecast suggests a record-breaking heatwave. Gorakhpur is not an exception in eastern UP that's reporting extreme conditions. Skin disorders aren't the only ailments affecting the population. Vector-borne diseases are also breaking records due to rising temperatures. Reports suggest a spike in dengue: In 2023, there was a record number of infections. This year, more than five million people visited hospitals due to problems caused by vector-borne diseases. Recently, Global Climate & Health Alliance's executive director Jenny Miller stated that 40,000 people in India alone suffered from heat strokes, resulting in the death of 700 people, in 2024. Clearly, the detrimental effects of rising temperatures are showing a consistent upward trend. Researchers studying the impact of the climate crisis on humans at Lancet Countdown have

# Quarrying crisis in Tamil Nadu's Uthiramerur leaves residents in distress



If one were to have a bird's eye view of Uthiramerur taluk in Kancheepuram district, it would possibly be a canvas of grey with small patches of green. However, it was not like this in the not-so-distant past. A vast portion of the land known for its kuda olai system of election and bewitching temple architecture is "greying", thanks to a large number of granite quarries and crushing units. Almost every tree and plant, roads, mud on the roadsides, and crops in the fields have turned grey in and around villages including Siruthamur, Pazhaveri, Arungundram, Pazhaya Seevaram, Alanjeri, and Thirumukkudal, thanks to quarrying and stone crushing units that make M-sand. On a cloudy, still afternoon in November, the roads around these units feel eerie, and the trees seem frozen as if petrified.

Estimates show that close to 60 villages in this region are affected by quarrying, and there are around 80 quarries. According to a mapper, data from the National Remote Sensing Centre show that in 2005-06, a total of 4.21sq. km. was under mining in the erstwhile Kancheepuram district. The area increased to 33.13 sq. km. in 2015-16, but this figure includes some sand mining areas too. The district also saw a reduction in land under paddy, with quarrying being a major cause.

Farmers at Alanjeri said a proposed quarry (Kori as they call it) that they were protesting against had fenced off land where a channel bringing water from a hillock runs through. "The channel, constructed by the Rural Development Department, used to carry water to our irrigation tank wherein two wells that meet our drinking water needs are situated. The water gets contaminated by quarry dust and if the water does not fill up the Alanjeri tank, a chain of 10 other tanks won't get water. We used to grow three crops of paddy a year. Now, we struggle to grow one crop," said V. Balakrishnan, a farmer. The village only has Dalit farmers and they claim the first quarry in their village is located on Panchami land unknowingly sold in bits and pieces to others. "We have been petitioning the Collector for several years to stop the operation of the quarry and not allow a second one to come up. The new one lies on the route of the annual procession of our village deities Theni Amman and Palani Amman. They won't allow us to take a detour even," said Vijayakumar, another farmer. Farmers lead the battle

C. Devaraj of Arungundram said his father Chinnapaiyan was the first to die in an accident caused by the heavy vehicles carrying stones from a quarry. "He was one of the first to protest against the quarry operations in the area. It was in November 2003." In one village, the panchayat president refused to pass a resolution against the quarries since he himself owned one. "The quarries are so close to each other in some cases that we have no space for our animals to graze," he added. Last year, farmer leaders from several villages joined to stage a hunger strike seeking relief to Rajendran, a farmer whose land could not be cultivated, with the well drying up because of quarry operations. "We were denied police permission even to use chairs for the protest," said Harikrishnan of Pazhaveri. Mr. Rajendran said it was 12 years since his well dried up. "I have been holding up against the quarry operators and managing with the income from milch animals. If I approach elected representatives, they tell me to sell off the land handed down by my forefathers. I don't want a car or air-conditioner; I want to grow crops on my land and pass it onto my son to grow food for the people," he said. Farmer leader Manavalan said public hearings for new quarries are not held in the village or nearby, but in places where quarry owners muster enough supporters to out-number those opposing them. "Last year, a public hearing for a quarry witnessed very angry exchanges between farmers and an IAS officer. We told him to travel with us by bike without a helmet to feel the kind of dust we inhale from the trucks carrying the stone without cover. People are getting asthma and wheezing. The quarries do not follow basic rules like sprinkling water regularly to prevent the dust from flying," Mr. Harikrishnan added. Up in arms: Farmers at Alanjeri say a proposed quarry that they are protesting against has fenced off land where a channel bringing water to the irrigation tank runs through. They used to grow three crops of paddy a year, but struggle to grow even one now. Up in arms: Farmers at Alanjeri say a proposed quarry that they are protesting against has fenced off land where a channel bringing water to the irrigation tank runs through. They used to grow three crops of paddy a year, but struggle to grow even one now. | Photo Credit: B. Jothi Ramalingam

The village roads running around the taluk are like a dirt patch for the mighty trucks that carry blue metal and stones. "Since the vehicles are always overloaded, they cannot stop as soon as they should. We shudder to send children to school as accidents keep happening. We are waging a continuous battle with the trucks. Two bridges across Palar River, connecting Pazhaya Seevaram and Thirumukkoodal and and Avalur and Walajahbad, have a continuous flow of vehicles on all days, except on Sundays," said Premkumar of the BJP, which has been holding protests in the area, calling for restriction in the timing for the trucks to play. Farmers have been demanding that the timing of the trucks be regulated so that students can travel safely. Quarries and stone-crushing units are a major source of fugitive dust, a significant environmental concern that arises at nearly every stage of the operation. Dust is emitted during unloading of raw materials, crushing, screening, conveying, and storing of finished products. As stones are broken, shaken on vibrating screens, transported along conveyor belts, and stored in open stockpiles, fine particles — particularly stone dust — become airborne. A 2023 study in the International Journal of Health Sciences and Research found that prolonged exposure to silica dust significantly impairs lung function among stone quarry workers in South India. The researchers observed that lung impairment was the highest among loaders, followed by stone grinders, drillers, blasters, and stone cutters. The problem is particularly acute with fine materials, like stone dust, which are easily carried by the wind and can linger in the air for long. Dust from stone quarries not only affects the workers on site but also people living nearby. Poomima Prabhakaran, Director, Centre for Health Analytics Research and Trends at Ashoka University, said that though the dust particles released from quarries are relatively large, they are hazardous to human health. Prolonged exposure to high dust levels can lead to respiratory problems, silicosis, and skin or eye irritation, she added.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has outlined stringent guidelines for stone-crushing units. They include the requirement for full enclosure around crushers and screens to contain dust at the source. Additionally, units must install fine-mist water sprinklers to dampen dust particles, along with bag filters and dry dust-extraction systems to capture airborne dust. Conveyor belts are to be fully covered to prevent dust from escaping, and discharge points must be fitted with telescopic chutes to control dust release when materials are transferred. Stockpiles of crushed material should either be kept wet or covered to reduce dust dispersion, ensuring that emissions are minimised and air quality is preserved within and around the crusher zones. S.M. Shiv Nagendra, a professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, and an expert in air quality monitoring, said the carrying capacity of areas near quarries should be assessed. He noted that quarrying close to residential areas contributes significantly to pollution. The CPCB guidelines also mandate that internal roads be paved to prevent dust resuspension; wind-breaking walls and foggers be installed; and accumulated dust cleaned regularly. Units must also recycle water used for suppression and conduct ambient air monitoring to ensure the control of particulate emissions. While industries are required to implement continuous real-time air quality monitoring, quarries are not bound by the same regulation. However, even with these monitoring systems in place, they may not fully capture the extent of the pollution. Mr. Nagendra pointed out that current air quality monitoring stations measure pollution only in a one-kilometre radius, leaving out the full extent of pollution affecting surrounding areas.

In July 2025, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) to enforce stricter standards for granting or renewing Consent to Operate (CTO) for quarrying and mining units in the State, after several units came under the scanner for violations. It ruled that quarrying activities should not continue unless penalties for past environmental violations were fully paid. These violations included failure to maintain safety distances, inadequate fencing and greenbelt development, insufficient dust control measures, and exceeding the approved extraction limits. The NGT instructed the TNPCB to require water sprinkling, greenbelt development, black-topped roads, and equipment enclosures before granting CTO. It also recommended that greenbelt development begin at the application stage to ensure saplings are ready when operations start.

G. Sundarrajan of Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation, called for the identification of quarry clusters and a third-party audit of the Cumulative Impact Assessment to evaluate the effect on groundwater and air quality. He also pointed to other States, like Telangana, which use satellite imagery to monitor sand mining and storage in near real-time and suggested that Tamil Nadu adopt a similar approach. A channel brings water from a hillock to the Alanjeri tank. The water gets contaminated by quarry dust. If the water does not fill up the tank, a chain of 10 other tanks will not get water. A channel brings water from a hillock to the Alanjeri tank. The water gets contaminated by quarry dust. If the water does not fill up the tank, a chain of 10 other tanks will not get water. | Photo Credit: B. Jothi Ramalingam

A senior hydrogeologist, who preferred to remain anonymous, said the lack of a proper law to govern mining and groundwater extraction is the main reason for the current situation. The management of groundwater is governed by a mere government order: MS 142. A draft Tamil Nadu Groundwater (Development and Management) Act has been drawn up, but is yet to be enacted. Mining is a major subject in this Act because mining for coal or sand or rock will affect groundwater extraction. In Neyveli, the groundwater level, which used to be at 6 feet, is now at 35 feet-40 feet with continuous mining, he said. He said there is regulation only at the individual mine level now. Nobody is seeing the larger picture, and this is leading to environmental damage. An ecologist said that when people keep scooping stuff out of the quarries, the surrounding groundwater level will go down. In the long run, the nature of the soil will change owing to water loss. This will lead to gradual desertification, the kinds of plants able to grow on such a soil will change, and farmers will have to change their crops. Food crops will vanish. One day, the soil, instead of becoming grey, will go "bald" and will not be able to grow anything.

No alternative to M-sand A former government official who had worked in Kancheepuram said the district administration was seized of the matter and there were times when up to 30 quarries had been shut down. "The quarry owners have been warned to keep the truck tops closed with tarpaulin and instructed to carry only the permitted load. The TNPCB is the one that has the larger role in controlling the quarries," he said. However, without the quarries, construction activities and road laying in and around the city would come to a standstill. "Give us an alternative material to M-sand, gravel, and blue metal. As river sand cannot be mined, the administration has no other option but to allow rock mining," he pointed out. The District Environmental Engineer of Kancheepuram acknowledged the complaints and representations about the pollution from stone quarries. "We have received representations forwarded from the Collectorate. They have sought a report, and we are starting work on it," he said.

## India's AI job postings surge nearly 6x since 2019

New Delhi: India's artificial intelligence (AI) job postings have grown nearly six-fold since 2019 amid the country's rapidly expanding role as a global AI talent and execution hub, a report showed on Wednesday. The data compiled by strategy consulting firm Redseer Strategy Consultants said the rise in AI-led hiring is expected to significantly reshape India's office market, with demand for flexible workspaces witnessing strong growth over the next few years. The report, titled "AI and the Future of Flexible Workspaces", stated that India's knowledge-economy office stock could witness an additional demand of nearly 79 million square feet between 2025 and 2030, over and above the pre-AI growth trajectory. "The conversation around AI has largely centred on workforce disruption, but what we are seeing on the ground is a structural shift in how enterprises consume office space," Chhavi Singh, Associate Partner at Redseer Strategy Consultants said. "AI-led teams are becoming more specialised, collaboration-heavy, and dynamic in scale. That is accelerating the move toward 'core plus flex' workplace models, where enterprises want agility without compromising on infrastructure or employee experience," Singh added. According to the report, AI job postings in India crossed 290,000 in 2025, driven by growing demand for talent in machine learning, Generative AI and ML Ops.

# Uranium found in breastmilk of lactating mothers, more studies expected in other states



A recent study has revealed alarming levels of uranium (U238) in the breastmilk of lactating mothers across several districts in Bihar, raising serious health concerns for their infants. Researchers from multiple institutions have found that uranium exposure through breastmilk could pose significant non-carcinogenic health risks to infants.

Speaking with ANI, Dr Ashok Sharma of AIIMS Delhi, who is a co-author of the study, said, "The study analysed breast milk from 40 lactating mothers and found uranium (U-238) in all samples. Although 70% of infants showed potential non-carcinogenic health risk, the overall uranium levels were below permissible limits and are expected to have minimal actual health impact on both mothers and infants. The highest average contamination occurred in Khagaria district and the highest individual value in Katihar district. While uranium exposure may pose risks such as impaired neurological development and reduced IQ, breastfeeding should not be discontinued and remains the most beneficial source of infant nutrition unless clinically indicated." The study showed that: 70% of the infants had HQ > 1, indicating possible non-carcinogenic health risks from uranium exposure through breast milk. Uranium exposure in infants may affect: Kidney development, Neurological development, Cognitive and mental health outcomes (including low IQ and neurodevelopmental delay) if long-term exposure continues.

"However, based on the observed uranium concentrations in breast milk samples (0-5.25 ug/L), the study still concludes that the actual impact on infant health is likely low, and most uranium absorbed by mothers is excreted primarily through urine, not concentrated in breast milk. Therefore, breastfeeding remains recommended, unless a

clinical indication suggests otherwise," he said Dr Ashok also said that such studies will be conducted in other states to know about the presence of heavy metals. "We are under the process of examining the heavy metals in other states and their impact on human health which is a need of the hour." The study, conducted on 40 randomly selected lactating women from various districts of Bihar, involved quantification of U238 in breastmilk. All samples tested contained uranium, with the highest levels observed in the Katihar district. Health risk assessments showed that infants are particularly vulnerable due to their limited ability to eliminate uranium from their bodies. The study estimates that 70 per cent of the infant population analysed could experience non-carcinogenic health effects from exposure. Uranium, a naturally occurring radioactive element, is commonly found in granite and other rocks. It can contaminate groundwater through natural processes and human activities such as mining, burning coal, nuclear industry emissions, and the use of phosphate fertilisers. On further studies to identify the presence of pesticides, environmental pollutants in breastmilk Dr Ashok said, "the article does address future directions, and pesticides are included in their plans. From the study's discussion and conclusion sections, this investigation focused on uranium (U-238) in breast milk; our previous work had already identified arsenic, lead, and mercury in breast milk. We further highlight the need for continued biomonitoring of toxic contaminants, including environmental pollutants such as pesticides in breast milk, to better understand infant exposure risk.

"The World Health Organisation (WHO) sets a provisional limit of 30 micrograms per litre (ug/L) for uranium in drinking water, while some countries, such as Germany, have adopted stricter limits of 10 ug/L. In India, uranium contamination has been reported in an estimated 151 districts across 18 states, with 1.7 per cent of groundwater sources affected in Bihar. Globally, elevated uranium levels have been observed in countries including Canada, the United States, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Bangladesh, China, Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, and the lower Mekong Delta region. Though prior global studies have shown high uranium concentrations in groundwater, clear clinical symptoms among exposed populations have not been consistently observed. However, the current research underscores the urgent need to monitor U238 in Bihar to assess and mitigate potential health risks to mothers and their infants.

# Auramine in Indian food: why a banned dye keeps returning | Explained



India continues to face recurring episodes of chemical adulteration in food, particularly through the use of non-permitted synthetic dyes. One of the most persistent among them is auramine O, a bright yellow industrial dye banned under Indian food-safety regulations. Recent inspections by state food-safety departments, academic studies and even everyday observations such as unnaturally bright yellow chickpeas sold in public have again uncovered its presence in sweets and savoury items. This concern is not new, India has dealt with multiple waves of dye-related adulteration for nearly four decades, from metanil yellow in turmeric, rhodamine B in cotton candy and curry masala, Sudan dyes added to spices, Argemone oil mixed with mustard oil, calcium carbide used to ripen fruits, urea added to milk to thicken, mineral oil mixed with edible oils to chalk powder added to flour revealing systemic vulnerabilities in both regulation and awareness. Auramine's re-emergence is part of this larger pattern.

What is auramine?

Auramine O is a synthetic yellow dye extensively used in industry, including textile and leather processing, printing inks, paper manufacturing, and certain microbiological staining procedures. It has a vivid colour and is inexpensive, but Auramine O is not approved for use as a food colour in India, the European Union, the United States, or most other regulatory jurisdictions. Toxicological research has linked its ingestion to a range of health risks, including liver and kidney damage, enlargement of the spleen, mutagenic effects that can alter genetic material, and potential carcinogenic outcomes. Animal studies have consistently demonstrated organ lesions and disruptions in metabolic processes even at relatively low doses of exposure. Reflecting the seriousness of these findings, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies auramine as a substance that is possibly carcinogenic to humans.

How does auramine enter food?

Despite longstanding prohibitions, auramine continues to enter the food chain largely due to its easy availability and low cost. Industrial-grade colours are sold informally in local markets, and small-scale sweet makers or street vendors often rely on these unlabelled powders because they provide a bright, appealing yellow that mimics saffron, turmeric, or permitted synthetic colours. In many cases, producers remain unaware of regulatory restrictions or view enforcement as sporadic and avoidable. During festive seasons when large quantities of brightly coloured sweets, snacks, and fried items are produced the use of inexpensive colourants tends to spike, raising the likelihood of auramine contamination.

What have earlier investigations in India shown?

Findings from different regions consistently show that dyes such as auramine, metanil yellow, rhodamine B, and malachite green appear in certain samples of sweets, savoury snacks, condiments, and pickles. These violations are particularly common in unorganised food sectors, where oversight is limited and ingredients are often procured through informal supply chains. Regulatory challenges compound the problem. India's food production landscape is dominated by micro and small enterprises, many of which operate with limited technical knowledge of safe manufacturing practices. While the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, provides stringent provisions against adulteration, enforcement remains uneven due to variations in laboratory capacity, staffing, and surveillance systems across states. In several toxicology reports, long-term ingestion of

non-permitted dyes including auramine -- has been linked to physiological degeneration, organ pathology, and genetic damage in animal studies. Yet, despite repeated crackdowns, the recurrence of auramine in food samples indicates that economic incentives and supply-chain fragility continue to override compliance.

What is the global context?

The concerns surrounding auramine are not unique to India. Historically, several countries encountered similar issues in the mid-20th century, when industrial dyes including auramine were occasionally used in foods before emerging toxicological evidence prompted universal bans. Today, regulators in the U.S., EU, and East Asian nations classify auramine strictly as an industrial dye, and its presence in consumables triggers product recalls and import alerts. In recent years, isolated reports of auramine contamination have surfaced in turmeric consignments, pickles, and brightly coloured sweets across parts of South Asia and Africa, underscoring its global status as a prohibited and hazardous additive.

Why are these violations significant for India today?

Despite improvements in food safety systems, the wide variety of street foods, festival sweets, and locally prepared snacks in India can sometimes increase exposure to products that may contain industrial dyes, largely because these items often move through complex and informal supply chains. Children who tend to consume a disproportionate share of brightly coloured foods are at increased risk of long-term harm. Recurrent contamination erodes consumer trust and creates pressure on regulatory authorities to strengthen surveillance. The continued detection of auramine also highlights structural challenges related to informal manufacturing, limited awareness of safety standards, and the affordability gap between permitted and non-permitted colourants.

What steps are being taken?

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) periodically intensifies sampling, surveillance, and enforcement efforts, particularly during festive seasons when colour adulteration peaks. Several states have launched targeted drives against illegal colourants, leading to seizures of unlabelled dye packets and prosecution of violating units. Alongside enforcement, awareness programmes for small food manufacturers and street vendors are being expanded to encourage safer manufacturing practices. There is also a push to strengthen laboratory infrastructure and develop rapid testing kits that can detect industrial dyes at the point of sale. What lies ahead?

Eliminating auramine from the food chain will require a multilayered approach. This includes tighter regulation of chemical markets selling industrial dyes, sustained community-level education for small manufacturers, broader deployment of easy-to-use testing tools, and stronger penalties for chronic violators. Consumer education especially regarding the risks associated with unnaturally bright foods will also be crucial.

## 9 in 10 SMBs in Hyderabad adopt AI as digital transformation accelerates: LinkedIn study

Hyderabad: Small and medium businesses (SMBs) in Hyderabad are leading India's AI adoption wave, with 9 in 10 SMBs (91%) already investing or planning to invest in AI solutions, according to new LinkedIn research. At the same time, 91% of decision-makers expect business growth over the next year, signaling a sector focused on smarter systems, skilled talent, and trusted digital platforms.

The study highlights that AI is central to SMB strategy in Hyderabad. 57% of SMBs say AI and automation are critical to staying competitive, 52% view operational efficiency as key to protecting margins, and 51% prioritize securing future-ready talent for survival.

# To compete with China, India may need China



The Ministry of Finance is set to scrap curbs on Chinese firms bidding for government contracts, which were introduced in 2020. The curbs were imposed following a deadly clash between the countries' troops in the Galwan Valley. They required Chinese bidders to register with an Indian government committee and obtain political and security clearances. According to Reuters, this resulted in China losing out on contracts worth \$700-750 billion. Notably, even during periods when India had a more favourable stance, direct Chinese investment remained low. China directly contributed less than 1% of India FDI equity inflows from 2000 to 2021, showing that recent curbs only add pressure.

The chart below shows China's share and rank in India's total FDI equity inflows from 2000 to 2025. The figure for 2000-2021 is cumulative. However, China's cumulative (direct and indirect) FDI inflows before 2020 into India are difficult to calculate as they were mostly routed through tax havens, according to Santosh Pai, Partner at Denton's Link Legal and Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies. "Chinese investments almost never go directly into a country," he told The Hindu. These means of investments were wholly altered when the Indian government issued 'Press Note 3' in April 2020, which specifically stated that an entity of a country, which shares a land border with India, or where the beneficial owner is a citizen of any such country, requires mandatory approval from the Government of India before for an investment can be executed. Pai estimated that this denied any indirect investments that Chinese companies had slated for India.

A few years after this policy amendment, India's Ministry of Finance, in its annual Economic Survey for 2023-24, suggested that increased FDI inflows from China can help increase India's global supply chain participation and push exports. The Ministry took note of the U.S.' and Europe's shift away from sourcing imports directly from China. The U.S.' total trade with China reduced in 2023 and remained stagnant in 2024. The European Union also saw a similar dip in trade with China in 2023 (Chart 2B). The chart below shows the U.S.'s total trade (including imports and exports) with China over the years (in \$ bn).

The Survey stated that FDI from China could boost India's exports to the U.S., "similar to how East Asian economies did in the past." Pai elaborated on India's change of heart. "Due to China's dominance in most markets, India cannot attract global supply chains which want to diversify from China without including Chinese companies in the mix," he said. The chart below shows the U.S.'s total trade (including imports and exports) with China over the years. The figures were sourced from Eurostat data, wherein exports and imports are indexed at 100 each, with 2013 as the starting year. Using this method, EU's total trade in 2013, which includes imports and exports, is represented as 200. In 2019, the index had increased to 239. India has proven to be a ready alternative for the U.S. to replace China in at least one of the major items. Due to its dominance in the manufacturing of components, China made up more than 60% of the U.S.'s imports of smartphones in 2016. However, 10 years later, China's share has dwindled to about 22% of the U.S.'s smartphone imports, majorly due to higher tariffs. The chart below shows the U.S.'s overall smartphone imports in \$ bn over the years. Meanwhile, countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, and India have shown upticks in their shares of U.S.'s smartphone imports. However, the possibility of replicating this success, without China's help, in other items as well is slim as of now. The chart below shows select countries' share in the U.S.'s import of smartphones over the years. While China's FDI stock (or cumulative FDI inflows) to most of its staple investment destinations have increased over the years, its stock with India has declined over the past decade. The table below shows that when Chinese FDI stock is ranked, India fell by 19 ranks between 2014 and 2024. Pai stated that although China was eager to invest in Indian companies, the curbs that were set in 2020 may have projected an unpredictable environment for investment.

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## Why only female Darwin's bark spiders weave the toughest webs

One of the strongest materials on the earth isn't made in a factory or synthesised in a laboratory but spun by a creature barely two inches long. The Darwin's bark spider (*Caerostris darwini*), found in the forests of Madagascar, weaves silk that outperforms steel and most human-made fibres in both strength and toughness. Larger webs, stronger threads. Its silk has a tensile strength of about 1.6 gigapascals, around 3x higher than that of iron, making it the toughest biological material ever tested. But as scientists are now finding, this extraordinary strength isn't something every individual produces. Across spider species, body size is often linked to silk quality. Larger spiders generally produce tougher silks to capture larger or faster prey. In orb-weaving spiders such as the Darwin's bark spider, larger bodies over evolutionary time have accompanied larger webs and stronger silk threads.

Scientists from institutions in China, Madagascar, Slovenia, and the US studied bark spiders to understand the conditions in which they produce the tough silk. Their findings were recently published in *Integrative Zoology*. Three hypotheses. The study focused on two bark spider species in Madagascar: *Caerostris darwini*, which spins the largest orb webs ever recorded, and its close relative *Caerostris kuntneri*. Egg sacs from both species were collected from Analamazaotra National Park and the spiders were raised in laboratory conditions. This allowed the scientists to compare silk produced by males and females at different life stages while keeping environmental factors such as diet and humidity constant.

The team tested three competing hypotheses. The first proposed that all individuals — males and females, juveniles and adults — produce silk of similar toughness. The second suggested only females produce tougher silk, regardless of size. The third said only large individuals, especially large adult females, produce exceptionally tough silk as and when their body size and ecological role demand it. The size difference between male and female bark spiders is striking. In *C. darwini*, adult females are about 3x larger than males. In *Caerostris kuntneri*, they can be up to 5x larger, suggesting that females are under much stronger evolutionary pressure to invest in tougher silk.

To measure silk quality, the researchers collected dragline silk, also known as major ampullate silk, from spiders of both sexes and at different life stages in each species. Each strand was carefully mounted on a cardboard frame and stretched to test its strength, stiffness, and ability to absorb energy before breaking. Dragline silk is one of the most important types of spider silk. Nearly invisible to the naked eye, it forms the structural backbone of an orb web and serves as safety lines, anchor threads, and emergency escape ropes for the spiders. Producing this silk, however, is metabolically expensive. The energy required to synthesise the amino acids that make up dragline silk varies; some such as proline, which plays an important role in making silk elastic, are particularly expensive. Darwin's bark spider silk contains unusually high levels of this protein, explaining its exceptional mechanical properties but in turn increasing its metabolic cost.

Quality and architecture. The study's results were unequivocal: only large adult females produced exceptionally tough silk. Their silk was also stiffer and more capable of absorbing far more mechanical strain before breaking than the silk produced by males or juveniles. The silk from adult males and juvenile males and females was mechanically indistinguishable.

The study also found that adult females produce high-performance silk only when it's biologically necessary. As the females grow larger and begin building large webs capable of intercepting fast-moving prey, they 'turn on' on the physiological machinery required to manufacture the superior silk. The study also uncovered a close link between silk quality and the architecture of the web. Adult female Darwin's bark spiders build more sparse webs, with wider gaps between threads, using less silk per unit area. Despite being economical, these webs are highly effective because each thread can absorb (relatively enormous) forces. Juveniles and males on the other hand spin more dense webs made of metabolically cheaper and weaker silk. Curiously, not all the properties of the silk varied with size and sex. Regarding



less of age or sex, all individuals produced silk of comparably high stretchability, or how much the silk could be stretched before it broke. It suggested that the elasticity of the silk of spiders of the genus *Caerostris* is a genetically conserved feature — while extreme toughness is tuned according to body size and ecological demand. At the molecular level, differences in silk properties arise from changes in protein composition, how the proteins are arranged and cross-linked, and even the shape and length of the ducts that spin silk inside the spider's body. *C. darwini* has an unusually long and complex spinning duct that scientists believe could be allowing silk proteins to produce exceptionally strong silk fibre.

The trade-off however is time and energy. Female bark spiders produce less silk overall, take longer to rebuild their webs, and invest more in quality over quantity. "We think that very tough silk evolved because it was needed to structurally support the huge webs built by *Caerostris* spiders, rather than as an adaptation to hunt any specific prey," Matjaž Gregoric, the lead author of the study and a researcher at the Jovan Hadži Institute of Biology, Slovenia, said. The strategy pays off in the spider's distinctive habitat. *C. darwini* builds enormous webs, up to 25 m wide, suspended over rivers and lakes. These aerial traps allow the spider to capture swarms of flies and beetles that few other spiders can. Silk production in Darwin's bark spiders has evolved to ensure energy is invested only where it can yield a greater survival advantage. The extraordinary properties of its silk thus emerge from a complex interplay between body size, sex, ecology, and behaviour.

## Gates and OpenAI team up for AI health push in African countries

The Gates Foundation and OpenAI are setting up a \$50 million partnership to help African countries use artificial intelligence to improve their health systems. The partnership, called Horizon 1000, plans to work with African leaders to work out how best to use the technology, starting with Rwanda.

"In poorer countries with enormous health worker shortages and lack of health systems infrastructure, AI can be a gamechanger in expanding access to quality care," said Bill Gates in a blog post announcing the launch. He has repeatedly described AI as one of the most transformative technologies ever developed.

The foundation has already set up a number of AI initiatives, while Rwanda last year established an AI health hub in Kigali. Horizon 1000 aims to reach 1,000 primary health clinics and surrounding communities across several countries by 2028, Gates said.

The launch comes as many lower-income countries struggle with major cuts to international aid budgets; reductions Gates said in December had contributed to the first rise in preventable child deaths this century. AI could be particularly valuable in countries with severe shortages of trained health workers, Gates said. He noted estimates suggesting sub-Saharan Africa is short of around six million healthcare professionals.



# What the Anna's Archive Spotify hack reveals about digital piracy



In late December, a relatively little-known platform, Anna's Archive, made global headlines after it hacked Spotify. Tracked closely by open source movement advocates, the database that indexes millions of digital books and journals claimed it had scraped from Spotify about 86 million music files and metadata coming to slightly under 300TB. The platform claimed it "saw a role for us here to build a music archive primarily aimed at preservation." While the music collection is yet to be made fully available, the main web link to access Anna's Archive is down globally. This sudden outage has left numerous users—academics, bibliophiles, and open source activists—in distress.

What is Anna's Archive and how does it work?

Anna's Archive is a type of shadow library project that unifies existing libraries—both legal and illegal. It does this by collaborating with volunteers, scraping web content, and setting up mirrors to preserve digital records. When a user accesses Anna's Archive, they can see a variety of fast and slow download links from the platform's partner servers. Those who contribute certain amounts can get a higher number of faster downloads per day. In essence, Anna's Archive is a search engine for the contents of different shadow libraries. Anna's Archive claims that it has preserved about 16% of the world's books, including scientific journals, since its inception in 2022. The real identity of the person or group behind the project is unknown. But the group has cited Aaron Swartz, an American technologist and digital activist, as one of its sources of inspiration. The group considers itself a non-profit and claims that all donations are spent on servers, storage, and bandwidth. About its site being taken down and the scraping of Spotify data, the group posted on Reddit: "This unfortunately happens to shadow libraries on a regular basis. We don't believe this has to do with our Spotify backup." While many expressed support for the database, others criticised the project for purportedly drawing attention to its illegal activities by targeting a high-profile company like Spotify.

Is Anna's Archive an illegal platform?

Yes. But Anna's Archive claims that its mission is "backing up all knowledge and culture of humanity" and making it available to anyone. To fulfil its mission, the database breaks copyright laws and violates licensing permission so users can download e-books and other digital files for free. When a reader finds free books through Anna's Archive rather than going through a bookseller or a library, publishers lose out on their revenue while authors, artists, and other creatives lose out on the royalties. Anna's Archive has made contradictory claims regarding the legality of its project. In an introductory blog post published in November

2022, the author noted: "We deliberately violate the copyright law in most countries. This allows us to do something that legal entities cannot do: making sure books are mirrored far and wide". On the other hand, the website claimed that it does not host any copyrighted materials, and only indexes publicly available metadata as a search engine.

Furthermore, Anna's Archive shared that its code and data are fully open source. The platform offers its dataset that includes unreleased collections for archival and LLM training purposes. Anna's Archive offered enterprise-level access "for donations in the range of tens of thousands USD," or in exchange for high-quality collections it doesn't have yet. This means that companies building AI chatbots could use Anna's Archive to train their products on millions of works of art, science, and literature, without fairly compensating the creators. This month, a U.S. judge ordered Anna's Archive to delete its data from WorldCat, a global catalog of library materials. Anna's Archive in a 2023 blog post claimed it had "meticulously scraped all WorldCat records," by exploiting a flawed website upgrade to obtain a comprehensive to-do list of all the remaining books to be added to Anna's Archive. The legal order is also meant to stop Anna's Archive from scraping, harvesting, using, storing, or sharing WorldCat's data. However, this is unlikely to deter the group, which gleefully thanked WorldCat for hundreds of millions of records and the metadata of 30,000 libraries.

What is the current status of Anna's Archive?

Anna's Archive is currently unreachable through its annas-archive.org address, even when attempting to access it via a TOR browser. Some people are using alternative web addresses in order to access the database while others are waiting for the platform to come back online through the old .org address. Anna's Archive as well as community members have provided tips and technical advice for those who wish to access the platform through other links. However, there is the risk of less experienced users being scammed by fake web addresses. Anna's Archive has alleged that the annas-archive.su address, for example, is fraudulent and steals users' donations.

In spite of the takedown, downloads appear to be continuing. On January 19, Anna's Archive shared on its website that based on downloads in the last 30 days, the hourly average was 37,000 and the daily average was 883,000. There was a sharp dip in downloads after the .org web address went down, followed by a gradual recovery. The platform also provides downloads stats for individual books. Multiple Anna's Archive users and donors on Reddit justified their downloads by citing the prohibitive cost of buying books. Others spoke about the lack of libraries in their country, high import fees for foreign books, the need for educational resources, the ability to get new books during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, getting digital versions of physical books they already had, upskilling for career reasons, working on their hobbies, inculcating a reading habit instead of scrolling online, reading more diversely, or not wanting to use the restrictive e-book formats provided by the original publishers. "[G]od bless, being from 3rd world country where can i get all [this] valuable knowledge. however we have to come to a common ground and see how to compensate authors[,] the knowledge that i got from books has made people retain jobs and support families," shared a user on Reddit this month, in response to Anna's Archive.

## A tactical thaw in Kerala politics



With just over a couple of months to go for the Kerala Assembly elections, and coming hard on the heels of a fiercely contested local body poll, the State's political chessboard is being swiftly rearranged. At the centre of this churn is a development that would have seemed improbable even a year ago: the visible thaw in relations between the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam and the Nair Service Society (NSS). For the two Hindu community organisations that wield decisive influence across large swathes of southern and central Kerala, the symbolism of this emerging bonhomie is as potent as the electoral arithmetic. If this alignment holds, it would represent the most serious attempt at Hindu community convergence in over a decade.

The last attempt to stitch together a Grand Hindu Alliance between 2012 and 2014 had failed. It collapsed under bitter disagreements between these very same bodies over caste-based reservations and the Devaswom Recruitment Board. The bitterness of that rupture lingered for almost a decade, making the present display of warmth all the more striking. Beneath the cordiality, however, still lies a fundamental uncertainty over how they intend to reconcile positions shaped by sharply different social and political standings. For now, the convergence appears tactical. In reality, the rapprochement did not materialise overnight. The leadership of the NSS and SNDP had been edging closer for over a year. The turning point came in September last year with the Global Ayyappa Sangamam at Pampa, organised by the Left Democratic Front government ostensibly to deliberate on the future course of development at the hill shrine.

But what has clearly accelerated the public expression of this alignment is the emergence of a common adversary in Opposition leader V.D. Satheesan. The general secretaries of both organisations, G. Sukumaran Nair and Vellappally Natesan, have made little effort to hide their hostility toward Mr. Satheesan since he assumed office. This discontent came to the fore after Mr. Satheesan criticised controversial remarks by the SNDP leader, widely seen as

targeting the Muslim community in Malabar. From there, the divisions became sharper, and the alignment unmistakably public. After all, both organisations have long harboured concerns over a perceived rise of Muslim influence in Kerala's political arena.

The projection of the LDF as enjoying the confidence of two of Kerala's most influential Hindu community organisations has sparked speculation that the CPI(M) played a quiet role in nudging the SNDP-NSS rapprochement. The move is widely seen as a counterweight to the steady consolidation of Muslim votes in Malabar and Catholic votes in central Travancore behind the Congress-led United Democratic Front. Viewed through this prism, the timing of senior CPI(M) leader A.K. Balan's remark that Jamaat e Islami would control the Home portfolio under a UDF government appears anything but incidental. This pattern found continuity when Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Chierian drew pointed attention to the identity of candidates fielded by the Indian Union Muslim League. The CPI(M) and the LDF have maintained a studied silence, as if to allow the narrative to gain traction without formal endorsement.

For the UDF, which rides high on its local body election gains under Mr. Satheesan's leadership, this evolving chemistry between the NSS and SNDP is an unwelcome complication. Not just the Congress, but even the IUML has chosen restraint. After a decade out of power, the UDF's strategy is clear: allow anti-incumbency to do the heavy lifting, consolidate its social coalition, and avoid detonating new fault lines on the eve of the Assembly polls. Whether the coming together of these two Hindu community organisations, which together represent roughly 35% of Kerala's Hindu population, will convert into a proportionate electoral swing remains an open question. Large sections within these communities are already anchored to entrenched political loyalties. The National Democratic Alliance also commands a significant share of this social space. What is already beyond doubt, however, is that identity politics is no longer hovering at the margins. It is fast-moving to the very centre of Kerala's high-stakes electoral contest.

# Five questions may be all it takes to identify TB patients who need urgent care

A simple five-question tool that requires no laboratory tests can help health workers quickly identify tuberculosis (TB) patients who are most likely to become severely ill and need urgent hospital care, according to a study published recently in BMJ Open. Researchers found that the bedside assessment performed as well as the more elaborate triage information routinely collected under the national TB programme in preventing deaths. Its accuracy improved further when combined with basic patient details already recorded on the Ni-kshay portal, such as age, sex, the site of infection and whether the patient had previously been treated for TB.

The tool assesses if the patient is severely undernourished using body mass index (BMI), whether they have swelling in the legs, whether they are breathing unusually fast, whether their oxygen levels are low and whether they are able to stand on their own. The study also examined whether adding more information — such as whether a patient has diabetes or HIV, or even whether they have a bank account — could improve the model further. It found that these additional details did not significantly enhance the tool's ability to identify patients at the highest risk. The five-question model, developed by the ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE) and implemented in Tamil Nadu, was designed to simplify what public health experts call "differentiated TB care" — ensuring that the sickest patients are identified early and receive hospital-based care as quickly as possible.

What is differentiated TB care and why is it necessary?

Differentiated TB care is based on a simple principle: not all TB patients are equally sick. While many patients can be treated safely at home, some are severely undernourished or critically ill and require immediate hospital care, oxygen support, nutritional rehabilitation and closer monitoring. Identifying these patients early is crucial because the majority of TB deaths occur soon after diagnosis. "Almost 70 per cent of TB deaths happen during the first two months after diagnosis," said Dr Hemant Shewade, one of the authors of the study and a senior scientist at ICMR-NIE. "These deaths usually occur in patients who are severely undernourished or severely ill. The sickest TB patients are four to five times more likely to die of the disease. A triage tool can help health workers easily identify the low-hanging fruits, so to say, where interventions will have the highest impact," he said. The need for such a system is particularly acute in India, which accounts for the highest burden of TB globally.

How does the five-question tool work?

A patient is considered "triage positive" and may require hospital admission if they meet any one of the following criteria: they have a BMI below 14, or a BMI below 16 along with swelling in the feet; they have a respiratory rate of more than 24 breaths per minute; their oxygen saturation is below 94 per cent; or they are unable to stand without support. The simplicity of the tool is one of its biggest advantages. While the national programme also has a differentiated TB care tool for identifying patients who need immediate attention, it requires health workers to fill in 16 to 20 parameters, some of which depend on laboratory tests. In many resource-constrained healthcare facilities, where a large proportion of TB patients are diagnosed, these parameters are either not available immediately or are not recorded consistently. As a result, health workers are often



unable to accurately estimate a patient's risk at the time of diagnosis.

What were the different models that were studied?

Researchers tested four different models using data from more than 55,000 TB patients in Tamil Nadu. The first model relied on basic information routinely collected by health workers and uploaded to the national Ni-kshay portal at the time of diagnosis. The second model used only the five bedside indicators developed by ICMR-NIE. Interestingly, researchers found that this simple five-parameter tool performed as well as the first model, despite relying on far less information. The third model combined the five bedside indicators with some routinely captured data from Ni-kshay, including age, sex, whether the infection had been microbiologically confirmed, the site of infection and whether the patient had previously received treatment for TB. This model performed significantly better than the previous two. The fourth model added even more information, including HIV status, diabetes status and whether the patient had a bank account — a variable often used as a marker of socioeconomic vulnerability. However, researchers found that these additional details did not improve prediction any further. The fourth model performed at par with the third. The findings suggest that a relatively small amount of information may be sufficient to accurately identify patients who need urgent care.

Why is there a need for simpler models?

According to researchers, the current system often delays risk assessment because many variables are captured only after treatment has begun. "Currently, most of these variables are routinely captured at a treatment facility and there is a delay of three weeks in using them for triage and death prediction," said Dr Shewade. "In resource-constrained settings, risk stratification and death prediction should be possible using easily measurable and available variables at TB diagnosis," he added. The Tamil Nadu experience suggests that simplifying the process can have tangible benefits. According to the researchers, the use of the five-question triage tool has helped reduce TB deaths by 30 to 50 per cent across different districts in the state.

Will these recommendations be implemented nationally?

That question remains open. ICMR-NIE has shared its findings with the national TB programme and recommended that the Tamil Nadu model be scaled up across the country. All four models tested in the study have also been made available online by the institute as simple calculators that health workers can use to estimate a patient's risk.

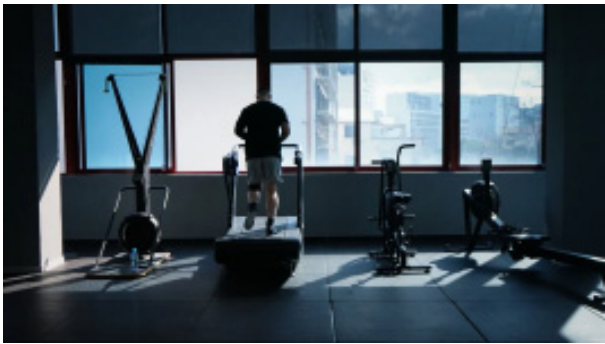
# Uttarakhand cop dies during workout: The heart checks that are a must

The death of a 38-year-old Uttarakhand Special Operations Group (SOG) officer during a gym workout has once again revived an unsettling question: Why do apparently healthy, fit people collapse while exercising?

"Incidents like these are reminders that fitness and heart health are not always the same thing. The question is not whether Indians should exercise — they absolutely should. The question is whether they know how to exercise safely and wisely. It is about whether they know how to prepare their bodies for exercise, recognise warning signs and understand that fitness is built gradually, not forced suddenly. Most importantly, do they know about their underlying heart condition which a bout of exercise might just exacerbate," says Dr Ranjan Shetty, lead cardiologist and medical director at Sparsh Hospital, Bengaluru, who has seen many gym-related cardiac arrests and heart attacks among stressed professionals. He speaks to The Indian Express about what we most overlook. Why we must identify hidden heart problems. Exercise itself rarely creates the disease. Rather, it exposes a condition that has remained hidden. A sudden cardiac arrest is an abrupt failure of the heart's electrical system. The heart stops pumping blood effectively and, unless help arrives within minutes, death can follow. A heart attack, by contrast, occurs when blood supply to a part of the heart muscle is blocked. One can lead to the other, but they are not the same event.

Sudden cardiac arrests are often linked to inherited disorders of the heart muscle or abnormalities in the heart's electrical circuitry. These conditions can remain silent for years, producing no symptoms until they are triggered by intense exertion. Among those over 35 or 40 years, the more common culprit is coronary artery disease — narrowing of the blood vessels supplying the heart. High blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, smoking and chronic stress have become common companions of urban life, all of which are risk factors in people who otherwise appear healthy. Severe dehydration can interfere with heart rhythms, leading to irregularities and stoppage of heartbeats. Dehydration depletes vital minerals like potassium and magnesium, electrolytes which govern the heart's electrical system. A deficiency can trigger severe rhythm disorder and a cardiac arrest. Why we should not go from zero to 100

If there is one mistake Indians make while embracing fitness culture, it is confusing enthusiasm with preparedness. A person who has been sedentary for years walks into a gym and immediately signs up for high-intensity interval training, heavy weightlifting or marathon preparation. Trainers promise transformations in 90 days. Social media celebrates extremes. The body, however, operates on a slower timetable. The heart is a muscle that adapts gradually. It responds to regular training, not sudden torture. Research consistently shows that the risk of sudden cardiac events is highest among people who are habitually inactive and then subject themselves to vigorous, unaccustomed exercise. The paradox is that regular exercise lowers the risk of sudden cardiac death dramatically over the long term. But sporadic bouts of intense exercise in an untrained individual can increase the risk. Start slowly. Increase duration before increasing intensity. Why you must do a full body check-up and endurance test before joining a gym. A family history of sudden death, especially before the age of 50,



deserves attention. So do episodes of unexplained fainting, chest discomfort, breathlessness out of proportion to effort or palpitations associated with dizziness. Hypertension, diabetes, obesity and smoking are risk factors that should shape how one begins exercising. People above 40 years, or younger individuals with significant risk factors, may benefit from a medical assessment that includes blood pressure measurement, cholesterol and blood sugar tests and, where indicated, an electrocardiogram or exercise stress test. The purpose is not to frighten people away from exercise. Quite the opposite. It is to ensure that exercise becomes safer and more sustainable.

What are warning signs nobody should ignore

Chest pain or pressure during exercise should never be dismissed as muscular soreness. Breathlessness that seems disproportionate to the effort, palpitations accompanied by dizziness, episodes of blacking out or severe unexplained fatigue after exercise are warning signs that demand medical attention. Young age offers no immunity. Nor does a muscular physique. We increasingly encounter patients in their thirties with advanced coronary artery disease, uncontrolled hypertension or structural heart abnormalities that had gone undiagnosed for years.

Why you must seek clinical advice on supplements. No discussion of gym safety is complete without acknowledging the growing culture of performance enhancement. Many commercially available supplements contain large quantities of caffeine and other stimulants that can elevate heart rate and blood pressure. More worrying is the covert use of anabolic steroids. They may produce dramatic gains in muscle mass, but they come at a cost. They can enlarge the heart, worsen cholesterol levels, elevate blood pressure and increase the risk of dangerous arrhythmias. Some studies have linked long-term anabolic steroid use with scarring of the heart muscle and premature cardiovascular disease.

What's a checklist before choosing a gym?

Few people inquire whether their gym has staff trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR); it's a life saver. Fewer still ask whether there is an automated external defibrillator (AED) on the premises. Immediate CPR and rapid defibrillation can double or even triple survival rates in case of a sudden cardiac event. While fitness centres market transformation, they must also be prepared for emergencies. For most Indians, the greatest threat to the heart is not the workout. It is the belief that health can be postponed until tomorrow.

# TN ammonia gas leak: How exposure affects the body, and when it can turn fatal

Seven people died and more than 40 were hospitalised in Tamil Nadu after an ammonia gas leak at a private seafood export company spread to the workers' residential premises. The injured are currently under treatment at several hospitals near the seafood unit, with the critically injured being moved to Stanley Medical College in Chennai.

First, how does ammonia affect the body? Exposure to high levels of ammonia starts irritating and hurting the skin, eyes, throat, and lungs. It can lead to abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting. It can cause painful blisters on the skin. It can trigger swelling and narrowing of the throat, making it harder to breathe. It can lead to severe bouts of coughing and lung damage, which can ultimately result in death. Serious patients have reported pulmonary edema (fluid accumulation in the lungs), severe oxygen deprivation and respiratory failure. Most people can immediately smell the chemical, feel skin irritation or even start coughing, ensuring that they do not get exposed to high quantities. "Exposure for a long time may affect people's ability to sense the chemical," says the US Centres for Disease Control. Some, who have been exposed to very high levels of ammonia, can experience long-term health consequences such as chronic cough, asthma and scarring of the lungs. A 2012 study from Gujarat based on the data of over 1,200 employees of a urea manufacturing plant found that more than 68.22% workers who were exposed to ammonia gas at work had a significantly higher risk of respiratory disease as compared to workers that were not exposed to ammonia.

How are such cases treated? There is no specific treatment for exposure to ammonia. Doctors and health professionals usually try to remove the ammonia from the body after an exposure and then provide supportive care for any symptoms a person develops.

What should you do if exposed? If you have been exposed to ammonia gas, you should: Remove all your clothes. Do not remove it over your head to prevent further expo-



sure into the mouth and eyes. If you have to, close your eyes and mouth before doing so. Ammonia is generally used in the manufacturing of fertilisers, plastics, explosives, and other chemicals such as corrosion inhibitors. It is used for water purification, it is present in household cleaners, and is required in industries such as rubber, textile and leather. It is also used as a refrigerant gas, which is likely the case in Tamil Nadu.

Have there been other instances previously? Yes. There was an instance of ammonia gas leak in a meat factory in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh that affected at least 50 workers in 2022. Two years before that, around 50 people fell ill or fainted in a cold storage plant in Haryana's Uttar Pradesh. Anonna Dutt is a Principal Correspondent who writes primarily on health at the Indian Express. She reports on myriad topics ranging from the growing burden of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension to the problems with pervasive infectious conditions. She reported on the government's management of the Covid-19 pandemic and closely followed the vaccination programme. Her stories have resulted in the city government investing in high-end tests for the poor and acknowledging errors in their official reports. Dutt also takes a keen

# ‘We now have scientific evidence it can help in preventive healthcare’



Every year on International Yoga Day, millions roll out their mats, celebrating a practice that has been part of India's civilizational heritage for millennia. Yet the most important development of yoga for us in academia is happening beyond parks or stadiums. It is happening in research laboratories, clinical trials and medical journals. Yoga is steadily moving from a belief system to an evidence-based health intervention. The numbers tell a compelling story. Nearly 90 per cent of all scientific publications on yoga in medical literature have appeared in the last two decades. In fact, this has accelerated further in the last decade, with the number of yoga-related clinical trials reported in PubMed (the leading biomedical search engine) more than doubling in the most recent decade compared with the preceding ten years.

This transition is particularly important in my field of cardiovascular medicine, where claims are scrutinized rigorously and only interventions supported by evidence find a place in clinical practice. Today, that evidence is beginning to emerge and become mainstream. One of the landmark studies in this field was the Indian Council of Medical Research-funded trial by our Yoga-CaRe group of authors, published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology in 2020. Conducted across 24 centres in India and among nearly 4,000 patients recovering from heart attacks, it remains the largest randomised clinical trial ever undertaken on yoga-based cardiac rehabilitation. It found that patients who participated in a structured yoga-based rehabilitation programme reported significantly better health status and earlier return to normal daily activities following a heart attack. In fact, among practitioners who attended 75% or more of yoga sessions, there were 40% fewer adverse cardiovascular outcomes. The Yoga-CaRe trial was important not merely for its findings but also for demonstrating that yoga can be evaluated using the same rigorous standards applied to medicines and medical devices. More recently, CaReMATCH, an analysis of several cardiac reha-

bilitation trials, showed that yoga was as beneficial as conventional cardiac rehabilitation in improving quality of life and preventing recurrent hospitalizations by 30%. This has important implications for India, since the availability and acceptability of standard cardiac rehabilitation with multiple instruments and gadgets is limited and expensive, while yoga is culturally acceptable and readily available and affordable. A yoga-based rehabilitation model can extend the reach of cardiovascular care far beyond tertiary hospitals into smaller cities and rural communities. Research suggests that yoga works by improving autonomic balance (equilibrium between the sympathetic fight-or-flight and the parasympathetic rest-and-digest systems) enhancing heart-rate variability (the natural fluctuation in the exact time intervals between consecutive heartbeats and an indicator of how well your body adapts to stress and recovers from exertion) reducing stress-related hormonal activation, and improving psychological well-being. These mechanisms are key to cardiovascular health. Evidence for yoga is emerging not only in cardiac rehabilitation but also in preventive cardiovascular health. A growing body of research suggests that regular yoga practice can improve blood pressure, body weight, lipid levels and, importantly, quality of life. A pooled analysis of 49 trials found that yoga produced average reductions of 5 mmHg in systolic and 3 mmHg in diastolic blood pressure. Such reductions can lead to 25% and 20% lowering in the risk of brain and heart attack, respectively. The public health implications of this can be profound. Even modest improvements in these risk factors can translate into large reductions in cardiovascular disease and other non-communicable conditions, including disorders affecting brain health, kidney disease and bone health, when adopted across large populations.

Beyond disease prevention, yoga promotes positive health and has been shown to improve physical fitness, mental well-being, emotional resilience, sleep quality, and healthy aging — outcomes that are increasingly recognized as important components of overall health. The next step is to expand access to yoga while systematically measuring its impact on health outcomes. Doing so will help generate the evidence needed to guide policy and maximize yoga's contribution to public health. Positive results should lead to its systematic implementation through the extensive network of Ayushman Aarogya Mandirs as a proactive health policy. The real story of yoga in the 21st century is, therefore, not one of ancient wisdom competing with modern science. It is one of ancient wisdom being examined, tested, and, where justified, validated by modern science. India has long exported yoga as culture. The moment has come to export it as evidence-based therapy.

# What is stopping the makers to mention the lead heroine's name on the poster?

Chennai: Actress Sanam Shetty has taken exception to a poster of director Venky Atluri's much awaited film, 'Vishwanath & Sons', featuring actors Suriya and Mamitha Baiju in the lead, as the poster in question did not feature the name of Mamitha Baiju, who plays the heroine in the film. The makers of 'Vishwanath & Sons' on Friday released the first single from the film, 'Pattampoochi', much to the delight of fans and film buffs. While the poster announcing the release of the single had Suriya's name in it, it did not have Mamitha Baiju's name.

Taking exception to this gender inequality, actress Sanam Shetty, quoting a tweet of actress Mamitha Baiju, wrote on her X timeline, "What is stopping the makers to mention the lead heroine's name on the poster? All other main names are mentioned except hers!" She went on to say, "This is unfair and high time we change this trend! @\_mamithabaiju has earned her name that's why she is cast in such a big film! But even if she was a newbie, the heroine rightfully deserves to get equal credits everywhere."

Cinema Industry needs to evolve... one change at a time! #equality #cinema #femaleArtistRights." The link to the song, which was released on Friday, was shared by actor Suriya on his social media timelines. Suriya wrote, "A first is always special — here's the first single from #VishwanathandSons #Pattampoochi. A @gyprakash musical. sung by @Sublahshini. Written by @Arunrajakamaraj/ @ramjowrites." G V Prakash Kumar has scored the music

for the number that has been rendered by Subhalashini and has lyrics by Arunraja Kamaraj. For the unaware, the eagerly awaited family entertainer is to hit screens worldwide on August 14 this year. Directed by blockbuster filmmaker Venky Atluri and produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi & Sai Soujanya, the film is expected to offer audiences wholesome entertainment, packed with emotions, humour and heartwarming family moments. The film has created tremendous excitement among audiences ever since the makers released a teaser. The teaser introduces Sanjay Vishwanath, an international pistol shooter who continues to chase his dreams even in his 40s.

Suriya appears in a layered role, portraying both fatherly warmth and emotional depth. His stylish presence and the impactful dialogues penned by Venky Atluri bring back shades reminiscent of his iconic performances. Adding freshness to the narrative is Mamitha Baiju, who brings vibrant and charming energy to the film. The teaser hints at an unconventional love story involving a noticeable age gap. With Venky Atluri's sensibility in storytelling, the film is expected to handle this aspect with depth and emotional maturity. Apart from Suriya and Mamitha Baiju, the film also stars Radhika Sarathkumar and Raveena Tandon in key roles.

The film has cinematography by Nimish Ravi and editing by Navin Nooli. The film is to be distributed in Tamil Nadu by Think Studios, ensuring a strong theatrical release across the state.

## Consumer inflation rises to 3.93% in May, higher costs from West Asia war get passed on to households



Consumer prices in India rose 3.93% in May compared to a year ago as producers continued to pass on more of their input cost increases to households, according to data released on Friday by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). At 3.93%, the May headline inflation rate, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), is higher than the 3.48% recorded in April. Inflation, which is the year-on-year change in prices, has now risen every month in 2026. After having risen to 4.2% in April from 2.9% in March, inflation for the 'restaurant and accommodation services' category increased further to 5.75% in May, reflecting the impact of eateries raising menu prices due to hikes in commercial LPG prices on account of the West Asia war. The increase in prices of 'restaurant and accommodation services' in May compared to April was 1.8%.

## Domestic cell mandate triggers supply crunch, may hit rooftop solar installation

The Centre's plan to install rooftop solar panels in 75 lakh households by year-end may hit a few bumps due to the limited availability and rising costs of these panels made from domestically- manufactured solar cells. About 40 lakh rooftop systems have been installed under the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana so far, adding over 12 GW capacity. Vendors and installers empanelled under the scheme across multiple states told The Indian Express that they are struggling to procure Domestic Content Requirement (DCR)-compliant solar panels, which are mandatory under the scheme. DCR-compliant solar panels are those in which locally manufactured solar cells — components that convert sunlight into electricity — are used.

Taking cognizance of the issue, Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Secretary at Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) on Monday held a meeting with domestic solar cell manufacturers to emphasise the need to ensure adequate availability of domestically-manufactured solar PV cells and DCR solar modules, especially for vendors and installers engaged in setting up of Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) solar projects like solar rooftop plants and solar agricultural pumps, while also keeping the prices reasonable. "Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE), through REC Limited and National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), is keeping a close eye on the availability and prices of domestically manufactured solar cells and modules and is closely monitoring the situation," the ministry said in response to queries sent by "With domestic solar PV cell manufacturing capacity expected to rise substantially in the next few months, the demand supply situation is expected to improve further," it added.

New mandate triggers price rise According to the ministry, prices of DCR solar PV modules — domestically manufactured modules made using domestically produced solar PV cells — fluctuated between March and May 2026. Prices declined from their February 2026 levels during March and April before rising again in May. The ministry attributed this price increase in May to a likely surge in demand from developers seeking to commission net-metering and open-access renewable energy projects before the May 31, 2026 deadline, after which the exemption from mandatory domestic cell sourcing requirements expired.

From June 1, the government made it mandatory for all domestic, commercial and industrial solar projects to use only locally manufactured solar cells in the solar panels deployed in those projects. While the move is aimed at reducing India's dependence on imports and strengthening the domestic solar manufacturing ecosystem, industry stakeholders say it has also exposed a critical supply gap. India currently lacks sufficient domestic cell manufacturing capacity to meet the rapidly growing demand for solar installations. In 2025-26, India added around 45 gigawatts (GW) of solar capacity. Against an annual solar module production of around 60-65 GW, India's solar cell manufacturing capacity stands at only about 30 GW. As a result, a significant portion of the country's module production has historically relied on imported cells. Even though the Domestic Content Requirement (DCR) has long been mandatory

The increase in CPI inflation comes a week after the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) left the policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25%, with the central bank lowering its growth forecast and raising its inflation view for 2026-27. On June 5, the RBI cut its GDP growth forecast for 2026-27 to 6.6% from 6.9% and raised the inflation projection to 5.1% from 4.6%, with Governor Sanjay Malhotra warning there are indications that average crude oil prices this fiscal would be "substantially higher" than the \$85 per barrel. As per the RBI's latest forecasts, inflation is seen averaging 4.2% in April-June, 5.1% in July-September, 5.9% in October-December, and 5.4% in January-March 2027. Over April-May, CPI inflation has averaged 3.7%. The RBI is mandated to target a CPI inflation of 4% in the medium-term in a range of 2-6%. As such, the forecasts show inflation reaching the upper bound of the RBI's target range in the last three months of 2026. Last week, the RBI also raised its expectations of core inflation to 4.7% from 4.4%. Core inflation measures the change in prices of non-food, non-fuel items, whose prices can be volatile. The movement in prices of non-food, non-fuel items, therefore, are seen as an indicator of underlying price pressures in the economy. Siddharth Upasani is a Deputy Associate Editor with The Indian Express. He reports primarily on data and the economy, looking for trends and changes in the former which paint a picture of the latter. Before The Indian Express, he worked at Moneycontrol and financial newswire Informist (previously called Cogencis). Outside of work, sports, fantasy football, and graphic novels keep him busy.



for rooftop solar installations under the PM Surya Ghar scheme, the recent extension of domestic cell sourcing norms to additional segments, including commercial and industrial projects, has significantly increased demand for solar modules manufactured using locally produced cells. Industry stakeholders say the sudden surge in demand has outpaced available domestic manufacturing capacity, creating a supply-demand mismatch. This has led to shortages of DCR-compliant modules and a sharp rise in prices, potentially slowing the rollout of rooftop solar systems and other distributed renewable energy projects across the country. Several vendors who install solar systems under the PM Surya Ghar scheme told The Indian Express that they are grappling with a severe shortage of DCR-compliant solar modules. They said that even when modules are available, prices have risen sharply. Vendors from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Odisha reported waiting periods of 25-30 days for DCR-compliant panels, with many approaching the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) seeking intervention.

"The industry is currently facing a severe shortage of DCR-certified solar modules. Leading manufacturers such as Adani, Waaree, Premier Energies and other major suppliers are operating at full capacity and have long waiting periods for deliveries," said Vijay Kumar, President of the Solar Ardent Association in Haryana and Managing Director of Indivm Energy Private Limited. According to Vijay, the supply crunch has left many rooftop solar installers across the country struggling to procure modules in the required quantities, leading to delays in project execution and uncertainty for consumers who have already received approvals or made advance payments. "Consumers are waiting for installations, vendors are unable to fulfil commitments, and project pipelines have slowed significantly," he said, adding that the rooftop solar ecosystem, which had gained considerable momentum over the past year, is now facing disruptions as supply has failed to keep pace with demand. Arshi Chadha, founder of Delhi-based Bridgeway Power, echoed similar concerns. "Availability is extremely limited and, even when modules are available, prices have risen by nearly 20-23% since the June 1 mandate came into effect," Chadha said. According to Chadha, the increase in DCR module prices has raised the cost of installing a rooftop solar system for a household by at least Rs 20,000, adding to the financial burden on both consumers and installers.

## Sameera Reddy's Mapusa market finds offer a glimpse into Goa's culinary traditions: 'Maddache Godd'



Rashi Chahal, nutritionist, La Femme, added that coconut jaggery is packed with vitamins (particularly B vitamins) and minerals such as potassium, magnesium, and zinc. According to her, it provides a natural source of energy and can help replenish electrolytes, making it a popular choice in tropical regions for its cooling properties and nutritional value. Inside Goa's cuisine Food author Rajyasree Sen, in her column Dishing It Out, wrote that Goan cuisine has a kick to it, from the chillies used, which is often tamed down by the use of coconut milk. She says that chillies feature generously across Goan recipes.

"The red ones go into the fiery peri peri and recheado masalas. Chicken cafreal, on the other hand, is green and herby, spiced with green chillies and coriander. Recheado, slathered over fresh fish and grilled or fried, is particularly addictive, best enjoyed on its own or with fluffy rice," she told indianexpress.com. According to Sen, the cuisine of Goa was developed by Catholic monks, with a "mix of Iberian with Saraswath Hindu sensibilities and flavours". Sen writes that Goa's Hindu Saraswat cuisine and Saraswat Brahmin cuisine are especially popular, and many home chefs now open up their houses to guests for meals in Goa. Gaurav Herwadkar, executive sous chef, Conrad Pune, added that it often involves traditional cooking techniques such as roasting, grinding, and slow cooking to enhance the flavours of the dishes. "Coconut is a staple ingredient in Goan cuisine, and various forms of coconut are used, including grated coconut, coconut milk, and coconut oil. Kokum, a dark purple fruit, is often used for its tangy flavour and natural colouring," he told indianexpress.com. Herwadkar added that the cuisine makes extensive use of spices such as mustard seeds, cumin, coriander, turmeric, and red chillies. The spices contribute to the bold and flavourful nature of the dishes.

## One of India's rarest wild cats spotted in Kuno: Why it matters

One of India's rarest wild cats, the Caracal, was recently captured on a camera trap in Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh, marking a rare sighting after decades. Often referred to as the "ghost of the grasslands" because of its elusive nature, the species has become increasingly difficult to spot due to habitat loss and shrinking grasslands. Conservationists and forest officials have hailed the sighting, announced around World Environment Day, as a positive sign for Kuno's ecological health and a potential indicator of a healthy predator-prey balance within the landscape.

While many reports have described the camera-trap image as the Caracal's "return" to Kuno, Conservationist Indrajit Ghorpade thinks otherwise. "It is inaccurate to say the Caracal disappeared and has now reappeared in Kuno," he says. "They have always been there. The problem is that they were neglected, rarely studied, and therefore rarely talked about or seen." According to Ghorpade, sporadic sightings have continued over the years across parts of central and western India, particularly from Ranthambore through the Chambal Valley landscape. Sightings have also been reported from areas around Panna, while isolated populations survive in parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. "The Caracal is naturally shy and elusive, living in harsh landscapes that are difficult to monitor," he explains. "That makes sightings extremely rare, but not impossible." A forgotten predator of India's grasslands The Caracal, like the cheetah, was historically trained by royalty for hunting," says Ghorpade. "Over time, its habitat shrank dramatically, leaving only small, isolated populations." He believes the species is among several grassland animals that have been overlooked in conservation planning for decades.

"I have always felt that grassland species such as the Great Indian Bustard, Jerdon's Courser, the Indian wolf, and the Caracal were neglected after Independence, unlike flagship species such as the tiger," he says. A rare wild cat called Caracal has been spotted in Kuno National Park in Sheopur district in Madhya Pradesh after several decades, marking a significant milestone in the state's wildlife con-



servation efforts. The sighting came during a recent camera trap survey. According to Ghorpade, prey availability will ultimately determine whether Caracal populations can survive and expand. "In my opinion, prey availability determines their range," he says. "Like wolves, they may move outside protected areas in search of food if resources are insufficient." The recent sighting could indicate that habitat protection efforts are beginning to create conditions where rare species have a better chance of survival. "With increasing emphasis on habitat protection and the creation of new sanctuaries, ecosystems have an opportunity to recover," says Ghorpade. "Biodiversity should rebound if these landscapes continue to receive protection and remain relatively undisturbed by human activity." Kuno's low human footprint, interconnected habitats, and ongoing conservation efforts may be contributing to a more favourable environment for elusive predators such as the Caracal. However, Ghorpade underlined that there has been no serious census, study, or research programme for many endangered species. "There is a need for a structured, long-term conservation programme similar to those developed for tigers and, more recently, the Great Indian Bustard. Such efforts would include dedicated population monitoring, habitat management, scientific research, and public awareness initiatives," he emphasises.

## David Hockney, the British artist who went in search of Californian colour, dies at 88

Initially, almost as much as his paintings, Hockney was known for his own image — thick-rimmed spectacles, peroxide hair, shiny gold jacket — which became a symbol of Britain's Swinging Sixties. As an art student in the northern English city of Bradford — where he was born to an accountancy clerk father and a devout Methodist mother — Hockney rebelled against convention. He gave titles to his abstract paintings such as "Going to be a Queen for Tonight" and "Doll Boy" at a time when homosexuality was punishable by prison.

To continue his studies, in 1959 he moved to London where he had a meteoric rise in the British pop art movement and rubbed shoulders with stars from dancer Rudolf Nureyev to Mick Jagger. But Hockney yearned for the excitement he saw in the work of American artists. Using money from the sale of his art, he visited New York for the first time in 1961 — where he became a friend of Andy Warhol — and moved to California three years later. "I thought people who produced such work must live in colour, so I went in search of it," he is quoted as saying in a biography written by art critic and friend Peter Adam. One of Britain's greatest ever artists, a Yorkshireman to his bootstraps, my neighbour in Kensington (often saw him on local manoeuvres, albeit in a wheelchair more recently) and a wonderful character. Loved his quote: 'Laugh a lot, it clears the lungs.' "I had spent the first 20 years of my life in the gothic gloom of the North. Here I felt free." His pictures of swimming pools and naked men in showers became icons of a sun-drenched lifestyle that he documented with luminous acrylic paint before dividing his time between Los Angeles, London and Paris in the late 1960s and 1970s.

He remained unpretentious despite his success. "I am actually still a student," he told Adam. "I just happen to have quite a lot of credit cards in my pocket." In 1985, when he was invited to the White House to dine with President Ronald Reagan, Prince Charles and Princess Diana, he was held up for half an hour by security officers because he was the only guest to arrive on foot, his biographer wrote.

'YOU DON'T RETIRE DOING THIS' Hockney's images of love, sex and material wealth led to claims by some art critics that his work was trivial. But he won greater renown than any other British artist of the 20th century. One of his most famous paintings, "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)" — showing a figure swimming underwater and a man gazing into the pool — sold for \$90.3 million in 2018, the most expensive work by a living artist sold at auction at the time.

As he grew older and his life turned more domestic, dogs replaced men in Hockney's work, at a time when many of his friends were dying of AIDS. He said he cried for two days when Stanley, one of his beloved dachshunds, died in 2001, having been immortalised in scores of paintings and sketches. He brought us such joyful, fun, beautiful art. In the late 1990s, Hockney began returning more frequently to visit his mother in the northern English county of Yorkshire, where he had grown up, and a terminally ill friend en-

couraged him to paint the local landscapes. Feeling increasingly lonely, he moved from California to the seaside town of Bridlington on England's North Sea coast. For a decade he painted clumps of bare trees in winter, fields full of ripe crops and tracks stretching towards the gentle rolling hills of the Yorkshire Wolds region. It was the most productive period of his entire career as he rushed to capture scenes that, he said, changed more dramatically with the seasons than did those of California. "You don't retire doing this," he told the BBC in his broad Yorkshire accent when asked about his unflinching energy. "You just do it until you fall over."

The former enfant terrible of British art, a cigarette almost always in his hand, never stopped trying new techniques. He used faxes to share his work and then iPads to produce it. His Yorkshire paintings led to a stained-glass window for Westminster Abbey, in central London. In 2018, Hockney bought a farmhouse in Normandy, in northern France, and turned his eye to the fields and flowers of his garden there. The 90-metre-long "A Year in Normandie" frieze was inspired by the nearly 1,000-year-old Bayeux Tapestry. Hockney's work ethic — instilled in him from getting up daily at 6 o'clock to work in hospitals for two years, when he refused to do his military service in the army — barely relented in his later years. "I tend to think that you should work every day," he said. "And I do."

## Tech layoffs fuel massive surge in AI and GenAI upskilling programs

Hyderabad: With layoffs sweeping across the IT and Financial tech sector as companies increasingly shift towards AI-driven automation into their operations, the focus now shifted to skilling and upskilling in artificial intelligence and GenAI. In response to the situation, the educational institutions and edu-tech companies have come up with programmes that help students and professionals secure their future. The International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) — Hyderabad, in association with the TalentSprint, is offering a PG certificate programme in AI and ML. This programme is aimed to empower careers of the mid to senior level professionals.

Bridge module, programming, math foundations, and classical algorithms, deep learning, advanced deep learning, generative AI and agentic systems, experiential learning and industry hackathons are part of the curriculum. For registration and more details, visit the link <https://talentsprint.com/>. The IIT Guwahati has also launched a unique MTech. degree program in Robotics and Artificial intelligence, designed for both fresh graduates and working professionals aiming to enhance their skills on AI-driven robotics systems.

## TCS ties up with Anthropic for AI adoption

TCS will setup a dedicated Business Unit focused on delivering strong customer value propositions, joint industry solutions and deep AI expertise on the Claude family of models through early access to Claude models, TCS said. "In regulated industries, most AI initiatives stall at the pilot stage, where the requirements for accuracy, auditability and oversight are far more stringent, and the consequences of error significantly higher. This partnership is designed to overcome those barriers," it said in a statement.

Combining TCS' governance, controls and implementation expertise will enable enterprises to deploy Claude confidently in production, not just in experimentation, TCS said. Dario Amodei, Co-founder and CEO, Anthropic, said, "We built Claude to be safe, trusted, and helpful, particularly in contexts where accuracy matters most. This partnership deepens our commitment to India, our second-largest market, with TCS bringing Claude to enterprises and professionals across the region and globally, including 50,000 of its employees." As a global premier partner in the Claude Partner Network, TCS will bring Claude models to enterprises that demand accuracy, deep integration, resilience and strong governance, TCS said. Combining scaled internal deployment, joint go-to-market offerings, industry co-innovation, and workforce enablement, the partnership gives clients a practical path to enterprise-wide adoption and measurable outcomes, it said. TCS said it will equip 50,000 associates across engineering, finance, legal, marketing, and sales with Claude through enterprise-wide licensing. By de-

ploying Claude internally, TCS will gain first-hand experience to transform its own operations while applying those insights to drive client success, TCS said.

TCS and Anthropic will jointly go to market with AI solutions and services across industries including highly regulated sectors, such as financial services, public services, life sciences, healthcare, aviation, telecom, and medtech, it said. Together, they will co-innovate solutions for domain-specific workflows, modernisation, and customer experience transformation, backed by TCS' consulting, engineering, and managed services capabilities, it said.

K Krithivasan, CEO and MD, TCS, said, "Enterprise AI value comes from understanding business context, orchestrating complex systems, and applying deep AI engineering talent. By combining Claude with our industry expertise, engineering rigor, and large-scale transformation capabilities, we will help customers move faster to production, especially in industries where trust, resilience, and regulatory discipline are critical." "This partnership reflects TCS' broader strategy to help clients become perpetually adaptive enterprises by turning frontier AI into transformation at enterprise scale," he said. N Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons, said, "This partnership reflects our shared conviction that AI will be foundational and transformative for enterprises worldwide. By combining Anthropic's capabilities with Tata Group's scale, trusted relationships, and nation-building commitment, we will accelerate enterprise re-invention and equip India's youth with the skills to lead in the

## Vaibhav Sooryavanshi backs process, stays confident ahead of Zimbabwe T20Is



Harare: Acknowledging that the last four months have been a rollercoaster of 'ups and downs,' teenage Indian batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi said his confidence still remains intact and he is focused on trusting his process ahead of the three-match T20I series against Zimbabwe starting on Thursday. Sooryavanshi, 15, made history during India's 4-0 T20I series defeat in England by becoming the country's youngest-ever international cricketer and breaking Sachin Tendulkar's long-standing record. However, after failing to cross 20 in three innings, he was dropped for the final match of the series in Southampton.

"Yes, kaafi ups and downs aaye hain 4 mahine mein (there have been several ups and down in the last four months). It's part of cricket, it will keep happening. But I have to follow the process and give my 100 per cent for the

team. "It's an obvious thing that whatever I want (guidance etc), the coaches are making it available and whatever practice I require I am getting that. Feeling very good, there is confidence also," said Sooryavanshi in a video posted on bcci.tv. Through the upcoming series against Zimbabwe, Sooryavanshi is also making a return to the Harare Sports Club, where he smashed a match-winning 175 off 80 balls against England in the Under-19 World Cup final in February this year to help India lift the trophy. "It's a very memorable ground for me. Just four months back, we had played the U-19 World Cup Final and won, so a very special ground. To represent India is everyone's dream and it's a very special moment. "I'm playing on a ground where we won the U-19 World Cup four months back and made history (and) to return to the ground and play here will be an altogether different feeling... really enjoying it," added Sooryavanshi. With senior opener Sanju Samson rested, Sooryavanshi is expected to feature in the top order as India look to bounce back from consecutive T20 series defeats in Ireland and England. "The pitches and the conditions here, I've got a fair idea about them when I last played here during the U-19 World Cup.

So, I will try what all I gathered during that tournament to apply those learnings during the matches now and do well. "I will back my practice which I have done so far and try to back my game and whatever contribution I can make for the team I will try to give that. I have played two matches on this ground (and) it went well. I will try to carry it forward," concluded Sooryavanshi.

## Record over 1.7 bn people watched FIFA WC related videos on YouTube: Sundar Pichai

New Delhi: Google CEO Sundar Pichai said on Wednesday that YouTube drew over 1.7 billion unique global viewers to watch World Cup-related videos and lifted lifetime views of related content to over 200 billion. "It was our most viewed World Cup ever on YouTube, bringing lifetime views of related content to over 200 billion!," Google CEO said on X. CEO, YouTube Neal Mohan's post was shared by Pichai to mention additional audience figures.

Mohan said that the platform's first Creator Cup drew over 10 million live views. He also mentioned over 2.5 million views "from our creator cohort who brought iconic commentary and perspectives throughout the tournament," in his X post. "Congrats on an incredible championship, Spain! And a huge thanks to our partners, creators and teams at YouTube who made the fan experience unlike any other," the post said. US President Donald Trump said that over 6.5 million spectators had attended the tournament, exceeding the combined attendance of the previous two World Cups. Trump called the tournament "the most successful sporting event, maybe in the history of the world", adding that fans from 200 countries attended 104 matches across 16 cities in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The FIFA World Cup disrupted US workplaces and may have shaved as



much as \$11.7 billion off the country's productivity as millions of workers adjusted their schedules to watch matches, according to a report. The tournament's global impact was nearly \$17 billion, due to higher absenteeism, late arrivals and early departures during the competition, the data from UKG showed. In addition, the data from workplace platform Envoy showed highest work disruption coming the day after the United States men's team was eliminated from the tournament. Office attendance dropped 26 per cent on July 7, while employee entries dropped 11.5 per cent.

## Zimbabwe names uncapped Tafadzwa Tsiga in T20I squad for India series



Harare: Uncapped wicketkeeper-batter Tafadzwa Tsiga has earned his maiden T20I call-up, while all-rounder Wessly Madhevere and pacer Newman Nyamhuri returned to the 15-member Zimbabwe squad for the three-match series against India, starting here on Thursday. The trio come into the squad in place of Clive Madande, Tinotenda Maposa, and Tashinga Musekiwa, who were part of the side that recently faced Bangladesh. All three matches of the series will be played at the Harare

Tsiga, who has represented Zimbabwe in 10 Tests,

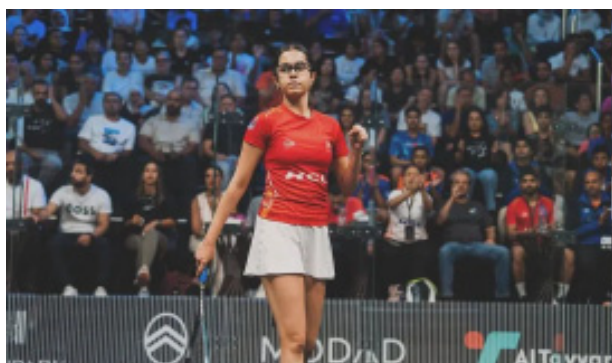
is yet to make his white-ball international debut. Madhevere, a regular in the Test and ODI setups during the Bangladesh series, returns to the shortest format for the first time since July 2025, and has played 79 T20Is so far. Meanwhile, Nyamhuri makes a comeback after recovering from a niggles that curtailed his participation during the ODIs against Bangladesh earlier this month. Tanaka Chivanga, who was brought in as Nyamhuri's replacement and featured in the third ODI, has managed to retain his spot. Sikandar Raza will continue to lead Zimbabwe, who secured a historic innings win in the sole Test and clinched the ODI series 2-1 before conceding the T20I series 1-2. The hosts will face a formidable task against reigning T20 World Cup champions India, who are coming off a 2-0 defeat in Ireland and a 4-0 loss in England. The two teams last met during the T20 World Cup Super Eight stage, where India secured a 72-run win in Chennai over Zimbabwe, who had earlier shocked Australia to reach the round of eight. Zimbabwe squad: Sikandar Raza (captain), Brian Bennett, Ryan Burl, Tanaka Chivanga, Ben Curran, Brad Evans, Wessly Madhevere, Tadiwanashe Marumani (wk), Wellington Masakadza, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Richard Ngarava, Newman Nyamhuri, Milton Shumba, Tafadzwa Tsiga (wk).

## Anahat, Aryaveer advance to World Squash Junior Championships pre-quarterfinals

Anahat, Aryaveer advance to round-of-16 in World Junior squash Ontario: India's Anahat Singh and Aryaveer Dewan advanced to the round-of-16 at the World Squash Junior Individual Championships.

Women's top seed Anahat, who is hoping to become India's first-ever junior world champion, brushed aside Hong Kong's Pui Yin Chole Lo in straight games in the round-of-32, and will next meet Malaysian 13/16 seed Doyce Ye San Lee Aryaveer, seeded 5/8, eased past South African Joseph Feast in straight games in the round-of-32, and will take on American 9/12 seed Yaseen Shalaby next.

Meanwhile, Gurveer Singh, Yusha Nafees, Saanvi Kalanki, Rudra Singh and Anika Dubey lost to higher-seeded opponents. Among the drama from Day 2 action, it was Brazil's Laura Silva, who stole the show, as she staged an incredible comeback from 2-0 down to win 3-2, booking her place in the last 16. The Brazilian wasn't the only player to survive a second-round scare, as Malaysia's Harlecin Tan came back from 2-1 down against Canada's Wing Kai Gladys Ho to progress into the next round. Meanwhile, England's Dylan Roberts progressed after a win against Malaysia's Ivan Jia Yu Chang, and Hong Kong, China's Helen Tang also secured a place in the last 16 after beating Australia's Sarbani Maitra in three games, 11-6, 11-3, 11-3. Elsewhere, Pakistan's Nauman Khan beat England's Gabriel Chak 3-1; Malaysia's Doyce Ye San Lee reached the last 16 after beating the Netherlands' Renske Huntelaar; Mohammed



Alnasfan of Saudi Arabia progressed after a straight-game victory over Japan's Shunsaku Kariyazono; Egypt's Habiba Rizk moved into the last 16 with a win over France's Leelou Laporte; Belgium's Savannah Moxham progressed after a win against India's Saanvi Kalanki.

Results (Round of 32): Men: 5/8-Aryaveer Dewan bt Joseph Feast (RSA) 11-4, 11-3, 11-3; 2-Adam Hawal (Egy) bt Gurveer Singh 11-6, 11-8, 11-3; 5/8-Nickhileswar Moganasundharam (Mas) bt Yusha Nafees 11-9, 11-7, 11-8. Women: 5/8-Savannah Moxham (Bel) bt Saanvi Kalanki 11-7, 11-4, 11-2; 3/4-Barb Sameh (Egy) bt Rudra Singh 11-5, 11-6, 11-1; Tsz Ching Cheung (HK) bt Anika Dubey 11-6, 11-7, 11-5; 1-Anahat Singh bt Pui Yin Chole Lo (HK) 11-3, 11-1, 11-3.

## Arnolds of Andhra: Kondavelagada, Amadalavalasa & Godalam's weightlifting wizards



Ustad is the title bestowed on the winner of Sangidi Rallu, a traditional strength contest held during Pongal in village festivals of northern Andhra Pradesh. Exported worldwide, black granite is a popular stone of the region. It has been used for years to carve the Sangidi Rallu, a torus weighing 80-220 Kg. Over time, that folk contest evolved into organised weightlifting in Kondavelagada (pr: kon-duh-wella-gadaa), a village in Vizianagaram district. The village has produced 20 national and 13 international weightlifters, with successive generations securing government jobs through sport, and lifting their families out of poverty.

Among the latest are sisters Bellana Bhargavi (17) and Bellana Harika (19), who won gold medals at the Commonwealth Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Samoa in April 2026. Next week, the tiny village will be in the spotlight once again when Ajay Babu – the son of Valluri Srinivasa Rao, a weightlifting pioneer in these parts – steps on the platform at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow later this month. Ajay, who is in Glasgow currently, spoke to the Indian Express about continuing a tradition. "In 2010, my father won a bronze medal, and in 2014 Santoshi Matsa claimed silver at the Commonwealth Games. I want to better that and win gold, and participate in the Olympics." The story of Kondavelagada's remarkable production line began more than three decades ago. In 1991, a young Valluri Srinivasa Rao, Annapurna Challa and her elder brother Ramu were among the many children captivated by the annual Sangidi Rallu competition. Winning it was a matter of immense pride, and the contest drew almost the entire village. Around the same time, weightlifting was gaining popularity across northern Andhra. Inspired by what they had seen elsewhere, a few elderly villagers decided to bring proper weightlifting equipment to Kondavelagada. That decision changed the village's future. Ramu, whose movement had been restricted by polio, never had the opportunity to become a competitive weightlifter. But he had developed a fascination for physical strength after watching bodybuilders on Doordarshan. Rao, meanwhile, inherited his father's love for Sangidi Rallu and tried his hand at the village contest, though without much success. The two friends found another outlet. Every morning, after the regular Sangidi Rallu participants finished training around seven or eight o'clock, they would quietly slip into the gym and experiment with the new equipment. Flower cultivation – marigold, roses, crossandra, was the village's primary occupation, and Rao's family depended on it for a living. Morning training was followed by long hours in the fields. "From morning to evening, we worked in the flower fields," Rao (47) recalled with a smile. "School was optional." While training, Rao observed older lifters closely, copying their techniques and picking up whatever advice they were willing to offer. Before long, he entered a district-level competition. Despite having no formal coaching, he won. That victory changed everything.

"M.S. Sharma, who was the district weightlifting coach, came home and asked my parents to send me to his academy," Rao said. "They were thrilled after that district medal and agreed immediately." Challa Ramu with Valluri Srinivas Rao and a weightlifter. (Special arrangement) Challa Ramu with Valluri Srinivas Rao and a weightlifter. (Special arrangement) Life, however, did not become any easier. "I used to cycle from the village to Vizianagaram every day to sell flowers. After that, I would go for training." In 1996, Vizianagaram hosted the National Weightlifting Championships. Rao, Ramu and Annapurna travelled to watch India's best lifters compete. What they witnessed left a lasting impression. "Our jaws dropped," Ramu recalled. "It wasn't just men competing. Women were lifting weights, too." For Annapurna, that moment proved life-changing. "My sister started lifting weights soon after," Ramu said. "Within a couple of years, she became a national champion in the rural championships, while Rao became state champion." Their progress attracted the attention of the Sports Authority of India (SAI). When Sharma was transferred to the SAI centre in Eluru, he invited both Rao and Annapurna to continue training under him. They accepted immediately. Just days before they were due to leave for Eluru in 1999, Annapurna died after falling into an open well on the family's farm. Her death devastated not only the family but the entire village, which had celebrated her rise as one of its own. Rao no longer wanted to leave. "The whole village had to convince him," Ramu recalled. "There were times when his family didn't even have enough food. We told him that if he went to Eluru, he would at least get three meals a day, become stronger and continue weightlifting." The argument eventually persuaded him. Eluru transformed Rao's career. Under Sharma, the farmer's son developed into one of Andhra Pradesh's leading weightlifters, winning silver medals at the National Games in Visakhapatnam (2002) and the inaugural Afro-Asian Championships (2003) in Hyderabad. Challa Ramu's gym in Kondavelagada. (Special Arrangement) Challa Ramu's gym in Kondavelagada. (Special Arrangement) Back home, his success sparked a ripple effect. Children who had watched Rao grow up now wanted to follow the same path. For Ramu, though, the years after Annapurna's death were far more difficult. "For three or four years, I didn't know what I was doing," he said. Then one day, village elders approached him with a proposal. "We'll help you set up a gym," they told me. "Will you teach our children?"

He accepted. "When Rao and Annapurna trained under Sharma in Vizianagaram, I was always there. I learned the techniques, nutrition, training loads—everything by watching. When the village trusted me with its children, I couldn't say no. That faith turned my grief into strength." By 2005, Kondavelagada had its own coaching centre. And soon, Ramu's trainees were winning national medals. Today, Rao has taken voluntary retirement from the Army and has returned to the village, where he and Ramu are building an-

other gym – determined to ensure the next generation does not have to leave home to chase their dreams. Weightlifting is a route out of poverty with government jobs for medallists. "Our village has around 3,000 people," Rao said. "Most families still depend on farming. Many take loans just to provide proper nutrition for their children. We can only do so much ourselves. A weightlifter needs Rs 50,000 to 60,000 every month for food and training. Where will these farmers find that kind of money?" Before Kondavelagada became a weightlifting nursery, there was Amadalavalasa (Pr: Amm-duh-luh-vuhluh-saaa) in the neighbouring Srikakulam district. Its Maruthi Yuvajana Vyayama Mandali, produced eight international and 46 national weightlifters, making it the region's original weightlifting powerhouse. Founded in 1969 by tailor K. Amminaidu, the gym laid the foundation for northern Andhra's weightlifting culture. Amminaidu is now 86, partially deaf, and lives a quiet life. He is looked after by his five children, three of whom are weightlifters. "Our inspiration was Kodi Rammurthy Naidu," Amminaidu said. His son Madhusudhan added: "Even today, whenever someone joins us, or when we go to Sangidi Rallu competitions to identify youngsters, we invoke Rammurthy's name as a blessing for a successful career." The region's folklore says Kodi Rammurthy Naidu, from Veeragattam near the Odisha border, discovered an idol of Lord Hanuman while bathing in a pond in the late 1800s. Inspired by the deity, he resolved to become the strongest man in the world. Maruthi Yuvajana Vyayama Mandali in Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district. (Express photo) Maruthi Yuvajana Vyayama Mandali in Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district. (Express photo) "He had a special breathing technique that allowed an elephant to walk across wooden planks placed on his chest," former weightlifter Mugithi Appalanaidu recalled a story that's now a part of the folklore. "The Vizianagaram king was so impressed that he rewarded him with gold and jewels, and sent him to England and China to display his feats of strength and challenge wrestlers there." Rammurthy's exploits inspired and he also established a gym in Vizianagaram, where his methods were passed down to students who carried them across the region. One of those inspired was Amminaidu, a former kusti wrestler himself. "In those days, we pushed a rod through two stones and lifted it—that was our weightlifting," he recalled. "I travelled across the region looking for better facilities, coaches and equipment."

Eventually, they persuaded R. Suryanarayana of Andhra University, who had trained under Russian coaches, to help them. They also found a fabricator in Rajahmundry capable of building modern weightlifting equipment. As medals followed, so did government jobs. Among those inspired was Neelamsetty Appanna, who turned to coaching after retiring from competition. He travelled to the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NSNIS), Patiala, for a one-year coaching diploma. There, a lecturer offered advice that would transform the region. "We may soon have women competing in weightlifting," he told Appanna. "Find girls who are interested." Maruthi Yuvajana Vyayama Mandali in Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district. (Express photo) Maruthi Yuvajana Vyayama Mandali in Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district. (Express photo) Back in Vooavanipeta, Appanna and Vishwanatham, the former secretary of the Srikakulam Weightlifting Association, began doing exactly that. "Sometimes parents tried to assault us," he laughed. "They asked who would marry their daughters if they started lifting weights." Eventually, they changed strategy and focused on children aged nine to 12. Vishwanatham paid for their food from his own pocket to ensure they had enough nutrition to train. "Most of them came from very poor families." One day, two sisters from the railway colony walked into their lives. The elder was Karnam Narsamma. The younger was nine-year-old Karnam Malleswari. After training under Appanna for a couple of years, Malleswari joined the Maruthi Gym. "She was a tiny girl peeping through the doors," recalled Appalanaidu. "We told her she shouldn't be watching semi-naked men train. But Amminaidu took her in and started teaching her." The little girl would go on to become India's first woman Olympic medallist, winning bronze at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Her success, along with that of several others from the region, appeared to herald a golden era. It didn't last.

As of today, only seven weightlifters are from the Maruthi gym. There are about 3-4 preparing for national level from the region said Madhusudhan. "We did everything we could. But none of those who got government jobs came back to build gyms or help the next generation. We never received recognition, and neither did our village," said Vishwanatham. Appanna still remembers the sacrifices. "I travelled with the team in general compartments. The government paid only half of our expenses. The rest came from our own pockets. I was always worried about the safety of those girls while travelling" The Maruthi Gym now faces another challenge. "Today's weightlifters need modern equipment, but we simply don't have the money," Madhusudhan said. "We don't know what else to do. But spreading the culture of weightlifting is my father's legacy. As long as we can, we'll continue."

\*\*\* Tilaka Dhananjaya Kumar, who won bronze at the National Weightlifting Championships in Pondicherry in 1992, secured a government job as a teacher and was posted in his hometown of Godalam, a remote hamlet of around 1,200 people in Srikakulam district, barely four kilometres from the Bay of Bengal. Like Kondavelagada and Amadalavalasa before it, Godalam became another village where weightlifting offered a route out of poverty. For Dhananjaya, reaching a gym was once a struggle. There was no road connecting his village to Maruthi Gym, forcing him to hitch rides to Kottabommali, around 13 kilometres away, where the nearest railway station was located. "I travelled there in the morning to train, stayed overnight and returned home the next evening," he recalled. Weightlifting became Dhananjaya's way out. After securing his teaching job, he established a gym in Godalam, determined to give local children the opportunities he never had. "There are only two things I know — teaching and weightlifting. If these children reach the national level and get government jobs, their lives, and this region, will improve." Every year, veteran coaches and former weightlifters from across Srikakulam gather for Sangati Rallu and local weightlifting competitions with 60-65 registrations. "It's almost like an annual reunion," Madhusudhan said. "That's where we first noticed Dhananjaya arriving with children from his region." But sustaining momentum got difficult. Since being promoted to a high-school teacher, Dhananjaya has struggled to devote the same amount of time to coaching. "Earlier, I trained around 15 or 16 children. Now I'm down to three or four. That helps maintain quality, but our equipment has become rusty and needs replacing." He paused, unsure of what the future held. The equipment may have rusted, the gyms may be ageing, and the coaches may no longer have the means they once did. But every year, when the Sangidi Rallu competition returns, so does the hope that another child will discover a different future.

## Dhurandhar 2 actor recalls accidentally injuring Ranveer Singh during action scene, reveals actor's 'humanity': 'I was scared, he hugged me'



During various interactions, Ranveer Singh had made one thing clear — that he worked extremely hard for Dhurandhar. The film's recently released second part is currently on a spree of breaking box office records. But even during the film's intense action sequences, Ranveer never let go of his humility. Recently, his co-star in Dhurandhar 2, Gursewak Singh, shared one such instance when the actor, despite being injured on set, continued to shoot and also motivated Gursewak, who was hurt during the sequence. Gursewak took to Instagram to share photos with Ranveer and wrote in Hindi, "Why brother Ranveer Singh is such a lovely person and brilliant artist, let me tell you a story. We were shooting an action scene at Amritsar's plane house, which is also in the movie. I was behind Ranveer Singh and I had a bomb that I had to go ahead and set."

He went on to share, "Then I had to go to the tractor

and protect myself between the tyres, and then Ranveer had to cover me, as told by action master. We had quite a few rehearsals and everything went perfectly. But don't know how I got wrong and it took 2 seconds to set the bomb. As soon as I left there, me and Ranveer brother had a big collision — like something would hit at 70 speed. I fell into the tyres, and Ranveer fell on me." The actor shared that both he and Ranveer were injured. "His gun hit my stomach and my gun hose hit his elbow. He got up and moved out there. He was hurt too, but I fainted, and I was scared he might have been hurt more," he said.

Gursewak added that the entire crew rushed to check on Ranveer after the accident and only seconds later realised that he too was injured. A doctor was immediately called in, and director Aditya Dhar also rushed to his aid. The doctor informed the team that Gursewak had suffered an injury to his stomach and had swelling. Meanwhile, Aditya consoled him and said, "It happens in action, don't you be afraid". I told him that Ranveer Singh sir also got hurt. He said, 'No problem, you relax, it's part of the shoot' and told the doctor to check properly." After Ranveer got to know about Gursewak's condition, he too rushed to meet him. The actor shared, "I said in fear, 'Sir, sorry, it was my fault.' but Ranveer told me 'never mind,' and gave him a hug."

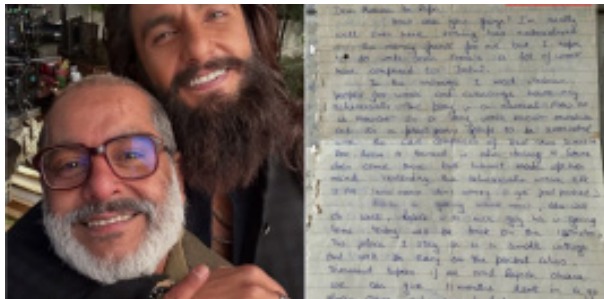
Gursewak went on to reveal that despite his injury, Ranveer continued to shoot and even motivated him to do the same. He said, "My eyes were teary- I was totally emotional with their love. Then he saw my injury and asked, 'Can you shoot or do want a break?' I also dared and said, 'It's the last scene, when you're doing it, I'll do it too'. I asked, 'Sir, how hurt are you?', He said, 'Elbow will have a little trouble exercising, but never mind — let's do the scene.' Then we finished that scene. This is the third day of shoot. After that we shot for 35 more days." Lauding Ranveer, he further wrote, "From that day till the release of the movie, Ranveer Singh never let me feel like I made a mistake. This is what humanity is... Love... Take care of each other. I guess this is why he's a star..."

## Dhurandhar star Gaurav Gera shares emotional 1998 letter from his days of struggle in a Mumbai cottage: 'Future is bright'

Actor Gaurav Gera, who plays Mohammad Aalam in Dhurandhar: The Revenge, has been receiving widespread praise for his performance in the film. As the spy-thriller continues to do well at the box office, the actor recently shared a very personal moment from his early days in Mumbai. On Sunday, Gaurav took to his Instagram account to post pictures of a handwritten letter he had written to his parents back in 1998, soon after he moved from Delhi to Mumbai to pursue a career in acting. In his post, Gaurav reflected on his 28-year journey and how much has changed over time.

Through the letter, Gaurav shared details about his simple life back then. In the letter, he spoke about living in a small cottage with a friend to manage expenses and learning to survive in a new city. Talking about his hopes at the time, he had written, "Other expenses include telephone, electricity, gas, and water bills, and food. Mumma and Papa, the future is bright, but I still have a lot to learn," demonstrating his patience and belief in his dreams.

He also wrote a caption that read: "This letter to my parents — 3rd Dec 1998 ... less than a month after I moved to Mumbai ... this was 28 years ago ... so no emails, let-



ters ... of course, after that, lots of TV, some films, ad films, musical plays, radio, TikTok, Reels ... it's been a lovely journey with ups and downs ... God has been kind ... but this Dhurandhar ... dunno what the future holds ... but I want to thank my 23-year-old self for staying hopeful and Ma Pa for endless support #DhurandharTheRevenge." Dhurandhar: The Revenge, directed by Aditya Dhar and starring Ranveer Singh, released on March 19 and continues to perform strongly at the box office.

## Ustaad Bhagat Singh Box Office Collection Day 4: Pawan Kalyan film bombs, struggles to cross Rs 90 cr mark; earns less than Hari Hara Veera Mallu



If Ustaad Bhagat Singh's performance continues this way, it will become an even bigger box-office bomb than Pawan Kalyan's globally panned Hari Hara Veera Mallu (2025)

Ustaad Bhagat Singh Box Office Collection Day 4: In a significant setback for Telugu star Pawan Kalyan, his latest action comedy Ustaad Bhagat Singh has completed its opening weekend without crossing even the Rs 90 crore mark globally. Unfortunately, the movie hasn't even recorded a two-digit daily collection since the second day of its release, and its poor performance continued on Sunday, March 22, as it earned just a few crores more than what the Telugu version of director Aditya Dhar's Ranveer Singh-led Dhurandhar: The Revenge minted on the same day.

If Ustaad Bhagat Singh's performance continues this way, it will become an even bigger box-office bomb than

Pawan Kalyan's globally panned Hari Hara Veera Mallu (2025). On Sunday, the movie recorded an India net collection of just Rs 8 crore across 3,200 shows, taking its total domestic earnings to Rs 60.80 crore, according to industry tracker Sacnilk. On the same day, the Telugu version of Dhurandhar 2 earned Rs 5.25 crore, besides its original Hindi edition's Rs 107 crore.

Dhurandhar 2 worldwide box office collection, all records broken till now: Biggest Hindi opener; rare back-to-back Rs 100 cr days; fastest to cross Rs 500 cr mark Ustaad Bhagat Singh's worldwide gross currently stands at Rs 80.75 crore. During the day, the action comedy witnessed an overall occupancy of 33.96 per cent in the Telugu market. While the morning shows commenced with 21 per cent occupancy, the rate fluctuated as the day progressed, reaching 41.38 per cent in the afternoon, 44.54 per cent in the evening, and 28.92 per cent during night screenings.

Worse still, the action comedy is performing worse than Pawan Kalyan's most recent box-office bomb, Hari Hara Veera Mallu. Although the two movies opened at the same Rs 34.75 crore (both on Thursdays), Hari Hara Veera Mallu experienced a steep decline in its daily earnings to Rs 8 crore on Friday. However, it improved its collection slightly and earned Rs 9.15 crore and Rs 10.60 crore on Saturday and Sunday, respectively. Even as Ustaad Bhagat Singh fared better than Hari Hara Veera Mallu on its first Friday with Rs 9 crore, it declined afterwards, collecting only Rs 9.05 crore and Rs 8 crore in the domestic market on Saturday and Sunday, respectively. Thus, while Hari Hara Veera Mallu's opening weekend nett collection stood at Rs 19.75 crore, Ustaad Bhagat Singh's was Rs 17.05 crore. Hari Hara Veera Mallu grossed Rs 116.88 crore in its lifetime against a mammoth budget of Rs 300 crore. Helmed by Harish Shankar, Ustaad Bhagat Singh had opened to largely negative reviews from all quarters. In her review, SCREEN's Yashaswini Sri wrote, "Pawan Kalyan's movie had every reason to work.

## Resignation of Union Education Minister: A Victory for Democracy and the Voice of India's Students

"The resignation of Union Education Minister Shri Dharmendra Pradhan marks a significant moment for Indian democracy. It reaffirms that no government can afford to ignore the aspirations, concerns, and collective voice of millions of students and young people across the country." "This development stands as a testament to the power of democratic accountability and the unwavering struggle for justice. It also reflects the growing demand for transparency, fairness, and integrity in the education system." "I sincerely congratulate Shri Rahul Gandhi, whose consistent and fearless efforts—both inside Parliament and among the people—kept the concerns of students and youth at the forefront of the national discourse. His unwavering commitment to safeguarding the future of India's youth has inspired millions and strengthened the faith of young people in democratic values." "This is not merely a political development; it is a victory for every student who raised their voice, every parent who stood by their children, and every citizen who believes that governments must remain accountable to the people." "The Telangana Mahila Congress reaffirms its unwavering support for the rights of students, educational reforms, constitutional values, and democratic principles. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Shri Rahul Gandhi in every struggle to protect the future of India's youth and strengthen our democracy." "Jai Congress! Jai Hind!" "K. Shailaja" Vice President" Telangana Mahila Congress



## 'I gave Ranveer Singh a look...': Rakesh Bedi reveals Dhurandhar easter eggs audiences missed, how he set up Dhurandhar 2's biggest twist

The comical, yet equally shrewd and menacing character of Rakesh Bedi's politician Jameel Jamali in Dhurandhar 2 has garnered praise from all quarters. In a recent interaction, Rakesh opened up about how he prepared for the role and revealed that he had been subtly hinting at the major plot twist in Dhurandhar 2 right from the beginning.

Warning: Spoiler alert. Speaking to CNN-News18, Rakesh admitted that he was aware of his character's graph from the very start and understood how Jamali was manipulating Ranveer Singh's Hamza to fulfil his own political motives while making him believe he was in control. He said, "I knew the graph of my character from the beginning, otherwise how I would have craft it? There are a few looks that I have given to Ranveer in the first part when I see him for the first time or when I am sitting in the car and I look at him, I am noticing him in that moment. In many places in the previous film, I have given these looks to Ranveer because in the film, Ranveer doesn't know, but I know that he is my asset and I have to work on him."

He added, "And then the planning starts that how without Ranveer even knowing it, I start eliminating one person after another through him, eventually taking Ranveer to the top. I let Ranveer think that he is using me, but it is actually that I am using him the way I want to." When asked how he prepared for the shrewd character of a Pakistani politician, Rakesh admitted that he studied several real-life figures. He said, "I studied a lot of Pakistani politicians for this role." Recently, Pakistani politician Nabil Gabol claimed that Rakesh's character is based on him. Responding to this, the actor said, "The one politician who thinks I studied him for this role, he



has a misunderstanding. He thinks that I took inspiration from him because I resemble him, but it is not the case. Let him take that privilege, he's basking in the glory that somebody has portrayed him but actually I have not. I didn't even know that a Nabeel Gabol type person exists."

Praising Ranveer and Dhurandhar director Aditya Dhar, he said, "Ranveer's performance is out of the world. I don't see any actor today who is anywhere near him. He is fantastic. He is a bundle of energy." He added, "No words for Aditya, he is an amazing man. One of the coolest demeanour in the industry. Doesn't lose his cool ever, doesn't raise his voice ever and the magnitude of the gravity that he carries inside him is immense, which doesn't come out very easily. When you talk to him or when he directs you, you realise that this man is really full of something."

# GANDHI

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