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Revanth Targets KCR Family in Land Grab

Hyderabad, Sept 16: : Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Wednesday accused former chief minister and BRS chief K. Chandrashekhara Rao of encroaching 388 acres of government land at his nearly 700-acre farmhouse at Erravalli and announced the formation of a high-powered fact-finding committee to



probe the land encroachment within 30 days.

Giving a detailed three-and-a-half-hour reply to a debate on prohibited lands under Section 22A in the state Assembly, Revanth Reddy alleged that Chandrashekhara Rao and his family members had amassed assets worth thousands of crores of rupees and acquired hundreds of acres of government, Bhoodan and assigned land under the cover of Dharani.

Revanth Reddy asked how the government lost 388 acres of land when Chandrashekhara Rao and his family had purchased only 295 acres. He also promised to distribute 388 acres of the alleged government land to 800 Dalit families, whom he said, were insulted in the past.

The Chief Minister asked local officials at Erravalli, local minister and the minister in charge to uncover the facts behind the land encroachment within

30 days. If they fail to meet the deadline, Revanth Reddy warned action would be taken against them.

He called Chandrashekhara Rao a “fake and pseudo Telangana freedom fighter”, contrasted him with renowned revolutionary freedom fighters, from Che Guevara to local hero Komaram Bheem, who, Revanth Reddy said, had sacrificed everything in their lives.

The Chief Minister also alleged that the Chandrashekhara Rao family had illegally amassed 440 acres of government land across 31 villages in 24 mandals of nine districts in the state, in violation of the Agriculture Land Ceiling Act and the Urban Land Ceiling Act.

He said Chandrashekhara Rao and his wife Shobha owned 67.5 acres of wetland, against the ceiling of 27 acres mandated under the Agriculture Land Ceiling Act.

Similarly, Revanth Reddy alleged BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao, his wife Shailima and their unmarried children Alekhya and Himanshu Rao owned 123.26 acres of wetland.

“Former BRS minister Harish Rao and his wife Srinitha owned 30.5 acres, while Kavita and her husband held 37.26 acres,” he alleged.

The Chief Minister said former Rajya Sabha MP Joginipally Santosh Kumar, his wife Rohini and his father Ravinder Rao owned 79.2 acres of land in the state. Similarly, other close family members such as Naveen Rao owned 53.21 acres and Kondal Rao 48.38 acres, he alleged.

Stating that he was not providing details of land allegedly acquired by Chandrashekhara Rao’s family members in the names of benamis, Revanth Reddy said the Janawada farmhouse owned by Rama Rao was illegally transferred from Shatabisha Agro Company through benami transactions. He said the property was earlier seized by the income-tax department from Satyam Computers founder Ramalinga Raju in connection with the accounting fraud.

The Chief Minister also asked Harish Rao to disclose how he acquired 14 acres near the Ranganayaka Sagar reservoir from farmers at a price lower than the compensation offered by the government for land acquisition.

He asked whether the farmers who sold the land had been threatened or offered black money, as they had formally withdrawn their claims for government compensation and sold the land to Harish Rao for ` 2.5 lakh per acre, against the government’s offer of ` 6.25 lakh per acre.

Revanth Reddy said Harish Rao’s alleged illegal acquisition of land must be probed by the Enforcement Directorate. He further alleged that Harish Rao, during the previous BRS government, had laid a BT road to his farm at a cost of ` 5.33 crore without inviting tenders.

Explaining how Harish Rao had allegedly used the Dharani portal to benefit his uncle M. Hanmanth Rao, his brother Mahesh Rao and his own brother, Revanth Reddy said that, out of the 122 acres owned by a Marwadi person named Gaurav Khurana, 93.33 acres had been transferred to a firm named ‘Raj Hitech Farms’, owned by them, using Transaction Module 33, which was meant for correcting spelling errors in names.

“Neither a sale deed nor a gift deed, nor any other legally recognised method of transferring land, was used. Instead, Transaction Module 33 of Dharani

was allegedly misused to transfer the land. Similarly, another 120 acres and eight guntas of land in Balanagar were acquired from the same person by misusing the Dharani portal,” Revanth Reddy alleged, adding that the person was afraid to lodge a complaint.

Lashing out at the alleged misuse of Dharani during the BRS regime, Revanth Reddy said land worth ` 50 crore had been regularised in favour of former MLC L.V. Stevenson for a meagre ` 1.53 crore in Secunderabad just before the last Assembly elections.

Pointing to alleged violations by BRS ministers and their close associates, Revanth Reddy said former minister G. Jagadeeshwar Reddy had illegally incorporated 15 acres of Inam land through Dharani into his 47-acre parcel located beside the airport. Another person, Pilot Rohit Reddy, who was caught in a drugs case, had violated GO 111 and built a farmhouse, he said.

Revanth Reddy said that when the state government proposed setting aside 650 acres of government land at Bahadurguda for a bullet train project proposed by the Narendra Modi government, the land mafia and BRS leaders acted against it.

He also pointed out that 77 acres of Bhoodan land in Union minister G. Kishan Reddy’s native village of Timmapur had been completely encroached upon. Kishan Reddy had raised the matter when he was an MLA in 2008, he said, adding that the BRS leaders had opposed the government’s decision to place the land on the prohibited list. Pointing out that land worth more than ` 1 lakh crore in the state had allegedly been misused through the Dharani portal during the BRS regime, Revanth Reddy lashed out at My Home Group chairman Juppally Rameshwar Rao for allegedly encroaching upon more than 100 acres of assigned land across five villages within a 2,463-acre parcel near the Shamshabad airport. “Similarly, a large portion of Evacuee property at Kapra was illegally transferred using Dharani and BRS media,” he alleged.

India Should Aspire to Be Among Early Leaders in Emerging Tech: Modi

New Delhi, Sept 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate SEMICON India 2026 in New Delhi on Thursday, a day after asserting that India should aspire to be among the early leaders in emerging technologies.

The three-day conference and exhibition, to be held from September 17 to 19 under the theme “Silicon to Systems: Building the Ecosystem,” will bring together Indian and international companies,



policy-makers, investors, researchers, start-ups, academic institutions and students from across the semiconductor and electronics value chain.

Chairing a semiconductor roundtable with leading CEOs on Wednesday, Modi said the government was committed to providing a predictable and responsive policy environment. He also emphasised the importance of close collaboration between the government and the semiconductor industry in shaping India’s technological future.

The Prime Minister highlighted India’s strong foundation in talent, technology adoption and infrastructure and called for greater industry participation in skilling, innovation and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, the Prime Minister’s Office said.

Noting the significant progress made in the semiconductor sector, Modi said the ecosystem was moving from foundational efforts to a phase of greater scale and opportunity.

He reiterated the government’s commitment to providing a predictable and responsive policy environment, while emphasising that policies must evolve in line with technological advances and industry re-

quirements.

Modi invited industry leaders to suggest policy and administrative measures and assured them that their inputs would be considered while further strengthening the sector. He also encouraged them to participate actively in the next phase of India’s semiconductor growth.

In a post on X, Modi said: “During this evening’s semiconductor roundtable with CEOs, I emphasised: unequivocal support to the semiconductor industry from the Centre; a predictable and responsive policy environment; continued focus on skilling, innovation and infrastructure upgradation; and furthering every effort towards making India a leader in emerging technologies.”

Referring to the target of training one crore people in AI, Modi said India’s talent pool, combined with the experience and capabilities of global industry leaders, could create significant opportunities.

The CEOs appreciated the government’s sustained efforts to develop India’s semiconductor capabilities and noted the progress made in manufacturing, design, infrastructure and talent development.

They expressed confidence in the opportunities emerging under the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 and in the country’s potential to build capabilities across the semiconductor value chain, including manufacturing, research and development, advanced technologies and supporting industries.

The industry leaders said the progress achieved in recent years had created a strong foundation for greater industry participation. They also expressed their commitment to contributing to India’s emergence as a globally competitive semiconductor and technology hub.

The meeting was attended by CEOs, heads and representatives of several organisations, including SEMI, Micron, Infineon, Applied Materials, ASML, Merck, Tokyo Electron Limited, Fujifilm, AMD, Intel, Tata Electronics, Lam Research, Rapidus, NXP, Foxconn, Semiconductor Devices, Advantest, Celestica Capital, CG Power and IBM Research. On SEMICON India 2026, the PMO said: “The conference will focus on advancing collaboration, investment, innovation and talent development in India.

Rahul Gandhi, Opposition demand rollback of UPI MDR fee over new charges

New Delhi, Sept 16

The opposition on Wednesday stepped up its attack on the government over the MDR regime for UPI and demanded a rollback of the move, with Rahul Gandhi alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has decided to “prostrate” before US President Donald Trump.

The leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha urged the PM to “stop lying down in front of the US, have a spine, stand up” and rollback the “UPI tax”.

The Congress accused the government of giving in to a US demand to get rid of zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) and charge for UPI. In a swipe at Modi, the party said he has “redefined NOTA — Narendra’s Ongoing Trump Appeasement”.

The government on Tuesday introduced a 0.4 per cent fee on transfers worth more than Rs 2,000 made to merchants through UPI from October 15, while explicitly ring-fencing everyday person-to-person transactions as well as small payments from any charge.

Gandhi said, “(Former prime minister) Indira (Gandhi) ji was once asked whether she leans left or right and her response was ‘I don’t lean left, I don’t lean right, I stand straight’. Modi ji has a completely different concept, he is neither left nor right, he has decided to lie down straight and prostrate himself in front of Donald Trump.” “He (Modi) has put a tax on every single Indian person by taxing UPI and giving a huge amount of money to the United States,” Gandhi said in a video in which he is seen standing before a portrait of his grandmother Indira Gandhi. Geographic Reference

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh asked whether the MDR was announced to enable US card companies to compete with UPI.

In a post on X, Ramesh said the US House of Representatives will on Thursday vote on a bill that proposes 100 per cent tariffs on India.

The US Senate has already approved this draconian law, he pointed out.

Ramesh took a swipe at the government and tagged a finance ministry post from June 2025, which stated that claims that the MDR will be charged on UPI transactions were completely false.

“The U-turn Ustad owes an explanation for his somersault,” he said.

The Trump regime has also been cracking down on Indian immigrants and making tougher laws against them, the Congress leader said.



H-1B visa costs have been increased and such holders could soon be deported immediately when out of a job, he said, adding that such holders are mostly IT professionals.

“Here, the Modi government has given in to a US demand to get rid of zero MDR and charge for UPI. The U.S. Trade Representative earlier this year criticized UPI for being free and having driven out Visa and Mastercard,” Ramesh said.

“Why 0.4% MDR? Is it because debit card MDR is also 0.4%? Is this being done to enable US card companies to compete with UPI?” he said.

The Congress leader asked if this is going to make UPI “sustainable” as the government claims.

Noting that the estimated annual cost of running the entire UPI ecosystem is around Rs 20,000 crore, Ramesh said this is less than 10 per cent of what the RBI has been transferring to the Union government over the past few years to show healthy public finances for the Modi government.

“The PM has redefined NOTA — Narendra’s Ongoing Trump Appeasement,” Ramesh said.

In another post, Ramesh termed the MDR regime “2017 GST Redux”.

Addressing a press conference, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said huge volumes of transactions happen through UPI, and PM Modi has once again decided to take money from people’s pockets.

She alleged that this was being done at the US’ behest, with American companies, including Mastercard and Visa, having long lobbied for higher MDR citing their losses. “Mr. Modi is now complying with their demand at the cost of ordinary Indians,” she alleged. Echoing the sentiments of the Congress, TMC MP Saugata Roy said the idea of levying a fee on UPI transactions has been opposed by the Congress and it is justified because this will lead to an increase in the price of most commodities.

Panchkula land allotment case: Panchkula court discharges Bhupinder Hooda, Motilal Vora in ED case



A Panchkula court on Friday discharged former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora and the Associated Journals Limited (AJL) in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) case concerning the controversial re-allotment of a Panchkula plot.The ruling came nearly a month after the Punjab and Haryana High Court similarly discharged Hooda in the related Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case, holding that the evidence on record did not even establish a prima facie case of criminality.

Reacting to the judgment, Hooda told The Indian Express, "I have always maintained faith in the judiciary. These cases had no basis from the very beginning."The case relates to Institutional Plot No. C-17 in Sector 6, Panchkula, allotted in 1982 by the Haryana Urban Development Authority (now Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran) to AJL. The plot was resumed in 1992 after construction was not completed within the stipulated period. AJL's appeal and revision petitions were dismissed in 1995 and 1996.In 2005, shortly after Hooda assumed office as chief minister, the plot was re-allotted to AJL at the original rates. Following a change of government in 2014, a vigilance inquiry led to the registration of an FIR, later handed over to the CBI. The agency alleged that the re-allotment was illegal, caused financial loss to the authority and conferred undue benefit on AJL.In 2019, the

ED filed a prosecution complaint before a special court in Panchkula against Hooda, Vora and AJL under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).According to ED, the property was allotted to AJL in 1982, but it was returned to HUDA in 1992 because AJL did not comply with the conditions of the allotment letter."The Resumption Order attained finality after dismissal of the Revision Petition in 1996. However, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, the then CM, Haryana/Chairman HUDA, blatantly misused his official position and dishonestly allotted the said plot afresh in the guise of re-allotment to the AJL at original rates plus interest in violation of the necessary conditions/ policy of HUDA vide order dated 28.08.2005," ED stated in 2019 after filing a prosecution complaint.

In its prosecution complaint, ED also alleged that Hooda did not adhere to the legal opinion of Legal Remembrance, Haryana, and to the recommendations of HUDA officers and the Financial Commissioner, Town and Country Planning (FCTCP).“Thus, the CM caused wrongful loss to HUDA and wrongful gain to AJL,” ED alleged, adding, “Bhupinder Singh Hooda further favoured the AJL by granting them three undue extensions for construction in the said plot from 01.05.2008 to 10.05.2012 until the AJL completed the construction in the year 2014.”A Special CBI Court framed charges in the case in 2021 under Sections 120-B and 420 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, prompting Hooda and AJL to approach the high court.Setting aside the 2021 order of the Special CBI Court, high court Justice Tribhuvan Dahiya ruled that all consequential proceedings stood quashed and the petitioners were discharged.Justice Dahiya also held that the prosecution's case rested entirely on the allegation that Hooda had abused his official position in 2005 to secure re-allotment of the plot to AJL in violation of statutory provisions. However, the court found no material to establish conspiracy, cheating, wrongful gain or wrongful loss.The High Court was sharply critical of CBI, observing that its approach was legally unsustainable and that continuing the prosecution would amount to an abuse of the court's process.

Experts criticise ‘subsidy regime’, flag falling water table in Punjab, Haryana

With the water table in Punjab and Haryana declining at an alarming rate of 1.7 feet per year, policy experts on Thursday raised serious concerns over the sustainability of the region's agricultural model, strongly criticising the existing subsidy regime and calling for its urgent rationalisation.At a colloquium held at the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), experts said that unchecked subsidies, particularly on electricity and inputs, are accelerating water depletion and discouraging crop diversification, warning that a decisive shift toward diversified and less water-intensive farming is now imperative.

The colloquium, titled “Promoting Diversification for Higher Incomes and Sustainable Agriculture in Punjab and Haryana,” brought together economists, policymakers, and researchers to deliberate on the future of agriculture in two of India's most agriculturally intensive states. A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the urgent need to move away from water-intensive crops such as paddy, and toward a more diversified and sustainable agricultural system.Experts pointed out that despite mounting ecological stress, policy distortions, especially subsidies on electricity and fertilisers, continue to incentivise the cultivation of paddy and wheat. These subsidies, while politically sensitive and historically justified, are now widely seen as the biggest barrier to diversification.

Ramesh Chand, a member of NITI Aayog, expressed concern over the structural challenges facing Punjab's agricultural economy. He noted that while the state had once been a model of agriculture-led growth, particularly during and after the Green Revolution, it has struggled to maintain that momentum in recent decades. According to him, agricultural growth has hovered around 4.6 per cent over the past two decades, but this has not translated into broader economic dynamism.Chand also highlighted the paradox facing Indian agriculture. He said, “On one hand, the country is sitting on a buffer stock of nearly 71 million tonnes of foodgrains, costing around Rs 35,000 crore annually to maintain and on the other hand, India continues to spend thousands of crores in foreign exchange to import pulses and edible oils. This imbalance is giving us a message that there is urgent need for diversification.”He added that innovation and research are critical to this transition. However, he lamented that institutions such as Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) lack adequate funding for research into alternative crops and new seed varieties. “If PAU Vice-Chancellor Dr SS Gosal does not have funds to carry out research, what would he do? If the state can charge 3-4 per cent tax on foodgrains, why cannot it set aside an R&D fund of 1 per cent,” he said.Calling for a forward-looking approach, Chand advocated increased focus on crops like basmati rice, horticulture, and maize. He noted that only 2.3 per cent of Punjab's cultivated area is currently under horticulture, and expanding this to 10 per cent could significantly boost the state's economic growth. He also pointed to the potential of maize as a feedstock

for ethanol production, noting that ethanol blending in petrol has already reached 10 per cent.

Sukhpal Singh of Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad described electricity subsidies as a major obstacle to crop diversification. He argued that such subsidies disproportionately benefit farmers with access to tube wells, while small and marginal farmers often remain excluded.He said that diversification must be understood as a risk management strategy. Farmers, he explained, prefer crops that offer assured procurement, stable prices, and low market risk, conditions that currently favour paddy and wheat. In contrast, alternative crops come with higher uncertainty, making farmers reluctant to shift.He pointed to the absence of a robust crop insurance mechanism in Punjab. Despite earlier promises by the state government to develop its own scheme after rejecting a central programme, no effective system has been implemented even after more than a decade. Without risk mitigation tools such as insurance, Sukhpal argued, diversification efforts are unlikely to succeed. “We have been saying no to crop insurance on the plea that our crop is 100 per cent irrigated. But there are so many factors. You cannot protect the crop from high temperatures, hail and floods. We have to go for crop insurance.”

Raising concerns about institutional inefficiencies, he questioned how long agencies like the Food Corporation of India could continue to shoulder the burden of procurement across multiple states. “We have been milking one agent y-the FCI. For how long can one agency sustain the entire agriculture produce?” He also criticised Punjab for failing to take advantage of central schemes such as additional MSP packages for alternative crops and the Bhavantar Yojana. He also pointed to the lack of infrastructure, particularly cold storage facilities in vegetable markets, as a key bottleneck. “We urge farmers to diversify, but fail to provide the necessary ecosystem,” he remarked, adding that commission agents in some cases now earn more per acre than farmers themselves.

Ashok Gulati, a distinguished professor at Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), underscored the fiscal burden of existing subsidies. He pointed out that the urea subsidy alone stands at around Rs 1.25 lakh crore and is expected to rise further, while state governments continue to spend heavily on electricity subsidies.He proposed doubling the central government's subsidy for non-paddy crops from Rs 17,500 to Rs 35,000 per hectare, stating that farmers would only shift if they are assured incomes comparable to paddy cultivation. “We need to move from a cereal-centric system to a demand-driven, high-value agricultural model,” he said, calling for better market linkages and policy alignment.Gosal highlighted the adverse impact of continuous rice cultivation on soil health. He noted that paddy not only consumes large quantities of water but also depletes essential nutrients from the soil. He said that while farmers are open to change, they need viable and profitable alternatives.

Limited, and Kanpur Electric Supply Company Limited.According to officials, the shutdown is being carried out to update the online portal software and undertake configuration work on the Restructured Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Programme (R-APDRP) system.Officials informed that the temporary shutdown is part of a planned exercise to enhance system efficiency and ensure smoother, faster service delivery once the upgrade is completed.Consumers have been advised to complete their online transactions in advance to avoid inconvenience. In case of any difficulty or power-related complaints during the period, consumers can reach out to the 1912 power helpline, which will remain operational.

Karnataka ends EV tax exemptions: New lifetime charges to hit all electric car buyers



The Karnataka government introduced a lifetime tax on all electric four-wheelers in the state, ending earlier exemptions. This is part of efforts to collect an additional Rs 250 crore in motor vehicle taxes this fiscal year after missing the target for the last fiscal year by Rs 1,000 crore. Earlier, the tax only applied to battery-operated vehicles costing over Rs 25 lakh.The tax was introduced through the Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which the state legislature passed on March 26 this year.The amendment to the Karnataka Motor Vehicle Taxation Act, 1957, is expected to generate “Rs 250 crore” from “the different categories of vehicles which will be registered in the year 2026-27”, according to the Bill.

The Bill has introduced lifetime taxes—earlier exempt for motor cars, jeeps, omni buses and private service vehicles which run on electricity—at 5 per cent of the vehicle's cost for those priced up to Rs 10 lakh, and 8 per cent for vehicles costing between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 25 lakh. Previously, the lifetime tax for EV cars and other four-wheelers in Karnataka was 10 per cent for vehicles costing above Rs 25 lakh.The government has also introduced lifetime tax slabs for already registered vehicles

at the rate of 93 per cent of the lifetime tax on a new vehicle for four-wheelers up to two years old, and down to 25 per cent for vehicles that are over 15 years old.The changes also include a reduction in the lifetime taxes for private transport vehicles like luxury buses, sleeper buses, and 12-seater vehicles.

State Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy defended the measures, introduced at a time when fossil fuel supplies to India are constrained due to the West Asia conflict. “This is not intended to meet tax targets. We have a target of Rs 15,000 crore from taxes. We cannot exceed the target. It depends on the number of vehicles registered in the year. We may get an additional 4 to 5 per cent from penalties, etc. There is no intention for greater tax collection,” Reddy said on the floor of the Legislature while seeking the passage of the Bill.Incidentally, the transport department collected only Rs 14,000 crore in motor vehicle taxes last fiscal year against a target of Rs 15,000 crore, which was still a 10.71 per cent growth in tax collection. The motor vehicles tax target for 2026-27 is Rs 15,500 crore.“It is considered necessary further to amend the Karnataka Motor Vehicle Taxation Act, 1957 (Karnataka Act No 35 of 1957) to make collection of tax effectively and to reduce the tax payment defaulters for the exchequer of the state and certain other consequential amendments are also made,” the Karnataka government said in its statement of reasons for the new amendment to the Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation Act.The new tax law also specifies a refund of 93 per cent of the lifetime tax refund on EV vehicles on cancellation of a Karnataka registration within a year, and 25 per cent of the life tax if the registration is cancelled after 14-15 years of registration.It also provides a Rs 1,000 reduction in the registration tax for vehicles with a carrying capacity of 12 passengers, and a reduction for luxury private buses and sleeper buses from Rs 2,500, Rs 3,500 and Rs 4,000, respectively, to Rs 1,500, Rs 2,500 and

Birthday party feud turns violent: One injured in firing, 4 arrested

A dispute that began during a birthday party at Ansal Society in Sector 115 escalated into a firing incident, leaving one boy injured. Police have arrested four accused in connection with the case, while efforts are ongoing to nab others involved.The arrests were made by a police team led by Inspector Simarjeet Singh. The accused have been identified as Reteinder Singh (resident of Rajinder Nagar, Khanna), Savej Khan (village Taprana, Shamli, UP), Jobanpreet Singh (village Dhoolan, Fatehabad, Haryana), and Hardik Adlakha (village Mohna, Ballabgarh, Fatehabad). A case has been registered against them at Sohana Police Station under the Arms Act and charges of attempt to murder.

According to police, complainant Anuj Sharma, a resident of Ansal Sector-115, stated that the dispute be-

gan a few days earlier during a birthday party at Flat No. 604, where a clash broke out between two groups. During the altercation, one of the accused allegedly hit Savej Khan on the head with a glass, leading to a lingering rivalry.On April 1, both groups reportedly came face-to-face near the old Kabaddi ground in village Bhagomajra. It is alleged that the accused, along with their associates, opened fire during the confrontation. In the incident, Anuj Sharma's friend, Rishabh Phogat, sustained a gunshot injury to his left arm. He was immediately rushed to a hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment.Police have also recovered the car used in the crime from the accused. Officials stated that interrogation is underway, and efforts are being made to recover the weapon used in the firing. Further arrests are expected soon as the investigation progresses.

Haryana Police's Abhedya app cracks down on extortion calls, nets gangsters within days



Sonipat police's Special Unit against Gangsters (Suag) has recently arrested five members of an interstate gang involved in making extortion calls with the help of the Haryana Police's 'Abhedya' app.The gang, linked to gangsters Randeep Malik and Deepak Boxer, used stolen mobile phones for making VoIP calls to threaten their targets in Haryana and Delhi. Their preliminary interrogation revealed that they had plans to target six establishments across Sonipat, Panipat and Delhi. They were tracked down through Abhedya app, after they made extortion calls to one of their targets in Sonipat, said a Haryana Police officer.Meanwhile, since its launch on March 21, close to around 200 businessmen, doctors and prominent persons in Haryana have installed the Abhedya mobile app. The app – according to the state police – prevents the subscribers from getting “unwanted extortion phone calls and messages”.The majority of the subscribers are based in Gurugram, Faridabad, Ambala, Sonipat, Panipat, Rohtak, Hisar, Hansi, and Bhiwani.

Diler Singh, a Loharu-based businessman who installed this app last week, said, “It has been six days, since I downloaded this mobile app. So far, I have not received any mischievous phone call. Earlier, I had received a few from random international phone numbers. I am having a peaceful sleep these days.”A Bhiwani-based businessman, Virender, who had lodged complaint with the police for receiving extortion-related messages, said, “These extortion messages had caused immense trauma to me and my family members. After installing this app, I have not received any such messages for the last one week.”Two prominent business partners of Panipat also installed this app. “It looks like we can now sleep in peace. Ever since, we have downloaded this app, we have not received any extortion phone call/ message. It is a good initiative of the Haryana Police. This app blocks unwanted international calls or calls/ messages using VoIP, but we have even requested our district police chief that they should also develop some other application that can completely block even direct mobile phone calls,” one of the two businessmen said.Explaining the functioning of this app, Haryana Director General of Police Ajay Singhal said, “The [phone] calls originating within the country are relatively easier to trace, while calls from multiple foreign numbers pose a significant challenge. This app is proving to be effective to tackle this. The feedback received from across the districts of Haryana show a reduction of around 40-50 per cent of such extortion calls. Not only extortion calls, but this app will also help establish an effective control over digital fraud and cybercrime related calls.”

“The Abhedya app identifies calls and messages from unknown and suspicious numbers, blocks them before they reach the user and specifically monitors international, virtual and unsaved numbers for the subscriber. It automatically rejects calls and blocks numbers if found suspicious. The app also deletes suspicious chats, voice messages, notifications and voice notes from the mobile device, ensuring that the subscriber remains free from any mental stress or fear. Also, the suspicious calls coming from abroad are also being monitored through the app. Since, the app is also monitored by the Haryana Police's cyber wings and technical experts, such unscrupulous callers are also tracked through back-end systems,” a senior Haryana Police officer explained.Asked how the app's misuse can be prevented, an officer stated that “the app's access can only be authorised by an officer above the rank of a district police chief [a Superintendent of Police]. The person intending to download this app will first have to approach the district SP who can only authorise download of the app on the person's device.”Giving further lowdown on how the app functions, the officer added, “The app blocks all kinds of communication from international numbers, including virtual numbers and force criminals to use Indian numbers, which can be traced and tracked by law enforcement agencies.”The Haryana Police are also coming out with another update of this app through which not only internet-based fraud calls but also regular calls can be controlled. “It includes features to block unknown international calls, suspicious domestic calls (as per user preference), and private or hidden numbers, while allowing calls only from saved and verified numbers,” a senior officer explained.

RS Praveen Kumar seeks probe into alleged attack on KTR's PA, PRO at Saifabad police station

Hyderabad: BRS general secretary RS Praveen Kumar demanded a probe into the alleged attack on BRS working president KT Rama Rao's PA and PRO inside the Saifabad police station. He stated that the incident was part of a conspiracy and exposed the complete failure of law and order in Telangana.Addressing a press conference at Telangana Bhavan here, Praveen Kumar said Mahesh and Mahender Reddy, who were summoned for questioning in connection with the September 7 Assembly incident, were deliberately made to wait at the police station on the day of the Vinayaka Chavithi festival. He said there was no police officer available until afternoon and power supply to the station was cut for some time.The BRS leader questioned why the duo were questioned like terrorists in a dark room of the police station. He stated that around 15 masked men entered the police station and attempted to attack the duo, but none of them were apprehended.

Building the information backbone for India’s drinking water future



Data and its management are the backbone of any system, and any differences in that may appear technical but have real consequences. When definitions differ and data sources conflict, states spend valuable time reconciling spreadsheets instead of solving problems on the ground. Engineers struggle to prioritise repairs and progress slows down, not because of lack of effort, but of absence of a holistic picture.

As India undertakes one of the world’s largest rural water supply transformations, this challenge needs urgent attention. Since the launch of the Jal Jeevan Mission in 2019, household tap water coverage in rural India has increased from 16.72% to over 81%. This achievement is not just about pipes and connections. It is about lives changed, saving over 5.5 crore hours of daily drudgery (largely for women), and preventing nearly four lakh deaths from diarrhoeal diseases. But building pipes and pumps is only one part of the journey. The real test is ensuring water flows regularly, safely, and sustainably for years to come. That requires constant monitoring of infrastructure, early detection of problems, and coordinated action across multiple institutions. This is where India has begun laying the foundations for Digital Public Infrastructure for the drinking water sector. A key building block in this effort is the creation of a unique digital identity for every drinking water scheme through Sujalam Bharat IDs and Sujal Gaon IDs. A Sujalam Bharat ID establishes a comprehensive digital record of hydraulically connected assets from source to tap. Integrated with platforms such as the Sujalam Bharat App, it enables the creation of Sujal Gaon IDs and provides a clear view of how water systems are interconnected. This enhances monitoring, promotes transparency, and contributes to building a technologically empowered Viksit Bharat @2047. Scheme performance

Infrastructure data alone are not enough. For drinking water systems to remain reliable, digital systems must also capture how these schemes perform over time. Data on the regularity of water supply, water levels in sources, water quality indicators and the financial sustainability of schemes are equally important. When such information

flows regularly into digital systems, governments and communities can better understand whether schemes are functioning as intended and where attention is needed. Reliable operational data can transform how the sector responds to challenges. Declining source levels and irregular supply patterns can be detected early. Water quality risks can be flagged before they become public health concerns. Timely financial planning for operation and maintenance can ensure that systems continue to deliver their intended benefits.

Equally important, this visibility strengthens community governance. Gram panchayats and village water and sanitation committees play a central role in managing rural drinking water systems, with a close understanding of local needs and seasonal water realities. When local institutions can see both the physical infrastructure and how it is performing, they gain a clearer understanding of their water supply systems. Information on pipelines, pumps and tanks, combined with data on supply regularity, water levels, water quality and financial sustainability, provides village institutions with a simple but powerful view of their systems. With this data, communities can spot problems early and resolve them with engineers. For gram panchayats and village water and sanitation committees, this transparency strengthens local water management and Jan Bhagidari. As this infrastructure evolves, states can share information more easily using common formats. They retain control of their systems while enabling collective learning on what works and where improvement is needed.

These foundations can enable data- and AI-driven innovations. Frontline workers can capture images of pumps and pipelines, and AI can assess supply, detect damage, and flag maintenance needs. Analytics can identify risks and patterns that need attention. All of this depends on one thing: trusted, reliable information flowing through the system. Pipes and pumps will deliver water, but trusted, shared information will keep them working well for years. When communities understand their water systems, they care for them. When local institutions have the right information and tools, they manage them with confidence. And when digital infrastructure supports people on the ground, safe and sustainable drinking water for every rural household can be ensured. When communities understand their water systems, they care for them. When local institutions have the right information and tools, they manage them with confidence. And when digital infrastructure supports people on the ground, safe and sustainable drinking water for every rural household can endure. The Jal Jeevan Mission has connected millions of rural households to tap water. The next phase is ensuring these systems remain functional over time. The recently concluded Jal Mahotsav 2026 reflected this shift, recognising communities across the country for their role in managing drinking water assets,

‘Operation Chabutra’ sparks debate over safety and freedom on Hyderabad streets



A late-night policing drive targeting groups ‘loitering’ on city roads has triggered a split in public opinion, with residents and netizens sharply divided over whether it enhances safety or encroaches on personal freedom. The initiative titled Operation Chabutra is being carried out across Hyderabad, particularly in the south and Old City areas, where police say complaints of harassment, intimidation and petty crime tend to surface after midnight. Teams patrol identified stretches, questioning those found sitting on roadside platforms, street corners and relatively isolated locations.

Police officials maintain that the operation is aimed at deterrence rather than indiscriminate action. DCP, Golconda Zone, G. Chandra Mohan said the questioning is based on behaviour rather than mere presence. “The motive behind the questioning is that whoever is loitering on streets, or sitting in isolated places, will be pulled up, not all. When some are found catcalling couples, women, and indulging in extortion, we counsel them in front of their parents or elders. If they are involved in crime against women, teasing, or property offence, that will be a case. Minor scuffle will be dealt with counselling,” he said. An officer from the Charminar zone said the timing and approach are calibrated based on past incidents. “The operation usually starts after midnight. If found roaming without a purpose, we cross check them once, but roaming after 1 a.m. is dealt with strictly. Recently, there were incidents of a couple being assaulted, and a delivery boy robbed. The South and South-West range get more of such cases.”

He added that the drive is intended to remain largely non-confrontational. “It is a peaceful operation, mostly counselling. There is a misconception of using lathi by police. That happens in isolated cases when a group tries to escape or evade questions. If there is a complaint about it, we will surely take action.” The term ‘chabutra’

itself reflects a long-standing social culture in parts of the Old City, where residents, particularly youth, gather on raised platforms or ‘arugu’ during summer nights. Advocate Vasudev Raju from Nampally Criminal Court said that such spaces have traditionally been part of community life. “I am basically from a place called Aliabad in Old City, south of Charminar near Rajanna Bowli. Life here has to be experienced, not just witnessed. Youth can really enjoy summer nights on an arugu or chabutra. But they should not run away when patrol vans or police come, should avoid vices and always be in a place covered by CCTV to establish that nothing nefarious is done.”

However, legal concerns have also been raised over the manner of enforcement. Advocate Rama Rao Immaneni criticised the operation, calling it an overreach. “Innovative humiliation in the name of a new device called Operation Chabutra turned out to be a source of public humiliation. Powers of police with regard to surveillance are limited to erstwhile AP Police Standing Orders 601 and 744 adopted by Telangana after reorganisation. It forms no part of their duty to publicly thrack the citizens by branding them. Crime control cannot be under unconstitutional methods as we are living in a democracy,” he said. Videos of the operation, particularly from Mailardevpally and surrounding areas, have circulated widely online, drawing contrasting reactions. Some users have welcomed the move, arguing that stricter enforcement is necessary to address nuisance. One comment described the action as a “good job”, adding that certain groups take advantage of perceived leniency and need to be controlled to maintain order.

Others have raised concerns over the manner of policing. A user questioned why people were being ‘harassed’ instead of simply being asked to disperse, while another replied that such an approach often fails. Questions have also been raised about freedom of movement on public roads and the use of force in certain instances. At the same time, there is support from residents in other localities who say similar nuisance persists in their areas. Some have called for such drives in places like Balapur, citing disturbances through the day and night. Sai Sagar, a resident from Maruthi Nagar, said, “I often reach home around 2 a.m. and see boys ganged up with beer bottles in the end of my lane. There is definitely a need for such vigilance to ensure public safety,” he said. Police also clarified that individuals returning from work or with valid reasons are not targeted. In recent checks, youth allegedly driving under the influence of alcohol

AI tools to increase IVF success rate and reduce patient costs



Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help reduce patient costs by achieving pregnancy faster during IVF (In vitro fertilisation) process, said Dr. Manika Khanna, Chairperson and MD at Gaudium IVF, while introducing two new AI tools — SiD (Sperm Identification Device) and ERICA (Embryo Ranking Intelligent Classification Assistant) — in New Delhi on Wednesday (April 1, 2026). These AI tools have been developed by the IVF 2.0, a UK-headquartered embryology innovation organisation, founded by embryologists Dr. Jacques Cohen and Dr. Alejandro Chave.

SiD is an AI system designed to optimise sperm selection during fertility treatments. It identifies the most viable sperm for fertilisation, which can lead to better-quality

blastocyst formation. While ERICA supports embryologists in embryo selection, provides objective, data-driven ranking of embryos. It is done by analysing static images of blastocysts based on key morphological and developmental characteristics. They have been data-fed by the genome sequencing data from India as well, said Dr. Khanna. The newly introduced technologies are designed to enhance critical stages of the IVF process.

Together, these non-invasive tools assist embryologists in improving decision-making and reducing variability. Early clinical observations suggest that the integration of these AI systems can significantly improve fertilisation and blastocyst development rates. Dr. Khanna said that nearly 15% Indians (male and female, both) are infertile now. She attributes it to increasing stress and exposure to pollutants, consumption of preservative-rich food, use of tobacco and unverified fitness supplements. By improving precision and consistency, the adoption of AI has the potential to reduce the need for repeat cycles, thereby lowering the emotional, physical, and financial burden on patients while inspiring confidence among clinicians and stakeholders, added Dr. Khanna. She said that these AI tools analyse the sample on 2.5 million parameters and help embryologists choose the best sperm and embryo. Dr. Khanna added that AI increases first-cycle IVF success rate by 5-7%. While these AI tools help reduce time and money,

Uttar Pradesh top performer under PM’s solar power scheme: UPNEDA



Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the top-performing State under the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojna, in March 2026, setting a new national benchmark in rooftop solar deployment. With 52,729 installations in a single month, the State has outperformed leading States such as Gujarat and Maharashtra. The State has consistently remained among the top two States since July 2025, with the government arguing that it reflects sustained momentum, strong execution, and robust field-level governance. “Under PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, Uttar Pradesh has surged ahead with more than 1,524 MW of rooftop solar capacity, generating approximately 6.8–7.0 million units of green energy daily and enabling households savings on electricity bill. This progress po-

sitions Uttar Pradesh as a national leader in sustainable energy adoption, while also creating more than 60,000 jobs across the State,” said Inderjit Singh, Director of the Uttar Pradesh New and Renewable Energy Development Agency (UPNEDA). “The March 2026 installations in Uttar Pradesh represent the highest monthly deployment achieved by any State since the inception of the scheme, underscoring the State’s leadership in accelerating decentralised solar adoption.

As per the national portal, Uttar Pradesh has achieved 4,48,233 cumulative rooftop solar installations, placing it third in India. However, given the current growth trajectory, the State is well-positioned to surpass Maharashtra and move to second place in the coming months. The State also recorded multiple operational milestones during the month, including a record 3,188 installations in a single day on 31 March 2026, marking the highest-ever daily achievement. The total installed capacity has now reached 1,524.61 MW. Additionally, approximately ₹4,000 crore in subsidies have been disbursed, including ₹2,985 crore from the Central government, directly benefiting lakhs of households,” reads an official statement. This large-scale solar expansion is delivering measurable socio-economic and environmental benefits. Rooftop solar adoption has resulted in an estimated saving of more than 6,000 acres of land, which would otherwise be required for ground-mounted plants.

Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Rajnath Singh's remarks: 'Response to any attack would be 'swift, calibrated and decisive'



Mr. Asif took to X to respond to remarks by his Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh, who earlier said that any “misadventure” from India’s neighbour in the prevailing situation would invite an “unprecedented and decisive” action. Speaking at an event in poll-bound Kerala, Mr. Singh on Thursday (April 2) said that following the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack that claimed 26 lives, India had destroyed the terrorist hideouts and infrastructure in Pakistan. He contended that during Operation Sindoor, Indian forces brought Pakistan to its knees within 22 minutes.

“Repeated rhetoric reflects not strength, but visible strategic anxiety as the anniversary of the Pahalgam” attack approaches, Mr. Asif said. Mr. Asif further said: “Such threat-mongering is not new; it is part of a predict-

able pattern - externalising internal fragility, and attempting to provoke escalation under the garb of unsubstantiated allegations for vested political interests.” Recalling the four-day conflict in May, the Pakistani Minister said that history was a stark reminder that miscalculation has consequences. “The next time our response will be even more forceful and decisive. Let there be no ambiguity: Pakistan remains committed to peace and regional stability, but its resolve to defend sovereignty is absolute, its preparedness complete, and its response will be swift, calibrated, and decisive,” he said. The Pahalgam attack that took place on April 22 last year resulted in a brief conflict between the two countries.

Congress, BRS gear up for crucial civic polls

Hyderabad: A high-stakes political contest is set to unfold on Saturday as elections for Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons in three municipalities including Ibrahimpatnam, Kyathanpally, and Khanapur, are held following weeks of legal battles and political manoeuvring. With both the ruling Congress and the opposition BRS mobilising top leadership, the contest assumed significance, emerging as a prestige battle. Despite the BRS winning majority seats in all three municipalities, the ruling Congress allegedly used all tricks

Belagavi entrepreneur helps commercial units overcome LPG shortage using alternative energy sources

Since the war in West Asia began a month ago, hotels and industries in Belagavi have been facing the shortage of commercial LPG cylinders. However, a third of them have switched to biomass-based stoves, water heaters and steam generators, thanks to Sameer Kanabargi, an innovator and entrepreneur who runs Phoenix Industries. For over 35 years, this small unit in the Udyambag Industrial Estate in Belagavi has been silently working in the field of alternative energy sources and disseminating technology developed by premier institutions like IIT, IISc, TERI and others. Phoenix Industries has designed and produced a range of equipment for the Indian Army and the Border Security Force. Some of the over two dozen tools and implements produced by Mr. Kanabargi are his own inventions. Phoenix produces biomass-based stoves, water heaters, gasifiers, steam generators and other equipment. They can be used to feed a small family of two to a crowd of two lakh. They use inputs, including agriculture waste like bagasse, stems, leaves and other farm residue, twigs, tree branches, coconut shells or other waste, paper, cardboard and plywood. “The input can be any inflammable waste material. There is no need to modify any of our equipment,” Mr. Kanabargi said. It is estimated that around 150 of the 350 hotels and around 100 small and medium industries in Belagavi and Maharashtra have switched to biomass-based stoves and burners. Some of them have made the switch now while those that had stopped using them have returned to the renewable and low-cost energy source. The current LPG shortage has increased the demand by multiple times and the factory is working in three shifts to meet the demand. “I think the demand and inquiries we have got in the last 10 days is equal to the demand we received in the last 10 years,” he said. “While we need to rely on foreign countries for LPG supply, biomass is easily available all around us. In rural areas, it is virtually



free, while in the cities, it costs around ₹5-₹7 per kg. Three kilograms of biomass gives the same amount of heat energy as one kilo of LPG. But then, the final cost works out to be 40%-50% cheaper. Industries that use our products have recovered the cost in 30-100 days,” he said. Mr. Kanabargi was among the earliest adopters of the ASTRA Ole no smoke chulha designed by IISc’s Centre for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Areas. “We produced over 20,000 model ASTRA Ole that were given to rural poor by the government and other agencies. He was among the few industrialists invited by IIT Bombay for a feasibility study of biomass-based gasifiers and other tools. He mass produced biomass stoves designed by TERI under its extension programme. He designed a portable room heater that runs on pine needles for BSF personnel working in sub zero temperatures and transferred the technology free. Mr. Kanabargi says he has this streak of “think differently” from the crowd. “It all started when I was in ninth standard,” he recalls. He designed a multi-purpose kitchen stove that can cook rice and generate hot water at the same time. He won a State-level award for the project. He still keeps the working model in his office.

EYE SECRETS Editorial

Avoid triumphalism, focus on development

As Maoist ideology is on the brink of slipping into history, it is a sobering moment for those who were drawn towards the pursuit of overthrowing the state and capturing power through the barrel of a gun and those who egged on youth to chase a false dream in the name of championing the cause of the poor. It is also a time for the government to avoid triumphalism and instead focus on the socio-economic development of the regions that were virtually turned into killing fields and became hostage to the violent activity of naxalite outfits for decades. In 2009, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh dubbed naxalism as the “gravest internal security threat” to India. Nearly 17 years later, Union Home Minister Amit Shah stood on the floor of Parliament and declared that the country has now become ‘naxal-free’, meeting the March 2026 deadline set by the NDA government. This is the culmination of an aggressive and well-coordinated security operation to hunt the Maoists in their strongholds, particularly in the Bastar region. Over the last five decades of violence, nearly 20,000 people have died, including over 5,000 security personnel. Since its birth in West Bengal’s Naxalbari in 1967, the movement spread its tentacles across the country. At its peak, the insurgency had spread across 12 States, encompassing 17% of India’s territory. In the Red Corridor, the Maoists virtually ran a parallel administration with kangaroo courts, armed enforcement units, and shadow taxation levied on contractors and villagers alike.

However, over the years, the revolutionary movement lost steam and began to crumble under an unrelenting offensive by the security forces and the steady erosion of its support base. Once a romantic notion that attracted both the restive urban youth on campuses and the underprivileged and exploited sections in rural areas and gave them a sense of purpose and justice, naxalism gradually degenerated into a refuge for a clutch of extortionists and trigger-happy vigilantes indulging in point-less violent attacks and blindly obstructing developmental projects. Indiscriminate killing of innocent people, branding them as police informers, and resorting to the same brutal methods that they often accuse their enemy classes of, public hangings after holding kangaroo courts, killing politicians and policemen and resorting to extortions resulted in a steady erosion of public support. Academics and the intellectual class, once the mainstay of the Maoist ideology, slowly moved away from it. Leading security experts believe that the latest turn of events may well signal the end of Maoism in the country. Government data indicate that districts once considered Maoist strongholds have either been cleared of insurgent elements or substantially stabilised. Security forces, supported by improved intelligence, road connectivity, telecommunications expansion, and welfare delivery systems, have steadily pushed armed cadres into retreat.

Mumbai’s lost lakes set for revival amid rising climate extremes

At a time when Mumbai is experiencing extreme climate events like heat wave and relentless waterlogging during the monsoon, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) administration has floated a proposal to carry out a survey and identify the number of natural lakes in the city that exists today.

The move comes at a time when Mumbai is witnessing a series of redevelopment and infrastructure work due to which many natural water bodies including lakes and ponds have been either reclaimed or filled to make available land for development leading to loss of ecological biodiversity. Meanwhile according to the experts the natural lakes play a key role in micro climate moderation by lowering the temperature in urban areas, mitigating the urban heat island effect.At present, some of the key lakes that exist in Mumbai include the Tulsi lake, Vihar lake, Powai lake, Sion Talao, Bandra Talao, Banganga Tank among others. Of these, the Tulsi and Vihar lakes supply potable water to Mumbai daily.

“The overall drive will be a multi stage drive. In the first stage, we will identify the locations in our own city plan where natural water bodies are marked. Then we will carry out a survey to identify the present condition of these water bodies. If they still exist, then they will be rejuvenated and developed into blue zones of Mumbai,” Avinash Dhakane — additional municipal commissioner told the Indian Express.He said that the primary objective behind this project is to find the lost lakes to ensure that the urban heat effects are restored along with ecological sustainability. Dhakane also maintained that the larger plan is to upscale the city’s overall urban infrastructure by rejuvenation of these water bodies to make open spaces more accessible for people.

“At present, the project is in the planning stage. Once we develop the entire modus-operandi, the project proposal will be drafted following which a tender will be floated to appoint consultants for this project,” he added.Meanwhile civic officials said that in Mumbai’s Development Plan (DP) 1991 and 2034, there were 300 lakes likely in Mumbai. However, in the last three decades due to various infrastructure and real estate projects, several lakes were reclaimed and filled by the authorities.According to a survey report carried out by the World Wide Fund for Nature or WWF, 129 sites were identified via satellite imagery as potential sites for natural lakes in Mumbai.

‘He is compromised’: After Saurabh Bharadwaj’s ‘samosa jibe’, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann weighs in on Raghav Chadha



A day after the AAP removed Raghav Chadha as the deputy leader in the Upper House, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said Friday that the Rajya Sabha MP was “compromised.” The remarks from Mann, who was speaking to the media, came after several AAP leaders reacted to a video posted by Raghav Chadha.

Responding to a question about Chadha’s claim that he was being silenced, Mann said, “If he does not walk out on important issues where the party has taken a clear stand, does not follow the party line by raising the issue of deletion of votes in West Bengal, or raise his voice against the Gujarat government registering 160 FIRs against AAP leaders and volunteers, on a bid to spread hatred on lines of caste and religion in Punjab, on MSP and withholding of Rural Development Fund (RDF) of Punjab and is raising the issue of samosas being sold at a higher price at the airport and pizza should be delivered in 40 minutes instead of 30, is it not violation of party whip? Would you not feel he is speaking from a different station? In that case, action has to be taken.”

State’s duty is to protect animals, and to protect citizens from those animals: Bombay High Court



The Kolhapur bench of the Bombay High Court (HC) has given ad-interim directions to the Maharashtra Forest Department and the government administration to provide safe transport for school children and an ambulance for people residing in the buffer zone of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (STR) to thwart casualties due to man-animal conflicts.Justice Madhav Jamadar and Pravin Patil passed the order on Thursday while hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by Harish Kamble of the Ukhalu village in Kolhapur district.The HC order stated that under Section 38 V of the Wildlife Protection Act and Article 21 of the Constitution of India, “the State has a twin obligation: to protect the animals, and to protect the citizens from those animals.”Education of about 500 students in at least five schools in the region has been affected, causing violation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009, due to the frequent sighting of tigers and leopards, even on the main approach roads during school hours, the PIL highlighted.Children from Dhangarwada in Ukhalu in Shahuwadi taluka in Kolhapur; Children from Dhangarwada in Ukhalu in Kolhapur. (Express Photo)

The PIL stated that human casualties in wildlife attacks in various villages in the buffer zone of Chandoli National Park (CNP) in STR and nearby areas in the last few years.The PIL claimed that over a thousand acres of fertile agricultural land in these villages are lying uncultivated as farmers are afraid of entering their farms due to a constant threat from wild animals, thus causing a violation of their Right to Livelihood.The PIL demanded safety measures such as immediate installation of solar fencing/protection walls around the villages, advanced life support ambulances, safe school transport facilities for students, “livelihood loss compensation” for farmers unable to cultivate their fertile lands, fitting radio collars on all leopards and establish a “real time SMS/WhatsApp alert mechanism” to warn the villagers about their movements.Kamble’s lawyer, Raviraj Birje, submitted news reports from March 2026 showing recent incidents of human wildlife conflict in the buffer zone in Chandoli National Park in STR and nearby areas.Birje also submit-

Why Mumbai has remained dry even as heavy downpour batters Maharashtra

Late on Thursday night, amid a forecast of thunderstorms, some suburban pockets of Mumbai received scanty showers. Beyond the city’s limits, however, the weather was far more dramatic.Heavy rain and hail activity battered areas across Maharashtra in unusually intense bouts of pre-monsoon spells. On Thursday, Pune recorded its wettest April since 1896, while parts of Marathwada and Vidarbha too have been battered by incessant showers over the past 3-4 days.Why has heavy rain eluded Mumbai?According to scientists from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), thunderstorms and heavy pre-monsoon showers have swept areas that fall along the line of discontinuity, an area where there is a sudden change in wind direction or speed, often leading to unstable weather conditions.“At present, there is a western disturbance (WD) system which ushered in westerly winds. At the line of discontinuity, there is a change in air mass, meaning that the westerly winds interacted with easterly winds,” said Sushma Nair, a scientist at IMD Mumbai.“This type of air flow is prominent in Madhya Maharashtra and Marathwada. Therefore, the areas in these regions are experiencing thundershowers and rain activity,” she explained.However, Mumbai is beyond the radar of this line of discontinuity, thereby leaving it much

drier than its neighbouring regions. “It was only poised to receive light rain because of the moisture incursion, which was spurred by the WD system,” a scientist said.Can Mumbai expect heavy rain anytime soon?In its forecast for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, the IMD has eliminated the possibility of rain in the coming days. In fact, scientists said that heavy showers are unlikely to sweep the Mumbai region until late May.“Thunderstorms are a very common feature during the summer months. However, heavy rain activity is a rare occurrence for Mumbai in the month of April,” a meteorologist told The Indian Express.Historical records from the weather bureau show that Mumbai’s wettest April was recorded in 2023, at a mere 14 mm of rainfall.Forecast for the coming daysWhile rain will continue to elude Mumbai, the IMD has forecast normal temperatures for the city in the next week. According to the weather bureau, maximum temperatures in the city are likely to oscillate between 32-33°C till April 9, while night-time temperatures may hover around 23°C.Nayonika BoseNayonika Bose is a Senior Correspondent with The Indian Express’ Mumbai bureau. While in the early stages of her career, her focused reporting on local governance and community welfare already demonstrates clear Expertise and Trustworthiness in covering essential

Congress leader Khushbaz Jattana dies in hit-and-run accident in Sonipat

Punjab Congress leader Khushbaz Singh Jattana (47) and his driver Parminder were killed on Thursday evening after a speeding truck rammed into their stationary SUV on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway near the Jakholi toll plaza in Haryana’s Sonipat district. Jattana’s gunman, Head Constable Karandeep Singh, was critically injured and admitted to a private hospital in Sonipat. The truck driver fled the spot, and a manhunt was launched to nab him.

According to the police, the incident took place around 6.15 pm when Jattana, his driver, gunman and a mechanic had stopped to change a flat tyre. Jattana and the gunman had stepped out of the vehicle while the driver and mechanic were working on it. An incoming truck hit the group and the SUV. Jattana and Parminder died on the spot.The bodies have been shifted to the mortuary of a government hospital in Sonipat.Jattana, a native of Muktsar district, had been active in Punjab politics for over two decades. He began his political career in student politics at Panjab University, where he served as president of the Students Organisation of Panjab University from 2002 to 2004 while studying law.He later joined the Congress and went on to serve as vice-president of the Punjab Youth Congress and district (rural) president in Bathinda. He contested the Assembly elections from Talwandi Sabo in 2017 and 2022 but lost both times.Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring said the party had lost a dynamic and promising leader. Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa termed the incident heartbreaking and said a young life had been cut short abruptly.

Armed assailants fire shots, loot Rs 3.5 lakh from gas agency employee

In a daylight robbery, two masked bike-borne assailants opened fire and looted around Rs 3.5 lakh from a gas agency employee near Peer Sohana (Kharar) on Thursday afternoon, creating panic in the area.According to the preliminary information, Vipin, an employee at a PANSP gas agency warehouse, was travelling on his motorcycle carrying cash, accompanied by his acquaintance Dharampal. He had reportedly just left the agency premises with approximately Rs 3.5 lakh in cash.

As they reached near the Peer Sohana area, two masked men on a motorcycle approached them from behind. Eyewitnesses said the attackers rode alongside and struck Vipin with the butt of a pistol. When Vipin and Dharampal attempted to resist, the assailants fired shots in the air to intimidate them, triggering chaos in the vicinity.Moments later, the attackers fired another shot near Vipin’s feet, further frightening the victims. Taking advantage of the situation, they snatched the bag containing cash and fled the scene at high speed. The stolen amount is estimated to be around Rs 3.5 lakh.

Police from Sadar Kharar Police Station rushed to the spot upon receiving information and initiated an investigation. CCTV footage from nearby areas is being scanned to identify the accused.Police officials stated that efforts are underway to trace and arrest the culprits soon. The incident has raised serious concerns about security in the area, with locals demanding increased police patrolling to prevent such crimes.DSP Karan Sandhu said that “statements of the gas agency employees have been recorded. CCTV footage from nearby areas is being examined. A case of robbery and under the Arms Act will be registered against unknown persons”.

High-speed rail to Noida International Airport? Jewar MLA approaches Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

A demand for high-speed rail connectivity to Noida International Airport has been raised by the Jewar MLA with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. (Image generated using AI)A demand for high-speed rail connectivity to Noida International Airport has been raised by the Jewar MLA with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. (Image generated using AI)

Noida International Airport latest news: Jewar MLA Dharendra Singh met Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and sought a high-speed rail connectivity to Noida International Airport (NIA). He also urged the redevelopment of Chola railway station in Uttar Pradesh with modern infrastructure and passenger amenities. The Chola railway station is a part of North Central Railway (NCR) zone.

Noida International Airport rail connectivityIn a letter to the Railway Minister, Dharendra Singh also sought expedited approval and execution of the proposed new railway line in the region. He further requested consideration for the stoppage of major trains at Chola railway station.

“We, on behalf of the people of Jewar and Anupshahr constituencies, would like to formally submit our request for the comprehensive development and upgradation of Chola Railway Station into a modern, multimodal transport hub, aligned with the upcoming Noida International Airport (Jewar Airport).Given the strategic importance of the airport—one of the largest infrastructure projects in the country—the role of Chola Railway Station becomes pivotal in ensuring seamless regional and national connectivity. Strengthening this node will significantly benefit not only Gautam Buddha Nagar and Bulandshahr districts but the entire Western Uttar Pradesh region,” he said.The phase 1 of Noida International Airport was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 28. This new airport is set to benefit various regions including Agra, Mathura, Aligarh, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Etawah, Bulandshahr and Faridabad. It has been developed as the second international airport for the Delhi-NCR region.Noida International Airport is among the largest greenfield airport projects in the country.

Gavaskar slams BCCI’s domestic cricket schedule



Legendary Indian batter Sunil Gavaskar has lambasted the scheduling for India’s 2026-27 domestic cricket season, highlighting a disregard for First-Class cricket and the Ranji Trophy in favour of auditions for the Indian Premier League (IPL) auction.The senior men’s domestic season began with the Duleep Trophy tournament played over the last fortnight in Bengaluru and Chennai. It will be followed by the first leg of the Ranji Trophy group stages set to be played across the country between October 11 and November 5. The tournament will then witness a break of over two months during which the limited-overs tournaments – Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20s and the 50-overs Vijay Hazare Trophy – will be played between November 14 and January 8, 2027. The white-ball leg will also coincide with the IPL auction for the 2027 season.

‘All for IPL auctions’“After the league stage of the

‘Gukesh has the ceiling but Sindarov, a clear favourite’

Carlsen, who has long criticised the one-on-one format for determining the world’s best, added that even a non-favourite would rarely lose by more than one or two points. Carlsen, who has long criticised the one-on-one format for determining the world’s best, added that even a non-favourite would rarely lose by more than one or two points. Five-time World Champion Magnus Carlsen has reiterated his stance on the upcoming World Chess Championship, calling India’s D Gukesh the underdog and Uzbek challenger Javokhir Sindarov the clear favourite.“As it stands, there’s no question that Sindarov is the favourite,” Carlsen said during the ongoing Global Chess League in Bengaluru.“Chess is a highly psychological game, so it probably won’t take a lot to place some doubts in Sindarov’s mind and some confidence in Gukesh,” he added.Carlsen believes Gukesh has proven his ceiling is on par with or even better than Sindarov’s, calling it an interesting challenge for the Indian to get back to the level that made him the youngest world champion in history.

“The word ‘defend’ is really not a good place to begin. In terms of how Gukesh has played for the last couple of years, he should not be in a position where he has to defend anything. He should be in a position where he has everything to gain.”“He showed in 2024 that when things click, he has the potential to play at an extremely high level. I don’t think a lot of people believe he will do it now, but it’s even more of an interesting challenge for him to try and get back to that,” he said.Earlier, Carlsen praised Sindarov as a well-rounded player with no apparent weaknesses. “He’s very well rounded, doesn’t have any obvious weaknesses,” he had said.Carlsen also stressed that

For wrestler Sujeet, path to gold goes via Japan

EMS News Agency, Sept 15

Asian Games 2026: Sujeet has spent the past year making a convincing case that he belongs among the world’s best at 65kg. (UWW)Asian Games 2026: Sujeet has spent the past year making a convincing case that he belongs among the world’s best at 65kg. (UWW)Sujeet Kalkal’s biggest threat at the Asian Games was supposed to be the man missing from the draw.Rahman Amouzad, the Iranian world champion and the No. 1 wrestler in the world at 65kg, was expected to stand between the Indian and an Asian Games gold medal. But with Amouzad absent from the entry list for Aichi-Nagoya, the equation has suddenly changed.

Not completely. Because the man Sujeet may now have to beat for gold is the wrestler who has already beaten Amouzad when it mattered most.Kotaro Kiyooka will wrestle at the Asian Games in his home country. He is Japan’s Olympic champion, the man who stunned Amouzad in the final in Paris two years ago, and, with the Iranian out of the field, the biggest obstacle in Sujeet’s path.

For the Indian, it is an opportunity — but not quite the open road that Amouzad’s absence might suggest.Sujeet has spent the past year making a convincing case that he belongs among the world’s best at 65kg. The 23-year-old went into the Asian Championships in Bishkek earlier this year unbeaten in 2026 after gold medals at the Zagreb Open and the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series, before going on to win the continental title.The Asian Games, however, could present him with a test of an entirely different order.At the Asian Championships, Japan was represented by Takara Suda, who had moved up from 61kg. At the Asian Games, Japan will have its Olympic champion. And Kiyooka is no ordinary home favourite.His gold medal in Paris was one of the surprises of the Olympic wrestling competition. Having first emerged from Japan’s famously unforgiving domestic system — a process that required him to beat former world and Olympic champion Takuto Otoguro for his place — Kiyooka went all the way to the final and defeated Amouzad 10-3 to win gold.The result matters even more now.Amouzad’s absence removes the division’s most accomplished active wrestler from Sujeet’s side of the equation. But it leaves behind the one man who has proved, on the biggest stage, that Amouzad can be beaten.That makes a potential Sujeet-Kiyooka clash the bout that could define India’s 65kg campaign. Kiyooka known for his counter lift and cartwheel sequence, will run into Sujeet’s speed.There are, of course, other complications. The Asian Championships showed just how deep the continental field can be. Uzbekistan’s Umidjon Jalolov arrived in Bishkek as a world bronze medalist, while wrestlers from Kazakhstan — Nachyn Kuular — and

Ranji Trophy, there’s a gap of over a month for the white-ball tournaments, after which the Ranji Trophy knockout starts. The rhythm and momentum get destroyed.“Why is the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy not played till the quarterfinal, then a break for a few weeks, and then the semifinals and final, as it happens with the Ranji Trophy? It won’t be done because the auction for the IPL happens pretty soon after the tournament,” Gavaskar wrote in his Sportstar column.The second half of the forthcoming Ranji season will commence on January 17, 2027, with the final set to be played from February 27.“How can a tournament be interrupted to accommodate a white-ball tournament? The Ranji Trophy national championship needs to be given pride of place again, rather than being pushed around here and there as it has been over the past few years.” The BCCI opted the current format of fixtures for the Ranji Trophy since the 2024-25 season, citing harsh winter conditions in north India that disrupted several matches over previous years. In 2023-24, the tournament ran from January to March.The former India captain forewarned that neglecting red-ball cricket will impact the development of top talent in the red-ball format.“Ignoring domestic cricket to focus on international cricket will prove counterproductive in the end. Most importantly, if red-ball cricket is neglected, then the chances of producing top-class players will reduce considerably. Look at the current Indian teams, and you will find that just about every player has come through the fire of red-ball cricket. Red-ball cricket gives a grounding that white-ball cricket hardly ever does,” he added.



Gukesh must take the initiative from the start to keep Sindarov on the back foot.“If Sindarov is ahead early on, it’s probably very, very bad news for Gukesh. If Gukesh is ahead early on, he automatically becomes a significant favourite. That’s how these matches work.”The Norwegian, who has long criticised the one-on-one format for determining the world’s best, added that even a non-favourite would rarely lose by more than one or two points.“The thing about World Championship matches, and one of the reasons I believe it’s an extraordinarily bad way to determine the best player in the world, is that you play Classical, which is the most egalitarian format, and you don’t play a ton of games. It means that even if you think it’s 80-20 before the match, the likelihood is still very high that it’s going to be a one or two-point match, because chess is such a drawish game,” he said.



Iran — Abbas Ebrahimzadeh — continue to be among the serious threats.But for Sujeet, the hierarchy has become considerably clearer. Amouzad’s name is missing. Kiyooka’s is not.

And that is significant for another reason. The Asian Games will be held in Japan. If Sujeet is to win what could become one of India’s most significant gold medals of the Games, he may have to beat an Olympic champion in front of his home crowd.It would also be a fitting measure of just how far Sujeet has come. Not long ago, India’s 65kg division belonged to Bajrang Punia, the last male wrestler to win an Asian Games gold, in 2018. Sujeet’s rise has coincided with the search for a successor in one of Indian wrestling’s most successful categories. His results this year — culminating in the Asian title — have put him firmly in that conversation.His style of wrestling has won him many admirers, including the new foreign coach Shako Bendinitis. Most Indians, including Bajrang, have relied on stamina more than technique. They aimed to outlast their opponents in a bout. Sujeet is the opposite of that — he puts into practice all the technical drills learnt over the years.Shako hailed him as an ‘amazing wrestler’, who, ‘with a little bit of tactical advice, with a little bit more power’, will be a dangerous wrestler at the Los Angeles Olympics.The Asian Games will test those credentials. And it will be his biggest test so far.The absence of the world No. 1 may have, on paper, made the gold medal more attainable. But the road to it may still run through an Olympic champion. And in Nagoya, Kotaro Kiyooka will be wrestling in his own backyard.

Washington back in nets, Bumrah to join India camp

New Delhi: A fit-again Washington Sundar slogged hard at the Indian team’s afternoon net session on Thursday as the team management awaited the arrival of Jasprit Bumrah and Nitish Reddy ahead of the three-match away series against Afghanistan, starting Sunday.With Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Ishan Kishan and Tilak Varma finishing their Duleep Trophy final assignment

India’s TT stars face a different game at Asian Games



In table tennis, it’s not always what the paddler brings to the table. But what the table might bring to the player.Every competition table might look just the same, but they could be every bit as finicky and whimsical as cricket pitches or badminton shuttles. At the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, the tables will play much slower and Indians will need to be in their best physical shape.

“There’s a huge difference in tables, as much as grass and clay in tennis,” explains G Sathiyam, before Indians embark to Higashiyama Park with hope to improve upon the performance at the last edition where Sutirtha Mukherjee and Ayhika Mukherjee won a gutsy bronze.“But there are no demarcated seasons for us. The segregation in TT is like first week clay, second grass and then clay again in a different country,” Sathiyam says.In India, tables are grainy, faster and spinnier. In hotter conditions, the ball comes on faster. In Europe, it’s a little slower. Slowest are the DHS (Double Happiness) tables in China and Japan where the spin quotient comes down.Sathiyam’s longtime coach S Raman runs an academy in Chennai, which brought in 2-3 different varieties of tables to help its players.“There’s three variables to TT conditions – vertical bounce, the amount of spin depending on the friction of the table and linear speed,” Raman says.“You have to constantly keep recalibrating your playing style. Also, the same table brand can play differently in Conditions A, B or E. This makes it tough to get consistent results,” he adds.Especially when Indian tables are grippier and the ball dances around wickedly at pace.TT tables differ in bounce, linear speed, and spin depending on the friction of surface. TT tables differ in bounce, linear speed, and spin depending on the friction of surface. Pichumani

The force behind 400 metre national record holder Vishal

Early last year, Vishal TK approached coach Jason Dawson with the wish to train with the Jamaican. Dawson told him to start eating. Dawson does not recall Vishal’s weight, but he felt the six-foot-two sprinter was too thin. “That’s why I called him stickman. I looked at Vishal, and I said, ‘ok I will try to coach you’. But I need you to grant me a favour. Just eat everything you can. I think it has to do with his metabolism because he can eat, but he burns it like this The 54-year-old’s training regimen is not for everyone. “I am out of my comfort zone, but I am living in hell happily,” is how Vishal, the first and only Indian to clock sub-45 seconds in the 400 metres, described Dawson’s training camp.By the end of a training session, his athletes typically have nothing left in the tank. Dawson is like the father pushing them to run one more lap or an extra training drill. They are like children who speak freely and fuss, hoping the father’s heart melts.

Dawson’s hard-yards method bore fruit when, months after he joined the Indian setup, the men’s 4x400 meter relay team finished fifth at the 2023 World Championships final in Budapest. “I am glad they performed like that because they needed it. India needed to see that their team can perform amongst the biggest athletes out there. The youngsters coming up needed to see that,” Dawson said.Yet, not everyone bought into Dawson’s approach. Thereafter, he took a different set of athletes under his wing. Among them is Vishal, who is reaping the rewards for having faith in the Jamaican. “One of the things that shocked me when I came to India was the mental side of how athletes viewed training. It was more like a resistance because anything that seems new is impossible. Like ‘we have never done this before.’ I would always tell my guys, especially Vishal, that difficult is not impossible. So now when I tell Vishal, ‘this is difficult,’ he says ‘difficult is not impossible, coach,’” Dawson said.

Vishal T K with his father, Thennarasu, after becoming the first Indian to run a sub-45 seconds 400 metres race. (AFI) Vishal T K with his father, Thennarasu, after becoming the first Indian to run a sub-45 seconds 400 metres race. (AFI)Vishal recalls naysayers discouraging him from training under Dawson. The outcome of his first race after he linked up with Dawson gave the cynics fodder. At the Indian Open 400 metre competition in Thiruvananthapuram in March last year, Vishal clocked 49.07 seconds and finished seventh.But a month later, he bounced back to win gold at the Federation Cup in Kochi with a time of 46.19 seconds. Four months later in August, at the Inter-State competition in Chennai, Vishal broke the national record for the first time by clocking 45.12 seconds.“For my coach Jason” was scribbled on the back of his bib, an acknowledgement of Dawson’s contribution. “People made me feel bad by saying why are you running a girl’s timing (after the Indian Open). I shut everyone’s mouth after one month when I won the Fed Cup,” Vishal said. “That one month (between the Indian Open and the Federation Cup) there was so much negativity. When I started working with him, people said, ‘I told you Jason coach’s work is hard’. See that is why you are running 48-49. I was like ‘why are you trying to disturb me’. When I was going to the Federation Cup, people said, ‘hey, you can finish in the top 6’. They were trying to hold me back. But I won.”

Born to coachDawson, a former sprinter, was drawn to coaching even when he was a teenager. He considers himself fortunate to have the opportunity to pick the brains of Glen Mills, the coach at the famous Racers Track Club, who mentored Usain Bolt. Fitz Coleman, another legendary coach from Jamaica, and the late Lloyd Cowan, the coach of Christine Ohuruogu, the 400 metre gold medalist at the 2008 Olympics, are men whom he was influenced by. When the opportunity to work with Indian athletes came his way, Dawson thought why not.“So when I came (to India) I observed as much as possible. I realised that talent is there. Before I even came here, I clearly remember telling Fitz Coleman that talent is there in India. He travels the world and he is one of those prolific coaches. He said, ‘yes, talent is there, but we don’t know what is the problem’.”

Krishnan)Manush Shah, on whom many hopes rest due to his partnership with Manav Thakkar that’s No.3 in the world, explains the granular behaviour of tables.“We need to wait more, produce more power from the lower body in order to not get injured in the upper body. Also, we tend to stay closer to the table to be prepared for shorter balls inside the table.”Slower balls means there are fewer opportunities to attack. “So, we focus on defence and then bring attack into the rally,” he added.One could be training all year in India, where the ball is whizzing; and stand a foot behind. When they play abroad, slow balls demand more power, which the top Chinese and Japanese have trained for. Indians like the Mukherjeas, Manika Batra, Sreeja Akula besides Ankur Bhattacharya, Sathiyam and the MnMs have been confronting this challenge over the years.“We have to adjust to different conditions all the time. As soon as you get a good feel of one set of conditions, the next one is completely different,” she says.

Sathiyam says his mind zones in on what to expect the moment he clears immigration. For Sutirtha, adapting to tables has become a part of life, though a webpage all paddlers visit ahead of a tournament is the tournament prospectus which mentions the type of table to be used.“You just have to acclimatise within a short time on the practice day. They declare on the prospectus. You can’t buy so many tables for training, can you?” she remarks.You can – if you are in China or Korea.“I’ve seen Korean training halls and in China, where they train with 12-13 types of tables, while India will have at most 3-4. In Chennai, we have 2-3 variations including a DHS table,” Sathiyam says. “DHS tables in China and Japan result in the spin quotient reducing. It puts more pressure on the legs because the ball comes slowly a lot of times. It changes strokemaking. When it’s slow, the body movement changes since you are used to play from much behind in India.”“When the ball moves at speed, less effort is extracted from the body,” says fellow international Snehit Suravajjula. “It gets difficult when competing abroad because of the tables.”Coach Raman, though, cuts through the table-babble and benefits of simulation.“It’s ultimately down to the player. As long as you know that a table is neither your best friend nor your worst enemy, you are OK,” he says.He says the talk about the ‘latest table’ often tends to be a “manufacturing gimmick.”



Once in India, Dawson took the 400 metres to new heights — first the relay team in Budapest and now Vishal.Vishal’s coach at the Lakshmibai National College of Physical Education in Thiruvananthapuram, Srinivasan, convinced the quarter-miler, who earlier specialised in the 100 metres and 200 metres, to train with Dawson. His previous coach Vinod Kumar, too green-lighted the move.At the Federation Cup in Ranchi in May, Vishal clocked 44.98s to become the first Indian to complete the one-race lap in less than 45 seconds. “Coach had told me a week earlier, I want you to be the first 44-second runner in India. He told me, if you do this your grandchildren will remember it,” Vishal said.But before Vishal broke records, his technique needed to be fixed. Despite being a sprinter, Vishal didn’t use the starting blocks to his advantage. But this wasn’t the only issue.

“His pattern of running and body language was nothing. I said, ‘Vishal you have to learn to use your hands’. Your hands are very important when you are sprinting. I looked at what he was like on the starting block. Then I said forget about the starting block, I will help you with it later. The starting block was just there as an instrument on the track for Vishal. The starting block is supposed to propel you for your race,” Dawson said.Vishal terms his start as ‘garbage’ and admits as a sprinter, he should have been better at it. “When I came to him, I was standing up and running and he changed everything. It is 400 metres, not just the first twenty metres or thirty metres. So he made me better in that 370 metres,” Vishal said.Improving the start is kept for the next season. The immediate focus is the Asian Games in Aichi–Nagoya. Vishal didn’t qualify for the 400 metre final at the Commonwealth Games. The Asiad is an opportunity to end the season on a high.“I also told Vishal, you have to keep working hard. Because I am going to coach others. So don’t get comfortable. I am going to push everyone I work with to hit you, because you are up there,” Dawson said.Vishal is ready to walk through fire. That is how much he trusts Dawson. “Like father and son. Even if he scolds me, I don’t get upset. People come and take photos with me now even when I am watching a race from the stands. I am happy we raised the bar.”

Centuries stand out in HCA Super League

Hyderabad: Centuries by Aaron George (119) for Team G and Sai Pragnay Reddy (162) for Team E were among the highlights of the HCA Senior Men’s Multi-Day Super League Cricket Championship here on Thursday.

Senior Men’s Multi-Day Super League: Team F 226 in 73.5 overs & 354 in 64.2 overs bt Team H 99 in 26 overs & 246 in 39.2 overs (A Avanish Rao 57, Mickil Jaiswal 46, Madhukar Manne 63no, M Dheeraj Rao 5/76).Team G 342 in 107.5 overs & 227/2 in 53 overs (G Ritish Reddy 60, Aaron George 119) vs Team E 362/10 in 95.3 overs (Sai Pragnay Reddy 162, Rahul Buddhi 66, Tarun Rajan 6/60, Saqlain Arafat 3/75).Team A 348 in 83 overs & 231 in 50.5 overs (Sacheit Binrajka 39, S Dheeraj 61, Harshit Sai 3/46, TVS Narayana Reja 3/45)

‘With Awarapan 2, I wanted to reclaim the box office failure of the first film’: Vishesh Bhatt



Nineteen years after Mohit Suri’s 2007 action romance Awarapan failed to make a dent at the box office, producer Vishesh Bhatt was confident that would change with the sequel, Awarapan 2. While Emraan Hashmi reprises his iconic role of Shivam Pandit, Bilal Siddiqi takes over from Shagufta Rafique as the screenwriter, and Nitin Kakkar from Mohit Suri as the director. In an exclusive interview with SCREEN, Vishesh discusses why he decided to make a sequel despite the first film’s failure, why Suri didn’t return to helm the film, and his terms with uncle and mentor Mahesh Bhatt despite the latter’s fallout with the former’s father, Mukesh Bhatt.

What made you continue the journey of Shivam Pandit although he was presumed dead at the end of the first film?

I felt there was a spiritual and emotional element to it. There was a voice within me, which asked me to tap more into that spiritual element. It’s great that today, because of the internet, people interpret so fast. They were able to see if Shivam is talking to God through “Tera Mera Rishta Purana” in the first part, now God is talking back to him in the sequel. That relationship is very important to someone as broken as Shivam. Emraan and I have experienced the heartache of the journey of Awarapan. We’d discussed that we’d take on this, and prove to ourselves that Awarapan was a good story and a good film to make. I wanted to reclaim the market and business side of Awarapan.

Did it take time for Emraan to slip into the shoes of Shivam?

Emraan told me Shivam’s character is in his silences, which is very true. Yes, he has deeply moving moments, but he doesn’t just come and tote his gun. Obviously in 2026, you see that it’s more externalized. We had a learning from part 1 that it’s different to watch a film on television for 19 years, and you understand what the silences mean. But in cinema hall, the silences come and go. There’s no rewind or pause. We knew that, but the whole character is still layered with those silences.

Awarapan 2 Emraan Hashmi as Shivam Pandit in Awarapan 2.

Bilal Siddiqi was in school when he watched Awarapan. Did his fandom help in correcting the first film with the sequel?

There were a lot of people on this film, including Bilal, who watched Awarapan as kids. They never got to go to the cinemas then, but watched it on TV. They became a part of the film’s crew. For me, it felt like yesterday, which was a good thing. But those crew members heaved a sigh after the first shot of the first day on set when they felt, “Shivam is back!” I said, “Okay, we’re in the correct zone.” The fact that I felt it as well as someone new felt it meant Emraan did it beautifully.

Why did you never offer Mohit Suri to direct Awarapan 2?

It’s about timing. Mohit is my brother. My creative expression has always been with Mohit. Because we’ve grown up together, we have a great sync. But when we were going to start making the film, he was already into Saiyaara. There were also some conversations about Aashiqui 3. He’s a passionate filmmaker, but I felt his universe was in the Aashiqui and Saiyaara space. He gave Saiyaara all his heart, and you could see the results.

Was it important to get a fresh perspective because the first film failed at the box office?

We speak about Awarapan all the time, but Mohit never proposed we should make the sequel. It’s not like he proposed, and I said no. His calling was somewhere else. His heart was in Awarapan, but his heart was also

broken. It was good that there were some of us, and there were some new energies, and the family grew bigger. We wanted to do something new because the old is already done. It’s different from a Dhurandhar, where part 1 and 2 happened six months apart, so you work with the same team for cost effectiveness.

Shabana Azmi told me she did the special appearance in Awarapan 2 only because she knows you since you were born. How did you make the character of Nafisa worthy of her caliber?

If anything else, she’s more powerful in person than on screen. That’s her personality and depth. Whenever I’d discuss something, she’d listen respectfully, but she’d say, ‘I can still see only the little Vishesh in you.’ I told her, ‘I’m 40 years old!’ After working for so many years, I never had the privilege of working with her. The character has the layers and gravitas that required a legendary space, and would represent what a Shabana Azmi could play. Nitin and Bilal narrated the story to her. I was there, but I wanted to keep the personal out of it. She also asked them to narrate the full story, and not only her character. She’d ask questions about not just her character, but also the whole story. After you came onboard Vishesh Films, Mahesh Bhatt said you challenged him and Mukesh Bhatt’s filmmaking formulas. How did you do that?

They also built a platform that challenged the status quo. That’s been the DNA of this company. My father and uncle were never with the time. They always stood on their own by going against the tide. So, I have that in my DNA, and in the culture of this company. So, when I’d hear them repeating themselves, I would ask them, ‘Why are we doing this? What’s the reason? Is it money? Even if it is, let’s be true to it. Let’s not kid ourselves that it’s for a higher cause.’ We were also going from film to digital. From my experience of going to the top film school in New York University, I learnt that you can be yourself while not being in a bubble. These are two different things. You can challenge everything, but also challenge the bubble you live in.

What kind of inputs did you bring to the table? When I became more active from the time of Gangster (2006), I’d go to the radio and make them listen to the songs. Zeher (2005) was a small film, so we didn’t have budgets. I’d sit the whole day at the MTV office to make them listen to “Woh Lamhe Woh Baatein”. Because I knew they had an editorial space besides the paid space. We believed our songs were our stars, but how do we make them listen to the audience in the internet’s absence? Mohit and I’d remix even the soulful songs, to which Bhatt sahab and my father asked why we’re adding beats to such good lyrics and melody. But we did it so that one can celebrate the emotions at a party. From 2000, I was always trying to keep our identity, yet be relevant with the times. It doesn’t come easy to keep that balance.

Mahesh Bhatt is no longer a part of Vishesh Films after his fallout with your father. Since he was also your mentor, did you take his blessings before Awarapan 2?

He gives me his blessings all the time. A lot of times, people would tell me, “We don’t envy you.” Because I was the buffer between them and the outside world, but also between both the brothers. I’d get hammered from all sides. My relationship with him was that of a mentor. When you share that, it goes beyond family. They’re my sounding boards. In fact, they’d ask me, ‘You’re doing it right. Why are you asking us?’ But when you don’t seek external validation, the voice of the mentor has a different kind of importance. When the teaser came out, he pointed out exactly what I was trying to do with the film. I want to, but I’m such a hands-on producer. People ask me why I’m so invested in films I’m only producing, not directing. Maybe that’s never been me. I don’t seek the limelight. I actually like the journey of making the film. There’s been a warped understanding that only the director makes the film, and the producer cracks deals. But my father said a very good thing, ‘Both the jobs of the producer and the director are a 24-hour job each. Nobody can do 48 hours in one day, right?’ The two halves work together to make the film land. Now that Awarapan 2 is out, is there a message to the fans of the first film who’ve been pining for a sequel for the past 19 years? If this film succeeds, all us fans of Awarapan would succeed. Awarapan 2 wasn’t a cash grab. The market was asking why we’re making the sequel of an unsuccessful film. But we put our own money on a film that we’ve already lost money on. If you like films like Awarapan, go, support it, and give it everything. Tell me, and the market, that we should keep making Awarapan. Otherwise I’d be forced to make what the market will ask me to make because Awarapan fans didn’t come out to support me, but were crying somewhere and typing some nonsense on the keyboard. The love for Awarapan was a little too late. This is the second chance to love and support Awarapan.



film. Clips and screenshots mocking its animation and bewildering storyline began circulating online. Instead of killing the film, the ridicule created a new reason to watch it: audiences wanted to see for themselves whether it really was as strange as everyone claimed. The turnaround was dramatic. Maoyan’s figures put the film’s total box office at 17.1 million yuan (\$2.5 million), after it took in 8.2 million yuan in a single day and recorded nearly 300,000 admissions that day. Cinemas began adding screenings as demand grew. Some did not even have official promotional artwork, so staff created their own. The Associated Press reported that cinema posters included a hand-drawn calf alongside the slogans, “Come on over if you’re into the bizarre” and “No refunds.”

Sunny Deol’s force to Emraan Hashmi’s silence: Batwara 1947, Awarapan 2’s divine connect



There can hardly be two films more different from each other than Batwara 1947 and Awarapan 2. If one excavates the past to make sense of the present, the other excavates our feelings about the past to make the present more profitable. One arrives carrying the weight of history; the other, the weight of memory. One is fronted by a yesteryear single-screen hero who became an emblem of a certain kind of Hindi-movie masculinity that was all force and fury; the other by a hero whose multiplex-born masculinity was defined by sensuality, cherished by a generation but never quite elevated into stardom. And yet, when you watch them closely, and back to back, the distance between the two begins to diminish. Beyond their wildly different surfaces, they are speaking, in strangely similar ways, about strangely similar things. Their kinship, then, goes well beyond the curious coincidence of Shabana Azmi appearing in both films.

A sense of time haunts both. With Awarapan 2, the nostalgia was almost inevitable. Its relationship with its 2007 predecessor was always going to be part of its appeal. Awarapan 2 understands that what it is selling is not simply a continuation of a story, but the return of a particular time. The mid-2000s, when a certain kind of Hindi-film melancholy had a home on television, when Emraan Hashmi’s brooding lovers could exist somewhere between the multiplex and the small screen, and when a song could preserve a film long after it had faded. The sequel turns that distance into its own emotional currency, taking a character who has been frozen in the memory of his audience and placing him, at last, in the present tense again.

Batwara 1947, meanwhile, is not simply a film about the past; it is a film that seems to have carried some of the past into its own making. Its historical subject is Partition, but its sense of time is also lodged in its form, in the way it is pitched, staged, shot and edited. Directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, it often resembles a film made in another time and age: theatrical, declamatory, emotionally unrestrained. And yet, the irony is that this datedness does not always diminish its potency. In portions, Batwara 1947 soars with a sincerity that Awarapan 2, for all its carefully cultivated nostalgia, can only manufacture. What makes the two films interesting together, then, is not simply what they remember, but the ways in which they make time visible. One film reaches into the past to retrieve a feeling; the other seems to have arrived from the past carrying one with it.

Faith is another thread that binds these films together, though Batwara 1947 wears it much more openly. Consider the scene in which Sikandar’s (Sunny Deol) factory is denied the land he had already purchased because its owner, at the last moment, refuses to give it to

him for sheltering Mai (Shabana Azmi), a Hindu woman in a newly created Pakistan. The loss unsettles him; his wife and daughter are equally distraught. But when they tell Mai, she responds with the unhurried assurance of an elder at home: “God will show us the way.” The film soon makes good on her faith. Sikandar is granted a piece of land larger than the one he had lost, turning what could have been a simple plot resolution into something closer to an act of providence. It is a pattern the film returns to repeatedly. “May God protect you.” “By the grace of God.” “All thanks to the Almighty.” “He is the most merciful.” These are not simply lines of dialogue but a vocabulary through which its characters understand what happens to them.

At one crucial moment, when Hamida (Preity Zinta) finds herself in grave danger and cries out, “Oh God,” Sikandar arrives almost as an answer to the prayer. The film’s faith, however, is not simply the belief that the higher power will intervene. It is also a way of holding on to something when the world seems to have forfeited its moral compass. When Sikandar and Hamida despair at the cynicism unleashed by Partition and the hatred gathering around them, they wonder whether people have lost their faith in God. Later, when a law officer threatens to invoke the authority of the law, Sikandar draws a distinction of his own: he may do what the law permits, but he will do what his imaan commands. Hamida, too, refuses to imagine survival at the cost of surrendering her faith. And in the moment when Mai breaks into a devotional song, the film’s faith perhaps finds its most elemental form, belief turning into song, and song into prayer.

And needless to say, Awarapan has always been a film about faith. About love as worship, about the surrender that only love can demand, about the ways by which a love story makes you believe in something larger than yourself. Beyond all its gangster paraphernalia and wounded masculinity, it was always, in its strangest sense, a love story between an atheist and God. The film simply kept disguising this romance as something else. In the sequel, directed by Nitin Kakkar and written by Bilal Siddiqi and Vishesh Bhatt, that romance hides into the background, only to surface at the moments when the film most needs to believe in itself. And when it does, it becomes its greatest trump card, and perhaps its most cinematic saving grace. Without giving too much away, one of the year’s most beautiful moments on a big screen arrives when the most beloved song from the prequel finally fills the frame in all its glory, only to reiterate, how Shivam’s (Emraan Hashmi) story has always been incomplete without the divine.

He is, after all, a man whose journey has always been governed by the twin ideas of karma and penance. Of sins that demand reckoning and wounds that demand atonement. So it is fitting that the film opens with the thought that you may be different, you may be distant, but God resides within you. The idea keeps returning in other forms. The taweez once again becomes the film’s emotional axis, his dead beloved yet again tells him that he is the chosen one, that he is meant to be an angel in a world of demons. Much of Awarapan 2, then, becomes a story about the divine returning to Shivam in ways he cannot quite recognise, appearing at the edge of death, pulling him back from it, and preserving his faith in the possibility of his own humanity. So, unlike Sikandar, who believes in the divine and trusts that God will restore what has been wronged, Shivam is a man who must first be made to believe that only the divine can restore him. Yet both are, in their own ways, khuda ke bande, doing God’s work in their own time, in their own language, and according to the demands of their own faith. If Awarapan 2 believes that to free an oppressed soul is to free a little of mankind itself, Batwara 1947 endorses that to protect one oppressed soul is to restore something of mankind that has been lost.

‘Don’t daydream about my bedroom’: Kangana Ranaut slams Baba Ramdev amid ‘Gen Gutter’ row

A day after yoga guru and businessman Baba Ramdev slammed Kangana Ranaut for her controversial “Generation Gutter” comment, the actor-politician has retorted, advising him not to give her character lessons. Claiming that she has a better personality than him, Kangana also pointed out that no “fraud” has been detected under her name, taking a jibe at the many controversies surrounding Ramdev and his Patanjali brand.

What triggered Kangana Ranaut-Baba Ramdev clash?

For those unversed, in response to the widespread support for the Cockroach Janta Party-led student protests in New Delhi, Kangana Ranaut had taken to social media to make purportedly objectionable comments about Indian Gen Z. In one of her posts, she criticised “young Hindu women who want to imitate the lives of independent career women without earning that freedom.” Claiming that they have “nothing to offer to the system,” she called them “ugly and corrupt,” and accused them of “doing drugs, drinking, and having endless body count.” She further labelled them “Generation Gutter,” sparking widespread controversy.

During his recent appearance at the TV9 Satta Sammelan, Ramdev was asked about Kangana Ranaut’s comments, and the yoga guru tore into her, questioning what qualifications she had to ridicule the country’s youth. “What is her qualification? Unka bachpan kaisa raha hai? Unki jawaani kaisi rahi hai? Unke pehle ke kaarname kaise rahe hain? (How was her childhood? How was her youth? What were her past accomplishments like?)” He added, “I don’t want to talk about such people. Calling any of our youngsters or Gen Z ‘gutter’ is a sign of a corrupted mind. It’s wrong. Her party members should take note of this.” “No fraud detected here”: Kangana Ranaut hits back at Baba Ramdev

On Wednesday, August 19, Kangana Ranaut took to her Instagram stories to respond to Baba Ramdev. “Baba ji, don’t daydream about my jawani or bedroom. One can only assume based on rumours and gossip. At least mujhe kabhi Supreme Court se fatkar nahi lagi (I



never got scolded by the Supreme Court) for false/fraud efficacy claims based on hard facts, not some gossip or assumptions. So don’t give me character lessons. Tumse toh bahut zyada behtar hai mera character (My character is far better than yours), no fraud detected here,” the actor-politician noted. Kangana Ranaut was most recently seen in director Manoj Tapadia’s Bharat Bhagya Viddhaata, which became a box-office bomb, grossing just Rs 8.32 crore worldwide, according to industry tracker Sacnilk. She also serves as a BJP MP representing the Mandi constituency in Himachal Pradesh. A proponent of yoga and Ayurveda, Baba Ramdev is the co-founder of Patanjali Ayurved and Patanjali Yogpeeth.