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CM Revanth to flag off Rs 9,100 cr development works in 3 days



Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will tour Kodangal from November 7 to 9 and inaugurate/lay foundation of development works worth Rs 9,100 crore.

He will participate in meetings with farmers, industrialists and women from self-help groups during these three days.

He will also inaugurate the Mega Rythu Mela and Industrial Expo at the premises of the Young India Education Hub in Hakimpeta, Dudyala mandal, Vikarabad district at 11 am on November 7.

The next day, he will lay the foundation stone of the Eco-Palm palm oil factory, at the Lagacharla industrial corridor which is being built at an estimated cost of Rs. 81 crore.

He will then inaugurate the Zila Parishad High School and Government Junior College buildings built with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds from Natco at a cost of Rs 4 crore in Hakimpeta.

He will also lay the foundation stone for Radial Road-2 in Nacharam village, Kosgi mandal. The project is estimated to cost Rs. 5,060 crore.

Fire breaks out in 4 coaches of Amritsar-bound train near Rajpura, passengers evacuated

Panic gripped passengers aboard the Amritsar-bound Karmabhoomi Express after a fire broke out in four general coaches of the train near Rajpura in Patiala district on Friday. Passengers were evacuated safely, and no casualties or injuries had been reported so far.

According to railway officials, the fire broke out in train No. 12508 (Amritsar–New Jalpaiguri Karmabhoomi Express) shortly after it departed from Sadhugarh railway station in Fatehgarh Sahib at 12.58 pm.

The blaze spread to coach No. 265287GS, the fifth coach from the engine, triggering panic among passengers as thick smoke and flames engulfed the affected compartments. Passengers rushed out of the coaches to escape the fire.

Following the alert, railway authorities, police personnel and fire brigade teams rushed to the spot and launched firefighting and evacuation operations.

A medical relief train carrying Accident Relief Medical Equipment (ARME) was dispatched from Ambala at 1.20 pm to assist in the emergency response.

Ambala Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vinod Kumar Bhatia also reached the spot to oversee the situation. He said no injuries or casualties had been reported so far.



The exact cause of the fire was yet to be ascertained. Railway officials were investigating the incident.



CM Naidu Visits Cyclone-Hit Villages In Bapatla, Inspects Crop Damage

Bapatla: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday visited cyclone-hit villages in Bapatla district and inspected agricultural fields inundated by severe cyclonic storm Murasu.At Jillellamudi, he inspected submerged paddy fields and interacted with farmers to assess the extent of crop damage and the investments they had made in cultivation.

Farmers told him that their crops had been damaged just before harvest. They recalled the government's support in supplying water during drought conditions.

Naidu asked the farmers whether they had enrolled under the crop insurance scheme and said insurance coverage and input subsidies could provide relief in the event of natural calamities. He said awareness about crop insurance would also be increased among farmers.

The CM inspected the flow of floodwater near the Jillellamudi bridge, where officials briefed him on inundation in several areas due to the heavy flow of water in the stream.

Farmers raised concerns over damaged gates of the Nallamada stream and sought their repair. Naidu directed officials to submit proposals for repairing the existing gates or installing new ones.

He asked officials to examine measures to prevent floodwater from entering agricultural fields and ensure its effective utilisation. The CM later inspected road stretches damaged by erosion between Jillellamudi and Returu.

Farmers from Returu told him that they had cultivated crops using water supplied through the Pattiseema project but had suffered losses due to the cyclone.

Naidu said planning water releases ahead of the cropping season could help minimise crop losses during cyclones, it said.

He also referred to the Polavaram project in this context, highlighting its role in facilitating early cultivation.

At Returu, the CM inspected inundated paddy fields and enquired about the progress of crop damage assessments.

He interacted with representatives of Water Users Associations and sought details about the removal of weeds and other obstructions from canals and sluices to ensure the smooth flow of water.

Severe cyclonic storm Murasu crossed the Andhra Pradesh coast between Nellore and Narsapur, near Ongole, on Tuesday, claiming eight lives, officials said. Five deaths were reported in Bapatla district, two in Guntur and one in Palnadu.

The state government has released Rs 37 crore to the affected districts for immediate relief, according to a press release. A preliminary assessment showed that crop damage was reported across 1.4 lakh hectares, affecting more than 1.8 lakh farmers. Horticultural crops were damaged over 6,749 hectares, impacting 12,586 farmers.

CBI Books Kishore Biyani in Rs 904 Crore Bank Fraud Case

New Delhi: The CBI has registered an FIR against Future Retail Ltd and businessman Kishore Biyani in connection with an alleged bank fraud involving Rs 904.32 crore. The agency also conducted searches at premises linked to him in Mumbai on Friday.

The agency has also named his brother, Rakesh Biyani, in the case, registered under provisions relating to criminal conspiracy and cheating, as well as the Prevention of Corruption Act, officials said.



"The Central Bureau of Investigation has registered a case on the complaint of the State Bank of India's stressed assets management branch - III, Mumbai against Future Retail Ltd and its promoters/managing directors/ executive directors/guarantors namely Kishore Biyani, Rakesh Biyani, unknown public servants and others for offenses of criminal conspiracy for cheating and also the offenses under the Prevention of Corruption Act, resulting in alleged wrongful loss of Rs.904.32 crore to the complainant Bank," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

According to the SBI complaint, the accused allegedly entered into a criminal conspiracy to obtain credit facilities from the bank and a consortium of nine banks.

Future Retail operated multiple retail formats, including hypermarkets and supermarkets such as Big Bazaar, Fashion@Big Bazaar and Foodhall. It was also engaged in the general trading of FMCG and fashion products through its stores.

The CBI alleged that the company failed to utilise the funds for the purposes for which they had been sanctioned.

"It is further alleged that the company diverted the funds by siphoning them off through associate companies/connected entities and caused loss to the bank," the statement said.

The agency registered the FIR on November 4 and subsequently conducted searches at multiple premises in Mumbai.

"Incriminating documents relevant to the investigation were recovered and seized during the searches," the spokesperson said.

The investigation is underway to ascertain the full extent of the alleged conspiracy, identify the roles of those involved, including public servants and private individuals, and trace the end use of the loan funds, she added.

KFC, Pista House ordered to shut after food raids in Telangana

Hyderabad: The Telangana Standards Authority for Food and Essential Drugs (TG SAFE) has suspended the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) licences and registrations of five food establishments across the state following inspections that revealed serious violations of food safety and hygiene norms.

The establishments have been directed to immediately stop their business operations in the interest of public health, according to a press note issued by TG SAFE Commissioner on Friday, November 6.

The establishments facing action include a KFC outlet operated by Devyani International Limited at Christian Colony, Sawaran Street, Karimnagar; Pista House Restaurant at Muthangi in Patancheru mandal; Ganapathi Hotel Mess and Hostel at Patancheru Bus Stand in Sangareddy district; Nawabi Delights at Dhobi Ghat, Madannapet; and SK Bakers and Fast Food at Ayodhya Nagar Colony, Mehdipatnam.



During the inspection of the KFC outlet in Karimnagar, Food Safety Officers reportedly found that the Total Polar Compounds (TPC) readings of cooking oil used for frying French fries and chicken items were 31 and 35.5 respectively. Around 90 litres of cooking oil was removed from the fryers and seized. The inspection also revealed foul smell in the thawing area, housefly infestation and unhygienic freezers containing dust and food debris.

At Pista House in Muthangi, officials reportedly found cockroaches, clogged drains, damaged and unclean vessels and improper storage of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food items in the same refrigerators. Raw and cooked meat were also stored together. The washing and cooking areas were not properly separated, while food handlers were found working without gloves

Telangana Police to roll out FitCop health app for all 90K staff

Hyderabad: The Telangana Police is set to extend its FitCop health monitoring programme to all its units and wings, covering about 90,000 personnel, Director General of Police (DGP) CV Anand said on Friday, November 6.

A sponsor has agreed to fund the entire programme for the next 10 years, he said in a post on X, without naming the sponsor.

Anand said he held a meeting with the app developers, the department's technical team and senior officers to review the health parameters and features to be built into the application. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the sponsor and the rollout plan were also discussed.

In the first phase, personnel will be screened for body mass index (BMI), height, weight, blood pressure and diabetes. Those found to be at high risk will be monitored and guided by doctors, who will contact them from a call centre.

The DGP said the programme will also offer mental health support, personalised diet and exercise advice, and broader wellness services.



"Our objective is not merely to monitor health, but to help every police personnel lead a healthier life," he said, adding that the initiative was also aimed at improving work efficiency.

FitCop was first launched by the Hyderabad Police in 2022, when Anand was the city police commissioner. It was run in partnership with the NGO Helping Hand Foundation.

EDITORIAL

Rethinking educational games for Indian classrooms

A child learning to read in Telugu may encounter a word that is pronounced differently across regions, while the same child learning mathematics must grasp underlying arithmetic concepts in a different linguistic environment. Designing an educational game for both these subjects requires more than translating instructions or adding points and rewards to digital games. It demands an understanding of how children learn, the language they speak, the dialect they use, the communities they belong to, and the institutions that support their education.

This remains a central challenge in integrating game-based learning (GBL) and gamification into foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in India. With diverse linguistic and socio-cultural contexts, varied curricula and unequal access to digital infrastructure, India cannot assume that a single model of educational gaming will work equally well in every State. Besides, considerable regional and cultural diversity also exists within districts.For instance, Hyderabadis are influenced by Dakhani, a linguistic variety shaped by Hindi, Urdu, and Telugu, while districts like Adilabad and Nizamabad have Marathi influence, and Mulug has Hindi influence. The challenge is not simply to make learning enjoyable, but to develop approaches that are pedagogically sound, culturally relevant and adaptable to children's diverse learning needs.

Research has shown that games can complement conventional teaching methods by making learners active participants rather than passive recipients of information. In foundational learning, games can help children develop the ability to read, write, and work with numbers. Gamified applications have demonstrated effectiveness in improving student performance, with outcomes comparable to those of traditional pen-and-paper exercises in some settings.Gamified applications have demonstrated effectiveness in improving student performance, with outcomes comparable to those of traditional pen-and-paper exercises in some settings. Their value lies not merely in making an activity entertaining, but also in encouraging repeated practice, providing feedback and sustaining attention. A child reluctant to practise reading may be more willing to attempt an exercise when progress is presented through stages and challenges.Consider a game in which a schoolgirl from Telangana embarks on a journey to reach the historic Warangal Fort. Along the way, she deciphers clues, solves mathematical puzzles, and overcomes obstacles inspired by the region's history. This approach makes learning more than a classroom activity—becoming the means of reaching a goal.India's diversity makes this challenge particularly consequential. Educational gaming must accommodate differences in language, curriculum, classroom resources, teacher preparedness and children's sociocultural experiences. These are not independent considerations; they influence one another and determine whether a game is accessible, meaningful and educationally effective.Language presents another set of challenges. In Telangana, for instance, the pronunciation of a word may differ from its standard form. The standard Telugu ve?ta?u ('he goes') may be pronounced elta?u in colloquial Telangana speech, illustrating how regional dialects shape spoken language. Similarly, a game developed around one linguistic context cannot simply be assumed to function appropriately in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil or Marathi-speaking classrooms.An educational game must account for the relationship between spoken language and written text, as well as the linguistic experiences children bring from home

FIR against Prashant Bhushan for sharing fake video of Russian foreign minister



The Delhi Police has registered an FIR against senior lawyer Prashant Bhushan for sharing an allegedly doctored video showing Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov purportedly criticising India for giving advice on the Russia-Ukraine War, an officer said.The officer said that the video came into the notice of Delhi police officers when it was posted by an X handle called QuoteNews on Tuesday, stating that Bhushan had shared a doctored video.

Earlier, the Ministry of External Affairs had fact-checked Bhushan's tweet on Tuesday, calling the video fake, after Bhushan allegedly shared it from his X handle. He had shared it with the text, "A tight slap by Russian Foreign Minister on India. What kind of advice was Jaishankar giving to India."Police officers said that they found the video during a routine 'cyber patrolling' exercise, while scanning social media for the spread of misinformation. A case has been registered at the New Delhi range of the Special Cell under the Information Technology Act and other relevant sections of the BNS.

In the doctored video, the Russian foreign minister can purportedly be heard saying that India is just a trading partner for Russia."This commercial relationship doesn't give India the right to interfere in our foreign policy or advise us on Russia, Ukraine or the United States. India is neither our ally nor a superpower," he appears to be saying.The video started doing the rounds after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Sergey Lavrov in Atlanta, on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Minister meeting on October 31. "Discussed the Ukraine conflict, Gulf situation and multilateral issues with FM Sergey Lavrov of Russia," Jaishankar had stated in a post.

Despite GRAP-2 curbs, Delhi pollution worsens; Mandir Marg records AQI over 500



Despite the GRAP-2 anti-pollution restrictions, Delhi's air quality remained in the 'Very Poor' category at 6 AM on Wednesday. The AQI at 4 PM on Tuesday was 350 and has worsened in 14 hours, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) recorded at 379, according to the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM).Meanwhile, private tracker AQI.in, put the capital in the 'Hazardous' category at around 11 AM, with a reading of 579.Several monitoring stations across Delhi reported high pollution levels, with Mandir Marg recording an AQI of 508, falling into the 'severe' category.

The initial wind and showers last week rendered the air somewhat clean, bringing down the average AQI of Delhi. However, since the showers abated, air pollution has been on the rise.The city's temperature stood at 17.2 degrees Celsius in the morning. The IITM has warned that people may experience more serious health effects due to the current air quality. And according to the IITM's prediction, Delhi will still be in the same 'Very Poor' category on Thursday as well with the AQI of '343'.AQI is categorised as Good (0 – 50), Satisfactory (51 – 100), Moderate (101 – 200), Poor (201 – 300), Very Poor (301 – 400), and Severe: (401 – 500).The national capital is likely to remain in 'Very Poor' category over next few days, according to the latest updates of the department.Dust-generating construction and demolition banned, including highways, flyovers and pipelines, on CAQM directions.Offices: 50% staff in office, rest work from home. Railways, metro, airports, hospitals, water, sanitation and national security projects continue. Violations draw action under the CAQM Act, 2021.Mainly clear skies with morning mist. Max 27–30°C, min 14–17°C from Nov 4 to 6. Northwesterly winds of 15–20 kmph in the afternoon on some days.Source: IITM, IMD, PTI, CAQM order dated Oct 30. Readings are 6 am figures and change through the day.

The Public Works Department (PWD) has formed two committees comprising eight officials to inspect 200 truck-mounted anti-smog guns being deployed across Delhi.According to officials, no vehicle will be allowed to operate or be deployed unless its fitness is certified by the committees. The teams will conduct physical inspections and check whether the equipment is functioning properly and meeting the conditions according to the tender.The anti-smog guns will be deployed at construction sites and other pollution areas as part of the government's efforts to control dust pollution ahead of winters. This comes after the capital's chief minister Rekha Gupta's direction.The PWD is also planning a special drive to clean and control dust along its 1400 km road network. Under the plan, the 200 anti-smog guns will be tasked with deep cleaning at least 200 metres of road each day, according to a PTI report.The cleaning drive will include removing dust from roads, clearing kerb/footpath channels and drainage openings, removing debris and coordinating with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.Anti-smog guns spray fine droplets of water into the air to settle dust and suspended particles. Mounted on vehicles fitted with water tanks, the equipment can spray water up to 50 metres high and is used to bring down dust pollution, including particulate matter.Construction activities ban

The Gurugram administration has prohibited dust-generating construction and demolition in the district from November 5 to 20 to curb rising air pollution. The restrictions have been imposed in accordance with directions issued by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).Deputy Commissioner Uttam Singh also directed Haryana government and private offices to allow only 50% of their staff to work from office, with the remaining employees working from home, as per PTI reports.The construction ban will cover highways, roads, flyovers, overbridges, pipelines and other linear infrastructure projects.Projects related to railways, metro services, airports, hospitals, water supply, sanitation and national security will also be allowed to continue.Sub-Divisional Magistrates and Pollution Control Board officials will carry out daily inspections to ensure compliance. Violations will invite action under the CAQM Act, 2021, the administration said.Stage I has applied since Oct 21. Stage II is added on top; both are in force. CAQM can lift a stage as air improves.Daily mechanical or vacuum sweeping and water sprinkling on identified roads, preferably at night or early morning, with more machine shifts.Daily sprinkling with dust suppressants before peak hours on heavy-traffic corridors and congestion points.Staggered timings for public offices and municipal bodies in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar. States may decide for other NCR areas; the Centre for its own offices.Delhi Metro says it will run 20 more weekday trips from Nov 3.

Resident welfare associations to provide electric heaters to security, sanitation and horticulture staff, so they do not burn biomass or waste.Citizens are asked to: use public transport or carpool, take less congested routes, keep footpaths clear, avoid dust-generating construction work, outdoor smoke-generating cooking and heating, and open burning of waste. Work from home where possible.Not part of GRAP-II: 50% office attendance. CAQM moved it to Stage III in its Nov 2025 revision.

The Nov 5–20 construction curbs and 50% attendance in NCR come from a separate precautionary order dated Oct 30.Ban on coal and firewood in tandoors at hotels, restaurants and open eateries.Regulation of diesel generator sets.GRAP is set by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) and is separate from measures the Delhi government announces on its own.Source: CAQM order of Nov 2 and revised GRAP schedule (Sep 29, 2026); PIB (Nov 22, 2025); CPCB National AQI bands.According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Delhi is likely to witness mainly clear skies over the next few days, with mist expected during the morning hours.The maximum temperature is likely to remain between 27 and 30 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature is expected to range from 14 to 17 degrees Celsius between November 4 and 6.The IMD has forecast northwesterly winds, with speeds reaching up to 15-20 kmph during the afternoon on some days.

'Considering proposal to admit students to one-year master's via entrance test': Delhi University to HC

The Delhi University (DU) on Tuesday told the Delhi High Court that it is considering a proposal to conduct an entrance test from the next academic session for admissions to its one-year postgraduate (PG) programme.DU introduced the one-year master's programme in the academic year 2026-27 to accommodate students who completed the four-year undergraduate programme under the National Education Policy (NEP) framework, instead of the traditional three-year undergraduate course.

While the university admits students to its two-year PG course through CUET-PG, its 2026-27 admission policy for the one-year PG course had no entrance examination. Instead, it followed a priority order decided by the university. Students with a four-year Honours degree with Research or Entrepreneurship in the relevant subject fall in the first priority category, P1, whereas those with a four-year multidisciplinary degree with a Major in the subject fall in P2. Since P1 candidates must be considered before P2 applicants, a multidisciplinary student with a higher CGPA can be considered after an Honours graduate with a lower score.

Consequently, several students from DU's first batch of four-year undergraduates have approached the Delhi HC, arguing in their petitions that the admission criteria for the one-year master's were "discriminatory".Responding to the pleas, the university has told the HC that it is stretched to its "maximum capacity" after introducing the one-year PG programme this year. The programme added 6,147 seats, over half of them (3,340) in its open school, on top of the 12,000 seats in its two-year PG programme.In an affidavit filed on November 3, DU registrar Vikas Gupta told the HC, "This increase has already pushed the University to its maximum capacity in terms of accommodation, infrastructure availability, and teachers' strength. Offering a 1-year PG without additional resources has already added a significant load to the University, beyond its capacity."Going forward, the university, taking note of the "grievances of the students", is now "considering the proposal to conduct an Entrance test from the academic session 2027-28 for admissions to one-year PG programmes", adding that "the admissions will be made solely on the merit of the entrance test.""An assessment of resources shall be made for deciding the number of seats that can be offered for both one-year and two-year PG programmes," DU has said.The university has faced criticism from both students and teachers over how admissions to the one-year PG programme were conducted in its first year. Both groups have complained of delayed notifications, unclear information, insufficient seats and disruption of the academic cycle.

Rs 10.24 cr gone from PNB accounts': How office assistant perpetrated the fraud

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday arrested two people, including an office assistant working at the Punjab National Bank's (PNB) Greater Noida branch in Sector PI-1 after more than two dozen customers alleged that crores of rupees had gone missing from their accounts. The arrests come after the bank had set up an inquiry commitee to probe the Rs 10.24-crore fraud case, which found that the accused employee, an office assistant identified as Deepanshi, allegedly carried out the transactions over three years using IDs of other staff members. She had also allegedly added other accused as joint holders for fixed deposit accounts and disabled mobile alerts for customers for perpetrating the fraud.The other accused has been identified as Ashutosh Kumar Pathak, who has been linked to the alleged money trail. The central agency has obtained the transit remand for Pathak from the Special Court of CBI Cases, Pune, Maharashtra, while the investigation is continuing, an official said.

The CBI had registered the case on October 29 based on the complaint by the bank following the completion of internal inquiry, alleging that funds from various accounts had been siphoned off by the "accused office assistant in conspiracy with others by carrying out unauthorised debit transactions".

'Office assistant used staff IDs'In its complaint, the bank stated that after a review of system logs, user activity records and also transactions, it was revealed, prima facie, that "multiple unauthorised transactions had been carried out in customer accounts over a substantial period of time."This was done allegedly by misusing user IDs belonging to different officials of the branch by Deepanshi. The funds from the accounts were allegedly transferred to saving accounts of customers to that of Pathak and other accused.

To ensure that customers don't get the mobile transaction alerts, the complaint states, she had disabled the feature "associated with certain customer accounts before the transactions (under lens) were carried out, thereby delaying the detection of unauthorised debits by the affected customers."For the fixed deposit accounts maintained with the branch, it alleged that Pathak and other accused were added as joint holders, and that actions have allegedly appeared to have been carried out over a period of approximately three years.The FIR is registered under sections of criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust cheating, falsification of accounts and criminal misconduct.

How the scam unfoldedThe complaint filed by Ajay Kumar Pandey, Chief Manager, Circle Office, Noida, mentions that a customer named Sangita having her savings account in the bank had approached the bank along with her husband and daughter in order to update her passbook, where she allegedly found three transactions dated September 16 to have been carried out from her account without her knowledge, and had asked to meet the branch head."The branch head was not available. However, the accused staff, Ms. Deepanshi, immediately met them and convinced them with the genuineness of the transaction. That the above incident involving complaint of customer's husband regarding serious irregularities in the account of Ms. Sangita, were brought to the notice of the Branch Head, and she questioned Ms Deepanshi about the incident, to which Ms. Deepanshi informed that Ms. Sangita had a word with her husband over the phone and informed that she invested in property and transferred the disputed transaction amount to the account of Mr. Ashutosh Pathak," the complaint read.

Day before sales are allowed, Sadar Bazar's fire-cracker trade already buzzing



"Jaldi le lijiye, police ghoom rahi hai (Please buy quickly, the police are patrolling)", a young seller told a customer in a narrow lane in Sadar Bazar on Tuesday afternoon. It was around 2.30 pm, a day before the permitted window for selling firecrackers in Delhi was to begin.The seller, in his early 20s, was among a group of young men carrying kattas (sacks) stuffed with packets of firecrackers – phuljharis, anaar, rockets, chakris, children's matchstick crackers and high-decibel crackers.When asked whether these were green crackers, he replied, "Yeh kya hota hai? (What is that?)"

When reminded of the Supreme Court order, which would come into effect on Wednesday, another young man in the group said, "That's exactly why we are asking you to buy them quickly."Ahead of Diwali, the Supreme Court had on Monday allowed the sale of certified green crackers at designated locations in Delhi-NCR for three days – from November 4 to 6. The use of these crackers was permitted only between 6 am and 7 am and 8 pm and 10 pm on November 7 and 8, when Diwali will be celebrated. The temporary relaxation will end on November 8, with the complete ban returning on November 9.Further down towards Qutab Road, sellers were openly offering firecrackers, while keeping a wary eye out for the police.

A shopkeeper, mostly selling children's novelty crackers that produce sparks but make little noise, insisted that his products were permitted. "These are for children; these are allowed."Asked where he had sourced them from, he said, "We don't know much, but most come from Sonipat in Haryana."A look at the packaging showed that most packets carried a green-coloured logo bearing the words 'Green Fireworks – CSIR-NEERI (National Environmental Engineering Research Institute), India'. The stickers on the boxes mentioned the manufacturers' names and carried QR codes that redirected customers to their websites.While sellers appeared anxious about the police turning up and seizing their stock, customers made hurried purchases. According to some vendors, most of their stock had been sold within minutes.At one shop, a middle-aged seller said the window to do business this year was too short."Things will be better from tomorrow," he said, adding that traders were grateful for the government's decision to allow green crackers.

But we got little time to make up for the losses of previous years. How much can we earn in three days?" the seller asked.The SC, in its order, allowed manufacturers holding valid certification from CSIR-NEERI and the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) to manufacture only approved green crackers between November 2 and 6.The bench further ordered that traders whose licences had been cancelled were allowed to have them temporarily restored from November 4 to 6 to "facilitate the sale of approved green crackers purchased from CSIR-NEERI-certified manufacturers".Such licences shall be immediately cancelled if they are found flouting the aforesaid directions, and they shall be prohibited from selling firecrackers during the remaining period, it added.According to a senior police officer, several teams have been working on intelligence inputs to prevent the illegal storage and sale of firecrackers. Although manufacturing has been banned in Delhi for the past decade, police teams have been conducting regular raids to curb their unauthorised storage and sale, the officer added.Last month, as part of a crackdown, police had seized over 1,073 kg of firecrackers and registered 10 FIRs across five police station areas – Lahori Gate, Burari, Kotwali, Bara Hindu Rao and Subzi Mandi – for alleged unauthorised sale and possession.According to Delhi government officials, there are around 125 permanent firecracker sellers registered in the Capital. The government also issues a limited number of temporary licences ahead of the festival, they added.This year, the district deputy commissioners of police (DCPs) will issue temporary licences for the period between November 4 and 6.According to wholesale businessman Rajiv Jain, repeated restrictions had taken a toll on the firecracker business, particularly for permanent sellers."The year-round ban on firecrackers affects the business of permanent sellers. Last year, we got some relaxation, but we were given very few days to sell. This year, again, we have just three days to sell crackers," Jain said.The production, storage, sale and use of firecrackers were completely banned in Delhi in 2024. Before that, restrictions were generally imposed seasonally, either around Diwali or during the three months when pollution levels remain high across the NCR.Since manufacturing is banned in Delhi, the sellers here mostly buy green firecrackers from Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu; Rohtak, Sonipat, Jhajjar, Kurukshetra in Haryana and Meerut, Sharanpur and Hapur in UP.

Cyclone Murasu brings over 230 mm rain to Bhadradri Kothagudem, Khammam

Hyderabad: Khammam and Bhadradri Kothagudem districts bore the brunt of Cyclone Murasu on Tuesday night and the early hours of Wednesday, with multiple locations recording over 200 mm (20 cm) of downpours under the cyclonic system's direct influence.While Hyderabad and its surrounding districts largely escaped the worst of Murasu, large regions of Khammam and Bhadradri Kothagudem received 'extremely heavy' to 'very heavy' rainfall over a 24-hour window.Mulakalapally mandal in Bhadradri Kothagudem registered the highest rainfall in the state at 231.8 mm (23.18 cm). Neighboring Khammam recorded massive rainfall numbers as well, led by Vemsoor mandal at 196.5 mm (19.65 cm) and Sathupalle at 188.0 mm (18.8 cm).In sharp contrast, Hyderabad and most other districts across Telangana experienced mostly overcast skies with minimal rainfall, escaping major disruptions and keeping normal life unhindered. Mulakalapally (Mulakalapally Mandal, Bhadradri Kothagudem District) – 231.8 mm (23.18 cm) (Extremely Heavy) Naidupeta (Dammapeta Mandal, Bhadradri Kothagudem District) – 214.3 mm (21.43 cm) (Extremely Heavy)

Wildlife at risk as Singur water levels fall, environmentalists seek minimum storage in Manjeera



Sangareddy: The video of Indian Flapshell Turtle, which appeared to be searching for a water source walking across cracked soil of river Manjeera near Manoor, is just a reflection what could be the fate of the birds, crocodiles and other beings that made river Manjeera as their home when the officials draws out all the water from Singur.Singur project had just 2.60 TMC ft of water now against its full storage capacity of 29.91 TMC ft. While the HMWSSB and Mission Bagiratha officials were planning to draw water leaving just 0.87 TMC ft of water, the dead storage, until December last, the question certainly arises what would be the fate of the birds, Mugger Crocodiles, Smooth Coater Otters and other living beings that inhabited Manjeera.

Even though the Indian Flapshell Turtle survives four to five months without food and water, and Mugger Crocodile survives for little more than that, but it is not the case of all the other beings living in the river. As the officials decided to just leave 0.87 TMC ft of water for the other being survive, the Singur and Manjeera dams are expected to go dry entirely before the mid-summer.Manjeera Wildlife Sanctury is home for nearly 300 bird species which include several winter and summer migrant birds. Thousands of these birds have made Singur and Manjeera as their home along the river course. Of these 300 bird species, 82 were water birds which would not be able to survive without water for even for a few days. According to a report prepared by the officials while seeking Ramsar site tag for the Manjeera Wildlife Sanctury, it is home for 57 fish species, 31 reptiles,18 invertbrates, and 14 amiphibian species.Manjeera is also known for its rich floral diversity. There were 88 species found in the river which includes 37 trees, 26 shrubs, 17 aquatic plants and 8 grass species. Manjeera is not only a breeding centre for Mugger Crocodiles (Crocodylus palustris).It is also a home for seven different species of mammals including Smooth Coated Otter, Indian Flying Fox , Hanuman Langur (Semnopithecus sp.) Rhesus Macaque , Jungle Cat , Indian Jackal , Wild Hare, and Wild Pig. To save all the beings that made Manjeera home, environmentalists urged the government to keep at least 0.5 TMC ft of water in Manjeera dam and 1.5 TMC ft of water in Singur which would last until the onset of next monsoon in June 2027.

After meeting Amit Shah, NCP MLAs tell Sunetra Pawar feud 'weakening party'



Lack of clarity on the internal differences in the party, stalled constituency work and the loss of the crucial Finance portfolio – these were among the concerns raised by NCP MLAs in its meeting held on Tuesday Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar's official residence, Devgiri, sources said.The meeting came 48 hours after senior NCP leaders, in the absence of party president Sunetra Pawar, met Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

According to sources, several legislators questioned the ongoing differences among the party's senior leadership, saying the repeated public airing of internal disputes was weakening the organisation at the grassroots."MLAs expressed that they receive no clarity on the ground regarding the ongoing disputes among senior leaders. The continuous public exposure of internal conflicts is weakening the party," said a senior party leader who attended the meeting.

The legislators also questioned why constituency-level work was not progressing despite the NCP being part of the ruling Mahayuti government. They sought clarity on what had transpired over the Finance portfolio,which was held by the late Ajit Pawar in the Devendra Fadnavis government. MLA Anil Bhaidas Patil specifically demanded that the party make concerted efforts to reclaim it.Several MLAs also complained about alliance partners, alleging that constituency-level proposals and development works were not being cleared by departments headed by ministers from Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena.State NCP president Sunil Tatkare, meanwhile, briefed the legislators on strengthening the party organisation and asked them to visit drought-affected areas across Maharashtra. He directed them to meet farmers, understand their grievances and make efforts to ensure they receive government assistance.

Tatkare assured the MLAs that their concerns, including those arising from the differences among senior leaders, would be taken up at a meeting of the party's senior leadership.The meeting was attended by NCP MLAs and MPs, Sunetra Pawar, and her sons Parth and Jay Pawar.Before the meeting, Sunetra Pawar had said the discussions would focus on strengthening the party organisation and that the internal feud would not be on the agenda.

'Considering proposal to admit students to one-year master's via entrance test': Delhi University to HC



The Delhi University (DU) on Tuesday told the Delhi High Court that it is considering a proposal to conduct an entrance test from the next academic session for admissions to its one-year postgraduate (PG) programme.DU introduced the one-year master's programme in the academic year 2026-27 to accommodate students who completed the four-year undergraduate programme under the National Education Policy (NEP) framework, instead of the traditional three-year undergraduate course.

While the university admits students to its two-year PG course through CUET-PG, its 2026-27 admission policy for the one-year PG course had no entrance examination. Instead, it followed a priority order decided by the university. Students with a four-year Honours degree with Research or Entrepreneurship in the relevant subject fall in the first priority category, P1, whereas those with a four-year multidisciplinary degree with a Major in the subject fall in P2. Since P1 candidates must be considered before P2 applicants, a multidisciplinary student with a higher CGPA can be considered after an Honours graduate with a lower score.Consequently, several students from DU's first batch of four-year undergraduates have approached the Delhi HC, arguing in their petitions that the admission criteria for the one-year master's were "discriminatory".

Responding to the pleas, the university has told the HC that it is stretched to its "maximum capacity" after introducing the one-year PG programme this year. The programme added 6,147 seats, over half of them (3,340) in its open school, on top of the 12,000 seats in its two-year PG programme.In an affidavit filed on November 3, DU registrar Vikas Gupta told the HC, "This increase has already pushed the University to its maximum capacity in terms of accommodation, infrastructure availability, and teachers' strength. Offering a 1-year PG without additional resources has already added a significant load to the University, beyond its capacity."Going forward, the university, taking note of the "grievances of the students", is now "considering the proposal to conduct an Entrance test from the academic session 2027-28 for admissions to one-year PG programmes", adding that "the admissions will be made solely on the merit of the entrance test.""An assessment of resources shall be made for deciding the number of seats that can be offered for both one-year and two-year PG programmes," DU has said.The university has faced criticism from both students and teachers over how admissions to the one-year PG programme were conducted in its first year. Both groups have complained of delayed notifications, unclear information, insufficient seats and disruption of the academic cycle.Owing to repeated grievances from students, some of whom approached the Delhi HC, DU which initially offered 1,063 seats in the one-year PG programme, later increased it to 2,807 regular seats and 3,340 open school seats.

What happens when 32 prisons face a bomb threat and nobody can leave?



Early November 3, the police headquarters in Gandhinagar received a message: One of the state's 32 prisons and the state police chief's office would be "blown up". The threat mail, however, did not specify which prison.Such threats have become regular over the past two years. The targets are usually schools, courts, civic body buildings, stadiums and even events like concerts and international summits, which can be evacuated. But not prisons.

Prisons here house gangsters such as Lawrence Bishnoi, convicts of the 2008 serial bombings, gangsters accused under the older terror laws and self-styled godman Narayan Sai.While other premises can be immediately evacuated—schoolchildren can be sent off home, courts can be adjourned, and government buildings can be emptied, checked and then declared safe—prisons cannot be evacuated, unless in the most extreme circumstances.At Sabarmati Central Jail in Ahmedabad, the largest correctional facility in Gujarat that has Bishnoi among the 4,300-plus inmates, teams of the bomb and doq squad and the anti-terror arm— the Special Operations Group (SOG)—were deployed, along with three vehicles of the Ahmedabad Fire and Emergency Services (AFES), on Tuesday.A senior official said, "The key places that had to be checked were those where visitors come, such as the front offices, the administration area, and where visitors meet prisoners."What happens when prisons get bomb threat? No evacuation, only staggered searches Prisons in GujaratAlso, there are spots between the barracks and the main gate that are accessed by several people. An officer in South Gujarat said, "While we have stringent security measures in place, there are areas where items and products arrive from outside. These include canteens, food storage units, medical facilities, clothing stores and visitors' rooms."

In some cases, there may be secondary structures abutting the prison premises, such as a temple in Lajpore Central Jail in Surat where Narayan Sai is lodged.The state houses more than 18,500 prisoners lodged in its 32 prisons and 50 other holding facilities. The 32 prisons include four Central Jails in Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara; nine district jails; two special jails; four open jails; 11 sub-jails and two women's jails.How was the sweep doneOfficials say it is easier to sweep a high-security area in a central prison since it is mainly built of concrete, has low occupancy, and is checked frequently.Apart from prison guards, the State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) personnel were also deployed in central prisons where they patrolled the perimeter even as the bomb squad swept through the boundary walls.

"Despite these bomb threats being so generic and having become a scare tactic, we have taken it in our stride and are making sure every corner of the prison is checked and access control is maintained", said a police officer at another major prison. Timings for the sweep were staggered.A field officer from the Special Operations Group team that checked one of the prisons said, "The Quick Response Team (QRT) reached the jail first to secure the area, followed by the BDDS (Bomb Disposal and Dog Squad) team. We first checked the front offices, administration areas, visitors and the perimeter of the prison. Every team requires permission to enter the interior areas of the prison. Their names are noted down, their phones taken away and they are accompanied by a member of the prison staff at all times."

A bomb disposal squad officer said: "The interior of a prison is checked sector by sector. Prisoners are moved to another area temporarily while we conduct the search. That's how we go through various areas; it is a highly time-consuming exercise."A prison officer who supervised the check on Tuesday said, "Most of the staff are not allowed to take phones inside the prison premises. The same applies to everyone else, except in special circumstances such as judges."After guards' shifts change around 6 am, prisoners are allowed to go to the yards of their specific barracks. By 9 am, visitors begin filling out access forms before they can meet an inmate. The morning visiting hours end at 12 pm.

Tuesday's sweep took place when the visitors were meeting inmates. However, considering the "low threat perception" and the nearing Diwali festival, the prisons were not put on lockdown."We didn't stop the visitors. Instead, we carried out extra checking of the people entering the premises," said the superintendent of a jail in Saurashtra.At a prison in Central Gujarat, an officer said, "We had the visitors double-checked. Police carried out anti-sabotage checks of vehicles, so we didn't need to turn them away."Rakesh Barot, the Inspector General (IG) of Gujarat Prisons, told The Indian Express: "In light of the bomb threat to prisons received by the DGP office, we asked officials at all jails to carry out thorough checks. Apart from the BDDS teams, the SRPF teams are also patrolling the perimeters; prison staff are conducting their own checks of the premises.""The morning meeting time is between 9 am and 12 pm, and the evening meeting time is 4 to 6 pm. We decided not to send any of the visitors back from the prison during these checks."The challenge, said Barot, was to make sure that the premises were checked thoroughly, inside and out.Since the bomb threat was received at the Director General of Police's office in Gandhinagar, the FIR is likely to be filed at a police station in the Gandhinagar jurisdiction.

Delhi winter action plan came into effect on November 1: Around 300 construction sites inspected each day



The Delhi Government has inspected an average of around 300 construction sites daily in the first three days since the complete ban on civil construction activities came into effect under its Winter Action Plan.Just over 15% of the construction sites inspected were found violating the ban, according to official sources.Meanwhile, on the third day of enforcement on Tuesday, the government imposed penalties worth Rs 75.6 lakh on violators of pollution control norms, including Rs 53.8 lakh for violations related to Pollution Under Control Certificates (PUCC) and the rest for flouting ban on construction and demolition activities.According to official data, more than 70% of the action against construction and demolition sites involved plots measuring less than 500 sq m. "This shows that both inspections and violations are concentrated largely at smaller construction sites, which are among the significant sources of dust pollution. However, in the coming days, we expect smaller construction sites to comply with the ban following the crackdown," a senior official said.Sources said an average of around 10 sites have been ordered to shut down on each of the three days. "These sites were found to be serious violations and hence, closure orders were issued," the official said.According to government data, of the Rs 53.8 lakh imposed in fines for PUCC violations on Tuesday, Rs 42.4 lakh was challaned by the Delhi Traffic Police and the remaining Rs 11.4 lakh by the Delhi Transport department.Meanwhile, sources said around 10,000 vehicles were being checked daily, with more than a third found to be non-destined vehicles below BS-VI emission standards.On Tuesday, Rs 75.6 lakh in penalties was imposed for violations, including those related to PUCC and construction and demolition activities.

Private cars accounted for the largest share of challans. "However, the number still remains very low. First, because many commuters have planned well in advance and have made alternate arrangements. Second, majority of those who were unaware about the restriction have been asked to return back," an official said.As part of the Winter Action Plan, which came into effect on November 1, outdoor construction activities and demolition work have been prohibited, up to January 31.

Two students allegedly sexually assaulted after being made to consume alcohol at Balanagar party



Hyderabad: Two girl students were allegedly sexually assaulted by two youths after being made to consume excessive alcohol at a party in Balanagar.According to information available, the suspects, identified as Ghana and Tarun, allegedly invited the two students to a party in Balanagar. After taking them to the venue, the duo allegedly made the students consume large quantities of alcohol before sexually assaulting them.The students reportedly fell seriously ill following the incident and were subsequently admitted to a hospital in Madhuranagar.The incident came to light after the women approached the Madhuranagar police and lodged a complaint.Based on their complaint, the Madhuranagar police registered a case and took up investigation.It is learnt that the case may be transferred to Balanagar on the point of jurisdiction.Police are probing the circumstances under which the students were taken to the party and the alleged assault.

Short-sightedness costs Telangana Rs 50,000 crore

A crippling lack of foresight, misaligned policy decisions, and the breakdown of advance planning in irrigation management have pushed Telangana into a deep socio-economic crisis. Despite early global warnings regarding the impending El Niño phenomenon, state administrative machinery failed to act in time.Inter-departmental coordination collapsed, leaving Telangana's agricultural engine, rural livelihood networks, and the capital's drinking water infrastructure exposed to devastating, near-irreversible damage.The irony is stark: a fraction of proactive investment, between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 1,500 crore to run lift pumps early along the Godavari and Krishna rivers, could have fundamentally altered this trajectory.Failure of Vision and ManagementEffective irrigation management requires timely planning, strategic budgetary allocations, and seamless pump operations. Yet the current administration appears oblivious to these basic levers of governance.While State officials vacillated, neighboring States heeded climate warnings, spending under Rs 900 crore on power costs for lift schemes to safeguard crops worth Rs 20,000 crore. Had Telangana shown similar foresight by lifting 100 TMC of water, State reservoirs and irrigation tanks would have remained replenished and groundwater tables stabilised.

Over 15 lakh acres of cotton, alongside 5 lakh acres of paddy, maize, and red gram, could have been preserved through minimal late-season wetting. Saving that Rs 20,000 crore in agricultural yield would have prevented a ripple effect across connected supply chains, preserving an overall regional economic footprint estimated at Rs 50,000 crore.Hyderabad's Impending Urban Crisis

The crisis is not confined to rural fields. It has reached the capital's doorsteps. Despite the recent monsoon, water levels in key supply reservoirs have plunged, and metropolitan aquifers are virtually depleted.The Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) currently distributes 20,000 municipal tankers daily, a drop in the ocean for an urban population of 15 million. With official deliveries delayed by days, residents rely heavily on private tankers charging upwards of Rs 2,000 per load.An estimated 1,00,000 private trips are made daily to supply homes with dead borewells, forcing citizens to spend Rs 16 crore every day simply to access basic drinking water. If drought conditions persist over the next nine months, urban households stand to burn through an astonishing Rs 10,000 crore on private water by next summer.In rural Telangana, small and marginal farmers who depend on cotton as their primary monsoon cash crop are facing complete financial ruin. Although the State recorded a modest 17% overall rainfall deficit between June and September, prolonged dry spells disrupted sensitive crop cycles. Preliminary estimates show 23.40 lakh acres of crop damage Statewide, with cotton accounting for 15 lakh acres.Because cotton is an input-intensive crop, smallholders borrowed heavily for high-cost seeds, fertilizers, and labor. The loss of yield shrinks rural purchasing power, stalls local markets, and paralyses ancillary industries including ginning mills, textiles, and transport logistics.Over half of Telangana's population relies on agriculture. Yet, the government's response has been symbolic at best, declaring just three mandals in Jangaon district as drought-affected while two lack acres of crop lost.

Indian American Suhas Subramanyam re-elected to US House from Virginia

\Washington: Suhas Subramanyam, the son of Tamil physicians whose mother is from Bengaluru and father grew up in Chennai and Secunderabad, was re-elected on Tuesday (local time) to represent Virginia's 10th Congressional District."The campaign is over, but the work is just beginning. I look forward to working with our community to deliver change in Washington," Subramanyam posted on X."My mom's from Bangalore. My dad's from Chennai and Secunderabad, and we have ties in India. I still have family in India," he said in an interview last year.

His mother arrived at Dulles Airport in 1979, a story he has tied to the Northern Virginia district he represents. "Dulles Airport here, and our district was their Ellis Island," he told CNBC-TV18.Born in Houston, Texas, in 1986, Subramanyam studied philosophy at Tulane University and earned a law degree from Northwestern University. He worked as an aide to Representative Suzanne Kosmas, clerked for Senator Dick Durbin on the Senate Judiciary Committee, where he worked on the DREAM Act, and served as a White House technology policy adviser under President Barack Obama from 2015.

He has also worked as a lawyer, run a small technology business and volunteered as an emergency medical technician and firefighter, according to his campaign.In 2019, he became the first Indian American, first South Asian and first Hindu elected to the Virginia General Assembly. He served in the House of Delegates from 2020 to 2024 and briefly in the Virginia Senate before winning the US House seat vacated by Jennifer Wexton in 2024.In Congress, Subramanyam sits on the Oversight Committee, where he is the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Military and Foreign Affairs and also serves on the cybersecurity and information technology panel, as well as on the Science, Space and Technology Committee and the Ethics Committee, according to his House website.He has been a leading voice on issues watched closely by Indian Americans. He backs the Domestic Visa Renewal Modernization Act, part of a three-bill package that would let holders of H-1B, L, O and other visas renew them inside the United States.When the Trump administration imposed a $100,000 fee on new H-1B petitions, he said: "This isn't immigration policy. This is economic sabotage." He co-signed an October 2025 letter to President Donald Trump and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick warning about the H-1B proclamation.

He has also criticised Trump's tariffs on India. "Tariffs are a tax on the American people," he told the Hindustan Times, adding, "I think Trump has handled the relationship with India poorly" and "India is a natural ally.""I think the majority of Indian Americans still are Democrats," he said, warning that "putting tariffs on India will not help his standing with Indian Americans."Subramanyam has also introduced the Responsible Data Center Siting Act. "Congress must set reasonable guardrails around data centers," he wrote on X.He closed his campaign with a rally alongside Virginia Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner.Subramanyam and his wife, Miranda Pena Subramanyam, live with their two daughters in Loudoun County.

US-Iran tensions persist as Qatar and regional powers push for diplomatic settlement



Tehran: With US midterm elections about to conclude, tensions between Washington and Tehran remained high as both sides exchanged warnings and conditions for a possible settlement, while regional countries stepped up diplomatic efforts to prevent renewed hostilities.Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Ali Abdollahi warned Tuesday that Iran's armed forces would respond to any level or type of threat from the United States and Israel immediately and "without geographical limitations."

Meanwhile, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Mohsen Rezaei said in a post on social media platform X that the US response to Iran's demands was not convincing, Xinhua news agecy reported."They must completely and explicitly address Iran's seven conditions and act upon them. Only in this case the Strait of Hormuz will be reopened," Rezaei said.Iran conveyed a plan to the United States through mediators on September 22 to end hostilities and reopen the Strait of Hormuz within seven days if its conditions were met.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said Monday that Iran had reduced the period for implementing the seven-day plan to two days in good faith.US President Donald Trump said Monday that he was "in no rush" to decide whether to resume military action against Iran."One way or the other, we will do something, but there is no rush. We crippled them financially," Trump said in a phone interview with Axios.Trump later wrote on Truth Social that Iran wanted a settlement and that one could happen soon.Axios reported that Trump was weighing three possible courses of action: reaching a diplomatic deal, resuming military action, or maintaining maximum economic pressure without a deal or renewed hostilities.US Vice President JD Vance and White House envoy Steve Witkoff favor diplomacy, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth are pushing for renewed military operations. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, CIA Director John Ratcliffe and Secretary of State Marco Rubio favor maintaining the current "no war, no deal" status quo, the report said.

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported Monday that Trump was leaning toward launching a large-scale attack on Iran after the midterm elections, potentially targeting Iranian infrastructure and nuclear facilities, although no final decision had been made.Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed Al Ansari said Tuesday that the United States and Iran were reviewing proposals to end their conflict, but differences remained unresolved.

He told a weekly press briefing that a Qatari delegation had returned from Tehran on Monday evening after more than three hours of talks with Iranian officials.Qatar was relaying proposals in coordination with Pakistan, Gulf Cooperation Council countries and other regional and international partners, he said, adding that no concrete breakthrough had been achieved.Also on Tuesday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi urged the United States and Iran to show maximum flexibility and seek a political settlement.At a joint press conference in Cairo with visiting Slovenian President Natasa Pirc Musar, he called on the two sides to "create space for understanding and dialogue" and pledged Egypt's continued efforts with regional and international partners to de-escalate tensions.Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi made a phone call on Tuesday evening and discussed regional efforts to de-escalate tensions and reach a comprehensive deal addressing all parties' concerns, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said.Despite diplomatic efforts, military tensions have persisted.

The United States attacked Iran's strategic Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz on Monday, The WSJ reported, citing US officials.Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps said late Monday that its air defense systems had intercepted three US drones in the country's southern airspace, identifying two of them as MQM-170 Outlaw drones, which it said were intercepted over Qeshm Island, and the third as an MQ-9 Reaper, which it said was shot down in waters east of the Strait of Hormuz.The strikes were part of a series of limited attacks Washington had secretly carried out against Iran in recent weeks while President Trump was touting the possibility of a diplomatic deal, the WSJ report said.Washington did not publicly announce the strikes to avoid signaling a resumption of major combat operations, one US official was quoted as saying.

'Failed to see benefits due to high fuel prices': Trump blames Iran war for Republican defeat in midterms

President Donald Trump congratulated Democrats for doing "a good job" after the party inflicted devastating defeats on his Republican allies, winning back both houses of Congress and picking up several governors' mansions.But the president, in an interview with Fox News early Wednesday morning, didn't take responsibility for a long night of GOP defeats, including many in what had been considered reliably conservatives states."No matter how good the president is, you lose," Trump said, adding that "because of the gasoline price" Americans had failed to see the economic benefits brought about by his presidency. He said that high fuel prices came about because of the war in Iran, and again defended the US military campaign in the Middle East as necessary to prevent the Islamic Republic from obtaining nuclear weapons."It's just the way it is," Trump said.

Trump said he could work with a House and Senate run by the opposition "if the Democrats want to work with me." He also alluded to the considerable clout that a president has with or without allies in control of Congress."It's a power of veto," Trump said. "It's one of the stronger powers that a president has, and they'll send over things that are insane, and I'll veto them. And after a couple of months of vetoes, they'll call and they'll say, 'How do we get this stuff done?'"Asked if he made a mistake in choosing Senate



candidates Ken Paxton in Texas and Darline Graham in South Carolina, who both lost, Trump dismissed the notion. He said that he considered Senator John Cornyn, the Republican incumbent in Texas, "a disloyal guy." Paxton defeated Cornyn in the Republican primary after getting Trump's endorsement.In the closing weeks of the midterm election campaign, Trump implored Americans at rallies across the country to vote as if he himself were running.But as he told Fox News in the interview: "I don't like to consider it a defeat for me. I wasn't on the ballot."

Indian-American Democrats score early wins in US midterm elections

Washington: Indian-American Democrats Suhas Subramanyam and Aruna Miller were projected to win re-election on Tuesday as the first results of the US midterm elections emerged, while Pia Dandiya led a closely contested congressional race in Florida and Republican Vivek Ramaswamy trailed in Ohio's governor's contest.NBC News projected Subramanyam's victory in Virginia's 10th Congressional District, where the Democratic incumbent secured about 63 per cent of the vote against Republican challenger Dave Beckwith's 35 per cent, with approximately 82 per cent of the expected vote counted.

The victory gives Subramanyam, who first entered Congress in 2025, a second two-year term.Subramanyam, who became Virginia's first Indian-American member of Congress in 2024, also faced independent candidate Ahsen Malik.In neighbouring Maryland, Indian-American Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller secured another term after NBC News projected Democratic Governor Wes Moore's re-election.Miller, who ran alongside Moore on the Democratic ticket, defeated Republican lieutenant governor candidate Rob Krop, the running mate of former state delegate Dan Cox. Her re-election ensures continued Indian-American representation in one of the country's highest state executive offices.The results represented early successes for Indian-American Democrats as several closely watched races remained undecided.

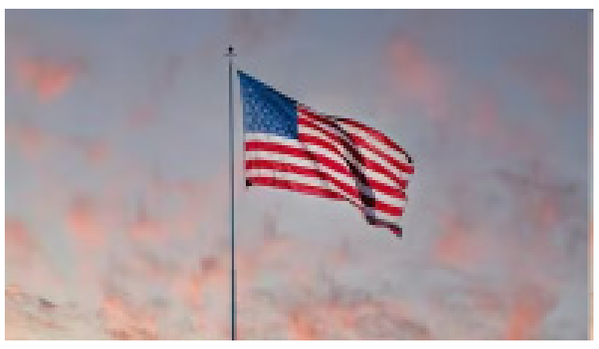
In Florida's 22nd Congressional District, Democrat Pia Dandiya was leading Republican Casey Askar by approximately 52 per cent to 48 per cent, with about 94 per cent of the expected vote counted, according to NBC's election-night figures.Approximately 280,000 votes had been counted in the contest. NBC had not projected a winner, although Dandiya held a substantial advantage with relatively few votes remaining.Dandiya, a former school principal, is seeking to enter Congress from a newly redrawn South Florida district. The contest has attracted attention as one of the competitive House races that could influence control of the chamber.In Ohio, Democrat Amy Acton maintained a sizeable early lead over Indian-American Republican Vivek Ramaswamy in the governor's race.Acton received approximately 63 per cent of the vote against Ramaswamy's 34 per cent, with about one-quarter of the expected vote counted, according to NBC News. Roughly 1.2 million votes had been counted at that stage.The network said the contest remained too early to call.Ramaswamy, a biotechnology entrepreneur and former Republican presidential candidate endorsed by President



Donald Trump, is seeking to succeed term-limited Republican Governor Mike DeWine.

Acton, a physician and former Ohio health director, emerged as the Democratic challenger in a contest that has drawn national attention.In Massachusetts, Democratic Senator Ed Markey was projected to win re-election. The result meant defeat for independent Indian-American candidate Shiva Ayyadurai, who was among the challengers alongside Republican John Deaton.Elsewhere, Democratic Senator Jon Ossoff was projected to win re-election in Georgia, defeating Republican Congressman Mike Collins in one of the early Senate race calls.In Georgia's state legislative elections, Indian-American Democrat Jyot Singh held an early lead over Republican Yassin Moghazy in House District 97, although counting remained incomplete.Other Indian-American candidates, including Republican Mahesh Ganorkar in North Carolina and Democrat Pooja Sethi in Texas, were awaiting definitive results.The November 3 elections will determine control of the 435-member US House of Representatives and 35 Senate seats, along with governorships, state legislative positions and local offices. The elections are being held halfway through Trump's second presidential term.

US midterm election results: States which flipped blue



Democrat Adam Hamilton defeated Republican Senator Roger Marshall in Kansas. The state had not elected a Democratic senator in nearly 100 years. Hamilton's victory was one of the biggest surprises of the election.Iowa elected a Democratic senator: Democrat Josh Turek defeated Republican Ashley Hinson in the race for Iowa's open Senate seat. Turek will replace retiring Republican Senator Joni Ernst. Trump had won Iowa by 13 percentage points in the 2024 presidential election, making the Democratic victory a major upset, according to AP.

Texas elected a Democrat to the Senate: Democrat James Talarico won the Senate race in Texas, delivering another major victory for his party in a traditionally Republican state. Celebrating his win, Talarico told supporters, "We just took back Texas", according to AP News.Ohio returned Sherrod Brown to the Senate: Democrat Sherrod Brown defeated Republican Senator Jon Husted. Brown told supporters that Ohio voters had sent an "undeniable message" through their votes.Maine's Susan Collins lost her Senate seat: Democrat Troy Jackson defeated Republican Senator Susan Collins, who was seeking a sixth term. Collins conceded the race, ending her long run in the Senate. Jackson, a former president of the Maine Senate, became the Democratic nominee in July after Graham Platner dropped out of the race, according to AP.Democrats also won the governor's race in Georgia: Democrat Keisha Lance Bottoms defeated her Republican opponent to win the Georgia governor's race.

Ohio and Iowa governor races turn blueDemocrat Amy Acton defeated her Republican opponent to flip Ohio's governor's office from Republican to Democratic control. Her victory was another setback for Republicans in a state that has been an important political battleground.Democrat Rob Sand defeated Republican candidate Zach Lahn to win Iowa's governor's race. He became the first Democrat to win the state's governor's office in 20 years.

Texas and Indiana see major Democratic winsDemocrat Gina Hinojosa defeated Republican Governor Greg Abbott in a major upset. She will become Texas' first Latina governor.Democrat Bobby Pulido, a Latin Grammy Award-winning singer, defeated Republican Congresswoman Monica De La Cruz in Texas' 15th Congressional District.Democrat J.D. Ford defeated three-term Republican Congresswoman Victoria Spartz in Indiana's 5th Congressional District.Iowa and Wisconsin flip key seats to DemocratsDemocrats won three congressional districts in Iowa, which had an entirely Republican delegation before the election. Democrat Christina Bohannan defeated Republican Congresswoman Mariannette Miller-Meeks in Iowa's 1st Congressional District. Democrat Sarah Trone Garriott defeated Republican Zach Nunn in Iowa's 3rd Congressional District.Democrat Lindsay James defeated Republican Joe Mitchell in Iowa's 2nd Congressional District. The seat became open after Republican Congresswoman Ashley Hinson decided to run for the Senate.Democrats won control of the Wisconsin Senate, ending Republican control of the chamber. Democrats also won control of the state's House, giving them greater power in the legislature. Before the election, Republicans held 71 of the 120 seats.Minnesota and Michigan see historic Democratic victoriesDemocrat Peggy Flanagan defeated Republican Michele Tafoya, a former NFL sideline reporter. Flanagan, who is currently Minnesota's lieutenant governor, will become the first Native American woman to serve as a US senator.Democrat Jocelyn Benson won Michigan's governor's race, promising to fight corruption and address the rising cost of living.Democrat Abdul El-Sayed declared himself the winner of Michigan's open Senate race after facing Republican Mike Rogers. If confirmed, he would become the first Muslim senator, according to AP News.

Iran thanks India for rescuing 20 crew members of pirated vessel in Arabian Sea

New Delhi: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi on Tuesday expressed gratitude to the Government of India, the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force for rescuing 20 Iranian crew members of the fishing vessel Azini from pirates in a coordinated operation in the Arabian Sea.Appreciating the Indian Armed Forces for their efforts, the Iranian Embassy said the operation reflected India's commitment to humanitarian assistance and its role in saving lives beyond borders. In a post on X, the Embassy said: "The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi expresses its sincere appreciation to the Government of India, the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force for their successful operation to rescue the 20 Iranian crew members of the fishing vessel Azini from pirates." "We highly commend the professionalism, courage and effective coordination demonstrated by the Indian Armed Forces, reflecting India's strong commitment to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and its role in saving lives beyond borders," It added.The embassy highlighted that this humanitarian operation stands as a testament to the "spirit of friendship, solidarity and cooperation between Iran and India." "We extend our sincere gratitude to all those involved in ensuring the safe rescue of the Iranian crew."The Indian Navy rescued all 20 crew members of the pirated fishing vessel Azini in a meticulously coordinated 48-hour operation, more than 3,000 km from Mumbai, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said.

Indian killed as two helicopters collide in Nepal

Kathmandu: A 47-year-old Indian national was killed and another passenger injured when two helicopters collided while landing on Tuesday in Nepal's Solukhumbu district, police said.The two helicopters collided while landing at Pheriche in Ward 4 of Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality of Solukhumbu district on Tuesday, according to a Nepal Police statement.The helicopters, operated by Fishtail Air and Air Dynasty, collided at around 8.11 am (local time), according to the District Police Office, Solukhumbu. Both helicopters took off from Lukla Airport, the gateway to Mt Everest.

Police Inspector Mausam Tamang said the deceased was identified as Vasanth Kumar Balaramaramadu, an Indian national travelling aboard the Fishtail Air helicopter.Shailesh Krishna Patel, a 49-year-old Indian origin resident of New Zealand who was also aboard the same helicopter, was injured in the collision. He was airlifted to Mediciti Hospital in Kathmandu by a Prabhu Helicopter, Tamang said.Nepalese pilots, Rabindra Prajapati of Fishtail Air and Prajwal KC of Dynasty Air, were also injured in



the incident and have been taken to Kathmandu for further treatment. Dynasty Air helicopter was carrying cargo.Pheriche lies on the way to the Mt Everest Base Camp, 150 km northeast of Kathmandu.Police said the body of Balaramaramadu has been taken to a hospital in Lukla and will soon be sent to Kathmandu for postmortem.The number of passengers aboard the two helicopters at the time of the collision has yet to be confirmed.

Language belongs to a different realm



From sails to steam engines, from bullock carts to motor cars, from huts to skyscrapers, every stage of human history has been marked by breathtaking technological progress. Each new invention has made life faster, easier and more comfortable. Yet, amid all this change, one aspect of human experience has remained strikingly constant: how we communicate.The medium has evolved dramatically — from messengers and handwritten letters to telephones and instant messaging, but the essence has not. It is still one human being reaching out to another. The town crier's drumbeat in the village square has become a digital notice on a government website, but both are acts of connection. The tools have changed but the impulse to communicate has not.Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now rewriting the rules of learning and work. It solves equations, drafts essays, designs buildings and composes music. It can act as a tutor, a translator, a researcher, and even a companion. In subjects that rely on logic, structure and fixed systems — mathematics, physics, engineering — AI has already become transformative. Students can now get instant explanations of complex formulas or visualise difficult scientific concepts at the click of a button.What a machine cannot feel

Language, however, belongs to a different realm. It is not only a system of rules but also a living, breathing expression of culture and emotion. AI can process grammar and vocabulary, but it cannot capture humour, irony, affection or hesitation. A sentence translated by a machine may be correct in words, yet wrong in spirit. When someone says "I miss you" or "Te extraño", the meaning is inseparable from emotion, something a machine cannot feel.Technology has made translation almost effortless. A Hindi email can appear in flawless English; a Japanese article can be read in French in seconds. Yet, these translations, however precise, may sound sterile. The tone, the rhythm and the subtle warmth that define human speech are easily lost. Translation can transfer meaning but not experience. Understanding a language requires more than decoding its words. It demands entering its world.In the lived moments

That is why learning a language has always been different from learning a formula. It is not an abstract skill but a human interaction. It happens in conversation, in laughter, in mistakes. It happens when someone struggles to express a thought and is gently corrected, or when a joke finally lands after weeks of practice. These small, lived moments build confidence and connection, something that no app or chatbot can replicate.AI tools can certainly assist. They can correct pronunciation, explain grammar and offer personalised practice. For teachers, they make lesson planning and feedback faster and more efficient. But they cannot replace the very heart of language learning, the emotional effort of trying to be understood by another person. Fluency is not achieved by perfection alone, but by empathy. To speak a language well, one must also learn how others think and feel.Moreover, languages constantly evolve. Slang, idioms and even tones of politeness change from year to year. A machine can record these shifts, but it cannot belong to a community. It can predict usage, but it cannot participate in the living rhythm of speech. True mastery requires being part of that rhythm — listening, adapting, responding.The biggest riskPerhaps the greatest risk is not that AI will replace language learning, but that it will make people believe they no longer need to learn. If machines can translate instantly, the temptation to skip the effort grows. Yet, in doing so, we would lose something vital: the humility and the patience that come from learning another's tongue. When we learn a language, we do not just acquire words. We learn another way of seeing the world.AI will continue to build our bridges, design our cities, and analyse our data. But when it comes to building bridges etween people, it will remain an assistant, not a substitute. The process of learning a language — slow, emotional, and deeply human — will outlast every technological revolution.Technology can help us talk across borders, but only effort and empathy can help us truly understand one another. And that is something no machine, however intelligent, will ever be able to automate.

Prince Andrew stripped of all titles after Virginia Giuffre's memoir



Toowoomba: Prince Andrew will be stripped of his royal titles, including prince, and will move out of his home, Royal Lodge, to a private residence.Buckingham Palace issued a statement today that King Charles has initiated a formal process to remove the "style, titles and honours of Prince Andrew", who "will now be known as Andrew Mountbatten Windsor".The decision comes in the wake of Virginia Giuffre's posthumous memoir Nobody's Girl, published this fortnight.The memoir includes an inside account of the two years Giuffre spent as a "sex slave" working for Jeffrey Epstein and co-conspirator Ghislaine Maxwell. Giuffre died by suicide in April this year, aged 41, on her farm in Western Australia.

Three weeks before she died, she emailed her co-author, journalist Amy Wallace, and longtime publicist Dini von Mueffling: "In the event of my passing, I would like to ensure that Nobody's Girl is still released." "Today," Giuffre's family said, "she declares a victory. She has brought down a British prince with her truth and extraordinary courage".British historian and author Andrew Lownie (author of a book about Andrew and his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson, called Entitled), told Sky News earlier this month, "the only way the story will go away is if [Andrew] leaves Royal Lodge, goes into exile abroad with his ex-wife, and is basically stripped of all his honours, including Prince Andrew". Sarah Ferguson will also move out of Royal Lodge.As a trauma memoir, Nobody's Girl forces us to bear witness to an uncomfortable truth: Giuffre's abuse was hidden in plain sight."Don't be fooled by those in Epstein's circle who say they didn't know what Epstein was doing," she writes."Anyone who spent any significant amount of time with Epstein saw him touching girls." She continues: "They can say they didn't know he was raping children. But they were not blind." Four days before the memoir was published, Prince Andrew announced he would no longer use the titles conferred upon him, including Duke of York.Three days later, leaked emails from 2011 suggested he gave Giuffre's date of birth and social security number to one of his protection officers, hours before the infamous photograph of him with her was published.Maxwell's brother, Ian Maxwell, published an article in the Spectator today, headlined "Don't take Virginia Giuffre's memoir at face value". The memoir keeps his sister, who was convicted of charges including sex trafficking of a minor, in world headlines – at a time Donald Trump has said he will "take a look" at pardoning her.Earlier this year, Maxwell was moved to a lower security prison to continue her 20-year sentence.Allegations of parental abuseGiuffre writes that her father began molesting her at the age of seven. He "strenuously" denies this. While the memoir makes this public for the first time, Giuffre's older brother Danny Wilson told ABC's 7.30 he first heard the allegations years before the memoir was published – and confronted his father about it.

Giuffre regularly wet her pants at school – earning her the cruel nickname "Pee Girl". She recalls: "I began to get painful urinary tract infections. My infections were so severe, I couldn't hold my urine."After one (of several) medical examinations, a doctor told her mother her primary school-aged daughter's hymen was broken. Giuffre writes of this moment: My mother didn't hesitate. 'Oh, she rides horses bareback,' she explained. That was the end of that. I didn't even know what a hymen was.Later, she recalls her mother raising suspicions about her involvement with Epstein and "apex predator" Maxwell, questioning "what this older couple wanted with a teenage girl who had no credentials".Giuffre writes: "I guess I was glad she cared enough to have suspicions, but at the same time, wasn't it a little late for that? I knew she couldn't save me; she'd never saved me before." Around the time of her doctor's visit, the memoir alleges, Giuffre's father began "trading" his daughter to a friend – a tall, muscular man with "a military bearing" who was also abusing his own stepdaughter.In 2000, the man was convicted of molesting another girl in North Carolina. He spent 14 months in prison and a decade as a registered sex offender.Giuffre writes that she was abused by these men for five years, from ages seven to eleven; it only stopped when she began menstruating.Heartbreakingly, Giuffre discloses that at one point she imagined Maxwell (or "G-Max" as she wanted to be known) as her mother: "While I was hardly equipped to judge, it often seemed to me that Epstein and Maxwell behaved like actual parents." Among other things, the pair gave Giuffre her first cell phone, whitened her teeth, and taught her how to hold a knife and fork "just so".'The younger, the better'Giuffre's memoir is a courageous and clear-eyed account of what trauma takes – and what recovery demands.Told in four chronological parts – "Daughter", "Prisoner", "Survivor" and "Warrior" – the memoir meticulously records the "sexual assaulting, battering, exploiting, and abusing" Giuffre endured throughout her life, most notably at the hands of Epstein and Maxwell.The result is a devastating expose of the fetishisation and abuse of girls – "the younger, the better", Epstein said – and society's failure to protect the most vulnerable.It is also a damning indictment of everyone who knew and looked away.'Please don't stop reading'Giuffre was 16 and working as a locker-room attendant at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort when Ghislaine Maxwell recruited her to "service Epstein", under the pretence of training as a masseuse.(In October 2007, Trump – who is portrayed favourably in the memoir – reportedly banned Epstein from his resort after Epstein hit on the teenage daughter of another member.) Over the next two years, and roughly 350 pages, Giuffre tells how she was trafficked to "a multitude of powerful men", including Prince Andrew, French modelling agent Jean-Luc Brunel, a prominent psychology professor and a respected United States senator.In one of the most distressing scenes, Giuffre describes how she was trafficked to "a former minister", who raped her so "savagely" she was left "bleeding from [her] mouth, vagina, and anus".When Virginia told Epstein about the brutal attack, which made it hurt to breathe and swallow, he said, "You'll get that sometimes." Eight weeks later, he returned Giuffre to the politician, who this time abused her on one of Epstein's private jets. In the US version of the memoir, the politician is described not as a "former minister" but as "a former Prime Minister"."I know this is a lot to take in," Giuffre writes. "The violence. The neglect. The bad decisions. The self-harm. But please don't stop reading." One of the most devastating revelations comes toward the end of the memoir. Giuffre – now in her forties – receives a phone call from a confidant claiming to have evidence that Epstein paid off her father when she was a girl.In 2000, when Epstein and Maxwell started abusing the teenager at El Brillo Way, it is alleged that her father accepted "a sum of money" from the paedophile.According to Giuffre, when she confronted her father, there was "a brief silence" before "he started yelling at [her] for being an ungrateful daughter".Of all the betrayals she endured, this one stands alone: "I will never get over it".Girls, no one cared about

"When a molester shows his face," Giuffre writes, "many people tend to look the other way." In chapter 11, Giuffre describes how Epstein's personal chef, the celebrity cook Adam Perry Lang, made her her favourite food – pizza. This, apparently, became something of a tradition – Lang feeding Giuffre, but never "ogling", "even if I was standing naked in front of him, which was not unusual".She wrote: "When I'd finished attending to Epstein or one of the other guests, Lang would have a cheesy hot pie waiting." In 2019, Lang issued a statement about working for Epstein: "My role was limited to meal preparation. I was unaware of the depraved behaviour and have great sympathy and admiration for the brave women who have come forward." In another scene, Giuffre reveals that Epstein "never wore a condom". After falling pregnant at the age of 17, she suffered an ectopic pregnancy.On this day, Giuffre recalls how Epstein and Maxwell ("two halves of a wicked whole") – with the help of Epstein's New York butler – drove her to the hospital after she woke in "a pool of blood".Epstein lied to the doctor about her age, Giuffre alleges, and the two men seemed to enter "a gentlemen's agreement" in which "whatever was going on between this middle-aged man and his teenage acquaintance […] would be kept quiet"."We were girls who no one cared about, and Epstein pretended to care," Giuffre writes. "At times I think he even believed he cared." She describes how Epstein "threw what looked like a lifeline to girls who were drowning, girls who had nothing, girls who wished to be and do better." As a self-described "pleaser" who "survived by acquiescing", Giuffre writes that Epstein and Maxwell "knew just how to tap into that same crooked vein" her childhood abusers had: abuse cloaked in "a fake mantle of 'love. '"

In March 2001, at Maxwell's upscale townhouse in London's Belgravia – where Prince Andrew was famously pictured with his arm around the teenager – Giuffre recalls how Maxwell invited Andrew to guess her age. When the prince correctly guessed 17, he reportedly told her, "My daughters are just a little younger than you." Later that night, she writes, Prince Andrew bought the teenager cocktails at Tramp – an exclusive London nightclub – where she and the prince danced awkwardly and the prince "sweated profusely". In the car, on the way home, Maxwell instructed Giuffre "to do for [Andy] what you do for Jeffrey".In November 2019, in his calamitous interview with BBC's Newsnight, Prince Andrew denied any wrongdoing, claiming he had "no recollection of ever meeting this lady".He told presenter Emily Maitlis he could not have danced sweatily at Tramp because he had "a peculiar medical condition" that prevented perspiration, caused by what he described as "an overdose of adrenaline" in the Falklands War.

In that interview, Andrew admitted his decision to stay at Epstein's New York home in December 2010 – months after Epstein was released from jail for soliciting and procuring minors for prostitution – was "the wrong thing to do". However, the prince claimed his decision was "probably coloured by [his] tendency to be too honourable".In her memoir, Giuffre describes Andrew as "friendly enough but entitled" – "as if he believed having sex with [her] was his birthright." She alleges she had sex with the prince on two more occasions.Publishing a book posthumously can be an ethical minefield. Critics often question whether posthumous publication is what the author would have wanted. They point to the author's right to protect their work and their literary reputation – a right that cannot survive them.However, Giuffre left no space for speculation. In the email she sent her co-author and publicist before her death, she made her wishes clear: It is my heartfelt wish that this work be published, regardless of my circumstances at the time. The content of this book is crucial, as it aims to shed light on the systemic failures that allow the trafficking of vulnerable individuals.As the memoir progresses, Giuffre's health spirals. The physical, emotional and mental toll of trauma closes in on her. Epstein is dead. Maxwell is in prison. But Giuffre is still "trapped in an invisible cage"."From the start," she says, "I was groomed to be complicit in my own devastation. Of all the terrible wounds they inflicted, that forced complicity was the most destructive." Before she died, Giuffre made a promise to her husband and children that she would try with "all her might" to believe her life mattered. Her final goal was to prevent "the emotional time-bomb" inside her from detonating.While Giuffre may at last be beyond harm, the truth remains. She – like the hundreds of girls abused by Epstein and his associates – was wronged.Her fight, like theirs, transcends death: release the Epstein files; hold abusers and their enablers accountable; expose the systems that protect predators; abolish statutes of limitations for the sexual abuse of minors. Ensure no other child suffers. This is what Giuffre wanted.By publishing her memoir, she ensured the fight would survive her. She made certain her voice would outlast her pain. In this way, she got the last word.

Study reveals heat-linked kidney strain among Tamil Nadu's agricultural workers

A new population-based study published in The Lancet has found that Tamil Nadu's agricultural workers face a growing risk of kidney disease linked to heat exposure, dehydration and long outdoor work hours.Conducted between August and December 2023, the Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (or uncertain cause) CKDu - AGRI study surveyed agricultural workers across all five agro-climatic zones of the State -- the North-East, North-West, Western, Cauvery Delta, and Southern regions. Using a stratified multi-stage cluster sampling method, researchers studied 3,350 farm workers from 125 villages, collecting data on occupation, health and environmental exposures.

The researchers observed a striking seasonal variation in kidney function. During August -- one of Tamil Nadu's hottest months -- 17.4% of participants had an estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) below 60 mL/min/1.73 m². When tested again in December, kidney function had returned to normal in most."These were asymptomatic, subclinical episodes of acute kidney injury," says R. Sakthirajan,co-author of the study, senior assistant professor, Institute of Nephrology, Madras Medical College. "Because all assays were done in a single reference laboratory, the variation almost certainly reflects physiological stress rather than measurement error."The team point out that these transient injuries are linked to repetitive heat and dehydration stress during fieldwork -- a pattern also documented in Central America and Sri Lanka. "We plan to follow participants across different seasons to track kidney markers, hydration, and individual heat exposure," adds Sudharshini Subramaniam, co-author of the study, associate professor, Institute of Community Medicine. "This will help confirm whether repeated seasonal stress leads to chronic kidney disease over time."The study found an overall CKD prevalence of 5.31%, with nearly half of these cases classified as Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown aetiology (CKDu) -- that is, not linked to diabetes, hypertension or heart disease. The burden was significantly higher in the North-East (7.68%) and Southern (6.4%) zones compared to the North-West (2.16%).The Universal Thermal Climate Index (UTCI) used to model heat exposure showed levels above 38°C for more than four hours per day - an indicator of "very strong heat stress" across the North-East and South in August. Workers with CKD spent an average of 36.18 hours a week outdoors, compared to 33.42 hours among those with normal kidney function. For those with CKDu, the average was even higher, at 38.07 hours.

Risk factors included older age (above 53.5 years), male sex, hypertension, anaemia, history of renal stones, smokeless tobacco use, and long hours of outdoor work. Interestingly, factors such as potable water source, snake bite, COVID infection and alcohol intake showed no association with CKD prevalence. The prevalence was 7.9%



among those without formal education, compared to 2.5% among graduates.The prevalence of diabetes (13.4%) and hypertension (30.6%) was similar to national averages, yet two-thirds of people living with hypertension and 40% of people living with diabetes were newly diagnosed during the study, underscoring low awareness.The researchers note that the Tamil Nadu findings mirror global CKDu "hotspots" -- first reported among sugarcane and corn workers in El Salvador and later in Nicaragua, Mexico and Panama where heat and dehydration are suspected to play a key role.Preventive measures"Simple preventive measures can help," says Gopalakrishnan Natarajan, co-author of the study, member secretary of TRANSTAN and former Director, Institute of Nephrology. "Following the Water–Rest–Shade protocol around 750 mL of cool water every hour and 10–15 minutes of rest each hour can protect workers from heat strain."The researchers also recommend flexible work hours to avoid peak heat, and the inclusion of renal function monitoring in routine occupational health checks. At a policy level, they point to the absence of heat-specific labour standards in India. "There is an urgent need to integrate heat-stress thresholds and kidney health monitoring into workplace safety frameworks," the team notes.Need of early detectionOnly 1.6% of participants reported symptoms such as swelling, and nocturia -- waking at night to urinate was the only common complaint, seen in 12.9%. "The silent profile of CKD means symptom-based diagnosis misses most cases," says Dr. Subramaniam.The authors recommend annual serum creatinine and urine albumin–creatinine testing for agricultural workers through existing primary health programmes. Village health nurses and multipurpose health workers could be trained to identify high-risk groups -- men above 50, those with anaemia, tobacco users and those exposed to prolonged heat.Expanding access to education and implementing tobacco-cessation measures, they suggest, may also help reduce risk. As Tamil Nadu faces hotter summers, the study urge that kidney health must become part of India's climate and labour policy.

Five more arrests made, says Paris prosecutor

Five more people have been arrested in the investigation into the theft of crown jewels from the Louvre Museum, but the treasures remain missing, the Paris prosecutor announced Thursday (October 30, 2025).The five were detained on late Wednesday night (October 29, 2025) in separate police operations in Paris and surrounding areas, including the Seine-Saint-Denis region, prosecutor Laure Beccuau told RTL radio. She did not release their identities or other details.One is suspected of being part of the four-person team that robbed the Louvre's Apollo Gallery in broad daylight on October 19, the prosecutor said. Two other members of the team were arrested on Sunday (October 26, 2025) and given preliminary charges on Wednesday (October 29, 2025) of criminal conspiracy and theft committed by an organised gang. Both partially admitted their involvement, according to the prosecutor."Searches last night and overnight did not allow us to find the goods," Ms. Beccuau said.It took thieves less than eight minutes to steal the jewels valued at 88 million euros ($102 million), shocking the world. The robbers forced open a window, cut into cases with power tools, and fled with eight pieces of the French crown jewels.One of those who has been charged is a 34-year-old Algerian national who has been living in France since 2010, Ms. Beccuau said. He was arrested at Charles de Gaulle Airport as he was about to fly to Algeria with no return ticket. He was living in a suburb north of Paris, Aubervilliers, and was known to police mostly for road traffic offenses. His DNA was found on one of the scooters used by robbers to leave the scene, she said.The other suspect, 39, was arrested at his home in Aubervilliers. The man was known to police for several thefts, and his DNA was found on one of the glass cases where the jewels were displayed and on items the thieves left behind, she added.Video surveillance cameras showed there were at least four criminals involved, Ms. Beccuau said.The four suspected robbers arrived onboard a truck equipped with a freight lift that two of them used to climb up to the museum's window. The four of them left onboard two motor scooters along the Seine River toward eastern Paris, where they had some other vehicles parked, she detailed.Ms. Beccuau said nothing suggests that the robbers had any accomplices within the museum's staff.

L&T signs pact with US firm to manufacture unmanned aircraft systems for Indian Army

New Delhi: Infrastructure major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Friday said that it has entered into a strategic pact with US-based Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI) for manufacturing unmanned aircraft systems for the Indian Army.Under the partnership, both the firms will together manufacture Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) in India.L&T's engineering, precision manufacturing and system integration capabilities in defence and aerospace and GA-ASI operational expertise will be utilised in this strategic pact."Under this partnership, L&T will participate in the upcoming 87 MALE RPAS programme of the Ministry of Defence, where L&T will be the prime bidder and GA-ASI the technology partner," the infrastructure major said in a filing to the BSE.The collaboration will enable the production of GA-ASI's MQ-series RPAS that are combat proven.These are widely operational across the globe with millions of flight hours in surveillance and strike missions, it said.The partnership marks a milestone in India's pursuit of a self-reliant defence ecosystem, strengthening Indo-US defence collaboration and fostering a competitive, globally integrated aerospace manufacturing base.

Man uses old laptop and AI to stay connected with his mother 24/7



What if you could be miles away from home and still have your mother within sight throughout the day? Harsh Savergaonkar has found a simple tech-powered solution, using an old laptop and an always-on video call to stay connected with his mother while working away from home.The setup was shared online by Harsh, who explained that he placed an old Linux laptop connected to a large screen on the dining table at his home. A video call remains active throughout the day, creating a virtual window between the two despite the distance. leaving mom for work was the hardest this time so i set up an old linux laptop with a big screen on our dining table that stays on a video call 24×7 got claude to write scripts so that if the laptop / browser crashes it rejoins, if the wifi breaks it fixes itself and rejoins, and if it gets switched off she just presses the power button and i'm back right now i'm somewhere over iceland working and eating, and she's at home doing her work we're not even talking, but every now and then she looks up and i'm there, and i look up and she's there

and when she gets up at 3am for water, i'll be on the screen working and she can just say hi before going back to beThe system was designed to keep working even when technical problems arise. Savergaonkar said he used AI assistant Claude to help write scripts that automatically restart the video call if the browser or laptop crashes. The system can also attempt to reconnect after an internet outage.If the laptop is switched off, his mother only needs to press the power button to restore the connection, he explained.The setup is not necessarily meant for constant conversation. Instead, mother and son simply go about their routines while remaining visible to one another. Savergaonkar said he could be working or eating somewhere as far away as Iceland while his mother continued with her day back home.The small moments are what make the arrangement particularly meaningful. They may not speak for long periods, but occasionally one of them looks up at the screen and sees the other person there.One of the most touching moments comes when his mother wakes up during the night. If she gets up around 3 am to drink water, she can see her son working on the screen, greet him briefly and then return to bed."We're not even talking, but every now and then she looks up and I'm there, and I look up and she's there," Harsh wrote.The unusual use of technology quickly drew attention online, with several users praising the idea and asking how they could create something similar."This is beautiful, man! It's tough living alone in another country, and kudos to you for going on!" one user wrote.Others asked Savergaonkar to share more details about how he built the system, while some suggested adding features such as alerts when his mother appears on camera during unusual hours or when the two have not acknowledged each other for a while.Not everyone thought such an elaborate setup was necessary, though. "This is a great idea! But why not use a CCTV or a baby cam?" one user questioned.Despite the debate over the technology involved, the idea has resonated because of what it represents. Rather than using the screen simply for scheduled calls, the mother and son have created a way to share everyday life from different places.For them, the constant video feed is less about talking and more about knowing that the other person is there.

Delhi HC seeks dedicated POCSO probe teams to speed up investigations



New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has directed the Commissioner of Police to consider setting up dedicated investigation teams for cases registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in every police district of the national capital to ensure timely probes.A bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia issued the direction while disposing of a public interest litigation (PIL) concerning delays in the investigation of cases under the POCSO Act.

During the hearing, the petitioner drew the High Court's attention to the statutory timelines prescribed under the POCSO Act and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.The bench was informed that Section 35 of the POCSO Act mandates that the evidence of a child victim be recorded within 30 days of the Special Court taking cognisance of the offence, while the trial is required to be completed, as far as possible, within one year.

The petitioner further referred to Section 193(2) of the BNSS, which mandates that investigations into specified offences under the POCSO Act be completed within two months from the date of registration of the FIR by the officer in charge of the police station.It was submitted before the High Court that there have been numerous instances where investigations were not completed within the time stipulated by law.

The petitioner, Zuber Ali, had sought the setting up of dedicated POCSO investigation teams in every police district of Delhi to ensure timely investigation of such cases. He had also submitted a representation dated September 5 to the Commissioner of Police, highlighting the issue and seeking appropriate measures.During the hearing, counsel appearing for the Delhi Police, on instructions, informed the High Court that the representation was being attended to and that necessary consultations and other processes were underway.Taking note of the response, the bench said the Delhi Police was already cognisant of the grievances raised in the representation and directed the Commissioner of Police to take appropriate steps while taking into account the suggestions made by the petitioner.It directed that a decision be taken within three months and asked counsel for the Delhi Police to communicate the order to the Commissioner of Police forthwith.

Tata Trusts trustees accuse Venu Srinivasan and Vijay Singh of undermining board resolutions

New Delhi: Senior trustees of Sir Dorabji Tata Trust have accused fellow trustees Venu Srinivasan and Vijay Singh of undermining board resolutions and breaching their fiduciary duties by publicly supporting the listing of Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata Group, according to a report.NDTV Profit reported that the letter — signed by SDTT trustees Noel N Tata, Darius J. Khambata, Neville N. Tata and Bhaskar Bhat — marks an escalation in internal differences within Tata Trusts over the future ownership and listing status of Tata Sons.The trustees said keeping Tata Sons unlisted had been the settled position of the Trusts and the company for years. The Tata Sons board had unanimously resolved in March 2024 to retain the company's unlisted status, while trustees of SDTT and Sir Ratan Tata Trust unanimously reiterated the position in July 2025 and agreed to engage with the Reserve Bank of India on the matter, according to the report.Moreover, the trustees said the July 2025 resolutions had not been rescinded and criticised Srinivasan and Singh for not seeking a reconsideration of those decisions or bringing their changed views on a potential listing before the trustees for collective deliberation. Their public statements supporting a listing undermined the Trusts' resolutions and could also affect Tata Sons' pending application with the RBI.

The trustees also referred to a September 28 proposal to merge Tata Electronics Systems Solutions Private Limited and Tata Consulting Engineers with Tata Sons as one possible route to help the company avoid the RBI's



principal business criteria for non-banking financial companies while retaining its unlisted status.The report showed that the Tata Sons board had asked the Trusts to explore all available options and not listing alone to comply with the RBI's communications."The Tata Trusts did what the Board of Tata Sons asked of them," the trustees said in the letter and defended their efforts to find alternatives to a public listing.The developments highlight growing differences among trustees over whether Tata Sons should remain unlisted or pursue a public listing as it seeks to address regulatory requirements set by the RBI.

SC directs Assam authorities to examine concerns raised over recurring floods and erosion

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking directions to ensure effective measures to address recurring floods, riverbank erosion and drainage-related problems in Assam and the Brahmaputra Valley.A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant declined to entertain the plea filed by advocate Ujjawal Gaur but directed the registry to forward a copy of the petition to all the respondent authorities, asking them to examine the issues raised and take appropriate remedial measures.

Appearing in person, Gaur submitted that the administrative lapses highlighted in the petition were amenable to judicial scrutiny and urged the apex court to issue notice to the authorities. However, the CJI-led Bench observed that the suggestions and deficiencies highlighted by the petitioner ought to draw the attention of the concerned authorities, but the issue was "not essentially legal" in nature.The PIL had sought judicial intervention to ensure effective implementation of the statutory framework governing flood and erosion management. It also proposed a high-level expert mechanism to examine the recurring problems.The petitioner contended that the recurring devastation caused by floods could not be treated as wholly inevitable when statutory frameworks and specialised institutions had been created for flood control, riverbank erosion and drainage management.The plea referred to the Brahmaputra Board Act, 1980, the Assam Embankment and Drainage Act, 1953, and the River Boards Act, 1956, arguing that these laws contemplated scientific investigation, integrated river-basin planning and implementation of measures relating to floods, erosion and drainage.It relied on successive reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), which, according to the petitioner, had recorded deficiencies in flood-control planning, execution and maintenance, drainage management, floodplain management and monitoring of projects.The petition specifically referred to the CAG's Performance Audit on "Flood Control in Assam", contained in Report No. 5 of 2018. It claimed that the report identified deficiencies in integrated basin-wise planning, floodplain zoning, hydrological and morphological studies, and the execution and monitoring of flood-control works.It also relied on official records concerning drainage congestion, backflow, inadequate drainage



through sluices, encroachment upon natural drainage channels, sedimentation and river morphology as factors aggravating flood vulnerability.

The petitioner further highlighted a shortage of technical manpower in the Brahmaputra Board, referring to an official Lok Sabha reply dated December 12, 2024, which disclosed that 65 of its 182 sanctioned technical posts remained vacant in 2024.The plea also referred to a CAG State Finances Audit Report, claiming that Rs 1,112.50 crore remained uninvested in the State Disaster Response Fund as of March 31, 2025, and pointed to savings of Rs 555.13 crore under the Water Resources grant during 2024-25.The petitioner argued that the issue was not about eliminating floods altogether or directing authorities on specific engineering designs, but ensuring that statutory institutions discharged the functions entrusted to them.The plea sought directions for updated scientific hydrological, morphological and drainage studies; an integrated basin-wide flood, erosion and drainage management framework; assessment and maintenance of flood-control infrastructure; protection of natural drainage channels and vulnerable floodplains; strengthening of technical capacity; and mechanisms for monitoring and accountability.The petitioner had sought directions to the Union government, Central Water Commission, National Disaster Management Authority, Brahmaputra Board, Assam government and other concerned states and authorities.

Mann govt moves SC against HC-ordered CBI probe

New Delhi/Chandigarh: The Punjab government has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court's order directing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe allegations of corruption involving Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's OSD Rajvir Ghuman and others.As per details available on the apex court's official website, a Special Leave Petition (SLP) has been filed by the State of Punjab through its Home Department and registered as Diary No. 62464/2026. The petition was filed in the early hours of Tuesday (October 6) and is currently listed as "pending".

The state government has approached the Supreme Court a day after the Punjab and Haryana High Court ordered that the matter arising from three letters written by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to the Punjab DGP be handed over to the CBI.The High Court also directed the CBI to register a case and submit a status report within two months. The ED had written three letters to Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav, alleging that CM Bhagwant Mann's OSD Rajvir Ghuman and his associates Nitin Gohal and Bir Devinder were involved in corruption.

The central anti-money laundering agency had claimed that they were interfering in administrative transfers and postings, besides government tenders, and had called for registration of an FIR.After the Punjab Police did not register a case on the basis of the ED communications, advocate Nikhil Saraf filed a PIL before the Punjab and Haryana High Court seeking a CBI probe.In his petition, Saraf had argued that the ED letters contained serious allegations concerning persons linked to the Punjab Chief Minister's Office and sought a "fair and independent investigation" free from the influence of the Punjab Police and Punjab Vigilance.

He had also sought an investigation into the alleged money trail and appropriate action against those found guilty. While directing the CBI probe, the High Court ordered the investigating agency to submit its report within two months and directed the Punjab government and police to extend full cooperation to the CBI.Meanwhile, Punjab BJP President Kewal Singh Dhillon welcomed the High Court's decision to hand over the matter to the CBI and attacked the Mann government over the allegations.Speaking to the media in Chandigarh on Monday, Dhillon said the development had exposed the reality behind a government that claims to follow a "zero-tolerance" policy towards corruption.He demanded that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann should resign immediately, alleging that the government had lost the moral right to remain in power. Dhillon said the ED had written to the Punjab DGP three times, but the Punjab Police did not register an FIR, following which the matter reached the High Court through a PIL.He expressed hope that the CBI would conduct a fair and transparent investigation and ques-



tioned why the government had allegedly resisted an investigation despite repeated communications from the ED.Dhillon demanded that the Punjab government and the police provide all necessary records to the CBI and extend full cooperation so that the investigation could be completed within the two-month deadline fixed by the High Court.

CARE Hospitals doctors replant severed forearm of 19-year-old worker

Hyderabad: In a complex surgical intervention, a multidisciplinary team at CARE Hospitals, Hitec City, replanted a completely severed right forearm of a 19-year-old worker following a drill-machine accident.

The young man reached the hospital's emergency department within an hour of the accident and underwent a marathon 10-hour surgery to save the limb. The worker suffered a severe crush injury while operating a drill machine, resulting in complete amputation of his right forearm. Considering his young age, the extent of the injury and the timely arrival at the hospital, doctors decided to attempt replantation and give him the best possible chance of preserving his limb and regaining function.

A multidisciplinary team comprising specialists from Orthopaedics, Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, General Surgery and Anaesthesia took up a complex procedure which involved extensive cleaning of the damaged tissue, stabilisation of both forearm bones with plates, restoration of the limb and reconstruction of the damaged soft tissues.

Assam revives Dibrugarh river route with first Bangladesh cargo shipment

Dibrugarh (Assam): A barge carrying 540 metric tonnes of methanol left Bogibeel Terminal here for Dhaka in Bangladesh on Monday, marking the first cargo shipment from upper Assam to a foreign port since Independence, nearly seven decades after Dibrugarh's river ghat fell silent.The methanol, produced by state-owned Assam Petro-Chemicals Ltd (APCL) at Namrup, is bound for Pangaon Port in Dhaka. The vessel will travel about 768 km along National Waterway-2 on the Brahmaputra to the India-Bangladesh border before continuing on the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR).The vessel will cover a total distance of about 1,300 km from Bogibeel in Dibrugarh to Narayanganj in Dhaka.

Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off the vessel DLB Patkai, pushed by the tug Kushal Konwar, from Bogibeel. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma joined the ceremony virtually.The voyage is being viewed as a test of whether the Brahmaputra can emerge as a commercially viable freight corridor linking the Northeast with overseas markets. Regular methanol shipments to Bangladesh are planned. The shipment was made possible after customs and immigration complexes were recently established at Bogibeel and Dhubri."Our grandparents grew up hearing the steamer whistle at Dibrugarh Ghat. For 70 years, that whistle fell silent, and the ships stopped coming," Sonowal said."Today, a ship leaves Dibrugarh for the world once again. The river never failed us. What it lacked for decades was the will to revive it," he said.Sarma described it as a proud day for Assam.Assam's own product, made in Namrup, is now travelling to an international market on Assam's own river. The Northeast is no longer a frontier. It is India's gateway to the East," he said.Dibrugarh was once among the busiest river ports in eastern India. Government steamers reached the town from Calcutta, now Kolkata, by 1856. In 1882, the Dibru-Sadiya Railway began operating from the Dibrugarh steamer ghat.By 1913, steamers were sailing up the Brahmaputra to Dibrugarh daily, carrying tea, timber and passengers. The 1947 Partition disrupted the route, forcing Assam's goods to pass through East Pakistan to reach Calcutta.According to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, cargo movement on India's national waterways rose from 18 million metric tonnes in 2013-14 to 218 million metric tonnes in 2025-26.More than Rs 6,800 crore is being invested in waterways across the Northeast, including the development of National Waterway-2, a ship repair facility at Pandu and last-mile connectivity to Pandu Port."Every ton we move on the



river means less fuel burnt and fewer trucks on the highway," Sonowal said.He added that India was working with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar on regional waterway links.

Man critically injured after touching high-voltage wire in Charlapalli

Hyderabad: A 27-year-old man suffered severe injuries after coming into contact with a 32-KV high-voltage electricity wire at his house in Charlapalli The youth, identified as Ram Singh, a native of Rajasthan, was reportedly speaking on his mobile phone when he came into contact with the high-voltage wire, resulting in an electrical short circuit.



He suffered serious burns and was rushed to a hospital for treatment. His condition is said to be critical. Police are investigating.

AI's rewriting of the rules of education



India is gearing up to turn its education system on its head by introducing Artificial Intelligence (AI) to students as early as class three from the academic year in 2026-27. This is no small feat. The Ministry of Education, in synchrony with the National Education Policy 2020, is crafting a comprehensive framework to weave AI learning through the entire K-12 tapestry (kindergarten to class 12). The goal is to arm the future workforce with cutting-edge tech skills to thrive in a techno-driven economy.

Teacher training and pilot projectsBut throwing AI into classrooms is not just plug-and-play. The real challenge lies in upskilling a mammoth teaching force of over one crore educators in India. The government is rolling out pilot initiatives allowing teachers to harness AI tools to design lesson plans and teaching resources. Over 10,000 teachers have already been trained since 2019 with help from technology giants Intel, IBM, and government institutes such as the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology. The goal is to equip educators who can impart AI concepts confidently and practically. But how ready are India's teachers to morph into AI guides? What are the obstacles in this massive transition? How ready teachers are will dictate how successful the AI revolution becomes.AI is not just about introducing new content. It promises a colossal shift away from "one-size-fits-all" education to personalisation. AI-powered platforms analyse student behaviour, learning speed, and comprehension to tailor lessons that meet individual needs. If a student struggles with algebra, the AI tutor offers extra practice and alternative explanations. If a student is good in biology, he can get ready for more advanced challenges, with AI. Such adaptive learning not only boosts engagement but also dismantles barriers for diverse student populations, including those with disabilities or regional language needs.Despite its transformative potential, AI is designed to augment, not replace, the human element in education. The focus is on enhancing human judgment, creativity and critical thinking through smart tools. AI automates repetitive tasks such as grading and attendance, freeing teachers to spend more time on meaningful engagement with students. It acts as a powerful assistant in personalised lesson planning and real-time feedback, amplifying the effectiveness of educators. So, while AI is shaking up the classroom, there is still no substitute for a passionate teacher who drives learning with empathy and insight.Opportunity amid disruption

As AI reshapes education, it also signals seismic workforce changes. According to a recent NITI Aayog report, while AI could displace up to two million jobs in India's tech sector over the next five years, it is also projected to create four million new jobs by 2030, jobs that demand new skills and adaptability. This is a dual-edged sword that calls for the urgent preparation of today's learners.By embedding AI in early education, India aims to create a workforce that is ready for a digital economy, and not left behind by rapid automation. But are students and educators prepared to embrace this whirlwind of change? The question is not just about job loss or creation but about shaping a resilient workforce that can ride the AI wave.Generative AI technology, which creates new content based on patterns in data, is already gaining traction in Indian education. More than half of India's higher education institutes are incorporating generative AI to enhance teaching and learning. From AI chatbots that answer student queries 24X7 to platforms that create interactive quizzes and personalised study materials, generative AI is making education more engaging and tailored. This explosion of AI tools could narrow the learning gap significantly in India's vast and diverse education landscape. It is a frontier full of promise but also challenges that are related to access, quality and ethics.Driving inclusivity and accessibilityPerhaps the most heartening impact of AI in education is its role in fostering inclusivity. AI-powered adaptive learning and language processing tools break down barriers for non-native speakers and learners with disabilities. The customisation of educational content can create equitable learning environments. In countries that are multicultural and multilingual like India, this AI-driven push for inclusiveness could rewrite the rules of who gets to learn and how. Could AI be the great equaliser that education systems worldwide have long sought? The signs are promising, but deliberate design and policy are critical.India's bold initiative to weave AI into early education signals a massive transformation in how knowledge is imparted, how teachers teach, and how students engage with learning. The revolution comes with challenges: teacher training at scale, ensuring equitable access to AI tools, and preparing students for jobs that do not even exist.Are Indian schools truly ready for this AI overhaul? Can the education system keep pace with rapid technological advancements without leaving disadvantaged communities behind? Only time will tell. But one thing is clear: the rules of education are being rewritten right before our eyes, and AI is the pen scripting this brave new world.

How Mari Selvaraj has portrayed Dalit lives within Tamil cinema



Filmmaker Mari Selvaraj's rise in Tamil cinema as one of its top filmmakers from humble beginnings and his evolution as a master craftsman is a story by itself. It wouldn't be a stretch to state that Mr. Selvaraj along with filmmaker Pa. Ranjith filled a yawning gap in Tamil cinema by ensuring that Dalit protagonists and Ambedkarite politics of emancipation formed the central core of their films, serving as an anathema to the persistent normalisation of violence and oppression by dominant castes in the name of valour and history in Tamil cinema.It has been 13 years since filmmaker Pa. Ranjith burst onto the scene with Attakathi and seven years since Mari Selvaraj's first film, Pariyerum Perumal, released in theatres to positive reviews and success at the box office, dispelling the notion that films about caste discrimination set in the deep south are akin to a spark in the powder keg. Yet, crucial differences between the two filmmakers haven't been emphasised enough. Except for Attakathi, Mr. Ranjith largely shies away from making films with significant autobiographical elements while Mr. Selvaraj situates his autobiographical episodes in historical contexts, save for Maamannan.

Mr. Ranjith's point of view has been informed by a different political tradition in northern parts of Tamil Nadu, where fight for rights would mean large scale political mobilisations, street protests and litigations. However, Mr. Selvaraj's formative years were spent in what was then a part of the Tirunelveli district, a southern district of Tamil Nadu, that has been a hot-bed of caste-violence and caste-based mobilisation through the 90s, including widespread rioting across neighbouring districts, known as the 'Thenmaavatta Kalavarangal'. Young and middle-aged taxi drivers hailing from southern districts but making a living in Chennai, Bengaluru or Mumbai could tell you how the smallest of provocations, say, in restrooms, in cinema halls, in public buses (as in Bison: Kaalamaadan), or in tea shops could snowball into a major incident of violence. Irrespective of which community they hail from, most of them find the prevailing environment toxic and are realising that it is not worth contributing to violence and spending one's life entangled in court cases.This is perhaps why Mr. Selvaraj's point of view appears to look like he is striving for a negotiation, often resorting to dialogue even with his worst enemy, despite the fact that Dalit communities in the south of Tamil Nadu often fight back and resist oppression violently. During a visit to Tirunelveli before the 2021 State Assembly elections, this author asked political activists within the Devendrakula Vellalar community about Mr. Selvaraj's first film Pariyerum Perumal. They were quite critical of the film. "It is not our film. It is a film made for you people," a political party office bearer said jokingly. He meant that the film was meant to tug at your heart, and not aimed at his throat.

However, Mr. Selvaraj quickly changed his tone in Karnan, featuring Dhanush, in which he wove a story around a painful historical incident of police brutality to etch a rather spirited story about how a regular, everyday youth uses revolutionary violence in pursuit of justice. "This is more our film. We fought back...and now everybody knows that," the same activist, told me over the phone after the release. In four of the five films that Mr. Selvaraj has made so far, it is clear that he has been struggling to make sense of his personal experience with caste and the social machinations around him. Questions have been asked, not just by those who don't like the politics in his films, but also by those who take him seriously as a filmmaker.Questions of conscience

Many have spoken about how Mr. Selvaraj has mastered the art of representation — the way women tie their sarees in his films, how dominant castes strut around and throw their weight in villages and towns, and how the smallest of scuffles could snowball into a conflict involving whole communities. After an uncomfortable outing in Maamannan, which had some decent ideas, Mr. Selvaraj returned to his familiar surroundings with Vaazhai, telling us a story of characters hailing from his world, with episodes from his life. Its message was that caste-based labour exploitation has a role to play in accidents, too.

With Bison: Kaalamaadan, Mr. Selvaraj plonks his protagonist, Kittan, an aspiring Kabaddi player, who is asked to stay out of trouble by his father, in the midst of a raging, violent war between two community leaders — one fighting to ensure that the social balance remains tilted in his community's favour and the other, fighting to create equilibrium. In Bison, Mr. Selvaraj continues to open himself up to the criticism that his films often tries to appeal to the good conscience of the oppressor castes. A writer who is well-informed about the politics in the south said, "Except for Karnan, protagonists in Mari's films have sought equality with the oppressor castes by showcasing the struggles of the protagonist and appealing to their good side. However, nobody in Tamil cinema today has been able to capture how the dominant castes try to maintain their dominance in the caste society. He is exceptional in that case."While one need not speculate about his motivations, it is true that the idea of seeking parity by appealing to the good conscience of dominant castes sits uncomfortably with the larger Dalit community who remember their struggles in the south differently. It is perhaps understandable that cinema, being an expensive mainstream art, necessitating the need to recoup money in the market, imposes certain restrictions such as creating a sense of balance in representation and so on. The movement that began with Pa. Ranjith and Mari Selvaraj, finds itself at an inflection point: can mainstream cinema be used to build bridges and force a change of mindsets in other communities while telling stories of oppression the way it must be told?Bison could be seen as a move towards that. By bringing the life and struggles of Manathi Ganesan, a Kabaddi player, on the silver screen, Mr. Selvaraj has shown his intent to celebrate not just those who fight for the rights of people, organise protests and so on, but also heroes from the community who quietly break glass ceilings and set benchmarks, not just for young people within the community but for Tamil society as a whole.

Gender disparity exists even in informal labour market



Hence, the recent rise in women's employment appears to be largely a proliferation of low-productivity activities. The indirect evidence does not indicate any improvement in the availability of decent jobs for women

Gender inequality issues are widespread and numerous. Wage and earning inequality in the labour market has been a major concern. Why job market outcomes differ across genders, even after controlling for human capital-specific factors, is a key question. Even within the informal sector, which is generally characterised by low levels of productivity and earnings, gender differences are perceptible.Some studies present a thorough and intricate assessment of the recent growth in female workforce participation rates (FWPR) in India, supported by detailed data obtained from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Their paper reveals that a substantial portion of this increase is concentrated specifically within the agricultural sector, where notable rises in self-employment and unpaid family work have collectively contributed to heightened participation rates among women.?The authors compellingly argue that these trends should not merely be interpreted as indicators of disguised unemployment; rather, they may signify productive engagement in economic activities that have historically been under-recognised and undervalued (Goldar and Agarwal, 2024).

In general, the informal sector is viewed as a sector that is subordinate to the formal sector. For the sake of flexibility, regulations are not encouraged, allowing for greater employment potential to be tapped, which is often lacking in the formal sector. Though residual types of activities are conducted within the informal sector, the greater employment potential is considered a merit in low-income countries. Within the residual activities or a sector that is subordinate to another, any further possibility of discrimination is usually unexpected. However, our findings reveal that even within the informal sector, women experience worse outcomes than men. In the face of an excess supply of labour in menial and low-productivity activities, the possibility of gender-based outcomes cannot be ruled out, as hiring and firing practices may involve gross inequality, perpetuated by stereotypes and prejudices.Our study using the unit-level data of the PLFS argues that significant differences exist between males and females in terms of employment structure and labour market outcomes. In general, the industrial classification and the nature of employment for female and male workers vary significantly. Furthermore, within the informal sector, the types of employment and wage/earning outcomes reveal substantial differences.In order to assess whether the rising employment of women is associated with productive absorption, resulting in an increased standard of living, the average monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) is compared across households with and without women workers. First, the households are distributed across different decile groups, and for each group, the average consumption expenditure per capita has been estimated separately for households with women workers and those without.

At the upper end, the backward-sloping supply curve of women suggests that the average monthly consumption expenditure per capita could be higher for households without women workers compared with those with women workers. This is somewhat evident when we compare the top decile in the rural context across both survey years. In the lowest decile group, households with women workers are marginally better off than those without.Overall, there does not seem to be any significant difference in the consumption expenditure per capita between the two groups of households across most of the decile classes. This compels us to reflect on the quality of employment in which women are engaged. If the recent surge in employment statistics is due to a rise in women's employment, it does not necessarily indicate that rural women are being increasingly absorbed into quality jobs. Had that been the case, the rise in rural women's employment would have been accompanied by an increase in income per household, which would again be reflected in the monthly consumption expenditure per capita.In the urban context, most of the decile groups do not reveal any significant difference in terms of consumption expenditure per capita between households with and without women workers. At the top, households in the decile class without women workers are better off than those with women workers, as noted in the rural context as well. However, in the lowest decile group, households with women workers are marginally better off than those without women workers.Low-productivity work

Hence, the recent rise in women's employment appears to be largely a proliferation of low-productivity activities. The indirect evidence does not indicate any improvement in the availability of decent jobs for women. The lack of productive jobs compels many women to participate in low-productivity activities, as open unemployment may not be a feasible option. As men, the principal breadwinners, may not have access to jobs with sufficient incomes to meet their households' consumption requirements, women feel compelled to enter the labour market and resort to jobs of last resort. Additionally, in the absence of male members to participate in the job market, women are forced to seek income-earning opportunities, even if the quality of those jobs remains poor. Of course, this increase in low-productivity jobs does not necessarily reflect a shrinking demand for decent jobs; it could also be attributed to poor human capital formation among women job seekers.A more rigorous analysis is conducted based on the unit-level data to assess gender differences in the nature of employment within the informal sector. After controlling for important variables, the gender differences in the occupational choice function are significant. Furthermore, these differences are reflected in the wage/earning function, providing evidence that women's engagement in the labour market is not necessarily associated with equality. In regular wage employment, casual wage employment, and self-employment, women earn less than men.

Additionally, wage employment within the informal sector is less accessible to women workers compared with their male counterparts; they are more susceptible to self-employment, which may not generate substantial earnings for the workers. This has important implications for the non-attainment of empowerment and a "say" in the decision-making process.Policy directives can be envisioned to extend support to female workers for accessing wage employment and to reduce gender wage inequality. It is important to recognise that even within the domain of petty and residual activities, discrimination exists, perpetuating inequality.Arup Mitra is Professor, South Asian University; and Divya Sharma is Assistant Professor of Economics, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies-Technical Campus; views expressed are personal

As campaign peaks, Bihar narrative revolves around old and new strands

The verdict in the two-phase Bihar Assembly election will be pronounced in a little over a fortnight, on November 14, but the campaign's momentum on the ground has given way to Chhath festivities, which fell this year on October 27-28. Moreover, a paradigm shift in the format of the election campaign has seen it move from the ground to social media. And from the heat and dust of intense campaigning have risen a handful of dominant themes in voter conversations.

Firstly, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar still appears more popular than other political leaders in the arena but his failing health is a talking point, especially among male voters. The ruling National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) 'Dus Hazaria' scheme, a reference to the ?10,000 transferred to 'Jeevika Didis' (community mobilisers for self-help groups in a World Bank-supported initiative) under the 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana'(CM women's employment scheme) through Direct Benefit Transfer to the beneficiaries' bank accounts, has gained huge traction and accolades.Mr. Kumar has been, for a long time, assiduously carving a caste-neutral women's vote bank, with several welfare schemes crafted especially for women under his baton. Women voters (at 48%) are almost equal in number to male voters in Bihar. They can be heard speaking of the 'Dus Hazaria' scheme everywhere, proclaiming their support for Mr. Kumar."We will all vote for Nitish Kumar," a group of women voters from an Extremely Backward Class (EBC) told this reporter, sitting by the roadside under the shadow of a neem (margosa)tree at noon on October 22 in Samastipur. They were busy weaving sup-daura (handcrafted bamboo baskets) used in the Chhath festival to carry fruits and other offerings to the rising and setting Sun.Men of the same group, sitting nearby and also weaving baskets, beads of sweat crowding their brow, sounded more cautious. "We have heard he (Nitish Kumar) is not well these days. He should give up his position before things turn fatal," they said.The ruling NDA has fielded 34 women candidates, while the Opposition Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) has 31 women candidates in the fray this year.Tejashwi's burdenSecondly, voter conversations centre around Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav burdened by the inherited tag of "lawlessness in Bihar" of his parents' regimes from 1990 to November 2005. The younger son of RJD supremo Lalu Prasad is a former Leader of the Opposition in Bihar Assembly, and was Deputy Chief Minister twice in Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) governments. NDA leaders have targeted him over the years of "misrule and migovernance" under the RJD, a focus Mr. Yadav has struggled to shrug off.Mr. Lalu Prasad has declared his younger son to be his political heir, and Mr. Yadav has announced several welfare schemes for women but voters frequently recall the "jungle raj" that became a byword for the RJD era in Bihar's governnance. "It's okay that he (Mr. Yadav) too has announced something for us, but who can forget the total absence of law in the RJD regime," voters in urban Darbhanga told this reporter.At 36, Mr. Yadav is popular among younger voters. "He is young, and has proved he means what he says in the 17 months during which he was a Mahagathbandhan Deputy CM," students returning from a coaching institute in Darbhanga town as the prepared to write examinations for 'government jobs', said. Mr. Yadav has promised one 'government job' per family if he comes to power. "Did Modi ji provide ?15 lakh to everyone in the country as he had promised?" they said, when asked about Mr. Yadav's campaign



promise.PM's popularityThirdly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is still the most popular leader across age groups in both urban and rural constituencies of the State, irrespective of their caste affiliations. Voters speak of Mr. Modi as a "strong leader who is tough, and at the same time takes care of every section of society". "We need a leader like him," Ramesh Kushwaha of Vaishali district said, looking to others sitting with him for confirmation as they nodded.Mr. Modi has campaigned extensively in Bihar. On October 30, he is scheduled to address two public meetings at Muzaffarpur and Chhapra, and will hold a roadshow in Patna on November 2. "He is more appealing for us than any other leader either in Bihar or the country," Sanjay Bind, pedalling his cycle swiftly on the Mahua-Samastipur road in Vaishali district, said.Congress is backFourthly, the Congress party, which was pushed into something approaching a political coma in the State when Mr. Prasad led the RJD to power in 1990, has finally found its stride with the success of Rahul Gandhi's 14-day, 1,300-km-long Voter Adhikar Yatra across 24 districts. Congress leaders and supporters have received a fresh lease of life, and the party Bihar headquarters Sadaqat Ashram is seen buzzing with activity after a long time.Enthused party leaders have even pressured the RJD to let the Congress contest more seats. Several party leaders suggested that had Mr. Gandhi stayed for more days in Bihar, or camped here, the contest in Bihar this time would have been between "the BJP-led NDA and the Congress-led Mahagathbandhan" , with the party reclaiming lost ground.'Over-hyped' JSPFifthly, the lack of traction for the newly launched Jan Suraaj Party, founded by former poll strategist Prashant Kishor on October 2, 2024 in Patna, has become evident. The JSP is contesting all 243 seats, with three candidates withdrawing their nominations. But despite the hype on social media, and in some sections of conventional media, there is little evidence of interest in the party on the ground."It (the JSP) is doing well only on social media. It is over-hyped publicity of the kind Mr. Kishor was doing for other political parties as an expert on elections, nothing else," Rajesh Kumar, 55, an engineer-turned-stock broker from the Kumhrar constituency in central Patna, said. "Candidates with a good personality and career are not guaranteed to win elections in Bihar. Do you think the Congress party candidate from Patna Sahib, Shashant Shekhar, is in anyway less educated than any of the JSP's candidates, but will he win the poll? It's a million dollar question," Mr. Kumar added.Several smaller parties have had a little impact in some constituencies on the ground. The All India Majlis-e- Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) has caught the attention of voters in some constituencies of the Seemanchal (border) districts of northeast Bihar, where its presence may be impactful in the results.

Kunal Kapoor, Ramayana's Indra, says Ranbir Kapoor has the 'stillness, grace' to play Rama



When a glimpse of Airavat, the divine flying elephant, was offered in the first trailer of Ramayana, Nitesh Tiwari's adaptation of the Indian epic, earlier this year, the audience began speculating who'd play Indra, the rain god who'd be perched atop his mighty vahana, in a battle against the chief antagonist Ravana, played by Yash in the mythological epic. The international trailer of the film, unveiled last month, revealed it to be Kunal Kapoor, who recently spoke on SCREEN Spotlight about his experience of working on the film."All of us have looked at movies in the West and said, 'Wow, that's incredible!' But secretly, we've hoped and said, 'Why can't we make a film like that?'," said Kunal. He discovered that was the exact film co-producer Namit Malhotra of Prime Focus and director Nitesh Tiwari are aiming for with Ramayana. "They've put so much time, passion, and effort, and so many resources into it for over six to seven years now. So, there was no question of not wanting to be a part of it," he argued.

Calling the experience of shooting his sequences "wonderful", Kunal confessed he's never been on a set like that in his 25-year career so far. "It was incredibly quiet, almost meditative. Everybody knew they were telling a story that was important to our culture and our history. It was the first set I was on where everybody knew exactly what was going on," he pointed out, claiming that not only the director, actors, and assistant directors, but also the spotboys and the lighting staff were in full sync with what was happening in every scene, thus developing a "magical" subconscious connection with everybody on set.

He attributed it greatly to the temperament of Nitesh Tiwari. He admitted that in the hands of a lesser director, mounting such an epic would've been far more chaotic. "Nitesh sir is a great guy to work with. He's so easy. Anybody else who was making a film of this magnitude would be stressed. You'd see that on the set. But with him, he's absolutely relaxed and great fun to work with," said Kunal. His conversations with the filmmaker about playing Indra also helped him shape the character with all his nuance intact."The most interesting characters are those who are powerful on the outside, but have some kind of fragility inside. Indra is a personification of that. Lord Indra commands rains, thunder, and armies, but from everything you've read about it, there's some vulnerability inside. I find that very fascinating — not just the power, but what that power is trying to protect inside. Even though he's a god, that makes him deeply human and relatable," explained Kunal.Since his role demanded a lot of hugely mounted action sequences, he shot extensively with the green screen, for the first time in his career so far. "The thing with the green screen is there's nothing available to you. There's no real palace or sunrise. Everything is out of your imagination. You've to create pretty much everything in your head. But that can be a lot of fun as well. Because it takes you back to the most important thing as an actor — your imagination. It also takes you back to your childhood, where you'd play with imagination. That was a lot of fun," he recalled.He also hailed the technical insight provided by action director Terry Notary, best known for serving as a movement coach on Hollywood's blockbuster action epics like the Planet of the Apes franchise, X2 (2003, from the X-Men franchise), Superman Returns (2006), Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer (2007), The Incredible Hulk (2008), Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, Avatar (2009), The Adventures of Tintin (2011), The Hobbit franchise, and Russo Brothers' upcoming Marvel movie Avengers: Doomsday.

"We got very lucky because we had somebody like Terry. He trained all the actors in the Planet of the Apes to imbibe that body language. What I found really fascinating about working with him was he was not just an action director, but a body language expert directing action. That's very different from working with an action director. Just having that kind of a talent on the film makes it incredibly easy for everybody else. Because you're shooting not only an action sequence, but also an important part of a story that's close to all our hearts. So, when you find talent that looks at it and approaches it like that, it really elevates the work," reasoned Kunal.On working with Yash, and the casting of Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi

Out of the lead actors of Ramayana, Yash only had scenes to share with the KGF star Yash, who plays the chief antagonist Ravana in the film. "Yash is a great guy. He's very, very grounded and easy. He's obviously a huge star across the country, but you don't get that feeling when you work with him. He was amazing to work with as well," said Kunal.While he didn't have any scenes with Ranbir Kapoor and Sai Pallavi, he vouched that they'd make for a befitting Rama and Sita respectively, especially having worked with them in the past. "Ranbir is obviously a fantastic actor. He's that rare actor who has the ability to say a lot while doing very little. That's the stillness you need to play Shri Rama. It's not an over-the-top character. You've to had a restraint and grace to you, but within that, you need to be able to convey a lot. And you need a brilliant actor to do that. So, I think Ranbir is going to be amazing as Rama," argued Kunal. He shared screen space with Ranbir almost two decades ago in Siddharth Anand's 2007 romantic comedy Bachna Ae Haseeno.He was paired with Sai Pallavi more recently, in Sunil Pandey's romantic comedy Ek Din earlier this year, which was also her Bollywood debut. "I remember when we were doing a scene together, I looked at what she was doing while I was in the scene. I was just so fascinated because she had the ability to take something very simply written, but elevate it. She's obviously going to be fantastic in the film. She's such a good actor," added Kunal.Co-produced by Prime Focus and Yash's Monster Mind Creations, Ramayana is adapted for the screen by Tiwari and Shridhar Raghavan. Also starring Sunny Deol as Hanuman, Ravi Dubey as Lakshman, Rakul Preet Singh as Shurpanakha, and Arun Govil as Dasharatha, it's slated to release in cinemas worldwide this Thursday on November 5, three days ahead of Diwali.

'I deliberately tried to stay away from television': Abhijeet Sawant on returning to Indian Idol



In an exclusive interview, Abhijeet Sawant shared his take on playback singing and said its very important for ever singer in India.

Singer Abhijeet Sawant has returned to the Indian Idol stage after 22 years. He is currently seen as a participant on Indian Idol: Legends Return. Abhijeet, who won the first season of Indian Idol back in 2004, shared that the show changed his life completely. In an exclusive interview with SCREEN, Abhijeet spoke about joining the latest season of Indian Idol, participating in other reality shows, and his take on playback singing.Talking about returning to the same stage after 22 years, Abhijeet Sawant said, "It feels very nostalgic. My journey started from this platform. So I was very excited to come back and remember that whole aura of the old days. It was something different to experience. Many people will think this is kind of a competition. But I'm beyond this situation right now. For me, it's about collecting old memories and creating new ones. So this is kind of a fun roller-coaster ride for me."

He even shared his thoughts on sharing the stage with a new generation of singers. Abhijeet added, "For me, it's a completely different experience because today's generation is different. They behave differently. They work differently. I have become more mature as a person, dealing with this new generation, a new lot of singers. It's a completely different experience. Honestly, I'm learning this whole process. I am learning how to cope with the new generation. Back in 2004, it was completely different; when we started, everybody was new to the show. Not only us, but the musicians, the producers, directors, everybody was new in that format. So those days, everybody was trying their luck and trying to figure out their place. They were very honest. Our first season was completely pure."

Abhijeet Sawant on life after winning Indian IdolSharing how winning Indian Idol 1 changed his life, Abhijeet recalled, "My life changed completely after winning the first Indian Idol. Earlier I was just a normal boy, learning music, trying to get a chance to perform on stage. And after that, in six months, we all became the heartthrobs of the Indian audience. My world changed completely. Even today, many people ask me, did you have all your dreams fulfilled after Indian Idol. I had very limited dreams before the show, it was only later I created bigger dreams. So Indian Idol actually gave me a chance to dream big, think beyond my limitations, and work on that."

Abhijeet also shared his take on Independent music versus playback singing, he said, "The good thing about today's music is that an individual artist can work on his own craft and he doesn't need any other support. When we started, playback music was the only music for singers. Everybody used to say that if you get one playback song, everything will be fine. But I think now, you don't need that one song or a hit song. You just have to work on your craft and release your own songs, work with social media presence, and create your own style of music."He added, "In 2007, after my first album, my second album was almost at a time when non-film music was dying. And in those days, it was MP3s time, piracy of music. So only film music was left; pop music, non-film music was over. Now, after many years, Honey Singh and Badshah started getting their original music or indie music again back in the system because of YouTube. I love doing playback singing. It is the biggest platform for any singer in India, so it will always be important. But now I'm at that age, experience, and situation where I don't have to call someone and keep asking for work. I'm an established singer now. People know me, they see me, they listen to me. If anyone remembers me, they will definitely call me for playback singing."

Abhijeet Sawant on Bigg Boss Marathi and Celebrity MasterChefAfter winning Indian Idol, Abhijeet Sawant also explored the reality show space. He participated in Bigg Boss Marathi and also Celebrity MasterChef. Sharing why he chose to explore reality shows beyond singing, Abhijeet Sawant said, "I'm a television baby; I was born on television as a singer and as a performer. So for me, staying away from television is a little difficult. I deliberately tried to stay away from television, but that was a wrong decision. I felt I should come back, and then I started doing all the other shows because I realized people like me on television.""People don't only see me as a reality show singer. Abhijit Sawant is always seen as a popular face on television. So that is a big advantage for me and for my career also. I took a break from television, and I wanted to get into only playback.

Pyre is a love story. For those from Uttarakhand, it is also the story of our home



Pyre opens with Padam Singh (played by Padam Singh Kapri) walking along a hill path with a small drum in his hand, singing. Beside him is his wife Tulsi (Heera Devi). To someone from outside, it is an old couple on a mountain path, with a folk song in the air. To people from Uttarakhand, it is something we have known all our lives.The song is a Jaagar, a traditional ritual to invoke the spirits of ancestors and the devi-devta of the mountains. The small drum is the hudka. In the film, Padam and Tulsi are Bubu and Aama, the Kumaoni words for grandfather and grandmother.Such moments keep you fixated in Pyre. When Bubu needs to call for help, he reaches for the bhankora, the horn we associate with worship and village gatherings. The song he hums is "Sarg Tara Junyali Raat" by Uttarakhand's folk singer Gopal Babu Goswami. When Aama snaps at him, "Teri buddhi mein bajra pad gaya", we laugh out loud, because it is exactly how our own grandmothers scolded us, with the same mix of irritation and love. Bubu and Aama are not characters for us; they are family.Director Vinod Kapri has said that Pyre is ultimately a film about love, between two people who have spent their lives together, and their loneliness. It is a universal story: an old couple, their companionship, their dependence on each other. Anyone can relate to it, but it hits too close to home for us, because it is a story we have witnessed first-hand.

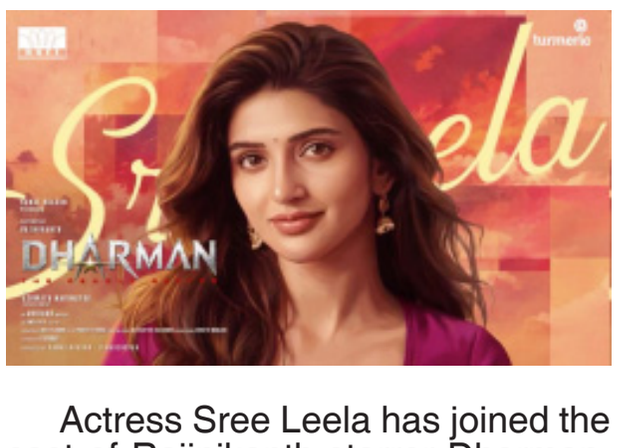
A couple, a few goats, and a letterWhat do two people say to each other after about 65 years of marriage? Mostly, they bicker. Padam teases, Tulsi complains, and the quarrelling is their love language. They live with their goats in a village that is slowly running out of people, and their son, Hariya, has been in Mumbai for 28 years. When a letter arrives saying he will visit, Tulsi's spirits lift, and the film settles into the long, aching business of waiting. Padam, meanwhile, keeps pleading with the young men still in the village not to leave.Pyre is based on the real story of a couple Vinod Kapri met in Munsiyari. The old man would give a goat to anyone who helped him carry his sick wife to a doctor. Asked what would happen when the goats ran out, he said he would be gone before that.Not much happens in Pyre. Two old people tend their goats, light a beedi, fetch wood, mend the house, and wait. Yet it stays with you, because that is how life really is in a village emptying around you. The days pass, one very like the other. You wait for a letter, a visit. The film has the patience to sit inside that waiting, and it trusts us to feel what the waiting costs.

A big part of why it works is the two people at its centre — Padam Singh Kapri, a retired Army havildar, and Heera Devi, a local farmer, had never faced a camera before. So nothing they do looks performed. Their innocence is not an act. It is real, and you can feel it in every quarrel and every small kindness. You see someone you know in them: your grandparents, perhaps, or an elderly neighbour from your village.The mountains behind the postcardsOutside the state, Uttarakhand is snow peaks, tea on a balcony, a weekend away from the city. For those who live there, it also means a sick old woman being carried down the mountain, as Aama is in the film, to a hospital not equipped to give her the care she needs.Some of us grew up in remote villages with no road at all and have seen patients carried to the nearest road on chairs and charpoys. Others, like me, grew up in hilly towns where roads exist, but the medical facilities are much the same. Anything beyond an ordinary cold and fever, and you are referred to the nearest city, four or five hours away. So we know all of this. We have lived some version of it, and we have watched the rest happen around us: neighbours packing up and leaving, old people like Aama and Bubu left alone in houses that were once full, whole villages slowly turning into ghosts.And then there is the rain. Every monsoon, houses collapse somewhere in the hills. A few days of heavy rain and the worry begins. Will there be a landslide? Will the road be washed away? Will the electricity go, and for how many days? Nature gives the mountains their beauty. It also makes sure that people who live there never feel completely safe.There is a saying in the hills: pahaad ka paani aur pahaad ki jawani kabhi pahaad ke kaam nahi aati (The water and the youth of the mountains never work for the mountains).

We have watched it come true. I am one of the people who left the state to earn a living, part of the same migration. I always wanted to go back. Like many others, I never could.Of roughly 16,500 villages in Uttarakhand, the state's Rural Development and Migration Prevention Commission counted 1,792 as completely uninhabited by 2022. As per the 2011 Census, the number was a little over a thousand. Between 2008 and 2018 alone, 1,18,981 people left their villages for good, about half of them for work and 15 per cent for education. Most who leave are between 26 and 35, which is exactly the age of the young men Padam keeps begging to stay.So when Jeevan leaves for Mumbai and Bubu says that his son has gone today, the sentence carries 28 years of waiting. Jeevan and Lakshman were the ones he called for help. In a village that had already lost its own son, they had become the closest thing he had to one.

Imagine belonging to a place where community is everything, and watching every door close, one by one, until the village is only the memory of the people who lived there.Bubu's fear is a practical one. When everyone has left, who will take Aama to the hospital the next time she falls sick? And when one of them dies, who will carry the body down the hills for the cremation? So he does what he can. He builds a pyre in front of their house, for both of them.That is what the title means. It is a plan, made by an old man who has run out of people to ask for help.When the people go, the culture goesGirish Tiwari "Girda", the jan kavi of Uttarakhand, understood that migration was never only an economic problem. A poet, theatre artist and activist who gave the state movement its voice, often argued that roads should not be built in the hills simply as a way to send the youth out, but so that jobs come in and people can stay.In an interview, he described the cost in plainer words, "Ab jab yahan log hi nahi hain, aapki jawani hi aapke pahad mein nahi hai, toh sanskriti kahan se aayegi. Sanskriti to aadmi ki hoti hai, pahaado mein gaon mein ya to gharon mein taale latke hain, ya tooti kamar ki budhiya baithi hai ya baccha hai. Beech ki peedi to sab gayab hai pahad se (When there are no people left here, when the youth themselves are no longer in the mountains, where will the culture come from? Culture is sustained by people)."We rarely think about how a culture survives. It does not survive because a song has been recorded or a festival has a place on the calendar. It survives because people carry it. Most of us never learnt a folk song from a book. We learnt by being there: at a relative's house during a ritual, watching the elders, listening to our grandparents' stories, hearing our mother tongue spoken around us every day. That is how it has always been handed down, from one generation to the next, simply by seeing and being part of it.But when the young have left and only the old remain, who is left to watch, to learn, to carry it on? Who will perform the Jaagar once Bubu's generation is gone? Who will recognise the hudka and the bhankora, or know the songs of Gopal Babu Goswami?Girda was right. We are losing more than villages. A language grows less familiar to children growing up outside the state, and folk traditions turn into occasional performances instead of everyday life.Uttarakhand celebrates its Foundation Day on November 9. Its people fought for a separate state, and some gave their lives for it, so that the hills would get what they deserved. Twenty-six years later, we are still counting ghost villages, and there are still Aamas and Bubus in remote villages living lonely lives at an age when they should be surrounded by family.That is why, for us, Pyre is not just a story of love and companionship. It is the story of our home.

Sree Leela joins Rajinikanth's Dharman, makers welcome actress on board



Actress Sree Leela has joined the cast of Rajinikanth-starrer Dharman, directed by Ashwath Marimuthu and produced by Kamal Haasan's Raaj Kamal Films International. The film, in which Rajinikanth plays a doctor taking on criminals, has completed its third shooting schedule.

Chennai: The makers of director Ashwath Marimuthu's eagerly awaited action entertainer 'Dharman', featuring Superstar Rajinikanth in the lead, on Wednesday welcomed actress Sree Leela on board the unit of the film.Raaj Kamal Films International, the production house of actor Kamal Haasan which is producing the film, took to its social media timelines to welcome the actress on board the unit of the film.It wrote, "She's got the spark. She's got the pataka. Welcoming the gorgeous @sreeleela14 to DHARMAN. #Dharman #KettaPaiyanSir

.Director Ashwath Marimuthu too took to his X timeline to welcome the actress to the unit. He wrote, "Welcome on board @sreeleela14."For the unaware, Ashwath Marimuthu had announced that the unit of the film had wrapped up its third schedule of filming on September 30 this year. The director had, at an event in Chennai, disclosed that Rajinikanth was very happy and very kicked about the pace and the quality of how Dharman was shaping up.

"I am now comfortable working with Thalaivar. I was very scared initially. I have worked with Ashok Selvan, then Pradeep and after that, I started working with Thalaivar. But I have realised nothing has changed. That is because Rajinikanth's work ethics is so pure and amazing. It is like having a child on the sets. Even after 50 years, he is so excited and so full of energy," the director had said at the event.The unit of the film had begun its third schedule on September 16 this year. The unit of the film had wrapped up its second schedule of shooting on September 4 this year. The unit had commenced the second schedule on August 13 this year. The makers, at the time of announcing the commencement of the second schedule, had said, "The deadly doctor. #Dharman Schedule 2 Begins, and this one's legendary. #KettaPaiyanSir. #SuperstarRajinikanth #KamalHaasan."The film has triggered huge excitement among fans ever since the makers announced the project. In June this year, the makers had dropped a making video that showed how the team had arrived at Superstar Rajinikanth's look in the film.

For the unaware, Rajinikanth plays a doctor who takes on criminals in Dharman. Actor, producer and parliamentarian Kamal Haasan, while announcing the title of the film, had said, "Dharmame vellum! (Only Dharma will win) #Dharman #Thalaivar173 #SuperstarRajinikanth @rajinikanth #Mahendran @Dir_Ashwath @anirudhofficial @anbariv @RKFI @turmericmediaTM @magizhmandram."The title poster of the film that was released on the occasion showed Rajinikanth in an operation theatre in a hospital holding a scalpel, even as he seemed to have one leg placed over the body of a slain rowdy sheeter.The film is to have music by Anirudh. Cinematography for the film is by Niketh Bommi and editing is by Pradeep E Raghav.

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