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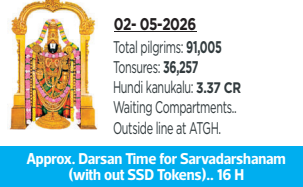
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DELHI POLICE NAB ABSCONDING GANGSTER IN RS 2 CRORE EXTORTION CASE

New Delhi (TSIT)

In a major breakthrough against organised crime, the Delhi Police Crime Branch has apprehended an absconding gangster, Kaptan alias Tanna, a key associate of Kapil Sangwan (Nandu gang), in connection with a high-value extortion case. According to an official press release issued by the Crime Branch, the operation led to the "successful apprehension of wanted accused Kaptan in Rs 2 crore extortion case", highlighting what officials described as "effective policing and crime control efforts". The accused had been evading arrest by frequently changing hideouts and was tracked through sustained technical surveillance. Police said the case pertains to FIR No. 347/25 dated August 29, 2025, under relevant provisions of the BNS and Arms Act. The victim had received a WhatsApp video and threat messages demanding Rs 2 crore, with threats to kill him and his family if the demand was not met. Detailing the accused's role, the press release noted that he was "involved in reconnaissance and arms supply for planned firing at the victim's house", acting as a crucial facilitator in the conspiracy.

TODDLER AMONG NINE KILLED IN DELHI MULTISTOREY FIRE

New Delhi (TSIT)

A 15-year-old child was among the nine people who lost their lives in the tragic fire incident at a four-storey building in Delhi Vivek Vihar on Sunday, officials confirmed. The fire broke out on the second floor of the building at around 4 a.m., after which 14 fire engines were dispatched to the scene. During the rescue and relief operations, over 10 people were rescued. The identities of all nine deceased have been established, the officials said. The maximum casualties were reported on the second floor, where five people lost their lives - Arvind Jain (60 years), his wife Anita Jain (58 years), Arvind's son Nishant Jain (35 years), Nishant's wife Anchal Jain (33 years) and their son Akash Jain (1.5 years). On the third floor, three members of a family were killed. They have been identified as Nitin Jain (50 years), his wife Shailley Jain (48 years), and their son Sanyak Jain (25 years). On the first floor, Sikha Jain (40 years) was killed, while her husband, Naveen Jain (48 years), was injured and is currently receiving treatment. Upon receiving the information about the fire, police staff, along with the Vivek Vihar SHO and ACP, immediately proceeded to the spot. The fire brigade and crime team also reached the spot at premises No. B-13, Vivek Vihar Phase I.

Coastal Karnataka temperature predicted to rise in coming days



Mangaluru (TSIT)

The Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) has forecast an increase in temperatures across Dakshina Kannada (DK) district in the coming days. A rise in temperature is specifically predicted for the Kadaba and Puttur taluks of the district. In its monthly outlook, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had previously indicated that minimum temperatures in May would likely be above normal in several parts of the country, though some regions in north-west, central, and northeast India might see below-normal minimum temperatures.

Coastal regions have already been experiencing a surge in heat over the last few days. The weather pattern typically begins with cloudy skies in the morning, followed by intense humidity and rising temperatures as the day progresses. On Saturday, the heat was particularly intense across DK district. In Mangaluru, the maximum temperature was recorded at 33.8°C, which is 0.5°C below normal, while the minimum temperature stood at 26.6°C, marking an increase of 1.3°C above the seasonal average. Despite the heatwave warning, the IMD has also forecast the possibility of rain in some parts of the district over the next two days.

KTR accuses CM Revanth of betraying 14 lakh students over fee reimbursement

Hyderabad (TSIT):

Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) working president K. T. Rama Rao on Sunday attacked Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy for what he called betraying nearly 14 lakh students from BC, SC, ST, and minority communities over fee reimbursement.

In a detailed letter addressed to the Chief Minister, he alleged that grave injustice is being meted out to the students.

KTR stated that Government Order (GO No. 7) is a "dark and deliberate attempt" to dismantle the fee reimbursement scheme, which has been a crucial support system enabling access to higher education for economically weaker sections.

The GO reportedly allows educational institutions to collect fees from students pending reimbursement approval.

He stated that the move would effectively deprive lakhs of poor students of higher education opportunities and push their future into uncertainty. KTR demanded the immediate withdrawal of GO 7 and called



upon the Chief Minister to issue a public apology to the student community.

Highlighting the financial distress in the education sector, KTR pointed out that the state government has failed to clear fee reimbursement dues amounting to nearly Rs 10,000 crore over the past two-and-a-half years. He noted that this has severely impacted over 2,500 educational institutions, with colleges struggling to function and students facing

difficulties in accessing certificates and continuing their education.

KTR further criticised the government for misleading stakeholders through committees, token releases, and delayed assurances instead of addressing the core issue of pending dues.

Recalling the origins of the scheme, he said that the fee reimbursement programme was introduced by former Chief Minister Y. S.

Rajasekhara Reddy and was effectively continued and strengthened in Telangana by K. Chandrasekhara Rao to ensure inclusive access to education.

The BRS leader questioned the intent of the current government in weakening such a vital welfare initiative.

KTR also expressed concern over the deteriorating condition of residential educational institutions and alleged administrative negligence in ensuring basic facilities for students. Warning of statewide protests, he stated that BRS will not remain a silent spectator if the government continues to undermine the future of students. "If the student community is forced to take to the streets, the government will be held accountable for the consequences," he cautioned. The BRS working president reiterated the party's demand for the immediate release of pending dues and withdrawal of GO 7 in the interest of protecting the future of lakhs of students across Telangana.

IMPLEMENTING ALL PROMISES MADE TO FARMERS, SAYS MIN PONGULETI



Hyderabad (TSIT):

Telangana's minister for revenue Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy said on Sunday that the state government is implementing the promises made to farmers in the farmers' declaration released as part of the Congress party's election campaign by senior leader Rahul Gandhi.

He claimed that the farmers' friendly government is fulfilling the assurances one by one by implementing various programmes. He stated that paddy and maize crops are being procured at Minimum Support Price, with payments credited to farmers' accounts within a week.

The minister was speaking at Praja Darbar held in Khammam

district as part of a 99-day action plan titled 'Praja Palana-Pragati Pranaliika' (people's governance-progress plan). He recalled that government waived crop loans of Rs 2 lakh for 25 lakh farmers while the financial assistance under Rythu Bharosa has been increased to Rs 12,000 per acre.

The government is also paying Rs 500 bonus per quintal for fine paddy. A subsidy distribution programme for agricultural equipment will be conducted from May 5 to 7. "As part of the Praja Palana, we are conducting farmers' festivals and organizing a distribution program of agricultural tools on subsidy to farmers in Warangal on May 5, 6, 7. We request the farmer brothers to make good use of this opportunity," he said.

Srinivasa Reddy stated that after the Congress government came to power in Telangana, a Farmers' Commission was also established.

Lashing out at previous government of Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS), he said the BRS government handcuffed farmers in Khammam for demanding support price. Now they are trying to trap farmer brothers with fake love. The previous government ruled for 10 years and did not provide agricultural tools on subsidy to farmers.

He stated that the goal of the people's government is to eliminate the need for citizens to run around government offices for solutions. Instead, officials are reaching out directly to people, receiving petitions, and resolving issues on the spot. The minister along with District Collector Divakar T.S. and Additional Collector Dr. P. Sreeja, he directly received grievances from the public. He emphasised that since the formation of the "people's government, transparent governance has been taken to the doorstep of citizens, with every petition being carefully examined and acted upon promptly".

TN POLLS: All arrangements in place for vote counting, says TN CEO Patnaik

Chennai (TSIT)

All arrangements, including an elaborate three-tier security mechanism, have been put in place for the counting of votes for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections scheduled on May 4, Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik said on Sunday. Counting will begin at 8 a.m. with postal ballots, followed by Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) votes from 8.30 a.m. across 62 designated counting centres in the state.

Counting for the 234 Assembly constituencies was held on April 23 in an intense electoral contest, with the ruling DMK striving to retain power, while the AIADMK is aiming for a comeback after five years in the opposition. The electoral landscape has been further complicated by the debut of actor-politi-



cian Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), along with the presence of Seeman-led Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK). A massive deployment of nearly 1.25 lakh personnel, including counting staff, micro-observers and security forces, has been made to ensure a smooth and transparent process.

Of these, about one lakh police personnel will be engaged in maintaining law and

order, according to police sources.

To facilitate counting, authorities have set up 234 counting halls for EVM votes and an additional 240 halls for postal ballots and Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballots (ETPBs).

A total of 3,324 counting tables will be used. The exercise will be overseen by Returning Officers (ROs) assisted by Assistant Returning Officers (AROs), with

10,545 personnel deployed for counting duties and 4,624 micro-observers ensuring adherence to norms.

The Election Commission has also appointed 234 counting observers - one for each constituency - to monitor proceedings and enforce compliance. Additionally, 1,135 AROs have been deployed specifically for postal ballot counting, with one table allotted for every 500 ballots. Security has been tightened with a three-layer system.

The outer 100-metre perimeter will be secured by local police, the entry gates by State Armed Police, and the innermost areas - including counting halls and EVM strong rooms - by Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF). In total, 65 CAPF companies have been stationed at counting centres.

Govt rejects claims of Aadhaar design change, calls viral posts misleading

New Delhi (TSIT)

The government on Sunday dismissed reports claiming that Aadhaar cards will soon be reduced to a simple format with just a photograph and QR code, stating that there is no such proposal under consideration and terming the claims misleading. In an official statement, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that news reports and social media posts suggesting a change in Aadhaar's format are incorrect and are creating unnecessary confusion among the public.

"Such news reports and social media posts are creating unwanted confusion in the minds of the peo-



There are intermittent news reports and social media posts explaining how Aadhaar's look may change by the end of this year to just a photo and a QR code, alone. This is not correct. There is no plan for any such changes."

ple," it added.

It advised people to rely only on official communication from the Unique Identification Authority of India through its verified channels and press releases issued via PIB, and urged media outlets not to amplify unverified information. "People in general are advised to ignore such reports and social media posts and refer to official communication from UIDAI through its official social media handles and press releases issued through PIB. Media is also advised not to encourage such information," the ministry stated.

The clarification comes amid growing circulation of claims online that

Aadhaar could soon undergo a major redesign.

The government reiterated that no such decision has been taken and asked citizens to ignore misleading posts. The statement gains significance given the scale and importance of Aadhaar, which has evolved into the world's largest biometric identification system.

According to the government, Aadhaar currently has around 134 crore users and has facilitated over 17,000 crore authentication transactions so far. Maintained by the Unique Identification Authority of India, the Aadhaar ecosystem plays a crucial role in enabling identity verification for a wide range of services.

Over 700 caught for drunken driving in Hyderabad, Cyberabad

Hyderabad (TSIT):

More than 700 drivers have been caught driving vehicles under the influence of alcohol during the weekend special drive by the traffic police under the limits of the Hyderabad and Cyberabad police commissionerates. As many as 445 drivers were caught by Hyderabad Traffic Police, while 283 offenders were apprehended in Cyberabad.

Hyderabad Traffic Police conducted a two-day special drive on May 1 and 2 against drunken driving to ensure road safety. During the special drive, a total of 445 drivers were caught driving vehicles under the influence of alcohol. Of them, 371 were two-wheeler riders, 26 were



three-wheeler riders, and 48 were four-wheeler and other vehicle drivers. Offenders were categorised based on their Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) levels. According to the Joint Commissioner of Police (traffic), the BAC level was found to be 30-50 mg/100 ml in 99 cases, 51-100 in 173 cases, 101-150 in 100 cases, 151-200 in 42 cases, 201-250 in 11 cases, 251-300 in 12 cases and 300 above in eight cases.

## Bengal: Repolling in 15 booths of 2 assembly seats concludes, nearly 87 pc turnout till 5 pm

**KOLKATA:** Repolling in 15 booths of two assembly constituencies in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district concluded at 6 pm on Saturday, with around 87 per cent turnout recorded an hour before the close of voting, an official said. A voter turnout of 86.90 per cent was recorded till 5 pm, with the figure from one booth still awaited, he said. Voting began at 7 am and continued till 6 pm. Polling was more or less peaceful at 11 polling booths of Magrahat Paschim assembly constituency and four in Diamond Harbour. The Election Commission had ordered a

repoll on Friday, following reports of electoral malpractices. However, in booth number 179 at Chanda Primary School of the Trinamool Congress alleged that a specially abled voter and his mother were harassed by central forces. The incident sparked protests by party workers and locals. The TMC claimed that the voter's mother, who had entered the booth to assist him, and her son were detained for a considerable time by central forces over alleged rule violations. "TMC leaders Manmohini Biswas and Pratik Ur Rahman reached the spot and led the



protests. The matter was taken care of by our officers there," an official of the poll body said. Polling was otherwise peaceful across 15 booths, he said. The Commission said that every person standing in queue before the close of polling hours would be permitted to vote. Magrahat Paschim registered 86.11 per cent voter turnout, while in Diamond Harbour, the figure was 87.60 per cent, the official said. Voting in these two assembly constituencies was held in the second phase of the assembly elections on April 29. The repoll order was based on reports received from return-

ing officers and observers of the two constituencies and "material circumstances", he said. In Magrahat Paschim, TMC's Md Samim Ahmed Molla is pitted against BJP nominee Goursundar Ghosh, while Abdul Majid Halder of the Congress and ISF candidate Abdul Aziz Al Hassan are also in the fray. TMC candidate Panna Lal Halder is contesting against Dipak Kumar Halder of the BJP in the Diamond Harbour seat. Goutam Bhattacharya of the Congress and CPI(M)'s Samar Naiya are among other candidates. The BJP had alleged rampant

electoral malpractices in certain polling stations of both the assembly seats under the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, which is represented by TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee. The EC had deputed its special observer, Subrata Gupta, to fact-check the allegations from the ground. The poll panel will decide on repolling in the Falta assembly constituency on Saturday. The West Bengal assembly elections were held in two phases - April 23 and April 29 - amid unprecedented security arrangements. Counting of votes will take place on May 4.

## Delhi CM, announces 7 new corridors of Metro in Phase V (B)



**New Delhi:** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, during her address at the Delhi Metro's 32nd Foundation Day here said that the system has become national capital's life-line, and is a benchmark of efficiency and discipline. CM also announced a major expansion of the Delhi Metro network, saying that work under Phase IV and Phase V is

progressing rapidly, and preparations are underway to begin construction on seven new corridors under Phase V (B), which will further strengthen connectivity across the city. Describing metro as city's life-line, she credited the employees, officers and support staff for their commitment, saying their professionalism has made the system a globally rec-

ognised model of urban transit. Ms Gupta said that despite initial challenges, the Metro earned public confidence through efficient operations and strict adherence to timelines and standards, while also establishing credibility within the administrative system. Running over 4,500 trips daily, the metro is serving more than 6.5 million passengers, she stated. The successful execution of complex engineering works, including nearly 100 km of underground tunnels, reflects its strong technical capabilities and robust management, CM said, adding that "It is now difficult to imagine Delhi without the Metro. Addressing city's pollution, CM Gupta said strengthening public transport is key to a sustainable solution, with the Metro playing a central role. Emphasising financial discipline, the CM said every rupee invested in Metro projects is being utilised transparently and efficiently, with a long-term vision to ensure a modern and resilient transport system for Delhi.

## Mamata, Abhishek hold meeting with all TMC counting agents ahead of Bengal poll results

**KOLKATA:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday told counting agents of the party during a meeting that it will secure over 200 of the 294 assembly seats, two days ahead of the counting of votes polled. The two leaders, who held a virtual meeting with counting agents of 291 assembly seats, also told them that they should regularly update the leadership about the prevailing situation at counting centres and must remain there till the end of the exercise. The Anit Thapa-led Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGP) contested the remaining three seats in the Darjeeling hills. The two-phase assembly polls were held on April 23 and April 29, with counting of votes scheduled for May 4.



The CM, who asserted that the "TMC will at least win 200-plus seats if not more", also asked counting agents not to give importance to the "propaganda and campaign by the BJP and its allies" about the number of seats they would secure. She said that the TMC will stand beside party activists, including counting agents, who were allegedly assault-

ed by central forces during voting or campaigning. "We will ensure those party workers who were assaulted by central forces for standing up against their brutalities are financially rewarded," she said. "Do not give importance to the numerous exit polls telecast on TV channels and the social media," she told the agents, according to a

senior TMC leader. The TMC supremo said such exit polls have no value. "The 2021 and 2024 exit polls were way off the mark. I think most such polls are meant to influence the share market," the CM said. She also said that in case of any TMC candidate losing a seat by "a margin of 200-300 votes", the counting agents must insist on re-counting. "No one should leave the counting centres till the process is over," the chief minister said. She also called for surveillance by party cadres near electrical transformers, citing the "power outage" during counting at Nandigram in the 2021 polls. The TMC chief said the counting agents must carry food items prepared at home. Abhishek Banerjee, who also interacted with the

counting agents virtually, asked them to insist on re-counting, particularly for postal ballots, in case of defeat of TMC nominees by a narrow margin. "All unusual activities inside counting centres, like the sudden power outage at the Nandigram counting centre in 2021, must be immediately reported to the party's top brass," he said. The virtual meeting, which began at 4 pm, lasted for nearly two hours. Virtual interactions had been a regular feature during the revision of electoral rolls, with Abhishek Banerjee holding multiple meetings with booth-level agents between November and February. However, such meetings were not held by either Abhishek Banerjee or Mamata Banerjee after the announcement of the assembly polls in March, but by leaders like Mahua Moitra.

## Medicover Hospitals Promotes Lung Health with "Breathe Easy, Run Free" 5K; Launches Free Screening Package

\*Hyderabad, May 3, 2026\* Reinforcing its commitment to preventive healthcare, the Department of Pulmonology at Medicover Hospitals organized the "Breathe Easy, Run Free" 5K Run to raise awareness about lung health and the importance of early screening.

The run commenced from the hospital premises, extended up to IKEA, and concluded back at the campus. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from over 250 individuals, including doctors, staff, fitness enthusiasts, and members of the public, reflecting strong community involvement.

The highlight of the event was the unveiling of a "Free Lung Screening Package" (worth ₹2500) by Chief Guest Dr. Hariradhakrishna. The



package includes Complete Blood Picture (CBP), Chest X-ray, Pulmonary Function Test (PFT), and a Pulmonologist consultation,

aimed at promoting early diagnosis and timely intervention. Dr. Hariradhakrishna stated, "Rising pollution and changing life-

styles are significantly impacting lung health. Initiatives like this help create awareness and encourage preventive care." Dr. Raghukanth emphasized, "Nowadays, cold and cough are increasingly affecting people across all age groups. Though often neglected, they may indicate underlying respiratory issues. Regular screening and an active lifestyle are essential." Dr. Rajamanohar added, "Early detection through simple tests can prevent complications and improve outcomes." Dr. Meghana Subah said, "Preventive healthcare is crucial. We encourage everyone to utilize this free screening and prioritize their respiratory health."

The event concluded on a positive note, highlighting Medicover Hospitals' dedication to community health and awareness.

## Court rejects plea seeking Rahul's voice sample in defamation case

**SULTANPUR:** A local MP/MLA court on Saturday rejected a plea seeking a voice sample of Rae Bareilly MP Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case filed by a BJP functionary against the Congress leader, and posted the matter for next hearing on May 11. The plea, filed by BJP leader Vijay Mishra through his counsel Santosh Kumar Pandey, had sought Gandhi's voice sample for a forensic test to compare it with an audio clip. After the petition was dismissed, Pandey said they would file a revision plea before the sessions court against the order. The court rejected the plea after hearing the arguments of both sides, including Gandhi's counsel Kashi Prasad Shukla. The matter dates back to

2018 when Mishra, a local BJP leader, filed a defamation suit over Gandhi's alleged objectionable remarks targeting Amit Shah while campaigning for the Karnataka Assembly elections. After five years of legal proceedings, the court issued a warrant against Gandhi in December 2023. The Rae Bareilly MP surrendered before the court in February 2024, and was granted bail on two sureties of Rs 25,000 each by a special magistrate. On July 26 last year, the Congress leader recorded his statement before the court, claiming innocence and calling the case a political conspiracy. Earlier this year, multiple hearings were postponed due to a strike by lawyers and the ill-health of Gandhi's counsel.

## CBI arrests Kamlesh Parekh after extradition from UAE

**NEW DELHI:** The CBI has arrested Kamlesh Parekh, a fugitive wanted in a 10-year-old Rs 2,672 crore bank fraud case, after his extradition from the UAE, officials said on Saturday. Parekh, wanted in the bank fraud case filed against Shree Ganesh Jewellery House (I) Ltd, Kolkata, was extradited from the UAE on Friday, they said. The CBI had registered the case in 2016 against the company and others for allegedly cheating a consortium of 25 banks to the tune of Rs 2,672 crore. "The agency had chargesheeted Parekh, the promoter of the company who had been absconding since the probe began, on December 31, 2022," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement. "An open-ended non-bailable warrant was issued against him in 2019, while a Red Corner Notice was issued through Interpol in 2024. The authorities in the UAE detained him on the basis of the said notice after."

## Govt appoints R Balasubramaniam, Joram Aniya as full-time members of NITI Aayog

**NEW DELHI:** The Centre on Saturday appointed academician Joram Aniya and scholar-author R Balasubramaniam as full-time members of the Niti Aayog, taking the total number of such members in the government think tank to seven, along with a vice-chairman. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the chairman of the Niti Aayog.

"In continuation of the Cabinet Secretariat's notification dated 24.04.2026, the prime minister has approved the appointment of the following persons as full-time members of the NITI Aayog with effect from the date of assumption of charge and until further orders, on the same terms and conditions as are applicable to full-time members: (i) Dr R Balasubramaniam; (ii) Dr Joram Aniya," a notification issued by the Cabinet Secretariat said. On April 24, while re-constituting the Niti Aayog, the government appointed Ashok Kumar Lahiri as its vice-chairman and economist K V Raju, AIIMS Director M



Srinivas, Secretary in the Department of Science and Technology, Abhay Karandikar, scientist Gorbardhan Das and former Cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba as full-time members. Sources said Aniya's inclusion in the government think tank marked a historic moment, bringing an eminent intellectual voice from Arunachal Pradesh to the highest level of national policy-making. An accomplished academician, associate professor, and member of the Arunachal Pradesh Pri-

ivate Educational Regulatory Commission, Aniya has more than 18 years of experience in teaching, research, and public policy engagement. Notably, she is the first woman from the Nyishi community to earn a PhD, and the first in Hindi language in the state, with significant contributions to literature, culture and indigenous knowledge systems. She has authored and edited many books on Nyishi literature and culture, along with numerous research publications.

## Court denies bail to Al Falah University group chairman in money laundering case

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court on Saturday rejected the regular bail application filed by the Al Falah University group chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui in a money laundering case. Additional Sessions Judge Sheetal Chaudhary Pradhan made the decision after hearing arguments

from both Siddiqui and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). A detailed order is pending. The ED opposed the bail plea, citing the seriousness of the allegations and the stage of the investigation. Siddiqui was arrested for his involvement in a money laundering case linked

to the alleged generation of illicit funds from the fees paid by students at his educational institution in Faridabad. He is accused of misrepresenting the accreditation and recognition of his institutions. He was arrested by the ED in November 2025 and is in judicial custody.

Siddiqui is facing prosecution in a charge sheet already filed by the ED, while a separate charge sheet has also been filed against him by the Delhi Police Crime Branch. The agency also informed the court that another money laundering probe involving Siddiqui is underway.

On February 7, the trial court granted Siddiqui interim bail for two weeks on humanitarian grounds to care for his wife, who is undergoing cancer treatment. The ED challenged this temporary relief in the Delhi High Court, resulting in the trial court reconsidering the matter.

## LDF will return to power for 3rd straight term: CPI(M) state secy

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan on Saturday expressed confidence that the LDF would form the government for a third consecutive term when votes are counted on May 4. Speaking to reporters, Govindan said a close analysis of exit polls indicated that the LDF would return to power. He said surveys had also found Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to be the most popular politician in the state and that people wanted him to continue in office. "The exit polls have confirmed that there is no wave favouring the UDF. Exit polls have predicted 60-69 seats for the LDF, with just two more seats needed to come to power. But if we look closely at those surveys, the LDF has the upper hand in several seats where a UDF victory is pre-

dicted," he said. He added that the survey results also showed there was no anti-incumbency factor in the election, contrary to the UDF's claims of winning over 100 seats. Govindan said he was confident that the LDF would begin its third term in government on May 4. He also took a swipe at the Congress, saying that even before the election results were announced, party leaders were discussing who would become chief minister and making arrangements for ministers' personal staff. Polling for the 140 Assembly constituencies in Kerala was held on April 9, and votes will be counted on May 4. The LDF has been in power in Kerala for the past 10 years, having won the 2016 and 2021 Assembly elections.

## Bengal: Repoll turnout dip natural, says TMC MP Roy

**KOLKATA:** TMC MP Saugata Roy on Saturday said there was "nothing new or unnatural" in the lower voter turnout recorded during repolling in Magrahat Paschim and Diamond Harbour, attributing it to the departure of outstation voters after exercising their franchise on April 29. Repolling in 15 booths across the two Assembly constituencies in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district concluded at 6 pm, recording around 87 per cent turnout. Diamond Harbour had recorded 92.48 per cent voter turnout till 7 pm on April 29 during the second phase of the Assembly elections. However, repolling in select booths on Saturday saw comparatively lower participation. According to Election Com-

mission data, Magrahat Paschim registered 86.11 per cent voter turnout during the repoll, while Diamond Harbour recorded 87.60 per cent on Saturday till 5 pm. Reacting to the figures, Roy said such a drop during repolling was expected. "There is nothing new or unnatural in the percentage coming down during repoll. Many voters who had come from outside to cast their votes on April 29 might have left afterwards. Naturally, the turnout during repoll will be lower," the senior TMC leader said. The EC had ordered repolling in certain booths following complaints of violence, intimidation and procedural irregularities during polling on April 29.

## Two youths burnt alive after car rams into bike in Andhra's Anantapur



Amaravati, May 3: In a horrific accident, two young men were burnt alive when a motorbike they were riding caught fire after being hit by a car in Andhra Pradesh's Anantapur district.

The accident occurred late on Saturday night on the national highway at Aravakuru Cheruvu Cross in Kuderu mandal.

According to police, a Bolero car hit the bike coming from the opposite direction. The petrol tank of the bike exploded under the impact of the crash, resulting in a fire that engulfed the two-wheeler. Both people riding the bike were trapped in the

flames and died on the spot. After hitting the bike, the speeding car ramed into an autorickshaw, which overturned. A person travelling in the three-wheeler suffered critical injuries and was rushed to the government hospital at Anantapur.

The deceased were identified as Ajit Kumar (20) and Akash (22). Police identified the victims with the help of the registration number of the bike. The two friends were on their way to Anantapur town for some work late last night. Akash, the only son of his parents, used to drive a tractor to eke out a living, while Ajith did

welding work in their village in Vajrakaruru mandal in the same district.

Meanwhile, in a shocking incident of road rage, a car driver drove the vehicle for about two kilometres with a man on the bonnet after a fight over a road accident.

The incident occurred in Meerpet in Rangareddy district on the outskirts of Hyderabad on Sunday.

A man and his son were riding a motorbike, which was hit by a car. According to eyewitnesses, this led to a heated argument between them. The car driver allegedly attacked the father-son duo and then tried to escape from the spot. The man riding the bike tried to stop the car by clinging to the car's bonnet, but the driver did not stop the vehicle.

The person at the wheel drove the car for about two kilometres and returned to the accident spot with the bike rider still clinging to the bonnet. With the locals raising an alarm, the car driver fled the spot. The victim lodged a complaint with the police, which registered a case and took up an investigation.

## New Courts Inaugurated Across Visakhapatnam to Strengthen Judicial System



Visakhapatnam, May 3: In a significant move to strengthen judicial infrastructure, several newly sanctioned courts were inaugurated across Visakhapatnam district on Sunday. The ceremonies were led by Justice Ravi Nath Tilhari, Administrative Judge of the district and Judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, in the presence of Justice Ravi Cheemalapati.

At the District Court Complex in Visakhapatnam, the V, VI, and VII Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate-cum-Additional Civil Judge (Senior Division) courts were formally inaugurated, marking a major expansion of the city's judicial system.

In Gajuwaka, a Family Court-cum-Additional District and Sessions Judge

Court was inaugurated to enhance access to family and civil justice. Similarly, a new Civil Judge (Senior Division) Court was launched in Bheemunipatnam, extending judicial services to coastal areas.

Meanwhile, Narsipatnam witnessed the inauguration of an Additional District and Sessions Judge Court along with a II Additional Civil Judge (Junior Division) Court at the local court complex. The programmes were attended by Principal District & Sessions Judge Chinnamsetty Raju, I Additional District & Sessions Judge M. Venkata Ramana, along with other judges, bar association members, advocates, and police officials.

## Railway Staff Lead by Example, Turning Service into a Lifelong Commitment

The South India Times, Visakhapatnam: In a time when leisure is often associated with digital screens for the youth and vacations for the middle-aged, a remarkable group of serving and retired railway employees is redefining the essence of social responsibility. Braving the scorching summer heat, these dedicated individuals continue to serve society with unwavering commitment, proving that true service knows no age or retirement. As temperatures rise, railway volunteers—many of them retired staff—have been actively distributing drinking water at railway stations and key public locations, offering relief to thousands of passengers and pilgrims enduring the harsh summer conditions.

At the revered hill shrine of Simhachalam, their service assumes even greater significance. Here, retired railway employees prepare and distribute food items such as pulihora, buttermilk, and pongali to visiting devotees. Their day begins early with cooking, continues with food distribution through the afternoon,



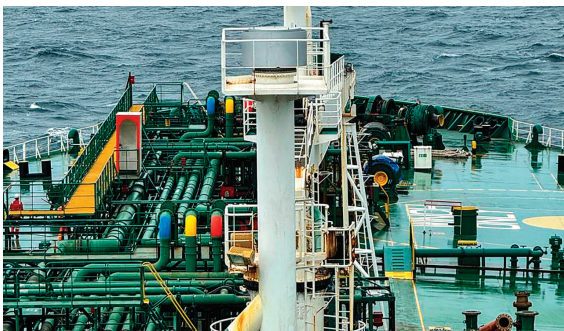
and concludes with cleaning, reflecting a continuous cycle of selfless dedication. Rather than opting for rest or recreation, these individuals have embraced a higher purpose. Their efforts not only provide physical relief but also strengthen the bonds of compassion and community spirit. Supporting this noble initiative, the Duvvada Rail Users Association has played a vital role in mobilizing NGOs and local volunteers. Under the guidance of K Eswara Rao, various associations, volunteers, and even police personnel have come together in a united effort to serve the traveling public. This collective endeavor aligns

with the initiatives of the East Coast Railway Waltair Division, which has been actively providing free drinking water services during the summer months.

Commending these efforts, Divisional Railway Manager Lalit Bohra appreciated the dedication of the teams, NGOs, and volunteers. He emphasized that such acts of service set a strong example for the younger generation, encouraging them to contribute meaningfully to society. This initiative stands as a powerful example of collective responsibility and shared humanity, demonstrating that when service is embraced wholeheartedly, it becomes a lifelong commitment.

## Vizag-bound tanker with 46,313 tonnes of LPG sails safely through Hormuz

New Delhi, May 3: MT Sarv Shakti, carrying 46,313 MT of LPG, safely sailed through the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday and is expected to arrive at Visakhapatnam on May 13 with the Indian cooking gas cargo, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways said on Sunday.



The Marshall Islands-flagged ship has 20 crew members onboard, of whom as many as 18 are Indians, a ministry statement said.

The ship, carrying over 45,000 tonnes of LPG, was earlier tracked moving into the Gulf of Oman after passing near Iran's Larak and Qeshm islands on Saturday, according to ship-tracking data.

Sarv Shakti, a very

large gas carrier, has previously operated on routes between the Persian Gulf and Indian ports. It was broadcasting its Indian destination and crew details, a safety protocol widely adopted by vessels navigating the region since the outbreak of conflict involving Iran.

The vessel's journey is significant as it represents the first known pas-

sage by an India-linked tanker since a US-led blockade targeting ships associated with Iran began weeks ago.

The restrictions had effectively reduced tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to near-zero levels, disrupting one of the world's most critical energy corridors.

Sarv Shakti is also among the largest carri-

ers to navigate the route since a brief and chaotic reopening of the strait last month, which was quickly followed by renewed restrictions.

Meanwhile, the ministry also said that all Indian seafarers in the Middle East are also reported safe, and no incident involving Indian-flagged vessels has been reported in the past 24 hours. It said it has put in place the necessary measures to safeguard Indian vessels and seafarers operating in the Gulf region. DG Shipping Control Room has handled 8,373 calls and more than 17,965 emails since activation. In the past 24 hours, 38 calls and 127 emails have been received.



HEVY RUSH IN SRISAILAM.....

## Extensive arrangements in Tirumala to cope up Summer Vacation rush

Tirumala: In view of the summer holidays and the expected heavy influx of pilgrims which has already commenced from the past few days, TTD has made elaborate arrangements in Tirumala to ensure better facilities for the multitude of devotees. All necessary amenities have been made available to avoid inconvenience to the devout.

### Engineering Arrangements:

The Engineering Department has undertaken extensive works at an estimated cost of Rs.2 crores. To provide relief from the scorching heat, shaded shelters have been arranged from Batagangamma Circle to Gogarbhram Dam Circle up to the Outer Ring Road. Additional shelters have also been set up at Vaikuntham Queue Complex-2, the Museum premises, and Narayanagiri Gardens. Cooling paint has been applied in queue lines, and temporary shelters have been installed for waiting pilgrims. Special focus has been given to high-footfall areas such as the temple surroundings, laddu counters, and movement zones.

Synthetic enamel cool paint has been applied on the four Mada Streets to reduce ground heat. Temporary toilets have also been arranged along queue lines from Bhatagangamma Temple Circle to the Outer Ring Road.

Health Department Initiatives Under the Health Department, drinking water is being continuously supplied to devotees through mobile water drums by Srivari Sevaks. Each batch consists of 15 volunteers, and a total of 45 volunteers (in three batches) serve daily.



Sanitation is being maintained rigorously in queue lines, with regular garbage clearance to ensure a clean environment.

### Medical Facilities

A total of 16 medical centers are available in Tirumala to provide immediate medical services to the devotees.

Additionally, a mobile first-aid center has been arranged along the Outer Ring Road queue lines, while another first-aid facility at Narayanagiri Gardens besides VQC dispensaries, footpath routes first aid centres.

### Adequate Laddus

To meet the increased demand, laddus are being supplied in large quantities. While 3.5 lakh laddus are provided on normal days, an

additional buffer stock of 3.5 lakh laddus has been maintained for the summer rush.

### Accommodation Facilities:

Due to space constraints, accommodation in Tirumala is limited to about 60,000 pilgrims. Currently, around 7,500 rooms and five pilgrim amenities complexes are available.

Pilgrims who do not get rooms can utilize around 9,000 odd lockers available at PAC-1, PAC-2, PAC-3, Padmanabha Nilayam, and PAC-5. Rooms are not allotted to an individual (single person) as many pilgrims with families will be waiting for accommodation.

### Tonsure Arrangements:

TTD has made elaborate arrangements for devotees offer-

ing hair (tonsure). Along with the main Kalyanakatta, 11 mini Kalyanakattas are functioning at PAC-1, PAC-2, PAC-3, PAC-5, GNC, HVC, Sapthagiri Rest House, Nandakam Rest House, Kaustubham Rest House, Sri Venkateswara Rest House, and Sri Padmavati Rest House.

A total of 1,152 barbers perform tonsuring services, including 269 women.

Considering the intense summer conditions, TTD is focusing on providing essential facilities such as shade, cool environment, cleanliness, drinking water, accommodation, tonsure services, and laddu availability to ensure a comfortable pilgrimage experience.

## YSR Congress condemns attack on its leader, calls it reflection of deteriorating law & order

Amaravati, May 3: YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has strongly condemned the brutal attack on one of its leaders and former Rayachoti Municipal Vice Chairman Dasaratha Ramireddy, calling it a clear reflection of deteriorating law and order and politically driven violence in Andhra Pradesh.

YSRCP State General Secretary Gadikota Srikanth Reddy described the assault carried out allegedly by supporters of Minister Ram Prasad Reddy using deadly weapons, as a barbaric and undemocratic act, stating that attacks on opposition leaders and cadres have sharply increased since the coalition government assumed power.

He accused the government of misusing police machinery to target opposition voices instead of addressing public issues, alleging that a "Red Book regime" has replaced constitutional governance,



with false cases being filed and vulnerable sections, party workers, and those questioning the government facing systematic attacks.

'Red Book' is a reference to a book carried by TDP leader Nara Lokesh during the election campaign, claiming that it has names of all those who harassed TDP cadres during YSRCP rule and had declared that they will be brought to justice. YSRCP leader in Lok Sabha P.V. Midhun Reddy stated that the attack was carried out in the presence of police, exposing their failure and alleged complicity. He stated that despite prior complaints by Dasaratha Ramireddy

to CI and DSP officials regarding threats and repeated attacks on his function hall, no preventive action was taken, resulting in the victim now battling for life with severe injuries.

He expressed outrage that despite clear video evidence, no cases have been registered against the accused, and demanded immediate registration of attempt-to-murder charges and strict legal action.

Highlighting the broader pattern, he said police are aggressively filing multiple cases against YSRCP social media activists while remaining inactive when ruling party supporters carry out violent attacks in broad daylight. YSR Congress warned that continued inaction would further erode public trust in the police system and embolden such violence, urging authorities to act swiftly to restore law and order and ensure justice.

## TTD dismisses reports of security lapse at Nagalapuram Temple

Tirupati: The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Sunday dismissed social media reports of a security lapse at the Sri Veda Narayana Swamy Temple in Nagalapuram, terming them "false and misleading". According to TTD officials, the

incident occurred when a local MLA visited the temple for darshan and his personal gunman attempted to enter the premises carrying a firearm, which is prohibited under temple regulations. Security personnel objected and instructed the gunman not to proceed.

However, he did not comply with the directions and moved ahead up to the Ashirvada Mandapam before exiting along with the MLA. TTD clarified that its security staff acted promptly and explained the rules to the gunman, but he violated the norms.

# EDITORIAL

## The 25% Question In Tamil Nadu: Why Polls Vary On Vijay's Chances

The first past the post model is often the nightmare of a psephologist in India. It leads to vagaries of the kind the normal mind can least imagine. Chitrasen Sinhu won the Singhbhum Lok Sabha seat in Jharkhand in 1996, polling just 21 per cent votes. The example of this Lok Sabha seat when scaled up to an entire state exemplifies the predicament over Vijay's vote share conversion in Tamil Nadu. A Wholesome Psephological Framework For The First Past The Post Model Can a vote share of even just 25 per cent, not the peak of 35 per cent as estimated by some polls for the TVK convert to a big win?

### A framework of three factors explains this.

1. Concentration of votes: Breaks up the states into different categories of seats, which are not necessarily contiguous, but that which correspond to similar patterns of contest. In the case of Vijay, these, as per ground feedback, could be portions of northern Tamil Nadu, urban areas, minority-dominant and Scheduled Castes (SC) seats. Think of it like this - if this set of non-contiguous seats forms a smaller state by itself, say with 150-160 seats, the votes here could be concentrated enough to deliver the state to a lucky winner. The estimation of this catchment landscape is the first key.
2. Effective number of political parties on the landscape: Simply put, this means 'what is the real polarity of the contest?' Are they two parties, 2.5 parties, triangular, 3.5 parties, etc? For each concentration region on the landscape, this has to be estimated before you use the first past the post model to make forecasts.
3. Effective modeling of multi-party swings: Almost with an engineering precision you need to understand how the multiple flows of votes between different parties contribute to the new vote on each party individually.

Elections with multiple polarities and sudden surge or growth of one particular party have often caught psephologists on the wrong foot because one of the above steps goes amiss. They simply follow the law of large numbers. What Is The Application Of The Law Of Large Numbers? It simply assumes that if we poll a large number of respondents in a survey, they capture the overall trend and those will then be used to project a seat-by-seat result.

### Typical cases of multipolarity and sudden surge that have been largely wrongly estimated in the past:

1. Tamil Nadu 1998
2. Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu 2009
3. Delhi 2013 and 2015
4. UP 2014, 2017 and 2024
5. Haryana 2024

### Most of the pollsters got the above wrong as they simply followed the law of large numbers.

#### The Case Of Tamil Nadu Assembly Polls 2026

Why Tamil Nadu might have been a nightmare for many a psephologist is that in multi-cornered contests and a new party in place, estimates made without the multi-party flow creation and simply following the law of large numbers is inadequate. You may not get it wrong all the time, but surely you won't be right most of the time, and won't have the confidence to say where you went wrong.

### So let us try and understand what is creating a wide range of results:

1. Inaccurate segmentation of the state into categorised seats and regions based on polarity of the contest. You would fail to convert vote shares accurately into seat shares if you do not have this. This would create gross level errors, as the overall vote shares assume a homogeneity that does not exist on the ground. This creates wide variations such as some polls suggesting the party. A winning and another poll suggesting a diametrically opposite party B winning.
2. Inaccurate multi-party flows: You may end up getting the direction of the result correct e.g. surge in TVK voters, but you won't get the order of the vote shares right, so you can't exactly call the winner. You may have polls which are directionally aligned, but the value of vote share and its conversion to seats would vary from poll to poll. This has been observed in the case of two polls giving a substantial vote share to the TVK, but being inconsistent in terms of the seats they gave to the TVK.

### In the context of Tamil Nadu, the following:

#### Situations Where Accurate Segmentation Of The State Matters Of Vijay As Splitters Of Vote

Given that Vijay has a subtle appeal cutting across religious lines, the DMK has tried to ensure that it becomes the singular choice of the minority voters. The party has empaneled support of various Christian denominations, with apparent circulated letters from the church, which state that the DMK has done enough for minorities not to waste their vote, including in seats like Perambur from where Vijay is contesting. Similarly, SCs are spread across the state in a variety of clusters. Non-contiguous clusters and regions based on these would help in working on the varying polarity of the contest, across the state.

#### Modelling The Effective Polarity Of The Contest

With the advent of Vijay there has been a race to the bottom to salvage every single seat by both the alliances, some crafted just for a couple of seats, and some crafted for a couple of districts. While these look cosmetic, they actually alter the winners threshold often in multi-party scenarios. The DMK for example has in its alliance four Muslim-centric parties: MMK, MJK, SDPI, and Muslim League, often with leaders with a hold over just a couple of seats, but an engagement that will ensure minimal splintering of votes, helping it beat the threshold. Similarly, the DMDK, a party with just 0.42 per cent votes in the last assembly polls, was given a generous 10 seats by the DMK alliance, which is a tacit acknowledgement that the party was trying to go past the rubicon even if in just two or three districts by pooling in from another party. Modelling Multi-Party Flows The hypothesised threat to the DMK in urban areas from Vijay could be real, especially in areas where the minority vote along with the urban youth vote could upset the traditional apple cart of the DMK as well as the AIADMK.

# Two Rival Imaginations Of Identity: Bangla Versus Hindutva

It is more than an election. It is a dispute over the grammar of belonging - who gets to be "us," and what "us" is allowed to mean when power is at stake. In West Bengal, the coming count does not merely decide seats in an assembly; it tests two rival imaginations of identity, both confident, both mobilizing, both speaking in the language of moral righteousness. One imagines the region as a Bengali home. The other imagines the nation's spiritual centre as a Hindu home. Between them lies the fragile hinge of everyday life: jobs, safety, dignity, and the right to be counted as a full citizen.

Consider how history hides inside the smallest gestures - how a slogan can become a mood, how a crowd can feel like weather. Here, too, the "mood" has formed. The central conflict of the election can be summarized almost like a thesis statement: Bengali identity versus Hindutva identity. And yet it is never only ideology. It's also memory, and grievance, and a carefully shaped sense of who is inside the room - and who is being ushered out.

Trinamool pitches Bengali identity. The Trinamool Congress pitched a Bengali identity not as an abstract cultural badge but as a claim to sovereignty over the meaning of citizenship. Their Bengali slogan - "Jato karo Hamla, Ebar jitbe Bangla" ("However much you attack, this time Bangla will win") - sounds like defiance, but it does something subtler: it turns politics into resistance. It suggests that identity is under assault, and that the only way to survive is to vote as if Bengali-ness were not a festival but a lifeline.

In that pitch, Trinamool organized its campaign around a set of deliberate pillars - "two Ms" and an attempt to turn procedure into grievance. The two Ms are Mahila (women) and Muslim. These were not merely demographic notes; they were framed as moral responsibilities and



guarantees. And then there was SIR, pushed as the main agenda - not just as an administrative matter, but as an indictment. Mamata Banerjee even argued in the Supreme Court about the unfairness of the SIR process. Trinamool argued that the category of "logical discrepancies" affecting 27 lakh voters was unfair and unconstitutional, and they tied the grievance to a larger story: that the process was effectively imposed by the Centre and outsiders, thereby robbing Bengali voters of rights. "This is how identity becomes a courtroom in electoral form. A technical classification turns into a narrative of betrayal. A voter list turns into an emblem of dignity. The claim is not simply "we are right," but "you are being robbed" - and if you are being robbed, then anger becomes duty.

**TMC's Women's welfare**  
Women's empowerment formed one of the emotional engines of the cam-

campaign. Trinamool placed an array of welfare initiatives at the centre of its messaging: Lakshmi Bhandar, Jyotir Alo, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, Swasthya Sathi, among others - programmes described as money and support flowing directly to poor women voters. In political terms, the message was: the state reaches you in the ways that matter, and when violence or neglect is the opposition's theme, Trinamool can answer with care, cash, and concrete naming of benefits.

### BJP is the Bahiragoto party, claims Trinamool

Alongside this was their promise of protection to 30 per cent Muslim voters - again, not only as policy but as reassurance. But perhaps the most distinctive feature of Trinamool's identity politics was that it insisted Bengali identity is not merely ethnic; it is constitutional, social, and local. The opposition party was not steeped enough in Bengali tradition to claim

moral authority over Bengal's future. Hence the repeated charge that the BJP is an "outsider/bahiragoto" party - a force that may bring slogans, but not understanding.

### BJP focuses on Hindutva identity

Now consider the counter-mosaic assembled by the BJP: Hindutva identity, organized around themes that reach for unity by narrowing the boundaries of belonging. Their campaign's standout issue was "Ghushpaiti" - illegal immigration from Bangladesh - treated not simply as governance but as an existential pressure on cultural and political space. This is a familiar mechanism in identity politics: when boundaries feel threatened, unity is offered as protection. The BJP then aimed to puncture Trinamool's Muslim outreach. Their claim was that Trinamool was appeasing Muslim voters unfairly, and from that accusation they built a broader attempt to polarize Hindu voters.

Cultural mobilization became part of the strategy: Jagran, Ram Navami processions, and slogans that tried to gather disparate communities under a single chant-line - "Jai Shri Ram," "Jai Maa Durga," "Jai Maa Kali." These phrases act like emotional tokens. They convert faith into a public signal and political loyalty into visible participation. BJP's powerful pitch on Porivorton The BJP also pressed the powerful theme of "Porivorton" - a total transformation of Bengal, a remake of the past into a present that can be owned again. In this framing, West Bengal is not simply improving; it is being restored to a "true" image - often described through the long phrase "Sonar Bangla". Women's issues were addressed too, but with a different route: the BJP highlighted its attempt to pass a Women's Reservation Bill via Parliament, then blamed Trinamool and other parties of the INDIA alliance for failure.

## Falta No Outlier: Bengal's Long, Troubled Romance With Political Violence

The Election Commission of India's decision to order re-polling in the entire assembly constituency of Falta is a manifestation of the 'endemic' political violence in West Bengal. Ordering a re-poll for an entire assembly constituency is an extremely rare and drastic measure, but this has been ordered because the "integrity of the recorded votes" was compromised in over 21 per cent of the booths. Such large-scale 'intervention' into the electoral process in the presence of historically the largest numbers of CAPFs and Union government officials, underscores that the violent brigades are not of little means in resources, as well as abilities. The elections in West Bengal this year has been one of the most peaceful in the state's history, yet the violent past provided a backdrop, even if only in the form of the BJP raising the spectre of its return in the event of the Trinamool being re-elected. Although the by-poll in Falta will, in all likelihood, have little bearing on the nature of the electoral mandate in the state - barring affecting the political fortunes of Mamata Banerjee's aide and Trinamool candidate Jahangir Khan - the episode underscores the paradoxical facet of the state wherein, political-driven ferocious brutality co-exists with distinguished scholarly traditions and an epic cultural canvas. In almost a century and quarter of sustained existence, political violence remained a constant because it was not solely a series of isolated criminal acts. Instead, violence in Bengal has emerged as a deeply structural phenomenon with political power, local muscle, and economic survival being intertwined. Often, the roots of political violence in the state are

traced back to three major post-independence periods - the Naxalite movement (1967-72), the Left Front era (1977-2011) and the continuing Trinamool era. However, the 1905 Partition of Bengal by the Viceroy of India, George Nathaniel Curzon acted as the primary catalyst for what has evolved into the current nature of violence. It has to be recognised that protests to this decision, eventually rescinded in 1911, in most parts of India, largely remained within the constitutional boundaries. However, in (United) Bengal, it gave rise to the phenomenon of revolutionism or militant nationalism. Innumerable revolutionaries secured their space in history even as the British administration labelled them 'terrorists'. Secret societies like Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar were formed and some spread to other parts of India too - contemporary Maharashtra for instance - and many of these groups or individuals, even assassinated British officials and came to be seen as heroes or martyrs, if they died in action or were executed by the colonial administration. Such influence also crossed the proverbial seven seas and saw Madan Lal Dhingra, under the influence of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, assassinating a British official and walking to the gallows. The cult of martyrdom, starting with Bengal, established political and cultural precedent. Over time, sacrifice and violence in the name of a 'cause' came to be justified in the region. Independence was preceded by protracted and extreme levels of violence in Bengal, starting with communal rioting and targeted killings, triggered by Muslim League's call for Direct Action in 1946.

## WEDDING PROCESSION, RITUALS AND CHANGING SOCIETY



Priyanka Saurabh

There was a time when the arrival of a wedding procession wasn't just a celebration of one family visiting another, but a celebration for the entire village. Homes and courtyards were decorated, feasts were set up, songs were sung, elders offered blessings, and hospitality was considered a matter of honor. Today, in many places, that same wedding procession has become so confined to the time clock that the entire event seems to be transformed into a "go quickly, eat quickly, hand over the envelope, and return quickly." This shift isn't just about food or ceremony style; it signals a transformation in social relationships, collectivism, and the very essence of Indian wedding culture. Marriage used to be a long-term social process, forging relationships, bonding neighborhoods, and passing down values from generation to generation. Now, many weddings are confined to one-day events, held in hotels or guest houses, and with limited formalities, reducing the scope of tradition to a mere ritual. Indian marriage has never been a private arrangement between two individuals; it has always been a shared event of family, community, and culture. In rural society, the wedding procession meant an open welcome for guests, a community meal, folk



songs, laughter, and a public display of the dignity of relationships. The food served in a row, the groom's traditional attire, the in-laws' turban, the temporary decorations in the courtyard of the house, and the overnight stay—all these made marriage a sacrament, not a simple ceremony. Within this social structure, honoring a guest, hosting them, caring for them, and sharing a sense of belonging was considered a moral duty. The wedding party wasn't just visitors who brought food; they represented the arrival of a new relationship. Therefore, their welcome was as intimate and elaborate as the meaning of marriage itself. This is why older people, looking at today's hurried weddings, often say, "There's no wedding anymore, only the ceremony." This sentiment conceals not just a complaint but also a cultural truth. Times have changed, lifestyles have

evolved, and weddings have been impacted. Urbanization, inflation, professional life, limited leisure time, transportation, and new planning facilities have made weddings smaller and more manageable. Many families today prefer to manage everything in a short time rather than a grand event, so as not to overwhelm guests and reduce the financial pressure on the host. This is a practical approach, but it also loses some of the traditional intimacy. Guest houses, banquet halls, catering, and fixed time slots have made weddings more organized, but also more formal. Where guests used to stay, they now simply leave after a meal. Where rituals used to be accompanied by songs and group participation, DJs, photo sessions, and stage events have become the main attractions in many places. The liveliness of weddings remains, but their intima-

cy is diminishing. The biggest pressure on weddings today is expense and showmanship. Many families are more concerned with "what people will say" than with values. The decorations, clothes, stage, menu, caravan, and social media image—all of this leaves the core message of marriage behind. Where once there was dignity in simplicity, now grandeur often appears hollow. This trend isn't just urban; its impact is visible in villages as well. Luxury cars replace palanquins, loud music replaces traditional songs, and meals at separate tables instead of group gatherings—these changes aren't bad in themselves. The problem arises when convenience culture completely displaces ritual culture. Marriage then becomes a social spectacle rather than a sacred union. This is where modernity can become disruptive rather than useful. In Indian tradition, marriage is not just a celebration, but a sacrament. Sanskar means an event that connects a person to moral, familial, and social life. When marriage is reduced to mere entertainment, food, and photographs, it transforms from a sacrament to a celebratory consumption. This sends a message to the new generation that the depth of relationships is more important than the grandeur of their celebration. This is why today's weddings often seem unfamiliar to the older generation. They say that while guests used to be part of the family, now they're just a name on a list. Previously, weddings took time, allowing for the opportunity to understand and nurture relationships.

FACT CHECK:

# Does producing 1 litre of ethanol take 10,000 litres of water?

**Hyderabad:** A number has been doing the rounds – 10,790 litres, the amount of water needed to produce just one litre of ethanol from rice. The figure has since led to a sharp critique of India's ethanol blending programme. The industry is fighting back, and the truth, as it turns out, is more complicated than it looks. The Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association (GEMA) called the 10,000-litre figure "factually misleading and devoid of context," saying it refers to the total lifecycle water footprint of the crop, including rainfall absorbed during cultivation, and not what ethanol plants actually consume. GEMA says modern distilleries use only three to five litres of process water per litre of ethanol. On this specific point, GEMA is correct. The 10,000-litre number, shared by Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra at a global conference in Delhi last year, is drawn from virtual water accounting – a methodology that adds up all water a crop absorbs across its growing cycle, including rainwater that would have fallen on



that land. It is a tool for understanding agricultural water stress, not industrial water consumption. Conflating the two is a methodological error, and critics of ethanol production have gone all guns blazing on it without the caveat. However, the industry's rebuttal skips over a few things. Where the rebuttal falls short The more serious concern is not how much water a distillery draws from a pipe, but what grows in the fields feeding it. India's ethanol programme runs

primarily on sugarcane and, increasingly, rice. These two are the most irrigation-heavy crops in the country. Growing one kilogram of rice requires an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 litres of water, the bulk of which is drawn from groundwater, not rain. The government has allocated 52 lakh tonne of rice for ethanol in 2024-25, with a target of 90 lakh tonnes the following year, according to a report by India Today. GEMA counters this, saying that the grain being used is surplus and damaged stock –

broken rice that cannot re-enter the food supply – and that "the water required to grow this grain has already been expended at the farm level." This argument carries some weight. Converting spoiled buffer stock into fuel is actually a waste-to-wealth exercise. But it runs into a complication. The government plans to cut broken rice in ration supplies from 25 per cent to 10 per cent so that more can go to distilleries. That's not using extra stock. It's redirecting it, and it affects food

security quite directly.

**The sugarcane problem**

On sugarcane, the critique is harder to ignore. GEMA itself says maize, not sugarcane, is now the preferred raw material for ethanol, even as it cited it as "largely rain-fed." Anjal Prakash, an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) author, told India Today that sugarcane cultivation has already stressed water tables in the regions where most ethanol plants are located. Swathi Seshadri of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) also told India Today that these plants are concentrated in cane-growing belts precisely because of raw material proximity. Those belts in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, she said, are among India's most groundwater-stressed. Pertinent questions GEMA president Dr CK Jain's broader argument that India's water crisis is a decades-old agricultural problem and that the ethanol industry is being unfairly blamed for it is not without merit.

## DELIVERY PLATFORMS ACT TO PROTECT WORKERS AS TEMPERATURES CROSS 40 DEGREES

**New Delhi:** As brutal heatwaves sweep across large parts of India, pushing temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius, the spotlight has once again turned to the millions of gig workers who form the backbone of the country's booming e-commerce and quick-commerce sectors. For delivery partners navigating congested city traffic on two-wheelers, the summer months bring a heightened risk of severe dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke. Bounded by algorithmic targets and the pressure of rapid delivery windows, these workers often spend peak afternoon hours exposed to extreme weather conditions, with little to no access to clean drinking water or shaded resting spots on their routes. Facing mounting scrutiny over the occupational hazards associated with the gig economy, major food delivery, quick commerce, and e-commerce platforms are now rolling out a slew of mitigation measures. From specialised cooling gear to air-conditioned rest hubs, companies are attempting to buffer their frontline workforce against the harsh realities of the Indian summer.



**Project Ashray**

E-commerce major Amazon, which also operates its quick commerce service Amazon Now, has introduced 'Project Ashray', a network of 100 air-conditioned rest stops across major cities offering seating, washrooms, and first aid, which the company says is accessible even to delivery partners outside its own network. "These facilities provide comfortable seating, clean washrooms, drinking water, charging stations, and first-aid support, serving more than 150,000 delivery partners every month, including those outside Amazon's network. We are also organising free health check-ups through nationwide medical camps to provide preventive health screenings, where doctors advise delivery partners on staying hydrated, recognising

early signs of heat exhaustion, and managing health while on the road," Amazon said in a statement. Similarly, Zomato has tied up with restaurant partners, TVS, and Shell to create over 5,000 rest points offering shade and water, which are also open to the broader gig economy. Zomato and Blinkit delivery partners are covered under a broader health insurance programme that includes OPD and IPD/hospitalisation and day care coverage. "We have designated rest areas across our store to support delivery partners during the summer period. These areas provide seating, ventilation, and access to drinking water. We are providing summer support supplies at stores, including hydration products such as electrolyte powders, beverages, and similar essentials.

Historic halt:

## KUWAIT EXPORTS NO CRUDE OIL IN APRIL, FIRST SINCE 1991 GULF WAR

Kuwait exported no crude oil in April 2026, marking the first such stoppage since the aftermath of the Gulf War, according to ship-tracking platform TankerTrackers. In a post on X on Saturday, May 2, the firm said Kuwait shipped "zero barrels of crude oil" during April, describing it as an unprecedented pause in exports over the past three decades.



Despite the halt in crude shipments, Kuwait has continued to produce oil. TankerTrackers said output is being diverted into storage and refining, with some refined products still reaching international markets. "Crude oil, however, hasn't departed to our best knowledge," the firm noted. The disruption is linked to tensions affecting the Strait of Hormuz, a critical corridor through which a significant share of the world's oil supply is transported. Restrictions and security concerns in the waterway have disrupted normal shipping routes across the Gulf.

The last time Kuwait's crude exports fell to zero was during Iraq's invasion in 1990. In early 1991, retreating Iraqi forces set fire to hundreds of oil wells, severely damaging infrastructure and slashing production capacity for nearly two years. Kuwait, a key member of OPEC, plays a central role in global energy markets,

with the bulk of its crude traditionally exported to Asia and Europe. In April, Kuwait recorded no crude oil exports for the first time since the end of the Gulf War in 1991. The international oil ship-tracking website TankerTrackers.com reported on Saturday, May 2, that crude oil exports from Kuwait were completely halted in April. According to the

report, Kuwait continues to produce oil, but part of it is being stored domestically or used in the production of petroleum products.

However, crude oil exports were halted last month due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Following the war between the United States and Israel against Iran, global oil prices have risen.

## Nifty, Sensex likely to stay range-bound with mild bullish bias: Experts

**Mumbai:** India's benchmark indices Nifty and Sensex are expected to remain range-bound in the near term, with a slight bullish undertone in Nifty but continued caution in the broader market, according to experts on Sunday, May 1. The Nifty began the week on a positive note with a modest gap-up and largely moved within a narrow range – reflecting a consolidation phase. Despite struggling for most of the week to hold above its short-term averages, the index eventually managed to close above its 20-day exponential moving average and also held above the crucial 100-week EMA level. Analysts believe this indicates underlying strength and points to a potential shift towards a positive trend. "The price action suggests consolidation with a mildly bullish bias. On the upside, resistance levels are placed at 24,350 and 24,600," an analyst stated. "On the downside, support is seen at 23,900



and 23,550. A breakdown below 23,500 could result in increased selling pressure," a market expert stated. Given the current market structure, traders are advised to remain disciplined and adhere to strict stop-loss strategies amid ongoing volatility, they added. In contrast, the Nifty Bank index underperformed during the week – reflecting sustained selling pressure at higher levels. "The Bank Nifty index opened the session on a flat note at 56,162.60, reflecting initial indecision among market participants. It moved

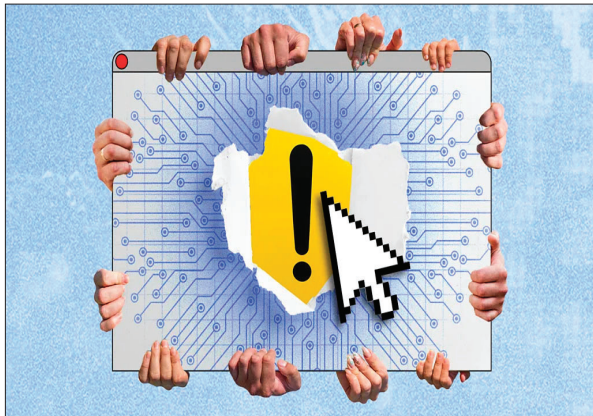
higher to register a weekly high of 56,474.95 but failed to sustain at elevated levels, leading to a subsequent correction," an analyst mentioned. "In the near term, immediate downside support is placed in the 54,350-53,850 zone in case selling pressure re-emerges. On the upside, 55,550 acts as immediate resistance, while 56,200 stands as the next key supply zone," the analyst added. Meanwhile, the Sensex is currently trading within a tight range, reflecting a cautious market environment. "On the upside, 77,500-78,000 con-

India's benchmark indices Nifty and Sensex are expected to remain range-bound in the near term, with a slight bullish undertone in Nifty but continued caution in the broader market, according to experts on Sunday, May 1.

tinues to act as an immediate resistance band, and a sustained move above this zone would be required to improve sentiment and extend the upmove toward 79,000-80,000 levels," an analyst said. On the downside, 76,300-76,000 serves as immediate support, followed by a stronger base in the 75,600-75,300 range, which is expected to provide a cushion if selling pressure intensifies, they added. Nifty began the week on a positive note with a modest gap-up and largely moved within a narrow range.

## Why AI companies want you to be afraid of them

They built it. They're scared of it. They're selling it anyway.



Stop me if you've heard this one before: a tech company says it's built a new AI that's so powerful it's scary. Apparently, it's too dangerous to release into the world – the consequences would be catastrophic. Luckily for us, they are keeping it locked up for now. They just wanted you to know. That's exactly what AI company Anthropic is telling us about its latest model, Claude Mythos. The company says Mythos' ability to find cybersecurity bugs far surpasses human experts, and it could have world-altering consequences if similar technology lands in the wrong hands. "The fallout – for economies, public safety and national security – could be severe," Anthropic said in an early April blog post. Some breathless observers warned that Mythos will soon force you to replace every piece of technology in your life, down to your WiFi-

enabled microwave, to protect from the digital madness. Some security experts doubt these claims, but let's set that aside. This isn't new. Executives at leading AI providers regularly issue warnings about how their industry's products may destroy humanity. Why do AI companies want us to be afraid of them? It's a strange way for any company to talk about its own work. You don't hear McDonald's announcing that it's created a burger so terrifyingly delicious that it

would be unethical to grill it for the public. Here's one theory. According to critics, it benefits AI companies to keep you fixated on apocalypse because it distracts from the very real damage they're already doing to the world. Tech leaders say they're just warning us about an inevitable future, and safety is a top priority whether it's now or later. But others argue what we're actually seeing is fear mongering, which exaggerates the potential of the technology and serves to boost stock prices.

## Is Italy the new tax haven for the global rich?

Italy has already been attacked by the French Government for using tax incentives to lure wealthy French and other international residents away, but with the war in the Middle East hurting the Gulf states, Italy has become an even more attractive location for the rich. Tax wasn't the main reason for leaving France, Robert insists over a café crème at Charles de Gaulle airport. It was the beauty of Italy, the bella vita (the beautiful/good life), the art and the music. But for the Frenchman, buying a house in Rome and becoming an Italian tax resident was a very nice part of the package offered by the country, where high net worth individuals can pay a fixed annual tax on all foreign income – regardless of amount – and enjoy a series of other exemptions. Robert, who describes himself as only "moderately wealthy", moved to Italy eight years ago after a career in computers which ended with him selling his company. Robert, not his real name, may not be among the French



billionaires who have fled the French taxman for Italy, but the advantages to him are clear. If he'd been buying a house in France, he would have had to pay what the French call frais de notaire (solicitor's fees) most of which goes to the government (much like Stamp Duty in the UK or Real Estate Transfer Taxes in the US). In Italy there's an exemption for the prima casa, the first house you buy. In France, President Macron trans-

formed France's Impot sur la Fortune (wealth tax) into an Impot sur la Fortune Immobilière (real estate wealth tax) so stock market investments, for example, are no longer affected but "if you have ten million dollars' worth of property, this tax is very painful indeed," says Robert. Again, there's nothing like that in Italy. In France you also have to pay a property tax (taxe foncière or land tax). "We don't have that here for the prima casa (first

home)," says Robert, although he notes "there is a high charge for refuse collection". The best thing as far as he is concerned is that there is no inheritance tax on property you own in Italy up to 1 million (\$1.1 million) and it's only 4% beyond that threshold. In France the tax-free limit is much lower – 100,000 (\$110,000) – and beyond that it's a sliding scale up to a top rate of 45%. But it's for the seriously rich that Italy starts to look like a fiscal paradise.

"I have friends who have moved here for tax reasons and others who are thinking about it," Robert tells me. "For people who really pay a lot of tax, Italy is very attractive because of its 'flat tax'. In Italy, the taxman fixes an upper limit of tax that can be levied on income. However much you earn, you never pay more than that. The upper limit is now 300,000 (\$363,000). Although not long ago it was 100,000 before rising to 200,000. If you're paying a million euros of income tax a year in France, Italy is very tempting. As for US citizens, Americans are always taxable on worldwide income, so moving to Italy would not help their tax bill. Robert tells me that he has two rich French friends who have moved to Italy in the past few months, but they came from the UK. They were both working in finance in the City of London and were keen to move to a place where the fiscal regime was as sympathetic to them as the one Britain had before it changed the rules for wealthy foreign residents.

# Russian strikes kill 10 as Zelensky says Ukraine hits oil tankers and terminal

Russian drone and missile strikes in Ukraine have killed 10 people and injured at least 76 over the past day, Ukrainian officials say. Officials in five regions around the country reported fatalities as Moscow continues to target Ukrainian cities with regular drone and missile attacks. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said three Russian oil tankers, a cruise-missile carrier warship and a patrol boat were struck in separate attacks on two Russian ports. There are no details on damage to the ships, but Zelensky said the tankers were part of Russia's "shadow fleet" used to evade Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's full-scale invasion launched in 2022. Ukraine's air force said 269 drones were fired by Russia overnight, but 249 of them were shot down or jammed. It confirmed 19 direct drone hits and one ballistic mis-



sile hit in 15 locations, as well as damage caused by falling debris from one drone. Ukrainian officials said three people were killed in separate incidents in Kherson region, while two died in each of Odesa, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions and one in Sumy region. At the same time,

Russia's military said Ukraine had fired at least 334 drones, with the north-western Leningrad region heavily targeted. Export terminals there and in other regions have been targeted by Ukraine in recent weeks in a series of successful strikes launched by Ukraine on Russian oil

infrastructure, which Kyiv says has knocked out billions of dollars worth of exports. On Sunday, Zelensky said infrastructure of the north-western Primorsk terminal on the Baltic Sea, near Finland, had been significantly damaged, and an oil tanker and a patrol boat were hit. He

## Highlights

**Russian drone and missile strikes in Ukraine have killed 10 people and injured at least 76 over the past day, Ukrainian officials say. Officials in five regions around the country reported fatalities as Moscow continues to target Ukrainian cities with regular drone and missile attacks.**

added that the third vessel struck there was a Karakurt class corvette designed to carry Kalibr cruise missiles. The Ukrainian leader earlier said that another two oil tankers were hit by Ukrainian drones at the entrance to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. "These tankers were active-

ly used for transporting oil. Now they will not be," he wrote on Telegram. The post was accompanied by black-and-white video footage apparently showing a naval drone approaching one of the tankers. Russian authorities have mostly downplayed the impact of such attacks, but the Kremlin is clearly concerned about the deep reach of Ukrainian drones into its territory. On Wednesday the Kremlin announced it was paring back its annual military parade to mark Victory Day - the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War Two, on 9 May - due to what it said was the "terrorist threat" from Ukraine. Ukraine has recently intensified its drone strikes deep inside Russia, more than four years into Russia's full-scale invasion. Kyiv says it is hitting legitimate military targets, and in turn accuses Moscow of attacking civilians in Ukraine.

## Drones are getting drugs, escape tools and crab legs to inmates, 'kind of like a DoorDash.' Prisons are fighting back

Around 3:30 one morning this winter, officers stationed in the prison yard of South Carolina's Turbeville Correctional Institution heard a propeller buzzing somewhere above the state prison. One officer quickly recognized the familiar sound and looked toward the sky: it was yet another drone approaching the facility. The drone flew into the yard and dropped a three-foot package before whizzing away, the captain of the drone hunting team for South Carolina's state prisons told CNN in an interview. The officer ran to secure the package before an inmate could get to it first. Inside, officials found tobacco, marijuana, ecstasy and four phones, which the South Carolina Department of Corrections, or SCDC, estimates are worth a combined \$165,700 in the "prison economy."

South Carolina is one of the many states across the country dealing with a persistent and growing problem: Drones are flying onto prison grounds, often in the dark of night, and dropping contraband for inmates - everything from knives, cell-phones and escape tools to crab legs, cigarettes and a stuffed toy cat hiding drugs worth thousands of dollars. The issue has become so pervasive that 21 state attorneys general sent a letter to the US National Security Council in late March asking for help handling the sharp increase in drone drops over prison grounds, namely through the loosening of federal restrictions that they say limit the way state and local law enforcement can respond. "This type of illegal activity is happening all over the country and the consequences are severe," they wrote. "The introduction of drugs contributes to addiction, violence, and overdose incidents. Smuggled weapons heighten the risk of assaults and coordinated acts of violence."

## The clandestine network smuggling Starlink tech into Iran to beat internet blackout

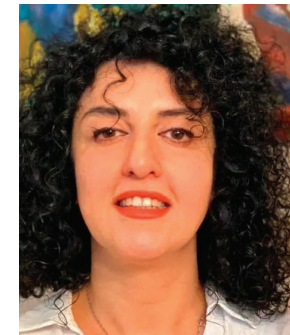


"If even one extra person is able to access the internet, I think it's successful and it's worth it," says Sahand. The Iranian man is visibly anxious, speaking to the BBC outside Iran, as he carefully explains how he is part of a clandestine network smuggling satellite internet technology - which is illegal in Iran - into the country. Sahand, whose name we have changed, fears for family members and other contacts inside the country. "If I was identified by the Iranian regime, they might make those I'm in touch with in Iran pay the price," he says. For more than two months, Iran has been in digital darkness as the government maintains one of the longest-running national internet shutdowns ever recorded worldwide. The current blackout began after the US and Israel launched airstrikes on 28 February. Before that, internet access had been partially restored for just a month following a previous digital shutdown in January, imposed during a deadly regime crackdown on nationwide protests. More than 6,500 protesters were killed and 53,000 arrested, according to the US-based

Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA). Officials say the government shut down the internet during the war for security reasons, suggesting the aim is to prevent surveillance, espionage and cyber-attacks. The Starlink devices Sahand sends to Iran are one of the most reliable ways of bypassing the shutdown. The white, flat terminals, paired with routers, provide internet access by connecting to a network of satellites owned by Elon Musk's SpaceX company, allowing users to completely bypass Iran's heavily controlled domestic internet. According to Sahand, several people can connect to each terminal at the same time. He says he and others in the network buy them and "smuggle them through the borders" in a "very complex operation", though he declines to give details. Sahand says he has sent a dozen to Iran since January and "we are actively looking for other ways to smuggle in more". The human rights organisation Witness estimated in January that there are at least 50,000 Starlink terminals in Iran. Activists say the number is likely to have risen.

## CONCERN FOR JAILED IRANIAN NOBEL LAUREATE AS BROTHER FEARS SHE IS DYING

Relatives of jailed Iranian human rights campaigner Narges Mohammadi and the Nobel Peace Prize Committee have called for her to be transferred to adequate medical facilities following a sharp reported deterioration of her health. Her family said the 54-year-old had been taken from her prison in north-west Iran to a local hospital, calling the move a "last-minute" action that may come too late. Mohammadi's brother Hamidreza, who lives in Norway, told the BBC's Newshour programme he fears she is dying, and that he wakes up "waiting for the worst call" he could get. Narges Mohammadi was awarded the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize. She was arrested in December for



her criticism of the authorities. Last month, Hamidreza Mohammadi said his sister had been found unconscious by fellow inmates at Zanjan Prison in north-west Iran, after suffering a suspected heart attack. He added that prison officials had refused to transfer her to a hospital despite her history of cardiac, lung and blood pressure problems.

## Germany troop cuts send wrong signal to Russia, say two top US Republicans

Two senior US Republican lawmakers have criticised a decision by the Pentagon to cut 5,000 US troops stationed in Germany, saying it risked undermining deterrence and would send the wrong signal to Russia. Roger Wicker and Mike Rogers, who chair the Senate and House armed services committees respectively, said that rather than being withdrawn, those troops should be moved further east. Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell on Friday said the move followed a thorough review and recognised "theater requirements and conditions on the ground". On Saturday, President Donald Trump said further cuts could take place, without providing details. The US has more than 36,000 active duty troops in Germany. Germany's defence



minister said the Pentagon decision was "foreseeable". Speaking to the DPA news agency, Boris Pistorius also stressed "the presence of American soldiers in Europe, and particularly in Germany, is in our interest and in the interest of the US". The Nato military alliance said it was seeking clarification from Washington. In a joint statement, Wicker and Rogers said they were "very concerned by the decision to withdraw a US brigade from Germany" as European allies move towards spending more of their economic output (GDP) on defence. "Prematurely reducing America's forward presence in Europe before those capabilities are fully realised risks undermining deterrence and sending the wrong signal to Vladimir Putin," the statement said. "Rather than with-

drawing forces from the continent altogether, it is in America's interest to maintain a strong deterrent in Europe by moving these 5,000 U.S. forces to the east." The senior Democrat on the House armed services committee, Adam Smith, said the decision was "not grounded in any coherent US national security policy, strategy, or even analysis" but based on "the hurt feelings of a president who is seeking political vengeance". However, Clay Higgins, a Republican on the same committee, appeared to support the administration's move while taking a dig at perceived time-wasting by the upper chamber of Congress. "Pulling 5K American troops from the arrogant Germans. Maybe we should send them the Senate," he said on X.

## NIGERIA SUMMONS SOUTH AFRICAN ENVOY OVER ATTACKS ON ITS NATIONALS

Nigeria has summoned South Africa's acting High Commissioner over a spate of recent attacks on foreigners in the southern African nation. Nigeria will formally convey its "profound concern" at a meeting on Monday over incidents in South Africa, saying they could affect existing relations between the countries, according to a foreign ministry statement. The meeting will focus on recent marches held by anti-immigrant groups and "documented instances of mistreatment of Nigerian citizens and attacks on their businesses", it said. At least two Nigerians and four Ethiopians have been killed



in recent weeks, local media reported, while there have been attacks on citizens of other African countries. As Africa's most industrialised country, people from elsewhere in the continent have long travelled to South Africa to seek work. South African President Cyril

Ramaphosa has condemned the attacks but also cautioned foreigners to respect local laws. He used his Freedom Day address last week - marking the country's first democratic elections in 1994 - to remind South Africans of the support other African nations had given in

the struggle against the racist system of apartheid. But some South Africans accuse foreigners of being in the county illegally, taking jobs from locals and having links to crime, especially drugs trafficking. Anti-immigrant groups have been stopping people outside hospitals and schools demanding to see their identity papers. During a march by one such group in the capital, Pretoria, last week, foreign-owned businesses were urged to close in case of violence. At the time, one Nigerian man told BBC Pidgin: "It is not okay because we are blacks, we are brothers... everybody comes here just to survive."

## Hezbollah deploys a potent new weapon designed to evade Israeli detection



The explosive-laden quadcopter skimmed above the rooftops of southern Lebanon, navigating with precision between bombed-out buildings and along dirt roads. The drone gave its operator a clear first-person picture of its target: an Israeli tank with soldiers standing nearby. At the top of the picture, in white letters, were two words. The quadcopter is a fiber-optic drone, experts say, a weapon Hezbollah has increasingly used with deadly accuracy. The drones are difficult to stop and even harder to detect, giving their operators a high-resolution view of the target without emitting any signal that could be jammed. The drones are "immune to communication jamming, and in the absence of an electronic signature, it is also impossible to discover the location from which they were launched," wrote Yehoshua Kalisky, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies. In a sleekly produced Hezbollah video from Sunday, the quadcopter drone, weighing no more than a few kilo-

grams, hits its target as the Israeli soldiers appear to be completely unaware of its approach. According to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the attack killed 19-year-old Sgt. Idan Fooks and injured several others. Hezbollah then launched more drones at a rescue helicopter that arrived at the scene to evacuate the wounded troops. Fiber-optic drones are effective in their simplicity: Instead of a wireless signal that controls the drone remotely, the fiber-optic cable hardwires the drone directly to its operator. Because fiber optic cables are so thin and light - virtually invisible to the naked eye - the cable can stretch for up to 9.3 miles (15 kilometers) or more, an Israeli military source told CNN, allowing the operator to remain a safe distance away while the drone feeds him a crystal-clear, first-person image of the target. The IDF has relied on its technological advantage to counter drone warfare, jamming the signals and frequencies used by drone operators to control the devices in order to stop them before they reach Israeli soldiers.

## TWO US SERVICE MEMBERS REPORTED MISSING IN MOROCCO, OFFICIALS SAY

Two US service members have gone missing during military exercises in Morocco, the US African Command (Africom) has said. The missing Americans were participating in African Lion 2026, an annual joint exercise designed to strengthen operations between US forces, Nato allies, and African nations, officials said. Africom said they were reported missing on Saturday near the Cap Draa Training Area, which is near the city of Tan Tan in Morocco. A search and rescue mission involving ground, air, and maritime resources from the US, Morocco and other countries is underway for the service members, officials said. "The incident remains under investigation and the search is ongoing," Africom said in a statement



released on Sunday. "Our focus is on the service members involved and their families." Authorities believe the incident was an accident and was not an act of terrorism or kidnapping, a US official with knowledge of the matter told

the BBC. African Lion, the continent's largest annual joint military exercise, is hosted across Morocco, Ghana, Senegal and Tunisia. It focuses on all-domain operations, crisis response, and multinational coordination to

enhance regional security and prepare for emergencies. The exercise, which involves 5,000 personnel from over 40 countries and more than 30 US-based industry partners, is scheduled to run from 27 April to 8 May.

## Man charged with murder and sexual assault of 5-year-old Australian girl

A man has been charged with murder and two counts of sexual assault following the death of a five-year-old girl in Australia. The body of the girl, who is identified only as Kumanjaya Little Baby, a pseudonym given to her by her family for cultural reasons after her death, was discovered on Thursday following several days of a major police search.



Jefferson Lewis, 47, was charged with her murder on Saturday night and has been scheduled to appear in a Darwin court on Tuesday. Five people have been arrested over violent riots in Alice Springs sparked by the child's death. Northern Territory Police Commissioner Martin Dole

announced the charges against Lewis on Sunday morning. "This remains a deeply distressing matter and our thoughts are firmly with Kumanjaya's family, loved ones and the wider community that have been deeply impacted by these events," he said. Dole asked for the community to respect the judicial process.



## IPL 206: KKR DEFEATED SRH BY 169/3 WITH 10 BALLS LEFT



## Shubman Gill Asked About His Wedding Ahead Of IPL 2026 Clash. Gujarat Titans Captain's Reply Is Viral

Gujarat Titans skipper Shubman Gill was stumped by a question by broadcaster Danny Morrison during the toss ahead of the IPL 2026 match against Punjab Kings in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Gill won the toss and opted to bowl but the interaction took an unexpected turn as Morrison asked whether Gill is getting married. The GT captain was left stunned by the question before saying 'no'. The conversation ended abruptly as Morrison shifted his attention to Shreyas Iyer but the video of the interaction has already gone viral on social media. Here's a look at the full conversation between Shubman Gill and Danny Morrison - Morrison: Still, Shubbers, there are no wedding bells around the corner? Anything that we need to



know about. Gill: No. No. Nothing. Morrison: Good to see you. This is not the first time that Morrison left Gill completely speechless at the toss as he asked a similar question during the IPL 2025 match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Gujarat Titans at Eden Gardens. Gujarat Titans captain Shubman Gill won the toss

and elected to bowl against Punjab Kings. GT made one change, handing Nishant Sindhu his debut, while PBKS brought in pacer Xavier Bartlett. Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Sai Sudharsan, Jos Buttler (wk), Washington Sundar, Nishant Sindhu, Jason Holder, Rashid Khan, Arshad Khan, Kagiso Rabada, Mohammed Siraj,

Manav Suthar. Punjab Kings: Prabhsimran Singh (wk), Priyansh Arya, Cooper Connolly, Shreyas Iyer (c), Marcus Stoinis, Suryansh Shedge, Nehal Wadhara, Marco Jansen, Xavier Bartlett, Arshdeep Singh, Yuzvendra Chahal. "Shubman Gill: We're gonna bowl first. I think we have been chasing well in the past few games and our bowling has been top-notch, so we thought we'll continue with the momentum. (Middle-order performing in the last game) Yeah, definitely in the last match, we spoke about our middle-order finishing the game and I think our Rahul bhai, batting in the middle, it was magnificent [to] watch and him finishing the game was exactly what we talked about."

## KKR BACK IN IPL 2026 PLAYOFFS RACE?

## WHAT WIN AGAINST SUNRISERS HYDERABAD MEANS FOR AJINKYA RAHANE AND CO

Kolkata Knight Riders received a massive boost in the IPL 2026 Playoffs race as the Ajinkya Rahane-led side registered a comfortable 7-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday. Varun Chakravarthy took three wickets while Sunil Narine and Kartik Tyagi took two each to bundle out SRH for 165. Travis Head top-scored with 61 off 28 deliveries. In response, Ankrish Raghuvanshi slammed a half-century and Ajinkya Rahane scored a gritty 43 to guide their team to victory. As a result, KKR have 7 points from 9 matches after winning their last three matches. They still need to win all of their remaining matches to potentially guarantee their spot in



the Top 4 with 17 points. However, if they win 4 out of the 5 matches, they will have 15 points and in that case, they place in the IPL 2026 playoffs will be dependent on Net Run Rate (NRR) and other results. Ajinkya Rahane on Sunday lavished praise on his bowling unit for

its consistency over the last few games, crediting it for restricting Sunrisers Hyderabad to a below-par total and setting up the seven-wicket win. Varun Chakravarthy (3/36) and milestone man Sunil Narine (2/31) played key roles in bowling out SRH for 165 in 19

overs as KKR chased down the target with 10 balls to spare to register their third successive win. "Very good game. The way we came back with the ball. Looked like they will get 190-200. It would've been challenging to chase. But credit to our bowling unit, especially the spinners. They kept taking wickets," Rahane said during the post-match presentation. "Those small moments are really important, really happy with the win. The bowling unit has been doing really well in last 5-6 games. Credit to our bowling coaches - (Dwayne) Bravo and (Tim) Southee. Here and there you will go for runs, but as long as you're clear in your head, that's important."

## Rajasthan Royals Sale: Who Owns How Much Stake After Rs 15,600 Crore Deal?

Indian Premier League franchise Rajasthan Royals has been acquired by Lakshmi N Mittal and Aditya Mittal in partnership with Adar Poonawalla, from Manoj Badale and consortium. The deal, which has met a "definitive agreement", has been locked for USD 1.65 billion (approximately Rs 15,600 crore) after the Kal Somani-Rob Walton-Sheila Ford Hamp consortium pulled out of the race. This agreement also includes the enterprise value of Rajasthan Royals' men's franchise, Paarl Royals, and Barbados Royals. As per a PTI report, the deal is set to be finalised in the third quarter (Q3) of 2026. "Lakshmi N Mittal and Aditya Mittal today announce that a definitive agreement has been reached to acquire the Rajasthan Royals, in partner-



ship with Adar Poonawalla, from Manoj Badale and consortium," a press release issued by Mittal family stated. What will be the distribution of stake among the new owners of Rajasthan Royals? Once the deal is completed, the Mittal family will own the majority stake, which would be around 75% of the Rajasthan Royals franchise. Adar Poonawalla will hold approximately 18%, while the

remaining approximately 7% will be held by approved existing investors, including Manoj Badale, stated Rajasthan Royals in a press release. The restructured Rajasthan Royals board will comprise Lakshmi N. Mittal, Aditya Mittal, Vanisha Mittal-Bhatia, Adar Poonawalla and Badale. "Badale will continue to support Rajasthan Royals, acting as a bridge between the past and the present."

## Arjun Tendulkar Joins New T20 Side, Gets 400 Percent Rise From Base Price

Amid a lack of game time in the Indian Premier League (IPL), Arjun Tendulkar, son of legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar, fetched one of the biggest bids in the T20 Mumbai League auction on Saturday. Arjun, who is yet to play a game for Lucknow Super Giants in IPL 2026, was roped in by the ARCS Andheri team for Rs 10 lakh, a 400 percent hike from his base price of Rs 2 lakh. As a result, Arjun will earn 33.3% of what he earns from his IPL salary with LSG. Arjun will make his debut in the competition after he was declared eligible to be part in the tournament, despite representing different state association last season. Tendulkar played for Goa for the past few seasons after moving from Mumbai. However, he was cleared by



the BCCI to participate in the league as he did not play in any state league over the past 12 months. "To maintain focus and prevent excessive exertion, each player is permitted to participate in only one officially recognised cricket league, excluding the Indian Premier League (IPL), during a twelve-month period commencing from the conclusion of the tournament in

which they last participated," as per the BCCI guidelines for state associations hosting T20 tournaments. "For instance, if a player has participated in a Twenty20 tournament organised by a State Association, which concluded on August 31, 2024, they will not be permitted to participate in any other Twenty20 tournament organised by any other State Association until September 1, 2025," it adds. Arjun, who joined LSG ahead of the 2026 season following a stint with Mumbai Indians, has been working closely with coaching staff and senior players to refine his skills. Having showcased his all-round capabilities in the domestic circuit for Goa, Arjun's latest exploits in the nets suggest he is ready for the high-pressure environment of the IPL.

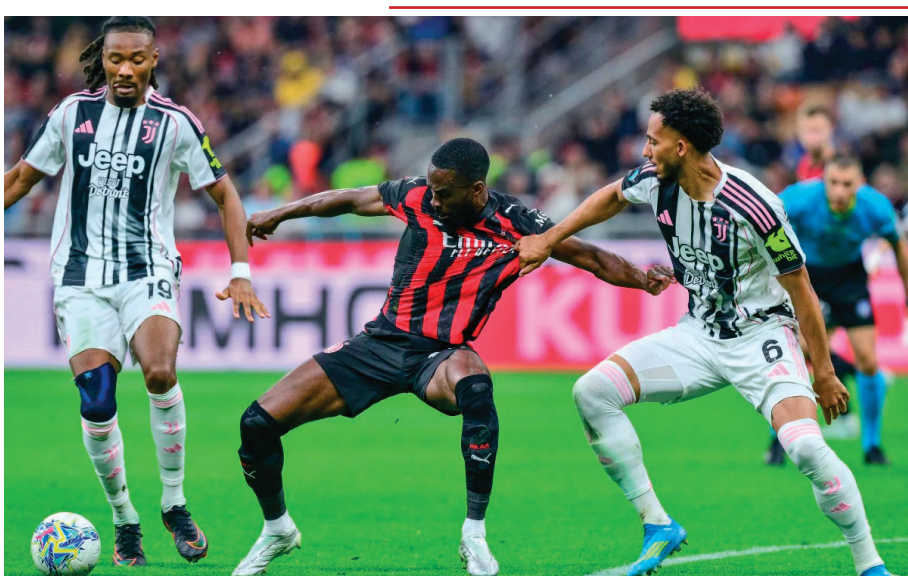
## Sir Alex Ferguson Taken To Hospital Ahead Of Manchester United vs Liverpool Game



Manchester United great Alex Ferguson was reportedly taken to the hospital after feeling unwell ahead of his former team's Premier League game against Liverpool on Sunday. The iconic former United manager was at Old Trafford for the match, but left before kick-off. Host broadcaster Sky Sports said the 84-year-old Ferguson was "conscious" and had "precautionary checks." The BBC said it was not an emergency situation. In 2018 Ferguson suffered a brain hemorrhage and underwent emergency surgery, before making a recovery. Ferguson frequently attends home matches and was pictured on social media at the stadium earlier in the day. The Associated Press has contacted United and Ferguson's representative for comment. Ferguson won 13 Premier League titles with United and two Champions Leagues during a trophy-laden 26-and-a-half years at the club. In total he won 28 major titles with United. He retired in

2013 having won the last of his 13 league titles. Ferguson, who managed United for 27 years during a glittering reign, watches the club's games from the directors' box. No further update has been provided on his condition after his admission to hospital. Ferguson had a brain haemorrhage in 2018 which left him seriously ill. He spoke about his recovery in detail three years later. He was pictured with guests at the stadium on Sunday a couple of hours before kick-off. Dr Aseem Malhotra, a consultant cardiologist, posted a picture on X, showing Ferguson and him together, external, and wrote: "A privilege, honour and dream come true to be invited to spend some quality time with Sir Alex Ferguson ahead of the game against Liverpool today at Old Trafford." Ferguson was taken in an ambulance from the tunnel area of Old Trafford to the hospital. Club officials are optimistic Ferguson will soon be fit enough to return home.

## AC Milan Loss Puts Champions League Spot In Danger; Inter Milan In Pole Position



AC Milan is falling into danger of losing its Champions League place as city rival Inter Milan closes in on the Serie A title. Massimiliano Allegri's team was reduced to 10 men and beaten 2-0 at Sassuolo on Sunday for its fourth loss in seven matches. Third-placed Milan was left only three points ahead of fourth-placed Juventus, which hosted Hellas Verona later; and five points ahead of fifth-placed Como, which is trying to get into the top four and secure a Champions League spot. Three rounds remain in the Italian league. Domenico Berardi scored early on for

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Sassuolo for his 12th career goal against Milan and Fikayo Tomori was sent off before Armand Lauriente doubled the advantage after the break. Milan has scored only one goal in its last five matches. Inter, which is 12 points ahead of Milan, can

seal the title with a draw against visiting Parma later. Earlier, Bologna was held 0-0 by Cagliari in a regional derby. Three rounds remain in the Italian league. Domenico Berardi scored early on for Sassuolo for his 12th career goal against Milan and Fikayo Tomori was sent off before Armand Lauriente doubled the advantage after the break. Milan has scored only one goal in its last five matches. Inter, which is 12 points ahead of Milan, can seal the title with a draw against visiting Parma later. Earlier, Bologna was held 0-0 by Cagliari in a regional derby.

## Agadha Posters Raise Curiosity, TEASER ON THE WAY!

Mystic thriller Agadha is turning out to be one of the most anticipated films as the makers were able to generate a lot of curiosity with just a single poster, that was released earlier. Very first poster of the film, where we see a lady in front of the mighty statue piqued the interest on the film amongst trade, audience, and business circles. Now the makers have released a new poster. This poster shows a man standing fearlessly inside a dark cave like space, facing a gigantic mystical idol with multiple hands. Flames rise around him from ritual fires, and he holds a severed object in the other, suggesting a powerful confrontation rooted in divine mysticism and danger. What stands out is how Agadha has managed to create this level of buzz purely through posters. Each design has added a new layer to the mystery, drawing the audience deeper into its mystical world. This kind of response, driven only by visuals, is rare and indicates the strong creative vision behind the film. Adding to this excitement, the poster officially announces that the teaser of Agadha will be released on May 7th at 10.20 AM, taking the anticipation to the next level. After generating immense curiosity with the first look posters, the audience and trade are now eagerly waiting to witness the moving visuals from this mystical divine



thriller. The film is written and directed by M. S. Raju, who is known for presenting unique concepts and never repeating himself. Produced by Kasi Visalakshi Balusu under the banner of Sri Adi Varaha Productions, Agadha is being made on a grand scale simultaneously in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Hindi. The makers have already revealed the key characters from the film. Kamakshi Bhaskarla plays the powerful role of Mahadevi, a character deeply connected

to the mystical core of the story. Shrawan Reddy is seen as Simha, whose intense look and rugged presence suggest that he is central to unfolding the mystery. The film has been shot for 85 days across massive sets and real locations, with nearly 45 minutes of VFX, indicating the scale and visual ambition of the project. Currently in post production, Agadha promises to be one of the most creative and dynamic mystical thrillers to come from Indian cinema in recent times.

## BUDDHA JAYANTI SHOULD BE DECLARED A NATIONAL HOLIDAY: DIRECTOR SATYA REDDY

**"KING BUDDHA" DIRECTOR SATYA REDDY ISSUES WARNING TO GARIKAPATI**

At a protest held at Jantar Mantar in Delhi demanding that Buddha Jayanti be declared a complete national holiday, "King Buddha" Hollywood film director Satya Reddy reacted strongly. He issued a stern warning to preacher Garikapati over his past remarks that allegedly portrayed Gautama Buddha in a negative light.

"From now on, any false propaganda about Gautama Buddha will not be tolerated. Any attempt to insult Buddha will be strongly condemned," Satya Reddy stated.

Speaking on the occasion, he emphasized, "Gautama Buddha was not an ordinary person—he was 'Shakya Simha.' His life is not a collection of simple tales, but a great heroic saga and a message of peace. It is our responsibility to pass on his true history, philosophy, and the path he showed to future generations."

He also highlighted a significant episode from Buddha's life: "After attaining enlightenment, when Buddha entered Kapilavastu, his wife Yashodhara welcomed him by illuminating the entire city with lamps. That grand occasion later came to be known as 'Buddha Deepavali,'" he explained. Satya Reddy further noted



that nearly 25 countries across the world following Buddha's teachings are leading in peace, development, and equality. "Looking at their progress, India too should once again move towards Buddhism—that is the true path to peace and development," he added. Several supporters who participated in the protest also strongly demanded that Buddha Jayanti be declared a national holiday. Satya Reddy stated that the movement would be intensified across the country to raise public awareness.

**The campaign will continue with the slogan: "Buddha Jayanti - A National Day of Honor."**

## T Gopichand, Vvenkat, Vijay Chilla, Shashi Devireddy, 70mm Entertainments #Gopichand34 Launched Grandly



T Gopichand's next crazy project, #Gopichand34, marks the directorial debut of renowned fight master Vvenkat. Backed by Vijay Chilla and Shashi Devireddy of 70mm Entertainments, a banner known for delivering strong, content-driven cinema, the project is set to be mounted on a grand scale. The makers have now confirmed that Malayalam actress Anarkali Nazar has been finalized as the female lead, marking her Telugu debut. The film was launched today in a grand manner with a traditional pooja ceremony, attended by the core team and several special guests. Director Shiva Nirvana, producer KL Damodar Prasad, and Mythri Movie Makers Ravi Shankar handed over the script, formally starting the proceedings.

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Action choreographers Ram-Lakshman masters switched on the camera, while Mallemla Shyam Prasad Reddy gave the first clap. Producer Dil Raju performed the honorary direction for the opening shot. The regular shoot will commence soon. With the strong backing of 70mm Entertainments, #Gopichand34 promises a fresh concept brought to life with top-tier production and technical finesse. For his directorial debut,

Vvenkat has crafted a script that showcases Gopichand in a fierce, action-packed avatar, rooted in intense drama and authentic emotions. On the technical front, Shamdat ISC is on board as the cinematographer, while Sam CS will compose the music. National Award-winning editor Sreekar Prasad will handle the editing department, and the production design team is led by Rama Krishna-Monika.

## KIARA'S TWO PIECE MADE MALDIVES LOOK EVEN HOTTER



Kiara Advani is truly living her best life and she wants the whole world to see it! The Bollywood superstar, who is eagerly awaited in the upcoming film Toxic, just shared a dreamy set of pictures from her beautiful Maldives holiday with husband Sidharth Malhotra and their adorable daughter Saraayah. Every single photo tells a warm, happy, and deeply personal story of a woman who has perfectly balanced stardom and motherhood. The pictures are absolutely stunning. Kiara looked effortlessly gorgeous lying on the

beach in a pink top with seashells in her hair, then turned heads in a chic black one-shoulder swimsuit with a bold zebra print sarong on a yacht. She floated peacefully in crystal blue waters in an orange bikini while a sweet "Mama and Mini" cap set melted every heart online. What makes these photos truly special is the joy behind every frame. From lazy sunset evenings on the deck to journalling in her "In My Mom Era" cap, Kiara shows that being a brilliant actress, a loving wife, and a proud new mama is not just possible, she is making it look absolutely magical.

## "He spoke about me... and hugged me. I can never forget that moment" – 'Thimmarajupalli TV' actor Lathish?

It's known that the film 'Thimmarajupalli TV' turned out to be a good success. With this movie, Kiran Abbavaram introduced nearly 50 artists and technicians to the screen. Actor Lathish, who played the villain Siddaiah in the film, earned good recognition. Talking about this first success of his, he shared his happiness. Here's what he said.



After that, I worked again in the direction department.

### ■ TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY BACKGROUND?

Mine is an agriculture-based, underprivileged family from Nagari. There were days we even stole salt to eat. My parents and elder brother worked hard to educate us. When I entered films, my brother stopped talking to me. But after watching this movie and my performance in it, he spoke to me. Among those who always stood by me in this journey, my sister Chamundeshwari and brother-in-law Koteswara Rao come first.

### ■ TELL US ABOUT YOUR CINEMA JOURNEY?

I worked in Bengaluru for a few days. I came to Hyderabad in 2017. Since then, I tried to act in films. Everyone said my acting was good. But no one gave me a chance. I worked as an associate director for Mahipal Reddy garu for the film 'Poster'. Then came a gap due to Corona. During that time, I directed and acted in a short film on YouTube.

### ■ WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE IN THIS JOURNEY?

I faced many hardships while making the short film. At that time, I had to ask my family for money to buy a camera. No one came forward to invest and produce it either. I didn't have membership in any association. I got that story registered under another director. Even the producer asked me for money. Later, I took training under Dr. Shaikh John Bashir garu.

### ■ TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOUR-

### ■ NEY AT B STUDIO?

At B Studio, they asked for One Lakh rupees for personal training. I asked dejectedly, "Is acting only for those who have money?" Immediately, seeing my commitment, they gave me training for free without taking a single rupee from me. I performed dozens of plays there. While I was doing those plays, the associate directors of 'Thimmarajupalli TV' saw me. They auditioned all of us right there.

### ■ HOW DID IT FEEL TO ACT AS A VILLAIN?

In the past, those who acted as villains later became big heroes. When I was told it was a villain role, all those stars came to my mind. A villain is just as important to a film as the hero. For this movie, I gained weight. I gained a full thirty kilos. I worked really hard to fit the role of Siddaiah. When people who watched the film ask, "Was that really you?", I feel so happy and content.

### ■ TELL US ABOUT THE APPRECIATION YOU RECEIVED FROM THE INDUSTRY?

After watching the film, Kiran Abbavaram anna appreciated the entire team. Especially, he praised Pradeep anna and me a lot. "You're so silent outside... how did you appear like that on screen?" he was surprised. "You did wonderfully," Kiran anna complimented.

## SAMANTHA HAS ONE BIG JOB AT SUMMER BOX OFFICE



May has begun on a mixed note for the box office, with both recent releases Jet Lee and Gayapadda Simham managing only an average response from audiences. The momentum that many expected at the start of the summer season hasn't quite picked up yet, leaving the actress still searching for a solid hit to draw crowds in large numbers. In this scenario, Samantha Ruth Prabhu finds herself in a crucial position. With just two weeks left for her upcoming film Maa Inti Bangaram, the responsibility to generate strong buzz is significant. Expectations are decent, especially considering her past track record and popularity across markets. However, somewhat surprisingly, Samantha appears to have slowed

down her promotional pace, something that was already noted in the previous week. At a time when aggressive promotions could make a major difference, this lull might affect the film's initial reach unless quickly addressed. The situation becomes even more competitive with next Friday bringing multiple releases like Godari Gattupaina, Razor, and Sathi Leelavathi. While these films are also trying to build attention, none have yet created strong pre-release excitement. With theatres craving footfall and audiences waiting for something compelling, the coming weeks are crucial. Samantha, along with the teams of these upcoming films, has a big job ahead to energize the box office and turn this slow phase into a vibrant one.

## The Red Bag Shoot Wrapped Up, Terrifying Concept Poster Unveiled, Teaser Releasing Soon

Producer Harikrishna Somisetty is making a unique film with strong content titled The Red Bag. Centered entirely around the story of a mysterious bag, the film is written and directed by Ravi Kumar Seerapu. The team has recently completed the shoot, and post-production work is now progressing at a brisk pace. The first-look poster, released earlier, has already generated notable interest among audiences. The team is planning to release the film's teaser soon. The Red Bag concept poster immediately sets a dark and intense tone, showing a blood-soaked hand



holding an elegant red bag marked with a gold butterfly. Blood stains, guns, knives, and brass knuckles around it hint at a violent world filled with danger and

secrets. The neon "SINNERS" sign in the background adds to the gritty mood, making the whole poster feel like a moment from a tense thriller.

Overall, it grabs attention instantly and leaves you curious about the story behind the bag. Adding to the film's intrigue is its diverse cast. Kabir Singh, known for his intense screen presence, plays a role that is said to be radically different from his past performances—one that taps into a darker, more unpredictable persona. Supporting him is an ensemble that includes Prasad Behara, Radhya, Sneha Singh, Monika, Akanksha, Eeshan Shankar, Avinash Badal, Bhargavi, and several others, all woven into a story where no character is just ornamental.