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Fifteen Indian tourists dead as boat capsizes in Vietnam

Vietnam, July 11 Three people from Andhra Pradesh were killed and two others from the state were hospitalised in Vietnam following a tourist boat capsizing near Phu Quoc Island, sources in the Andhra Pradesh government said on Saturday.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed grief over the deaths of three Andhra Pradesh people in the Vietnam boat tragedy. Two injured tourists are undergoing treatment. History

"Three Andhra Pradesh people died in the Vietnam boat mishap. We are coordinating with the Indian Embassy and the Vietnamese authorities, and all necessary assistance is being extended to the affected families. Further updates will be shared as more official information becomes available," Andhra Pradesh government sources told PTI.

The tourist speedboat carrying 32 Indian tourists and four crew members capsized near Phu Quoc Island while returning to An Thoi Port, the sources further said.

The accident claimed the lives of 15 Indian tourists, while 21 others were rescued. Of the survivors, 17 were passengers, and four were crew members.

Naidu said 33 people from Andhra Pradesh visited Vietnam, of whom 19 were on the boat. Three died, while the remaining passengers were rescued. Reviewing the incident, the chief minister sought details of relief measures and the tourists' condition.

He directed officials to ensure the survivors' safe return to Andhra Pradesh.

"Officials should remain in touch with the families of the deceased and provide them with all required assistance," Naidu said in a press release.

Naidu also directed officials in Andhra Pradesh Bhavan in Delhi to coordinate with Vietnamese authorities and the Indian Embassy to provide all required support to affected tourists and families.

The three deceased from Andhra Pradesh have been identified as N Adisheshaiah Ravi Teja from



Hindupuram in Sri Satya Sai district, Mudiya Sreedhar of Kadapa district and Gelli Jaya Lakshmi of Machilipatnam in Krishna district, official sources said.

Meanwhile, reacting to the tragedy, Teja's brother said the 41-year-old had left for Vietnam on July 8 on a company-sponsored incentive trip organised for mobile phone distributors.

"We have been hearing that he died in the boat accident, but it is still hard to believe because we have not received any official confirmation," he told reporters.

Similarly, family members of Sreedhar said he had travelled from Kadapa to Chennai, then Bangkok and onward to Vietnam on July 8. He was expected to return within two days.

"We received a call informing us about the accident, but we are still unable to believe it. We can accept it only after seeing his body," a family member said.

Another relative said Sridhar's trip had been sponsored by a mobile phone company as he was its distribu-

tor in Kadapa district.

"The company's employee, Nayeem, informed us about the incident. Doctors in Vietnam later confirmed his death," the relative said.

The families appealed to the authorities to facilitate the early repatriation of the bodies to Andhra Pradesh. Geographic Reference

Rescue operations have concluded, with all 36 persons on board accounted for. An investigation has been launched, with adverse weather, rough sea conditions and possible mechanical failure being examined as possible causes of the accident.

The tour was organised by Vietnam-based Threeland Travel through local coordinating vendor Sai Vietnam, while the Indian tourist group was reportedly associated with the mobile company. Meanwhile, Harihar Srinivas, a member of the Indian tourists group, told PTI on Saturday that 105 mobile distributors from South India had travelled to Vietnam on a business incentive trip.

CM Revanth reaffirms commitment to restore Kaleshwaram barrages

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has affirmed that the state government was ready to rehabilitate and restore Medigadda, Sundilla and Annaram barrages which are part of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS), based on the recommendations of the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA).

He demanded Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Eatala Rajendar to lead a delegation to Delhi and apprise the NDSA of the condition of the barrages for the release of Godavari water, and to convince the union government and order a Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) probe into the alleged Kaleshwaram project scam.

"We respect Eatala Rajender, but we do not respect the statements he has made. His stature would have been respected had he gathered details from the Irrigation Minister, the NDSA, or officials before making a comment on the release of water from Kaleshwaram Project," he said, addressing the media in Hyderabad on Saturday, July 11.

He alleged that Rajendar was speaking at the behest of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders and lost his credibility. He also took strong exception to the retired engineers' support to the BRS' demand for lifting Godavari water from Kannepalli pump house.

He ridiculed what he termed the "Khiladi Group" headed by former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR), with BRS working president KT Rama Rao



(KTR) and Siddipet MLA T Harish Rao, and now Eatala Rajender as its members, and its "misinformation campaign" on the release of water from the barrages.

The chief minister clarified that the NDSA's report had concluded that the Medigadda, Annaram, and Sundilla barrages were unsuitable for water storage.

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"The NDSA recommended that all restoration designs, repairs, and related works be undertaken only with the approval of the NDSA or the CWC. We are ready to handover the barrages to NDSA for rehabilitation if the agency comes forward. Rajendar should take the responsibility of convincing the central agency to address the issue," the chief minister said.

Veteran playback singer S Janaki passes away at 88



Mysuru: Veteran playback singer S Janaki died at a private hospital here on Saturday due to age-related ailments, family sources said.

She was 88 years old.

According to sources, she developed breathing issues last night and was subsequently admitted to the hospital.

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Known for her versatility, Janaki recorded over 48,000 songs in multiple languages, predominantly the South Indian languages of Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam.

Over a career spanning six decades, she sang for films, albums, television and radio in about 20 Indian languages, including Hindi, Odia, Tulu, Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali.

Sharing the news on behalf of the family, her granddaughter Apsara Vidyula, in an Instagram post, said, "It is with profound sadness that I share the passing of my beloved grandmother and legendary singer, Smt S Janaki."

Telangana police offer Rs 2L bounty on absconding murder accused

Hyderabad, July 11 The Telangana police has announced a reward of Rs 2 lakh for providing information regarding the murder accused who killed six people including a minor girl and his family members in Rangareddy while being out on bail.

The accused a 28-year-old, Raj Kumar, is alleged to have killed his wife Parvathi Saritha, 30, their two sons Parikshit, 3, and Daivikshit, 2, Chityala Rukkamma, 65, Chityala Lakshmi, 45, and a 17-year-old girl. Police said all the victims sustained multiple stab injuries.

According to investigators, the murders are suspected to have been driven by a long-standing grudge after a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was previously registered against

The accused a 28-year-old, Raj Kumar, is alleged to have killed his wife Parvathi Saritha, 30, their two sons Parikshit, 3, and Daivikshit, 2, Chityala Rukkamma, 65, Chityala Lakshmi, 45, and a 17-year-old girl. Police said all the victims sustained multiple stab injuries.

the suspect. Police are probing whether the earlier case was the immediate trigger for the killings.

After the incident, Raj Kumar allegedly contacted his parents over the phone and confessed to having murdered the six victims. The information was subsequently passed on to the police, who rushed to the village

and secured the crime scene.

Teams from the Future City Commissionerate launched an investigation, while forensic experts collected evidence from the house. The bodies were shifted for post-mortem examination.

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to having murdered the six victims. The information was subsequently passed on to the police, who rushed to the village and secured the crime scene. Teams from the Future City Commissionerate launched an investigation, while forensic experts collected evidence from the house. The bodies were shifted for post-mortem examination.



Religious structures razed in Faridabad for RRTS corridor; internet suspended, traffic diverted



The Faridabad civic body on Saturday carried out a major demolition drive in the city's NIT (New Industrial Township), razing several religious structures, including a mosque and two temples, to clear the right of way for crucial infrastructure projects. The operation, led by the Municipal Corporation of Faridabad (MCF) acting on directives from the National Green Tribunal (NGT), began at 4 am amidst heavy police deployment. The structures demolished included a 700-square-yard mosque at Masjid Chowk in NIT-3 and two temples in the vicinity.

Municipal officials stated the action was necessary as these illegal constructions directly obstructed the alignment of the upcoming Gurgaon-Faridabad-Noida Namo Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor

and a proposed elevated road project. To maintain law and order and prevent the spread of misinformation during the sensitive operation, the Haryana Home Department ordered a temporary suspension of mobile internet, bulk SMS, and dongle services in the NIT area. The order, issued on May 29 by Dr Vandana Disodia, Additional Secretary, Home, under Section 20 of The Telecommunications Act, is in effect from 12.30 am to 10 pm on May 30. It applies within a 1-kilometre radius of the demolition site. The administration cited apprehension of tension, damage to property, and disturbance of peace as reasons for the shutdown. The order explicitly exempted voice calls, individual SMS, mobile recharge services, banking SMS, and broadband/leased line internet services to minimise public and commercial inconvenience. The police began barricading the area around Masjid Chowk at 2 am, completely restricting civilian and vehicular movement before earth-moving machines were deployed, a spokesperson said. In coordination with the security arrangements, the Faridabad Traffic Police have issued a comprehensive traffic advisory. Several key routes remain temporarily closed to the general public from 2 am on May 30 to 2 pm. These include the stretch from Metro Mod to ESI Chowk via Sainik Colony Red Light, and the routes from DCP NIT Office to Mulla Hotel and Chimani Bai Chowk (now Namaste Chowk). Commuters heading towards Gurgaon have been advised to use alternative routes:

Gujarat HC dismisses family's plea seeking registration of FIR over 'custodial death'



WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING the constitutional gravity of custodial death allegations and noting the "irony" that the violation of a Supreme Court mandate to register an FIR in cognizable offences affords no direct recourse to a writ court, the Gujarat High Court has dismissed a petition seeking registration of an FIR in the alleged custodial death of 70-year-old Zahiruddin Shaikh, who had been arrested by Ahmedabad police in connection with an allegations of cow slaughter. Justice D N Ray, while pronouncing the judgment in the petition filed by Shaikh's son Tofik, held that the petitioner was bound to first exhaust statutory remedies under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), before invoking the extraordinary writ jurisdiction in the High Court.

The 30-page judgment, made available on Friday, noted that "the moment there is an allegation against the police authorities which is brought before the police authorities, instead of registering an FIR which would lend credence to the version of the informant, the police authorities would simply investigate whatever else and in whatever manner it would choose, to stifle the inconvenient truth." The court further weighed the legal position and noted, "I would have ordinarily thought that the most natural and effective remedy would have been a writ petition to implement the directions of Lalita Kumari..." Delving into whether "custodial death" could be "carved out as a special exception" to the statutory process to "redress a situation where Lalita Kumari (Supra) is not followed in letter and spirit", the court accepted that while the Commissioner of Police "may be biased and partisan" in such cases, the presumption cannot be extended to the Magistrate. The court held, "I cannot automatically include the Magistrate to whom an appeal from the decision of the Commissioner of Police would lie, in the same bracket."

Dismissing the petition, Justice Ray stated in the judgment, "It is ironic that even if a Supreme Court mandate is violated by the authorities, various Benches of the Supreme Court, relying upon Sakiri Vasu (Supra), a decision of a smaller Bench prior to the Constitution Bench decision in Lalita Kumari (Supra), have said that the pro-

cedure laid down in the CrPC/BNSS has to be followed and the writ court should not be approached prior to that, solely because an alternative remedy exists in the statute." The court had delved in detail into the 2013 precedent of Lalita Kumari as well as the earlier decision of the SC in Sakiri Vasu and the court applied the recent May 4 Supreme Court decision in the case of Sujal Vishwas Attavar vs State of Maharashtra, which reaffirmed that the extraordinary jurisdiction under Article 226 "ought not to have been invoked when alternative equally efficacious statutory remedies were available" and that "Article 226 is not a panacea for all grievances."

In a further order after pronouncement, the ACP M Division, Ahmedabad, A B Valan, who was present in the court, confirmed on the record that CCTV footage from Vejalpur Police Station for the relevant period had already been seized by panchnama, all medical records had been collected, and call detail records of the deceased and three alleged police officers would be obtained from mobile operators within a week. Appearing for the petitioner, Advocate Rohin Bhatt argued that the allegations disclosed cognizable offences, making FIR registration mandatory under the SC's Constitution Bench ruling in Lalita Kumari case. He had further submitted that "substantial pressure" had allegedly been exerted on the family to settle the matter, and that "local police investigating their own colleagues could never ensure a fair probe". For the State, Public Prosecutor Hardik Dave had opposed the petition, contending that the complaint with senior authorities of Ahmedabad police was lodged only on May 22 by the petitioner, after the petition was moved before the HC. Dave had contended that the act demonstrated a "predetermined intention" to bypass statutory remedies. The state relied on a consistent line of SC decisions including the recent May 4 judgment — all holding that aggrieved persons must exhaust the BNSS framework, approaching the superior police officers under Section 173(4) and thereafter the Magistrate under Section 175(3), before invoking writ jurisdiction. Zahiruddin was arrested on May 18, after the Vejalpur Police claimed to have recovered 520 kg of suspicious meat and a live white calf during a raid conducted on May 5. Police had arrested nine persons in the case and alleged that the 70-year-old was the kingpin of the illegal cow slaughter operation. According to the petitioner, while in custody that evening, his father was allegedly subjected to physical assault and administered unidentified substances. The next morning, he was taken to Sola Civil Hospital, referred to Asarwa Civil Hospital due to non-availability of ICU beds and eventually admitted to SVP Hospital, where he collapsed and was declared dead on May 19. An accidental death case was registered the same evening.

From clean classrooms to toilets: West Bengal schools told to complete reopening preparations



The West Bengal School Education Department has issued a set of instructions to ensure that the school environment, infrastructure, and quality of education meet the requisite standards before June 1. The state government schools will reopen on June 1 after the summer vacation. Instructions were sent to headmasters and teachers of all government and government-aided schools and district school inspectors to complete the preparations by May 31.

Sources said a meeting was held at the education department on Thursday to issue the memo to the heads of all Junior High Schools, Higher Secondary Schools, and madrasahs, to maintain a healthy, hygienic, and safe environment for students. According to the memo, all classrooms, school premises, benches, desks, chairs, tables, and other furniture in the school should be cleaned and kept in a usable condition. The school authorities have been directed to check whether the electrical lines, lights, fans, computers, and other equipment are functioning, and clear weeds or bushes from the school premises. As emphasis has been put on safe drinking water systems, the schools have been asked to clean water sources,

reservoirs, and tanks to ensure pure drinking water for students. Instructions have also been given to keep the toilets clean and the drainage system functional. An order has also been given for the strict monitoring of mid-day meal services. These include keeping the kitchen, cooking utensils, and dining areas clean, checking gas cylinders and fire extinguishing systems, and ensuring the quality of food grains.

SIR battle begins: Parties deploy booth armies across Maharashtra

With the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls scheduled between June 30 and July 29, political parties across Maharashtra have begun mobilising their organisations, from top leaders to booth-level workers, to ensure their voters remain on the rolls and to monitor the revision process closely. According to the Election Commission's schedule, printing of enumeration forms and training of Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will take place between June 20 and 29, followed by door-to-door verification from June 30 to July 29. Draft electoral rolls will be published on August 5, while claims and objections can be filed until September 4. The final electoral rolls will be published on October 7. The BJP has directed its cadre to ensure that none of its voters are omitted from the electoral rolls while also scrutinising the lists for alleged ineligible entries. The party has already held multiple meetings in Mumbai and instructed district units to organise similar sessions. Earlier this month, state BJP president Ravindra Chavan chaired a meeting attended by around 700 party functionaries, including MPs, MLAs and office bearers. The BJP has also launched a door-to-door awareness campaign based on its Panna

Telangana Police arrest ex-BRS MP after 'burn govt offices' speech goes viral



Telangana Police arrested former BRS MP Balka Suman for allegedly calling for "militant" activities that include "burning of government offices and breaking down rail tracks". Suman was arrested from near BRS party headquarters — BRS Bhavan — Saturday afternoon. He was booked under relevant sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act by the Nampally police. In a purported video that went viral five days ago, on May 25, Suman was seen telling the BRS cadre to burn offices. "Even if you go to jail for a month, it doesn't matter," he was heard telling the cadre in the Chennai constituency that he represented from 2018 to 2023.

Suman is believed to have been "unhappy" that farmers were not turning up at BRS protests over procurement troubles, and was purportedly heard voicing it in

the video, adding that it was "high time" for the BRS to launch "militant activities" to attract people's attention. The Congress called the speech as "a militant move to destabilise and topple the democratically elected Congress government". "This is not legitimate Opposition politics. This is a direct call to abandon peaceful democratic protest in favour of militant confrontation, damaging public property, disrupting law and order, and endangering innocent lives," the Congress leadership said in a media release. A call to burn government offices crosses every line of responsible politics, the Congress leadership said in the release, questioning the silence from BRS leadership. "By not condemning Suman's calls, BRS leaders, including KCR and KTR, seem to have given their tacit approval or consent," the release said. Suman had later held a press conference to clarify his statement and state that it was not a public function, but an internal event of the party where he made the comments. "My words were misrepresented," Suman said. Some BRS leaders too defended Suman. "Congress Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had once said that Pragathi Bhawan (CM's official residence) should be bombed. He (Suman) did not say anything like that," a BRS leader told The Indian Express, adding that Suman's speech was meant to motivate the BRS cadre and not to cause any harm to public property. BRS's top leadership, however, remained silent on the matter. "The party has not issued any clarification," said a BRS leader.

On fast lane, Dilip Ghosh rides superbike without a helmet, some in awe, others criticise



Panchayat Minister Dilip Ghosh turned heads on Thursday morning when he was spotted riding a luxury superbike without a helmet outside Eco Park in New Town. Cruising down the road with a pillion behind him, the senior BJP leader stopped to share his excitement, simply stating, "It was amazing".

Taking to his X handle, the minister shared his firsthand experience of the high-end ride: "Today, I rode a Honda BigWing superbike. It is a high-speed 1800cc, 6-cylinder motorcycle. The bike is extremely comfortable and offers incredible speed. There is ample space at the back with a sofa-like passenger seat, ensuring that the

pillion rider can also sit very comfortably." Never one to miss a political beat, Ghosh linked his premium ride to urban development. He said that Kolkata's roads and footpaths, which faced heavy encroachment for years, making them narrow and completely unsuitable for heavy-weight superbikes, are now ready for superbikes.

"With the BJP government now clearing roads and footpaths from encroachments, the younger generation will no longer face difficulties in riding these motorcycles," he posted. He added that just as the new government is functioning at a rapid pace, the "speed of the city" and the efficiency of people's daily lives will also see a massive upgrade. As expected, the video of the minister's bike ride went viral almost instantly, racking up thousands of views, likes, and comments across social media platforms. Impressed by his confident riding style, a section of internet users dubbed him 'Dabangg Dilip'. However, the viral moment also brought its fair share of scrutiny. Motorcycle enthusiasts on the Internet quickly pointed out that the premium Honda touring bike he was riding comes with a staggering price tag of Rs 53 lakh. Several netizens raised questions about the minister's safety, asking why he chose to ride without a helmet.

HC stays notification extending Assam Tenancy Act to Chandigarh

Chandigarh The petition was heard by a division bench comprising Justices H S Sethi and Deepak Manchanda, which issued notice of motion to the respondents and sought their response. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has stayed the operation of a Central government notification extending the Assam Tenancy Act, 2021, to Chandigarh and directed that the East Punjab Urban Rent Restriction Act, 1949, continue to operate for the time being. The Bench ordered that the operation of the notification dated May 6, 2026, shall remain in abeyance till July 14. The interim order came on a writ petition filed jointly by the Punjab and Haryana High Court Bar Association and the District Bar Association, Chandigarh. The writ petition challenges the notification dated May 6, 2026, under which the Assam Tenancy Act was extended to Chandigarh, resulting in the repeal of the East Punjab Restriction Act — in force in the city since November 4, 1972. The petition was heard by a division bench comprising Justices H S Sethi and Deepak Manchanda, which issued notice of motion to the respondents and sought their response. Senior Advocate Chetan Mittal, assisted by Advocates Shifali Goyal and Ritvik Garg, appeared for the petitioners. They argued that the Centre had invoked Section 87 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, which empowers the Central government to extend to Chandigarh a law in force in Punjab, but does not confer power to repeal, amend or substitute an existing law already applicable to the Union Territory. The petitioners contended that the notification was therefore unconstitutional. The petition also questioned the adjudicatory mechanism under the Assam Tenancy Act. It was submitted that Section 30 of the Act designates the Tehsildar as the rent authority and Section 33 designates the Additional Deputy Commissioner as the Appellate Authority or Rent Court. The petitioners argued that rent disputes in Chandigarh had traditionally been adjudicated by judicial officers under the 1949 Act and that vesting such powers in executive authorities had



previously faced judicial scrutiny. The bar bodies also contended that several provisions of the Assam tenancy law were impracticable for Chandigarh, and were inconsistent with the city's planning and regulatory framework. They also raised concerns regarding the repeal-and-saving clause, arguing that while pending proceedings under the 1949 Act were protected, the notification did not clarify the legal position regarding fresh causes of action or subsisting tenancies. Another plank of the challenge was that although the notification had come into force, the Rules under the new Act had not yet been framed. And the authorities and infrastructure required for its implementation had not been notified either. According to the petitioners, this had created a legal vacuum affecting the landlords as well as the tenants. After hearing the submissions, the court recorded prima facie satisfaction on the issues raised by the petitioners, including the contention that Section 87 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act does not confer a power of repeal. The court also directed that the East Punjab Urban Rent Restriction Act, 1949, would continue to govern rent matters in Chandigarh, noting the conceded position that the Rules under the Assam Tenancy Act had not yet been framed, the Rent Authority had not been notified, and the necessary implementation infrastructure was not in place.

Pramukh model, asking workers to verify voter details family by family and map every society, community and locality. BJP leader Kirit Somaia, who has been tasked with training party workers on the SIR process, said, "Maharashtra BJP should take lessons from West Bengal on SIR where 64 lakh ineligible votes were deleted. Though Trinamool Congress may have blamed the SIR for their defeat, the fact remains that our objections about illegal votes were upheld by both the Election Commission and Supreme Court." According to Somaia, "At least fifty lakh ineligible voters are there in Maharashtra. We will ensure they don't make it to the list." "There are large cases of duplicate and double names. Along with that there are illegal Bangladeshis who have also enrolled themselves as voters. We have urged our party to closely monitor SIR at every assembly constituency and booth," he added. The BJP has already shortlisted BLAs across all Assembly constituencies and plans to monitor the exercise across 355 tehsils, 36 districts and nearly 40,000 villages. Congress launches 'Utha SIR Jage Vha' campaign The Congress has unveiled its statewide cam-

paign titled 'Utha SIR Jage Vha' and assigned senior leaders to oversee the process in all 288 Assembly constituencies. "There are 125 seats in the state out of 288 which the party did not contest for the last 25 years and still we are getting people to work as booth level agents is an extremely positive sign for us," Abhijeet Sapkal, state convener of the Congress campaign on SIR, said. The party has appointed senior leaders, including Balasaheb Thorat, Satej Patil and Amit Deshmukh, as BLA 1 in their respective constituencies. They have been tasked with appointing BLA 2 workers at every booth. "We have named BLA 2 as Bharat Rakshak as they are the most crucial individuals who will ensure that no legitimate voter is deleted," said Sapkal. The Congress has formed 75 training teams that will travel across the state between June 2 and June 10 to train booth-level workers. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has launched a statewide organisational exercise, appointing more than 1.25 lakh BLAs to oversee voter verification and strengthen the party's grassroots network. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has instructed MPs, MLAs, ministers and coordinators to actively participate in the exercise and ensure the party reaches every booth

The US is using an Iranian smuggling tactic to sneak oil out of the Gulf



DUBAI,- The United States military has overseen scores of secretive ship-to-ship oil transfers to keep Gulf energy exports flowing, using aerial and water drones as well as helicopters in an operation to guide convoys to awaiting tankers.The operation on the edge of the Strait of Hormuz employs a shuttling technique long used by Iran to skirt sanctions. Two specific locations where the oil transfers take place were identified by 11 people familiar with the operation – one off the coast of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates and the ?other off Oman’s port of Sohar. It started in early May, and at least 92 ships have been involved in the transfers, according to shipping data and satellite imagery reviewed by Reuters.

The Reuters Power Up newsletter provides everything you need to know about the global energy industry. Sign up here.A satellite image of side-by-side ships at sea, off the coast of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, June 6, 2026. European Union/Copernicus Sentinel-2/Handout via REUTERS Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tabAs recently as June 11, 17 pairs of ships could be seen carrying out simultaneous oil transfers at the two sites, according to satellite images ?reviewed by Reuters.

An Apache helicopter downed by Iran on June 9, sparking retaliatory bombings by the U.S., was involved in the mission, according to four sources, including a former U.S. official with knowledge of the attack. Using satellite imagery, Reuters counted six pairs of tanker ships clustered together in a small area off the port of Sohar the day the Apache was shot down.Reuters could not confirm what role the Apache played in the operation. In response to Reuters questions, a U.S. defense official said no Central Command forces are taking part in an off-shore ship-to-ship oil transfer operation. Both crew members were rescued by a drone boat, U.S. officials said.

The extent of the ship-to-ship transfers, how they work, and the Apache’s role in the operation have not been previously reported. The White House referred questions to Centcom. The Iranian government did not respond to requests for comment about the transfer operation.The two spots where these transfers take ?place, in the Gulf of Oman near the exit of the Strait of Hormuz, are close to the boundaries drawn by the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, a new Iranian body established to manage the Hormuz Strait. Ships that fail to comply with Iran’s orders are at risk of drone and missile attack by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.The Fujairah port itself ?has come under repeated Iranian fire during the time this U.S.-led operation has been underway. This past weekend, according to the British maritime risk management group Vanguard, an “unknown projectile” struck a tanker off the coast of Oman. Vanguard said in a statement that the crew was safe and that the ?impact caused some leakage of the cargo, but no environmental damage. It did not specify whether the tanker was involved in a ship-to-ship transfer.

A satellite image of side-by-side ships at sea, off the coast of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, June 6, 2026. European Union/Copernicus Sentinel-2/Handout via REUTERS Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tabIran responded to the U.S.-Israeli war by effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly a fifth of global oil consumption normally passes. That created the biggest global energy supply disruption in history and has spurred inflation around the world.

The ship-to-ship transfers, though ?risky and inefficient, appear to be a part of the Trump administration’s efforts to help restore normal oil flows from the Gulf. U.S. President Donald Trump said the Strait of Hormuz would reopen Friday under a framework peace deal with Iran announced this week, but details remain vague. Reuters could not determine whether the announced deal had affected the oil transfers.A Reuters investigation published May 20 found that Iran ?has established its own system for ushering ships through the opposite side of the Strait, involving island checkpoints, diplomatic deals and sometimes fees.The American transfer operations are fully controlled by the U.S. military, said eight of the sources, including a private security contractor who has been involved in the transfers.Tankers must sail to a meeting point before they reach the strait, then stagger their departures so they are around 3,000 to 4,000 meters apart, according to one of the sources as well as satellite imagery. Their transponders are off and their lights are dimmed, according to four sources.A series of waypoints allow the U.S. military to monitor the progress of the designated tankers, but the Americans are “obviously watching you all the time,” one of the sources said.

When they pass through the strait, just beyond a zone that Iran has delineated as under its control, the tankers pull alongside the recipient ships, ?which are Very Large Crude Carriers, or VLCCs, to begin the oil transfers. These take between 24 and 40 hours to complete. The empty tankers then shuttle back through the strait and the newly loaded VLCCs sail onward.What

India rejects proposal to expand only non-permanent UNSC membership, calls it ‘bordering on failure’

United Nations: India has dismissed as “bordering on failure” suggestions to expand only the non-permanent category of the Security Council membership as the nations of the world organisation grapple with reforming its highest decision-making body.India’s Permanent Representative P Harish said on Monday that reform without expanding the permanent membership “would fundamentally not change the decision-making power-structure of the P5”, the five permanent members – Britain, China, France, Russia and the US.“Groups and member states have waited this long for real and meaningful reform”, and “UNSC reform would be grossly inadequate, bordering on failure, if expansion is limited only to the non-permanent category”, he said at a meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) for Council reform.Uniting for Consensus (UFC), a 12-member group led by Italy and includes Pakistan, has been opposing the addition of permanent members and has exploited

makes this ship-to-ship operation possible is that there are a few shippers willing to sail their vessels through the strait to deliver the oil to the waiting tankers, despite ?the Iranian blockade.A satellite image of side-by-side ships at sea, off the coast of Sohar, Oman, June 9, 2026. SPOT © CNES 2026, Distribution Airbus DS/Handout via REUTERS Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tabBut the operation is risky. “You just don’t know when Iran might just decide to start using drones or even gunboats in order to prevent even those ships from transiting the strait,” said Noam Raydan, a senior fellow at Washington Institute who specializes in maritime risk and who reviewed Reuters’ findings.

The ship-to-ship technique has been used by Iran for years to bypass sanctions, because it masks the source of the oil. ?The Iranians usually operate one ?pair of ships at a time, both to avoid detection and because its prewar exports were relatively small. The U.S.-led operation, which involves mass transfers, gives Gulf producers better protection from Iranian retaliatory attacks so they can move crude, condensate and petroleum products to international buyers.Reuters reviewed more than a dozen satellite images taken between May 2 and June 11 showing ship-to-ship transfers involving state-owned Gulf tanker fleets and internationally operated vessels that receive the oil. LSEG and Kpler shipping data reviewed by Reuters showed repeated rendezvous between tankers operating in the area during the same period.Based on the imagery, Reuters calculated that at least 90 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products may have moved through the offshore network since early May. The volumes, based on the tankers’ carrying capacities, are still small compared to the pre-war average of about 20 million barrels that passed through the strait daily.“As the old rules weaken, it’s ironic that the United States is now taking a page out of the playbook of China, Russia, North Korea, and even Iran, whose so-called ‘dark fleets’ pioneered these techniques precisely to evade U.S. and UN sanctions,” Michael Froman, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in a note Friday. He ?was referring to the practice of sending ships through the strait without transponders, which Trump mentioned ?in comments June 10 after the downing of the Apache.

Six sources with direct knowledge of ?the operation said the U.S. has supported participating vessels through a combination of aerial surveillance, compliance screening and monitoring rather than naval escort. Reuters found no indication that U.S. military personnel were directly involved in the transfers themselves.THROUGH THE STRAITThe receiving side of the operation is dominated by international tanker operators, according to a review of the shipping records. One of them, Greece-based Dynacom Tankers Management, has alluded to its efforts to find creative ways to ship oil through the strait since the war began on February 28.“Freedom of navigation is essential and nobody can impose tolls or any other burden,” George ?Procopiou, Dynacom’s founder, told a Capital Link shipping conference in Athens on June 1. “We are here to serve, and Greece has the tradition of breaking blockades since antiquity,” he said. “I don’t want to go into more details, but I believe the hints are enough to understand what ?I mean.”Dynacom did not immediately respond to a request for ?comment on the U.S. operation.Another maritime source, however, said the new system imposes its own risks on their industry.

“There is a paucity of reliable data,” the maritime security source said. The transponders used to communicate ships locations are switched off, “and companies are not reporting through the usual reporting centres.” That risks collision between the ships, which travel at night with their lights off at speeds that don’t allow for easy maneuvering, according to multiple shipping industry officials.Four sources familiar with the arrangements said operators seeking access to the system are required to undergo a compliance review process before being allocated transit windows. The process includes submitting information to the U.S. Navy’s Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping office in Bahrain.

Two preliminary compliance documents reviewed by Reuters required operators to provide complete geospatial tracking histories, full beneficial ownership disclosure, cargo documentation and a willingness to ?permit cargo testing.If they are ?approved, participating vessels are then assigned transit windows and remain in contact with the U.S. military office in Bahrain throughout the voyage.Emirati exports account for a substantial share of the U.S. transfer operation, according to shipping records reviewed by ?Reuters. Six of the sources said UAE’s state-owned national oil company ADNOC has been among the most active participants in the U.S.-led transfers.

The Kuwait Oil Tanker Company has also been active in the transfers. Some 2.3 million barrels of crude were siphoned from one of its ships off the coast of Sohar on June 6, one of the busiest days for the transfers, according to TankerTrackers.com data. The receiving ship, Sea Ruby, was spotted five days later off India’s southwest coast and bound for ?China, where the cargo was expected to be discharged.A satellite image of side-by-side ships at sea, off the coast of Sohar, Oman, June 6, 2026. European Union/Copernicus Sentinel-2/Handout via REUTERS Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tabThe UAE government, ADNOC and the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company did not respond to requests for comment.“I don’t see a permanent solution in all of this,” said Raydan. “This is a temporary solution amid exceptional times.”

procedural manoeuvres to put spokes in the wheels of the reform process. Their main tactic has been to prevent the adoption of a negotiating text on which to base the discussion for reform that would enable the process to progress. They assert that there should be consensus before there can be negotiating text, which runs counter to the idea of negotiation leading to a consensus.“A nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’ approach must not become a tool to block progress”, Harish said.Without naming the UFC, he said, “Status-quoists have tried to use this argument in their favour and thereby, entrench the existing inequities in the Security Council”. “IGN cannot be fundamentally different from other UN processes, wherein negotiations are held on the basis of a text”, he said. “Therefore, we urge the co-Chairs to take the lead on formulating a text, with clearly-defined milestones and timelines”.

US-Iran deal promises end to war but how it will work remains unclear



EVIAN-LES-BAINS, France/DUBAI/JERUSALEM, Doubts swirled around the U.S.-Iran interim deal to end the war in the Middle East ?as shippers said it could take weeks for confidence to return after any reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, and fundamental questions remained unanswered.U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the deal ?to halt the conflict between the U.S. and Iran was "done" and going to a second stage, although details have yet to be made public and both countries say a permanent truce is yet to be negotiated.

The Reuters Iran Briefing newsletter keeps you informed with the latest developments and analysis of the Iran war. Sign up here. The interim agreement would extend a tenuous ceasefire announced in April by another 60 days and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has effectively blocked since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran in February.Negotiators would address difficult issues like the future of Iran’s nuclear programme during the next phase of talks, which Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Aragchi said ?would start in Switzerland on Friday after the formal signing of the framework deal.

Two other issues that Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used to justify the war - ending Iran’s support for regional armed proxies and ?curbing its missile programme - are not thought to be on the agenda for those negotiations.“We have our deal done with Iran, and it should be successful, it goes to ?a second stage, which I think would be actually easier,” Trump told reporters at a summit of the G7 group of big economies.Vice President JD Vance and Iran’s top negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf are expected to attend Friday’s formal signing ?in Geneva.Oil prices slid to new three-month lows on Tuesday, a day after tumbling nearly 5% following news of the deal, though industry officials say Middle East oil and gas output will take months to fully ?recover.Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote on social media Monday that the interim agreement was an “important step” toward stopping the fighting but noted a final deal for a lasting truce “has yet to take shape.”Vance told CNN that the signed

Netanyahu and Trump on collision course as US, Iran agree to halt war



JERUSALEM, Benjamin Netanyahu bet that his joint war alongside Donald Trump would topple Iran’s clerical rulers and bolster himself ahead of elections at home, as the architect of a U.S.-Israeli alliance that would reshape the Middle East.Instead, Israel’s longest-serving prime minister is on ?a collision course with Trump as the U.S. president seeks to extricate himself from the war, with both men’s goals unmet and Israeli military operations tied down in Lebanon.The Reuters Iran Briefing newsletter keeps you informed with the latest developments and analysis of the Iran war. Sign up here.

For now, Israeli officials have been cautious in public ?for fear of angering their most important ally, known for being prickly towards critics.But in private conversations, the frustration is clear. The preliminary agreement is “terrible for Israel,” said one senior Israeli official, giving a frank assessment on condition of anonymity. “And there is no one in the Israeli leadership who views it otherwise, from the prime minister to the chief of staff.”

Washington says that over the next 60 days, when a ceasefire is in place, it will negotiate full terms that will address U.S. and Israeli concerns, especially over Iran’s nuclear programme.But Israeli officials told Reuters they thought the negotiating period under the deal was ?likely to be extended, tying Israel’s hands from taking military action, while its concerns remain unresolved.Netanyahu and Trump have repeatedly clashed over Israel’s refusal to constrain its pursuit of Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, where a cessation of hostilities is a key ?Iranian demand.

At the start of the month, Trump described Netanyahu as “fucking crazy” in an angry phone call, ordering him not to strike Beirut while the U.S. was seeking a deal with Iran.Netanyahu ?called off attacks that day, but struck Beirut’s southern suburbs a week later, provoking Iranian missile strikes on Israel and a public rebuke of both sides from Trump.Hours before the U.S. and Iran announced their interim deal, Israel hit the Lebanese capital again on ?Sunday, after rockets were launched at Israel from Lebanon, fire Trump described as “small and meaningless”.Netanyahu said that Israel has emerged “strong and steady,” with a leadership that stands firm and wise. At a press conference in Jerusalem late on Monday, he acknowledged that he and ?Trump have sometimes had their differences."He is the president of the United States, I am the prime minister of Israel. We many times see eye-to-eye and there are times when we see eye-to-eye less so. I am in charge of Israel's security interests," Netanyahu said.Netanyahu, facing autumn elections he is projected to lose, may be more willing to defy Trump as he contends with an Israeli public that opinion polls show has grown sceptical of the U.S. president’s commitment to Israel’s security."This is a pretty stark moment of divergence of interests," said Dan

memorandum was a "very general document." Details would be released over the next two days, U.S. officials said.

Vance said it included "a very significant sanctions relief package" for Iran. He later told Fox News that Trump may decide to release the agreement before Friday.Both sides still face pressures following a conflict that killed at least ?7,000 people, mostly in Iran and Lebanon, and upended global energy markets.The accord exposes Trump to criticism from within his own party, while Iran’s leaders could face the risk of renewed protests if they fail to alleviate economic pressures after a destructive ?war

U.S. and Iranian officials say it could eventually deliver substantial economic benefits to Iran by lifting sanctions and unfreezing foreign assets. It could also set up a \$300 billion reconstruction fund, paid for by neighbouring Gulf states that host U.S. military bases and were hit ?by Iranian attacks ?during the war.U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Iran would have to satisfy U.S. demands never to build a nuclear weapon and cut off support for militias like Hezbollah in Lebanon in order to get those benefits.Iranian officials, who have always denied intending to build a nuclear weapon, say they have given up little by agreeing to resume diplomatic discussions over Iran’s uranium enrichment programme that were interrupted by the war.CAUTION OVER SHIPPINGWhile the latest agreement could lift Iran’s chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, which normally carries about one-fifth of the world’s trade in oil and liquefied natural gas, shippers say a return to normal traffic could take weeks.One concern is the possible presence of mines in the narrow waterway ?between Iran and Oman. A thorough minesweeping operation would “take weeks ?to months”, an official with Greek maritime security company ?Diaplos told Reuters on Tuesday.

Iran has suggested it will retain control with Oman over the strait. The U.S. said the strait will be open toll-free for 60 days and it would expect that provision to be part of a final agreement.Trump said in a Truth Social post that ships loaded with oil were starting to move out of the strait, “going ?along the Southern ‘Highway’”.

Reuters reported that the U.S. military had been overseeing scores of secretive ship-to-ship oil transfers to keep Gulf energy exports flowing.The conflict between U.S. ?ally Israel and the Iran-allied ?Hezbollah militia in Lebanon, which has uprooted 1.2 million people, remains another complication.Iran has said the deal requires a full cessation of hostilities there, but Netanyahu said Israel would keep its forces in southern Lebanon and retain the right to respond to Hezbollah attacks."Iran wanted us to withdraw from it, but I stood firm," he said on Monday. Trump said on Tuesday he was "not happy" with the way Israel had handled itself in Lebanon as he was trying to reach a deal with Iran.

Shapiro, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel under the ?Obama administration, now with the Atlantic Council think tank."He will try to not openly oppose (the deal), so as not to get into a brawl with Trump," said Shapiro. "But he will indicate Israel is not bound by it, and Israel reserves its rights."

Item 1 of 3 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds a news conference, following a U.S.-Iran deal, in Jerusalem, June 15, 2026. REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun/Pool[1/3]Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds news conference, following a U.S.-Iran deal, in Jerusalem, /Ronen Zvulun/Pool Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tabThe memorandum of understanding between the U.S. and Iran is expected to be signed on Friday in Switzerland. While precise terms were not immediately known, mediator Pakistan said the pact called for a permanent halt to military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon.Netanyahu ?said that Israel ?would keep its forces in southern Lebanon and maintain ‘freedom of action’ against Hezbollah attacks.

"Iran wanted us to withdraw from it but I stood firm," he told reporters. "We are keeping our freedom of action and we are keeping the security zone to protect (Israel's) northern citizens," he said.The interim deal would reopen the Strait of Hormuz oil chokepoint while leaving the fate of Tehran’s nuclear programme to be resolved during a 60-day negotiation period towards a final deal.Two other issues that Netanyahu and Trump had both declared as justifications for the war at its outset - curbing Iran’s missile programme and ending its support for regional armed groups - are not thought to be on the agenda during those talks.

Three Israeli officials said Israel sees it as very likely the 60-day pact will be extended to 90 days, with the U.S. ?maintaining its deployment of military assets in the region as it ?negotiates a broader deal.Two other Israeli officials said that Israel ?was caught by surprise last week when Trump first said that a deal with Iran was close. They acknowledged that Israel has had little success in influencing the talks.All of the officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to speak publicly.

NETANYAHU UNABLE TO SELL THIS AGREEMENT TO ISRAELI PUBLIC', ANALYST SAYSNetanyahu, who often clashed with Washington over the administrations of Democrats Barack Obama ?and Joe Biden, has long portrayed himself to the Israeli public as being uniquely adept in dealing with the Republican Trump.

During Trump’s first term, Israel secured major policy changes from Washington, which ?moved its embassy to Jerusalem and ?backed the Abraham Accords that brought Israel formal diplomatic ties with the UAE and Bahrain. On Iran, Trump ditched a nuclear agreement negotiated under Obama that Israel had long complained was too soft.During elections in 2019, Netanyahu displayed massive campaign billboards in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem showing him and Trump smiling and shaking hands.But now, the U.S.-Iran pact undermines Netanyahu’s case that a close relationship with Trump sets him apart from other candidates for prime minister, said Jonathan Rynhold, a political scientist at Bar-Ilan University, near Tel Aviv. "(Netanyahu) will be unable to sell this agreement ?to the Israeli ?public," Rynhold said.

"The best that he can hope for is that they fail to reach an agreement and the war restarts to Israel's advantage in 60 ?days."According to a poll released on Friday by the Israel Democracy Institute, just 41% of Jewish Israelis think their security is a central consideration for Trump, down from 64% in March.

EYE SECRETS
Editorial

Telangana's future lies in the hands of its youth

After the formation of Telangana State, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi government under the leadership of K Chandrashekar Rao left a distinct mark in several sectors. Particularly in farmer welfare, irrigation projects, rural development, and welfare schemes, Telangana emerged as a model State at the national level. Schemes such as Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bima, Kalyana Lakshmi, and Dalit Bandhu influenced the lives of ordinary people in many ways. Mission Bhagiratha provided drinking water to villages, while major projects like Kaleshwaram, the creation of new districts, and village development programmes brought a new administrative direction to the State. At the same time, government recruitments, TSPSC notifications, police appointments, and the expansion of Gurukul institutions generated hope among the youth. However, delays in recruitment processes, examination controversies, and the frustration of unemployed youth also became major topics of public discussion. Therefore, Telangana's development journey must be viewed as a unique socio-political phase where achievements and criticisms co-exist. When Telangana was formed, people did not fight merely for a geographical boundary. They fought for jobs for their children, respect for their language, and rights over their own land. The movement carried the aspirations of students, the tears of farmers, and the hopes of the unemployed. Have all those aspirations been fulfilled? Or is the journey still incomplete? This question has once again come before society. In recent times, the issue of employment has once again become a major topic of discussion in Telangana. While the government claims that large-scale recruitment has been undertaken, unemployed youth say that "a job is not merely a notification... it is the future of a family." Present-day Telangana stands between these two emotions. Governments may change. Slogans may change. But the clock of a young man preparing for employment never changes. Coaching centres in the morning, libraries in the afternoon, and hope at night — this has become the daily routine of thousands of families. During the Telangana movement, the slogan "Water, Funds, and Jobs" was not merely a political slogan; it was a social promise. That is why the issue of employment in Telangana is always deeply emotional. In this context, the recently announced employment statistics in the State have triggered debate. While the government says that lakhs of employment opportunities have been created, unemployed associations continue to question the number of unfilled vacancies. In reality, both arguments contain some truth. Recruitment processes are moving forward, but due to population growth, increasing educational qualifications, and instability in the private sector, the demand for employment has grown even further. The Telangana movement may have become part of history, but the State's future is still being shaped by its people. Fulfilling the aspirations of unemployed youth will determine whether the movement's promise is truly realised. A new trend is now visible in Telangana. Instead of depending only on government jobs, many young people are trying to learn skills and explore opportunities in emerging sectors. Technology, artificial intelligence, digital services, and rural entrepreneurship are opening new avenues. But for these opportunities to reach everyone, major reforms are needed not only in government policy but also in the education system. A job is not merely a salary. It is the dignity of a family. It is the result of a father's struggle. It is the value of a mother's sacrifices. It is the hope of a village.

Maharashtra cop dies by suicide after colleague rejects marriage proposal



A 26-year-old police constable with the Maharashtra State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) posted at the governor's official residence died by suicide on Monday night after his colleague allegedly rejected his marriage proposal, a police probe has found.

A 26-year-old police constable with the Maharashtra State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) posted at the governor's official residence died by suicide on Monday night after his colleague allegedly rejected his marriage proposal, a police probe has found. The woman had also lodged a complaint with the local police station saying the constable, Kautubh Sangle, who hails from Nashik, had been threatening suicide if she did not agree to marry him.

Sangle, posted with the State Reserve Police Force Group 16 Kolhapur, allegedly died by suicide around 8.30 pm while he was on guard duty at Lok Bhavan, the governor's official residence. While he did not leave behind any suicide note, the police probe revealed that Sangle had been persuading the woman, who got into the force a year before him, to marry him. "He was interested in the woman and wanted to marry her. But she did not want to marry him and had told him about it. Recently, Sangle came to know that her family had fixed her marriage, and he became angry," an officer at the Malabar Hill police station said. The police said that the man had shared photographs of the woman constable and him with her fiancé to discourage him from marrying her. The police have filed an accidental death report. The police found that Sangle's father had remarried after his wife's death and was not in contact with the family.

After crackdown, U-turn: Maharashtra to legalise bike taxis from Aug 1, domicile must for drivers



Maharashtra will legalise app-based bike taxi services from August 1 under a new regulatory framework that requires drivers to possess a Maharashtra domicile certificate and operate through registered aggregators, Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik told The Indian Express on Tuesday. Maharashtra will legalise app-based bike taxi services from August 1 under a new regulatory framework that requires drivers to possess a Maharashtra domicile certificate and operate through registered aggregators, Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik told The Indian Express on Tuesday. In a departure from its earlier attempts to curb app-based bike taxi operations, the Maharashtra government will begin issuing permits for such services from August 1 under a new regulatory framework that will require drivers to possess a Maharashtra domicile certificate, fulfil prescribed eligibility conditions and operate through registered aggregators, Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik told The Indian Express on Tuesday.

The move seeks to regularise app-based bike taxi services that have so far operated without a legal framework in the state. Replying to a discussion in the Legislative Assembly, Sarnaik said around 4 lakh to 4.5 lakh app-based bike taxis are currently operating in Maharashtra without valid permission. The issue was raised by Shiv Sena MLA Dilip Lande. "The government is not receiving any revenue from these services. We have now formulated a new policy to bring them under a regulatory framework," Sarnaik said in the House. Speaking to

The Indian Express, the minister said, "We are planning to make bike taxis legal from August 1 through a proper aggregator framework. Every bike taxi will operate through an app where services can be monitored. The objective is to regulate the sector rather than allow unregulated operations." Under the proposed framework, aggregators will be required to pay Rs 5 per ride to the state government and contribute 2 per cent of the fare towards a welfare fund to be administered by the State Transport Authority. "The welfare fund will be used for the benefit of drivers associated with bike taxis as well as four-wheeler aggregator platforms. We want those working through aggregators to receive welfare benefits and social security," Sarnaik told this newspaper. The minister said permits will be issued only to applicants holding a Maharashtra domicile certificate. Drivers will also have to fulfil all prescribed conditions, including obtaining the necessary licence, a government-issued badge and meeting other eligibility requirements before they are permitted to operate. Explaining the domicile requirement, Sarnaik told The Indian Express, "The domicile certificate is necessary so that we know how long a person has been in Maharashtra and whether he possesses knowledge of Marathi." He said the policy is also aimed at generating employment opportunities for local youth. The announcement marks a departure from the state's recent approach to bike taxis. Last year, Maharashtra notified rules permitting only electric bike taxis and subsequently launched enforcement drives against app-based aggregators such as Rapido, Ola and Uber, alleging they were operating unauthorised petrol-powered bike taxi services. Sarnaik said that because the aggregators operated through common app platforms across the country, enforcement posed technical challenges despite continued action by the Transport Department. According to information tabled in the Assembly, authorities collected fines totalling Rs 16.25 lakh against illegal bike taxi operations between April 2025 and March 2026, while another Rs 2.31 lakh was collected during April and May 2026. During the period, around 1,000 vehicles were found operating illegally, although criminal cases were registered against only 14 drivers. Despite the enforcement action, app-based bike taxi services continued to operate across several parts of Maharashtra.

Why the Ram Temple probe pinned ‘lapses’ on ex-trustee Anil Mishra



The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged theft of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has raised questions over the role of former trustee Anil Mishra, holding him responsible for negligence and lack of supervision in the counting process. In its nine-page preliminary report, the SIT said Mishra was also involved in recommending the appointment of six of the eight accused later named in the FIR and arrested.

On Monday, in its first meeting since the allegations surfaced, the Trust announced a sweeping organisational overhaul, including leadership changes and the creation of a new chief executive officer (CEO) post. The Trust also accepted the resignations of Rai and Mishra, and appointed senior RSS functionary and retired Indian Forest Service (IfoS) officer Krishna Mohan as interim General Secretary. Sources said a majority of the trustees in the meeting had opposed Rai's resignation. Trust Treasurer, Govind Giri, also said Rai cannot be held responsible for the negligence and the lapse in supervision. The report flagged Mishra's role with regard to the arrangement governing the counting process of donations. It said a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was executed between the Trust and the State Bank of India, prescribing a procedure for opening donation boxes, separating cash and coins, classifying valuable items, counting the currency, and depositing it in the bank in the joint presence of authorised representatives of the Trust and the Bank. It

said that on September 20, 2024, and February 6, 2025, Minutes of Meeting/Standard Operating Procedure (MoM/ SOP) were prepared between the Trust and the Bank, which were signed by then SBI Branch Manager, Ayodhya, Govind Mishra, and Anil Mishra. These documents, the report noted, clearly show that potential weaknesses and risks had been identified in advance and security measures prescribed to prevent them. According to the SIT report, the February 2025 SOP stated that the responsibility for maintaining transparency and authenticity of the counting process would rest with the Trust. The investigation, however, found that these security measures were not implemented — a deliberate act of negligence that created circumstances for theft/misappropriation, the SIT report has stated. It said Mishra, who represented the Trust while framing both the September 2024 arrangement and the February 2025 SOP with the bank, was expected to ensure that safeguards were enforced. The report noted that little evidence of sustained oversight, regular review, or effective supervision was found. Role of accused Among the eight arrested is Rai's former driver Ram Shankar Yadav alias Tinnu Yadav. The others are Avinash Shukla, Lavkush Mishra, Anukalp Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey, Ramashankar Mishra, and Subhash Srivastav. Srivastav, a retired bank employee, was the counting in-charge and officer supervising the opening of the boxes while the other six were involved in counting work. The SIT placed particular responsibility on Srivastava, noting that the alleged thefts occurred inside the counting room and that the failure to ensure regular frisking of staff was a critical lapse. It also found that Tinnu retained custody of keys to hundi across the temple complex without formal authorisation and had recommended his relative, Manish Kumar Yadav, for counting duty, thereby granting him access to the process where the alleged misappropriation took place. The report further flagged lapses by bank officials, noting that counting staff were not provided with prescribed attire and that oversight remained weak despite the presence of bank representatives. The mandated monthly rotation of bank officials overseeing the process was also not implemented.

70 ‘thefts’ in 45 days: SIT’s key finding in Ram Temple donation probe

70 incidents of thefts identified in 45 days, frisking protocol ignored, counting lapses found: In its nine-page preliminary report, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing alleged donation theft at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has flagged a series of systemic failures in supervision, CCTV monitoring, and cash-counting procedures. The SIT found that several personnel involved in the counting process failed to comply with prescribed security protocols. It flagged serious supervisory failures that, it said, created conditions conducive to the alleged criminal acts.

The probe team raised serious concerns over individuals controlling the keys of donation boxes or managing access-related arrangements without any clear written authorisation, including accused Ramshankar Yadav alias Tinnu, who is known to be close to Champat Rai, who resigned as general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra. The report also held accused Subhash Srivastava, the counting in-charge and officer supervising the opening of the boxes arrested in the case, responsible for permitting this informal arrangement to continue. 2. CCTV gaps The report identified major weaknesses in CCTV surveillance and record retention. While cameras were installed in the counting room, Trust personnel allegedly failed to monitor live footage effectively. Recordings were preserved for only 45 days — from April 27 to June 6 — despite earlier audit recommendations that footage be retained for 180 days. During this limited period, investigators identified 70 instances of alleged theft or embezzlement. The SIT said the alleged

pilferage may have begun even before April 27, but the absence of earlier footage made it impossible to establish the extent of any prior theft. Available footage, it said, repeatedly showed some employees engaged in counting concealing bundles of currency notes and loose cash inside their clothes, pockets, shoes, or other hidden locations. In several instances, other employees appeared to assist or provide cover, the report noted. The SIT also pointed to poor oversight, noting that these lapses continued despite representatives of both the Trust and the bank being present during the counting exercise. It also raised concerns over changes to frisking norms. Under an arrangement introduced in September 2024, all personnel entering or exiting the counting room were subject to security checks. However, a Standard Operating Procedure issued on February 6, 2025, diluted this requirement, allowing checks only at regular intervals or on a random basis. The SIT said the circumstances in which the rule was changed warranted closer examination, especially since even these limited checks were allegedly not carried out. It said ex-trustee Anil Mishra, who represented the Trust while framing both the September 2024 arrangement and the February 2025 SOP with the bank, was expected to ensure that safeguards were enforced. The report noted that little evidence of sustained oversight, regular review, or effective supervision was found. 5. Counting process flawed The SIT also found widespread violations of prescribed procedures for handling cash and valuables across all three modes of offerings (hundis, counters, sanctum), including poor documentation, mixing of offerings, and weak chain-of-custody controls.

‘Retire in an ashram’: Cockroach Janata Party chief takes jibe at Anna Hazare



Cockroach Janta Party founder-president Abhijeet Dipke on Tuesday took a jibe at social activist Anna Hazare, saying that "those whose time has passed" should retire from socio-political life and rest in an ashram. "Those whose time has passed should not make any decisions regarding the future of students and youth. They should now retire from socio-political life and go stay in an ashram," Dipke said, speaking to reporters in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar.

Dipke's remark came when he was asked if he planned to meet Hazare, who has extended support to the Cockroach Janta Party movement. Dipke said he would not meet Hazare or anyone else. Emphasising that the youth will decide their future course of action, Dipke said, "People who are over 50 to 60 years of age should now voluntarily retire from all social and political movements. This question is directly related to the future of the youth and students of the country. Therefore, let us—the youth—decide what we want to do and how to shape our future. Those elderly people who have already achieved everything should retire and rest in an ashram. They should not needlessly make decisions regarding the future of the youth." Surprising statement: Anna Hazare associate

Hazare's associates at his Ralegan Siddhi office expressed surprise at Dipke's remarks. "Anna had expressed support to Dipke when he had launched his party. Anna firmly believes that the youth should come forward and raise their voice. Dipke's statement is surprising," an associate said. "Dipke is not so big to respond to what he says. Anna will not respond. Activists in Ralegan Siddhi will respond," the associate added. Hazare was in the news last week after the Devendra Fadnis government in Maharashtra backed down from its plan to amend the Right to Information (RTI) rules. Hazare had threatened to launch a hunger strike from Sunday, prompting the government to stay the proposal.

‘Survived training, lost to unsafe road’: Sister of commando killed in Himachal



Amit died after his car reportedly skidded off the Khundian-Lagdu Road in the Jawalamukhi area of Kangra district on June 2 and plunged nearly 500 feet into a gorge.

Amit Singh Rana Himachal commando Amit Singh Rana was awarded the prestigious Shaurya Chakra in 2019 for displaying exceptional courage during counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

More than a month after 32-year-old Shaurya Chakra awardee and elite Marine Commando (MARCOS) Amit Singh Rana was killed in a road accident in Himachal Pradesh, his family on Tuesday urged the government to strengthen counter safety measures on all vulnerable hilly roads across the state. Amit died after his car reportedly skidded off the Khundian-Lagdu Road in the Jawalamukhi area of Kangra district on June 2 and plunged nearly 500 feet into a gorge. "A soldier who survived the toughest military training and dangerous operations should not lose his life because of an unsafe road," his elder sister, Pankaj, said in an email to Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Chief Secretary Kamlesh Kumar Pant and Public Works Department officials, adding that if proper crash barriers and road safety measures had been in place, her brother's life may have been saved.

Talking to The Indian Express, Pankaj said, "I urged the Himachal CM and others to look into this grave matter. The condition of roads, especially of link roads and in rural areas, is not up to the mark. The Khundian-Lagdu Road is one such road. We are not blaming anyone, but we lost a young soldier and a family member. We don't want this to happen to anyone else."

Amit was the only son of retired Armyman Kewal Singh Rana. He is survived by his parents, wife, three-year-old son, and two sisters. In her letter, Pankaj wrote that while her brother had completed one of the world's toughest military training programmes and survived dangerous counter-terrorism operations, it was heartbreaking that he lost his life on an unsafe road. No other vehicle on road at the time: Initial probe Kangra Deputy Commissioner Hemraj Bairwa said the Khundian-Lagdu Road is an internal village link road and assured that the administration would address the family's concerns. Meanwhile, a police officer at Khundian police station said a First Information Report (FIR) was registered in connection with the accident. "The exact cause is yet to be ascertained. Prima facie, there was no other vehicle on the road when the accident took place. The FIR was registered against the car driver, Amit Singh Rana. The stretch where the accident occurred was relatively plain, and the investigation is continuing," the officer said. Rana was awarded the prestigious Shaurya Chakra for displaying exceptional courage during counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Police crackdown on a syndicate-run cyber frauds in Morigaon



The district acquired notoriety during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown period in 2020 and 2021 when a group of youth working in other states returned home after losing their jobs. They apparently ganged up to create a syndicate to carry out cyber fraud. According to a senior police officer, who asked not to be named, a few of the youth who returned had lived in certain areas of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh where the police busted cybercrime hubs; during their stay in those states, the youth from Morigaon picked up tricks of the online fraud trade.

Investigation into Morigaon's links to online frauds started in early 2023 when police found – after tracking the crimes – that many cases were linked to the district."Over 20 cases were registered in Assam itself, cases were also registered in different parts of the country. In all the cases, cyber security experts of the police department found that the fraudulent activities were being operated from Morigaon's Moirabari Laharighat and Bhuragaon areas," the investigating police officer quoted above said. The distance between Moirabari and Bhuragaon is around 21 kilometres, and Laharighat is located at a distance of around 10 kilometres from both locations. Police said that the youth were operating from small shops, rooftops and neighbourhood computer centres.

Modus operandi A farmer from Morigaon's Laharighat (on the condition of anonymity) said that he had applied for a bank loan in 2021, which was not approved. In 2023 when he again tried for a loan, the bank said that his Cibil Score — a summary of an individual's credit history — was low because he didn't repay some amounts. "They said, I took small loans multiple times but I had no idea about those loans," he said. Similarly, a businessman from Moirabari said that he received a call from a bank one day and was told that there were over 20 loans by his name. "I immediately called the police and they registered a case of cyber fraud. The officials said fake documents were used," he said. According to the additional superintendent of police (crime), Morigaon district, Samiran Baishya, the fraudsters collected details of an individual's Aadhar, PAN and bank accounts from various online applications. "They used multiple ways to carry out fraudulent activities. What was common was forging documents to open bank accounts. Over 1000 such accounts were opened, mostly in the private banks," Baishya said. Loans were also issued from private finance companies. "Most of these companies are operating from Mumbai and other cities. They compete among themselves and sometimes issue loans easily on the basis of documents without physical verification. The fraudsters used this as an opportunity," he said. The amount of loans these fraudsters asked for between ₹10,000 and ₹22,00,000. "Though the amount of each loan was small, the number of loans was large and the total amount crossed ₹15 crore in the last few years," Baishya added. The process of forging documents The youth involved in these crimes were well-trained and created a syndicate across the Morigaon district and involved people with relevant skills in their team. They created forged PAN cards by using editing applications like PAN Creator, which can be found on the Google PlayStore, police said. "Their first step was to collect authentic Aadhar cards and PAN cards from different sources. Next was to mix the details with each other. They created the PAN card number of one person with the name of another person and a picture of someone else," Baishya said. After

Award-winning farmer from Vidarbha dies by suicide

NAGPUR: A farmer from western Vidarbha, honoured by the state for his contribution to agriculture, died by suicide on Thursday, his suicide note focusing on the lack of adequate irrigation in this drought-prone region. Kailash Nagre, 43, a recipient of Maharashtra's prestigious Adarsha Yuva Shetkari Puruskar (Ideal Young Farmer Award) in 2020, consumed poison and died in his fields in Shivni Armal village in Buldhana district on Thursday morning. At the forefront of protests demanding water for local farmland, Nagre left a three-page suicide note, which expressed his anguish over the lack of adequate irrigation in the region. In his note, he appealed to the chief minister and other people's representatives to ensure that the issue is addressed with utmost urgency. Nagre also said he was burdened by debt wrought by crop failure due to a water shortage. "I was unable to manage the house, the farm, court cases, education of my children, and keep them happy," he wrote. Nagre is survived by a wife and three children. A pall of gloom has descended over Shivni Armal village. A farmer leader has called Nagre's death a "murder by the state", while the opposition Congress has also held the BJP-led Mahayuti government responsible. His death has also brought to the fore numerous other challenges faced by farmers in a region in the throes of an agrarian crisis, and where farmers burdened by debt have been consistently dying by suicide. Nagre's death triggered outrage among local farmers, who initially refused to allow the police to take his

creating fake PAN cards, they would create Aadhar cards with the help of local youth allegedly working for the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), the agency which issues the identification cards. After creating these documents, they opened accounts in private banks and finance companies. Members of the syndicate would arrange mobile SIM cards using the forged documents. After linking the mobile numbers with the bank accounts, they would start calling the banks and finance companies for loans. They were provided loans without physical verification because that's a commonly followed practice for private finance companies. Once the loan was extracted, the gang members would destroy the SIM card, leaving no trace because the address and identity of the beneficiary were fake. Police investigation

The Inspector General of Police (IGP) (Law and Order) Assam, Prasanta Kumar Bhuiyan said that after receiving multiple complaints, they created a special team to investigate the matter. Young officers with technological knowledge were included in the team. "The cybercriminals are young and tech-savvy. We needed to create police teams with personnel who were equally tech-savvy and who could outsmart the criminals. By using geo-tracking technology, we found that almost all the accounts were created in Morigaon," he said.

The team studied the psychology of cybercriminals and attempted to predict their plans, in an effort to stay a step ahead of them. "We tried to understand them, their psychology, background and the style of operations," he said. "They (the suspects) were inspired by cybercriminals from other states. After understanding their psychology, we started tracking them and looked at each case separately to find where it started. We tracked all the points, from their source of creating fake documents, to getting loans, to destroying the evidence. This wasn't easy, it took time and effort," Bhuyian said. Subsequently, multiple raids were carried out in the district from 2023 and until May this year: Over 200 suspects have been taken into custody. Police have seized 7688 fake sim cards, over 250 PAN cards, over 100 voter ID cards, 175 mobile phones, around 20 laptops, 300 ATM cards, around 200 chequebooks and a large number of bank passbooks. The total amount of loans the fraudsters acquired in the last one and half years is ₹15,92,84,129. Police recovered cash of ₹44,51,20. Banks returned ₹19,00,000 to finance companies and froze ₹23,28,356 in different accounts, the police said. The IGP said that though some cybercriminals were arrested in other parts of the state including Guwahati, but Morigaon was the hub and most major operations were carried out from the district. "We had earlier sent a team to Jharkhand's Jamtara after Assam residents faced cyber fraud but we didn't find anyone there (to be involved) and from that point, we started closely studying this matter. The Morigaon case has similarities with (cyber fraud cases in) Jamtara," he said. Bhuiyan said that Assam police is strengthening itself to combat cybercrime and seminars and training programmes have been organised for the force. Also, special cybercrime branches have been created. According to him, public awareness could help prevent these crimes. "The victims report to us much (later) after the incidents. We keep telling people to stay away from clicking on unknown links but some people ignore these warnings," he added. According to the police, cybercriminals are known to change the way they operate. After the loan sector, they are now targeting credit cards and pension funds."

body for a post-mortem examination, demanding concrete assurances from the authorities. Sub-Divisional Magistrate Sanjay Khadse intervened, assuring the villagers and Nagre's family that the district administration would escalate the issue with the government. The last rites were eventually performed at Nagre's his farm on Thursday evening. Farmers in Nagre's village and 13 neighbouring villages have been protesting the government's failure to release water from the Khadakpurna dam, a key resource for agriculture in the area. Nagre was at the forefront of the protests, staging a seven-day hunger strike last December. He had recently been working towards securing water from the Khadakpurna reservoir, following government assurances. However, as months passed without any action, he became increasingly distressed. Unable to harvest his six-acre farm due to water scarcity, Nagre died by suicide. The opposition said it is a matter of shame for the state government that a farmer should have died by suicide due to water shortage. Targeting chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, state Congress chief Harshawardhan Sapkal said that while the government is issuing gag orders, it is ignoring basic problems faced by the people, and also attempting to cause divisions between communities. Farmer leader Ravikant Tupkar, who also hails from Buldhana, accusing the district administration, said Nagre's was not a death by suicide but a "murder committed by the government". "The government is not doing anything for the farmers."

Air pollution worsens in Indian cities during summer

PM2.5 levels - fine particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 microns or smaller, which can penetrate deep into the lungs and even enter the bloodstream, posing serious health risks such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases - increased across 154 cities this summer compared to the summer of 2023. Conversely, 88 cities saw a decrease in PM2.5 levels, and 27 cities either did not have monitoring systems installed or recorded no data last summer.

Additionally, the PM2.5 average in 35 cities exceeded the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) limit of 60 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). The analysis, conducted between April and June 2024 by Pune-based Respires Living Sciences (Respires), used primary data collected from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) portal to assess air quality during these summer months. "Our findings indicate a significant increase in PM2.5 levels in numerous cities this summer, challenging the perception that air pollution is only a winter concern," said Ronak Sutaria, CEO and founder, Respires. City Rankings: Assam's Bymrihat recorded worst PM2.5 levels this summer The data from Respires's analysis platform, AtlasAQ, showed that Bymrihat located near the Meghalaya-Assam border recorded the highest average PM2.5 levels at $116.35 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, falling into the 'poor' category, according to the CPCB. Despite being part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), Bymrihat's levels exceeded the NAAQS limit for approximately 73% of the summer days. However, it managed to decrease its summer PM2.5 levels by about 17% compared to the summer of 2023. "Bymrihat's high pollution levels highlight the growing air quality crisis in Northeast India, driven by industrial activities and inadequate pollution controls. The industrial town...has recorded high pollution levels throughout the year, and even during summer," said Sutaria.

Faridabad and Gurugram in the National Capital Region followed Bynrihat with averages of 104.88 and 95.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, respectively, both categorised as 'poor'. Faridabad experienced a substantial increase in PM2.5 levels of 94.9%, shifting from 'satisfactory' to 'poor'. "This rise is attributed to vehicular activity, construction dust, and meteorological factors prevalent in the National Capital Region," said Sutaria. The role of industrial activities combined with growing urbanisation are the main causes of high summer pollution. "Increasing pollution levels in regions like NCR highlight the need for stricter measures and consistent monitoring throughout the year," added Sutaria. "It's critical to implement and enforce policies that can mitigate these issues, especially during the summer months." Among the cleanest cities was Tirupur in Tamil Nadu, with PM2.5 levels at just 12 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. This stark contrast underscores the varying air quality conditions across different regions of India. The NCAP, launched in 2019, is a long-term, time-bound strategy targeting a 20-30% reduction in pollution levels by 2035.



duction in PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ levels by 2024, using 2017 as the base year. Extended to 2026 with a 40% reduction goal, NCAP focuses on 131 non-attainment cities, those that have consistently failed to meet the NAAQS, and implements city-specific action plans.

Out of the 131 NCAP cities, data was available for 100 cities on the CPCB's website, the RespiR analyst said. Among these, 59 cities or 45% showed an increase in PM2.5 levels, while 31 showed a decrease compared to the previous summer. Monitoring stations were unavailable for the remaining cities in the previous year. "After completing 5 years of NCAP, the limited monitoring coverage of just 75% of NCAP cities having reliable and comparable long-term monitoring data also reflects the fact that the existing monitoring network is not adequate. Alternate scientifically validated and scalable solutions need to be adopted to get an urgent and immediate understanding of the scale and magnitude of the challenge affecting us every day," said Sutaria. Delhi, ranked 13th overall and 6th among NCAP cities with a PM2.5 value of 79.25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, saw an increase of 22.4% from last summer. These findings from NCAP cities reveal that despite ongoing efforts, air quality is still deteriorating in many regions. Separate investigations need to be part of city action plans to identify and address the dominant pollution sources in each city," added Sutaria. Troubling trend for multiple pollutants across diverse regions during summer In addition to PM2.5, RespiR monitored several other pollutants, including particulate matter (PM10 - larger coarse particles of 10-micron size), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), sulphur dioxide (SO2), carbon monoxide (CO), and ozone across cities. The findings reveal troubling trends that extend beyond particulate matter. For instance, Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan recorded the highest PM10 levels, increasing by 21% from the previous year to 298 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, making it the most polluted city in terms of PM10 this summer.

The price of pet care in Hyderabad

On a sweltering March afternoon, as Hyderabad's streets lie still under the oppressive heat, one narrow lane in Hari Vihar Colony, Bhawani Nagar, hums with quiet urgency. Scooters weave through, autorickshaws sputter to a stop and cars inch forward, as people step out with crates, leashes and baskets, each carrying a life in need of care. Their destination: the Government Super Speciality Veterinary Hospital in Narayanguda, a sanctuary in a city where pet healthcare is often an expensive privilege. Beyond its rusting gate and weathered facade, the hospital pulses with activity. A bright new display board at the entrance, bearing the hospital's name along with a private sponsor's logo, suggests recent efforts to refresh its image. Dogs whimper, cats peer warily from their carriers, rabbits twitch their noses and a few goats shuffle on leashes.

In the crowded waiting area, 28-year-old Abdul Bashir from Falaknuma clutches a picnic basket, his last surviving cat nestled inside. "Until a year ago, I had three," he says. "One died soon after I got it. Another fell sick, and despite numerous treatments at a private clinic, I couldn't save her. Now, this is the only one left. I bring her here regularly, even though it is far from my home. It has been six months, and I trust this place." For pet parents like Bashir, the government-run facility is more than a hospital; it is a lifeline in a city where private veterinary clinics charge exorbitantly. This centre offers consultations for just ₹50, with most treatments and services provided free of cost. The long queue stretching outside under the relentless sun is proof of its value and the role it plays in Hyderabad's pet care landscape. Harshavardhan, 33, has travelled from Begumpet to the hospital, his Golden Retriever trotting beside him for a routine check-up. Gently guiding the dog into the back of his car after the visit, he reflects on the experience: "I have been to both private clinics and government centres, and I would choose the latter any day. The doctors here aren't working for money; they genuinely care about the pets. The only reason people like me sometimes opt for private clinics is because many of them offer 24x7 services. That is something government hospitals still lack." Just across the road from the hospital is a private pharmacy buzzing with pet parents making a stop before heading home. Among them is Kavita, her fluffy Chow Chow dog standing obediently by her side. "Some medicines are available in the hospital and are given after the doctor's consultation. But for the ones they don't have, we have to come here to buy them," she explains.

For many, this extra stop is but a small inconvenience compared to the steep costs of private veterinary care. A basic consultation at a private clinic range between 500 and 1,500, while government hospitals charge just 50 to 7100. Diagnostic procedures such as X-rays and blood tests can set pet parents back by 2,000 to 5,000 at private centres, but at government facilities, they cost as little as 200 to 7500.

The salary for a Veterinary Assistant Surgeon (local cadre, Class A) at a government facility ranges from 54,220 to 1,33,630. In contrast, private veterinarians charge around 1,000 per home visit, while teleconsultations start at 199 and go up to 499. The same pricing applies to in-person consultations as well. But financial concerns aren't the only challenge. Hyderabad's climate brings its own set of worries. Sunaina, 22, says her British Bulldog, still behind on vaccinations, was particularly vulnerable during the monsoon. She had to potty-train him indoors, making sure he never stepped into puddles, and if he did, clean his paws thoroughly. "I also check for ticks every two to three days," she adds. Winters, however, were the hardest. Bulldogs, with their short snouts, are prone to respiratory issues, and the cold made

breathing even more difficult for Sunaina's pet. To ease his discomfort, she relied on a nebuliser and bundled him in sweaters to keep him warm. Like many pet parents, Sunaina has realised that quality care often comes with a hefty price tag. While she was satisfied with her dog's treatment, she acknowledges that only a handful of hospitals in Hyderabad offer specialised procedures. The financial strain of pet care is something many pet parents grapple with, given the high consultation fees and inflated treatment costs at private clinics. "With more people having pets, there is an urgent need for more veterinary facilities across the city to meet the growing demand," she says. When it came to choosing a veterinary hospital, Sunaina admits she has never visited a government facility. Her experience with private clinics had been positive. Although expensive, she feels the quality of care justifies the cost. "From a pet parent's perspective, it seems pricey, but from a service provider's viewpoint, the charges make sense," she reasons. Still, she hopes prices would eventually become more affordable as and when more veterinary hospitals open. But the challenges of pet healthcare in Hyderabad run deeper than just cost. A veterinary healthcare expert, requesting anonymity, points to systemic issues that extend beyond affordability. The industry, he explains, suffers from weak regulation and compliance, especially compared to human healthcare. "Unlike human medicines, where procurement is streamlined and strictly regulated, veterinary drugs often enter the market through unclear distribution channels. Many international brands supply medicines without proper sourcing transparency, and some of these products may not even officially enter India through standard regulatory pathways," he says. The pricing structure at private veterinary clinics also raises concerns. "For example, a simple fluid therapy session shouldn't cost more than ₹100 for administration, with fluids available for ₹30 to ₹40 at any medical shop. The butterfly catheter and fixation materials add another ₹50 at the most. Yet, private clinics charge ₹500 or more just for administration. Pet parents, caught in the urgency of treatment, have little choice but to accept these inflated costs," he explains. Beyond procedures, medication pricing is another murky area. Veterinary pharmacies often stock medicines at 50-60% below their printed MRP, but pet parents are charged the full amount. "A box of amoxicillin injections, marked at ₹160-₹200, is typically procured by clinics for ₹80-₹100. But with no auditing or oversight, pricing remains unchecked," he adds. The disparity in veterinary expertise is another issue. While qualified veterinary doctors (BVSc and MVSc) undergo rigorous training comparable to MBBS graduates, the industry is also crowded with diploma holders and underqualified practitioners. "There are only a handful of truly respected veterinarians while the rest operate largely as businesses," he says. Financial pressures further shape how these private hospitals function. Clinics in upscale areas pay rents as high as ₹2-3 lakh per month, making profitability the driving factor. "Many rely on two or three compounders, running the clinic like a business that must break even within a year," he points out. Another concern is the cost of diagnostics. With Hyderabad having limited veterinary diagnostic centres, many pet clinics turn to human diagnostic facilities for advanced tests like CT scans and MRIs. "A human MRI might cost ₹3,000-₹4,000, but for an animal, the same is billed at ₹30,000-₹50,000. The referring clinic often takes a cut, making veterinary bills even more inflated," the expert notes. Looking ahead, he expresses apprehensions over the introduction of pet insurance in India. "With a lack of regulation in veterinary healthcare, how will pet insurance be monitored? When there are no audits, no standardised pricing, and no implementation of best practices, insurance could easily become another avenue for unchecked costs rather than a relief for pet parents," he warns.

Can a lab-grown placenta protect unborn babies? Top scientists have built one to find out



For decades, doctors have had to prescribe medicines during pregnancy with surprisingly little evidence about whether many of them reach the developing foetus via the placenta, the temporary organ that connects a mother and her unborn baby. Or whether it is indeed an effective barrier against microbes and toxins. Now, researchers from Mumbai’s ICMR-National Institute for Research on Women’s Health (ICMR-NIRWoH) and the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay) have developed a placenta-on-chip that closely mimics the human placenta.

This offers scientists a new way to study how drugs, nutrients, pollutants and infectious agents pass from mother to baby. Although it remains a laboratory research tool that requires further validation, researchers believe it could accelerate the development of pregnancy-safe therapeutics and provide new insights into conditions such as gestational diabetes, foetal growth restriction and pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure that damages organs).The human-cell-based platform recreates several key structural and functional features of the placenta and could reduce dependence on animal models, which often fail to accurately replicate human pregnancy. The study was led by researchers Anshul Bhide and Sourav Mukherjee under the supervision of Professor Deepak Modi (ICMR-NIRWoH) and Professor Abhijit Majumder (IIT Bombay).

Why is a placenta model significant?

The placenta is one of the most critical organs in pregnancy. Yet it is one of the least understood. It supplies oxygen and nutrients to the foetus, removes waste products, produces hormones essential for sustaining pregnancy and acts as a selective barrier, determining what passes from the mother’s bloodstream to the developing baby. How well the placenta functions influences foetal growth, pregnancy outcomes and the safety of medicines prescribed during pregnancy.

What is a placenta-on-chip?

Despite its name, it is not an electronic computer

chip. It is a transparent plastic device containing a porous membrane on which researchers grow human placental cells alongside human endothelial cells, which line blood vessels. Together, these recreate the interface through which nutrients, hormones and other molecules are exchanged between mother and foetus.Unlike many existing placenta-on-chip systems that require sophisticated microfluidic equipment, the Mumbai team’s model is a static two-chamber platform that can be used in a standard laboratory, making it simpler, reproducible and more accessible. Explaining the concept, Anshul Bhide, from ICMR-NIRWoH, told The Indian Express: “We tried to recreate the placenta to provide researchers a more humanised platform to better understand pregnancy and improve maternal and foetal health.” The project took more than three-and-a-half years to complete, beginning during the Covid-19 pandemic, and has been built entirely using human cells.

What makes this model different?

Bhide says the team demonstrated how the device reproduces the placenta’s cellular architecture, produces the pregnancy hormone beta-human chorionic gonadotropin (B-hCG), mimics glucose transport from mother to foetus, and forms a functional barrier capable of selectively transporting molecules while reproducing several physiological functions of the human placenta. “Our device is able to mimic the human placenta at structural, cellular, hormonal and functional levels. We also recreated the process by which urea is transported back into the maternal blood.”

What did the researchers find?

After validating that the device behaved like the human placenta, the team recreated a hyperglycaemia-like condition in which maternal blood glucose levels are elevated. They found that glucose transport across the placental barrier increased under these conditions and that the placental barrier itself was altered — findings consistent with previous studies showing increased glucose transfer across the placenta during maternal hyperglycaemia. “The present study focuses on functional transport outcomes, and future investigations will be needed to understand the molecular mechanisms behind this,” Bhide said.

How could this benefit mothers and babies?

The platform’s biggest potential application lies in improving pregnancy research and making medicines safer. “During pregnancy, we often cannot prescribe medicines because we do not know whether they will cross the placental barrier. Since our device functions like the human placenta, we can now use it to study drug transport to see how much of a medicine crosses the placenta and whether it reaches the baby,” Bhide said.Beyond medicines, its major application would be drug studies but it can also be used to study the impact of pollutants and infectious diseases on placental function.

30-year-old had headache, slurred speech, lost balance: But the trigger was not stroke



A 30-year-old woman walked out of her office and got to our emergency. She complained of a terrible headache. Then she struggled to find words. Her speech became impaired and she was convinced she was having a stroke. Except she wasn’t. Instead, her blood pressure had risen to a dangerously high level, producing symptoms that closely resembled those of a stroke, something we call a hypertensive emergency.Most of us know high blood pressure as “the silent killer” because it often causes no symptoms while quietly damaging the arteries, heart, kidneys and brain. People can feel perfectly well even as years of uncontrolled hypertension slowly take their toll. Many people live for years with blood pressure of around 140/90 mmHg without experiencing a hypertensive emergency, although it still increases their long-term risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney disease and other complications if left untreated.

A hypertensive emergency is different. It typically occurs when blood pressure abruptly rises to 180/120 mmHg (normal is 120/80 mmHg) or higher and there is evidence that vital organs — such as the brain, heart, kidneys or eyes — are being damaged. Symptoms may include severe headache, confusion, difficulty speaking, chest pain, shortness of breath or vision changes.However, the numbers are only part of the story. Some people can develop symptoms at lower readings, particularly if their blood pressure rises rapidly or they have other underlying medical conditions. That is why doctors must treat the person, not just the number.If someone develops sudden stroke-like symptoms, they should seek emergency medical care immediately, even if they do not know what their blood pressure is.Someone can have a reading above 180/120 mmHg without symptoms (sometimes called severe asymptomatic hypertension), while another person may become symptomatic with a somewhat lower pressure if it rises abruptly. That’s why sudden neurological symptoms always warrant urgent assessment.The brain is often one of the first organs to protest. A person may develop a severe headache unlike any they have experienced before. Vision may blur. Confusion may set in. Speech may become slurred or difficult. Some people experience dizziness, nausea, loss of balance, chest pain or shortness of breath.Whether symptoms are caused by a stroke or a hypertensive emergency, time matters. If someone suddenly develops trouble speaking, facial drooping, arm weakness, vision changes, confusion, or a severe unexplained headache, they should seek emergency medical care immediately. It is impossible to know the cause without urgent medical assessment.

What causes blood pressure to spike?

Doctors often describe hypertension as a disease of accumulated risk. Years of elevated blood pressure gradually stiffen blood vessels, forcing the heart to work harder while increasing the likelihood of stroke, heart attack, kidney disease and vision loss.A sudden hypertensive event may be triggered by several factors. Missed medication, chronic uncontrolled hypertension, kidney disease, cer-

tain medications, acute illness and severe pain can all contribute. Stress can also play a significant role.When we experience intense emotional or physical stress, the body releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones temporarily increase heart rate and constrict blood vessels, causing blood pressure to rise. For someone already living with hypertension, that surge may be enough to push blood pressure into dangerous territory.On the morning of her hospital admission, my patient told me she had been under considerable stress. Prolonged stress, poor nutrition, certain medications and some medical conditions may contribute to lower levels of essential minerals, particularly magnesium and, in some situations, potassium. These minerals are important for healthy nerve function, muscle contraction and maintaining a normal heart rhythm. So have a balanced diet.

Maintain blood pressure consistentlyManaging blood pressure involves much more than taking medication. It means checking your blood pressure regularly, taking prescribed medication consistently, limiting excess salt, eating a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, staying physically active, maintaining a healthy weight, sleeping well, managing stress and keeping regular appointments with your healthcare provider.These may sound like ordinary habits. But they are often what prevent extraordinary emergencies.The numbers recorded on a blood pressure monitor are not just statistics. They tell us how hard the heart is working, how much strain the arteries are under, and whether vital organs — including the brain — are receiving the circulation they need. Don’t ignore the warning signs, and if symptoms suggest a stroke — even if they later prove to be something else — seek emergency medical care without delay. It could save your life.

India's first mobile 'liquid tree' developed to clean air in crowded urban spaces

Dhanbad: Researchers at the CSIR-CIMFR claimed to have developed India’s first mobile Smart Algal Liquid Tree (SALT), a compact air-purification system that uses microalgae to absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, offering a solution for polluted urban areas where planting conventional trees is difficult.

Unlike a real tree, the device houses microalgae in water inside an enclosed unit. Through photosynthesis, the algae continuously absorb CO2 from the surrounding air and release oxygen, helping improve air quality, they said.

“The primary purpose of this innovation is to combat poor air quality in densely populated and space-constrained urban areas where there is little or no room to plant large trees,” Vetrivel Anguselvi, senior principal scientist at CIMFR who led the project, told PTI on Tuesday.

The patented technology has already been installed at the CSIR-Central Institute of Mining and Fuel Research (CIMFR) campus in Dhanbad and at Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh, where it has received encouraging feedback, she said.

Besides removing carbon dioxide, the system also helps reduce dust and can operate round the clock using natural or artificial light.

‘Not even eggs’: No single food enough for children, says top nutrition panel chief



No single food — not even eggs — can be considered a nutritional silver bullet for children, according to National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) Director Bharati Kulkarni. The real priority is to ensure that school-going children consume diverse, balanced diets that provide adequate energy, protein, vitamins and minerals, rather than reducing the nutrition debate to whether one food should replace another.The message comes at a time when India is striving to eliminate hunger by 2030 while simultaneously battling a complex nutritional landscape marked by persistent undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and rising childhood obesity. In an email interview with The Indian Express, Kulkarni explains why nutrition security must go beyond food security, what an ideal school-age diet should look like, and why the quality and diversity of meals matter far more than the inclusion or exclusion of any single ingredient.

How important is balanced nutrition for children in the school-going age?

Adequate nutrition during school-going years (six to 18) is critical because this is a period of rapid physical growth, brain development, immunity building, cognitive and behavioural development. Nutrition during these years influences not only height and weight gain, but also cognitive abilities, attention span, learning outcomes and academic performance. This is also a period to lay strong foundation for long-term health.

Indian children have been grappling with stunting, wasting and underweight for long. What is the lasting solution in terms of nutrition to improve these indicators?

Childhood stunting, wasting, and underweight are multifactorial and cannot be addressed by any single food or intervention. Long-term improvement requires a life-course approach involving: Adequate maternal nutrition before and during pregnancy, early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding, appropriate complementary feeding after six months of age, age-appropriate balanced diets during childhood and adolescence. This should be teamed up with improved sanitation, hygiene, and safe drinking water, prevention and timely treatment of infections.

What is the best diet plan for school children?

Rather than focusing on a rigid single diet plan, school children should consume a balanced and diverse diet from multiple food groups.As per Dietary Guidelines for Indians, a healthy daily diet should include:

Cereals/millet and other staples for energy (~45–50% of total energy)

Pulses/legumes, dairy, eggs, fish/meat, nuts/seeds for protein (~10–15% total energy intake)

Healthy fats/oils (~20–30% of total energy intake)

Vegetables and fruits for vitamins, minerals, and fibre

Adequate water

One should avoid foods high in added sugars, fat and salt (HFSS) and also the Ultra-processed foods

School meals are usually planned to contribute meaningfully toward at least one third of daily energy, protein and other important nutrient requirements while including protective foods such as pulses, vegetables, and fruit whenever feasible.

Why is protein important for growing children?

Protein is essential for growth of muscles, bones, and tissues, production of enzymes and hormones, immune function, repair and maintenance of body tissues, brain development and neurotransmitter synthesis. Children require quality protein not only for maintenance but also for growth, therefore, making adequate intake espe-

cially important during childhood and adolescence.

NIN has consistently maintained that egg is important in a balanced diet. NIN has even said that “egg is a complete food for children.” Why?

Egg is often described as a nutrient-dense food because it provides quality protein containing several essential amino acids, vitamins such as B12, A, D, and folate and certain minerals such as iron. Because of its nutrient density, digestibility, affordability, and often convenience, egg can be a valuable component of a balanced diet for children. It is one useful option among several nutritious foods and can add to diversity of diets

Can plant protein replace eggs in a balanced diet?

Plant proteins can contribute significantly to protein needs and, when properly combined from multiple sources, can support a balanced diet. Many individual plant protein sources may have lower digestibility or relatively lower levels of certain essential amino acids. Adding diverse plant foods such as pulses or legumes to cereals in the diet helps improve protein quality. It is important to focus on the overall diet diversity rather than seeing a single food as a replacement to the other.

What are the vegetarian equivalents for eggs and in what measure should they be consumed?

It may not be appropriate to look for equivalence of nutrient quality of two different foods. Vegetarian protein sources include pulses and legumes (dal, rajma, chana, lobia); soy products (soybean, tofu); milk and dairy (milk, curd, paneer are largely accepted as vegetarian sources in our country); groundnuts, some nuts and seeds.As already mentioned, there is no exact one-to-one “replacement” because foods differ in nutrient composition and bioavailability. Instead, the emphasis should be on combining multiple protein-rich foods across the day.

Soy is considered to be an allergen and processed food. Can it really replace eggs?

Soy is a well-recognised plant protein source with relatively high protein quality compared to many other plant foods. It is important to note a few points. Soy allergy exists but affects only a small subset of individuals. Not all soy foods are highly processed; minimally processed forms such as whole soybean, tofu, and soy flour are commonly consumed. Soy allergy is caused by specific soy proteins (such as Gly m 4, Gly m 5, and Gly m 6) that may trigger immune reactions in susceptible individuals. However, clinically significant soy allergy is relatively uncommon.Processing can improve soy’s nutritional quality. Heat treatment, soaking, cooking, and fermentation help reduce allergenicity to some extent and also lower anti-nutritional factors like trypsin inhibitors, and can also improve digestibility and absorption.Soy, like other legumes, can be part of a diverse vegetarian diet including different food groups.

How easy or difficult is it to get the right measure of protein from plant protein?

It is possible but it requires proper dietary planning to achieve complementary protein combinations through diverse foods. Traditional Indian diets often demonstrate useful combinations like Khichdi, Rice + Rajma, roti and chana, idli/dosa + sambar which can improve overall protein quality.

Should eggs be included in mid-day meals?

School meals should aim to provide safe, acceptable, affordable and nutrient-dense foods that improve diet quality. ICMR-NIN recommends nutrient requirements and the Central government notifies them. Implementation of the programme is a state subject and states implement the programmes based on local considerations. As mentioned above, egg is one of the nutrient-rich options because of its high-quality protein, fatty acid and micronutrient content. At the same time, other combinations of protein-rich foods can also meet the nutritional requirements in combination with other diverse foods.

Should milk, which is prone to adulteration and dilution, be introduced if eggs are not included?

Milk is a valuable source of protein, calcium and several micronutrients, especially for growing children. The nutritional value of milk depends on quality and safety.

Serena Williams on injury that forced Wimbledon exit: ‘Photo of the syringes...’

Serena Williams, who withdrew from Wimbledon doubles with sister Venus Williams owing to a knee injury, took to Instagram to pen a detailed note and share details about the nature of the injury. “I’m heartbroken to have to withdraw from doubles. Coming back to compete again has been a gift, and the opportunity to play alongside @venuswilliams once more meant the world to me. I did everything I could to be ready, but unfortunately my knee just isn’t ready to compete. I’m especially grateful to tournament director, Jamie Baker, and the entire tournament team for giving me every opportunity to play here. Thank you to the fans for your incredible support and for making this comeback so meaningful...All I can say is stay tuned to a city near you...”She continued, “The photo of the syringes shows the fluid they drained from my knee after my singles match...yikes! The good news is my knee shouldn’t swell or collect that much fluid again. The bad news is that, as hard as I tried, I just wasn’t able to get it ready for doubles.”Dr Swapnil Zambare, consultant arthroscopy at KIMS Hospitals Thane, explained that fluid build-up in the knee, known as a knee effusion, is the body’s way of signalling that the joint needs attention. “In professional athletes, it often happens after intense physical activity or irritation of structures like the cartilage, meniscus, ligaments, or the joint lining. Swelling itself is not an injury, but it shows ongoing inflammation. A swollen knee can limit movement, reduce muscle control, cause pain, and make it hard to perform at a competitive level,” said Dr Zambare.Serena Williams synringes knee Serena Williams shares a glimpse of her knee injury (Photo: Serena Williams/Instagram)

Serena also shared a picture of syringes filled with fluid drained from her knee. Why is this procedure done?

Dr Zambare explained that the procedure, called joint aspiration, removes excess fluid from the knee. “This helps relieve pressure, reduce discomfort, and improve mobility. Sometimes, the fluid is examined to find out the cause of the swelling, such as inflammation, bleeding, or infection. However, draining the fluid does not treat the underlying injury. If the source of irritation persists, the knee can



keep swelling, especially under the demands of high-intensity sport. This is why an athlete may feel temporary relief but still be advised against competing,” said Dr Zambare.The expert noted that continuing to play with an inflamed knee can impact balance, stability, and muscle function, raising the risk of worsening the current injury or harming other structures. “In sports like tennis, where sudden pivots, lunges, and explosive movements are common, a weakened knee can greatly affect both performance and safety,” said Dr Zambare.

What does recovery usually involve in cases like this?

The treatment plan depends on what caused the swelling. “Along with rest and changing activities, rehabilitation usually includes physiotherapy to rebuild strength, flexibility, and joint stability.

Ronaldo’s last World Cup ends in tears as Merino sends Spain through



The biggest dream of Cristiano Ronaldo would remain unconquered forever. The man who guzzled most of the records and trophies that football could offer would slip into the sunset without its greatest prize, the World Cup. It was the dream, to kiss it, to hold it into the skies, to cradle it like a baby; the fuel that kept him burning at 41, that made him rise above the aches and niggles of sculpted but battered body; the trolls and memes; the tactical burden he put on his team, the shimmering ego that many have long whispered should send him into the shadows.

His eyes were cold, almost numb. It was perhaps the moment he reconciled with his unfulfilled dream. He walked without emotions, immune to the commiseration of his own men, to the handshakes and hugs of the victorious Spanish team, including the gate-crasher of his dream, Mikel Merino. Perhaps he was drained, or simply grieving an arena that was never his. Then the tears rolled down, and he shut his eyes to fight them. But he could no longer contain his emotions when the applause and chants of the crowd swept the stadium, and he waved back, for the one last time perhaps. Maybe not. He could continue in the Saudi League, or globetrot for exhibition games. But this was it. The end of a dream he can’t dream again, a space he would never grace again. He would be celebrated as an all-time great, for the goals and the personality, for his capacity to inspire a generation of players, but he leaves without the crowning glory. The World Cup was never his grandest stage. The numbers pale—11 goals, only one of those in a knockout, and two assists in 26 games. Fewer goals than Miroslav Klose and Harry Kane, as many goals as Sandor Kocsis and Jurgen Klinsmann. His most memorable night came against Spain, eight years ago, when he slammed in a hat-trick against them in a group game. But most days and nights in the tournament brought him pain and tears, misery and dejection. In six World Cups, the furthest he and his team progressed was in 2006. He could not inspire his country,

in youth or middle age, the way he lifted club after club to dizzying heights. Ferran Torres (7) and Rodri (16) celebrate after Mikel Merino’s (6) goal during the World Cup round of 16 match between Portugal and Spain. (AP) Ferran Torres (7) and Rodri (16) celebrate after Mikel Merino’s (6) goal during the World Cup round of 16 match between Portugal and Spain. (AP)

There are other legends who were denied the sweetest taste on a football field. Even more cruelly. Like Johan Cruyff and Roberto Baggio. But he was, rather he believes, no ordinary legend. Ronaldo without the crown and sceptre is akin to Caesar without the Empire. If his wish literally ended at the legs of a midfielder turned false nine, Merino, into the field only six minutes ago, or when the headers of Joao Neves and Bernardo Silva in stoppage time veered wide, it had metaphorically come to a grinding halt long ago. The vaulting ambition blinded the reality that he had been a burden for his teammate as well as his own image. He ignored his body, his team, and the game changing indiscernibly around him. He was scoring goals, his fans and manager Roberto Martinez retaliated, but plenty little else. Then the goals dried up too, the sign his time was over. The force, the whip and precision too have forsaken him, the tools with which had counteracted his waning athleticism. His 15 attempts fetched only three goals—a brace against minnows Uzbekistan and a penalty against Croatia. Against Spain, he had three shots, none of which really bothered Unai Simon. The first was his sweetest strike, but from an acute angle that Simon parried around the post. Moments earlier, he was distraught when Rodri’s tug on his shirt inside the box went unpunished, even without a routine VAR check.

There was a flash of improvisation around the 40th minute. He received a headed ball across goal from Joao Felix, back to goal, but with a svelte touch, turned it goalwards. But his shot had neither the power nor the placement to trouble Simon. Upon resumption he won a free kick that Bruno Fernandes flapped over the bar. Ronaldo was aghast, though his free-kicks have long lost their bite. A few times Nuno Mendes sent him through, but he was beaten and outnumbered by Spain’s defenders. Felix, after flitting past red shirts, pinged a long cross for Ronaldo. He stretched late to connect, and the shot died, his body rebelling against the mind’s orders. For much of the remaining half, he was reduced to casting stink eyes at his own men, for the passes not given, the chances squandered. No player perhaps wanted to win the game quite like Ronaldo. But perhaps no player stood between him and dream than Ronaldo himself. That was the cruellest paradox in Ronaldo’s last act on the stage that never loved him back.

Belgium mock USA after ending World Cup dream: ‘Overturn this’



Belgium ensured the final chapter of one of the World Cup’s biggest controversies was written on the pitch, thrashing co-hosts USA 4-1 in the Round of 16 before taking a pointed swipe at their opponents on social media. Moments after the win in Seattle, the Belgian national team’s official X account posted a blunt message: “Overturn this.” It was a clear reference to FIFA’s decision, less than 24 hours before kickoff, to suspend Folarin Balogun’s automatic one-match ban after his red card against Bosnia and Herzegovina. The decision had sparked criticism across football. UEFA described it as “incomprehensible and unjustifiable”, while the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) vowed to “defend football” after FIFA rejected its appeal. The row dominated the build-up to the knockout tie. Balogun had been sent off in the USA’s final group-stage match, triggering an automatic suspension. Belgium prepared all week believing the striker would miss the game before FIFA reopened the case under Article 27 of its disciplinary code and overturned the ban on the eve of the match. The move

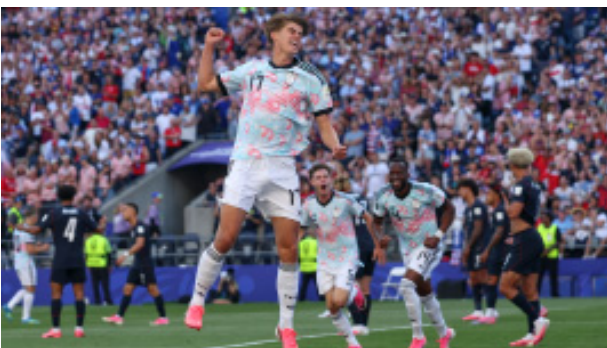
quickly became one of the tournament’s biggest talking points. Belgium captain Youri Tielemans admitted the controversy had fuelled the squad. “We were all aware of what happened,” he said. “Whether it gave us extra motivation? Yes, probably. But our biggest motivation was winning the game and reaching the quarter-finals.” Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois said Belgium felt disrespected by the narrative surrounding the build-up. “We felt there was a lack of respect towards us. Everyone was talking about the decision and the USA, as if Belgium didn’t exist. We wanted to answer on the pitch, and I think we did.” Midfielder Nicolas Raskin echoed those sentiments, saying the players had deliberately tried to ignore the off-field noise. “There was a lot being said, but we stayed focused on football. The best answer was to win convincingly.” They took another dig on X at how the sport was called in Europe as compared to North America. Midfielder Nicolas Raskin echoed those sentiments, saying the players had deliberately tried to ignore the off-field noise. “I think there was always a justice somewhere in life and the ?fact that something can happen like that, you can put it all you want, but we don’t think that was fair. And today, I think it just brings us a little bit of luck. We needed to win the game and the message throughout,” he told reporters. Manager Rudi Garcia, however, refused to blame Balogun himself for the saga. Garcia revealed he spoke briefly with the American striker after the final whistle and stressed that the controversy lay with FIFA’s decision-making rather than the player. “No, it wasn’t needed or necessary ... what really mattered to us is our gameplan,” he said, adding that he had spoken ?with Balogun after the final whistle. “He came to talk to me, I really like that. ... It’s not his fault, he’s not the one to blame and that’s what I told him.”

Belgium end US dream to reach the quarter-finals

Phone calls from the White House don’t win you football games. FIFA can bend rules but it still can’t guarantee results. Donald Trump and Gianni Infantino ensured that US forward Folarin Balogun’s red card was overturned and he was on field but that didn’t matter for Belgium, who scored a 4-1 win to book a place in the quarter-final of the World Cup. The American dream is over; all three hosts are out of the World Cup. Belgium, with the early momentum, took the lead in the opening 10 minutes through Charles De Ketelaere. A long ball was brought down beautifully by Leandro Trossard, whose cross was blocked before being pounced on by Nicolas Raskin, who drove at the US backline with some ease and delivered a low-driven pass into the box that was tapped in by De Ketelaere.

The American equaliser, arriving unexpectedly in the 31st minute, marked their solitary attempt on goal till then. Of course, Balogun found himself at the center of the action, hauled down by Brandon Mechele on the box’s edge; this allowed Malik Tillman to replicate his set-piece heroics from the Bosnia and Herzegovina match by dispatching yet another clinical free-kick. The lead didn’t last for more than two minutes, though, as De Ketelaere found himself on the scoresheet again. Trossard, once again unmarked on the left, delivered a floating cross to the back post where the Atlanta man jumped over veteran Tim Ream to gain control of the game once again.

Pochettino made just one change at the half, substituting out Sergiño Dest for Giovanni Reyna. Though the



co-hosts made an encouraging start to the second half, maintaining more possession and trying to progress quickly, it all went very wrong very fast. First, in the 54th minute, Christian Pulisic was teeing up a shot just outside the box, but Youri Tielemans intervened just in time, resulting in the American striking his opponent’s foot instead. Though not deemed a foul, the winger was in clear pain after that. Just three minutes later, the American squad saw their hopes further unravel due to a blunder by Matt Freese. The goalkeeper ventured far from his line to intercept the ball before De Ketelaere could reach it, but his hesitation to clear it immediately allowed the striker to poke it away. Left stranded in no man’s land and visibly unsure of how to react, Freese could only watch as Hans Vanaken seized the loose ball. Vanaken promptly struck a low-powered shot from distance that sailed past both the out-of-position keeper and a lunging Ream.

500 people expected to donate blood on MS Dhoni’s birthday

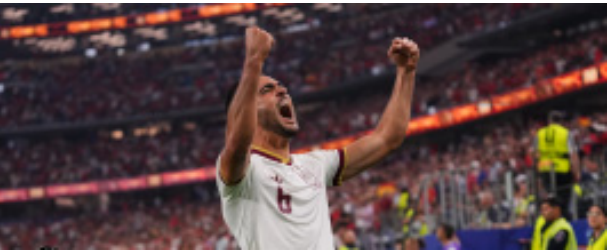


On the occasion of Indian cricketer MS Dhoni’s 45th birthday, a fan club in Hyderabad named Telugu MSDians has taken the initiative to donate blood at the Chiranjeevi Eye and Blood Bank. However, Praveen thought to do something special this time. “This year is Dhoni’s 45th birthday. I wanted to do something special. Film actors Chiranjeevi sir and his son Ram Charan sir do a lot of social work. They are iconic and inspirational people, so I decided to approach their blood bank.” “We have ensured that we are prepared for about 500 blood donors,” said Ravanam Swami Naidu, COO of the blood bank. “We have organised blood donation facilities on the ground floor and the first floor of the building. Chiranjeevi sir’s sister, Chief Medical Officer, Dr Madhavi Raj, will supervise the entire programme,” Naidu further said. Naidu also provided the checklist for eligible donors. The first requirement is that the donor should be between 18 and 60 years old and weigh over 50 kgs. “All medical check-ups are done, including haemoglobin,” Naidu said. The doctors will review the donor’s medical history, including any past medications or history of operations. “We follow the guidelines given by the Drug Control Department. If the donor is not fit, we will reject the blood donation,” said Naidu. Naidu would encourage more people to organise blood donation drives whenever there is the birthday of an inspirational figure to counter the shortage of blood in Hyderabad and rural Telangana for those in emergency. “Many times, people meet with accidents or heart attacks, and women delivering babies face blood shortages in many hospitals... they come to us for blood,

and we try to provide it. We save the lives of 20 to 30 people every day,” said Naidu. “Everyone healthy should definitely donate blood every three months...” Naidu says. A young Praveen in Visakhapatnam who saw Dhoni blast 148 against Pakistan at the stadium became his super fan. “I fell in love with him instantly,” he says. The way he conducts himself as a leader, and the way I was brought up by my parents... as they say, everything clicked for me becoming his fan. “Dhoni captained the Indian side to lift the ICC T20 World Cup in 2007 and then won the 2011 50-over World Cup. This has inspired Praveen to write a book in 2012 on Dhoni and his 2011 winning campaign, “A dawn in the lawn.”

He urged that he wanted to make a point in that book: it is easy to be critical while watching from television, but hard to play on the field. “The only see the fame and name... But they don’t know how hard it is to play physically and mentally. I feel bad about that,” Praveen said. In the same year, he authored the book, Praveen would also get the opportunity to meet Dhoni when there was a game in Visakhapatnam and get his autograph. His love for Dhoni grew exponentially after that, and he started calling himself “Dhoni devotee” “I have to follow the principles as a devotee, and I learned leadership skills from him,” which Praveen says comes handy in his professional career. Praveen’s love for Dhoni made him name his daughter Mahi. “Her full name is Rudhira Mahi. After her first birthday, the people who attended received gifts. We have given them something related to Dhoni,” Praveen laughed. “As soon as one enters my house, people see everything related to Dhoni. I have three cutouts of him. Dhoni’s iconic six shot in the 2011 World Cup. Additionally, I have a room. I decorated the room with all his memories. I got replicas of his IPL Cups, Champions Trophy, and World Cups made. When someone comes to my house, they are in awe and start taking pictures,” Praveen added. The fan club, on the other hand, has been running for a long while. It got its official recognition last year on June 26. He approached an auditor who formed a committee and signed the rules, and Praveen received the registration certificate. “We have 13 members officially registered as of now,” Praveen said. “It is the first official fan club of Dhoni,” a proud Praveen would say. It is not just the blood donation on Dhoni’s birthday, the fan club decided to organise food to municipal workers who clean roads in the morning. “They clean our roads before we go to the office... and if they don’t do it, we start falling ill, and that was the idea behind it,” Praveen reasoned. “We also got in contact with Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA), and as the TG20 league is happening right now, we want to plant a few trees,” he concluded.

Mikel Merino’s invisible intrusion pushes Portugal out of the World Cup



From the shadows pounced Mikel Merino. He was not in the place he was meant to be. Yet here he was. Wiggling through half a space the tired Portuguese defenders had left unmarked. Latching onto a needle-through-an-eye pass of Ferran Torres and coaxing the ball past an unsuspecting Diogo Costa. Merino is seldom the hero before a game, little reams of newsprint is spent on his utilitarian affinities to influence a game. But not for the first time, he made the difference for his team, the difference between an exhaustive extra time and potential tiebreaker. The difference between Cristiano Ronaldo living another day and bidding farewell to a tournament that seldom has been his.

When Fabian Ruiz took a hurried free kick, roughly 20 yards from Portugal’s goalmouth, Merino was lumbering, as though something was pulling him back. Ruiz passed behind to Rodri in midfield, he was just a few yards ahead of Rodri. But by the time the midfielder slipped the ball to Torres, Merino had made his typical run from behind, in stealth. And when Torres slid a gorgeously weighted ball, Merino was in the place where the ball was meant to be. He collected the ball and nervelessly plucked the goal to end a game that struggled to fulfil its preordained quality, that slumped to an afternoon siesta in Dallas.

For 90 minutes, the forwards and wingers designated to score goals, men far more celebrated than Merino, had failed to locate that perfect space. Costa did dash to flap away a thunderbolt from Alex Baena, but most other saves did not test his reflexes or elasticity. Perhaps, Costa or his defenders did not expect Merino’s anonymous run from the midfield. No one does, except when he rattles the goal. Merino has made a career out of invisible intrusions for his club and country. Arsenal supporters would recount several such goals that have made him a cult hero; Spain owed to him for the goal in the Euros semi-final against Germany. His uncanny knack of scoring impor-

tant goals had his Arsenal teammate Gabriel Martinelli call him “R9”. Portugal’s Cristiano Ronaldo (7) reacts after the World Cup round of 16 soccer match between Portugal and Spain in Arlington, Texas, near Dallas, Monday, July 6, 2026. Cristiano Ronaldo (7) reacts after the World Cup round of 16 match between Portugal and Spain. In its precision and nervelessness, the goal was quite like the numerous ones Ronaldo Nazario has stroked in his career. Soon after he scored the goal, he went to the corner flag and circled it thrice, a nod to his father Miguel Merino, a midfielder with a string of modest La Liga sides in the late and 90s. Yet, it was a moment that never happened. When he suffered a bone stress fracture and a rare hair-line fracture in his right foot in January, he thought his World Cup dreams were over. “When they told me about my injury, I thought I would not be at the World Cup, but here I am,” he said after the game.

For three months, he couldn’t walk. He prayed and cried. Then the doctor conveyed he was recovering faster than he had expected. He resumed his training with Arsenal, even though he remained on the bench for the Champions League final. He checked out with Spain’s manager Carlos de la Fuente whether he is in the World Cup scheme. He told him he will wait. The manager knew that few could multitask as imperceptibly as Merino could. He could man any role in the midfield, as an attacking midfielder a box-crasher, or a few times as the pivot; on the frontline, Arteta has deployed him as a false nine, an auxiliary striker and as centre forward. At Dortmund, he was commissioned as a left-sided centre back; in age-group tournaments for Spain, he was often the centre-back. Arteta discovered that he has the requisites to be a centre forward, he is aerially strong, he is clever in giving his defenders the slip, and he’s seldom wasteful, attributes that shone in his 15-goal season for Arsenal in 2024-25. “When he returned, I saw his desperation to get himself back into shape for the final (Champions League) and the World Cup,” Arteta said. “He’s another one that is going to push every boundary, sacrificing every little joy,” he added. In his race to get fit, he missed time with his newborn son, who is only two months old. “The injury, not seeing my little one grow: I used that as strength to get the best out of me. This is the product of the hard work my family always inculcated in me. I did my part. For it to happen at the last minute again, I am so happy,” he said after the game. The 29-year-old is not the archetypal Spanish midfield stylist, has a limited passing range, has nothing flashy.

Mbappe condemns Paraguayan senator over racist remarks after World Cup match

New York: France star Kylian Mbappe on Monday condemned a Paraguayan senator over racist remarks she made following Paraguay’s loss to France in the round of 16 at the World Cup. Mbappe called Celeste Amarilla, a senator from Paraguay’s Liberal Radical Party, a “despicable woman” who was “unworthy” of serving in Paraguay’s Congress. “Through your recklessness and your brazen racism, the entire world has already forgotten the journey and the historic effort that your players accomplished during this World Cup,” Mbappe wrote on X.

Amarilla posted a series of racist comments on X after Mbappe converted the winning penalty in France’s victory over Paraguay on Saturday, mocking the French captain’s origins, upbringing, education and appearance. France advanced to the quarterfinals, where it will face Morocco on Thursday. The Paraguayan government re-

leased a statement Monday afternoon condemning Amarilla’s remarks as “contrary to the values and principles that inspire peaceful coexistence and respect for human dignity that our country promotes.” It added that the senator’s comments do not represent either the Paraguayan government or the Paraguayan people. The French Football Federation on Monday denounced Amarilla’s comments as “utterly abhorrent” and “unacceptable,” adding that it would refer the matter to prosecutors. France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, and sports minister Marina Ferrari voiced support for the national team’s captain. “By targeting Kylian Mbappe, the senator is attacking everything our captain embodies and everything our country stands for: liberty, equality and fraternity,” Ferrari wrote on X. “One more goal for Kylian Mbappe. This time against racism,” Macron wrote on X, adding the captain had his “full support.”

Kangana Ranaut’s Queen 2 ‘unauthorised,’ claims Phantom Studios; files Rs 250 cr lawsuit



Earlier this year, Kangana Ranaut announced that after years of trying to make it happen, she finally reunited with director Vikas Bahl for Queen 2, the sequel to their 2013 cult coming-of-age film Queen. Last week, the duo even wrapped up shooting, calling it a “wonderful experience” as they cut the cake on the last day. However, little did they know that the film would run into legal trouble just five days later. Phantom Studios has now filed a lawsuit in Bombay High Court for Rs 250 crore against JioStar, which is backing Queen 2, alleging it’s an unauthorized sequel. The production house had reportedly reached out to JioStar multiple times for settlement discussions, but the latter hasn’t responded to the repeated requests yet. Meanwhile, Queen 2, which went on floors at the start of this year, has now wrapped up shoot and even entered its post-production stage.

Despite multiple requests of settlement discussions not being entertained by either JioStudios or Bahl, Phantom Studios had to take the legal action route, as reported by Mid-Day. Phantom Studios holds 50% rights of Queen,

including the right to make sequels. It hasn’t consented to any sequels, adaptations or derivative works of the film so far. Queen was originally produced by Phantom Films, which was founded by Bahl, Anurag Kashyap, Vikramaditya Motwane, and Madhu Mantena. It even won the National Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi for Queen. However, after Bahl’s name came up during the MeToo movement, it led to disagreements between the four founding members. As the founding members began leaving the company one by one, Phantom Film was disbanded in 2019. However, Mantena, along with producer Sheetal Talwar, revived the company in 2022 as Phantom Studios, which produced Advait Chandan’s romantic comedy Loveyapa, starring Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor, last year. After the success of Queen, four South remakes were also announced in 2018. The Tamil remake, directed by Ramesh Aravind, starred Kajal Aggarwal in Kangana’s role. The Telugu remake, That Is Mahalaxmi, starred Tamannaah Bhatia as the lead in a film helmed by Prasanth Varma. Zam Zam, the Malayalam remake directed by Neelakanta, featured Manjima Mohan in the lead. And the Kannada remake, also directed by Aravind, starred Parul Yadav. The four remakes, which were scheduled to be released at the same time, could never see light of the day. While it was logistical issues that delayed the shoot first, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) objected to certain scenes in a couple of remakes. The remakes, which were being produced by Manu Kumaran, could eventually never release owing to an ownership dispute. Meanwhile, the original Queen, written by Anvita Dutt, revolved around Kangana’s character Rani, who after being ditched by her fiancé (Rajkumar Rao), decides to go on a solo honeymoon instead. During her trip to Paris, she makes unlikely friends, including Lisa Hayden’s Vijayalakshmi, and eventually gives her ring back to her fiancé, who wants to reconcile and marry her.

The Odyssey first reactions: Critics hail Christopher Nolan’s ‘crowning achievement’



The Odyssey first reactions: Christopher Nolan’s action fantasy epic The Odyssey had its world premiere on Monday in London. The entire cast — Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Tom Holland, Zendaya, Charlize Theron, Himesh Patel, Lupita Nyong’o, Elliot Page, and Robert Pattinson among others — walked the red carpet. After the premiere, critics couldn’t help but hail Nolan’s new “crowning achievement”. Fandango and Rotten Tomatoes critic Erik Davis took to his X handle on Monday and shared, “Christopher Nolan’s #TheOdyssey is an absolute triumph and a crowning cinematic achievement from one of the great filmmakers of our time. It feels like everything Nolan has been working toward with IMAX has culminated here. The production design is incredible, the action is breathtaking, and the scale is unlike anything he’s done before.”

Ben Rolph from Discussing Film posted on X, “#TheOdyssey is an epic tale of unmeasurable scope, grounded by Odysseus’ quest for meaning on his arduous journey. Got chills multiple times, the sound literally shook the cinema. The music rocks, it’s exhilarating and

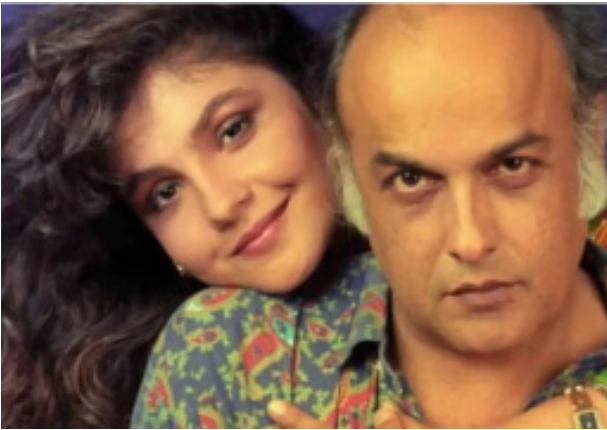
looks STUNNING & Robert Pattinson KILLS IT. The ending tho (mind-blown emoji).” “THE ODYSSEY is as epic as its source material with that level of Christopher Nolan spark that makes it something special. It’s a story of love and loss and takes you on quite the journey in only the way Nolan knows how. Breathtaking, bold, and perfection,” wrote Collider critic Rachel Leishman. “Christopher Nolan’s #TheOdyssey is flawless filmmaking, every inch as epic as you’d expect. Leading a stellar cast, Matt Damon gives Odysseus everything in a career-best powerhouse performance. Robert Pattinson is outstanding as Antinous and John Leguizamo’s Eumaeus is sublime,” chimed in critic Simon Thompson. Matt Neglia from the Next Big Picture shared on X, “A colossal achievement of scale, even by Nolan’s standards, its commitment to capturing as much as possible in-camera using new IMAX cameras is a staggering technical feat worthy of this sprawling yet intimate story of one man’s journey to return home, the burden and consequences of leadership, and the eternal struggle between mortals and gods.” “Christopher Nolan’s Odyssey is a colossal origin-myth story of postwar disillusion and a loss of innocence witnessed by the dead,” wrote film critic Peter Bradshaw. The unanimous points of appreciation seem to be the scale and immersive experience of IMAX, Damon and Patterson’s performances, the surprising horror elements in the film, and its final 20-minute stretch.

Following its world premiere in London, the team of The Odyssey will now travel to other cities for their respective premieres as part of its almost month-long global tour. Its next stop is on Wednesday, July 8, in Paris. Post that, it’ll take a pitstop in Mumbai for the India premiere on Saturday, July 11. It’ll then head to New York City for the premiere on July 14, followed by its theatrical release on July 18. A couple of weeks after its theatrical release, The Odyssey team will return to Asia and visit Beijing, China on July 30 and Seoul, South Korea on August 4. The first film to be shot completely on IMAX cameras, The Odyssey is an adaptation of ancient Greek poet Homer’s book.



of getting her eggs frozen was “disruptive.” “There is a point where you feel almost like hormonally... like disruptive... And almost like a pregnant woman, your mood swings are going like off the charts,” she said. “I am glad that I did it because I don’t want to have that in my head. I don’t want to have a clock in my head of doing the most important things of my life because of a clock,” she said and added, “When people ask when are you getting married, their main question is when are you having kids because unfortunately, women’s bodies are like that. It is tougher to get pregnant in a healthy way, and even for the baby to be healthy, it’s tougher after a certain age so I think I just took that call because instinctively, it came to me and I could afford it.” She admitted that it was “not an easy process but worth it.” When Priyanka Chopra opened up about freezing her eggs previously, Priyanka Chopra also opened up about the same and shared that she froze her eggs in her early 30s. She previously told Dax Shepherd in his podcast, “I felt such freedom, I did it in my early thirties and I could continue on an ambitious warpath,

‘Beti pagal ho gayi’: Pooja Bhatt rejected Aashiqui, forced Mahesh Bhatt into a silent rage



Pooja Bhatt was just 17 when she made her debut in the movies in her father Mahesh Bhatt’s film Daddy but Pooja, in a recent interview, claimed that the film “wasn’t designed to launch” her. In fact, she had made up her mind about not being in the movies after her first film and so when she was approached by her family for Aashiqui, she said no because her boyfriend at the time did not really love the fact that she was an actor. In a chat with Cyrus Broacha on his YouTube channel Cyrus Says, Pooja recalled, “My first film wasn’t designed to launch me. My father said, I have this story where a 17-year-old is the protagonist, and I was 17 then. He said you will be right for this part so would you be interested? I said let me think about it.” Pooja admitted that she was fully aware that being in the movies was “not an easy business” and she, for a brief period, had thought about being an architect, or even an astronaut.

Mahesh had just given her 24 hours to think about Daddy and when he got back to her, after 24 hours, he told her that could approach Dimple Kapadia’s daughter, Twinkle Khanna, for the role. Hearing this, Pooja instantly grabbed the opportunity. “He said so you don’t want to act, but you don’t want the role to go to someone else. You are made for this business, and I just did it,” she said. “Mahesh Bhatt said he will fire me if I don’t act well”

However, Pooja was told that she would get fired from the film if she did not perform well. “I was thrown into

the deep end. My father told me in no uncertain terms that if you can’t act, I am going to throw you out,” she recalled. He tested her with her lines and was satisfied but told her that the environment of a set is completely different so if she faltered there, she could still get fired. “He told me on set, it’s a different reality. If you can’t deliver, I am not going to give the world the privilege of telling you that you are no good. That’s the kind of upbringing one has had. Our families tell us the worst things that anyone out there in the world can tell us,” she recalled. “No room for good manners on a set! Pooja felt a lot of pressure to deliver from those present on the set as many of them had known her from a young age. “My spot boy, Jagan, who had seen me since I was a child, was saying, ‘Kal toh Pooja beti ka shooting hai. Dekhte hain ki acting kar payegi ya nahi?’ (Tomorrow is Pooja’s shoot. We’ll see if she can act or not.)” After Daddy wrapped up, Pooja was offered Aashiqui, which later starred Rahul Roy and Anu Aggarwal, but she chose to refuse the lead role because her then-boyfriend wasn’t very interested in her being an actor. “I was offered Aashiqui. The only time in my life my uncle Mukesh Bhatt came to my house with crisp bundles of cash. He said, ‘This is your signing amount’. I said, ‘I have decided I don’t want to act anymore’ Because I was in love by then and my then-boyfriend was not very happy with having a girlfriend who would be an actor,” she recalled, but did not reveal the name of the boyfriend. “He is still one of my best friends and he did not remember this detail,” she said. “He never told me in no uncertain terms, don’t act. I was trying to be the good girlfriend and the sacrificial lamb and I said I am not going to do movies anymore,” she recalled with a laugh.

Mukesh then called Mahesh and said, “Beti pagal ho gayi hai, na bol rahi hai film ko (Your daughter has gone crazy. She is saying no to the film).” When Pooja was asked to speak to Mahesh, all she could hear was “deep breathing” from the other side of the call. “All I could hear was deep breathing. My father was so angry. He said the destination might not be certain, but the flight is guaranteed, and you have no idea that you are making the biggest mistake of your life.” For the next two weeks, Mahesh did not speak to Pooja. So much so when her name came on in the credits of Daddy, Mahesh clapped sarcastically.

‘Let’s get Sylvester Stallone’: Ali Abbas Zafar offered Rocky star Salman Khan’s Sultan



plained that there was never any doubt about who would headline the film. “Salman Khan was the only choice for this film. When I narrated the story idea to Aditya Chopra, he said there’s only one person who can play this role, Salman Khan. I agreed wholeheartedly. We had decided that we’ll make this film only if Salman agrees to do it. When we narrated the film to Salman, it took him exactly 15 minutes to say, “I’m doing this.””

“Who doesn’t know Bhai, finds him intimidating! Ali also recalled the immense effort Salman put into preparing for the physically demanding role. “Salman Khan gave everything as an actor to Sultan, from physical transformation to speaking Haryanvi to the kind of hard work he put in learning wrestling, to putting and losing weight, was incredible. I was not worried because the day I narrated him the story, he said, “This story requires a certain kind of transformation, and I’ll do that.”” The filmmaker also reflected on casting Anushka Sharma opposite Salman. While Anushka had previously spoken about initially finding the superstar intimidating, Ali said the dynamic eventually worked in the film’s favour. “What Anushka brought to the character was phenomenal. They’re unlike each other, and I think that added to the opposites attract kind of an equation. Anyone who doesn’t know Bhai well finds him intimidating. But once you get to know him, you understand that there’s a very lovable person behind that hardness. As we shot the film, towards the end, it became very smooth because everyone knew each other very well.” In the same conversation, Ali also revealed that the makers had initially considered casting Sylvester Stallone in the mentor’s role that was eventually played by Randeep Hooda. “There were all kinds of names discussed for the role Randeep Hooda played. The most discussed name was Sylvester Stallone. We thought, let’s get Sylvester Stallone because he has done Rocky, and there would be nobody better than Rocky who can train Sultan. I met him. He loved the script, but his dates didn’t work out.”

Explaining why Randeep ultimately came on board, Ali added, “We went with Randeep because I was clear that I needed a very good actor for that role. Randeep had worked with Salman in Kick, so they had a good chemistry. I think what he did with Fateh was phenomenal.” On the work front, Ali Abbas Zafar is currently directing a romantic actioner starring Ahaan Panday, alongside Sharvari and Aaishvarya Thackeray.

Shilpa Shirodkar reveals BIL Mahesh Babu knows ‘Marathi’

Mumbai: Bollywood 90s diva Shilpa Shirodkar revealed a hilarious closely guarded family secret involving her superstar brother-in-law, Mahesh Babu. The actress who appeared in the latest episode of dance reality show, India’s Best Dancer season 5, recalled how Mahesh had tricked her and wife Namrata Shirodkar by keeping a little secret from them over their mother tongue Marathi, which he apparently knew.

Shilpa recalled the early days of Namrata and Mahesh’s marriage, by saying, “I have to tell you this, it’s a very personal thing,” Shilpa revealed with a laugh. “My sister is married to Mahesh, right? Who is Telugu. Unko Marathi nahi aati thi jab nayi nayi shaadi hui thi. Toh hum log, hum logon ko kuch bhi agar bolna hota tha toh hum log Marathi mein bolte the. So after a few years of being married to Namrata, me and Namrata were talking about something, or suddenly Mahesh said, ‘Accha, asa kaay?’ And we were like usko Marathi aati hai!” (He didn’t know Marathi when they were newly married. So if we wanted to say anything secretly, we would speak in Marathi. So after a few years of being married to Namrata, me and Namrata were talking about something, and suddenly Mahesh said, ‘Oh, is it so?’ And we were like he knows Marathi!) The sudden realization that the Telugu super-



star had been secretly understanding their private conversations for years, caught the sisters completely off guard. Shilpa continued by saying, “He was like mala samajhte Marathi. So he actually knows Marathi, he was hiding from us! And it was so funny because me and Namrata literally got caught and we were like, thank God hum logon ne aisa kuch nahi bola ki we would have been really, really taken for a ride.” (He was like, ‘I understand Marathi.’ So he actually knows Marathi, he was hiding it from us!)