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Kishor Wins Bihar Bypoll, Stuns BJP

New Delhi, August 3

A couple of weeks after the student protests across the nation forced the ouster of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the BJP was delivered another body blow, when Jan Suraaj Party leader Prash ant Kishor breached the saffron bulwark of Bankipur Assembly constituency in saffron-ruled Bihar. The BJP had held this seat for nearly 35-years. In his reaction, Kishor claimed that his victory was made possible "with backing of" disgruntled supporters of the BJP, Congress and the RJD, while Gen Z protests may also have played a role. The defeat is now viewed as a huge loss of face not merely for the BJP but also for party president Nitin Nabin and Bihar CM Samrat Choudhary.

Only in November 2025, during the last Assembly elections, Nabin had won this seat by over 50,000 votes. Kishor won the seat by a margin of over 19,000 votes, showing a shift of about 70,000 votes away from the BJP in less than a year. The BJP's vote share, which was over 62 per cent, came down to 34.44 per cent — a deficit of nearly 30 per cent. Kishor bagged nearly 50 per cent of the vote share. The bypoll was necessitated by the resignation of Nabin, who shifted to the Rajya Sabha. In the other two Assembly byelections held in Datia (Madhya Pradesh) and Manjalpur (Gujarat), the Congress and the BJP retained their respective seats. In Datia, the sitting MLA was from the Congress while the Manjalpur seat was held by the BJP. The by-polls in the three seats were the first elections held after the Jantar Mantar student protests.

Stunned by the Bankipur outcome, Bihar BJP president Sanjay Sarogi said the party "accepts the by-poll ver dict with bowed head". The BJP now intends to introspect over the rea sons for the major electoral debacle. It was felt that although viewing Kishor's victory as a reflection of the nation's mood might be premature, the urban population of Bankipur, which had remained loyal to the BJP for over three decades, shifted allegiance after the unprecedented movement launched by the Cockroach Janta Party demanding reforms in the education sector. Political pundits indicated that public sentiment turned against the BJP following the "police atrocities" against the students at Jantar Mantar on July 20, just 10 days before the polling day. The youth, which had been with the BJP, came together to vote against the lotus brigade. It may be recalled that the Bankipur constituency went through various twists and turns, with the BJP changing its candidates. The BJP's Abhishek Kumar, 9, was made to withdraw his candidature the following day.

Shivakumar expands Cabinet, discontent brews within party

New Delhi, August 3

In a deft political move, Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Monday inducted 20 ministers in the first expansion of his Cabinet since assuming the state's top post. Many of the inductees are new faces, reflecting a careful mix of caste and regional representation crucial to the southern state.The expansion strengthens the Shivakumar Cabinet, which took office in June. The influential Vokkaliga leader replaced Siddaramaiah in a leadership transition that had long been the subject of a power struggle within Karnataka Congress circles.

With the latest expansion, the Cabinet's strength has risen from 14 to 34.

The new ministers include P M Narendraswamy (Malavalli), Shivaraj Tangadagi (Kanakagiri), Rudrappa Lamani (Haveri), K S Basavanthappa (Mayakonda), B Nagendra (Ballari Rural), T Raghumoorthy (Challakere), B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan (Chamarajpet), Rizwan Arshad (Shivajinagar), Santosh Lad (Kalaghatagi) and Madhu Bangarappa (Soraba), among others.

GS Patil has been chosen as the new Speaker of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, while A S Ponnanna will serve as Deputy Speaker.

The expansion marks the return of former Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra. A former BJP leader who joined the Congress in 2018, Nagendra had resigned from the Cabinet in 2024 over allegations linked to the Valmiki Development Corporation scam.

In addition, two minority community leaders, B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan and Rizwan Arshad, have been inducted into the Cabinet.

The children of three former chief ministers are now part of Shivakumar's Cabinet. They are Yathindra Siddaramaiah (already a minister), Kumar Bangarappa (son of S Bangarappa) and Ajay Singh (son of N Dharam Singh)

Incidentally, six of the 20 newly inducted ministers were also part of the previous government led by Siddaramaiah.

Gayathri Shanthegowda, whose election from the Chikkamagaluru Local Authorities' Constituency was upheld by a recent Supreme Court verdict, will be the lone woman in the Cabinet. Her election came after the court set aside BJP leader M K Pranesh's election to the Legislative Council in December 2021.

Former deputy chief minister Laxman Savadi and Shivalinge Gowda, who joined the Congress from the BJP and JD(S), respectively, ahead of the 2023 assembly polls,

are also becoming ministers this time.

This much-awaited cabinet expansion aims to maintain social and regional representation, including adequate representation for AHINDA communities, women and younger legislators. The leadership is also seeking to strike a balance between legislators considered close to Shivakumar and those aligned with Siddaramaiah.

AHINDA politics refers to a powerful social and electoral coalition in Karnataka representing 'Alpasankhyataru' (minorities), 'Hindulidavaru' (backward classes), and 'Dalitaru' (dalits).

The expansion was expected to take place earlier but was delayed as the Congress leadership worked to strike a balance between experienced leaders and first-time ministers while ensuring equitable representation across Karnataka's regions and communities.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Shivakumar urged disappointed legislators to remain patient, saying it was "not possible to accommodate everyone" in the ministry. Recalling his own political journey, he said he too had once missed out on a cabinet berth before eventually becoming a minister

"Similarly, we will ensure that everyone gets an opportunity in the future," he said.

His remarks came after Congress MLA Yashwantraya Patil resigned after missing out on a cabinet berth, while Belur MLA Gopalakrishna is expected to follow suit, party sources said.

More than 15 disgruntled legislators also held a closed-door meeting at senior leader P V Jayachandra's residence in Bengaluru to discuss their next course of action. Sources said senior leaders, including H K Patil and Dinesh Gundu Rao, attended the meeting.

Full support to FCI to expand foodgrain storage capacity: Uttam

Hyderabad: Telangana Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Monday said the state government would extend full support to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) for expanding its foodgrain storage infrastructure to match the state's record paddy procurement.

Reddy gave the assurance during a courtesy visit by FCI General Manager Anuj Tyagi. The two dis-

cussed issues related to foodgrain procurement, storage infrastructure and logistics.

During the meeting, FCI officials highlighted the corporation's need to augment its grain storage capacity in Telangana due to the state's rapidly increasing paddy procurement, an official release said.

They outlined plans to substantially increase storage infrastructure by establishing modern warehouses in the state.

Uttam Kumar Reddy assured FCI of the Telangana government's complete cooperation for the successful implementation of the storage expansion programme.

The minister also stressed the need to streamline procurement operations, the release said.

MS Degree College Admissions Admissions 2026-27

He called for closer coordination between the state government and FCI to improve procurement efficiency, storage management and logistics.

Telangana emerged as the country's second-largest paddy procuring state during the Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2025-26, the release said.

Despite the record procurement, Telangana currently has only about 31.00 LMT of Central Pool storage capacity, leaving a storage deficit of 16.25 LMT under FCI's storage norms.

Uttam Kumar Reddy had on June 9 said Telangana created an "all-time record" in paddy procurement despite the Centre "reducing its procurement target" for the state.

He said the state government had procured 75 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of paddy by June 9 itself during the current Yasangi (Rabi) season, against the Centre's approved target of only 52 LMT.

Ameenpur couple goes missing after Rs 2 crore chit fund scam

Hyderabad: The Cyberabad police on Monday, August 3, booked a couple who are on the run in Ameenpur, Sangareddy, after they allegedly duped residents of BSR Colony promising high returns via a chit-collecting fund.

Sub-Inspector Madapathi Prabhakar of Ameenpur police station told Siasat.com that the couple, identified as Sirisha and Sambasivarao, began the chit fund scam in 2023.

"This has been going on for three years now, since 2023," said SI Prabhakar, adding that the couple stalled paying the returns "for 20-25 months," according to the complainants. The couple allegedly collected Rs 2 crore from the residents via the chit fund, he said, having collected Rs 2-5 lakh per person.

"Around 13 individuals filed the complaint this morning (August 3)," said Prabhakar.

KTR warns of protests at Rahul's house over unfulfilled promises

Hyderabad: Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president KT Rama Rao on Monday, August 3, threatened to lay siege to Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's residence in Delhi to demand that the Congress government in Telangana fulfil promises made to the youth, including the promise of 2 lakh jobs.

The former minister slammed Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for not fulfilling the promise of providing jobs and other promises made in the youth declaration.

Addressing a press conference, he accused the Congress government of pushing the youth of Telangana towards despair.

He recalled that Rahul Gandhi had promised 2 lakh jobs in the first year and claimed that not even 10,000 jobs have been filled in two years.

He said when there are 20,000 vacancies in the police department, the government has issued notifications for only 7,000 jobs.

"Congress deceived people with its pre-election declarations. Even the 'Job Calendar' tabled in the legislature has gone nowhere," he said.

He said that not even one out of 24 commitments under the Youth and Student Declarations has been fulfilled.

KTR said a student named Venu in Khammam has attempted suicide over the delay in issuing notification by Telangana State Public Service Commission for Group 1-4 jobs and is fighting for his life, demanding answers. He said the youth, in a handwritten note, demanded Rahul Gandhi, CM Revanth Reddy and Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka to introduce annual job calendars like the Union Public Service Commission.

"Where is Rahul Gandhi while young people here are resorting to suicide? The youth of Telangana want accountability, and they will not remain silent," he said, adding that the suicide note serves as a charge sheet against your incompetent and inept governance.

Stating that BRS will fill the job vacancies once it comes to power, he appealed to the unemployed not to resort to taking their own lives.

KTR slammed Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for calling engineers "criminal waste" and questioned Rahul Gandhi's silence on Revanth's comments.

"Neither Rahul nor Revanth has the courage to come forward and speak to the students. Rahul rushes to the scene if lathi-charges occur in other states.

Ekadantha Sanskrit Fundamental Course – Level IV Launched at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti Anaikatti,

Tamil Nadu:""Ekadantha – The School of Ancient Indian Studies, an institution dedicated to promoting the Sanskrit language and making India's ancient knowledge tradition accessible worldwide through modern technology, has launched its Sanskrit Fundamental Course – Level IV (Classical Sanskrit Grammar) on 24 July 2026 at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti, Tamil Nadu, in the gracious presence of Pujya Sri Swami Sadatmananda Saraswati Ji.""On this occasion, Pujya Swamiji unveiled the course poster and appreciated Ekadantha's efforts in promoting Sanskrit education.""More than 5,000 students from different parts of the world are already learning Sanskrit online through Ekadantha. Designed in a systematic, step-by-step manner—from the beginner level to Classical Sanskrit Grammar—this course enables students to develop the ability to independently read and understand Sanskrit texts.""In addition, the Ekadantha YouTube channel features more than 40 Sanskrit conversational short films. Among them, the short film "Asteyam" received an award at the 7th International Sanskrit Short Film Festival – Ujjain (2026).""The launch ceremony was attended by Pujya Sri Swami Sadatmananda Saraswati, Swami Satyatmananda Saraswati, Sri Dayanand Shanmugam, Sri Kripanand Shanmugam, Acharya Chintakindi Sadguna, Smt. K. Lalithamma, and M. V. Satish Kumar, Founder of Ekadantha.""The organizers stated that the course is open to everyone who wishes to learn Sanskrit in a simple and systematic manner."Please rewrite the content in 125words with impressive presentations in News format

GRAND 'GHATAM' PROCESSION OF SRI SRI NALLA POCHAMMA AMMAVARU TO BE HELD TODAY FOR ASHADA BONALU 2026

""HYDERABAD:: On the auspicious occasion of the ongoing *Ashada Bonalu Jathara 2026, the temple management committee has extended a warm invitation to all devotees across the city to participate in the sacred **Ghatam Procession (Aahwanam)* of *Sri Sri Nalla Pochamma Ammavaru*, scheduled for this afternoon."The grand cultural and devotional procession will kick off today, *August 2, 2026, at 3:00 PM* from the historic *Sri Kashi Vishwanatha Temple in Shalibanda.Procession Route and Highlights:Accompanied by traditional *Dappulu (folk drums), vibrant brass bands, and cultural music troupes, the holy Ghatam will travel through major heritage routes in the Old City:" * *Start:* Sri Kashi Vishwanatha Temple, ShalibandaRoute: Laldarwaza ? Chatrinaka ? Uppuguda RUB ? Mahankali Ammavari Temple" Destination:** Sri Nalla Pochamma Temple, Mukkera Basti"Organizers Extend Devotional Invitation"Aedla Pandarinath, President of the Sri Nalla Pochamma Temple Committee (and General Secretary, BJP Bhagyanagar District), along with committee members and local community leaders, encouraged devotees to attend in large numbers to partake in the traditional celebrations and seek the divine blessings of Goddess Nalla Pochamma.We request

all residents and devotees to join the procession along the route and receive the heavenly grace and protection of Ammavaru during this sacred month," stated the committee organizers."[10:11 PM, 8/3/2026] New English Paper Hemanth Reddy: In second page or third page madam

Before Ketan's killing, did Siya and Chetan secretly marry? Police investigate

Ketan Agarwal Lohagad Fort murder, Siya Goyal Chetan Chaudhary secret marriage, Lohagad Fort murder, Lohagad Fort, Pune Rural police murder investigation, marriedThe police arrested Siya and Chetan on June 23 after their investigation allegedly revealed that the two had planned Ketan's murder and pushed him off the Lohagad Fort on June 18. The Pune Rural police, investigating the alleged murder of Ketan Agarwal, are probing whether his fiancée, Siya Goyal and her boyfriend, Chetan Chaudhary, had secretly married months before the incident.The police said an analysis of communications between Siya and Chetan, along with other leads, pointed to a wedding ceremony a few months prior to the incident, and investigators are verifying whether it was legally registered.A police officer said investigators were examining WhatsApp chats and other communications between the two accused to establish whether they had undergone a secret marriage ceremony."We are investigating whether Siya and Chetan got married secretly, where the ceremony took place, and whether the marriage was legally registered. Once we have concrete leads on this, we will comment about it further," the officer said.The police arrested Siya and Chetan on June 23 after their investigation allegedly revealed that the two had planned Ketan's murder and pushed him off the Lohagad Fort on June 18. After 10 days in police custody, Siya and Chetan were sent to judicial custody for 14 days and are currently lodged in prison.Ketan's death, initially suspected to be an accidental fall from the historic fort near Pune, was later treated as a planned murder by the Pune Rural police.According to the police, Siya had got engaged to Ketan on February 19, with their wedding scheduled later this year, but she was also in a relationship with Chetan since October and did not want to marry Ketan.They said Siya had taken Ketan to Lohagad Fort on May 31 and June 14 before returning with Chetan on June 18, when they allegedly pushed him off the Lohagad Fort. The police also said Siya had tried to convince Ketan to visit the fort on June 4, but the plan was cancelled after his family objected.The investigation has also revealed that the two allegedly rehearsed their plan before carrying out the murder in an open area near a club lounge in Pune's Lulla Nagar. A police team recently took Siya to the location as part of the probe, while crime scene recreations were carried out separately with both accused at Lohagad Fort.

Stranded Andhra fishermen rescued off Odisha coast, to return to Visakhapatnam

Visakhapatnam: Andhra Pradesh Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Kinjarapu Atchannaidu has said all the fishermen stranded off the Paradip coast in Odisha have safely reached Paradip Harbour and will arrive in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.The fishermen were rescued after their fishing boat developed engine trouble and drifted into deeper waters due to adverse weather conditions off the Odisha coast."All the stranded fishermen are safe and have reached Paradip Harbour. They are scheduled to arrive in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday," Atchannaidu said in a press release issued on Monday.Medical examinations conducted at Paradip Harbour confirmed that all the fishermen are in good health, said the Minister. Personnel from the Ichchapuram Police have reached Paradip Harbour on behalf of the Andhra Pradesh government and are overseeing the necessary arrangements for the fishermen, he said."

Why Channi is emerging as a new power centre in Punjab Congress politics

As the Punjab Congress prepares for the 2027 Assembly elections, an informal shift appears to be taking shape within the party. While Amarinder Singh Raja Warring continues to head the state unit after the high command's recent announcement, former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi—tasked with leading the party's campaign committee for the upcoming polls—has emerged as the one around whom several senior leaders are holding consultations, reflecting the rise of a new political centre within the state unit.Recent meetings at Channi's residence have drawn attention within political circles. While they have not been officially described as factional gatherings, their frequency and the profile of those attending have reinforced the perception that Channi is increasingly becoming the principal point of consultation for leaders discussing the party's organisational and electoral strategy.The reasons for this development lie in a series of political decisions that have steadily enhanced Channi's stature over the past two years.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the Congress leadership's continuing confidence in Channi came during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. After the Congress's defeat in the 2022 Assembly polls, Channi lost both the Bhadaur and Chamkaur Sahib Assembly seats. Yet, the party high command chose to reposition him by fielding him from the Jalandhar parliamentary constituency.The decision was politically significant. Jalandhar had traditionally been associated with the family of former Congress MP Chaudhary Santokh Singh. Following his death, his wife contested the bypoll in 2023 and lost to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Sushil Rinku. In 2024, Chaudhary's family was one of the strongest contenders for the ticket. Channi, meanwhile, had never contested an election from the Doaba region. Despite this, the Congress leadership backed him.The decision paid off electorally. Channi won the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat comfortably, securing a fresh mandate from a politically significant region outside his traditional base. For many within the Congress, the victory strengthened his credibility as a leader with statewide appeal rather than one confined to a particular constituency or faction.

His standing has since grown further in Parliament. Channi was appointed chairperson of the key Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. More recently, he was selected for the Sansad Ratna Award for outstanding parliamentary performance, becoming the first MP from Punjab in 16 years to receive the honour. He is also among only two chairpersons of parliamentary standing committees to be recognised with the award this year.These developments have added a national dimension to Channi's political profile. Today, he combines several roles that few Punjab Congress leaders currently possess simultaneously: former chief minister, sitting Member of Parliament, chairperson of an important parliamentary committee, and a nationally recognised parliamentarian. That institutional stature is one reason many Congress leaders increasingly see him as a natural point of convergence."Former chief ministers rarely become ordinary organisational leaders. They retain administrative experience, statewide visibility and direct access to the party's central leadership. During periods of internal uncertainty, these attributes often make them the preferred interlocutors for leaders seeking organisational consensus," said a senior Congress leader.Administrative experience and social representation

Political experts said that Channi's social profile has further strengthened his position. As Punjab's first Dalit chief minister and now the Jalandhar MP, he represents a constituency that remains electorally crucial, particularly in Doaba, where Scheduled Castes account for nearly one-third of the population. His political presence allows the Congress to project both administrative experience and social representation at a time when the party is attempting to rebuild its electoral coalition.Political observers also see echoes of an earlier phase in Punjab Congress politics. In the run-up to the 2017 Assembly election, senior leaders gradually consolidated behind Amarinder Singh, helping establish him as the party's undisputed electoral face despite competing internal power centres. While the present circumstances are different, the pattern of leaders gravitating towards a former chief minister during a period of organisational uncertainty bears comparison.None of this indicates that the Congress high command intends to replace Raja Warring as state party chief. "But whenever dissatisfaction grows inside a political party, leaders usually look for a recognised face around whom discussions can take place. Channi naturally fits that role because he has administrative experience and electoral credibility," the leader said.Several Congress leaders privately acknowledge that meetings at Channi's residence have acquired political symbolism.

10 years after LPG death, court awards Rs 7 lakh to Nagpur family

A consumer court in Maharashtra has directed an insurance company to pay a man in Nagpur Rs 7 lakh with interest, over a decade after an LPG cylinder leak killed his wife. It also directed Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) to pay Rs 60,000 to his family.The Nagpur District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, in an order passed on July 2, granted relief for Sahebrao Katare, who lost his wife, Devratna Katare, on March 3, 2015, while under treatment for three months.Devratna suffered 54 per cent burn injuries on December 23, 2014, while she was preparing dinner in the kitchen. Sahebrao also sustained 12 per cent burn injuries while trying to save his wife.Sahebrao told the commission that he was entitled to Rs 20 lakh as per the policy for deaths caused by such LPG leaks.

In the order, the commission exonerated the local distributor for operational faults, while it directed the insurance company to pay Rs 5 lakh for the accidental death, Rs 1 lakh for the husband's injuries, under the Public Liability Policy for Oil Industries, and Rs 50,000 for property damage. It also ordered BPCL and the insurer to pay the family Rs 50,000 for prolonged mental agony and another Rs 10,000 for legal expenses within 45 days.

According to the complainant, a gas leak occurred while Devratna was replacing an empty LPG cylinder with a new one. The gas spread rapidly as soon as she removed its cap. The whole kitchen and the house went ablaze in an explosion after the gas caught fire from a prayer lamp in the kitchen.The family incurred expenses of Rs 6 lakh at the hospital and in the loss of household items due to the blaze. The family had approached the local police, but there was no progress in the probe, Sahebrao alleged.During the proceedings, the local distributor of BPCL claimed the blast occurred because the gas burner knob was not shut, stating there was no deficiency in service or negligence. United India Insurance Company also opposed the complainant's plea, stating there was a delay in submitting the requisite documents.The commission found a communication gap between the oil company and the insurer, which delayed the family's legitimate claims.

'I'm 62 and I don't have a home': Noida's Godrej Nest homebuyers left hanging

A government employee posted in Mumbai broke his fixed deposit meant for his teenage son's education to pay the final installment of Rs 7 lakh on a delayed Noida flat — a home he had planned for his retirement.The bank from which he had taken a home loan to buy his 2BHK flat in Godrej Nest, in Noida's Sector 150, refused to extend further credit, insisting on a written confirmation of the possession date."They said they needed the confirmation date. How could we give them this when even I wasn't sure?" he said.The man's ordeal mirrors the experience of many in NCR, where delayed possession — even by major developers — have left families trapped between unfinished homes and mounting EMIs.'Wanted a permanent address for my family'In 2022, armed with an initial investment of Rs 40 lakh from his parents, the man booked the 2BHK-plus-study apartment measuring 1,543 sq ft for Rs 1.34 crore.Hailing from Bihar, he said he has been forced to relocate to different cities for work but wanted a permanent address for his parents.Then the wait for his flat began."I was promised possession in September 2024," he said. "But the date went by and there was no sign of the flat."Repeated calls to the relationship manager brought no clarity. Living in Mumbai, he could not visit the site regularly. "A relative finally went there — and found the building was still incomplete," he said.Finally, by the end of June this year, the builder began handing over possession in two of the seven towers, covering around 550 flats, he said.

"I received an email on July 2 informing me of the handover, but it also said maintenance charges would apply from July 1 and that I still had to pay Rs 1.30 lakh," he said. "I've asked for a break-up because this amount wasn't mentioned in the second milestone, which I've already paid in full."Though the keys are now ready, relief remains elusive."I'm still repaying loans, my parents are dependent on me… I wanted them to shift soon so they could live close to relatives," he said. "I saw other properties where they said registration wasn't happening and possession could be given without it. So, I chose Godrej because of the brand name… Our assumption was wrong.""If this doesn't work out, I'll be nowhere," he said. "My entire retirement life will be constrained."He said buyers who have invested such large sums now feel they have little choice but to accept what is offered. "With a company like Godrej, there should have been much greater clarity."Another homebuyer, who received keys in late June and did not wish to be named, alleged poor construction quality."I've been forced to redo almost everything — including tiles in the bathroom and kitchen," she said. "We've had seepage complaints from day three."Dissatisfied with what she described as a rushed handover, she added, "I paid a 30% premium four-five years ago because I trusted the brand's promise of luxury and quality. I've received neither. The design and construction are already eight years old, and despite repeated delays, there's been no effort to upgrade the project.The homebuyer alleged that two towers — A2 and B2 — were delivered only after sustained pressure.

What is the procedure for removing judges? | Explained

Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution provide that a judge of the Supreme Court/High Court shall be removed by the President, on the grounds of 'proved misbehaviour' or 'incapacity' after a motion is passed in each House of Parliament by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two thirds of the members of that House present and voting (special majority) in the same session. The Constitution does not define the terms 'proved misbehaviour' or 'incapacity.' The Supreme Court has opined in various cases that wilful misconduct in office, corruption, lack of integrity or any other offence involving moral turpitude would constitute misbehaviour. Incapacity here means a medical condition that may include physical or mental incapacity.

The detailed procedure for removal is provided in the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. It stipulates that a notice of motion for removal should be signed by not less than 50 members in the Rajya Sabha and 100 members in the Lok Sabha. The Chairman or Speaker may after due consideration and consultation admit or refuse to admit the motion. If admitted, a three-member committee will be constituted consisting of Supreme Court/High Court judges and a distinguished jurist. If the Committee, after investigation, absolves the judge of any misbehaviour or incapacity, the motion pending shall not be proceeded with. If found guilty of misbehaviour or suffering from incapacity, the committee report will be taken up in the Houses of Parliament which would then need to pass the motion with special majority.

What is the current issue?

Justice Yadav made communally-charged remarks while speaking at an event organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He is reported to have said the country would be run according to the wishes of the majority. The 'Reinstatement of Values of Judicial Life' adopted by the Supreme Court in 1997, and followed by all the High Courts, mandates that behaviour and conduct of members of the higher judiciary must reaffirm people's faith in the impartiality of the judiciary. The judges should not commit any act of omission or commission that is unbecoming of the high office they occupy. Notably, though the Judges (Inquiry) Bill, 2006 was not passed by the Parliament, it defined 'misbehaviour' to include violation of code of conduct for the judges. This bill proposed imposition of 'minor measures,' like issuing warnings, public or private censure, withdrawal of judicial work for a limited time etc., for misconduct that does not warrant removal.

What is required?

The Blackstone's ratio in criminal jurisprudence that 'it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer' can be applied even when it comes to the removal of judges. The stringent process with the requirement of special majority in both houses has resulted in the non-removal of judges even after having been found guilty of misbehaviour by the inquiry committee. This is nevertheless essential to protect the independence of judges while discharging their duties. The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, against whom himself a notice of motion for removal has been submitted, is unlikely to admit the present motion. The Supreme Court has issued a notice seeking details of the controversial speech made by Justice Yadav.

How does La Niña affect India's climate? | Explained

La Niña, a phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), occurs when the region of the Pacific Ocean between Indonesia and South America is cooler than usual. Its counterpart, El Niño, represents a warming of the same region. These two phases significantly influence global atmospheric circulation and weather patterns. During La Niña years, India receives normal or above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season. Yet the same phenomenon causes droughts in Africa and intensifies hurricanes over the Atlantic Ocean. Conversely, the El Niño brings extreme summers and droughts in India while increasing rainfall in the southern United States.While the La Niña was expected to emerge by July this year, it is yet to. The India Meteorological Department now expects a La Niña to set in by late 2024 or early 2025, plus a milder winter due to this delay. This decade began with three consecutive La Niña events (2020-2022), a rare occurrence known as Triple Dip La Niña, followed by an El Niño in 2023. Climate change may increase the frequency and intensity of both La Niña and El Niño events, as rising sea and land temperatures disrupt the Pacific's balance. This could also amplify extreme La Niña events, which generally lead to harsh winters in India.

Will a La Niña emerge this winter?

2024 is different; the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in fact called it "spooky". The La Niña has not emerged as expected. Historically, the La Niña has usually formed during the monsoon or the pre-monsoon period, and it has formed only twice between October and December since 1950. Global forecasts had also predicted its emergence this monsoon. But in December, there remains only a 57% chance of it forming in 2024. It will be weak if it still does but it could affect global weather.The onset of La Niña or El Niño can be declared on the basis of many indices. For instance, the oceanic Niño index (ONI) compares the three-month average sea surface temperatures in the East-Central Tropical Pacific with the 30-year average. When the difference between the two is 0.5º C or higher, it is an El Niño, and when it is –0.5º C or lower, it is a La Niña. Currently, it is around –0.3º C. To be classified as a full-fledged La Niña or El Niño, ONI values need to exceed the thresholds at least five times consecutively.

Meteorology of a La Niña winter

Cities in southern India like Bengaluru and Hyderabad are experiencing a colder than usual winter this year, while north India is witnessing a delayed winter with above-normal temperatures. Some reports have linked the southern chill to a La Niña, but the current ONI

values suggest otherwise. Had a La Niña developed already, north India would likely be experiencing a colder winter than usual.An analysis of meteorological data over 35 years by researchers at the Council on Energy Environment and Water, New Delhi, has revealed that while La Niña winters feature colder nights compared to El Niño, daytime temperatures tend to be higher. Meteorological parameters like wind speed and planetary boundary layer height (PBLH) — the lowest atmospheric layer directly influenced by land-atmosphere interactions — also vary during ENSO phases, affecting air quality.The team found the average wind speed is higher throughout the day during La Niña winters. Faster winds help reduce air pollution by transporting pollutants away. They also found that the average PBLH is slightly lower during La Niña winters.If La Niña sets in, lower temperatures in north India may lead people to burn more biomass for heating, worsening air pollution. A lower PBLH could also trap more pollutants near the ground. But higher wind speeds could disperse the pollutants, potentially leading to better air quality.

La Niña and the monsoonsEl Niño summers are relatively harsher, as was the case in April this year, when India experienced intense, record-breaking heat waves. If a La Niña arrives and persists into the summer of 2025, it may offer relief from high heat. Additionally, an El Niño often disrupts monsoons, with India historically receiving below-average rainfall during at least half of all El Niño years since 1871. But the same figures also indicate evolving patterns since 1980.Both north and south India, for instance, have received less rainfall during more intense El Nino events while central India has been barely affected. A La Niña, on the other hand, promotes robust monsoons as evidenced by the "normal" or "above-normal" rainfall in the La Niña years of 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Try India's first Christmas cake from Mambally's Royal Biscuit Factory in Kerala

On the ground floor of the Harbour City Mall, around 210 metres away from the Old Bus Stand Junction in Thalassery, Kannur, is a dark green board with capital neon letters that spells out Mambally's. Behind its glass door, biscuits and cakes are neatly arranged on a glass shelf jostling for space with boxes of plum cakes that whisper a legacy of more than a century. Believed to be one of India's first bakeries, Mambally's Royal Biscuit Factory in Thalassery, established in 1880, is also reportedly the birthplace of the beloved plum cake, an assured presence on the dining table beside a glass of red wine at Christmas feasts. The history of Mambally's Royal Biscuit Factory can be traced back to five generations when Thalassery-native Mambally Bapu was approached by a British merchant Murdoch Brown to bake a cake for Christmas in 1883. He gave Bapu a cake from England to taste, asking him to replicate it and also provided some ingredients such as dry fruits. Brown also suggested Bapu to soak the fruits in a French brandy.Bapu had started his bakery on the main road opposite the Thalassery police station which moved to the Harbour City Mall a few years back. Following his training in Burma, he started the bakery which sold around 40 varieties of biscuits, buns and rusks initially. For preparing the cake, the baking doyen procured spices and replaced the brandy with local arrack made from cashew apples and bananas. He also had a blacksmith from Dharmadam, Thalassery, prepare a custom-made mould. As Murdoch returned to taste the cake, he was spellbound and called it one of the best he had ever eaten. This incident which eventually contributed to Thalassery being branded the City of Three C's – Cricket, Cakes and Circuses – is so popular that there is even an Amar Chitra Katha comic about it. As years progressed, the Mambally family branched out to different parts of the State, continuing to be a notable presence in the baked good industry. "In Thiruvananthapuram, Santha bakery is well-reputed in the business. We have got Best Bakery in Kottayam and Modern Bakery in Kottayam and Kozhikode. Then we have a Cochin Bakery, which is spread across Kerala and Karnataka. There are multiple bakeries and each one has created a legacy for itself. But everything started from Thalassery," says Renuka Bala, a fifth-generation member of the family who joined the business two years ago. "I was just trying to help my uncle MM Prakash who runs the shop. Along the way, I realised that we have such a legacy and no one from my generation was taking the business forward," she says. Today, the Mambally plum cake contains dry fruits and nuts such as raisins, walnuts and figs as well as candied fruits, ginger, and orange peel. (Renuka says the family used to have documents from Japan regarding the procurement of these items in the past.) They don't use alcohol anymore, but the fruits are still stewed in a bell metal uruli, a traditional wide-mouthed, shallow cookware.

Solely blaming stubble burning for Delhi's pollution is incorrect

Delhi's air quality has turned extremely bad again with the Air Quality Index (AQI) hovering between severe and very severe category. This deterioration took place over the weekend without the burning of any stubble in the farm fields of Punjab and Haryana.The Delhi AQI on Tuesday crossed 430 and is expected to move upwards this week as the minimum temperature is expected to remain below 5 degrees Celsius range and because wind speed, which helps in disbursal of pollutants, is slow. These facts raise critical questions for policymakers and scientists who have blamed the farmers in Punjab and Haryana for Delhi' and National Capital Region's (NCR) air pollution.Let's discuss some facts about the annual phenomenon of stubble burning.Normally the period between September and November 30 is considered the stubble burning period in Punjab and Haryana when farm fields are cleared for the winter crop. Stubble burning incidents in Punjab has come down from 81,042 in 2016, from when the data is available, to 10,909 in 2024, an eight-fold fall in eight years. The year-wise data shows that stubble fire incidents increased during Covid-19 pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 even though the air pollution level in Delhi did not spike as it happened in 2023 and 2024: This clearly indicates a delink between stubble fire incidents and Delhi poor air quality. Similarly, stubble burning incidents recorded in Haryana, where paddy stubble burning is 20% of the crop remains that are burnt, also dipped by almost 90% since 2016. In 2024, Haryana reported only 559 incidents of farm fires.Moreover, the department of science and technology's air appropriation analysis cannot distinguish between stubble and non-stubble contribution to air pollution as the measurement is through carbon (soot) content in air and comes under bio-mass burning category. Even satellites cannot distinguish between stubble and non-stubble burning. So, if someone is burning leaves or burning wood for cooking or body warmth in Delhi or anywhere in northwestern India, it will count as biomass burning and will be clubbed with stubble burning. If one drives through Delhi in winter nights, one can see many poor and homeless people burning dry wood or grass to keep themselves warm.The data and historical perspective provide enough evidence that stubble burning is not a major contributor to Delhi's air pollution levels. So, why is Delhi-NCR so polluted in winter? The two primary reasons are the region's very high self-generated air pollution load, which is increasing every year, and very poor dust management by the local authorities. The particulate matter air pollution on whose basis AQI is measured is primarily related to dust and vehicle/industry exhaust.According to a study done by non-government organisation, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the contribution of vehicular exhaust to the air pollution load in Delhi between October 12 to November 3, 2024, was 51.5%.The neighbouring districts such as Gurugram, Sonipat, Rohtak and Faridabad in Haryana and Gautam Budh Nagar in Uttar Pradesh contributed 34.97%. The contribution from neighbouring districts was also on account of vehicles. The study said that the farm fires, read total biomass, contribution was 8.19% and dust particles made up 3.7% of the total air pollution in the city.The analysis was derived from data provided by the Decision Support System for Air Quality Management in Delhi, developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune. Industrial emissions, including sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds, lead to the formation of secondary pollutants like ozone. Vehicle emissions, particularly from heavy traffic, release carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and hydrocarbons, intensifying pollution in congested areas, the study said.Given the government's inability to mitigate pollution levels, the Supreme Court intervened to address the crisis and a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih issues slew of measures including prohibition of polluting vehicles from entering Delhi and not to remove Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) without its approval. The top court ordered the Delhi government and police to ensure effective enforcement of the firecracker ban and action against polluting vehicles on road.The Delhi-NCR region has been under GRAP since the first week of November but its impact on controlling the pollution levels is not much. It is because the vehicular load is still very high and there is poor disbursal of pollutants generated, especially in the morning when there is a heavy traffic. Hence, the weather plays an important role for high density of pollutants in the city in winters unlike other months when higher temperatures and faster wind speed helps in disbursal of pollutants.The administration would not be able to combat Delhi-NCR's high winter air pollution levels until the region has a year-around action plan that includes fixing responsibility of officials in local authorities for carrying out any air management plan throughout the year.Pollution management should be turned into a people's movement with resident welfare associations held responsible for greening of parks and open areas. Littering should be made a cognizable offence, road and street cleaning should be fully mechanised and penalties should be imposed on municipal officials for failing to lift garbage.The government should work on phasing out of industries out of the region to new modern industrial belts with proper air and water pollution management systems, which would ease pollution and population load.

The hidden cost of green washing the Indian Railways

According to a recent report published in this daily, RITES Ltd., the consultancy arm of the Indian Railways, has won two contracts for the repurposing of six broad gauge diesel electric locomotives for export to some African railways. These locomotives will be converted for use on railways that use the Cape Gauge of 1,067 mm as against the 1,676 mm used on the broad gauge of the Indian Railways. While the Indian Railways, in collaboration with its consultancy public sector undertakings such as RITES and IRCON, has exported locomotives to countries in Asia and Africa in the past, this is probably for the first time that second-hand (used) locomotives are proposed to be exported after "gauge conversion''. While there is no doubt that this is a commendable effort in re-engineering that involves virtually rebuilding the locomotives on a narrower platform, the story that lies hidden is a sordid saga of the humongous wasting of costly assets and profligacy unmatched in the annals of railways anywhere in the world, in pursuit of a wholly fictitious goal.

The report mentions "soon to be redundant diesel locomotives'. The fact is that even as far back as March 31, 2023, according to information obtained by this writer under the Right to Information Act (RTI) more than a year ago, there were 585 diesel locomotives stabled (kept idling/stored) in various locations across the Indian Railways' network due to electrification. Further over 60% of those locomotives had a residual life of more than 15 years. Today, the figure is reported to be about 760 locomotives. How and why did the Indian Railways end up in a situation where hundreds of diesel electric locomotives in good working order with years of service still left in them became redundant? The answer lies with the policy of the government to electrify the entire broad gauge network of Indian Railways in mission mode, at a frenetic pace.Railway electrification in India has long ago transcended mundane considerations such as economic and financial viability and joined the pantheon of universal desiderata such as world peace and universal brotherhood (Vasudeiva Kutumbakam). Today, railway electrification is generally justified broadly on two grounds: a saving of foreign exchange by reducing the import of crude oil and reducing environmental pollution, and, as a corollary of the second point, the adaptability to switch over to renewable sources of energy such as solar and wind. In fact in an official pamphlet issued by the Ministry of Railways in February 2021, entitled 'Mission 100% Electrification – Moving Towards net zero carbon emission', the objectives of the mission have been spelt out thus: to provide environment friendly, green and clean mode of transport to the people; and to unleash its potential to use of renewable energy, especially solar, by making use of the huge land parcel available along the railway tracks.Let us examine these justifications in greater detail. The benefit of saving in foreign exchange is true in absolute terms. But viewed in the context of the total consumption of high speed diesel (HSD) oil in the country, the consumption for railway traction is minuscule. According to a study conducted by AC Nielsen and published by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (January 2014), when electrification of the Indian Railways was proceeding at a sedate "conventional" pace, 70% of of total diesel oil consumption in the country was by the transport sector. Out of this, the share of the Railways was just 3.24%. In comparison, trucks consumed 28% and agricultural sector consumed 13.2%. The share of the Railways reduced further to about 2% in 2021-22. So, 100% rail electrification will eliminate one of the smallest segments of diesel consumption, leaving the elephants in the room to roam free.Truth about environmental considerationsThe claim of environmental benefits is even more untenable in the Indian context. Consider the following facts. Electricity is a secondary source of energy, except when generated by lightning. It needs to be generated by expending a primary source of energy from fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas, nuclear energy or the kinetic energy of water stored at a height (as in hydroelectric projects), or through solar or wind power.

What is the situation in India? Nearly 50% of the electricity generated today in the country is through coal-fired thermal plants and the Indian Railways plays a crucial role in transporting the coal from the pit heads to the thermal power plants. In fact, nearly 50% of the Railways' total freight earnings of about ?1.7 lakh crore in 2023-24 (revised estimates) was generated by transporting coal for various purposes of which 80%, i.e., 40% of total freight earnings was generated only by transporting coal to thermal generating plants.Replacing diesel locomotives with electric locomotives will only result in electric locomotives powered by electricity — about 50% of which is generated by burning coal — being used to move more coal to coal-fired thermal plants to generate more electricity, to transport more coal. Coal is considered the dirtiest fuel, environmentally, on the planet. A complete switchover by the Indian Railways to electric traction merely shifts the pollution caused by diesel locomotives near the railway tracks to the source of power generation in a more concentrated form, ultimately polluting the same atmosphere. Unless and until about 80% of the total electricity generated in the country comes from non-fossil fuels — and that day seems far off — any claim of 100% electrification of the Indian Railways, making it a "Green Railway'', is in the realm of fantasy. Incidentally, before that situation becomes a reality, the Railways will have to find alternative commodities to coal — which, today, is the single highest freight earner — to avoid a financial meltdown.This article is not intended to reopen the time-worn debate of electric traction versus diesel traction. The issue is about chasing a mirage of converting the Indian Railways into a "green railway'', and, in the process, rendering a large number of serviceable diesel locomotives redundant. If all the locomotives already stabled are lined up today end to end, they will stretch for a length of almost 16 kilometres, a majority of them heading prematurely to the scrapyard.

'Disaster management, strategic purposes'Mission 100% electrification of the Railways will also result in a dichotomy in the near term. The Indian Railways today has more than 4,000 diesel locomotives. With the impending 100% electrification of the system, all of them will not become redundant overnight. According to a recent news report in a reputed financial daily, quoting a senior official, 2,500 diesel locomotives are proposed to be retained by the Railways for "disaster management and strategic purposes''. It is beyond comprehension what disaster will require such a large number of diesel locomotives to be set aside, unless this is a ruse to avoid sending locomotives with considerable residual service life prematurely to the scrapyard. Further, it is reported that another nearly 1,000 locomotives will continue in service for the next few years to meet traffic commitments. In other words, a 100%

EYE SECRETS

Editorial

Reforming India, a work in progress

This month 35 years ago, India took a leap of faith by initiating economic reforms that marked a defining moment in the country's history. Centred on liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG), the path-breaking policy dismantled the Licence Raj, eased import barriers, opened up the economy to competition, private investment and global trade, and accelerated economic growth. Looking back at the eventful journey that saw the country transform from a licence-permit economy into one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, one would acknowledge the unmistakable signs of growth and development. There are several positives to India's post-liberalisation growth story. The dismantling of industrial and trade controls gave a boost to economic growth and also helped in reducing the poverty rate. The economy has multiplied eight-fold. Absolute poverty has dropped sharply.

As the sixth-largest economy, India has among the world's biggest markets for a whole range of products and services. These reflect the birth of a large middle class with money to spend. However, it is still a work in progress as the reform process remains incomplete. Critical reforms in labour, land, agriculture, education, healthcare, infrastructure and the justice system are still pending. As a result, India has been unable to build the labour-intensive manufacturing base that transformed economies such as China and Vietnam. While liberalisation boosted the GDP and reduced poverty, it fell short of delivering broad-based prosperity.

The unfinished economic reforms have been the missing link. Agriculture remains largely unreformed, with significant productivity shortfalls when compared with world averages. Manufacturing remains stunted despite many policy initiatives and has not generated employment on the scale witnessed in East Asian economies.

The biggest success story post-reforms is that India has emerged as the global IT outsourcing hub, software export leader and a major provider of digital services. The country has transformed from an import-substitution economy into an export-oriented participant in global markets. Large forex reserves, diversified exports, greater resilience to external shocks and expanded services exports are among the key achievements. However, India continues to grapple with unemployment, uneven income distribution, rural distress and global economic uncertainties. Many reforms have been partial and uneven. Labour productivity remains low, judicial delays discourage investment, land acquisition remains contentious, and human capital indicators continue to lag behind those of developed economies. India has become richer, but not yet sufficiently productive. As it aspires to become a developed nation under the "Viksit Bharat 2047" vision, the next phase of reforms must focus on improving institutions, governance, innovation, human capital and competitiveness. Much more would have been achieved if the country had followed through with the core logic of the 1991 reforms: to leave to the private sector and markets what they can deliver, open up to the world and focus government

Panel directs PMC to prepare 25-year water purification plan

Following rising complaints of the supply of turbid water in parts of the city, the Pune Municipal Corporation's standing committee directed the civic administration to prepare an integrated water purification master plan for Pune.

Bhimale said long-term planning was necessary to ensure quality and clean water supply to citizens considering the growing population of the city.Bhimale said long-term planning was necessary to ensure quality and clean water supply to citizens considering the growing population of the city.Following rising complaints of the supply of turbid water in parts of the city, the Pune Municipal Corporation's standing committee directed the civic administration to prepare an integrated water purification master plan for Pune. The plan will take into consideration the city's supply needs for the next 25 years while modernising existing water purification plants."Citizens from different parts of the city have been complaining of turbid water from taps. Thus, the existing water purification and supply system needs to be upgraded. The old Parvati and Cantonment water purification plants should be modernised immediately, and their efficiency increased," said Srinath Bhimale, chairperson of the civic standing committee, on Monday.He added that the tender process and actual work of the new water purification project at Pune Cantonment should be completed within the specified time frame. He had earlier directed the administration to inspect the Parvati purification plant and submit a report on its status on turbid water supply immediately.Accordingly, the Additional Commissioner, officials of the water supply department and concerned engineers inspected the plant. The report submitted after the inspection clarified that the machinery in the Parvati water purification plant was under stress as it was old, making the water turbid.

Centre promises to withdraw NEET protest FIRs. Why the process may still take time

The Centre has assured the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) that cases against peaceful protesters in the NEET paper leak agitation will be withdrawn. Bihar and Assam have already announced that criminal cases and legal proceedings against protesters will be dropped, while Maharashtra is expected to discuss the issue at Tuesday's Cabinet meeting.Yet, across several states, protesters continue to receive police notices and summons, raising questions about why action is continuing despite the government's assurance. Some police forces, like in Maharashtra, say they will continue the legal process as they have not yet received government orders.While governments can decide to withdraw cases, the procedure depends on the stage of the investigation and the mechanism adopted by each state. In Maharashtra, where similar protest-related FIRs have been withdrawn in the past, the process has often taken months, and sometimes years.

Q. What have Bihar and Assam announced?

On Monday, Assam announced that it would withdraw cases registered against those who participated in the NEET protests. The state said five cases had been registered and 13 people arrested. The government said no adverse legal action would be initiated against those involved in the protests and that the process of withdrawing pending cases, regardless of the stage of investigation, would begin in accordance with law. It also said those arrested or detained would be reviewed for release expeditiously.Bihar issued a similar announcement, stating that no punitive or retaliatory action would be taken, existing FIRs, complaints and showcause notices would be withdrawn, those detained or arrested would be released and no further legal action would follow. Neither state has publicly detailed the legal procedure it will adopt. However, legal experts say one option available to the police is to file closure reports before the competent court, stating that the case need not proceed.Maharashtra is yet to make an announcement. Officials said the issue is likely to come up before the state Cabinet on Tuesday.

Q. Can an FIR simply be withdrawn?

Not always. After registering an FIR, police ordinarily investigate the case and either file a chargesheet if they find sufficient evidence or submit a final report recommending that no case be pursued. Under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), police can conclude that there is insufficient evidence to proceed and submit a report before the competent court. The court then decides whether to accept the closure.If a chargesheet has already been filed, however, the process becomes longer. In such cases, the prosecution must move the court seeking withdrawal under Section 360 of the BNSS, and the court must approve the request.

Q. Why could the process take longer in Maharashtra?

Maharashtra has previously withdrawn FIRs filed against participants in political and social protests through Government Resolutions (GRs), but the process has been far from immediate. The existing GR lays down eligibility criteria, including that the protest should not have resulted in loss of life or damage to public or private property exceeding Rs 5 lakh. It also requires scrutiny by a committee comprising police and prosecution officials before cases are recommended for withdrawal.If this route is followed, the investigation ordinarily continues. Police record statements, issue notices and complete the probe before filing a chargesheet. Those named in the FIR must then appear before court, after which the committee examines each case and recommends whether it should be withdrawn.Based on that recommendation, the prosecutor moves the court seeking withdrawal. Lawyers say this procedure has caused significant delays in the past and the experience of earlier protests illustrates this. FIRs registered against Aarey protesters in 2019 were closed only in 2021 after the prosecution sought withdrawal before the court. Similarly, cases registered in 2020 against activists and lawyers protesting the attack on JNU students and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act were closed only in 2023 after the state issued a GR in 2022 and the committee recommended withdrawal.

Q. What are the protesters asking for now?

Lawyers representing students involved in the NEET protests say the Centre's assurance should translate into immediate legal relief. Instead of waiting for investigations to conclude and chargesheets to be filed, they want states to issue directions enabling police to file closure reports before courts at the earliest, ensuring that notices, summons and further investigative steps are halted immediately.

Bengaluru man arrested for making obscene remarks to woman waiting for cab

A 42-year-old fruit vendor was arrested after a woman posted a video on Instagram alleging that he sexually harassed her and offered her money for sexual favours while she was waiting for a cab in Bengaluru, the police said Tuesday.After the man allegedly approached her and made obscene remarks on Sunday night, the woman confronted him and began recording the incident on her mobile phone. He allegedly continued abusing her before leaving when she warned that she would call the police.The police identified the arrested accused as Vijay Ragav, a resident of NRI Layout in Ramamurthy Nagar, and seized a scooter he allegedly used."The accused is currently in police custody," a police officer said.

In her Instagram video posted Monday, the woman alleged that the man was riding a scooter with the registration number KA03 KQ6190. "As a woman, I should be able to wait for my cab without being treated like an object or being propositioned for money. His words were intimidating, disrespectful and made me fear for my safety," she wrote.The woman urged authorities to take action against the man and appealed to the public not to ignore harassment in public spaces.Responding to the woman's post, the deputy commissioner of police (DCP) for the Whitefield division asked her to share the exact location of the incident.Based on her complaint, the police registered an FIR on charges of sexual harassment and insulting a woman's modesty. Further investigation is underway, they added.

CJP protest over, now marriage: A mother's plan for Abhijeet Dipke

Even as their son has emerged as the face of a national youth movement, the parents of Abhijeet Dipke, founder of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), are being swamped with marriage proposals for him. While his mother hopes to see him married by December or January, the family has left the final decision on the date and month to the 30-year-old activist."We were receiving marriage proposals for Abhijeet even before the CJP protest against NEET paper leak started, and they continue to come in," his mother Anita Dipke told She recalled discussing the topic with Abhijeet over the phone while he was in Boston. "He didn't say much about it; he just smiled. As parents, we have been pursuing him to get married, but when he returns home in a few days, we will bring up the subject again and let him take the final call," she added.Abhijeet was scheduled to return home shortly after the recent agitation concluded following the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, but postponed his travel after contracting typhoid. "We now learn it will take another four to five days for him to return," his mother said.

Family forced into hiding following threatsThe family said they were forced into hiding for nearly two weeks shortly after Abhijeet announced the launch of the Cockroach Janta Party."After he launched the party, Abhijeet began receiving threats in Boston. Callers threatened that since he was in Boston, they would target his parents in India," Anita Dipke said."Abhijeet called us immediately and urged us to relocate. We moved to Konkan and stayed with relatives for a fortnight. When he returned from Boston in the first week of June, we went to receive him." The family currently resides in the Waluj area of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar.Anita Dipke added that Abhijeet had kept his political plans quiet at home. "He never told us about his plan to launch the Cockroach party. We learned everything through news channels when we saw his interviews," she said.Recalling his childhood, Anita expressed surprise at her son's public speaking abilities on television. "At home, he hardly spoke. Apart from asking for meals or basic necessities, he rarely held long conversations or spoke about anything else. He never participated in elocution or debate contests in school," she said."He was always a quiet boy. We rarely saw him lose his temper or raise his voice. Seeing him speak three languages with ease on national TV was surprising." On his compassionate side, she recalled his efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic to support around 15 homeless Adivasi families."He offered them space in our parking area and arranged all their provisions using ration we provided. They stayed in our parking area for days," she recalled. "His father worried that our son would exhaust our savings, but Abhijeet insisted that serving those families was a humanitarian duty. He has always had a caring nature, which helped him unite everyone in Delhi."

While Abhijeet was an above-average student who scored 96 per cent in Class 10 at St Alphonsa School and studied at SB College in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, his family regrets pushing him towards engineering.After scoring 65 per cent in Class 12 science, his parents insisted he pursue engineering, given that his father is a civil engineer. He enrolled at the Sinhgad Institutes in Pune but struggled to adapt and left before appearing for his final examinations. "We realised forcing him into engineering was a wrong decision and allowed him to exit the field," his mother said.The family also expressed worries over physical attacks targeting Abhijeet during the recent protests. "When I learned he was slapped and had ink thrown on him, I cried and worried if he was badly hurt," his mother recalled."When I spoke to him, he told us not to worry, saying he now belonged to the nation as public property."

No more Gandhinagar trips: Gujarat raises district collectors' land allotment powers

Aiming to accelerate infrastructure development, industrial growth, and public welfare projects, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has substantially enhanced the financial powers of district collectors and district development officers to allot government land and gamtal (village site) plots, respectively.The decision is expected to streamline land allotment processes across Gujarat, as land records and site details are readily available at the district level. The move will also eliminate the need for applicants to travel to the capital, Gandhinagar, to complete administrative procedures.According to an official release issued Tuesday, the state government has consistently prioritised administrative reforms and procedural simplification to boost the "ease of doing business".

Following the decision, the financial caps for district collectors allotting government land have been raised as follows:State boards and corporations: Up to Rs 1 crore (increased from Rs 15 lakh) for allotting up to 2 hectares of land.Central government Departments: Up to Rs 50 lakh (increased from Rs 15 lakh) for allotting up to 1 hectare of land for public purposes.Cooperative housing societies: Up to Rs 50 lakh (increased from Rs 6 lakh).Residential purpose (individuals/government employees): Up to Rs 20 lakh (increased from Rs 1 lakh).Cooperative godowns and other institutions: Up to Rs 15 lakh (increased from Rs 3 lakh).Commercial purpose (via auction): Up to Rs 5 lakh (increased from Rs 1 lakh)Similarly, the financial limits for district development officers allotting plots have been expanded.Cooperative housing societies: Up to Rs 7.5 lakh (increased from Rs 1.5 lakh).Individual residential plots: Up to Rs 1 lakh (increased from Rs 20,000).Milk cooperatives/cooperative godowns/rural grid: Up to Rs 1 lakh (increased from Rs 20,000).Streamlining, revenue generationThe release noted that empowering district-level officials will significantly shorten administrative cycles, speed up execution of public and industrial projects, generate employment, and ensure faster deposit of premium amounts into the state treasury.Under the revised rules, if an applicant fails to pay the possession price or premium within 90 days of notification, the district collector is now authorised to grant an extension up to the end of the three-year tenure of the district land valuation committee, reducing redundant administrative paperwork.

CID to probe Karnataka veterinary officer recruitment scam

The Karnataka government on Tuesday handed over the investigation into the alleged irregularities in the Karnataka Public Service Commission's (KPSC) selection of veterinary officers to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).Director General of Police M A Saleem issued orders on Tuesday, directing the CID to take up the investigation.The development came days after the KPSC declared the final selection list of 400 veterinary officers on July 17. Later, allegations emerged that each seat was sold for Rs 80 lakh to Rs 1 crore.On Sunday, the KPSC held an emergency meeting, put the selection list on temporary hold, and set up an internal committee to investigate the allegations.FIRs lodged, court pulls up Sahukar's daughterTwo First Information Reports (FIRs) have already been registered at the Vidhana Soudha police station on July 24. In the first, former KPSC chairman Shivashankarappa S Sahukar, other KPSC officials, and 29 candidates have been named. Sahukar and his two daughters also face a separate case for alleged irregularities in getting government posts while he was the chairman. Sahukar has since been suspended.On Monday, the Karnataka High Court refused to cancel a criminal case against Sahukar's daughter, saying her alleged false income declaration amounted to an "eyewash" and "fraud". Suma S Sahukar has been charged with forgery for applying for a government job under the 3B reservation category, which is for people with an annual family income of less than Rs 8 lakh. She had challenged the case before the Karnataka High Court.

We will take to the streets: R Ashoka

A BJP delegation led by Opposition leader R Ashoka had on Monday demanded that the probe into the alleged KPSC scam be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation or a judicial inquiry headed by a Karnataka High Court judge.Those who paid money (bribe) were taken outside Bengaluru, to other states, given question papers, and made to prepare. There are allegations that meritorious candidates scored lower marks. Everyone knows that nothing happens in the KPSC without money. The belief that appointments here are made purely on merit must be restored among the people," he alleged."If no action is taken on this, we will take to the streets and launch an agitation. It is the habit of the Congress that when a question paper leak occurs in the state, officials must take responsibility, but when it happens at the Centre, the minister must take responsibility," Ashoka added.

Regime change? Inside Reza Pahlavi's faltering bid to lead Iran

PARIS - As the U.S. and Israel went to war on Iran this year, a transformative moment seemed to have arrived for Reza Pahlavi, son of the autocratic shah who was overthrown in 1979.Despite not having set foot in Iran in almost half a century, Pahlavi had been actively campaigning in the U.S. and Europe, giving speeches about a bright new future for his homeland, raising money and meeting elected officials."The Iranian people have called on me to lead the transition after the regime is gone," he declared on the social-media platform X shortly after the war began in late February. "I have accepted that responsibility."In Texas this March, Pahlavi received one of the most enthusiastic receptions at the Conservative Political Action Conference. As he took the stage, staunch supporters of President Donald Trump and a large contingent of Iranian Americans, many draped in the pre-revolution Iranian flag that flew during his father's rule, lavished him with a 45-second standing ovation.Four days later, Trump horrified many Iranian emigres by declaring in a social-media post: "we are blasting Iran into oblivion or, as they say, back to the Stone Ages!!!"To the shock of some of Pahlavi's Iranian-American financial supporters – one of whom said the donors had recently given his campaign more than $3 million in the hope he could lead a new, transitional government in Iran – the exiled prince didn't swiftly condemn Trump's remarks.Pahlavi received a hero's welcome at the influential CPAC gathering of U.S. conservatives in March - in what now appears to be a high-water mark for his movement. REUTERS/Daniel ColeNow, Pahlavi's triumphant appearance at CPAC appears to mark the apex of his rise as the most visible candidate vying to step in should the hardline Islamic government fall. Although he continues to campaign, his candidacy has sputtered.

In mid-January, Trump told Reuters that Pahlavi "seems very nice, but I don't know how he'd play within his own country." And behind the scenes his administration sidelined the prince. As Iranian-American human rights activist Ahmad Batebi prepared to address a January 15 United Nations Security Council meeting on Tehran's bloody crackdown on protests earlier that month, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Mike Waltz personally urged him not to mention Pahlavi by name, according to two people familiar with the exchange. Although Batebi supports Pahlavi, he complied.In a statement, Waltz told Reuters he suggested "a tight focus" on Batebi's own experience of torture in Iranian prisons and "the barbarism of the regime" would make "the greatest impact, rather than opposition politics."In June, the tattered ceasefire pact signed by the U.S. and Iran made no mention of regime change. Instead, the U.S. agreed to respect Iran's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in its internal affairs – and publicly dismissed Pahlavi again."The President of the United States never said that his goal was to install Reza Pahlavi to become the new leader of Iran," U.S. Vice President JD Vance told podcaster Megyn Kelly after Trump announced the U.S.-Iran memorandum of understanding on June 14. Pahlavi and his top aides were left to blast the agreement on social media.Meanwhile, some of Pahlavi's financial backers, who communicate in a private WhatsApp group, have grown disillusioned not just by his muted criticism of Trump's extreme wartime threats. In private calls, according to three people familiar with the matter, Pahlavi listened to but ultimately ignored their advice to try harder to unify the opposition and to forcefully condemn some of his more radical supporters' violence against and harassment of other Iranian dissidents. There is no evidence that Pahlavi had anything to do with those incidents.Pahlavi's faltering leadership bid highlights one of the major flaws in the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran: the lack of a clear alternative to the Islamic Republic. Shortly after the bombing began in late February, Trump called for the Iranian people to rise up and take over their government. But despite an air strike that killed the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the government has survived the onslaught – and in the view of many Iran watchers, has tightened its hold on power. The President of the United States never said that his goal was to install Reza Pahlavi to become the new leader of Iran.In two interviews with Reuters this month, including a lengthy video sit-down in Paris, Pahlavi stressed that Iran's current government is "very close" to collapse. "This campaign started as a lifetime mission to liberate Iran 46 years ago," he said. "And it has never been about me. It's been about the Iranian people and their right to self-determination."His role, he said, is to lead a transition to a new democratic government: "I'm not the destination, I'm a bridge to the destination."The Iranian mission to the United Nations in New York didn't respond to requests for comment.While Pahlavi's supporters see him as a unifier, several attempts he was involved in to unite the long-divided opposition collapsed. In one case in 2023, three people familiar with the matter say, his wife insulted other opposition leaders, which she denies. Two activists also say he was mostly all talk and no action during a campaign to designate as a terrorist organization the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which wields vast military, political and economic power in Iran.

For this story, Reuters interviewed more than 50 people, including eight of Pahlavi's current and former associates; reviewed hundreds of pages of legal documents; and sifted through extensive video, photographic and social-media records of Pahlavi and his supporters, some of whom favor a restoration of Iran's pre-revolutionary monarchy.Pahlavi's main credential is being the son of the last shah of Iran. Unlike many successful revolutionaries of the recent past, such as South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Poland's Lech Walesa or the Islamists who overthrew his father, Pahlavi doesn't seem to have a mass organized movement inside the country ready to roll into power. Iran's repressive government also has culled potential alternative opposition leaders who might have risen to Pahlavi's level of prominence, imprisoning or killing thousands of dissidents and allegedly trying to assassinate critics abroad.Far from a sputtering campaign, Pahlavi described a robust "mobilization to overcome this regime" and told Reuters it's "not true" that he hasn't built a mass movement. Huge numbers of Iranians heeded his call to protest in the streets on January 8 and 9, he said, and many died when the government responded with gunfire. He said he communicates with "cell leaders" of "over a thousand different groupings" that span labor, academia, religion and ethnic organizations "to be ready to intervene the moment that we have that opening." Reuters was unable to independently confirm how many groups inside Iran are working with him.It was Tehran's "massacre" of demonstrators in January that Pahlavi said changed his view on foreign intervention. That month, an Iranian official told Reuters that deaths in street protests had reached at least 5,000; Pahlavi puts the figure at 40,000. "This regime demonstrates that it has no mercy whatsoever," he said. "It's willing to kill thousands upon thousands of its own citizens, and therefore there has to be an adjustment of how you look at things." The Iranian people are still the "boots on the ground," he said, but they need foreign military help to "equal the playing field."

He said he hasn't sought the endorsement of any government or leader: "It is not for a foreign government to decide who or what should be the alternative for Iran. That's up to the Iranian people."In the interviews, Pahlavi did not directly address Trump's post about blasting Iran back to the Stone Ages but stressed, as he has in the past, that military strikes should "hit the regime as hard as you can" but spare "civilian infrastructure."Speaking about his own movement, Pahlavi unequivocally condemned violence by his more radical supporters and said he has worked hard to unify the Iranian opposition, gathering together representatives "from all walks of life, ideologies. In fact, I've reached out to people who were, at the time, my father's worst enemies. Today, they are fully on board working with me."Pahlavi said his critics "are entitled to their opinion. Some people may not like my face. Some people may think that I should be doing this and that," he said. But, he added, "I think for the most part, I'm enjoying a lot of support across the board, inside and outside of Iran."Some of that support, he acknowledged, comes from his family legacy: "Yes, I happen to have the Pahlavi name. And by the way, that's a positive. That's what people are chanting on the streets."While it's difficult to obtain accurate polling in an authoritarian society, a survey of 31,450 Iranians late last month found that about 48% view Pahlavi favorably, according to Ammar Maleki, director of the Netherlands-based Gamaan Research Institute, which conducts online polling in Iran.Stirring controversy among some Iranians, Reza Pahlavi met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his wife Sara Netanyahu and Israel's then-Minister of Intelligence Gila Gamliel (far right) in Jerusalem in 2023. Office of cabinet minister Gila Gamliel/Handout via REUTERS

'ROYALIST BUBBLE'It has been 48 years since Pahlavi, the eldest son of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was in Iran. An aviation enthusiast, he moved to Texas in 1978 at age 17 to begin jet pilot training at Reese Air Force Base. After the 1979 revolution – which began as a broad-based uprising against his father's repressive rule but produced the Islamic theocracy – he remained abroad, earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Southern California in social sciences and communication.Young Reza Pahlavi with his father, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last shah of Iran. Office of Reza Pahlavi/Handout via REUTERSPahlavi as a boy with his father, his mother Empress Farah, and his younger brother, Prince Alireza. Office of Reza Pahlavi/Handout via REUTERSHis life in exile has been marked by repeated personal tragedy. His father died in 1980 from complications related to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. His younger sister, Leila, died in London in 2001 of a drug overdose.

Two US lawmakers hold talks with Pakistan's Army chief in Rawalpindi

Islamabad: Two US lawmakers have called on Pakistan's Army chief Asim Munir in Rawalpindi, as Islamabad and Washington continue efforts to strengthen bilateral ties.The meeting took place at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi on Monday, Pakistan's military media wing, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), said in a statement.Congressmen Ryan Zinke of Montana and Michael Baumgartner of Washington — both of them members of the US House of Representatives — discussed matters of mutual interest, regional security, bilateral defence cooperation and avenues for enhancing economic collaboration during their meeting with Field Marshal Munir, it said.The visit by the two Republican lawmakers comes amid renewed momentum in US-Pakistan engagement, with both sides stepping up high-level political, defence and economic contacts after President Donald Trump's return to office last year.Pakistan has mediated between the US and Iran after hostilities broke out between the two countries earlier this year. Islamabad has continued to engage both Washington and Tehran amid efforts to revive a ceasefire that collapsed following renewed strikes this month.Munir highlighted Pakistan's economic potential to the visiting US lawmakers and stressed that sustainable regional stability was closely linked to economic growth, trade expansion and regional connectivity, the ISPR said.He also underlined Pakistan's ongoing structural reforms aimed at creating a business-friendly environment and attracting foreign investment, it said."Recognising the professional backgrounds and insights of the delegation, both sides discussed potential opportunities for bilateral economic engagement, private sector partnerships and enhancing bilateral trade ties," the ISPR said.The US lawmakers have expressed their commitment to promoting deeper economic, commercial and institutional linkages between the two countries, it added.The two congressmen arrived in Pakistan last week and also visited Lahore, where they met Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan.Speaking to state-run Pakistan Television, Baumgartner said bilateral ties between the two countries were "going to be stronger", while Zinke said, "the relationship has never been better".Munir has developed close ties with the Trump administration in recent years.Trump has publicly referred to Munir as his "favourite field marshal", while Pakistan nominated the US President for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Samsung to debut India-specific AI features in next Galaxy smartphone, says CEO

SAMSUNG

New Delhi/London: Samsung Electronics will introduce artificial intelligence features developed specifically for Indian consumers in its next Galaxy smartphone, as the company expands the role of its research and development centres in Noida and Bengaluru to build localised AI capabilities for one of its fastest-growing markets, Samsung Southwest Asia CEO and President J B Park said.The South Korean electronics maker said its India R&D teams are studying the persona of Indian consumers and developing AI features suited to benefit local consumers, including an AI-powered bill payment reminder that can identify recurring bills from emails and alert users before due dates.The initiative is part of Samsung's strategy to differentiate its AI offerings beyond features already available across smartphone brands by studying the consumer persona."We are trying to understand our users, and if we detect anything that can better your lifestyle, we will provide the solution, whether it's financial, or controlling your home devices, or alerting your elderly if they have a health issue. So, there are many personas that our team in Noida and Bengaluru are studying with the objective of giving a better solution," Park said at a roundtable with Indian journalists in London.Park said the Noida R&D centre has ideated an AI feature to help Samsung users by automating repetitive bill payment using AI. The artificial intelligence feature, which is currently in the works, is that AI will know which date and which email to look at and then alert users to make the bill payment without you having to incur a late fine."These are the kind of daily routines that consumers want to get out of and have a personal assistant AI do that job for you. The idea came from Noida R&D centre. And, this feature was engineered exclusively for Indian consumers, and we are going to introduce it in our next Galaxy device," Park said in response to a question from PTI. Samsung's latest foldables 'Z8' series phones, priced between Rs 1.25 lakh and Rs 2.60 lakh, are currently available for pre-booking for Indian markets and will be available in stores from August 7.Samsung's Galaxy Z Fold8 lineup comprises the Galaxy Z Fold8 Ultra (for immersive content viewing and multitasking), Galaxy Z Fold8 (a passport sized phone with Flex window for shortcuts) and Galaxy Z Flip8 (the sleekest flip smartphone yet, designed for self-expression and quick interactions while on the move).

Park had last week said that the Z8 series are made in India, supported by R&D centres in the country. Replying to questions at the roundtable, Park further said that he envisions to grow the R&D centre in India in terms of technology-related ideas and intellectual property (IP). "We believe that Indian brilliant minds (engineers and technicians) that are working in our facility and R&D centre have that capability (to develop IPs).There's always a hunger for getting more resources employed in our R&D centre, but we have to ensure that they (Indian engineers) do not work on simple technical problems. We have to make them work on more creative (aspects) to bring more IP into our technology. Then we will have an R&D centre that will contribute globally. That's the way we want to develop our R&D centre," Park said.He said Samsung aims to strengthen its R&D centres in India to create more intellectual property and develop technologies that originate from India for global markets.With revenue of Rs 1.11 lakh crore as of FY25, Samsung has put in place an end-to-end AI ecosystem, bringing Galaxy AI (smartphones, tablets, wearables), Bespoke AI (refrigerators, washing machines, and ACs), and Vision AI (televisions and smart monitors) together through SmartThings.

Netanyahu's first meeting with Trump since Iran war began is chance to smooth over strains

Jerusalem: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting with President Donald Trump on Tuesday is the first since the two leaders launched a joint war against Iran and a chance for Netanyahu to smooth out strains in their relationship.The meeting comes as both face growing pressures at home. Netanyahu is up for reelection and is embattled in part because of his deteriorating relationship with Trump. Trump is under pressure to end an unpopular war that has wreaked economic havoc and driven prices higher ahead of midterm elections this November.The two leaders also plan to discuss the framework agreement the US and Israel signed with Lebanon over the Israel-Hezbollah war and the expansion of the Abraham Accords, according to a White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the meeting.We have a little difference," Trump said Monday when asked by reporters if he and the Israeli prime minister were on the same page with Iran. "But pretty close, yeah."Trump and Netanyahu's relationship ebbed beforeTrump has had a hot-and-cold history with Netanyahu over the years, but upon his return to the White House last year, their alliance seemed stronger than ever. When they started the war together in February, it was with a united front, touting their respective militaries as acting in lockstep to take out Iran's leadership and pave the way for a government more friendly to the West.But as Iran fought back – sending drones and missiles slamming into US bases and high-rises in cities in the Gulf, and choking off the Strait of Hormuz – Trump came under immense pressure both at home and by allies in the region to end the conflict.

20 killed in JAAC Long March crackdown in PoK

Islamabad: At least 20 people were killed and dozens critically injured during the Long March organised by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), amid an escalating crackdown by Pakistani authorities on protesters in the region.The death toll is expected to rise, with several of those injured reported to be in critical condition.Sharing the details in a post on X on Tuesday, JAAC said, "The Long March caravans have reached Rawalakot city. According to information received so far, the identities of 19 deceased individuals have been confirmed, while one person did not have identification documents and sustained a bullet wound to the head; his body is present at the Palandri Hospital. Thus, the total deaths have reached at least 20. In addition, other details are contingent upon daylight breaking and the restoration of communications."

"The protesters are present at Chandni Chowk in Rawalakot city. Once daylight arrives, a gathering will be held at Shahid Chowk, where the future course of action will be announced," it added.This march was held after talks between JAAC and Pakistani authorities reportedly failed to produce a mutually acceptable outcome, prompting a renewed call for public mobilisation.It began from Mirpur Division on Sunday, with caravans converging at the Rawalakot sit-in before proceeding with the march towards Muzaffarabad on Monday.Meanwhile, the United Kashmir People's National Party (UKPNP) on Tuesday drew the international community's attention to the mounting humanitarian abuses unfolding presently in PoK.Citing reports, the group alleged that Pakistani security forces on Monday evening launched a violent crackdown against peaceful protesters in Rawalakot, killing and injuring dozens through the use of live ammunition, heavy shelling, tear gas, and other forms of force against civilians.Expressing concern over the reported violence, it said, "shelling and the use of live ammunition continue, raising fears of further loss of civilian life."

The group called on the United Nations, international human rights organisations, and democratic governments to take immediate action by demanding an immediate end to the use of live ammunition, shelling, and excessive force against peaceful civilians by Pakistani forces.These ongoing protests across PoK have emerged as a direct challenge to Islamabad's long-standing control in the region. Pakistani forces have repeatedly unleashed a brutal crackdown, leaving several civilians dead and injured, while the region remains under a strict blockade, curfew, and a total communications blackout.Geographic ReferenceLast month, India slammed Pakistan for unleashing a pattern of fake news and videos while making a "desperate attempt" to cover up its own failings and deflect attention away from its human rights abuses during the ongoing crackdown on protesters in PoK.Addressing a weekly media briefing, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that India expressed hope that the international community would hold Pakistan accountable for its misdeeds and abuses.When asked about the ongoing protests and crackdown on protesters in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), Jaiswal responded, "There are reports of police brutality in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in which several people have been killed, and there are several more who have been injured. We hope the international community will hold Pakistan accountable for its misdeeds and abuses."

Iran's FM says Ukraine's attack on Iranian ship 'cannot go unanswered'

EMS News Agency, August 1Tehran: Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi on said Ukraine's attack on an Iranian commercial ship in the Caspian Sea "cannot go unanswered."In a post on the social media platform X, Araghchi accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky of ordering "a blatant UN Charter violation done at Israel's behest to drag Europe into its war." He said he had "made clear that what the freeloader in Kyiv did CANNOT GO UNANSWERED" in phone calls with European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday and Sunday respectively, Xinhua

He made the remarks on Saturday in a phone call with EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, in which the two sides discussed the latest regional developments, according to a statement by the Iranian Foreign Ministry. Araghchi condemned the Ukrainian attack, urging the EU, UN Security Council, and international community to hold its "perpetrators" and supporters to account, according to the statement.The two sides also addressed developments in the Strait of Hormuz, stressing the need for diplomatic initiatives to manage regional tensions, it added. In a separate statement, the ministry said it summoned Ukraine's charge d'affaires in Tehran on Saturday over the attack, formally delivering a note of protest condemning the "hostile and criminal" act.

Treatment in limbo for months, patients with rare diseases still wait for relief — despite Delhi HC order

Delhi High Court directed that the Centre establish a National Fund for Rare Diseases and allocate Rs 974 crore for 2024-25 and 2025-26. This was to be approved and transferred in 30 days.

From a seven-year-old in Srinagar to a 16-year-old in Delhi suffering from “rare diseases”, a recent Delhi High Court verdict on ensuring uninterrupted treatment for patients like them came as a ray of hope.Since their diagnosis, patients of rare diseases — defined by WHO as a debilitating, lifelong condition that affects 1 or fewer people in 1,000 — and their kin faced challenges in accessing life-saving medication, whose cost runs into lakhs, and issues with its supply. A total of 104 petitions were finally moved in court, with over 100 patients seeking relief.

On October 4, the Delhi High Court directed that the Centre establish a National Fund for Rare Diseases and allocate Rs 974 crore for 2024-25 and 2025-26. This was to be approved and transferred in 30 days. It also said “treatment for all eligible… patients, as per an AIIMS report dated July 21, who are before the court in these batches of petitions shall commence in 45 days as per the NRDC (National Rare Diseases Committee) recommendations.”The court directed NRDC to hold its first meeting in the week beginning October 21, where directions were to be issued about ensuring procurement of rare disease drugs at reasonable prices, etc. It said “on the said date, cases of all petitioners shall be placed before the NRDC for approval and commencement of treatment”.However, a committee member, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the meeting has not been held yet with no notification issued for it.When contacted, Dr Madhulika Kabra, Professor, Division of Genetics, Department of Pediatrics at AIIMS New Delhi, who is part of the NRDC, said she would be unable to comment as she is on the panel.A month on, The Indian Express speaks to four families stuck in limbo as they wait for treatment to resume.‘Only hope I have is for the trial to be completed’: Father of 16-year-old, diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in 2018When the boy turned 10, his father noticed subtle changes in how he walked — he would flail or fall over midway, and climbing a short flight of stairs became a task. The father then took him to AIIMS.In 2018, the boy was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a rare disease that causes muscle weakness and degeneration. “At the time, doctors at AIIMS Delhi said there was no cure, no medicines were available, and it could only be managed through physiotherapy, supplements, and steroids. We also went to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, where we were told the same thing,” says the father, 39, a resident of Delhi’s Patel Nagar.The boy went to school till Class IV before his ailment started taking over his life. Now wheel-chair bound, he cannot even lift a glass of water by himself, says his father. “Till Class IV, his school principal had made arrangements for him to attend classes on the ground floor but gradually, it became difficult…”Steroids prescribed for his treatment had side effects, making him gain weight and affecting his growth. His father rues that the drug that can help manage his son’s muscle degradation is still under trial internationally.In 2023, the boy moved the Delhi HC — through his father — “in the hope that the court shall direct faster trials” which, in turn, can help him win the race against time, says the father. In a 2021 study, a systematic review of mortality in DMD patients pegged it at 22 years.The father, however, says the recent HC verdict does not make much of a difference to his boy. “The drug that can help him is under trial internationally and there has been no direction in that regard. I’ve been making rounds of AIIMS since 2018 but each time, I’ve been told it is not in their hands.”The sole earner in the family — he works with a courier service company in Patel Nagar — his son’s diagnosis has meant adjustments, shouldering mounting expenses, and knocking on every door possible. “AIIMS had recommended a physiotherapy clinic, but it charged Rs 150 an hour per day. I did not have the means to pay that much. So I asked them to teach me instead so I could do my son’s physiotherapy at home. I now do it twice a day.”He resorted to alternative medicine as well. “I took him to an Ayurveda clinic in Rajinder Nagar where I was spending Rs 3,000 a month for a year, but his condition did not improve. I also went to an ashram in Haridwar for Ayurvedic treatment; that too did not help. I got defrauded as well… someone promised me an ayurvedic oil that would cure him if massaged all over his body, in exchange for Rs 50,000. In my desperation, I paid up — it did nothing,” he says.“At this point, the only hope I have is for the trial to be completed at the earliest so my son can access the medicine like other DMD patients,” says the father, who also has a 10-year-old daughter.Dr Ratna Puri, senior consultant for genetics at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, says indigenous drug development for treating rare diseases is underway in India. “Development recently started… after the National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases, 2017, our funding agencies have been encouraging researchers and companies towards development of indigenous therapies,” she says.It’s been three months since her last dose, says grandfather“Bimaar hu, dard ho raha hai (I’m sick, it’s aching),” says the child, when asked what she is doing over a telephone call on a Thursday evening.At the age of four months, she was diagnosed with Gaucher’s disease, a rare genetically inherited lysosomal disorder where fat buildup, especially in the liver and spleen, can lead to anaemia and musculoskeletal disorders. She has been prescribed the Enzyme, Cerezyme Imiglucerase, every fortnight. The cost of the drug? It can go up to Rs 57.55 lakh a year.The amount has been covered by the government’s fund so far, but it’s been three months since she took her last dose. “She received her first injection in December 2022 and there was significant improvement. She started going to school as well,” says her 60-year-old grandfather.Three months ago, AIIMS told them it does not have the drug anymore, he said. The girl has now missed around 18 doses, says her family. A few weeks ago, her condition took a turn for the worse. “She has been throwing up and fainting. She has almost stopped eating, she says she does not have an appetite. She is severely weak and anaemic so going to school is not an option anymore,” says her grandfather. “We don’t know what to do…,” he adds.Her father is the only earning member; he used to drive an auto but has now switched to a sales job in a pharma firm in Srinagar. She has an eight-year-old brother. Even for her first injection, it took nearly four months for the family to get the medicine after AIIMS requested funds from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.“Our finances are drained… we’ve been making the rounds of AIIMS Delhi from Srinagar since 2017… we have to bear the costs of travelling and staying in Delhi every time we go for her treatment. Till last year, she was receiving five doses a month. This year, it was upped to six doses a month,” says the grandfather.It was in 2022 that the child, through her father, moved the HC seeking access to treatment and drugs after waiting for five years. “We would meet other patients of Gaucher’s disease at the AIIMS clinic and they were getting the drugs at the time. They told us there are a bunch of people who have moved the HC seeking access to the drug, which is when we came in touch with advocate Ashok Agarwal.”Agarwal has represented a large chunk of the patient-petitioners of rare diseases seeking relief before the Delhi HC. The injection for the child started after court orders. “It is thanks to the HC’s orders earlier that we got access to the drugs and it was for free. With the latest judgment, we thought it would help us. It’s been a month, but there is no headway,” the grandfather laments.‘She lost her hearing when treatment was stopped earlier’: Father of six-year-old girl, diagnosed with Gaucher’s disease in 2018Within days of her birth, the child was diagnosed with the disease. In 2020, following the HC’s order, she got access to the drugs. She is undergoing enzyme replacement therapy at AIIMS Delhi and the drug, Cerezyme, costs Rs 1.1 lakh per vial. She has been prescribed four vials a month.But her father, an Okhla resident, says since the start, there has been an interruption every two to three months because of the drug’s non-availability. This time, treatment stopped in August and is yet to resume.“I went to AIIMS earlier this week to check on the status of the drugs and was told the government has not released funds yet. There is a marked deterioration if she remains without therapy for five-six months… her spleen and liver get affected, leaving her prone to infections,” he says.“Then we had to move court to resume her medication. The only demand we have from the government is to not stop or interrupt her therapy, she already lost her hearing when it was stopped earlier… now she has to undergo a cochlear implant surgery which will cost Rs 4-4.5 lakh. I can’t afford that money and I don’t know how to arrange for it,” cries the 43-year-old.He has already lost four children to suspected inherited rare diseases — a son, diagnosed with Mucopolysaccharidosis-1 (MPS I), died at the age of eight. A daughter and two sons succumbed to Gaucher’s at the age of 14, 16 and 18 months.“For my fourth child… we were told the drugs were available and he got the first dose. Before he could take the second one, he died. We wanted to file a case in court over the unavailability of the drug and came in contact with advocate Ashok Agarwal,” says the father.The HC too recorded a stoppage in the six-year-old’s treatment in January 2023 after AIIMS exhausted the funds. Before that, the court issued orders on December 14, 2021, and February 1, 2022, directing the Centre to release funds for her treatment.Explaining how intermittent or disrupted therapy can affect patients with rare diseases, Dr Puri, says, “It varies on the disease as well as the stage at which a patient was started on such therapy… For genetic disorders, if treatment starts early, it has a better impact on the patient. For DMD, if the muscles have already atrophied, giving the most expensive therapy is not likely to reverse muscle damage. Published data to this effect is still lacking. But if we start therapy early in the course of the disease, then it is beneficial; interrupting treatment for long periods will impact the benefit achieved due to the therapy.”The impact of stopping therapy would ultimately vary on a case-to-case basis, assessed on multiple parameters, she adds. “For Gaucher’s disease, we follow parameters such as if the height and weight are improving, if the size of the liver and spleen is decreasing, we will look at bone health and neurological features, etc. Similarly, for DMD, we track it through… various muscle strength scales. It is very important to follow up on patients through such quantitative scales because all genetic disorders are multi-system disorders.”The child, meanwhile, goes to a private school. “With her special needs, she cannot be taken care of in a government school,” the father reasons. He is the only earning member in the family, working as an Arabic language translator in hospitals. Work has been sparse post Covid, he says.There is little dampening of the child’s spirits, says her family. “She is obsessed with fashion and make-up and is extremely chatty. From the time she wakes up, she asks us questions and talks our ears off. On most days, she’ll take my phone and start placing orders on retail websites. Half my job then becomes cancelling these orders,” her father laughs.While the court order has filled him with hope, he remains anxious. “The direction is welcome. It has, however, been nearly 30 days now but the fund remains to be released.”‘Up to govt… if they want to be humane, provide medicines’: Father of 19-year-old, diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in 2011It was on a family trip to Manali in 2010 when the teen, then aged five, could not climb stairs and would keep falling while walking. The family immediately returned home to Jaipur. After his symptoms were dismissed initially as signs of weakness, a DMD diagnosis was confirmed nearly a year later, officially, in 2011.“We sought a second opinion… Every doctor at the time kept saying DMD patients do not survive past 15 years,” says his father, aged 43.What followed were trips across the country and resorting to alternative therapies. In 2012, the teen went to the National Institute of Ayurveda in Jaipur after he was rendered wheelchair-bound.In 2013, his father started writing to officials and ministers at the local, state, and national-level seeking government intervention in the management as well as treatment of such diseases.In 2016, he took his son to Mayopathy Kappagam, a hospital for the treatment of Muscular Dystrophy, near Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. There, he claims, they discovered the benefit of kattu therapy — where pieces of cloth are tightly and strategically wrapped around body parts such as the knees, ankles, and spine to rectify posture. Father and son stayed in Tirunelveli for a year and have continued to visit every year.The father, who was running a jewellery business, says he shut shop after a few years and dedicated himself entirely to his son: “He studied till Class VIII before we decided we wanted to prioritise keeping him alive over his education. Our PM completed his studies later, so can my son.”The family’s finances were drained in commuting from Jaipur to AIIMS Delhi and other places for the teen’s treatment.

Invitation to a Scruffy Way of Life

What if we could be comfortable with our dark, dusty and threadbare corners that we hide from each other?What if we could be comfortable with our dark, dusty and threadbare corners that we hide from each other?Sona had recently moved back to Delhi from abroad and invited some friends home to reconnect and catch up. After the meal, she was left with a sense of disappointment though she could not figure out what was missing. “I had planned everything perfectly,” she said, “for friends I love and who matter so much to me.” I was very curious about what she meant by the word, “perfectly”. She sat still for some time and then with a sigh, wondered, “Maybe that is the problem, I was trying too hard to make it perfect.”

Sona explained how she had worked for days in micro-planning the meal, rearranging the furniture and hiding the shabby stuff. “I was so busy performing and perfecting that there was no time to connect,” she reflected. I wondered if she could remember times with her friends from the past that she cherished. With a tender smile on her face, she remembered how they would gather spontaneously, over “a potluck meal and have addas where the only thing that mattered was togetherness.” I asked her what was different in those gatherings and she replied, “All of us welcomed all of us.”I was reminded of this conversation while listening to a podcast in which the writer Oliver Burkeman talked about the concept of “scruffy hospitality,” (attributed to a priest Jack King) which honours, “If we only share meals with friends when we are excellent, we aren’t truly sharing life together.”

Growing up, I lived in a socially bustling household. My parents loved to have family and friends over all the time. Unlike me, they were happily oblivious to the mess in the house. As soon as I learned that someone was visiting the house, I would go around tidying up. It was a joke that people would hide their stuff before I hid them in an obscure corner never to be found. This pattern continued into adulthood. If friends would call to say that they would be dropping in an hour’s time, rather than looking forward to a good time, I would be rushing around pummelling the cushions, burying the scruffy bits in the cupboards and hiding any evidence that humans lived in our home. This frenzied commando-worthy operation would build up until the bell rang when I would dive into the bathroom to make myself presentable. Sounds familiar? No wonder having friends over seemed more of an ordeal than something to enjoy.We have been indoctrinated into thinking that we have to present the most “show-worthy”, “best version” of ourselves to others. Shabby, run-down homes become symbolic of our laziness and failures. This idea is exploited and commodified by our consumerist culture. We have grown up with the pictures of gorgeous homes in catalogues which we have dreamt of attaining one day. Anything less is not good enough and invites shame.This Diwali season look around and observe how the celebration is being co-opted, packaged and marketed to us. We are made to believe that we will find the elusive worthiness and happiness if only we could become glossier. But all that it is doing is making us more miserable in the dogged pursuit of more, “Earn more, want more and spend more”. As we cram our homes, landfills and oceans, the industries continue to thrive, but the cost to the Earth is high.I call it the burden of an infinity loop of Ps (proving, pretending, perfecting, pressurising, performing, posing, pushing, etc.). The burden multiplies much more if we bring in issues of normative judgments on people who struggle with poverty, disability, unemployment or who are not accepted due to their sexuality, gender expansiveness, neurodivergence, etc. What if we could be comfortable with our dark, dusty and threadbare corners that we hide from each other?The interesting thing is that most of us prefer to show shiny versions of ourselves to others and yet feel very honoured when others show their scruffy parts. It’s like dropping into our friend’s home uninvited and they welcome us warmly with no attempt to hide the laundry basket lying in the corner or scrambling to change out of their pyjamas. And being invited over for a rustled-up meal which you relish over deep conversations, laughter and togetherness. If you have enjoyed that experience you would know the joy of being included and feeling at home. Why is it that we find it difficult to give others what we seek from them?In that context, the scruffy home is a powerful metaphor for life. The shift for me has come in waves. It began when my kids (and dog) were little and their clutter was huge. As they grew up, they seemed to be oblivious to the chaos that surrounded them. “Don’t you think you should clean your room before your friends visit,” I would appeal and their inevitable response was, “We don’t care and they don’t care.” My husband did not care much, too, unless it came to his kitchen and cooking. But that is his story to tell. Then came the pandemic and a realisation that this “stuff” really does not matter in the big picture of life. We adopted the Japanese “wabi-sabi” and became comfortable in our unvarnished, imperfect homes. Then finally came our cats! They made our sofas into scratching posts, and curtains into swinging ropes and their litter trays took over the pretty corners of our home. We learned to shrug our shoulders, smile and go with the scruffy flow.What is the philosophy of a scruffy life? To unclench and let it be. To slow down and savour good conversations and connections. To live an unfiltered life. To invite people who matter to us into our lives and homes. With grace and respect. Without any rush to hide the lived-in human bits. To invite and receive without judgment. To be comfortable with each other’s sloppiness. To not be lured by the Instagramable aesthetics.

The paradox of stagnant rural wages

The Indian economy has grown at an average annual rate of 4.6% from 2019-20 to 2023-24, and 7.8% in the last three fiscal years (April-March) alone. The farm sector’s growth has averaged 4.2% and 3.6% for these respective periods. However, these macro growth numbers are not reflected in rural wages.The Labour Bureau compiles daily wage rate data for 25 agricultural and non-agricultural occupations, collected every month from 600 sample villages spread over 20 states. The accompanying charts show year-on-year growth in wages, taking a simple all-India average rate for rural male labourers across all occupations, from April 2019 to August 2024.rural wages Note: Nominal wages are simple arithmetic all-India average for rural male labourers across 25 agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. Source: Labour Bureau

The wage growth has been estimated in both nominal (current value) and real (after deducting annual inflation based on the consumer price index for rural India) terms, and for all rural as well as agricultural occupations. The latter includes ploughing/tilling, sowing, harvesting/threshing/winnowing, picking of commercial crops, horticulture, animal husbandry, watering/irrigation, and plant protection operations.rural wages For real wages, the Consumer Price Index (Rural) has been used. Source: Labour BureauThe average nominal year-on-year growth in rural wages during the five years ended 2023-24 worked out to 5.2%. It was higher, at 5.8%, for only agricultural wages. But in real inflation-adjusted terms, the average annual growth was -0.4% for rural and 0.2% for agricultural wages during this period.Even for the current fiscal (April-August), overall rural wages have risen only 5.4% year-on-year in nominal and 0.5% in real terms. The corresponding growth rates in agricultural wages have continued to be higher, at 5.7% and 0.7% respectively.It raises the obvious question: Why are real rural wages stagnant, if not negative, when the country’s GDP and even farm sector growth have been decent-to-good in recent times?

One explanation has to do with rising Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) among women, especially in rural India. LFPR is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and above that is working or seeking/willing to work for a relatively long part of a particular year. The all-India average female LFPR was only 24.5% in 2018-19. It rose to 30% in 2019-20, 32.5% in 2020-21, 32.8% in 2021-22, 37% in 2022-23 and 41.7% in the latest official Periodic Labour Force Survey for 2023-24 (July-June).Even more impressive has been the increase in the rural female LFPR: From 26.4% in 2018-19 to 33%, 36.5%, 36.6%, 41.5%, and 47.6% in the following five years. During this period (2018-19 to 2023-24), the male LFPR has gone up only marginally, from 75.5% to 78.8% for all-India and from 76.4% to 80.2% for rural India.The Finance Ministry’s Economic Survey for 2023-24 has attributed the sharp jump in the rural female LFPR (21.2 percentage points since 2018-19) mainly to the Narendra Modi government’s schemes such as Ujjwala, Har Ghar Jal, Saubhagya, and Swachh Bharat. These flagship programmes, the survey claims, have not just substantially expanded household access to clean cooking fuel, electricity, piped drinking water, and toilets. They have also freed up rural women’s time and effort that went into fetching water or collecting firewood and dung. Being able to cook faster using LPG cylinders or even electric mixer grinders has enabled them to deploy their energies towards more productive outside employment, instead of only mundane household tasks.The above freeing up of women’s time and rise in female LFPR have, however, also ended up significantly boosting the aggregate size of the rural workforce. The resultant rightward shift of the labour supply curve – more people willing to work at the same or lower rates – has then exerted downward pressure on real rural wages.While the rural female LFPR has soared between 2018-19 and 2023-24, so has agriculture’s share in the employment of this workforce – from 71.1% to 76.9% over this period. Thus, although more women are entering the rural labour force, they are working in greater numbers on farms. The movement is from home to field, not to factory or office.That, in turn, has probably to do with the nature of GDP growth. The economy may be churning out more goods and services but that process is becoming increasingly capital-intensive and labour-saving as well as labour-displacing. If growth is coming from sectors or industries requiring fewer workers for every unit of output, it translates into a rising share of income generated from that accruing to capital (i.e. profits of firms) as against labour (wages/compensation of employees).It is not surprising, therefore, that the new entrants into the labour force, specifically women, are mostly finding employment in agriculture. This is a sector where marginal productivity (output per worker) is already low; the supply of more labour would only further depress wages. The fact that rural non-agricultural wages have grown even less – actually fallen in real terms – shows a worse picture for non-farm labour demand.Capital-intensive, investment-led growth is good for cement, steel, and infrastructure-developing companies such as L&T, Adani Ports, KEC International, Bharat Forge, Finolex Cables, Kalpataru Projects, PNC Infratech, and NCC Ltd.But it isn’t that good for fast-moving consumer goods, home appliances, durables, and two-wheeler makers. They benefit more from growth that is labour-intensive and consumption-led. Their sales and profits get impacted

Google's expanding AI ambitions in India clash with global antitrust scrutiny

As Google rolls out a sweeping expansion of its artificial intelligence tools across search, advertising, and YouTube in India, its global ad and search business models are simultaneously under intense legal scrutiny in the U.S., raising questions about the balance between innovation and market power.In India, Google is aggressively integrating generative AI into its advertising ecosystem to reshape how brands reach consumers. At a recent virtual media roundtable, the tech giant highlighted AI-driven advancements aimed at enhancing discovery and commerce. Google says its tools are helping advertisers achieve tangible results, with platforms like YouTube, especially on connected TVs (CTV), and Shorts becoming key to capturing consumer attention in one of the world's fastest-growing digital markets.

For instance, YouTube now gets over 1 billion hours of global watch time daily, with India contributing significantly. The country's growing preference for CTV over linear TV is pushing advertisers to adopt newer formats. Some ad campaigns on CTV are also seeing nearly 3.6x conversion rate increase. Meanwhile, YouTube Shorts is gaining traction among younger users, with 72% of Indian respondents saying Shorts ads influence their purchase decisions, Google shared during the roundtable.Beyond video, Google Search is undergoing a transformation, too. AI Overviews powered by Gemini, Circle to Search, and Google Lens, which now handles nearly 20 billion monthly queries, are enabling more predictive and visually-driven search experiences. Google claimed that businesses are seeing results as some brands are reporting higher return on investment from their campaigns. The search giant shared that quick commerce company Zepto reduced content creation time significantly with AI-powered video tools.Yet while these innovations promise growth for India's digital economy, Google faces mounting pressure in the U.S. over how it has wielded its dominance in the online advertising sector.

U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema, on April 17, ruled that Google illegally dominated two markets in the ad tech and noted that the search giant was liable for "willfully acquiring and maintaining monopoly power" in the advertising technology business by being the middleman between buyers and sellers of ad content.In the trial that began last August, the second one that Google lost in less than two years, the Department of Justice (DOJ) alleged that Google illegally monopolised the digital ads market through its suite of tools, including those developed by DoubleClick, a company it acquired in 2008 for $3.1 billion.

At the time of acquisition, DoubleClick was a leader in display ad serving and had a vast network of advertisers and publishers. Integrating DoubleClick's technology allowed Google to enhance its ad targeting and analytics capabilities, solidifying its position in the digital advertising market.Google rebranded DoubleClick's products under the Google Marketing Platform, including tools like Display & Video 360 and Campaign Manager 360. These platforms have become integral to Google's advertising ecosystem, serving a significant portion of global digital ad transactions.In the antitrust case, the DOJ claims Google's ad stack, which is used for auctions and transactions, controls 87% of the U.S. market and has stifled competition, inflated costs for advertisers, and squeezed revenue for publishers.The stakes are high. While this ad tech case represents a smaller portion of Google's revenue compared to its core search business, the ruling by Judge Brinkema could reshape the landscape of digital advertising by breaking up Google's ad business, including the forced divestiture of its DoubleClick assets.

This ruling leads to another hearing to discuss remedies, including selling off the ad exchange unit and on how Google can restore competition in the ad tech market. Google, for its part, has said it will be appeal the ruling, noting that, "Publishers have many options and they choose Google because our ad tech tools are simple, affordable and effective."During the trial, Google also argued that the DOJ is unfairly targeting it in a highly competitive space. The company contends that it has built the most effective system through innovation, not coercion, and that the government is ignoring the broader ad ecosystem, which includes rising competition from platforms like Meta, Amazon, and TikTok.Meanwhile, in markets like India, Google's AI bets are gaining traction with businesses testing AI tools for cost efficiency and growth. But even as the company positions itself as a partner in digital transformation abroad, its practices back home remain a legal battleground.Judge Brinkema's ruling comes at a time when another historic antitrust trial that is currently underway this week.

'Scarcity of brides' hits Old Mysore region

About a month ago, residents of Maduvanahalli in Kollegal taluk of Chamarajanagar district witnessed the bizarre sight of a youth perched on the higher reaches of a metal structure supporting the overhead high-tension cables passing through the village.Notwithstanding the cries of his mother and pleas by other villagers, who had gathered beneath, cautioning him against taking any extreme step, the youth, identified as Masanashetty, 27, waved at the people and held the high-tension electric wire with his hands to be instantaneously electrocuted.

Though rumours abound about his failed love life, his suicide has been attributed by the family to their search for a suitable life partner yielding no result, a pattern that has become common in the rural hinterland of the Old Mysore region. Masanashetty had lapsed into depression following the futile search for a bride."It has become really difficult to find brides nowadays in the villages," said Nataraj, a journalist with a vernacular daily in Kollegal, who has also been searching for an alliance for his son for the last two years, but in vain.Appealing to almighty

Given the scarcity of brides, particularly for youth engaged in farming activities, young men from different villages across Mandya district have been taking out padayatras to religious shrines in Malai Mahadeshwara (MM) Hills situated in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar district for the last few years.One such padayatra was taken out in March this year by a group of 50 young men from Averahalli in Mandya district to M.M. Hills. One of the youths, who was part of the more than 110-km-long padayatra, said seeking "divine intervention" in their quest for a life partner was one of the main reasons for their march."We will pray for good rains and a good harvest also. But, we will be seeking the blessings of the Almighty to help us get brides," said the youth while expressing disappointment over the girls and their parents spurning matrimonial alliances from young men engaged in farming activities in rural parts of the State."They prefer alliances from men who are in government service and possess property in cities like Bengaluru and Mysuru. If nobody marries children of farmers, what would be their fate?" he asked.K.M. Shivaprasad, founder of the Akhila Karnataka Brahmacharigala Sangha.Though the tradition of padayatra to religious shrines had been around for a long time with elders, who were part of the padayatra, stopping by the villages enroute and looking for suitable matrimonial alliances for their children, K.M. Shivaprasad from Malavalli taluk of Mandya district, who is also the founder of Akhila Karnataka Brahmacharigala Sangha, said the bachelors themselves started taking out padayatras about three years ago.

Shivaprasad, also a bachelor himself, recalled their first padayatra planned about three years ago after a hopelessly poor response from eligible brides for a mass marriage programme organised by a local religious mutt."While thousands of eligible grooms registered for the programme, the number of brides barely crossed 250," he claimed. Hence, they planned a padayatra of young men from the villages, who were not able to find brides even after crossing 30 years, to the M.M. Hills. Film actor Daali Dhananjaya flagged the padayatra from Venkateshwara Temple in K.M. Doddi in February 2023.Film actor Daali Dhananjaya posing with bachelors at Venkateshwara Temple in K.M. Doddi before the bachelors took out the padayatra to M.M. Hills in February 2023.Film actor Daali Dhananjaya posing with bachelors at Venkateshwara Temple in K.M. Doddi before the bachelors took out the padayatra to M.M. Hills in February 2023. | Photo Credit: special arrangementExplaining the gravity of the situation, Shivaprasad said his native T. Kagepura village in Mandya district has about 900 registered voters out of whom about 35 are bachelors past their mid-thirties, whose search for brides has remained futile so far. Similarly, the nearby villages of Talagavadi and Nelakamanhalli, which are slightly bigger than their village, have about 100 such bachelors each, he said."There are no girls available for youth born between 1985 and 1995. The few who were available for men in this age group are already married," he said.

Meanwhile, the scarcity of brides for young men in the Old Mysore region has not remained just a social problem. Acknowledging the "bride crisis", Janata Dal (S), which enjoys widespread popularity among the people of the region, announced an incentive of ?2 lakh to women marrying sons of farmers in the State in its manifesto released ahead of the 2023 Assembly elections. During the election rallies, former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy hoped the incentive would encourage girls to marry sons of farmers.Even the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) took up the cudgels on behalf of the bachelors after the polls by petitioning Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to announce an incentive of ?5 lakh from the government for brides marrying young farmers in the State Budget of 2024.

KRRS leader Badagalapura Nagendra pointed out that there were men from the farming community who are unmarried, even though they are 45 years old. "Finding brides for the young farmers has become a social problem because of the neglect of agriculture. In the absence of schemes for making agriculture a prosperous activity, many farmers are abandoning agriculture and migrating to urban areas," he lamented. Nagendra had also sought a loan of ?25 lakh at simple interest to help the couple become economically strong by practising agriculture or allied activities.

What girls preferAt a time when most matchmakers do not evince interest in the search for brides by sons of farmers, H.L. Yamuna, who runs a matrimonial service for bachelor-farmers among others, said the girls nowadays, most of whom are also educated, are very particular about the financial security of their would-be partners. They prefer youth employed in either government services or the Information Technology sector, drawing handsome salaries in urban areas like Bengaluru."The girls themselves perform the due diligence by not only checking social media profiles, but also making sharp inquiries," she said while narrating an incident in which a girl found out that a boy's actual share in an agricultural property was just a fraction after division of the family property.Over the last few weeks, Shivaprasad said families from villages in Mandya and neighbouring districts have begun bringing brides from North Karnataka for their grooms. Also, a few youths have started breaking the caste barriers and marrying girls outside their castes. "But, a majority of such men are youngsters. Men born between 1985 and 1995 are still finding the going tough", he said."When we bachelors meet informally, we wonder why partners meant for us are not to be found. Isn't it against the laws of nature?" he questioned, highlighting the key question of disparity in the gender ratio.According to Karnataka's Civil Registration System (CRS) data, the child sex ratio at birth in Karnataka had dropped from 947 girls against 1,000 boys in 2021 to 929 girls against 1,000 boys in 2022.

Amidst regional ferment, Kurds' quest for statehood

West Asia is in a geo-engineering flux not seen since the birth of Israel 77 years ago. The perennial Palestinian issue is at a pivotal moment with an extreme right Israeli government's hard-line position at odds with the Arab States' insistence on a two-state solution for the Abraham Accords' expansion. After the loss of regional proxies and the resumption of American "maximum pressure" tactics and military threat, a weakened and isolated Iran has agreed to negotiate its nuclear programme. The toppling of the five decades-old al-Assad regime has created new paradigms. Although Turkey has ambitions to reshape Syria, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is battling an Intefadah at home. The decline of oil prices by a fifth in 2025 may upend the regional economic stability. Amidst this tumult, U.S. President Donald Trump, the global disruptor of "Gaza Riviera" fame, is set to pay his first visit abroad to the Gulf next month.How does this regional commotion impact a century-old quest by Kurds for statehood? In the past century, two diaspora-based states, viz. Israel and Armenia, have been created in West Asia. Could Kurdistan be the next or, once again, likely to be brushed under the carpet as weightier developments and superpower politics take precedence? Let us examine the prospects in some detail.An unrealised dream

Kurds are not only the biggest minority group in West Asia, but they are also the world's largest ethnic minority without a state of their own. Estimates vary, but their total population is put at 35 million-45 million. The overwhelming majority of them live in Turkey (around 17 million, 20% of the total population), Iraq (9 million, 20%), Iran (8 million, 10%), and Syria (2.5 million, 10%). Kurd diaspora exists in Germany (around 1.5 million) and other West European countries.While Kurds have their sub-divisions, their common identity is shaped by a shared history and the craggy geography of Asia Minor. Anthropological studies put them to be of Old Mediterranean and Caucasian stock, distinct from either Turkic, Semitic, or Iranian ethnicities dominating their existence. While most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, they are linked to other regional ethnic minorities, such as Yezidis, Alevi, and Zoroastrianism.

The Kurds have a reputation for gritty bravery. Historically, they have often been either exploited as a geopolitical pawn or subject to suppression and exclusion. One of the rare occasions when they led the endgame was in the 12th century when Salahuddin, a Kurd General, commanded the Islamic legion to liberate Jerusalem from crusading Christian armies. The Kurdish quest for a state has remained unrequited. The nearest the Kurds came to realising this ambition was at the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, negotiated to dismantle the Ottoman empire. It promised the Kurds an autonomous state in eastern Turkey. However, the Young Turks under Kemal Ataturk thwarted the Kurdistan Homeland project and instead foisted assertive Turkish nationalism. Since then, Ankara has single-mindedly suppressed the identity of Kurds, who were officially called "mountain Turks". This repression has continued: as late as 1994, a Kurdish female MP was sentenced to 15 years in prison for temerity to speak a sentence in Kurdish after her swearing-in about the Kurd-Turk brotherhood.Counterproductive repression

Turkish repression has been counterproductive: it led to the formation in 1978 of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) by Abdullah Öcalan which has waged a campaign for Kurdish independence. Mr. Öcalan was caught in 1999 and is still in solitary confinement in a Turkish jail. Four decades of no-holds-barred conflict has killed an estimated 37,000 people. Following the recent softening of Ankara's policies, Mr. Öcalan has called for the cessation of hostilities and PKK declared a ceasefire on March 15. Turkey has announced a $20 billion socio-economic reconstruction plan for the south-east of the country where most Kurds live but a political package to bring the Kurds to the Turkish mainstream is still awaited.The 13-year civil war provided Syria's Kurds a rare opportunity to fill in the politico-strategic vacuum. With substantive American support, a formidable Kurdish Self Defence Force (SDF) was created to fight the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. SDF currently controls nearly 40% of Syria. This has caused considerable threat perceptions in Ankara which accuses SDF of helping PKK. Turkey has sought to checkmate the SDF by creating exclusion zones and forming a militia against it. However, the US pressure has prevented it from an anti-SDF military campaign. In a potentially far-reaching move on March 11, the SDF Commander and the interim Syrian President signed a basic agreement to integrate the SDF into the new Damascus politico-strategic architecture. Even otherwise, SDF's good fortunes may diminish with the planned attenuation of American military presence in Syria.

During Saddam Hussein's rule, Kurds in neighbouring Iraq suffered brutal pogroms, forced deportation and even chemical weapons attacks. However, the situation changed in 1991 after the U.S. Operation Desert Storm substantially weakened Iraqi hold over Kurds and a Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was formed in 1992. The Constitution of Iraq following the U.S. occupation of the country granted the KRG considerable autonomy although a 2017 referendum on Kurdistan Regional Independence, which received 92% support, was disallowed by the Iraqi Supreme Court stating that no Iraqi province was allowed to secede. Meanwhile, oil-rich KRG has sought to assert its autonomy, often creating a piquant situation with Baghdad authorities. Following an international arbitration ruling, oil exports through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline have been suspended for the past two years. Turkish armed forces have also been active in hitting alleged PKK targets in KRG. Iran, too, has occasionally attacked the alleged hostile U.S.-Israeli presence in KRG. Thus, although KRG has now been around for over three decades, its existence is still quite tenuous.

Compared to repression elsewhere in the region, the Iranian regimes have been marginally benign to its Kurds who mostly live in the northwest of the country along mountainous borders with Turkey and Iraq; some Kurds are also living in the Khorasan province in the northeast. These areas lie along the geo-strategic faultlines, forcing Kurds to choose between loyalty to Tehran, Ankara, or Baghdad. Unlike in other Kurdish-populated countries, there are strong ethnic and cultural ties between Kurds and Persians and some modern Iranian dynasties were partly of Kurdish origin. While Tehran has never employed the same level of brutality against its own Kurds as Turkey or Iraq, it has always been implacably opposed to Kurdish separatism. During the long Persian-Ottoman wars and the recent Iran-Iraq war, largely Sunni Kurds were often suspected of being the fifth column of the foreign powers. Under the Islamic Republic, attempts to Persianise, and general economic deprivation, spurred centrifugal tendencies among Iranian Kurds. With the considerable weakening of the Iranian state and looming prospects of the U.S.-Israel military campaign against Tehran, Iranian Kurds, the country's largest minority, may feel encouraged to secede.

Recent weakening of the central authority in each of the aforementioned four countries has brightened the prospects of Kurdish statehood and such proto-states have already emerged in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, they neither have a unifying ideology such as Zionism nor a transnational political entity to dovetail their statehood to the emerging grand Western strategy for West Asia. Their hopes rest on the regional entropy creating a situation conducive to the creation of a Kurdistan. However, even if such a pro-Western surrogate Kurdish state is grafted, it remains to be seen whether it would face autoimmune rejection (as Israel) from regional powers or take deep roots.In short, Kurds' fate currently swings between two of their apt proverbs: "

World Bank not informed of India's decision on Indus Waters Treaty

The World Bank has not been informed of India's decision to keep the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in "abeyance," sources confirmed to The Hindu. Throughout the history of the treaty, the WB has played a key role as a mediator in cases of disputes arising between India and Pakistan on water sharing agreements, as laid out in the IWT.On Thursday (April 24, 2025), Debashree Mukherjee, Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, wrote to her Pakistan counterpart, Syed Ali Murtaza, that India was keeping the treaty in abeyance with "immediate effect.""The obligation to honour a treaty in good faith is fundamental to a treaty. However, what we have seen instead is sustained cross-border terrorism by Pakistan targeting the Indian Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir," her letter says.The "security uncertainties" have directly impeded India's "full utilisation rights" and Pakistan's action of not responding to previous requests by India to renegotiate the treaty was a "breach of trust" on its part.A Government source told The Hindu that, as Pakistan had been informed about India's position on the treaty, therefore there was "no need" to inform the WB.

A spokesperson for the WB said that "it did not opine" on "treaty-related sovereign decisions taken by its member countries.""The Indus Water Treaty is an agreement between India and Pakistan that has been profoundly important and successful for more than 60 years", the World Bank spokesperson said, backing the treaty in response to questions from The Hindu. The spokesperson explained that the Bank was only a "signatory to the treaty for a limited set of defined tasks", when asked if it planned any measures to reverse the suspension. Implication of India's moveFollowing the Pahalgam attack, India announced on Wednesday (April 23, 2025) that it would hold the IWT, in place since 1960, "in abeyance." On the surface, this implies that India will stop its periodic communication with Pakistan on sharing hydrological data on the Indus rivers or keep them apprised of infrastructural work on hydro-electric projects in the Chenab, Jhelum and the Indus main, also known as the Western rivers.However, even prior to the Pahalgam incident, the Permanent Indus Commission – or the teams of experts

from India and Pakistan that attempt to resolve disputes regarding the sharing of the waters of the Indus basin – hasn't convened since 2022.India in 2023 had called on Pakistan to "renegotiate" the treaty primarily because several of the original circumstances that prevailed when the treaty was formed had changed. Among them were, changes in the population structure, water requirements, the threat from climate-related cataclysms and 'cross border terrorism' were among the reasons India cited to renegotiate the six-decade-old treaty.Under the terms of the IWT, India cannot create significant hydropower storage on the Western rivers – Indus, Jhelum, Chenab – and must maintain water levels at prescribed levels, to ensure that no untoward flooding or disruption of Pakistan's agriculture happens.Its prominent hydropower projects on these rivers such as the Kishenganga project, Baglihar project are run-of-the river, meaning diverting the flow of the river to generate electricity. These projects do not halt the flow of the river via creating storage structures, though in nearly all of the disputes over the years regarding developing hydropower projects, Pakistan has accused India of modifying the design of structures to be able to perniciously control the flows of the rivers with India then clarifying that its intentions were purely to keep the projects running in optimal conditions."For India to weaponise the waters of the Indus, it has to completely ignore the IWT.

Alia Bhatt shares intense workout video, fans call her 'Alpha mama'

Alia Bhatt cranked up the excitement for Alpha by sharing a high-intensity gym video while announcing that advance bookings for the YRF Spy Universe film are now officially open. Sharing a clip from her morning gym session, Alia showcased her rigorous workout routine featuring boxing drills, strength training, and functional exercises. She captioned the post, "alpha morning routine with fire & rage ?????? advanced booking open now!"The workout clip has grabbed fans' attention not only for Alia's dedication to fitness but also for its electrifying background music, which is believed to be from Alpha.

Earlier too, Alia Bhatt and her co-star Sharvari shared a workout video on social media, where the two were seen working out in coordinated gym outfits. The clip showed them going through an intense training circuit, including boxing drills and tyre workouts.Directed by Shiv Rawail, Alpha marks the first female-led film in the YRF Spy Universe. The action thriller stars Alia Bhatt and Sharvari in lead roles, with Bobby Deol playing the antagonist.The film also features Anil Kapoor in a pivotal role and is expected to include special appearances from other characters within the spy universe.Alia Bhatt and Sharvari's film Alpha is also in the news after it received a UA 16+ certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), with the censor board reportedly suggesting multiple edits before granting approval. According to reports, the CBFC has muted certain expletives and trimmed or modified a few violent sequences, including stabbing-related scenes, as part of its certification process.

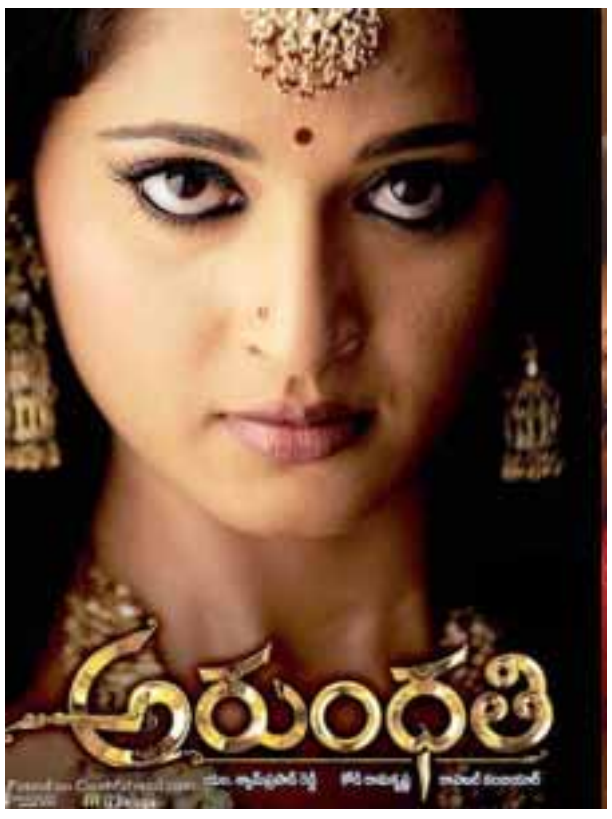
Bhagyaraj's letters, released posthumously, lead to backlash against son Shanthanu

Posts shared on K Bhagyaraj's official social media account after his death in Chennai have triggered a public controversy, with son Shanthanu Bhagyaraj facing accusations of forgery and opportunism after releasing what appeared to be earlier letters signed by the late filmmaker, addressed to his fans.The posts, which included two letters written on Bhagyaraj's personal letterhead and bearing his signature, were shared in the days following the filmmaker's death on June 27.

The first letter opens with one of Bhagyaraj's personal mottos, "The greatest joy in happiness is making others happy," and is addressed directly to his fans, thanking them for being the great joy of his life and describing them as precious as his own eyes. Crucially, the letter asks his fans to transfer their love and loyalty to his son Shanthanu going forward, writing, "In my place, I want you, as fans, to stand by Shanthanu's success." It closes with a reflection on the body's impermanence, ending with the lines, "This body has no expiry date marked on it. One day it will enter the fire, or the earth, or the cosmos."The second letter reads as a farewell from beyond, thanking those who showed up for his final journey with love and tears, and ending with the lines, "From now on, I will live on. In good cinema, in good screenplays, in good dialogues, in good human dignities, as a spirit."

The letters, in themselves, are moving and entirely in keeping with Bhagyaraj's literary voice, which was always warm, philosophical and gently self-aware. The reaction online, however, was sharply divided. A section of users questioned the authenticity and intent behind the release. Some users questioned the timing and how Bhagyaraj's daughter is not mentioned in the documents.Others went further, suggesting the content may have been AI-generated rather than genuinely written by Bhagyaraj himself, fabricating content in the filmmaker's known writing style without any actual prewritten material from him, though no evidence to support that specific claim has been put forward. Another netizen tweeted, "I'm glad that Shanthanu hasn't considered reanimating his dad through AI to recommend him for new movie chances. Why can't people let the dead rest for even a day?"A section of users on Tamil social media accused Shanthanu of being behind the letters' timing and release, suggesting he was leveraging the emotional weight of his father's legacy to boost his own standing as an actor, an accusation that lands with particular sharpness given that Shanthanu's career has remained closely tied to his father's name since his debut in Sakkarakatti in 2008. Several of his films were made under or in collaboration with Bhagyaraj's banner, and at least one, Koditta Idangalai Nirappuga in 2017, was made specifically as a tribute to Bhagyaraj by director Parthiban,

Samantha's Maa Inti Bangaaram emerges as highest earning women-led Telugu film



Samantha Ruth Prabhu in Maa Inti Bangaaram, which has now surpassed Anushka Shetty's Arundhati as the highest-grossing solo women-led Telugu film of all timeSamantha Ruth Prabhu in Maa Inti Bangaaram, which has now surpassed Anushka Shetty's Arundhati as the highest-grossing solo women-led Telugu film of all timeSamantha Ruth Prabhu's Maa Inti Bangaaram has created history at the Telugu box office, surpassing Anushka Shetty's Arundhati to become the highest-grossing solo women-led Telugu film of all time. According to Sacnilk, the film's worldwide gross stood at Rs 83.12 crore by its twelfth day, crossing Arundhati's lifetime worldwide collection of Rs 70 crore, a record that had stood unchallenged for sixteen years.

The milestone was first crossed on Day 10, when the film's worldwide gross reached Rs 78.71 crore, according to Sacnilk data. On that day, the film added Rs 5.30 crore net in India, an 8.2 per cent jump from the RS 4.90 crore it had collected on Day 9, taking the total India net collection to Rs 48.25 crore and the India gross to Rs 55.86 crore. Overseas added Rs 1 crore on Day 10, taking the international gross to Rs 22.85 crore. By Day 12, according to Sacnilk, the worldwide gross had climbed further to Rs 83.12 crore, with the India net collection crossing the Rs 50 crore mark.The record it broke had been set by Arundhati, the 2009 horror fantasy directed by Kodi Ramakrishna and starring Anushka Shetty, which had collected Rs 70 crore worldwide over its lifetime run and had gone on to become one of the biggest commercial successes led by a female actor in Telugu cinema's history, outperforming several male-led releases at the time of its release.At the time, it was considered a landmark for commercial Telugu cinema, as it demonstrated that a female-fronted film could drive a large-scale theatrical opening and sustain it over several weeks. For the next sixteen years, no solo female-led Telugu commercial film matched those numbers, even as the overall box office scale of the industry expanded enormously through franchises like Baahubali, Pushpa, KGF and Kalki 2898 AD.

The film, directed by BV Nandini Reddy and produced by Samantha under her own banner, Tralala Moving Pictures, along with Raj Nidimoru and Himank Duvvuru, was made on a budget of Rs 20 crore, and was released in Tamil as Engal Thangam. According to the filmmakers, the film had recovered a significant portion of its investment through non-theatrical rights before its June 19 release, giving the team a measure of commercial safety before a single ticket was sold.Sacnilk data shows that the film opened to Rs 5.35 crore net in India on Day 1 before jumping to Rs 10.10 crore on its first Sunday. The film continued to hold up well into its second week, driven by strong word of mouth and repeat viewership, particularly in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, which remained its biggest contributing markets throughout, and sustained family audience support.For Samantha personally, the milestone arrives at one of the most eventful stretches of her career, coinciding with her confirmed pregnancy and the announcement of a sequel, Maa Inti Bangaaram Part 2,

It's a national level experiment: Ali Fazal on 'Mirzapur: The Movie'

New Delhi: Ali Fazal still remembers how he felt scared to step into the world of "Mirzapur", the hinterland crime drama series which became a cult of its own and is now all set to explode on the big screen in a movie version.

Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce wedding: What we know so far — venue, guest list, NDAs

Almost a year after announcing their engagement, Taylor Swift is all set to tie the knot with Kansas City Chiefs footballer Travis Kelce this weekend. While the details of the long-awaited wedding have been kept under tight wraps, multiple outlets have reported several developments, related to the venue, guest list, and even the NDAs (non-disclosure agreements) — a part and parcel of every high-profile celebrity wedding.

Venue – 'World's Most Famous Arena'Dubbed as "The World's Most Famous Arena," the Madison Square Garden in New York City has a seating capacity of 20,000. Swift has a nostalgic connection to the stadium, having packed out the venue on several occasions, notably in 2011 during her Speak Now World Tour. She first performed at MSG in 2009, during her "Fearless" tour, and celebrated her 30th birthday at the arena 10 years later as part of iHeartRadio's "Jingle Ball".Located above a busy mainline railway station, MSG is bang in the beating heart of tourist and commercial Manhattan. Security is expected to be tight for the weekend nuptials between Swift and Kelce. TMZ reports that National Guard troops have been spotted in the vicinity of the venue in recent days, a not uncommon sight under a state-level deployment to secure major venues and transit hubs in the Big Apple.

Swift and Kelce won't be the first couple to tie the knot at The Garden. Funk and soul star Sly Stone and actor Kathy Silva got married at MSG back in 1974, bringing thousands of fans and guests with him. The MSG wedding reports have not been confirmed by either Taylor not Kelce. The arena's calendar of upcoming events lists nothing from June 29-July 6.Earlier, there were rumours of there being a much more intimate wedding being held in Swift's Watch Hill estate, located in a New England seaside village. Swift has owned the home for more than a decade, located at the Rhode Island beach community in the town of Westerly, close to the Connecticut border.Wedding planner Nicole Simeral has been spotted frequenting the neighbourhood, but she told AP that she's been working on a wedding every weekend of June in that area, and not just Swift's. She doubted Watch Hill would be practical for a wedding of that scale because of its limited luxury lodging.Page Six reports that the guest list includes around 100 guests — family members and very close friends of the couple. While Kelce's teammates are expected to attend, Swift's guest list may include A-list Hollywood celebrities, including close friends Selena Gomez, Blake Lively, and her husband Ryan Reynolds. However, none of the guests have confirmed their attendance or even receiving an invite, thanks to the customary NDAs.However, the said NDAs are said to be "all bark, no bite" as the guests aren't liable to any monetary compensation in case they violate the NDAs. There's also no consent forms to be filmed, so the couple isn't expected to have struck a deal with a streaming platform or wedding channel for their wedding documentary.Invitations have also reportedly gone out as phone calls, instead of physical invites, in order to avoid the venue and timings getting leaked. Much to their reported frustration, the guests have only been asked to save two dates — July 2 and July 3 — for the wedding in New York City. Even the venue and itinerary haven't been communicated to them so far.Prince William, a close friend of Swift, hinted a couple of months ago that he's looking forward to receive the wedding invitation. "I'm hoping, and I'm sure there might be an invitation around, but we'll see," he said.

Neha Dhupia loses temper at paparazzi over 'disrespectful' back shots

Actor Neha Dhupia was recently seen expressing her anger at paparazzi for clicking her from behind, which she called out as 'disrespectful'. The actor attended an event in Mumbai recently, where she had a heated interaction with photographers over the issue.A video of Neha confronting photographers has gone viral on social media, showing the actor visibly upset as she demanded accountability and called for an end to the practice. She strongly objected to the repeated use of such camera angles, asking photographers to stop what she termed as disrespectful coverage.

In the clip, Neha can be heard expressing her frustration, saying that repeated warnings have gone unheard and urging media personnel to maintain dignity while covering celebrities. The altercation reportedly began after she was photographed during a public appearance in a manner she found inappropriate.Neha was heard saying, "Mera nahi karna hai. Kisi ka nahi karna hai. Bol bol kar thak gaye hain. Yeh sab nahi chalega abhi. Band karo yeh sab. We have been telling you again and again. Don't do this. Hum log bahut izzat se aap logon se baat karte hain, but this is not acceptable (I don't want this done to me. Not to anyone. We've been saying this again and again. This will not be allowed anymore. Stop all this. We speak to you with a lot of respect, but this is not acceptable)."Neha also reportedly referenced earlier viral visuals from a fitness-related event, stating that her objection was not personal but part of a larger concern about media conduct. She said, "These paparazzi have become disrespectful. All they do is take back shots from behind. We're tired of telling them again and again – this needs to stop completely."Her outburst has sparked widespread debate online, with many social media users supporting her stance and calling for stricter boundaries in paparazzi coverage.Several actors, including Saptami Gowda, Rukmini Vasanth, and Sonakshi Sinha, have previously raised similar concerns about objectifying camera angles in public coverage.

Sunita Ahuja says she was told to stay 'quiet' as Govinda had 'countless flings for years'

Govinda and Sunita Ahuja's relationship has been under the scanner since last year. While there have been rumors about their separation, the couple has never officially confirmed the same. However, Sunita has time and again taken digs at Govinda straying outside their marriage. On the latest episode of Lock Upp: Sach Ya Sazaa, Sunita Ahuja once again spoke about Govinda's infidelity and why she never walked out of the relationship.

Sunita Ahuja on Govinda's infidelityOn the latest episode of Lock Upp: Sach Ya Sazaa, contestants were asked to share their views on infidelity. While Ram Kapoor initially supported cheating, Akanksha Chamola strongly opposed his opinion. During that discussion, Sunita told Harshad Chopda, "We are openly discussing this now, who had thought about this 40 years back. He is a star, had countless flings over the years. But we were taught to remain quiet; we were told that once you are married, you leave that house only after death."Later, talking to Shreya Kalra about feeling cheated in the marriage, Sunita shared, "Infidelity has been happening since day one, hasn't it? He is a hero after all, so you can't say anything. If I keep stressing at this age, my diabetes will spike. I just let it be and keep moving on. It's fine, I live for my kids."When asked if Govinda continues to cheat on her and whether they have separated, Sunita said, "Can you really stop anyone? Should I go and sit in front of him 24/7? You can't really, the other person will get irritated too. I don't think too much now. We've got two houses, and many people come to meet him, and I need some privacy in my own home." Further, when Shreya asked Sunita if she had ever sought another relationship or if she seeks one now, the star wife said, "It's not my age to do all this, I don't like it."

Sunita and Govinda have been married for over 40 years, and while she has often complained about Govinda not being a great husband, Sunita has fiercely guarded her personal life, too. Ahead of entering Lock Upp, she had told SCREEN that she won't allow a third person to comment about him. "This is not a family show, so I will not tolerate anyone talking about my family. Govinda is very senior, so nobody can point fingers at him. I am his wife; I can say what I want, but no third person can talk about him."

Talking about her divorce rumors, Sunita had earlier said in an interview, "People who gossip are all doing it on social media. They speak rubbish. We don't have to focus on that; we have to see what's going on in our house. Till the time Govinda's mother was alive, he was very good. He has been good after that as well. Govinda is a good son, brother. But, as a husband, what I want.. I love going to parties, for dinners, on holiday, but he got so indulged in providing for his family, that he never enjoyed it. He is 60 but has never lived for himself. This makes me feel bad. You are such a big superstar; what have you seen in life? Nothing. I always say that I want a son like Govinda, not a husband. There's no point even regretting it now; I can't leave him now. It has been 40 years now; even thinking about it would be a crime."She had also revealed in her YouTube vlog, "Many people took advantage of my innocence. I tolerated a lot — but not anymore. I have built my own identity now. I will always remain emotional because a 40-year relationship doesn't break overnight. But I have become strong-hearted. He is my childhood love. If he changes and lives according to what I believe is right, I will forgive him. I don't want to hear everything in the news. This is not the age where I can handle such stress — I am going through menopause. At this time, you need your husband and children to support you, not put pressure on you."Recently talking to SCREEN, Sunita also revealed how Govinda reacted to her participation in Lock Upp: Sach Ya Sazaa. She said, "Govinda was very tense. He said, 'Main ne apni biwi ko phool ki tarah paala hai, usko andar kisi ne dukh de diya toh woh rone lagegi.'

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