

# HYDERABAD HEADLINES

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## TILAK ENDS MI LOSING STREAK

STADIUM 11

## A STAR IN FULL BLOOM



BOX -OFFICE 12



PM Modi & President Lee planting a Sita Ashok sapling on Monday

## India, South Korea Set \$50 Billion Trade Target by 2030, Deepen Strategic Ties

HOME LAND 07

### SHORT TAKES



### 21 dead, 51 injured as bus rolls down hill in J&K's

At least 21 people were killed and 51 injured on Monday when an overcrowded passenger bus plunged hillside in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district, crushing an auto-rickshaw before landing upside down on the road.

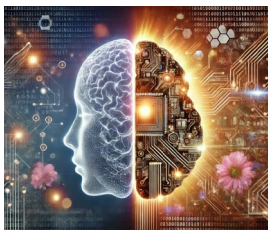
NEXT DOOR 05



### Fly91 flight to Hubballi diverted to Bengaluru

A Fly91 flight from Hyderabad to Hubballi on Sunday was diverted to Bengaluru due to adverse weather conditions, with airport officials maintaining that all passengers were safe. Sources said there were 22 passengers on board.

NEXT DOOR 05



### AI: Innovation's Triumph or Humanity's Test?

If we examine the history of human civilization, it becomes evident that every new technology arrives with a duality—bringing both possibilities and perils. The rapid advancement of AI has undoubtedly made life easier, faster, and more efficient.

OPINION 06

## Kaleshwaram Corruption: No Mercy for Guilty

### Govt. will not spare responsible for irregularities in Kaleshwaram : CM

Culprits will be brought to justice

Will not abandon Kaleshwaram. Carry out repairs and ensure water supply

CM Revanth Reddy demands Harish Rao to disclose details of his secret visit to Delhi

CM questions Harish for his meeting with advocates even before the judgment.

CM digs at BJP for not ordering a CBI probe into Kaleshwaram

KCR deliberately holds a public meeting today to divert the attention.

CM Revanth Reddy addressed the press conference today

"WE WILL NOT ABANDON KALESHWARAM. UNLIKE THE PREVIOUS REGIME THAT USED IT AS AN ATM, WE WILL COMPLETE THE NECESSARY REPAIRS AND ENSURE WATER REACHES THE FIELDS FOR DRINKING AND IRRIGATION."

Jayashankar Bhupalpally, April 20: CM Shri A Revanth Reddy affirmed that the State Government will not spare the responsible persons for the undrilled multi crore corruption in the construction of the Kaleshwaram project. The Chief Minister said that all the culprits would be brought to justice. Addressing the press conference, the CM warned that the government would move forward with necessary strategic plans if the BRS tried to use the BJP as a shield to escape corruption charges. Justice P.C. Ghosh Committee has already submitted a comprehensive

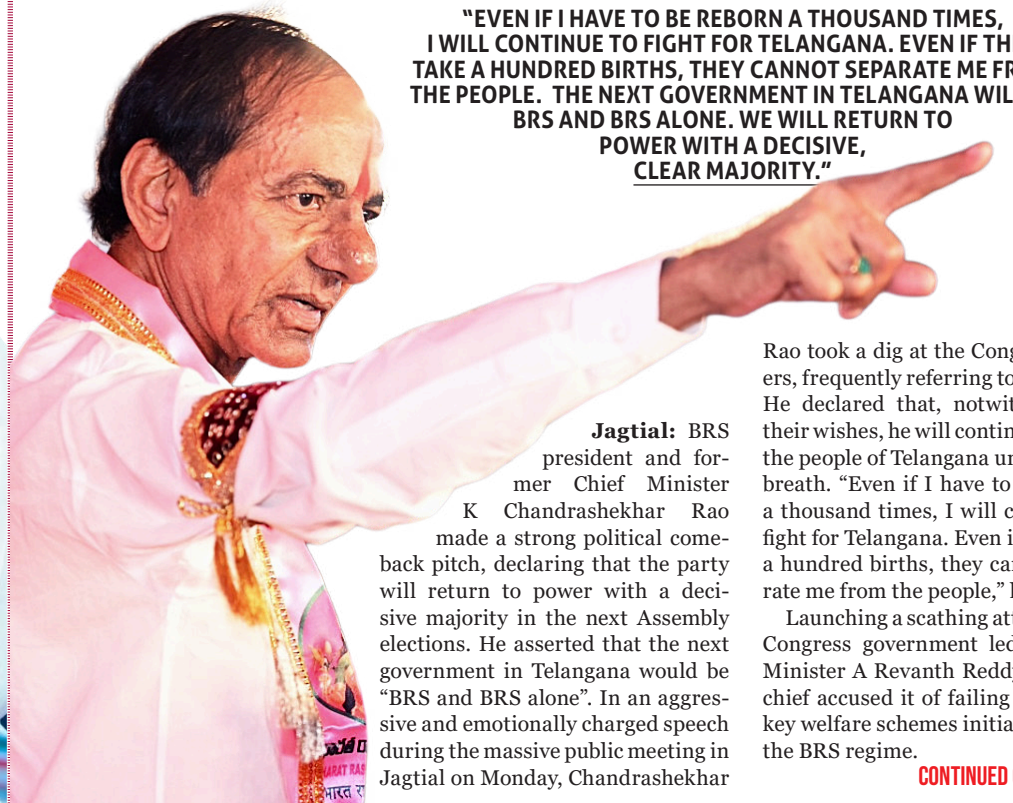
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >



## I Will Fight Until My Last Breath: KCR

### KCR Slams Congress "Misgovernance," Vows to Uproot HYDRAA

"EVEN IF I HAVE TO BE REBORN A THOUSAND TIMES, I WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR TELANGANA. EVEN IF THEY TAKE A HUNDRED BIRTHS, THEY CANNOT SEPARATE ME FROM THE PEOPLE. THE NEXT GOVERNMENT IN TELANGANA WILL BE BRS AND BRS ALONE. WE WILL RETURN TO POWER WITH A DECISIVE, CLEAR MAJORITY."



Jagtial: BRS president and former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao made a strong political comeback pitch, declaring that the party will return to power with a decisive majority in the next Assembly elections. He asserted that the next government in Telangana would be "BRS and BRS alone". In an aggressive and emotionally charged speech during the massive public meeting in Jagtial on Monday, Chandrashekar

Rao took a dig at the Congress leaders, frequently referring to his death. He declared that, notwithstanding their wishes, he will continue serving the people of Telangana until his last breath. "Even if I have to be reborn a thousand times, I will continue to fight for Telangana. Even if they take a hundred births, they cannot separate me from the people," he said.

Launching a scathing attack on the Congress government led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, the BRS chief accused it of failing to sustain key welfare schemes initiated during the BRS regime.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

### CM lays foundation stone for Rs. 198 crore Kaleshwaram Temple redevelopment

04

### CM and Ministers along with NDSA Officials inspected the Medigadda Barrage

## Harish leads BRS delegation to Delhi ahead of Kaleshwaram verdict

HYDERABAD, APRIL 20

BRS deputy floor leader T Harish Rao left for New Delhi on Monday, heading a three-member party delegation to strategise legally in anticipation of the Telangana High Court's ruling on the PC Ghose Commission regarding the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme.

The delegation, which comprises former MP B Vinod Kumar and Rajya Sabha member Vaddiraju Ravichandra, plans to meet with senior advocates from the Supreme Court.

According to party sources, Harish Rao's visit aims to explore potential avenues for contesting the commission led by Justice PC Ghose if the High Court issues an unfavorable verdict on Wednesday. The BRS leadership, including former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, has already questioned the legality of the Commission and its findings in the High Court.

## BRS heading for split? Harish Rao's Delhi trip sparks speculation: Minister Laxman

HYDERABAD, APRIL 20

Telangana Minister Adhuri Laxman on Monday claimed that internal rifts have surfaced within the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS), predicting an imminent split in the party. Talking to newsmen, he remarked that BRS chief K. Chandrashekar Rao was stepping out of his farmhouse after nearly a year, raising questions about the party's internal dynamics. Laxman also questioned why senior leader T. Harish Rao chose to visit Delhi instead of attending KCR's public meeting in Jagtial, hinting that the purpose of his meetings in the national capital would soon be revealed. The minister predicted that the BRS party appears to be on the verge of splitting into two factions.

## Ponnam calls for public participation in preserving Basaveshwara's social vision

HYDERABAD, APRIL 20

Minister for Transport Ponnam Prabhakar stated that Basaveshwara's philosophy must be understood in the context of changing times, and his life, vision, and ideals should be studied and followed.

The Minister announced that the state government has established a corporation in honour of Basaveshwara and the foundation stone for the Basaveshwara Bhavan will be laid soon.

Under the aegis of the Telangana Backward Classes Welfare department, the 893rd birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Basaveshwara were held at Ravindra

Bharathi in Hyderabad on Monday. Ministers Ponnam Prabhakar and Vakiti Srihari attended as chief guests at the programme.

On the occasion, the Ministers paid rich tributes to Mahatma Basaveshwara, stating that he was a notable thinker who taught society the values of equality, social justice, and ethical living.

Ponnam Prabhakar said that not only the government, but also followers and descendants of Basaveshwara should actively participate in these initiatives.

Referring to Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, he stated that the spirit of Basaveshwara's ideals

was reflected in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Ponnam Prabhakar further stated that that efforts will be made to educate future generations about Basaveshwara's philosophy.

"Mahatma Basaveshwara dedicated his life to eliminating caste discrimination and spreading the principle that all human beings are equal," he said.

The Minister advocated equal rights for women, and his reforms in this regard remain exemplary even today.

"Basaveshwara's contribution to the upliftment of marginalised communities is immense. The three core principles he upheld—justice,

equality, and righteousness—continue to guide present and future generations," Ponnam Prabhakar said.

The Minister called upon people to practice these values and work towards building an inclusive and equal society. Members of Parliament Suresh Shetkar, Police Housing Corporation Chairman Gurunath Reddy, Hyderabad CP Sajjanar, BC Corporation Chairman Noothi Srikanth Goud, Fisheries Corporation Chairman Mettu Sai Kumar, former MP B. B. Patil, BC Welfare Department Secretary Balamayadevi, along with other prominent leaders and officials, participated in the programme.

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# 4th Telangana Public Relations Conference Held in Hyderabad



**Dr K V Ramana Chary, IAS (Rtd)**  
Former Media Advisor to Govt of Telangana



**HYDERABAD**

The 4th Telangana Public Relations Conference was organised on 19th April at Hotel Tourism Plaza with the participation of nearly 200 delegates, communication professionals, academicians, students, and media representatives. The conference was held on the theme "Telangana Rising 2047: Communication, Innovation & Empowerment."

Dr Yadagiri Kambhampati, Chairman, PRSI, Hyderabad Chapter welcomed the gathering and said the Hyderabad Chapter has a proud legacy of organising impactful conferences and professional programmes. He stated that the conference would provide a roadmap for strengthening communication practices for Telangana's future growth. Y Babji, Editor, Public Relations Voice Journal presided over the inaugural session and explained the significance of the conference. He said communication professionals must play a proactive role in shaping public awareness, trust, and development narratives while connecting industry, government, academia, and youth.

K Sreenivas Reddy, Chairman, Telangana Media Academy, Chief Guest, said Telangana has emerged as a progressive state through visionary leadership and effective public communication. He emphasised that media and PR

professionals must work responsibly to promote truthful and development-oriented narratives. Smt Ch. Priyanka, Special Commissioner, Information & Public Relations Department, Govt of Telangana, Guest of Honour, highlighted the importance of transparent governance communication and citizen engagement. She said technology-driven outreach and timely dissemination of information are essential for building public confidence. Prof K Nageshwar, Political Analyst delivering the keynote address on "Telangana Growth Story: Communication Strategies for a Developed Telangana by 2047," said communication must become a strategic tool for economic progress, social inclusion and democratic participation.

U S Sarma, National Vice President (South), PRSI appreciated the Hyderabad Chapter for its vibrant activities and leadership within the PRSI family. He said public relations has become a vital pillar in governance, corporate growth, and nation-building. Rajesh Kalyana, Chapter Secretary proposed the vote of thanks.

The conference featured three technical sessions covering communication, innovation and empowerment.

**Session I: Communication - AI for Every Profession**

Chaired by Prof Pallavi Kabde of Dr

BR Ambedkar Open University, the session discussed the growing impact of Artificial Intelligence on governance, education, administration, and communication. Hemant K Sathyanarayana, IMAGINATE XR said AI, augmented reality, and immersive technologies are redefining learning and workplace communication. Dr Archana Kumari of JNU New Delhi stressed ethical use of AI, data privacy, and critical thinking. Lion K Govindraj coordinated the session.

**Session II: Innovation - Industry, Urban Development, Transport and Infrastructure**

The session was chaired by Dr G Rameswar Rao, Director of Engg Staff College of India. He said innovation is the key to sustainable cities, industrial growth, and modern infrastructure. Sri J Panduranga Naik, Joint Transport Commissioner, RTA, Hyderabad highlighted smart mobility systems, road safety, and digital transport services. Sri Krishna Baji coordinated the session and emphasised transparent communication in infrastructure development.

**Session III: Empowerment - Agriculture, Culture, Heritage, Tourism & Branding**

This session was chaired by Padma

Shri Yedla Venkateswara Rao Editor of Rythu Nestham. He said empowerment begins with strengthening farmers through knowledge, innovation, and market access. Dr R Ravi Kumar explained the concept of CURE, PURE and RARE, stressing sustainable and resource-efficient growth. Samala Venu, International Illusionist highlighted the importance of promoting Telangana's heritage and tourism globally. V Madhusudhan coordinated the session.

**Valedictory Session**

Sri K V Ramana Chary, for Advisor to Govt on PR, Media & Public Affairs, Chief Guest, said Public Relations has emerged as a strategic force in governance, development, and nation-building. He stated that Telangana's progress story must be communicated through credible and people-centric narratives. He also remarked that people who direct their proactive communication skills toward public good belong in public relations.

U S Sarma called upon students and young communicators to embrace ethics, innovation, and continuous learning.

Y Babji, Conference Director summed up the proceedings and said the conference successfully brought together experts from administration,

media, academia, industry, transport, agriculture and culture on one platform.

P Mohan Rao, Conference Co Director proposed the vote of thanks.

**Awards and Recognitions**

As part of the conference organised in connection with National Public Relations Day, the PRSI Hyderabad Chapter presented the prestigious Pride of Telangana Honours to K Sreenivas Reddy, Prof K Nageshwar and Prasanna Kumar Motupalli for their outstanding contributions.

Four former Chairpersons of the Hyderabad Chapter - P L Raghuram, Mathew Joseph, C Rama Krishna, and R Neelamegham - were felicitated with Lifetime Achievement Recognition.

Over 50 Excellence Awards were also presented to organisations in categories such as Public Relations, Corporate Communications, Corporate Publications, CSR, Crisis Communications, Social Media Campaigns and Digital Communications.

Prominent award-winning organisations included NMDC Limited, The Singareni Collieries Company Limited, Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Engineering Staff College of India, NCC, Bondada Groups, T-SAT, Srihara Hospitals, etc



## GITAM Conducts NCC Orientation Program

**HYDERABAD**

The GITAM Deemed to be University, Hyderabad, through its Directorate of Sports and NCC, organized a National Cadet Corps (NCC) Orientation Program on April 20, 2026, to familiarize cadets with the scope, training, and opportunities within the NCC.

During the session, NCC officer and senior cadets outlined the significance of various camps, including the Annual Training Camp (ATC), Republic Day Camp (RDC), Thal Sainik Camp (TSC), and Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) Camp. Through pre-

sentations and videos, cadets were introduced to activities such as map reading, compass usage, judging distance, field signals, pitching of tents, drill, physical training, weapon handling, cultural exchange, and national-level competitions, highlighting the role of these camps in building discipline, leadership, teamwork, and national pride. The program emphasized that NCC training extends beyond routine drills, offering transformative experiences that shape responsible and confident citizens. Associate NCC Officer Lieutenant S. Ajay Kumar convened the program with the support of senior cadets.

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No.2/3(Civ-Const.-CDL)/2026-MSPDCL-TECH/170426/01-07: Manipur State Power Distribution Company Limited, a Govt. of Manipur enterprise, invites Sealed Tender from Civil License contractor/Firms for the below work:

**TS No. 03/2/2026** - "Civil Works for Construction of Line Staff Quarter, Watchman Quarter & Underground tank at Chandel Sub-Division Campus, Chandel, MSPDCL"

The tender details and documents shall be available on payment of cost of tender of **Rs. 500/- (non-refundable)** from 21/04/2026 to 05/05/2026 at the office of the **General Manager (Purchase), MSPDCL, Secure Office Complex, 3rd Floor, North AOC, Imphal West.**

**Last date of Submission of Tender:**  
06/05/2026 (upto 11.00 A.M)

**Date of Opening:** 06/05/2026 (Time: 2.00 P.M.)  
**Venue:** MSPDCL Conference Hall

sd/-  
**(I. Saratchandra Singh)**  
General Manager (Purchase), MSPDCL

**Imphal,**  
17th April, 2026

## Cong slams BJP over 'delay tactics' on women's reservation bill

**HYDERABAD**

The Congress party on Monday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of spreading 'false propaganda' against the Congress on the Women's Reservation Bill and deliberately delaying the implementation of the Bill, despite supporting its passage in 2023.

Hyderabad DCC chief Syed Khalid Saifullah along with Assembly constituency in-charges Rajesh Kumar Pulipati (Bahadurpura), B. Nagesh (Chandrayangutta), Mohammed Mujeebullah Shareef (Charminar), Shaik Akbar (Malakpet) and K. Ravi Raj (Yakutpura), at a media conference in Gandhi Bhavan, alleged that linking the 33% quota for women to Census and delimitation exercises was a "calculated move" to postpone rollout. He

said the reservation could have been implemented ahead of the 2024 general elections if there was genuine intent.

Raising concerns over delimitation, the Congress leader warned it may reduce the political weight of southern states like Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

Reaffirming its stand, Saifullah said women's reservation is a matter of equality and demanded immediate implementation without preconditions.

In fact, the Congress party had introduced key reforms for women, including 33 per cent reservation in local bodies through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, as well as laws related to maternity benefits, domestic violence and workplace safety, he claimed.

## Blind welfare event highlights pension delays, seeks priority relief

**HYDERABAD:** A welfare event held on Akshaya Tritiya brought attention to the financial struggles of retired blind employees, with appeals for faster release of pending benefits.

Telangana legislative council chairman Gutha Sukender Reddy attended the programme organised by Ponugoti Chokka Rao, general secretary, Development and welfare association of the Blind, Hyderabad, where the former sarpanches of Tipparthi mandal, Nalgonda - Gunda Satyanarayana, Chintalakunta Ravinder Reddy, ex-ZPTC Basham Ram Reddy, Y. Narender Reddy, K. Jana Reddy, ex-Head Master were felicitated for their support.

The organisers urged the authorities to expedite payments such as GPF, GIS and leave encashment for visually impaired retirees, citing total dependence on these funds. The Chairman noted that Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka has released Rs.800 crore towards retirement dues, with priority for disabled employees. The association stressed that timely disbursal is critical for the livelihood of blind retirees.

## TDP Activists Turn Chandrababu Naidu's 76th Birthday into a Grand Celebration

**MEDCHAL-MALKAJGIRI**

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leaders and supporters celebrated the 76th birthday of party national president and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu with devotion and enthusiasm at KPHB 114 Division near JNTUH Circle.

The celebrations began with party members paying floral tributes to the NTR statue. Supporters offered garlands and prayers before taking out a rally to Ramya Ground, where a cake-cutting ceremony was held in a festive atmosphere. The event drew a large gathering of party cadre and well-wishers, who came together to mark the occasion with joy and respect.

Following the cake-cutting ceremony, the celebrations continued with the bursting of crackers and distribution of sweets and buttermilk packets to attendees. In keeping with the festive spirit, mangoes and other refreshments were also shared near the Vinayak Temple. Later, party members assembled once again at the NTR statue in Vasanta Nagar, where a second cake-cutting ceremony was organized.



Several prominent district and division leaders took part in the programme, including district in-charge committee member Uppala Padma Chowdary, along with senior leaders Sheikh Sattar, Atluri Deepak, Shiva sathyanarayana, Vasireddy Lakshminarayana, Kolluri Srinivas, Kakarla Gopikrishna, Chirumamilli Umamahesh, Subbarao, Jasti Ramadevi, Chandra Rao, Ramakrishna, Doppalapudi Madhan Mohan, Kishor Kor-

rapati, Cherukuri Ravi, Pavan Marny, Dorababu, Sambashiva Rao, Anand Rao, Kota, Kondla Rao, Vikram Singh, Sai, Manikantha Varma, Venkata, Raja, Kameswara Rao and others.

The birthday celebrations were held in a respectful and communal atmosphere, reflecting the strong support and admiration Chandrababu Naidu continues to enjoy among TDP members and supporters in the area.

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## SHORT TAKES

### KCR pays tribute to Basaveshwara, calls for social equality

**HYDERABAD:** Former chief minister and BRS chief K. Chandrashekar Rao on Monday paid rich tributes to social reformer Basaveshwara on his birth anniversary, hailing him as a pioneer of social justice and humanism. Basaveshwara's visionary approach paved the way for social awareness and reforms through his literature, he noted. KCR praised Basaveshwara's relentless fight against caste, gender and social discrimination, noting that his 12th-century vision of equality and dignity of labour remains relevant today. He said Telangana's welfare initiatives during the first decade of BRS rule.

### BRS future 'bleak', internal dissent growing: Cong MP Chamala

**HYDERABAD:** April 20 (NSS): Bhongir MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy on Monday said the future of the Bharat Rashtira Samithi appears uncertain amid signs of internal discord. Talking to newsmen, the Congress MP claimed that the BRS party leaders were not supportive of veteran politician T. Jeevan Reddy joining the BRS, noting that T. Harish Rao had not extended any invitation to him. Kiran Kumar Reddy also highlighted that while K. Chandrashekar Rao was re-emerging after a prolonged absence, Harish Rao's visit to Delhi had raised eyebrows. He asserted that details of the meetings would soon surface and added that the public was already aware of Harish Rao's possible political moves.

### Welfare Week in full swing: Collectors lead ground-level checks

**HYDERABAD:** As part of the Welfare Week, Hyderabad District Collector Harichandana Dasari took an active role in overseeing implementation across the institutions. At Mahendra Hills, she inspected kitchens, dining halls and hostels, emphasizing strict adherence to hygiene standards, timely food service, and improved training for cooking staff. Meals are being served as per the prescribed menu, while intermediate toppers were felicitated to encourage academic excellence. In a gesture of engagement, the Collector also shared a meal with students and urged them to aim higher. In Bhadradi Kothagudem, district collector Ankit conducted surprise inspections in Gurukul and Ekalavya schools in Telakapalli Mandal.

# Expedite completion of tourism projects: Jupally

HYDERABAD

Minister for Tourism, Culture, and Archaeology Jupally Krishna Rao has directed officials to accelerate the completion of ongoing tourism projects across the state to ensure they are made accessible to the public without further delay. Presiding over a high-level review meeting at the Telangana Tourism Development Corporation (TGTDC) office in Himayat Nagar on Monday, alongside TGTDC Chairman Patel Ramesh Reddy, the Minister scrutinised the progress of projects funded by the State government, Central government, and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP).

During the session, officials presented a detailed power-point presentation outlining the progress of various initiatives, including a district-wise breakdown of works totaling an estimated cost of 274.93 crore.

Emphasising on timelines and modernisation, the Minister issued several key directives, primarily requiring officials to adhere strictly to monthly timelines for all proposed and ongoing projects to ensure time-bound completion.

Regarding the modernisation of infrastructure, the Minister suggested replacing traditional boats with modern vessels and introducing additional boating units at Somasila to enhance the visitor experience.

To create innovative attractions, Jupally Krishna Rao requested the department to explore the feasibility of constructing Cantilever Glass Viewpoints, similar to those found in Russia and China, at high-altitude locations and scenic water bodies.

Furthermore, he called for the immediate preparation of proposals for the construction of additional cottages near the historic Ramappa Temple to accommodate growing tourist footfall.



Jupally Krishna Rao emphasised that under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the government aims to transform Telangana into a world-class tourism hub by 2047. He stated that the government's target is to make Telangana the top destination for tourism in the country by creating an investment-friendly environment and implementing comprehensive master plans for six Special Tourism Areas (STAs). These include Spiritual, Heritage, Eco-Wellness, Crafts, Water, and Buddhist circuits.

To support local talent and culture, the Minister directed the construction of 'Hampi-style' theaters at prominent tourist spots to host cultural performances, providing sustainable livelihoods for local artists. He also stressed that the expansion of the tourism sector must be coupled with a high priority on hygiene, maintenance, and tourist safety.

### Comprehensive Master Plans for Special Tourism Areas (STAs)

The department is currently developing master plans focusing on six primary cir-

cuits. The spiritual circuit includes sites such as Yadagirigutta, Bhadrachalam, Basara, Vemulawada, Alampur-Somasila, Ramappa, Kaleshwaram, and Medak. The Heritage circuit focuses on Warangal, Nalgonda, Palakurthi, Karimnagar, the Charminar Cluster, and the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Medchal Cluster, he said.

For Eco-Wellness, the plan covers Siddipet, the Nallamala Circuit, Sriram Sagar, Jannaram, the Tribal Circuit, Nagarjuna Sagar, Vikarabad, and Mahabubnagar.

The Crafts sector highlights Pochampally, Narayanpet, and Gadwal-Kothakota, whereas the Water Circuits encompass the Koratikal, Kuntala, Pochera, and Gayatri waterfalls. Finally, the Buddhist Circuits include significant historical sites like Kondapur, Dhulikatta, Karukonda, Nela-kondapalli, Buddhavanam, Phanigiri, and Gajulabanda. The meeting was attended by Special Chief Secretary Vani Prasad, TGTDC MD Gauthami, Buddhavanam Special Officer Mallepalli Laxmaiah, Archaeology Director Arjuna Rao, and other senior officials.



## Reform within key for progress: Shabbir Ali urges Muslim community

HYDERABAD

Telangana Government Advisor Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Monday stressed that behavioural and attitudinal change within the Muslim community is essential for long-term progress, placing education, discipline and responsible social habits at the centre of development.

Speaking after inaugurating 'Shine Kindergarten', a new initiative of Shine Model High School, at Al-Ain Colony in Shaheen Nagar here, he said true advancement depends on modern education and career planning. "Only higher education can change the fortune of any community", he asserted.

Highlighting the impact of the 4% Muslim reservation, Shabbir Ali said over 22 lakh beneficiaries have accessed education and jobs since its implementation.

Referring to MBBS admissions for 2024-25, he noted that 1,226 Muslim students secured seats across 65 medical colleges in Telangana, which together offer 8,965 seats. This included 485 boys and 741 girls, with

638 admissions under the BC-E quota. Citing examples, Shabbir Ali said daughters of auto-rickshaw drivers and daily wage workers are now becoming doctors and professionals due to reservation, scholarships and government support. He also referred to two Muslim girls who completed MBBS and higher studies, stating that major government hospitals such as NIMS, Gandhi Hospital and Osmania Hospital are competing to recruit them. "Their value has increased because of education," he said.

However, he expressed concern over declining academic interest among boys, blaming indiscipline and distractions. He urged the parents to play a more active role and called for better use of government schemes, stressing that welfare must be matched with community responsibility.

The programme was attended by Bahelmi Educational Board CEO Mohammed Abdul Junaid Bahelmi, Shine Model School Group Founder and Chairman Syed Nooruddin Ali Abid, along with community leaders, parents and educationists. (NSS)

## Rainwater harvesting pits only conserve water: Lions District Governor Dr. Arya



Dr Srinivas Vooradi

HANUMAKONDA

"As temperatures rise and heat becomes more intense, our lifestyles are being impacted in significant ways. Water scarcity is becoming increasingly urgent, and the steady drop in groundwater levels is particularly alarming. In this scenario, creation of rainwater harvesting pits is emerging as a vital solution," remarked Lions District Governor Dr. K Chandrasekhar Arya. Speaking at an awareness program on rainwater harvesting organized by the Lions Club of Hanumakonda Tricity at the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Ashram School on Monday, Dr. Arya stressed that it is a collective responsibility to prevent groundwater depletion, which is exacerbated by rapid urban growth

and excessive concrete development. He highlighted that enabling rainwater to seep into the ground not only helps recharge groundwater levels but also enhances water availability in borewells and wells throughout the summer. Second Vice District Governor Elect Revuri Ramana Reddy added that minimizing rainwater wastage and fostering water conservation are crucial for maintaining environmental equilibrium. The programme was presided over by MJPTBCWR School Principal J. Anji Reddy, with the participation of Cabinet Treasurer Challa Raghunath Reddy and Region Chairperson Ponnala Samyuktha. Program Coordinator Katanguru Ramgopal Reddy prepared and distributed informative pamphlets to raise awareness among students. Club President Madadi Prasad Reddy, Region Secretary B. Narasimha Reddy along with several teachers were also present.



Commuters struggle to navigate a badly damaged road at Lakdikapul on Sunday as delayed construction work and poor maintenance create hardships for motorists, raising concerns over traffic safety and civic neglect.

## BJP Sounds War Bugle Against Huzurabad Dump Yard

- Decision to Intensify Agitation with Protests and Road Blockades
- Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Meets Huzurabad Leaders on Protest Strategy
- "Continue the Fight Until the Heat Reaches the Government"
- "If the Dump Yard is Set Up, Lives of Huzurabad People Will Become Miserable"
- "Serious Risk to Public Health"
- "Even Marriage Alliances May Be Affected"
- "I Have Personally Seen the Suffering of People Near the Karimnagar Dump Yard"
- "Be Ready for Legal Battle If Necessary"
- Call by Bandi Sanjay to BJP Cadre

KARIMNAGAR

Opposing the state government's decision to set up a dumping yard on the outskirts of Huzurabad, the Bharatiya Janata Party has sounded a war bugle. The party has decided to intensify the movement through protests, road blockades (rasta rokos), sit-ins, and hunger strikes. It is preparing to continue the agitation until the state government backs down.

Under the leadership of Karimnagar district BJP president Gangadi Krishna Red-



dy, BJP leaders from the Huzurabad constituency met Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar today at the MP office in Karimnagar. They brought to his attention the growing concerns and anxiety among Huzurabad residents over the proposed dumping yard.

Bandi Sanjay stated that if the dumping yard is established, life for nearby residents would become extremely difficult. He warned of severe health issues and even said that youth in Huzurabad might struggle to find marriage alliances due to the situation. He added that he has personally witnessed the hardships faced by people living near the Karimnagar dumping yard and emphasized that such conditions should not be repeated.

Given that the concerns of Huzurabad residents are valid, he urged BJP cadres to prepare for large-scale protests. He called for sustained agitation in various forms until the government responds, stress-

ing that once the movement begins, there should be no retreat. He assured full support for the protests and said the struggle should continue until it impacts the top levels of government. He also advised party workers to ignore criticism from rival political parties and let their actions serve as the response. Later, Bandi Sanjay held detailed discussions on the protest plan against the dumping yard. He suggested specific programs and urged leaders to raise the issue with officials ranging from the District Collector to higher authorities. He also recommended preparing for a legal battle alongside public protests.

As part of the plan, district president Gangadi Krishna Reddy will hold a meeting with key BJP leaders in Huzurabad tomorrow to finalize the protest strategy. A protest program is planned the same day in Huzurabad, followed by a large-scale demonstration near the Collectorate in the district headquarters.

## CM lays foundation stone for Rs.198 crore Kaleshwaram Temple redevelopment

HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy laid the foundation stone for the redevelopment works of the Sri Kaleshwara Mukteshwara Temple in Kaleshwaram in Jayashankar Bhupalpal district at a cost of ₹198 crore on Monday. Following his visit to Sri Kaleshwara Mukteshwara Swami for darshan and the completion of the Maha Rudrabhishekam, the Chief Minister visited the Subhanda Devi Temple and later initiated the groundbreaking ceremony. Subsequently, he laid the foundation stone for the proposed Kaleshwara bus station, which will be constructed at a cost of ₹3.70 crore. Principal Secretary of the Endowments department, Sailaja Ramaiyer, along with Commissioner Hanumantha Rao, honoured the Chief Minister and the Ministers with warm accolades, presenting them with prasadam and silk robes.

Officials provided the Chief Minister with an overview of the planned temple redevelopment projects. Ministers Duddilla Sridhar Babu, Uttam Kumar Reddy, Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Ponnam Prabhakar, Adluri Laxman and Gaddam Vivek, MP Vamsi Krishna and others were present.



## CM and Other Ministers along with NDSA Officials inspected the Medigadda Barrage

**BHUPALAPALLY:** Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, along with ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy, Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Sridhar Babu, Anil Jain (Chairman of the National Dam Safety Authority), and senior officials inspected the Medigadda Barrage. The Chief Minister, ministers, and officials reviewed the ongoing works involving geotechnical, geophysical, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), and sample collection using bore rigs at pillars 20,

21, and 22 of the Medigadda Barrage. The government is collecting samples using 520 bore rigs and plans to send them to Central Water and Power Research Station for analysis. After laboratory testing there, a complete understanding of the extent of damage to the barrage is expected. Officials also explained to the Chief Minister the details of parallel cross-hole seismic tests related to the secant piles at the barrage site.

## 3 Bank Officials Held in ₹2,500 Cr Cyber Fraud in Gujarat

RAJKOT: (APR 20)

Three officials of leading private banks were arrested for their alleged involvement in a Rs 2,500-crore cyber fraud racket in Gujarat's Rajkot district, bringing the number of those held so far in the case to 20, police said on Monday.

Those arrested were identified as Maulik Kamani, a personal manager at Yes Bank in Padadhari; Kalpesh Dangariya, a manager at Axis Bank in Jamnagar; and Anurag Balda, a personal banker with HDFC Bank, Rajkot (Rural) Superintendent of Police Vijay Gurjar said.

Dangariya and Balda were previously employed with Yes Bank, he added.

## Chandrababu Naidu targets DMK, Cong over women's quota; seeks apology during TN campaign

COIMBATORE, APRIL 20

Campaigning for the AIADMK-led NDA ahead of the April 23 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections intensified on Monday, with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu addressing a public meeting in Coimbatore and targeting key opposition parties over the issue of women's reservation. Positioning the women's quota as a defining electoral issue, the Andhra Pradesh CM urged voters to hold parties accountable for their stand on the legislation. He said the debate over reservation for women in legislatures should be at the centre of political discourse, calling it a crucial step towards inclusive governance.

Praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi for introduc-



ing the proposal to provide 33 per cent reservation for women, CM Naidu described the move as a transformative reform. He argued that the initiative reflected a strong commitment to women's empowerment and political participation. At the same time, he accused the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)

and the Indian National Congress of opposing progressive reforms, alleging that their stance on the women's reservation Bill amounted to a disservice to women across the country. CM Naidu alleged that several opposition parties, including the Congress and the DMK, had historically resisted key reforms and

were continuing that trend by opposing the women's quota legislation. "What Modi Ji has done for women -- 33 per cent reservation -- is a landmark step. But Congress, DMK and some other parties have done injustice to women by opposing it," he said. Referring to recent developments in Parliament, the Andhra Pradesh CM claimed that the opposition bloc had voted against the amendment related to the Women's Reservation Act, and asserted that such a stance amounted to a betrayal of women's empowerment.

"They must now go before women and apologise. This is not just politics -- this is about the future of women in India," he added. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief also took aim at the M.K. Stalin-led DMK government, accusing it

of lacking vision and failing to effectively utilise the support extended by the Centre. He argued that Tamil Nadu had missed several opportunities for development due to what he described as poor governance and political rigidity.

The Andhra Pradesh CM urged voters in Tamil Nadu to reject parties that oppose reform-oriented policies and instead support the AIADMK-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the upcoming polls. He framed the election as a choice between progressive governance and regressive politics.

Chandrababu Naidu is on a two-day visit to Tamil Nadu as part of an intensive campaign for the NDA alliance, which is seeking to unseat the ruling DMK in the April 23 Assembly elections.

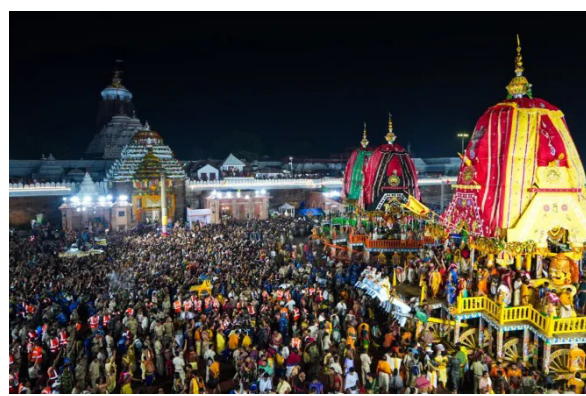
## President Murmu to inaugurate tribal museum in Odisha tomorrow

BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 20

President Droupadi Murmu will inaugurate a tribal museum, a planetarium, and a science centre during a day-long visit to Odisha on April 21, an official said. According to the President's Secretariat, Murmu will inaugurate the planetarium and science Centre and the Nirmal Munda Parivesh Path at a public function in Rourkela, said a statement. She will also inaugurate a tribal museum and an Integrated Command and Control Centre at Rourkela. Extensive and robust security measures have been implemented at all venues listed in the President's itinerary in view of her visit. Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, along with other senior dignitaries, are expected to interact with President Murmu during the visit. President Murmu had earlier visited her home state in February on a six-day visit. She visited Jajpur and offered prayers at the historic 13th-century Biraja Temple, and participated in some rituals at Nabhi Gaya. Murmu also visited the Balasore district and attended the 12th convocation ceremony of Fakir Mohan University. Later, the President travelled to Puri and visited the Shree Jagannath Tem-



ple. She offered prayers and participated in the aarti at the 12th-century shrine. The President also performed other specific rituals in the holy coastal town. During that visit, President Murmu also visited Mayurbhanj district and participated in a number of programmes across her home district. The President attended a special programme at the Jagannath Temple in Rairangpur and later visit Simlipal Wildlife Sanctuary. The next day, she engaged directly with women and youth from tribal communities at Simlipal, one of Odisha's premier biosphere reserves, known for its rich biodiversity and tribal heritage. Later that day, she will grace the 'Black Swan Summit, India' in Bhubaneswar, an event organised by the Odisha government in partnership with the Global Finance and Technology Network. Concluding her visit, President Murmu later travelled to Chhattisgarh, where she inaugurated the 'Bastar Pandum 2026' festival in Jagdalpur.



## Puri gears up for Rath Yatra as chariot construction process begins on Akshaya Tritiya

BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 20

The preparations for the famous annual Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Goddess Subhadra formally commenced on Monday with the sacred chariot construction rituals 'Ratha Katha Anukula Puja' held in Puri on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya.

Speaking to media persons, Chief Administrator of Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), Arabinda Kumar Padhee, said that the first phase of this year's Rath Yatra began today with the commencement of chariot construction. He informed that all the traditional rituals linked to chariot construction, or 'Ratha Katha Anukula Puja', were held smoothly on Monday. After the ceremonial puja, the Vishwakarma Maharana servitors began the traditional process of chariot construction by tying a sacred cloth to the logs, followed by the symbolic cutting of wood with a golden axe, an age-old ritual.

The Chandan Yatra or Sandalwood Yatra of the

holy triad commenced in the sacred town on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya on Monday. The 21-day-long summer festival of the deities of the famous Jagannath Temple is celebrated with much religious zeal and passion at Puri. Each day during the festival, the representative idols of the deities, Madanmohan, Rama, Krishna, Bhudevi, Shreedevi, and five Shivas (known as Panch Pandavas) are ceremoniously brought out in a grand procession and taken to Narendra Tank located near the Jagannath Temple, where they are placed on richly adorned boats. These boats are then gently rowed across the water amid a vibrant atmosphere filled with traditional music and dance performances. In addition to Puri, this festival is also widely celebrated in other religious places across the state, reflecting its cultural significance across Odisha.

SJTA Chief Administrator Padhee also expressed hope that the Chandan Yatra and the Ratha Yatra festival would be held smoothly this year, with the blessings of Lord Jagannath and the holy siblings.

## Homoeopathy Day Marked with Senior Care Services in Chennai

CHENNAI, APRIL 20:

The Indian Institute of Homoeopathic Physicians (IIHP), Tamil Nadu - Chennai branch, in collaboration with Venkateswara Homoeopathic Medical College and Hospital, Porur, celebrated the 27th Birth Anniversary of Dr. Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of Homoeopathy. The commemorative event and subsequent free medical camp were held at the Kakkum Karangal Old Age Home in Thiruvanniyur.

**Honoring the Founder :** The program commenced with dignitaries paying floral tributes and garlanding the portrait of Dr. Hahnemann. Dr. Kolli Raju, President of IIHP Tamil Nadu/Chennai and former Assistant Director In-charge of RRI Gudivada, presided over the function.

**Distinguished speakers highlighted the enduring legacy of the system :** Dr. N. R. Jaya Kumar, Pres-



ident of the Tamil Nadu Homoeopathic Medical Council and General Secretary of IIHP Tamil Nadu, delivered the keynote address. Dr. G.Nagendra Babu, Professor and HOD of Materia Medica at Sri Sairam Homoeopathic Medical College, delivered an insightful lecture on the life and history of Dr. Samuel Hahnemann. Dr. M.Prakash Rao, National Advisor of IIHP, addressed the gathering as the Chief Guest, explaining the scientific mechanism of homoeopathic medicines and its growing popular-

ity across India.

**Medical Camp and Community Outreach :**

Following the formal session, a Free Homoeopathic Medical Camp was conducted specifically for the senior citizens of the home. A dedicated team of doctors provided expert consultations and diagnostic screenings. Senior Clinical Team: Dr. Kolli Raju, Dr. Parasa Radhamma, Dr. N. R. Jaya Kumar, Dr. G. Nagendra Babu, and Dr. M. Prakash Rao. Venkateswara Medical College Team: Dr. Sivaseran, Dr. Siva

Shankari, Dr. Nivetha K., Dr. Priya Dharshini, Dr. Monisha, and Dr. Raja Rajeswari. Over 40 residents benefited from the camp, receiving free consultations and blood sugar screenings (Post-Prandial and Random). Essential homoeopathic medicines were dispensed free of cost to all participants.

**Collaborative Support :**

In a gesture of holistic care, Thiru Anbu from Vasan Eye Care Center (Neelangarai) joined the initiative, distributing free OPD consultation coupons and 50 percent discount cards to the patients. The program was seamlessly coordinated by Dr. D. Brito Welbert Dhas, Principal of Venkateswara Homoeopathic Medical College, with volunteer support from Mr. V.Deena Dayalan. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Thiru David Prince Manoharan, Managing Trustee of Kakkum Karangal, who expressed gratitude to the medical fraternity for their selfless service to the elderly.

## Odisha: Congress alleges misinformation in Women's Reservation

BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 20

The Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) on Monday criticised the BJP-led Union Government over the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill, alleging delays and spreading of false propaganda on the issue. Speaking at a press conference held here, Koraput MP Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka stated that he was present in the Lok Sabha when the Bill was introduced and said the



government's intentions were questionable from the very outset. He noted that the Bill was passed in 2023 with near unanimity, with only

two members opposing it, and later became law. However, he questioned the delay in issuing the Gazette notification, which was released only on April 16, 2026. He asked why it took the Union government three long years to issue the notification. He said the Congress party had wanted the immediate implementation from 2024, reserving 181 seats out of 543 in the Lok Sabha for women, along with provisions for SC, ST, and OBC communities. The Kor-

aput MP noted, however, that the government convened a special session of Parliament in the midst of elections and linked the implementation to the 2026 Census and delimitation, proposing reservation in an expanded House of 850 seats. Ulaka further alleged that the delimitation process could reduce representation for southern states based on population and limit the seat allocation in states like Assam and Jammu & Kashmir, where the BJP has no votes.

## 21 dead, 51 injured as bus rolls down hill in Udhampur

JAMMU, APR 20:

At least 21 people were killed and 51 injured on Monday when an overcrowded passenger bus plunged nearly 100 metres down a hillside in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district, crushing an auto-rickshaw before landing upside down on the road below, officials said. An Army convoy passing along the hilly stretch led the rescue operations after the driver of the private bus lost control of the vehicle while negotiating a blind curve near the hilltop Kagort village in the Ramnagar area around 10 am, the officials said. They said more than 60 passengers, including women and students, were on board, largely daily commuters travelling from Ramnagar to Udhampur. The rescue operations proved to be extremely challenging as the bus was reduced

to a mangled heap of iron, with its top portion almost completely torn off. President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the loss of lives in the accident. Modi also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the families of those killed and Rs 50,000 for those injured. Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah assured the families of the deceased and those injured of all possible assistance. Abdullah also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the next of kin of the deceased, Rs 1 lakh for those seriously injured and Rs 25,000 for those who sustained minor injuries in the accident. "A bus en route from Ramnagar to Udhampur lost control while negotiating a hilly stretch, plunged down the slope and crushed an auto-rickshaw upon landing

upside down on the road below. Fifteen passengers were found dead at the scene, while four later succumbed to their injuries in a hospital," Deputy Inspector General of Police, Udhampur-Reasi Range, Shiv Kumar Sharma told reporters at the site. The officials said two more critically-injured persons succumbed to their injuries at the Udhampur District Hospital during treatment, raising the death toll to 21. Among those killed were Tilo Ram, Prem Nath, Kartar Chand, Som Raj, Ram Chand, Gita Devi, Romal Singh, Sharda Devi, Sunny, Vishal Devi, Pushap Raj, Ramolo Ram, Gulabo Devi, Jalam Singh, Kesar Singh, Kanta Devi and Anita Devi -- all residents of Ramnagar. Sharma said the locals extended significant help during the rescue operations. Police teams, including the senior superintendent of police, the sta-

tion house officer (SHO) of Ramnagar and other officers, visited the spot. The vehicle was later straightened using a hydraulic crane, the DIG said. He said this was a very tragic incident and "we stand in solidarity with the families who have lost their loved ones. The Jammu and Kashmir Police stands with them in this hour of grief". Sharma said Director General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhat and Inspector General of Police, Jammu Zone, Bhim Sen Tuti are monitoring the situation over the phone. An Army soldier, who was leading a convoy from Udhampur to Ramnagar, said they swung into action immediately after noticing the civilian vehicle rolling down the hill. "I was leading the convoy when the accident occurred on the way. The vehicle fell from a height of nearly 100 metres. We immediately secured the area

and launched the rescue operations, thus saving many precious lives with great difficulty," he said. Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo said 51 people are admitted in hospitals following the accident. He said 43 of the injured are admitted in the Udhampur District Hospital and six in a Ramnagar hospital, while two critically-injured patients have been shifted to the Government Medical College (GMC) in Jammu for specialised treatment. "This is a very painful accident. As far as the injured are concerned, full care is being taken for their treatment," Dulloo told reporters at the Udhampur District Hospital. Praising the effective and coordinated rescue operations, the chief secretary said "our effort should be to ensure that such accidents do not happen in the future". "There is a need for stricter enforcement so that traffic violations are close-



ly monitored. It must be ensured that there is no overloading, vehicles are in good condition, drivers have valid licences and their medical fitness is verified. All these aspects need to be emphasised," he said. In a post on X, the LG said, "Tragic road accident in Udhampur is heartbreaking. My deepest condolences to bereaved families. May God grant them strength. Praying for a speedy recovery of the injured." Sinha said he has directed the district administration, police, the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and the health department to provide every possible assistance to those affected. The chief minister extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families

and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. In a post on X, Abdullah said: "The government stands firmly with the victims and their families in this hour of grief, and that all necessary assistance is being extended." Former chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, Jammu and Kashmir Congress chief Tariq Hameed Karra and Jammu and Kashmir BJP president Sat Sharma also expressed grief over the incident. Union minister Jitendra Singh, who represents the Udhampur constituency in the Lok Sabha, condoled the tragedy and is expected to visit the injured in the hospitals on Tuesday evening.

## Satara SP Transferred After Poll Row; Eknath Shinde Reacts

PUNE: (APR 20)

Satara Superintendent of Police Tushar Doshi, whose role in the ruckus involving the BJP and Shiv Sena-NCP during the Zilla Parishad president's election was criticised by junior allies in Mahayuti, was among the nine SP-rank IPS officers transferred by the government on Monday. Incidentally, the order was issued by the Maharashtra Home Department, hours before Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's rally in Satara in the evening. A row erupted a month ago when Shiv Sena leaders from Satara accused the local police of manhandling them during the poll to elect the Satara ZP president, who belongs to the BJP.

EDITORIAL

Open Forum

A NEW ERA FOR INDIAN QUEENS:  
R. VAISHALI'S HISTORIC  
TRIUMPH AND THE ROAD AHEAD

The monumental significance of R. Vaishali emerging victorious in the Women's Candidates tournament is impossible to exaggerate. As the winner of this exhausting 14-round competition, which brings together the most elite chess practitioners on the planet, she has earned the prestigious right to challenge the reigning World Champion. Despite not being considered among the initial favorites at the event held in Cyprus, the 24-year-old Grandmaster is now set to face China's Ju Wenjun in the definitive World Championship match scheduled for later this year. Vaishali has carved her name into history as the first Indian woman to win the Candidates—a tournament with a lineage stretching back to 1952—and she is now only the second Indian ever to contest the classical Women's World Chess Championship match. Her ultimate objective will undoubtedly be to become the first representative from India to capture the most coveted crown in the female division of the sport.

While Vaishali spearheaded the charge, Divya Deshmukh also represented India at the Candidates, although she endured a difficult and largely forgettable tournament, ultimately finishing in seventh place within the eight-player field. However, Divya had already secured her own place in the annals of history just last July when she triumphed at the World Cup, becoming the first Indian woman to win that esteemed title. It is truly extraordinary that two young Indian female players have conquered two of the most significant global chess events within a mere nine-month window. Furthermore, the veteran Koneru Humpy added to this golden run by clinching her second World Rapid Championship title in December 2024.

Despite these glittering individual achievements and the fact that Indian women—paralleling the success of their male counterparts—currently hold the title of reigning World Team Champions following their Chess Olympiad victory, the nation cannot yet claim extensive depth in women's chess. While the Indian chessboard is teeming with a relentless influx of fresh talent among young boys, the narrative remains starkly different for girls. Successful athletes like Vaishali and Divya are not necessarily the products of a structured national system; rather, they have flourished primarily due to the unwavering support of their parents. In Vaishali's specific case, significant corporate sponsorship has also been a fundamental pillar of her journey.

Indeed, the corporate sector has been instrumental in the explosive growth of Indian chess as a whole. The WestBridge Anand Chess Academy (WACA), established through the collaboration of Sandeep Singhal and the legendary five-time World Champion Viswanathan Anand, ensured that financial limitations did not hinder Gukesh's monumental challenge for the World Title against Ding Liren in 2024. The trajectory of Indian chess can only ascend further if additional corporate entities provide similar backing. To sustain this current momentum in the women's game, the national chess federation must prioritize the development of girls, providing them with specialized training under Grandmasters and organizing a much more frequent schedule of high-quality tournaments specifically for them.

In an era where mental health crises silently erode human potential, artificial intelligence is revolutionizing governance—from reactive crisis management to predictive, empathetic administration that prioritizes prevention, inclusion, and well-being for all.

In recent years, the definition of development has undergone a significant transformation. Progress is no longer measured solely through economic growth or infrastructure expansion; it is increasingly evaluated in terms of human well-being. At the centre of this evolving paradigm lies mental health, an area that has long remained under-addressed despite its profound impact on individuals and societies.

Conditions such as depression and anxiety disorders have emerged as a silent crisis, transcending age groups, geographical boundaries, and socio-economic divisions. For administrators and policymakers, mental health is not merely a healthcare concern; it is intrinsically linked to human capital, productivity, social harmony, and governance effectiveness. Behind every statistic lies a human story, a student losing confidence, a farmer succumbing to despair, or a worker struggling to cope with stress.

From Reactive Governance to Predictive Administration

Traditionally, governance systems have operated in a reactive mode, intervening only after problems escalate into crises. However, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is enabling a fundamental shift from reaction to anticipation. AI-driven tools now offer the capacity to analyse large datasets, detect patterns, and predict vulnerabilities before they manifest into severe mental health issues. This transition is particularly significant in the domain of clinical psychology, where early identification and intervention can dramatically alter outcomes.

For administrators, this represents an opportunity to move towards proactive governance; one that is preventive rather than curative, and strategic rather than fragmented.

Artificial Intelligence as a Force Multiplier in

Artificial intelligence has the potential to act as a force multiplier within administrative systems. By leveraging data analytics and machine learning, governments can:

- Map mental health vulnerabilities across districts and communities
- Identify high-risk populations with greater precision
- Design targeted and evidence-based interventions

Such capabilities enable a shift from generalized welfare approaches to highly focused, need-based governance. In effect, AI enhances both the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration.

Democratizing Access to Mental Health Care

One of the most pressing challenges in countries like India is the limited availability of mental health professionals relative to the population. This gap has historically restricted access to care, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

Artificial intelligence offers a promising solution by bridging this divide. Digital platforms and tele-mental health initiatives are expanding the reach of psychological support services. Programmes such as the National Tele Mental Health Programme (TELMANAS), along with AI-powered applications, are making mental health assistance more accessible, affordable, and scalable.

For administrators, this shift signifies a move towards inclusive governance ensuring that support reaches not only those who actively seek help, but also those who may suffer in silence

Strengthening Institutional Resilience

While much attention is given to citizen well-being, the mental health of the administrative workforce itself often remains overlooked. Police personnel, healthcare workers, teachers, and field officers operate in high-pressure

environments, frequently facing stress, burnout, and emotional fatigue. AI-enabled tools can play a crucial role in strengthening institutional resilience by:

- Monitoring indicators of stress and burnout
- Facilitating early intervention through counselling support
- Enabling better workload and resource management

A resilient administrative system is built on the well-being of its people. Ensuring their mental health is therefore both an ethical responsibility and a governance necessity.

Navigating Ethical Challenges

Despite its transformative potential, the integration of AI into clinical psychology raises important ethical concerns. Mental health data is highly sensitive and requires robust safeguards to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, AI systems are not immune to biases, which may lead to unequal or unjust outcomes if left unaddressed.

Equally important is the recognition that technology cannot substitute human empathy. Clinical psychology, at its core, is rooted in human connection, understanding, and compassion. Therefore, the use of AI must be guided by a clear ethical framework, one that balances innovation with responsibility. AI can assist and augment decision-making, but it must remain subordinate to human values.

The Need for Convergence

The future of mental health governance lies in convergence. Addressing complex psychological challenges requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors, including healthcare, education, social welfare, and technology. Administration must act as a catalyst in fostering this collaboration. Artificial intelligence can serve as a unifying platform, integrating data and insights from di-

verse domains to create a cohesive, citizen-centric system of care. Such an approach not only enhances efficiency but also ensures that interventions are holistic and sustainable.

Conclusion: Towards Empathetic Governance

The integration of artificial intelligence with clinical psychology represents more than a technological advancement, it signals a paradigm shift in governance. It calls for a transition:

- From treatment to prevention
- From access to inclusion
- From administrative efficiency to empathetic leadership

In this evolving landscape, administrators are not merely implementers of policy; they are custodians of human dignity and well-being.

Harnessing AI effectively requires more than technical capability, it demands vision, sensitivity, and ethical commitment. The ultimate goal is not just to build smarter systems, but to create a society that is healthier, more compassionate, and more resilient.

In the final analysis, the success of governance will not be judged solely by the efficiency of its systems, but by the depth of its understanding and the strength of its support for the people it serves.

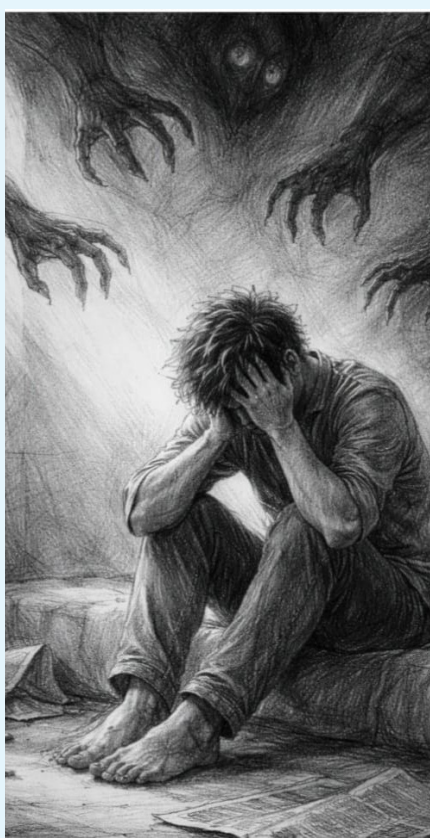


ASMITA LAL  
IAS

From IAS, views are personal. This is part of key note address delivered in Gautam Buddha University, Noida, in their Annual conference 2026 of Clinical Psychologists.

A GRAMMAR OF FEAR

Every image  
a hunter at my back.  
Every headline  
newsprint steeped in blood,  
staining my palms  
with sleepless red.  
The roar of murder,  
the hush after suicide,  
the long weather of war  
in the broken bodies of children  
the world misspeaks itself.  
Fear—  
not a serpent,  
but venom learning my veins  
it climbs the spine in cold syllables  
and settles behind the eyes  
as a ring of fire.  
Eyes closed—  
it remains.  
Eyes open—  
it is all.  
Tears fall—fear.  
Tears dry—  
fear, refined.  
Silence—  
thin strings of grief  
the heart—  
a low, persistent tremor.  
In the grind of train wheels  
burning distances.  
In bus windows—  
cities breaking into light.  
To travel  
is to lean over an edge.  
A middle-class face,  
creased by invisible debt—  
a house giving way  
without a sound.  
One moment—  
a voice that says mother is gone,  
and time misses a beat.  
A leaf underfoot—  
something stirs in the nerves.  
A touch of wind—  
an answer in the chest.  
Fear—  
a tree grown inward;  
roots in blood,  
branches in darkness,  
its shadow carried within.  
I am in fear.



Fear is in me.  
An unnamed presence  
takes its place.  
And yet—  
to look at it,  
without turning away,  
is to feel it loosen—  
thin out,  
recede,  
like shadow  
denied its light.  
Thought—  
the first edge.  
Action—  
the last.  
Who lives through yesterday,  
stands in today,  
and does not yield tomorrow—  
learns, quietly,  
to outlast fear.  
And life—  
unannounced—  
returns.

...: Dr. Peruka Raju ...  
7810032847

Current Affairs

Artificial Intelligence: Innovation's  
Triumph or Humanity's Test?

If we examine the history of human civilization, it becomes evident that every new technology arrives with a duality—bringing both possibilities and perils. Our present era is no exception. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence has undoubtedly made life easier, faster, and more efficient; yet, it has simultaneously emerged as a serious challenge to human values, ethics, and social balance. Thinkers, philosophers, and spiritual leaders across the world have repeatedly expressed concerns about this emerging reality. Recently, the apprehensions voiced by Pope Leo XIV have brought this issue to the center of global discourse. He clearly warned that if this technology is used beyond ethical boundaries, it could foster division, fear, violence, and conflict across the world. This is not merely an emotional reaction of a religious figure, but a reflection of a deeper worry—a concern that resonates within the collective conscience of humanity. Technology, in itself, is neither moral nor immoral; it is the manner of its use that defines its direction.

In the present time, Artificial Intelligence is no longer confined to constructive and beneficial applications. It is increasingly being used to generate misinformation, create fabricated images and voices, and manipulate public opinion. Its misuse in electoral processes has the potential to weaken the very foundations of democracy. When a voter cannot distinguish between truth and manufactured illusion, their ability to make informed decisions is compromised. This erosion of clarity ultimately undermines trust in democratic institutions. On social media platforms, numerous instances have emerged where individuals are falsely depicted alongside prominent leaders like Narendra Modi, despite no such interaction



ever taking place. This is not merely an individual deception—it is a systemic assault on the very structure of social trust. When the line between truth and falsehood becomes blurred, society inevitably descends into suspicion, instability, and distrust.

Another alarming dimension of Artificial Intelligence is its growing use in cybercrime. Criminals can now mimic a person's voice with remarkable accuracy, deceiving their acquaintances into transferring money under false pretenses. Impersonating family members or officials has become dangerously easy. Such incidents have wiped out the lifetime savings of many individuals within moments. This is not just financial loss—it is a profound violation of trust and a blow to the sense of security. In the financial sector, too, the misuse of AI poses significant risks. Automated cyberattacks can exploit vulnerabilities in banking systems. If such attacks occur on a large scale, the consequences would extend far beyond individual losses, potentially destabilizing national and global economies. The danger intensifies when regulatory institutions fail to keep pace with the complexity and speed of these evolving technologies.

From an environmental perspective as well, Artificial Intelligence is

not entirely benign. The establishment of massive data centers, excessive energy consumption, and the extraction of minerals place additional pressure on nature. The rising demand for resources like cobalt and lithium contributes not only to environmental degradation but also to human exploitation. Thus, AI is not merely a social or ethical challenge—it is an ecological one as well. Amid all these concerns, it is important to recognize that Artificial Intelligence cannot be rejected. It has become an integral part of modern life, and its contributions in fields such as healthcare, education, disaster management, and industrial productivity are invaluable. The issue lies not in the technology itself, but in the manner of its application. If aligned with human values, ethics, and social responsibility, it can indeed become a powerful force for good.

To achieve this, it is essential to establish clear and robust regulatory frameworks governing its development and use. Governments and institutions must ensure that AI operates in a transparent, secure, and accountable manner. Companies must develop mechanisms capable of detecting and controlling misleading content. Equally important is public awareness. No society can confront

this challenge without digital literacy. People must learn to question what they see and hear, understanding that not everything presented to them reflects reality. The habit of verification is no longer optional—it is essential.

At the ethical level, it is crucial that the data used to train AI systems is unbiased and of high quality. A biased foundation inevitably produces biased outcomes, reinforcing inequality and discrimination. Therefore, principles such as fairness, transparency, privacy, and accountability must form the core of AI development. From a cultural perspective, it is equally important to ensure that technological progress remains in harmony with our traditions and values. The digitization and preservation of cultural heritage can be a positive step, but it must be carried out with respect and sensitivity.

In conclusion, Artificial Intelligence is a powerful instrument that has the potential to redefine human existence. However, if divorced from ethical considerations, it can become a force of destruction with equal intensity. The need of the hour is to strengthen our moral foundations alongside technological advancement. The balance between scientific progress and human sensitivity is the only path that can lead us toward a secure, stable, and prosperous future.



LALIT GARG  
Writer, Journalist,  
Columnist

## IMD Warns of Intense Heatwave in North & West India

BY APARNA BOSE

**NEW DELHI: (Apr 20)** Northern parts of the Indo-Gangetic plains, the eastern coastal states, and the western states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and adjoining areas will have a higher-than-normal number of heatwave days this year, a top official at the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday. Speaking to PTI Videos, Mrityunjay Mohapatra, Director General of IMD, highlighted that there are climatologically prone areas where temperatures are expected to exceed 40 degrees Celsius, even in regions that may not experience heatwaves. "There are climatologically prone areas -- for example, the normal temperature in the Vidarbha region (Maharashtra) is around 41 to 42 degrees Celsius at this time of year.

# 'From chips to ships'

PM Modi hails India-South Korea ties; signs several MoUs: PM Modi hails India-South Korea ties; signs several MoUs

NEW DELHI:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday India-South Korea ties as New Delhi and Seoul signed several MoUs aimed at deepening bilateral cooperation. During a joint press statement, PM Modi said Korean President Lee Jae Myung visit is a crucial step towards a more advanced bilateral framework. India-South Korea Mega Deal: PM Modi & Lee Jae Myung Target 50 Billion Trade, Boost Ties "I am delighted to welcome President Lee on his first visit to India. President Lee's life is an inspiring example of struggle, service, and dedication. Every challenge has only strengthened his resolve to serve the people. Although this is his first visit to India, his affinity for India has been evident

since our very first meeting," PM Modi said. "This visit of the President of Korea to India is extremely important. Democratic values, market economy, and respect for the rule of law are in the DNA of both our countries. We also have a common outlook in the Indo-Pacific region," he added. The Prime Minister also said that partnership between both the nations is now moving towards a more advanced phase. "Based on all this, our relations have become more dynamic and comprehensive over the last decade, and today, with President Lee's visit, we are going to transform this trusted partnership into a futuristic partnership. We will realise new opportunities for cooperation in every field, from chips to ships, talent to technology, environment to energy, and together ensure



the progress and prosperity of both countries," he said. Meanwhile, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said that both the countries aim to increase the "current USD 25 billion level of annual trade volume between India and

South Korea to around USD 50 billion by 2030." "In the era of uncertainty, we share our view that India and Korea can be the most ideal partners for comprehensive cooperation to promote mutual growth and innovation. We have also agreed to enhance cooperation in strategic industries, including shipbuilding, AI, finance, and defence and promote culture and people-to-people exchanges," he added. The two sides also resolved to work together to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. "Following President Lee's visit, we are going to transform our trusted collaboration into a futuristic partnership," Modi said. The bilateral trade and economic relations gathered momentum following the implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Part-

nership Agreement (CEPA) in 2010. "From chips to ships, talent to technology, entertainment to energy, we will realise new opportunities for cooperation in every sector," he added.

### What should be the top priority in India-South Korea relations?

Economic and trade cooperation Technology and strategic partnerships The prime minister said both sides will continue to work towards an inclusive Indo-Pacific. "Through our shared efforts, we will continue to contribute to a peaceful, progressive, and inclusive Indo-Pacific," he said. The talks also focused on enhancing ties in areas of trade, investments, AI, semiconductors, critical and emerging technologies and people-to-people connect.



## Chief Minister chairs High-Powered Purchase Committee Meeting

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 20

Haryana Chief Minister, Sh. Nayab Singh Saini, on Monday, chaired the High-Powered Purchase Committee (HPPC) meeting and approved key proposals, including procurement of gas circuit breakers for power infrastructure and appointment of a consultant for the Integrated Manufacturing Cluster in Hisar. Revenue and Disaster Management Minister, Sh. Vipul Goel also remained present during the meeting. During the meeting, approval was granted for the procurement of SF6 gas circuit breakers for 220 kV transformers of the Haryana Power Distribution Corporation. A total of 41 gas circuit breakers will be purchased to ensure uninterrupted power supply during emergency situations. The procurement will be carried out at an estimated cost of approximately

Rs. 918.4 lakh. Approval was also accorded for the appointment of a consultant to work as a Program Manager for developing infrastructure in the Integrated Manufacturing Cluster at Hisar and for new cities. With this, work on the proposed manufacturing hub in Hisar will commence, and the public is expected to benefit in the near future. The State Government has approved the consultant's appointment for a period of three years, during which continuous monitoring and oversight of these hubs will be ensured. Additional Chief Secretary, Civil Aviation Department, Smt. G. Anupama, Chairperson, Haryana Power Utilities, Smt. Ashima Bar, Director General, Industries and Commerce Department, Dr. Yash Garg, Managing Director, HSIIDC, Sh. Sushil Sarwan, along with several senior officers, were present at the meeting.

## Citizens and activists in Hyderabad protest against the arrest of labour activists

and intellectuals supporting the labour movement in Noida

HYDERABAD, 20 APRIL:

Several activists and citizens from different walks of life in Hyderabad protested today against the repressive and conspiratorial measures adopted by the UP police to crush the workers' movement in UP's Noida. It is to be noted that the workers in many cities of north India are taking to the streets in recent weeks due to rising cost of life especially in the wake of LPG crisis. On 13th April the workers' movement in Noida suddenly took violent turn. However, instead of finding the real cause behind the violence, the state government immediately started blaming some labour activists for the violence by terming them 'Urban Naxal' and by ridiculously making a link with Pakistan. The protestors mentioned that amidst skyrocketing prices, the industrial workers surviving on a meagre salary of just

₹10,000 to ₹11,000 were left with no choice but to launch peaceful protests for better wages, proper working conditions, and a life of dignity. For supporting these protests, the Uttar Pradesh police arrested 5 labor activists (Rupesh, Maneesha, Aditya, Akriti and Shrishti) on false charges of inciting violence during the protest through WhatsApp groups are now being levelled against them. There are no evidences to show that they incited violence in any manner, rather evidences point that they were making appeals to the workers to carry out their protest in peaceful and non-violent manner. In fact, some social activists and independent journalists have shown with evidence that it was people associated with senior officers of UP police that posted provocative messages in the WhatsApp group. Further the UP police is also doing a with hunt of the

intellectuals and activists who were supporting the movement from social media. In Lucknow, Noida police raided a progressive bookstore Janchetna and abducted Satyam Varma, senior journalist and editor of the collected works of Bhagat Singh in Hindi. The protestors mentioned that UP is witnessing a fascist repression on the basic civil rights and it is nothing less than criminalising labour activism. They demanded that aforementioned intellectuals, activists, and labor supporters must be released unconditionally; the false charges against them must be withdrawn immediately, the police crackdown on workers' movement must end. A demand for high level judicial enquiry into what led to the incidents of violence was also made. They also demanded that workers' minimum wages be increased to ₹30,000 and that all their just demands be fulfilled.

## High Court Pulls Up Bharatiya Janata Party Worker in Rahul

BJP worker Vignesh Shishir has approached the Allahabad High Court seeking registration of an FIR against Rahul Gandhi, claiming he possesses documents purportedly proving the Congress leader's British citizenship and seeking his disqualification from Parliament.



The Allahabad High Court on Monday came down heavily on a BJP worker seeking an FIR against Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi over his alleged British citizenship, saying the court had been 'maligned' through social media posts casting aspersions on its functioning, before the judge recused himself from the case, according to Live Law. Justice Subhash Vidyarthi of the Lucknow Bench stepped aside from hearing the plea filed by Vignesh Shishir after taking strong exception to the petitioner's online posts and media statements. The development

came after the bench had earlier indicated it may issue notice to Gandhi in the matter. During the hearing, the court noted that Shishir had publicly alleged "foul play" and claimed he was being subjected to unfair treatment. Expressing sharp disapproval, Justice Vidyarthi said he regretted hearing the matter, observing that the petitioner appeared to have used the proceedings for "political mileage". "How is it justified to sling mud behind our backs? Is it right to speak against the Court? What kind of statements are you making in the media...you are making

the Court a part of your political arena," Live Law quoted Justice Vidyarthi as saying. The bench also flagged that Shishir had sought public opinion on social media on whether the case should continue before the same bench and had even sought the intervention of the Chief Justice of India. It held that such conduct amounted to casting aspersions on the court and damaging its dignity.

In a notable moment during the proceedings, both the government advocate and the Deputy Solicitor General of India conceded that the petitioner's social media posts were indefensible. Responding to the court's concerns, Shishir argued that his posts were not directed at the bench but at individuals allegedly pressuring him to withdraw the case. He also pointed to earlier posts where he had praised the court's previous order directing registration of an FIR against the Congress leader. "I appreciated your earlier order on social media.



## Liver Day Camp Held at BLW Hospital

VARANASI, APRIL 20:

A Health Awareness and Fibro Scan Screening Camp was organized today, 20 April 2026, in the auditorium hall of the Central Hospital of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) on the occasion of World Liver Day. Inaugurating the programme, Principal Chief Medical Officer Dr. Devesh Kumar stated that liver diseases such as fatty liver, hepatitis, liver cirrhosis and cancer are increasing rapidly due to faulty dietary habits, consumption of alcohol, medicines and toxic substances, diabetes, and unhealthy lifestyles. He informed that the theme of World Liver Day this year is "Solid Habits, Strong Liver". He also noted that reports of enlarged liver in ultrasound examinations are being seen in large numbers these days, causing mental stress among people. He explained that Fibro Scan helps measure liver stiffness and assists in assessing the condition of alcohol-related liver disease,

bile-related disorders, hepatitis and fatty liver diseases, enabling timely and appropriate treatment. It also helps prevent complications such as liver inflammation, fibrosis, tumors and congestion. On this occasion, Senior Divisional Medical Officer and Physician Dr. S.K. Maurya provided health education to patients and their family members regarding prevention and early treatment of liver-related diseases. Senior Divisional Medical Officer and Physician Dr. Minhaj Ahmad addressed people's queries related to liver health. During the programme, Fibro Scan examinations were conducted by Shri Bhagwan Singh Yadav and Shri Shiv Singh. Chief Nursing Superintendent Mrs. Chandrakala Rao, Mrs. Kamla Srinivasan, Mrs. Anita Chandra, Mrs. Aarti, Mrs. Jyoti Sinha and Shri Sumit Kumar played an important role in successfully conducting the health camp. A total of 110 people underwent liver screening and benefited from the health camp.

## Aam Aadmi Party Slams PM Over Manipur Silence

The AAP's latest salvo against PM Modi comes amid heightened tensions between the Meiteis and the Kukis in Manipur following the deaths of two children in a suspected rocket attack on April 7. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his silence on the ongoing ethnic tensions in Manipur, alleging that his focus remains

on election rallies, speeches and public appearances rather than "saving the lives and honour of daughters" in the state. "If elections were being held in Manipur, perhaps Modi ji would remember it," the party said in a post on X while sharing a ground report by India Today. Fresh violence has shaken Manipur after a suspected rocket hit a civilian home in Bishnupur district,



killing two young children and leaving their mother critically injured. Following the attack, an-

gry locals allegedly set fire to two oil tankers and a truck passing through Bishnupur, triggering tensions in the district. They also demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible and swift justice for the victims. The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) also held a protest rally in Imphal, with protestors holding placards and banners demanding the resigna-

tion of Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh and State Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam over the incident. The protestors were met with tear gas shells by the local police as they allegedly defied curfew restrictions, which were imposed after the April 7 explosion. Meanwhile, a five-day total shutdown called by civil society groups, which began on April 18 to protest the

deaths, has brought normal life to a standstill across Manipur's valley districts. The shutdown is being spearheaded by the Meira Paibis (women torchbearers), various civil society organisations, and a people's collective formed in response to the fatal blast. Thousands of people took to the streets at various places across valley districts on Sunday evening.

## Massive fire at Rajasthan refinery day ahead of its inauguration by PM Modi

A fire broke out in the CDU unit of the Pachpadra refinery in Barmer on Monday afternoon, a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi was scheduled to inaugurate the facility. A major fire broke out at the Pachpadra refinery in Rajasthan's Barmer district on Monday afternoon, just a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi was scheduled to inaugurate a key unit at the facility. According to officials, the blaze erupted in the Crude Distillation Unit (CDU), sending thick plumes of smoke billowing across the refinery premises. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained. Emergency response teams rushed to the spot soon after the incident was reported. Dozens of fire tenders from Balotra and nearby areas were deployed, and efforts to bring the blaze under control were underway at the time of reporting. Rajasthan Chief Secretary V Srinivas, along with senior administrative officials, police personnel and security teams, reached the site to oversee the situation. As a precautionary



measure, the CDU unit and surrounding areas were evacuated. The incident came on the eve of Prime Minister Modi's planned visit on April 21 to inaugurate a refinery unit. Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel Khushwant was also scheduled to visit the site later today to review security arrangements ahead of the event. The Pachpadra refinery project has seen multiple phases since its inception. Its foundation stone was laid on September 22, 2013, by Sonia Gandhi during the Ashok Gehlot-led government, with an initial estimated cost of Rs 37,230 crore. Following a change in government, Prime Minister Modi relaunched the project on January 16, 2018, with a revised cost estimate of Rs 43,129 crore.

## NFR Achieves Historic Milestones in Infrastructure and Track Modernisation

MALIGAON, 20 APRIL, 2026:

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has registered remarkable achievements in track modernisation, maintenance and safety during the financial year 2025-26, setting multiple new benchmarks in its history. These accomplishments reflect NFR's continued commitment to enhancing operational efficiency, passenger safety and infrastructure reliability. A major technological milestone was achieved with the introduction of Phased Array Ultrasonic Testing (PAUT) for testing Flash Butt Welds during the third quarter of 2024-25. Building on this initiative, a total of 53,544 welds were tested during 2025-26, significantly strengthening track safety and reliability through advanced inspection techniques. NFR recorded its highest-ever track renewal progress, completing 457 CTR (Complete Track Renewal) units during 2025-26. This marks a 33.07%



increase over the previous year's achievement of 343.08 CTR units. In addition, rail renewals of 449.42 track kilometres (TKM) were completed—another record in the zone's history. Sleeper renewals reached 465.02 TKM, showcasing substantial progress towards the annual target of 502 TKM. To further strengthen track structure, a record 9.57 lakh cubic meters of ballast was supplied and inserted during the year—6% higher than the previous year's 9.01 lakh cubic meters. This improvement has contributed significantly to enhanced

riding quality and overall track stability. Track fittings renewal also surpassed expectations, achieving a cumulative progress of 299.61 km against a target of 205 km—exceeding the target by an impressive 46.15%. Meanwhile, 4,312 points were tampered, surpassing the annual target of 4,150 by 3.9%, ensuring smoother train operations and reduced maintenance requirements. Operational efficiency saw further improvements with the increase in loop line speeds at 39 stations, upgraded from 15 kmph to 30 kmph, exceeding the previous year's

progress of 21 stations. Additionally, deep screening of 258 turnouts was completed, surpassing the annual target by 47.43%, enhancing track resilience and longevity. In the area of track safety monitoring, Ultrasonic Flaw Detection (USFD) testing covered an extensive 20,212.61 km, exceeding the annual target of 19,217 km. NFR also successfully rectified 23 track layouts, surpassing its target and improving operational safety and flexibility. Safety infrastructure received a major boost with the erection of 154.53 km of safety fencing, exceeding the annual target of 100 km by 54.53%. This initiative plays a crucial role in preventing trespassing and ensuring safer railway operations. These record-breaking accomplishments underline Northeast Frontier Railway's dedication to adopting advanced technologies, strengthening infrastructure, and ensuring safer and more efficient railway services for passengers and freight movement across the region.

## ED calls ex-Trinamool MP Nusrat Jahan for questioning ahead of Phase 1 polling in Bengal

KOLKATA, APRIL 20

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned actress and former Trinamool Congress MP Nusrat Jahan in connection with the ration scam, officials of the central probe agency said on Monday.



She has been asked to appear at the agency's CGO Complex office in Salt Lake on Wednesday (April 22) -- a day ahead of the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections -- for questioning in the case. However, the actress and former Basirhat MP has not yet responded to the summons. According to sources close to Nusrat, she is expected to respond shortly. It is also learnt that she may not appear at the Kolkata office and could instead present herself at the agency's headquarters in New

Delhi. During the Covid-19 lockdown, several trucks were seized in border areas of West Bengal's Basirhat on charges of smuggling wheat and rice to Bangladesh. Nusrat was the Basirhat MP at that time. According to ED sources, several names have surfaced during the investigation into the alleged ration smuggling, and officials intend to question her regarding wheat smuggling to Bangladesh. However, a few days ago, the Tollywood actress had travelled abroad on a holiday with her partner and actor Yash Dasgupta.

# Bangladesh fuel crisis worsens; panic buying triggers long queues at petrol pumps

DHAKA

As fuel prices surge in Bangladesh, long queues at petrol pumps due to panic buying persist, causing widespread disruption to daily life, despite repeated assurances from authorities of a stable fuel supply, local media reported on Monday.

The government announced the price hike through a gazette notification issued by the Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Division on April 18, citing rising global oil market trends.

The diesel prices were increased by Bangladeshi taka (Tk) 15 per litre, octane by Tk 20, petrol by Tk 19, and kerosene by Tk 18, with the new rates taking effect on Sunday night.

Reports suggest that many, including private car owners, public transport operators and small business owners, are spending hours waiting to



refuel -- leading to significant loss in working time and earnings. Abdul Karim, a ride-sharing driver in Mirpur, said that the prolonged delays have taken a toll on his income.

"I usually complete 12 to 14 trips a day, but now I lose two to three hours just waiting in line for fuel. My daily earnings have dropped by nearly 30 per cent," leading Bangladeshi dai-

ly The Dhaka Tribune quoted him as saying.

Expressing the frustration of managing her daily commute, school teacher Shahana Begum from Uttara said, "I waited almost one and a half hours to refuel last evening. It's becoming stressful to plan daily activities because you never know how long the queue will be," she added.

According to a senior official of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), short-term distribution adjustments and a surge in demand have put pressure on operations.

"There is no nationwide fuel shortage, but demand has increased sharply in recent days. Some stations face supply gaps due to transport scheduling issues," the official said, speak-

ing to Dhaka Tribune on condition of anonymity.

Addressing reporters in Dhaka, Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku termed the situation as "war-time", adding that global markets have already adjusted.

"Fuel must be purchased with foreign currency. By increasing prices slightly, we are

trying to keep the situation at a tolerable level," he said, noting that war inevitably brings global repercussions.

M. Shamsul Alam, energy advisor to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, slammed the decision to raise fuel prices as a "breach of trust", saying the government had assured the public that prices would not be raised in mid-month.

"By violating their own rule of monthly adjustments, they have undermined credibility," he said.

While authorities maintain that there is no nationwide fuel shortage, persistent queues at petrol pumps underscore the flaws in distribution systems and waning public confidence.

Experts warn that without improved logistics, stronger communication, and long-term energy planning, similar situations are likely to recur, especially amid global market volatility.



## Unification minister regrets leak claim related to Kusong reference as N Korea nuclear site

SEOUL

Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said on Monday his referring to North Korea's Kusong region as one of the sites hosting the country's nuclear facilities was intended to explain South Korea's North Korea policy, expressing regret over allegations that the remarks constituted an information leak.

The minister made the remarks amid allegations that he disclosed sensitive intelligence on North Korea, after describing Kusong as a site hosting uranium enrichment facilities during a parliamentary session last month.

So far, only two regions -- Yongbyon and Kusong -- have been officially recognised as uranium enrichment sites in North Korea, while researchers in South Korea and abroad have at times referred to Kusong as also hosting nuclear facilities.

"I only referred (to Kusong) as part of a policy explanation meant to illustrate the seriousness of North Korea's nuclear issue. Framing it as an information leak is very regrettable," Chung told

reporters. The United States has reportedly complained about Chung's disclosure of the information, which it believes was based on intelligence shared by Washington, and has ceased sharing satellite information on North Korea with Seoul.

The unification ministry has contended that Chung's remarks were based on "open information," including expert reports and local media articles, rather than intelligence from Washington, reports Yonhap news agency.

"It's (already) open information. I also mentioned Kusong during my confirmation hearing last year," the minister stated, dismissing allegations of an information leak. "I suspect a hidden motive behind bringing this issue up after nine months have passed."

Chung said the national interest should be the top priority in addressing this issue along with others, accusing some of falsely "spreading a scenario of a crisis in South Korea-US relations" and expressing hope that Seoul and Washington would resolve the matter "through smooth communications."

## VP Radhakrishnan departs for Delhi after 'successfully' concluding Sri Lanka visit

COLOMBO

Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan departed for New Delhi after concluding a successful two-day visit to Sri Lanka on Monday. The Vice President's visit yielded key outcomes focused on further strengthening the bilateral ties between the two nations, including eased OCI eligibility to sixth-generation Indian Origin Tamils (IOTs) for simpler travel to India.

VP Radhakrishnan also virtually handed over a cluster of houses to plantation workers under the Indian Housing Project Phase III, made an announcement of Northern Railway Line resumption, and installation of three new Bailey bridges as post-Cyclone Ditwah rehabilitation.

The agreements also covered enhanced estate worker scholarships, health facilities in Mullaitivu and Eastern Province, farmer clusters, Ayurveda projects, and Sri Lanka joining the International Big Cat Alliance.

Earlier in the day, the Vice President offered prayers at the Seetha Amman Temple in Sri Lanka's Seetha Eliya and said that the Indian government's initiative to renovate the religious site would further strengthen the historical ties between the two nations.

The Vice President also paid respects at the Hanuman Kovil, venerating the sacred footsteps of Lord Hanuman from his meeting with Devi Sita at the Ashok Vatika.



In a post on X, the Vice President's Office wrote, "Vice President Shri C. P. Radhakrishnan visited the Seetha Amman Temple in Seetha Eliya, Sri Lanka. The sacred temple associated with the holy Ramayana stands as a profound reminder of the deep cultural and civilisational linkages between India and Sri Lanka. The Vice President also paid respects at the Hanuman Kovil, venerating the sacred footsteps of Lord Hanuman from his meeting with Devi Sita at the Ashok Vatika."

"Recalling Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's announcement during his visit to Sri Lanka last year that the Seetha Amman Temple would be renovated with the assistance of the Government of India, he said that the initiative would further strengthen the

historical ties between the two countries," he added.

Vice President Radhakrishnan also visited houses built with the Indian Government's assistance under the Indian Housing Project (Phase III) at Liddlesdale Estate, Ragala, Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka, and interacted with the beneficiaries.

"The Vice President expressed his happiness at meeting the Indian-origin Tamil community and stated that the Government and people of India have a deep commitment to the welfare of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. He noted that the Government of India has so far provided 50,000 houses for the Tamil families in Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, as well as to Indian origin Tamil families in plantation regions. He added that an

additional 10,000 houses will be delivered under the fourth phase of the Indian Housing Project," the Vice President's Office posted on X.

The post further mentioned that while interacting with Indian-origin Tamils in Nuwara Eliya, the Vice President expressed his deep sorrow over the devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah. He also discussed India's relief and rescue operations launched under 'Operation Sagar Bandhu' in response to the natural calamity.

Earlier on Sunday, Vice President Radhakrishnan called on Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo, where both leaders held discussions on strengthening bilateral and cultural relations between the two countries.

In a post on X, the Ministry

of External Affairs (MEA) stated, "Vice President C P Radhakrishnan called on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake of Sri Lanka at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo today (Sunday). They held productive discussions on further deepening the multifaceted India-Sri Lanka ties, rooted in shared history and cultural values."

The Ministry further added, "Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan reaffirmed India's commitment to the Neighbourhood First policy and to further strengthen our cooperation for the benefit of both nations. The discussions also focused on various initiatives, including the Indian Housing Project and projects being implemented under the USD 450 mn package for areas affected by Cyclone Ditwah in Sri Lanka."

Vice President Radhakrishnan also met Sri Lankan Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya on Sunday and discussed the importance of further strengthening bilateral ties, including people-to-people bonds.

The visit also saw engagement with Sri Lanka's political leadership, as the Vice President met Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa in Colombo on Sunday. The MEA said, "Both leaders discussed further strengthening India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties." Premadasa noted that the discussions focused on enhancing trade relations, deepening economic cooperation, and exploring practical opportunities to benefit both nations.

## Protests held across Pakistan's Sindh against rising honour killing cases

ISLAMABAD

Protests, rallies, demonstrations and street theatre were held in various parts of Pakistan's Sindh to highlight injustice faced by women in the name of 'karo-kari' custom (murder for honour) and demanded action against killers, local media reported on Monday.

Rights group 'Civil Society for Truth, Peace and Justice' organised the protests, rallies and demonstrations in Sindh on Sunday. Participants of a protest rally gathered at the local press club in Hyderabad, Pakistan's leading daily, Dawn reported.

The protest was held after the alleged honour killing of Khalida Chandio, Shumaila Chandio and the alleged suicide by a medical undergraduate student, Fahmida Laghari. During the protests, the participants demanded justice for all the victims of honour killings.

A street theatre was also staged to condemn the brutal custom. During the protest, the speakers stated that killings under the 'karo-kari' custom continued unabated in Sindh, which was evident through the killing of Khalida Chandio in Tando Masti and Shumaila Chandio in Hala. They mentioned that Fahmida Laghari was harassed to the extent that she committed suicide and stressed that it should be considered murder.

## Trump offers 'better deal' as US-Iran talks falter

NEW YORK

While the second round of talks between Iran and the United States hung in the balance, President Donald Trump said Monday that he was offering Tehran a better deal than the agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which he ripped up in 2018 as favouring Iran.

"The deal that we are making with Iran will be far better than the JCPOA, commonly referred to as 'The Iran Nuclear Deal', penned by [former President] Barack Hussein Obama and Sleepy Joe Biden [his predecessor as president], one of the worst deals ever made having to do with the security of our country," Trump wrote on Truth Social.

That was an attempt to salvage the talks now in jeopardy as Trump seeks a way out of the conflict.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was signed

between Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council, along with Germany and the European Union, in 2015 to curtail Tehran's nuclear programme in exchange for lifting some sanctions.

Trump denounced it during his 2016 campaign, and after his election, he said the United States would withdraw from it, which it did in 2018.

While Trump has said that Vice President JD Vance, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, and Special Representative Steve Witkoff would be heading to Islamabad for the second round of negotiations, Iran has not confirmed its participation.

Tasnim news agency quoted Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei saying at his weekly briefing on Monday, "So far, we have not made any decisions regarding the next round of negotiations."

## Life satisfaction among Australians falls to record low, survey finds



CANBERRA

Average life satisfaction among Australians fell to the lowest level on record in March, according to the latest edition of an Australian National University (ANU) survey published on Monday.

The 29th iteration of the

ANUpoll, which has regularly surveyed Australians on their well-being since 2019, recorded an average life-satisfaction rating of 6.22 out of 10 from 3,662 participants, falling below the previous record low of 6.35 in March 2025.

Average life satisfaction has fallen by 3.7 per cent since the

last edition of the poll in December, marking the biggest decline between surveys since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Australia in March 2026 is a country under considerable strain," Nicholas Biddle, head of the ANU School of Politics and International Relations and leader of the ANUpoll project,

said in a media release. More respondents said they were dissatisfied with the direction of the country than satisfied for the first time in the poll's history, with 54 per cent dissatisfied and 46 per cent satisfied to some extent. Nearly 60 per cent said they believe life was better 50 years ago and 58.5 per cent believe it will be worse in 50 years in the future.

The timing of the survey coincided with the oil supply crisis driven by the conflict in the Middle East, which caused fuel prices in Australia to soar.

A record-high 34.9 per cent of respondents said they were finding it difficult or very difficult to cope on their current income and employed participants reported an average expected probability of losing their job of 26.8 per cent, up from 19.2 per cent in January 2025.

Biddle said that the proportion of employed Australians specifically concerned that machines or computer programs will replace their jobs has nearly doubled since March 2018.

## S. Korea, US agree on bolstering anti-money laundering cooperation

SEOUL

South Korea and the United States have agreed on enhancing cooperation to fight money laundering activities in the Asia-Pacific region, Seoul's financial regulator said on Monday.

Earlier this week, Lee Hyung-ju, commissioner of the Korea Financial Intelligence Unit (KoFIU), met Andrea Gacki, director of the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN), a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, in Washington, according to the Financial Services Commission (FSC).

The KoFIU is under the FSC, which is tasked with countering money laundering, the financing of terrorism and other illegal financial activities, reports Yonhap news agency.

During the meeting, Lee said the two countries should bolster transnational cooperation in fighting money laundering activities



in the Asia-Pacific region, pointing to online scams in some Southeast Asian countries involving Korean nationals.

In particular, anti-money laundering crackdown efforts should be implemented in cooperation with the private sector for early detections, the regulator said.

In response, Gacki said South Korea is an important strategic partner and agreed to raise information

exchanges between the two agencies to crack down on various forms of unlawful activities, according to the FSC.

Meanwhile, the chief of the country's financial regulator said on Friday that banks and state-run lenders will provide a set of financial support packages to the Middle East crisis-hit companies to ease their financial burdens and potential liquidity shortage.

In a meeting with heads of steelmakers and the sector-related firms, Lee Eog-weon, chairman of the Financial Services Commission (FSC), said policy lenders are set to provide a total of 25.6 trillion won (\$17.3 billion) in loans to companies facing troubles in the wake of the Middle East crisis.

Banks and other financial companies also have drawn up a support package totalling over 53 trillion won, according to Lee.

"We are taking timely measures to help crisis-hit companies overcome liquidity shortages and other troubles," Lee said, adding that the support measures may further increase depending on situations.

As to the steelmaking sector, the financial authorities will support their business reorganisation and improve their financial status via a 1 trillion-won fund aimed at supporting their business overhaul.



## Emcure shares slip by 2.64%: Did a viral video trigger the fall?

While the broader market remained positive, Emcure Pharma's stock moved in the opposite direction. Shares of Emcure Pharmaceuticals came under pressure on Monday after a social media controversy involving its Executive Director, Namita Thapar. The stock fell despite a broader market rally, reflecting investor concern over the ongoing backlash online. At the time of writing, Emcure Pharma shares were down 2.64% at Rs 1,628.

### WHAT TRIGGERED THE CONTROVERSY?

The issue began with a video posted by Namita Thapar towards the end of March. In the reel, she spoke about the health benefits of Namaz, describing it as a form of full-body exercise. She highlighted that the practice can support digestion, improve flexibility, and help with mental well-being. She also pointed out that the meditative and repetitive nature of Namaz may benefit mental health. According to her, the Vajrasana posture, which is part of the practice, can aid digestion and offer a moment of calm in a busy day. The video soon went viral, but it also attracted criticism and trolling on social media. Some users reacted strongly to her comments, leading to a wider online debate. On Monday, Thapar responded to the criticism on platform X. She said she had earlier shared similar content on Hindu practices as well.

### MARKET REACTION

While the broader market remained positive, Emcure Pharma's stock moved in the opposite direction. The decline suggests that investors are closely watching developments, as reputational issues can sometimes impact sentiment in the short term.

## Kia India launches refreshed Kia Syros MY26 at ₹8.39 lakh, adds features & wider automatic options

NEW DELHI, INDIA, 20 APRIL 2026:

Kia India, one of the country's leading mass-premium automakers, has announced the introduction of Kia Syros Model Year 2026 (MY26), expanding the model lineup with the new HTE, HTE(O), HTK+(O), and HTX(O) trims, guided by evolving customer needs and feedback. Starting at ₹ 839,900, the Syros MY26 enhances accessibility while reinforcing its value-led positioning, offering greater choice across the lineup with wider availability of automatic options, including new Diesel Automatic trims. With a stronger trim strategy, enhanced feature distribution across the entire range, and more distinctive SUV appeal with sporty and rugged front and rear design enhancements, the new Syros delivers greater, more meaningful value, while retaining its core strengths of exceptional space, premium interiors and strong safety credentials. "Customer insights have guided the Syros MY26 evolution, with design enhancements and a revised trim and feature lineup delivering more meaningful value, along with greater choice across trims and powertrains. Syros has been highly

Now starting at RS. 839,900, making premium features more accessible than ever while delivering greater meaningful value, backed by five-star BNCAP safety rating  
Enhanced SUV appeal with Sporty and Rugged front and rear design  
New R17 - 43.66 cm (17") Sporty Crystal Cut Alloy Wheel design with Neon colored brake calipers  
New trims HTE, HTE(O), HTK+(O) and HTX(O) introduced to offer greater choice  
Two new Diesel Automatic transmission trims now available at a more accessible price point - expanding convenience and choice for customers  
New colour options introduced: Magma Red, Ivory Silver Matte and Ivory Silver Gloss



recognized by the auto exports, winning multiple awards since launch. And this latest update further strengthens its appeal to a wider set of customers. This thoughtful evolution exemplifies Kia's consumer-first innovation, blending great cabin space and comfort with city-friendly agility while making premium convenience more accessible than ever. We invite customers to visit their nearest Kia dealerships to experience the Syros MY26," said Mr. Atul Sood, Sr. Vice President, Sales & Marketing. Kia Syros continues to offer features delivering high-value ownership experience. These include a 76.2cm (30") Trinity Panoramic Display panel - Connected Car Navigation Cockpit, dual-pane panoramic sunroof, streamline door handles, front and rear ventilated seats; along with second row seat recline and slide with 60:40 split, 20 Robust Hi-Standard Safety package, five-star BNCAP rating. The 80+ connected car features, OTA

updates and Kia Connect Diagnostics enhance overall convenience. Responding to evolving customer preferences for more distinctive road presence, the Syros MY26 now comes with a brand-new Sporty and Rugged front bumper with body-colored aero inserts and glossy black skid plates with LED fog lamps. The rear design is enhanced with LED high mounted stop lamp and a brand-new bumper with body-colored aero inserts. To strengthen the side profile, Syros now comes with glossy black roof rails and ORVMs along with body colored side garnish. All these changes enhance both visual appeal and perceived value of the Kia Syros. HTX and HTX(O) now come with a new R17 - 43.66 cm (17") Sporty Crystal Cut Alloy wheel design with Neon colored brake calipers. Further strengthening its visual presence, the Syros MY26 introduces new colour options including Mag-

ma Red, Ivory Silver Matte and Ivory Silver Gloss. With the new updates and strengthened variant line-up, key features are now accessible across a wider range of price points. This democratizes access to premium features while retaining the Syros' core strengths of rich cabin experience, exceptional space, and strong safety credentials with its five-star BNCAP safety rating. Diesel Automatic variant is now available from HTK+ onwards, addressing a key customer need for convenience in diesel powertrains and expanding convenience and flexibility, and is priced at ₹ 1,273,900. Designed with compact dimensions, the Kia Syros is easy to maneuver within crowded city conditions without compromising on interior space and passenger comfort, making it a compelling choice across varied usage needs. Proven customer satisfaction underscores ride comfort, spaciousness, and practicality as key strengths, hence, positioning Syros as a long-term family companion.

Through enhanced accessibility, expanded choice and stronger value delivery, the Syros MY26 further reinforces Kia's commitment to delivering thoughtful, consumer-first innovation with more meaningful value.



## itel Announces Counter Replacement for Feature Phones

Celebrating 10 Years of its Presence in India

NATIONAL, 20TH APRIL 2026:

itel, a leading tech brand of India known for its Durability, Reliability and Affordability, is celebrating 10 years of its impactful presence in India. itel has now reached a massive customer base of 15 crores, marking yet another milestone in its transformative journey. To celebrate this achievement, itel has unveiled an exciting 1-year Counter Replacement offer for all manufacturing defect in feature phones - a massive bonanza for customers across India. Over the past decade, itel has steadily built a dominant presence in India, connecting with consumers by offering a wide range of durable and reliable electronics products at affordable prices. Speaking about the completion of 10 years and launch of Counter Replacement, Arijet Talapatra, CEO of itel India said, "Completing 10 years in India and reaching 15 crore customers is an incredibly proud moment for all of us at itel. This would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication and support from our partners, team and customers. Today, this milestone reflects the trust we have earned over time. We are proud to introduce Counter Replacement for Feature Phones - an initiative born directly from the voices of our consumers. Every insight, every interaction shapes how we innovate. When we began this journey, our goal was to make technology available to people who are taking their first step into the digital world. We are committed to continuously building prod-

ucts that are durable, reliable, and affordable - qualities that itel is renowned for across Bharat."

The brand's journey also reflects a deeper purpose - enabling digital access for millions of Indians who previously had little to no exposure to smart technology. From first-time smartphone buyers to families looking for home appliances, the brand has played an integral role in helping consumers stay connected. Globally, itel is now present in over 80 countries - with an extensive portfolio spanning feature phones, smartphones, TVs, solar products, personal grooming products and home appliances. By keeping affordability at the centre of its approach, the brand continues to support Bharat's growing digital aspirations while addressing the everyday technology needs of its consumers.

### About itel

Established over 16 years, itel is a reliable smart life brand for everyone. Adopting "Enjoy Better Life" as its brand philosophy, itel's mission is to provide budget-friendly consumer electronic products to everyone. It democratizes technology by giving entry to technology and connectiveness to consumers without prior access to it. After more than 16 years of development, itel has expanded its presence in more than 80 emerging markets globally. itel has a product portfolio of smartphones, TV, accessories, electronics, speakers, home appliances and laptop products and in 2021, it ranked No.1 Global Smartphone brand under \$75 and No.1 feature phone brand.

## Audi brings the performance-focused Audi SQ8 to Hyderabad, strengthening Q range

German luxury carmaker Audi has launched the performance-focused Audi SQ8 in Hyderabad, strengthening its premium SUV portfolio in India. The new model blends high-performance engineering with everyday usability, positioning itself as a standout offering in the Q8 line-up. The Audi SQ8 is priced at an introductory ₹1.77 crore (ex-showroom). The company is also offering a 10-year complimentary roadside assistance package along with comprehensive maintenance and service plans.

Under the hood, the SUV is powered by a 4.0-litre V8 TFSI engine delivering 373 kW of power and 770 Nm of torque. It accelerates from 0 to



100 km/h in just 4.1 seconds, with a top speed of 250 km/h. The vehicle features quattro all-wheel drive, adaptive air suspension, and all-wheel steering, ensuring improved stability and agility. An S-specific sport exhaust enhances the driving experience, while optional upgrades include active roll stabilisation and a sports differential. On the exterior, the Audi SQ8 sports HD Matrix LED headlights with Audi Laser Light technology and comes with multiple alloy wheel designs. The SUV features S-specific styling elements, frameless doors, a panoramic sunroof, and

bold design accents, including an aluminium-look Single-frame grille. Optional packages such as Carbon Style and Black Styling further enhance its sporty appeal. Inside, the cabin is equipped with sport seats featuring S embossing and premium upholstery. The infotainment system includes Audi Virtual Cockpit Plus and MMI Navigation Plus with touch response. A Bang & Olufsen 3D Premium Sound System with 17 speakers delivers an immersive audio experience. Additional features include ambient lighting with 30 colour options, a flat-bottom steering wheel, and high-quality interior inlays. In terms of comfort and convenience, the SUV offers four-

zone climate control, park assist with 360-degree cameras, soft-close doors, and wireless charging. Optional features such as adaptive windshield wipers and a convenience key add to the ease of use. Safety remains a key focus, with the Audi SQ8 equipped with eight airbags, cruise control with speed limiter, and Audi Pre Sense Basic. Optional driver assistance features include night vision assist, a head-up display, and lane departure warning. The model is available in a range of exterior colours, including Mythos Black, Daytona Grey, Glacier White, Ascari Blue, and Chilli Red, along with multiple interior trim options and Audi Exclusive customisation choices.

## AU Small Finance Bank Rolls Out 'AU Royale' Programme

AU Small Finance Bank on Monday unveiled the 'AU Royale Banking Programme' for Company Secretaries, marking a first-of-its-kind profession-specific premium banking ecosystem in India. The announcement was made in Hyderabad on the bank's 31st Foundation Day.

The programme is designed exclusively for Company Secretaries (CS), offering tailored financial solutions, priority

services and a relationship-led banking approach to meet both professional and personal financial needs. It aims to address a long-standing gap in banking services for governance professionals responsible for corporate compliance and regulatory frameworks. The launch follows a Memorandum of Understanding signed earlier this year between the bank and the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI), under which customised banking and credit solutions are being extended to CS professionals nationwide. Under the AU



Royale Programme, customers can access specialised current

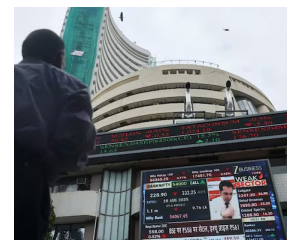
and savings accounts, a profession-linked premium credit card and collateral-free personal loans. The Royale Business Current Account and Royale Savings Account come with features such as zero minimum balance, personalised account numbers linked to CS membership, higher interest payouts and family banking benefits. The bank has also introduced the AU CS Credit Card, offering profession-centric benefits including discounts on ICSI membership renewal and accelerated reward points on tax payments and software ex-

penses. Lifestyle benefits such as airport lounge access, travel and dining rewards, and fuel surcharge waivers are also included. The card is lifetime free with no joining or annual charges. Additionally, eligible professionals can avail collateral-free personal loans of up to ₹15 lakh with minimal documentation, competitive interest rates starting at 12% and reduced processing fees. The programme also features premium onboarding, customised debit cards and dedicated relationship management to ensure seamless banking support for

Company Secretaries. Speaking on the launch, Deputy CEO Uttam Tibrewal highlighted the critical role of Company Secretaries in maintaining corporate governance and said the initiative reflects the bank's commitment to delivering secure and transparent banking solutions aligned with their responsibilities. ICSI President Pawan G Chandak welcomed the collaboration, stating that the initiative would empower Company Secretaries with specialised financial tools to support their evolving professional needs.

## Sensex, Nifty end flat after wild swings as market waits for clearer signals

Dalal Street spent Monday moving a lot and deciding very little. After a volatile session packed with sharp swings, the benchmark indices ended almost exactly where they began.



The BSE Sensex closed at 78,520.30, up 26.76 points or 0.03%, while the NSE Nifty50 settled at 24,364.85, higher by 11.30 points or 0.05%. The mood was shaped by familiar concerns. Fragile talks between Iran and the US, rising crude oil prices, and caution ahead of further geopolitical developments. Renewed disputes over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz added to the nervousness in global markets. Investors appear to be weighing whether recent tensions are temporary pressure tactics or something more serious. If the situation worsens, crude oil prices could rise sharply. For India, which imports most of its oil, that can mean pressure on inflation, the rupee and company costs.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Investments Limited, said investors are also watching the ceasefire timeline this week, which has kept risk appetite in check. "Renewed disputes over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz injected volatility into global markets," Nair said. He added that investors viewed recent disruptions in the Middle East as "potential negotiation tactics rather than

the onset of a full-scale conflict." Still, the market did not fold. Quarterly earnings are beginning to provide support, especially in sectors where investors still see long-term growth. This has led to selective buying in pockets of the market. Nair said "growth-oriented sectors such as power, capital goods, and consumer durables" continued to attract investor attention. Not every sector enjoyed the session. IT, telecom and banking stocks saw weakness, helping cap gains in the headline indices. Ankur Punj, MD and Business Head at Equis Wealth, said markets ended flat after sharp intraday swings amid weakness in those sectors. "There is currently a lot of uncertainty ahead of the peace talks," Punj said, adding that investors were adopting a "wait and watch approach before taking any firm stance on equity and other financial assets." That sums up Dalal Street right now. The market is not fearful, but it is not carefree either. It is willing to buy selectively, unwilling to chase aggressively, and quick to react to every headline from overseas. For the next few sessions, traders will watch three things closely:

## Jio Financial Services Limited posts 78% income jump to ₹3,274 crore in FY26

HYDERABAD, APRIL 20, 2026:

Jio Credit's AUM crosses Rs. 25,000 crore in FY26. Jio Payment Solutions Total Payment Value crosses Rs. 50,000 crore in FY26. The JioFinance app registers 23 million unique users... Board recommends a dividend of Rs. 0.60 per share with a face value of Rs. 10 each.

Jio Financial Services Limited (JFSL) on Monday reported a strong financial performance for the fourth quarter and full year ended March 31, 2026, marking what it described as a key transition from ground-work to accelerated growth. The company's net income from business operations surged fourfold year-on-year to ₹1,390 crore, contributing 54% of total consolidated income, compared to 20% in the previous fiscal. Consolidated profit after tax stood at ₹1,561 crore, while pre-provision operating profit (PPOP) reached ₹1,357 crore. Among its subsidiaries, Jio Credit Limited reported

assets under management (AUM) of ₹25,711 crore, registering over 2.5 times growth from FY25. Meanwhile, Jio Payment Solutions Limited recorded a total payment value (TPV) of ₹52,226 crore, up nearly 2.4 times year-on-year. Jio Payments Bank Limited saw its deposit base grow 84% to ₹544 crore. In the asset management space, JioBlackRock Asset Management crossed ₹15,200 crore in AUM within nine months of launch. Insurance arm Jio Insurance Broking Limited reported a total premium of ₹982 crore, up around 10%. For the March quarter, consolidated total income near-



ly doubled to ₹1,020 crore, while profit after tax stood at ₹272 crore. The company said profitability was impacted by the full consolidation of its payments bank, continued investments in new businesses, and geopolitical volatility affecting treasury income. A major highlight of the year was the launch of the new JioFinance app, an AI-driven financial services platform offering personalized solutions. Since its launch in February 2026, the app has crossed 1.7 million downloads and offers a wide marketplace, including in-

urance plans, fixed deposits, credit cards, loans, tax services, and digital gold. The company reported 23 million unique users across its digital platforms, with 9.3 million monthly active users in the fourth quarter. JFSL's lending business continued to expand rapidly, with gross disbursements of ₹10,629 crore in Q4 alone and net interest income rising sharply. The payments bank also reported strong growth in its customer base and business correspondent network, alongside expansion of toll payment operations across multiple states. In the investment segment, the joint venture with Black-

Rock saw strong investor participation, including over 1.1 million retail investors. The company has also begun wealth management operations and is awaiting final regulatory approval to expand into GIFT City. On the insurance front, its joint venture with Allianz commenced reinsurance operations in March 2026, with further plans to explore life and general insurance opportunities. The company said FY26 represents a "pivotal inflection point," as it transitions into a phase of sustained growth across lending, payments, insurance, and investment businesses.

# The best countries for women travelling solo in 2026

From Costa Rica's social surf towns to Norway's remote Arctic landscapes, new data and traveller insights reveal where solo female travellers feel most secure. All signs point to solo women driving today's travel trends. Multiple tour operators report that the demographic is among their fastest growing segments, especially women over 50 who aren't waiting on companions to get up and go. Searches for "solo travel for women" have surged 30% worldwide over the past five years. Despite increased interest, many women still have valid safety concerns. In a February 2026 survey conducted by Talker Research for Road Scholar, 59% of respondents said walking at

night was the aspect of solo travel that gave them the most pause. Women were also more likely than men to cite safety as the reason they hadn't yet travelled alone. "There is no single global index that captures how safe countries are for solo women travellers. Instead, we analysed the latest Georgetown University Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index – which ranks countries on women's inclusion, justice and security – alongside the Global Peace Index, and spoke to women travelling alone about where they felt most at ease. Here are five of the countries that stood out this year, and how to best navigate them as a solo woman traveller.



## Uruguay

Uruguay has also climbed sharply in this year's WPS Index, rising from 59th to 35th, driven by strong scores in justice and security, including low rates of violence against women. It is also ranked as the second most peaceful country in South America (just after Argentina) on the Global Peace Index. "I immediately noticed the easy-going vibe," said Claudia Tavani, who wrote about her experience at her blog. "Uruguay is incredibly chill with very welcoming people. I visited in mid-March when there weren't many tourists around, so I got to meet many locals who were always ready to chat and share interesting stories about the country, its history and its culture." Visiting Colonia del Sacramento in southwestern Uruguay is

a particular highlight, particularly the Barrio Histórico where most of the country's attractions can be found. "It's a maze of cobbled alleys with whitewashed walls and colourful bougainvillea pouring over the streets, and the vintage cars add a unique touch," said Tavani. She recommends stopping for sunset at Calle de los Suspiros (a well-preserved street that once featured the city's historic brothels) or at the lighthouse of Colonia. For beach vibes, she recommends Punta del Diablo, a fishing village on the eastern coast over the better-known and busier Punta del Este. "It's much more easy-going and safer to explore alone," she said. "The beach is a nice spot to hang out in the sun and swim." In Montevideo, renting a bike and cycling among the ramblas beside the Rio de la Plata is an easy way to explore.

## Costa Rica

This Central American country was recently named one of the world's happiest – and it has also recorded one of the most significant jumps in the WPS Index, rising from 60th to 34th. The shift reflects broader gains in women's inclusion and security, alongside a growing influx of remote workers drawn by its digital nomad visa. "Costa Rica is one of the easiest places in the world to meet people as a solo woman," said Molly Gagnon, a travel agent specialising in solo travel at The Social Solivagant, who has returned every year since 2021. She points to the strong mix of expats, surfers and entrepreneurs clustered around Santa Teresa and Nosara on the Nicoya Peninsula's Pacific side. "You naturally meet people in surf lessons, yoga classes, cafés and even just walking on the beach," she said.

"The culture fosters independence. It's very normal to see women doing things solo." For first-time visitors, she recommends booking one or two structured activities early in the trip – like a surf lesson or a guided hike – to accelerate meeting people, and opting for boutique hotels or social guesthouses over isolated holiday rentals. The peninsula's Caribbean side offers its own unique vibe. "The vibrancy and peacefulness along the coastal beaches was something I never had experienced before," said Ashley Hunter, a communications manager at Signature Travel Network, who recently solo travelled south of Puerto Viejo. "I would take photos during the day, and when the rain rolled in, I'd find a quiet place to tuck away, grab a snack and sketch from those images."

## Estonia

Estonia ranks 11th on the WPS Index – its highest-ever position – with strong gains in women's health outcomes, financial inclusion and perceived community safety. It also sits 24th on the Global Peace Index, reflecting low crime rates and political stability. "Throughout my time in Estonia, I couldn't have felt safer," said Veronika Romane, who blogs at Aim To Discover. Tallin's Unesco-listed Old Town is an ideal starting point. "It's intuitively easy," Romane said. "Pebbled roads, small shops with traditional crafts and food, an art scene and the rich history of Tallinn's streets made me feel completely at ease exploring on my own." Solo traveller Ioana Moga recommends visiting the Kiek in de Kōk Museum and Bastion Tunnels, comprised of multiple medieval towers. "Kiek in de Kōk means 'peek into the kitchen' because people in the tower could see into the kitchens of the

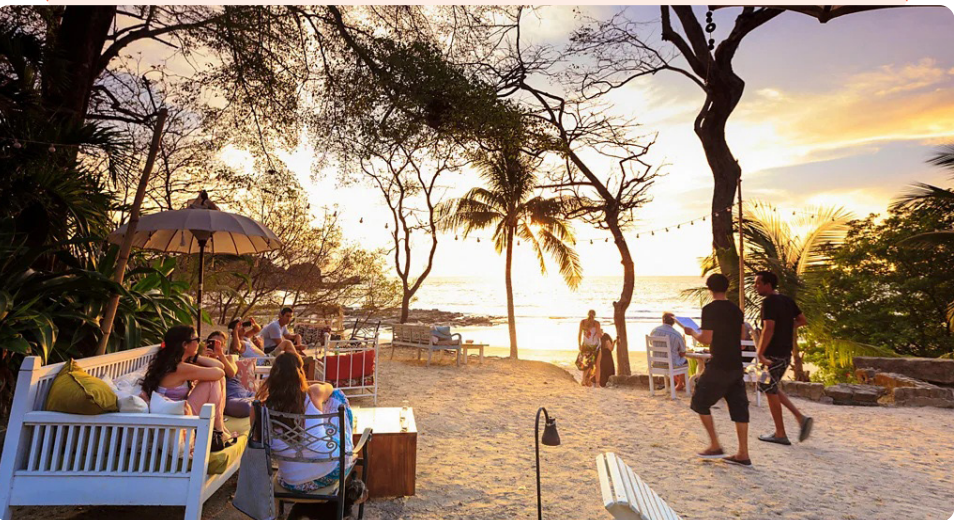
people across the street," said Moga, who chronicled the trip on her blog. "My favourite part was going underground and walking through the tunnels that were used for a variety of purposes for many centuries." Just west of the capital, Tabasalu Nature Park offers a scenic nature escape, where limestone cliffs rise above the Baltic Sea. "It was the perfect place for a peaceful and scenic hike," said Romane. "I felt at peace being there alone. The few people I met in the area were very kind and welcoming, simply there to enjoy nature just as I was."



Ranking 38th on the Global Peace Index, Vietnam has risen three places year-on-year and remains one of the highest-ranked countries in Southeast Asia. It also performed relatively well in the WPS compared to neighbouring countries, particularly for women's perception of community safety. "I found everyday interactions to be warm and welcoming here," said Gagnon, who also visited Vietnam solo last year. "Simple moments, chatting with a café owner, joining a street food table or taking a sleeper bus create organic social opportunities. It's a place where your 'social cup' gets filled naturally." She recommends joining one of the country's many small-group tours, which focus around everything from cooking to food to riding motorbikes, as an easy entry point for solo travel-

ers. But she also recommends reaping the rewards of spending time with locals. "I've returned to Vietnam multiple times, trekking in Sa Pa with a Hmong guide, staying in homestays in the Mekong Delta and spending Tet in the Central Highlands with a local family," said Tracy Smith, author of The Purpose of Getting Lost: A Story of Finding Myself. "I was struck not only by the beauty of the country but by how safe and welcomed I felt travelling alone. I'm returning this spring to attend my former guide's wedding." Her advice: move beyond checklist tourism. "Work with local guides, consider homestays and be open to slower, more relational travel," she said. "Vietnam rewards curiosity and respect, it's a country best experienced through connection."

## Vietnam

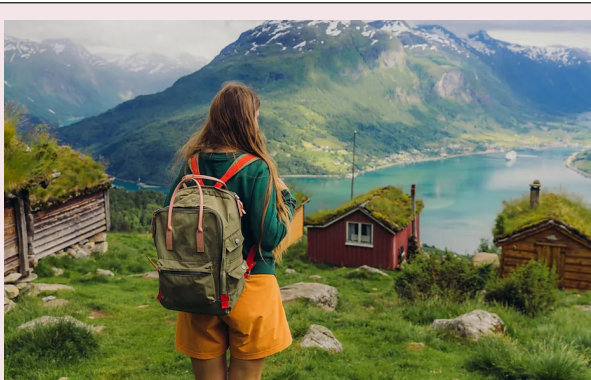


## Norway

Ranked third on the WPS Index (tied with Sweden), Norway scored highly for its welfare protections, equal pay and community safety. The country has consistently placed in the top three since the index began in 2017, and its strong social safety net (which includes universal

healthcare, parental leave and state-funded childcare) underpins a culture where women actively participate in the workforce and government. For solo women travellers, the appeal is as much about nature as safety. "Travelling solo here was effortless," said Janice Lintz, who said her expedition cruise here was one of the most extraor-

dinary trips she's ever taken. "The wildlife [in Svalbard] was beyond anything I imagined. We saw polar bears, bearded seals, walrus, Arctic foxes and reindeer. We also saw pancake ice at around 82 degrees north, which was surreal." The comfort and sense of wellbeing persist even outdoors in the dark. "I always felt safe, even when



photographing the night sky," said Lisa Michele Burns, founder of travel photography club The Wandering Lens. Burns has visited Norway twice alone, once in winter to photograph the northern lights and once at the end of summer, spending much of her time in the northern region around Bodø and the Lofoten Islands. "The dramatic coastlines

provide the perfect environment to wander, soak in the beauty and sounds and photograph slowly and watch the conditions unfold," she said. Even though Burns lives outdoors, she also appreciates the country's cosy hotels. "The Rorbuer [traditional fisherman's housing now converted into cabins] and Scandinavian interior design are other reasons

I'll always have Norway on my list of places I'd love to return to," she said. Burns recommends solo travellers hire a car and map out a journey through small villages and viewpoints in the Lofoten region, with plenty of unscheduled time built in. She highlights the pink sand shores of Mjelle, the beaches at Unstad and Haukland and the fishing village of Nusfjord.



Another stellar event is Hanle's annual Star Party, held each September at the end of the brief four-month window when the village is accessible to outsiders before the harsh winter sets in. The nocturnal festival draws serious stargazers and astrophotographers from across India, who come armed with telescopes and specialised cameras for deep sky observations. **Reaching for the stars** I've just arrived from Leh, the capital of Ladakh, to explore this remote landscape. The homestay I've chosen is a modest, single-storey concrete structure with shared dorms. My Tibetan-Ladakhi hosts welcome me with tingmo, a steamed bread with dal and thupka, a soup of hand-pulled noodles.

## Plan your trip..

**When to go:** June-September, ideally around the new Moon to see the Milky Way. The annual Star Party takes place in September. Getting there: Fly Delhi to Leh, then rest 48 hours to acclimatise. Take a bus (Wednesday/Saturday) or shared taxi to Hanle. Apply for permits in advance (required for all visitors). **Stay:** Book homestays well ahead. Try Hanle Lodge for private rooms or budget-friendly Pole Star. **Do:** Join a stargazing session with a trained astro guide, visit Hanle monastery and hike to the observatory on Mount Digpa Ratsa Ri. **Eat:** Eat Ladakhi food or Indian meals at your homestay; there are barely any restaurants or grocery stores in the village. There's little to do in Hanle while the Sun is shining, so I hitch a ride to Hanle's white-walled Buddhist monastery, perched above the valley. I look down onto the green and rusty hues of the meadows criss-crossed by glistening streams and encircled by brown, wrinkled mountains. This pastureland wasn't always home to telescopes and stargazers. Prior to 1992 – when scientists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) identified Hanle's conditions as ideal for astrono-

my – only a handful of Changpa nomadic families lived in the area. But when the Indian Astronomical Observatory was built and astrotourism developed – bolstered by the installation of the Himalayan Chandra Telescope in 2000, followed by MACE, the world's second-largest gamma ray telescope at the IIA campus – most of the nomads settled here permanently and created a tiny yet tight knit community, explained Dorje Angchuk, the observatory's engineer-in-charge. Soon, growing tourism from stargazers, wildlife enthusiasts and visitors to the nearby Umting La pass brought light pollution to Hanle. To restore the darkness of the night, IIA consulted with villagers, tapping dark sky reserves in the Canary Islands and Hawai'i for inspiration, and eventually founding HDSR with a focus on reducing light pollution and promoting astrotourism. Local guides received training on stars, constellations and guiding visitors. Shruti Sharma, a marketing professional from Jodhpur, recounted her 2017 visit to Hanle on a motorbike trip through Ladakh. "The houses had switched off their lights, everyone had their equipment out, and there was excitement in the air," she told me. "When I saw the Milky Way with my naked eye, I thought, 'what is this magic?'"

## Stargazing into the pitch-black night

Late one night, I find myself in astro guide Lesang Dorje's front yard for a stargazing session with a handful of other young travellers from other parts of India, who have stopped in Hanle for a night to see its spectacular cosmic tapestry. Dorje tries to get our attention as we line up behind the telescope. With a red laser pointer, he traces the Andromeda Galaxy and Saturn's rings. "The old nomads say the more time you spend in darkness, the better you can see by learning to use starlight," he said. Before electricity, the Changpa herders used the pole star to guide them down mountainsides at night. The villagers, who practice Tibetan Buddhism, make offerings during nyi 'dzin and zla 'dzin, the solar and lunar eclipse, which are considered auspicious. Celestial bodies are also a part of local folk music; when a bride departs her home at dawn after a marriage ceremony, a song called

Namlangs say karchen is sung which mentions Venus rising, explained Dorje. These Changpa traditions now sit alongside modern astrotourism, like IIA's Star Party – about to enter its third year. It's the opening night of the event and I have gathered on the grounds of the IIA campus with amateur astronomers and astrophotographers from all over India, who are eager to tick off their stargazing bucket list and take long-exposure photos of outer space. As darkness falls, only red LED flashlights are visible, used by astronomers to preserve night vision. Astrophotographer Dhruv Patel from Ahmedabad arrived with his initially reluctant mother Kiran, who remarked: "Even when I close my eyes, I can see stars and only stars. I feel like lying on the ground to keep watching them." The increase in tourism in the three years since HDSR's creation has brought higher income but also concerns. "I feel a growing

tension about how we will preserve Hanle with the increasing number of tourists," said Dorje. On a June night last year, more than 100 people gathered outside his house to see the stars, which meant he had to work until 02:30. Last summer, homestay owners turned away tourists due to limited capacity. To protect the darkness, villagers switch off lights at dusk and there is no power supply after 23:00. Many locals have also installed blackout curtains, lampshades and warm bulbs. IIA is also establishing practical measures like road delineators to keep vehicles on designated paths and plans to decentralise astrotourism across Ladakh. "It is just like any viral story," said Angchuk. "After the sudden excitement around Hanle subsides, the number of tourists will stabilise and only serious stargazers will visit." On my last morning, I rise before dawn to find the sky still shimmering with stars.

# The Himalayan village where you can see the cosmos

In the Moon-like landscape of Hanle, the jet-black skies reveal otherworldly starry skies that lure travellers from far and wide. But can locals preserve the natural darkness? I'm walking downhill as evening gives way to night, transfixed by what is unfolding above. As though someone is slowly rolling a screen in a shadow puppet show, an inky blue canvas emerges, where stars pop left and right. Mouth agape, I realise that the hazy band of light stretching above me is the Milky Way. A howl from a dog perched on a rock ledge brings me back to terra firma. I'm on Mount Digpa Ratsa Ri in the village of Hanle, where the Earth and cosmos are in close communion. Situated at 5,290m above sea level in the barren, Moon-like landscape of northern India's Ladakh region, Hanle rates

"one" (the darkest) on the Bortle dark sky scale, with 270 clear nights a year. Here, locals routinely switch off the lights after sunset to reveal the nightly eye-popping displays of stars. Over the last few years, travellers have been drawn to Hanle not just for the jet-black skies but also for the chance to experience astronomy intimately, guided by locals who are now making the cosmos their livelihood. Since 2022, when the Hanle Dark Sky Reserve (HDSR) was founded here – spanning 1,074 sq km, six villages, a monastery and 10 stationary telescopes – a network of homestays has flourished. Local-led stargazing expeditions unfold on rooftops, courtyards and below the dome-shaped Indian Astronomical Observatory, which houses one of the world's highest optical telescopes.



# IPL 2026: Tilak Verma's ton, Ashwani's four-fer power MI to 99-run win over GT

## Golf

**Pranavi Urs finishes tied 36th after closing with a 72**



**JOBURG:** Pranavi Urs ended her week with a steady performance, carding a 1-under 72 to secure a tied-36th finish at the Joburg Ladies Open. The only Indian golfer to make the cut, she experienced a rollercoaster round highlighted by a remarkable four-hole stretch from the second to the fifth, where she recorded par, birdie, eagle, and bogey. Overall, her round included two birdies, one eagle, and three bogeys. The other Indian participants—Diksha Dagar, Tvesa Malik, Avani Prashanth, and Hitaashee Bakshi—missed the cut.

## Football

**Recovered Musiala feels like a new arrival for Bayern ahead of key tests**



**BERLIN:** After Bayern Munich sealed their 35th national title last weekend, Vincent Kompany said the return of Jamal Musiala feels like a new arrival for the club. Ahead of Wednesday's German Cup semifinal against Leverkusen and Bayern's UEFA Champions League semifinal tie against Paris Saint-Germain on April 28 and May 6, the 23-year-old is stepping in after injuries to Serge Gnabry and Lennart Karl. "We can expect something from him," Bayern's head coach said. "Now that Serge, sadly, can't be around, we benefit from his step-by-step return." Following a cautious comeback plan, with recovery breaks and gradually increased playing time, the England-born attacker is beginning.

## AHMEDABAD

Fast bowler Ashwani Kumar took four wickets after Tilak Varma slammed an unbeaten century as the Mumbai Indians registered a dominant 99-run win in Match 30 of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Monday. The big win gave a big boost to the Mumbai Indians' Net Run Rate as the five-time champions moved to seventh spot in the points table.

Ashwani Kumar bagged 4-24 as the Gujarat Titans were bowled out for just 100 runs in 15.5 overs while chasing 200 runs as five-time champions. Earlier, India's T20 World Cup winner Tilak Varma smashed his maiden century off 45 balls and took the Mumbai Indians to 199/5 runs in 20 overs after a shaky start courtesy of Kagiso Rabada's three wickets in the Power-play.

Chasing a challenging target of 200, the Gujarat Titans had a nightmarish start as they lost a wicket on the very first ball. Jasprit Bumrah struck immediately to dismiss Sai Sudarshan, marking his first wicket of the IPL 2026. The pressure continued in the next over when skipper Hardik Pandya removed Jos Buttler. The in-form batter was trapped lbw and, despite opting for a review, the decision stayed with the umpire. Buttler managed just 5 runs off 6 balls, leaving GT in early trouble.

After the double setback, Sundar and captain Shubman Gill tried to rebuild the innings with a counterattack. The pair struck five boundaries in quick time, taking the score to 35/2 in four overs and briefly shifting momentum.

However, just as the Gujarat Titans looked to stabilise their innings, young pacer Ashwani Kumar struck to remove Gill for 14 off 13 balls. Down three wickets, the Gu-



jarat Titans ended the Power-play at 45/3, still under pressure in the chase.

Mumbai Indians' bowlers continued to dominate after the power-play. Allah Ghazanfar built pressure with a tight over before Mitchell Santner delivered a decisive double blow in the eighth over. He first dismissed Sundar for a brisk 26 off 17 balls and then removed Glenn Phillips with a clever slower delivery, leaving GT struggling at 56/5.

With the match slipping away, Rahul Te-

watia and Shahruxh Khan tried to steady things with a partnership built on singles and doubles. However, the required run rate kept climbing, adding more pressure.

The stand was broken in the 11th over when Tewatia edged a delivery from Ashwani and was caught behind by Quinton de Kock for 8 off 11 balls. Ashwani continued his impressive spell, striking again in his next over as Rashid Khan was caught for four. He then completed a brilliant

four-wicket haul by dismissing Shahruxh Khan, who fell while attempting a big shot.

Ghazanfar wrapped up the innings by picking up back-to-back wickets of Rabada and Mohammed Siraj in the 16th over, sealing a comprehensive bowling performance.

Ashwani Kumar was the standout bowler for the Mumbai Indians, finishing with excellent figures of 4-24. Santner and Ghazanfar supported well with two wickets each, while Bumrah and Pandya chipped in with

one wicket apiece as the Mumbai Indians dominated the chase from start to finish.

MI had a slow start after being put in to bat. Openers Danish Malewar and Quinton de Kock could not get going. Malewar was dismissed early for two by Kagiso Rabada, and de Kock followed soon after, scoring 13.

Naman Dhir tried to counterattack with a few boundaries, but Rabada continued his strong spell. He picked up his third wicket by removing Suryakumar Yadav for 15, leaving MI struggling at 46/3 in the power-play.

After the early setbacks, Tilak Varma and Dhir rebuilt the innings with a steady partnership. They rotated the strike well and punished loose balls, taking MI to 75/3 at the halfway stage. Their 52-run stand ended when Prasad Krishna dismissed Dhir for a well-made 45 off 32 balls.

Tilak then shifted gears in the final overs. After a slow start, he began attacking the bowlers, hitting big shots all around the ground. He reached his fifty in 33 balls and then accelerated further.

In the death overs, Tilak dominated the bowling attack, completing his maiden IPL century in just 45 balls. He remained unbeaten on 101, hitting eight fours and seven sixes, guiding the Mumbai Indians to a strong total of 199/5. For the Gujarat Titans, Rabada was the standout bowler with figures of 3/33. Mohammed Siraj and Prasad Krishna picked up one wicket each.

## BRIEF SCORES:

Mumbai Indians 199/5 in 20 overs (Tilak Varma 101\*, Naman Dhir 45; Kagiso Rabada 3-33, Mohammed Siraj 1-25) beat Gujarat Titans 100 all out in 15.5 overs (Washington Sundar 26, Shahruxh Khan 17; Ashwani Kumar 4-24, Mitchell Santner 2-16) by 99 runs.

## DGP B. Shivdhar Reddy Congratulates DSP Nikhat Zareen



## HYDERABAD

Director General of Police B. Shivdhar Reddy congratulated DSP Nikhat Zareen for securing a bronze medal at the prestigious international boxing

championship held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from April 2 to 12. DGP appreciated her at his office on Monday. The DGP lauded Nikhat Zareen for her outstanding performance at the international level, stating

that she has brought great pride and recognition to the Telangana Police as well as the State. He expressed confidence that she would continue to achieve greater success and bring more laurels in the future. On this oc-

casional, the DGP also appreciated the commendable performance of Telangana Police personnel in the 25th All India Police Water Sports Cluster Competition held at Dehradun and Tehri Lake, Uttarakhand, from April 8 to 12.

In the Rowing Coxless Pair (500 meters) category, Head Constable N. Ramakrishna of 1st Battalion TGSP and Police Constable J. Raju of CAR Siddipet secured a silver medal, showcasing exceptional skill and teamwork. The DGP congratulated them for their achievement. DGP (Law & Order) Mahesh M. Bhagwat, IGP (Sports) Gajjarao Bhupal, Sports Officer R.V. Rama Rao, Coach P. Krishna Rao (Head Constable, DAR Wanaparthy), and others were present during the felicitation programme.

## Sabalenka, Swiatek in same half as Madrid Open unveil women's draw



## MADRID

The draw for the upcoming Madrid Open has set the stage for a high-voltage fortnight, with defending champion Aryna Sabalenka placed in a challenging top half alongside Iga Swiatek, Mirra Andreeva, and Elina Svitolina.

The WTA 1000 clay-court event at Caja Magica begins on Tuesday, with the women's final scheduled for May 2 at the Manolo Santana Stadium. As one of the top seeds, World No. 1 Sabalenka receives a first-round bye and will open her campaign against either Peyton Stearns or Lois Boisson.

A three-time champion in Madrid, Sabalenka could face Naomi Osaka in the fourth round if seedings hold, while a potential quarter-final clash could see her take on either Jasmine Paolini or Belinda Bencic. The Belarusian is projected to meet fourth seed Swiatek in the semi-finals, though the Pole faces a tricky route.

Swiatek, champion here in 2024, begins against either a qualifier or

Daria Kasatkina and could encounter emerging American talent Iva Jovic in the fourth round, provided the youngster navigates past Leylah Fernandez earlier. Swiatek's section is further complicated by the presence of Andreeva and Svitolina, both of whom have beaten her this season, making the path to the last four particularly demanding.

In the bottom half, Elena Rybakina headlines a strong line-up featuring Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula, and rising prospect Victoria Mboko. Fresh off her Stuttgart triumph, Rybakina will begin against either Elena-Gabriela Ruse or Antonia Ruzic, with a possible third-round meeting against Zheng Qinwen.

The Kazakh is projected to face Madison Keys in the fourth round and Amanda Anisimova in the quarter-finals. Anisimova, seeded sixth, opens against either Dayana Yastremska or Solana Sierra. Elsewhere in the draw, Filipino teenager Alex Eala begins against a qualifier and could meet Elise Mertens in the second round.

## Table tennis world champion Fang to represent Kazakhstan, excluding three majors

## BEIJING

Fang Bo, a former member of the Chinese men's table tennis team that won World Cup and World Championships titles, announced on Monday that he would represent Kazakhstan in future competitions, excluding the Olympic Games, World Championships, and World Cup.

"I announce my return and will represent Kazakhstan," Fang wrote on the Chinese social media platform Weibo. "I have established cooperation with Nomad Table Tennis Academy, and I plan to compete in World Table Tennis events from June."

"I still hold Chinese nationality. I will not compete in the three majors," he added. Fang, 34, helped China win the 2015 Team World Cup and the 2016 World Team Championships. He reached the final of the 2015 World Championships in Suzhou before losing to teammate Ma Long, reports Xinhua.

Fang announced his retirement from the Chinese team in 2021. "My love for table tennis remains the reason why I come back. I want to challenge my limits once again," he concluded. A 33-year-old player with a right-handed, shakehand grip, Fang Bo reached the men's singles final at the World Championships by defeating the second-seeded Xu Xin and the defending champion Zhang Jike.

In 2017, he partnered with Petrisa Solja of Germany to win a bronze medal in the mixed doubles section at the World Championships in Dusseldorf, Germany. Fang also won a silver medal in the doubles and a bronze medal in mixed doubles in the 2017 Asian Championship in Wuxi. He won six medals, including three gold in the ITTF World Tour in 2013, 2015 and 2017.

## ISL 2025-26: Clinical Punjab FC cruise past Inter Kashi

## NEW DELHI

Samir Zeljković, Effiong Nsungusi Jr, and Bede Osuji scored a goal each as Punjab FC produced a clinical performance to defeat Inter Kashi 3-0 in the Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi on Monday.

Zeljko scored in the 37th minute, Nsungusi Jr struck in the 51st minute, and Bede Osuji scored in the 72nd minute for the Shers to secure three important points and move to 14 points from eight matches, consolidating seventh place. Inter Kashi, meanwhile, remain eighth with 11 points from nine matches. Zeljković was named the Player of the Match.

Punjab started on the front foot and looked sharp in the early exchanges, with Bede Osuji at the heart of their attacking play. Twice within the opening 10 minutes, Osuji's clever backheel flicks released Dani Ramirez inside the box, but Inter Kashi goalkeeper Lluís Tarrés reacted well on both occasions to deny the Spaniard.

The hosts continued to dominate possession, with Manglenhang Kipgen dictating play from midfield, while Effiong Nsungusi Jr and Osuji caused constant problems for Inter Kashi's defence. Despite Punjab's control, Inter Kashi threatened sporadically, with Tomba Singh and Narender Gahlot both going close from set-piece situations.

The breakthrough finally arrived in the 37th minute following a well-worked move. Pramveer Singh won possession near the halfway line and initiated an attack down the left, finding Osuji, who quickly combined with Nsungusi Jr in-



side the box. After a brief tussle, Nsungusi regained control and squared the ball to Samir Zeljković, who calmly slotted home with his right foot to give Punjab a deserved lead.

Inter Kashi attempted to respond before the break, with Alfred Planas and Sergio Llamas combining well, but Arshdeep Singh remained composed in goal to ensure Punjab carried their advantage into half-time.

Punjab doubled their lead shortly after the restart in the 51st minute, capitalising on a costly midfield error. Dani Ramirez seized possession and surged into the box from the left, evading multiple defenders before cutting the ball back to Nsungusi Jr, who finished clinically from close range to make it 2-0.

The hosts maintained their intensity and control, pressing high and restricting Inter Kashi to limited opportunities. Pramveer and Bijoy V. were particularly

impressive defensively, cutting out passing lanes and halting any potential counter-attacks.

Punjab added a third goal in the 72nd minute when substitute Leon Augustine drove forward from the left and slipped a precise pass into the path of Osuji, who turned smartly inside the box and unleashed a powerful right-footed strike into the top corner, leaving Tarrés with no chance.

With a comfortable lead, Punjab managed the remainder of the game with composure, continuing to press high and maintain their defensive shape. Inter Kashi struggled to break through, resorting to long balls which were effectively dealt with by the hosts' backline.

Punjab nearly added a fourth late on, with Vinit Rai striking the woodwork in stoppage time, while Ranjeet Singh Pandre was denied in a one-on-one by a crucial defensive intervention.

## RAPO Should Clear the Director Limbo

Ram Pothineni has once again left fans puzzled with his latest career move. For months, many were already concerned about his next project and the direction it might take. Now, the confusion has only deepened. Reports suggest that Ram has personally locked the script and is even planning to finalize the title 'The Lone Wolf' all without officially confirming a director. This unusual approach has sparked widespread discussion among fans and industry watchers.

Earlier buzz indicated that an associate of Lokesh Kanagaraj would helm the project.

However, recent updates claim that the filmmaker is no longer part of the venture, leaving the project without a director at a crucial stage. The big question everyone is asking is: how can a film move forward with such key decisions locked in by the hero alone? Typically, directors play a central role in shaping the script and even influencing the title. Ram's hands-on approach is raising eyebrows and fueling speculation. Some wonder if he is quietly scouting for a "ghost director" to execute his vision.

Also a section believes he may revise his decisions once a director officially joins. Until there is clarity, fans remain both curious and concerned about what this ambitious yet unconventional move will ultimately lead to.



## Dragon On Pause- Salaar 2 On Duty?

Acclaimed director Prashanth Neel, who has impressed the whole of India with the KGF franchise first, and then Salaar later, is carving out Dragon with Jr NTR now. The shoot of his film has hit another pause recently, with the official version being about look changes, scale adjustments, and planning bigger action blocks. Reports say the team took a break to alter NTR's physical transformation and overall presentation. So what's the director doing in this gap?

It's coming out that during this break, Prashanth Neel is reportedly sitting with his writers and working on Salaar 2. Well, this is the sequel of the Prabhas starrer Salaar that released in 2024, and despite mixed talk, scored huge at the box office. Neel's plan is said to be very clear. Finish the writing, lock the world, and get Superstar Prabhas back on the set of "Shouryanga Parvam" by the end of this year. That's where things get interesting, but debatable.

Dragon itself is not a small film. There are talks of it being expanded into a two-part film because of its scale and layered narrative. Add to that casting changes like the exit of Tovino Thomas and searching for other stars, which are causing delays and speculation. Now that Neel is trying to balance two large universes at the same time, many are wondering if he can do justice to his work.

That said, Salaar 2 isn't just a sequel, but a continuation of a world that already worked big at the box office and has a strong fan base. So it needs more attention than the short break' time that



This elegant portrait of Ritu Varma showcases her radiant smile and graceful charm in a richly embroidered royal blue lehenga with intricate silver zari work, paired with a statement multi-gem choker necklace. Seated against a soft pink backdrop, her effortless poise and sparkling eyes highlight her natural beauty and screen presence.

Ritu Varma, born on 10 March 1990 in Hyderabad, started with short films and modeling before making her feature film entry with a Best Actress – Telugu. She has delivered strong performances in Kannum Kollaiyadithaal (2020), Oke Oka Jeevitham (2022), Mark Antony (2023), Swag (2024, dual roles), and Mazaka (2025). Her Tamil projects include Nitham Oru Vaanam and the long-awaited Dhruva Natchathiram opposite Vikram, directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon.

In 2026, Ritu continues her versatile journey

## A Star in Full Bloom

small role in Baadshah (2013). She gained early attention in Yevade Subramanyam (2015) and rose to stardom with her lead role as Chitra in the critically acclaimed Telugu romantic comedy Pelli Choopulu (2016), winning the Nandi Award for Best Actress and Filmfare Critics Award for

with the Tamil release of Dhruva Natchathiram and the Telugu historical action drama Gopichand 33 (also referred to as Sankalp Reddy's film), where she plays the fierce tribal character Sathyavathi opposite Gopichand.



## WB Reveal the Only Way 'White Chicks' Sequel Can Happen"



Marlon Wayans and Shawn Wayans are open to a White Chicks sequel, but under one condition.

The brothers, who also returned for the new Scary Movie installment, recently opened up about potentially revisiting the cult classic during an interview with Entertainment Tonight.

"I'll put it this way: we're game," Marlon said. "We want to know if people want to come out and laugh, and [if] they come see Scary Movie, then I definitely..."

Shawn continued, "If this movie does well, a White Chicks 2 can happen."

The 2004 comedy follows two disgraced FBI agents who go undercover, transforming themselves from African-American men into blonde, white women, in an effort to protect a pair of socialites from a kidnapping plot. Marlon and Shawn starred and co-wrote the film with their other brother, Keenen Ivory Wayans, who served as the director.

While the Him actor seems

down for a potential White Chicks follow-up more than two decades later, Marlon previously detailed the challenges of making the original movie and getting into character every day on set.

He said, via People, on Kai Cenat's Mafiathon 3 livestream last year that they spent "seven hours in makeup every day, and then we work 14 hours after the seven hours because we produced a movie. If you're gonna produce the movie, you gotta push your call time, so that means you have no turnaround. Turnaround is usually 12 hours."

"We only got 3 hours every night, so after work, we were still there," Marlon continued of the grueling process. "Taking the makeup off, that took an hour."

You'll just have to wait and see if the brothers team up for a White Chicks sequel, but until then, Marlon and Shawn can be seen together in Scary Movie 6, which hits theaters on June 5, after being absent from the three previous installments.

## Will Deepika's Pregnancy Affect Allu Arjun's Raaka?

Bollywood starlet Deepika Padukone being pregnant again has suddenly put Superstar Allu Arjun's Raaka in a tricky spot. This isn't just about dates. This is about planning, scale, and how much a film can bend without breaking. Especially when the film stars Allu Arjun and is already carrying high expectations, her availability for the shoot or unavailability will create lots of gaps. Here's an interesting discussion going on in film circles about the same.

Quite unexpectedly, Deepika, who is fighting for wages and working hours to be reduced for a new mom like her, has become pregnant again. This is at a stage when she has a big project like Raaka in her hand, while sacked from the likes of Prabhas' Kalki 2898 AD and Spirit. Now that she's in her first trimester, will she continue to act in the action sequences and other things in Allu Arjun's Raaka? Or will the Raaka get affected by her decision? Almost a year will have passed if the team

waits for Deepika Padukone now? Some say that she will allot dates until the last trimester for this movie.

This isn't new for the industry. Big films have faced similar situations before. Schedules get adjusted. Body doubles come in. Action blocks get pushed. Sometimes, scripts even change slightly to accommodate reality. It's manageable. But then, earlier, Deepika disturbed the shooting of Kalki 2898 AD in the same way, as she got pregnant mid-way. Now it looks like the Raaka team that supported Deepika's unusual demands and voice, needs to make lots of adjustments to accommodate her. We have to see what they will do.



## Box Office: 'Super Mario' and 'Hail Mary' Easily Scare Off 'Lee Cronin's The Mummy'

The weekend box office remained steady as The Super Mario Galaxy Movie continued its dominant run, holding the No. 1 position for a third consecutive frame with \$35 million domestically. The animated hit has now surged to an impressive \$747.5 million worldwide, cementing its place as one of the year's biggest global earners.

Close behind, Project Hail Mary maintained its strong momentum in its fifth weekend, collecting \$20.4 million in North America. The sci-fi drama has emerged as a sleeper success, amassing \$573.1 million globally.

Debuting in third place, The

Mummy opened to \$13.5 million domestically, with its worldwide total reaching \$34 million. Directed by Lee Cronin, the horror feature has drawn mixed critical reactions but showed more encouraging audience turnout.

In limited release, Mother Mary, starring Anne Hathaway, delivered a strong per-theater average, while Lorne brought in modest returns from its wider rollout.

The box office landscape is expected to shift in the coming weeks with the arrival of Michael, followed by The Devil Wears Prada 2, both anticipated to draw significant audience interest and kick off the summer movie season.

## Hollywood's Big Studio to Distribute

Nitesh Tiwari's film Ramayana was recently presented at CinemaCon, a major film event held in Las Vegas. About 20 minutes of the movie's footage was shown to a select group, giving them an early look at the film. There has been a positive response to the footage from whoever has watched it.

Interestingly, producer Namit Malhotra and actor Yash also interacted with the media there post-screening. Reports suggest that Warner Bros. is showing interest in distributing the film globally.

Still, bringing Warner Bros on board for distribution is not an easy task. If this turns

true, the film will have a wider overseas release and could easily hit over 4500 screens in the USA.

However, this distribution deal has not been officially confirmed by Warner Bros. or the film's team yet. The rumor is fast spreading in Bollywood media. Especially, at the time when the teaser received a mediocre response, and if this deal news comes true, that will only benefit the film.

Billed to be a mythological epic grand epic fantasy, the film features Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi and Yash in the lead roles. Nitesh Tiwari is the film's director where AR Rahman and Hans Zimmer composing the music.



## Ramayana?