

## Farmers sell paddy on spot to traders fearing untimely rains

Hyderabad: Uncertain weather conditions coupled with practical challenges involving paddy storing have made Yasangi farmers vulnerable, forcing them to dispose of the stocks to traders immediately after harvest operations. Paddy ready for harvest and stocks close to the paddy purchase centre were exposed to rains in different districts including Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Kamareddy recently. Isolated rainfall with thunder storms have been forecast for Telangana, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema from April 18 to 21. Prompted by the cloudy weather conditions prevailing in parts of the State for the last one week, farmers were trying to dispose of their paddy as quickly as possible for fear of the stocks getting exposed to rain. They are looking at the traders to sell the paddy without further delay.

According to reports, private traders were way ahead in reaching out to the farmers. While the Civil Supplies Corporation could procure a little over four lakhs metric

tons of paddy through paddy purchase centres so far, private traders are said to have managed to procure double the quantity in the last one month. Farmers, who are able to fetch better prices, are preferring to sell the stocks to the traders to minimize post harvest losses in case of heavy rains.

They are able to save in transportation by selling their produce to the traders. Even the payments are reportedly being made by them promptly for sought-after varieties such as Gangakavery, RNR and HMT. The traders are buying RNR variety offering as much as Rs.2400 per quintal. Other grade-A varieties were also fetching better price in the open market. They have been buying paddy with moisture levels even up to 30 per cent, though the price offered is considerably less.

The common varieties are offered less than Rs.1800 to Rs.1900 per quintal in the open market. Such varieties are being moved to the paddy purchase centres in expectation of the MSP. The Civil Supplies



Corporation has purchased paddy worth about Rs.725 crore. The purchase centres in Suryapet witnessed heavy arrivals for the last four days, with farmers fearing that

rains could wreak havoc. Untimely rains had damaged paddy stocks on drying platforms causing heavy losses to the farmers last year.

## Van Gogh Immersive Experience extended till April 23, might get extended further



Hyderabad: The Real Van Gogh Immersive Experience, which is currently taking place at the Hitex Exhibition Centre in Hyderabad, has been extended till April 23. The timings for the exhibition are from 1.30 pm to 9 pm, with the last entry at 8 pm.

"We always had very high expectations of Hyderabad, and we haven't been left disappointed," said co-curator Nikhil Chinappa. "Watching art enthusiasts – young and old – and Van Gogh newbies

lose themselves in van Gogh's artistic brilliance and vivid colours, brought to life via pioneering 22k projection, has been immensely satisfying to watch. Hyderabad has shown us tremendous love, and we have extended the exhibition till April 23 due to popular demand. And we may extend further by a few more days if Hyderabad wants us to," he adds. The Experience brings out the colours and emotions of the Dutch master's paintings via an unparalleled visual spectacle, boasting

India's first 22K lumen projection and largest screens in India, and a specially created music score by Mitch de Klein that breathes new life into van Gogh's timeless masterpieces. The paintings for The Real

Van Gogh Immersive Experience were curated and animated by visual artists Hemali Vadalia and Naveen Boktapa of Motionvan Studios, with inputs from co-curator Jay Punjabi.

## Gachibowli, Chandrayangutta, Khairatabad record significant rainfall as Hyderabad soaks up respite

Hyderabad: After enduring scorching temperatures for a week, Hyderabad finally experienced a refreshing downpour during the early hours of Saturday. The much-needed relief came as a welcome respite to residents who had been battling intense heat in recent days.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) bulletin, the city is expected to witness a generally cloudy sky with the possibility of rain, thunderstorms, or dust storms until April 24.

The onset of rainfall was heralded by thunder and lightning in the early hours of Saturday, followed by a steady downpour. By 9:00 am, several areas in the city re-

corded significant rainfall, with Gachibowli receiving 12.5 mm, Chandrayangutta 12.3 mm, Khairatabad 11.3 mm, Asifnagar 10.8 mm, and Nampally 10.5 mm.

Almost the entire city experienced showers, providing much-needed relief to areas like Serilingampally, Saroornagar, Charminar, Uppal, Amberpet, Bandlaguda, and Malkajgiri.

The Disaster Response Force (DRF) team swiftly cleared 22 water stagnation areas and catch pits across the city after being deployed to clear blockages.

The impact of the rainfall was also felt in the temperature, with the average maximum temperature expected to drop to 37 degrees Celsius on Saturday.

# In a Delhi refugee camp, a Nehru from Pakistan awaits his tryst with Indian citizenship under CAA

No concrete roads, no piped water supply, no sewage system and no concrete houses — a step inside Adarsh Nagar Hindu Migrants relief camp in north Delhi feels like a leap back in time. And yet, for the nearly 250 Hindu refugee families from Pakistan occupying this land for over a decade, the camp symbolises hope — of Indian citizenship under the recently notified Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019. On April 5, nearly four weeks after the BJP government at the Centre notified the Act on March 11, 180 of the camp's 1,500 refugees applied for citizenship under CAA at a small office in their local school. Under the Act, undocumented non-Muslim migrants — Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians — from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014, are eligible for Indian citizenship.

One such application was submitted by the camp's pradhan, Nehru Lal, 48. He says he was asked for a copy of his passport, visa application and the residential permit he got when he left for India in 2013. Named after independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, he says, "It was quite common for people in my locality in Sindh (in Pakistan) to name their children after popular Indian politicians." Dressed in a white pathani suit, he told The Indian Express that he fled from Pakistan's Sindh due to increasing violence against minorities. Today, his 65-member family, including his wife, eight of his 10 children, six brothers and their respective families, reside at the camp, which is located at the Delhi Jal Board Maidan. "We survive on the salaries of my sons, who work at a mobile phone repair shop. While six of my daughters got married in Delhi after we moved here, two are settled in Sindh," he says.

Dhalu Ram, his wife Dharma Devi and their two sons arrived at Adarsh Nagar Hindu Migrants relief camp from Sindh in Pakistan on April 5. Dhalu Ram, his wife Dharma Devi and their two sons arrived at Adarsh Nagar Hindu Migrants relief camp from Sindh in Pakistan on April 5. (Express Photo by Gajendra Yadav) Sitting on a khaat (cot) in his makeshift house, a moustachioed Nehru recalls his first trip to India with his family. "We arrived here on a tourist visa along with nearly 500 others on a pilgrimage to Haridwar in 2013 and decided to stay back." He says his family was issued a 25-day visa in 2013, which they have been getting renewed online every two-three months. "We are not required to specify a reason for seeking an extension, but we have to submit an affidavit each time stating that we want to renew our visa," says Nehru. Dreams of buying farm land given his refugee status, he cannot move around in India without permission or buy property. "All those restrictions will go away after I get citizenship. Delhi has nothing to offer a farmer like me. I would like to buy land in Uttar Pradesh or Uttarakhand to grow wheat and sugarcane — just like I did in Sindh," he says, adding that he has been saving money to buy land.

Besides Adarsh Nagar, there are four

more camps in Delhi for Hindu refugees from Pakistan — in Rohini, Shahbad Dairy and two in Majnu Ka Tila. Nehru says, "Only around 1,000 people in these five camps are eligible for citizenship under CAA." Sisters Rajnandini, 16, and Jamna, 15, who came to India in 2013 with their parents, also applied for Indian citizenship at the camp's school on April 5. "Sindh was our home, but India will be our new home soon. Our father used to grow onions in his field in Pakistan. He works at a mobile phone repair shop here, while our mother makes mattresses," says Jamna, adding that her sister and she are two of three girls from Sindh's Bauri community who attend the local school.

Sisters Rajnandini, 16, and Jamna, 15, arrived in India with their parents in 2013. Their family applied for Indian citizenship on April 5. Sisters Rajnandini, 16, and Jamna, 15, arrived in India with their parents in 2013. Their family applied for Indian citizenship on April 5. (Express Photo by Gajendra Yadav) Rajnandini, who is good at mathematics and sews frocks for children in the camp for Rs 100 a piece, remarks, "My parents want me to study." While the girls agree that India has given them the freedom to go to school, Jamna complains about the conditions in the camp, "It needs to be developed. When it rains, the area gets submerged. We end up raising the platform of our house by putting bricks and mud." However, Pradhan Nehru does not have much hope when it comes to improvement in the camp's conditions. "Around 25 families lived here when I came here. Today, there are 250 families, mostly friends and relatives of the original inmates. The conditions here are so bad that we got electricity only in December 2022, that too after the Delhi High Court issued directions to the Centre." The Centre had in October 2021 objected to providing electricity to the camp on grounds that the refugees were "illegally encroaching upon defence land". Nearly 250 Hindu refugee families from Pakistan currently reside in Adarsh Nagar Hindu Migrants relief camp in north Delhi. Nearly 250 Hindu refugee families from Pakistan currently reside in Adarsh Nagar Hindu Migrants relief camp in north Delhi. (Express Photo by Gajendra Yadav)

Nehru claims the camp began as a small tent that his uncle pitched at the spot in 2011. "The police troubled him initially and even threw his belongings on the road. However, he got in touch with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), who requested the police to let him be. Gradually, more refugees turned up to live here." A recent visit to the camp by The Indian Express revealed that it was surrounded by a garbage dump, with pigs and cows scrounging for food. The boundary walls of the kuchcha houses there were made of bamboo and dried leaves that were tied together.

One of Dhalu Ram and his wife Dharma Devi's two sons building a shelter for the family at Adarsh Nagar Hindu Migrants relief camp. One of Dhalu Ram and his wife Dharma Devi's two sons building a shelter for the family at Adarsh Nagar



Hindu Migrants relief camp.) Down the path from Nehru's house, sits Dhalu Ram, 58, and his wife Dharma Devi, 50. The couple and their two sons arrived in India from Sindh on April 5 to "visit" their family members at the camp. "I was a farmer back in Pakistan," says Dhalu, as his two sons fashion bamboo pillars over which a thatched roof will be laid to shelter the family.

For the sake of his daughters For Sindh resident Moolchand, 37, who came to India with his wife, three daughters and a son just before the pandemic in 2020, this camp is his "only hope" even though he is not eligible for citizenship under CAA with its December 31, 2014 cut-off date. "We came to Haridwar on a pilgrimage and never left. I stayed back here for the sake of my daughters. It was getting tough to raise them in Sindh, since we were discouraged from teaching girls," says Moolchand, who earns around Rs 10,000 per month by tutoring the children in the camp. Moolchand earns around Rs 10,000

per month by tutoring children in the camp. Moolchand earns around Rs 10,000 per month by tutoring children in the camp. But life at the camp has hardly been easy. "Since the camp is close to the Yamuna, the whole area floods during monsoon and there are snakes too. But where will we go?" he says, sitting next to Nehru on a cot. The pradhan says nothing has changed for the refugees despite a stream of people, including "VHP and Bajrang Dal people", coming to meet them over their citizenship status since 2013. Even getting jobs is a problem, says Nehru. "Many boys from the camp worked in shops in Adarsh Nagar till their employers discovered their refugee status," he claims. As he awaits the freedom that he knows will come with Indian citizenship, pradhan Nehru remarks, "We will be able to do farming, set up our own business and even move freely across the country. We cannot fight with anyone right now, but after getting our citizenship we will also get the right to protest."

## Asus's new dual-screen laptop 'Zenbook DUO' now available in India

New Delhi: Taiwanese tech giant Asus on Tuesday said that its newly launched dual-screen laptop 'Zenbook DUO' is now available in India. Starting at Rs 1,59,990, the Zenbook DUO is now available for purchase on the e-commerce platforms, Amazon and Flipkart. "With its revolutionary dual-screen OLED displays, detachable Bluetooth keyboard, and versatile kickstand, the Zenbook DUO redefines the boundaries of productivity and creativity," Arnold Su, VP, Consumer and Gaming PC, System Business Group, Asus India, said in a statement. The Zenbook DUO features dual 14-inch FHD+ OLED touch screens with a 16:10 aspect ratio. It offers a 0.2ms response time and 60Hz refresh rate.

According to the company, it comes with a sleek all-metal design, weighing just 1.35 kg (1.65kg with a keyboard) and measures 14.6 mm thin. Moreover, the device



comes powered by up to Intel Core Ultra 9 Processor 185H, with Intel Arc iGPU and Intel AI Boost NPU for users to get exceptional performance.

The Zenbook DUO features an exhaustive port selection, including 2 x Thunderbolt 4 USB Type-C ports, USB 3.2 Gen 1 (Type-A), HDMI 2.1, and a 3.5mm combo audio jack, providing versatile connectivity options. In addition, the company mentioned that the laptop comes equipped with a range of intuitive software features designed to enhance user experience.

# Financial Results (Indian Gaap) For The Quarter And Year Ended March 31, 2024

The Board of Directors of HDFC Bank Limited approved the Bank's (Indian GAAP) results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2024, at its meeting held in Mumbai on Saturday, April 20, 2024. The accounts have been subjected to an audit by the statutory auditors of the Bank.

## CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS:

The Bank's consolidated net revenue grew by 133.6% to ₹ 807.0 billion for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 from ₹ 345.5 billion for the quarter ended March 31, 2023. The consolidated profit after tax for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 was ₹ 176.2 billion, up 39.9%, over the quarter ended March 31, 2023. Earnings per share for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 was ₹ 23.2 and book value per share as of March 31, 2024 was ₹ 600.8. The consolidated profit after tax for the year ended March 31, 2024 was ₹ 640.6 billion, up 39.3%, over the year ended March 31, 2023.

## STANDALONE FINANCIAL RESULTS:

Profit & Loss Account: Quarter ended March 31, 2024 The Bank's net revenue grew by 47.3% to ₹ 472.4 billion (including transaction gains of ₹ 73.4 billion from stake sale in subsidiary HDFC Credila Financial

Services Ltd) for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 from ₹ 320.8 billion for the quarter ended March 31, 2023.

Net interest income (interest earned less interest expended) for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 grew by 24.5% to ₹ 290.8 billion from ₹ 233.5 billion for the quarter ended March 31, 2023. Core net interest margin was at 3.44% on total assets, and 3.63% based on interest earning assets. Other income (non-interest revenue) for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 was ₹ 181.7 billion as against ₹ 87.3 billion in the corresponding quarter ended March 31, 2023. The four components of other income for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 were fees & commissions of ₹ 79.9 billion (₹ 66.3 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year), foreign exchange & derivatives revenue of ₹ 11.4 billion (₹ 10.1 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year), net trading and mark to market gain of ₹ 75.9 billion, including transaction gains of ₹ 73.4 billion mentioned above (loss of ₹ 0.4 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year) and miscellaneous income, including recoveries and dividend of ₹ 14.4 billion (₹ 11.3 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year). Operating expenses for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 were ₹ 179.7 billion, an increase of



33.5% over ₹ 134.6 billion during the corresponding quarter of the previous year. Operating expenses for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 included staff ex-gratia provision of ₹ 15 billion. The cost-to-income ratio for the quarter was at 38.0%. Excluding certain transaction gains and the ex-gratia provision, cost to income ratio for the quarter was at 41.3%.

The credit environment in the economy remains benign, and the Bank's credit performance across all segments continues to remain healthy. The Bank's GNPA at 1.24% has shown an improvement over the prior quarter. The Bank has considered this as an opportune stage to enhance its floating provisions, which are not specific to any portfolio, but act as a countercyclical buffer for making the balance sheet more resilient, and these also

qualify as Tier 2 Capital within the regulatory limits. Therefore, the Bank has made floating provisions of ₹ 109.0 billion during the quarter. Provisions and contingencies for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 were ₹ 135.1 billion (including the floating provisions of ₹ 109.0 billion mentioned above). Provisions and contingencies, excluding the floating provisions, for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 were ₹ 26.1 billion as against ₹ 26.9 billion for the quarter ended March 31, 2023. The total credit cost ratio (excluding the floating provisions mentioned above) was at 0.42%, as compared to 0.67% for the quarter ending March 31, 2023. Profit before tax (PBT) for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 was ₹ 157.6 billion. Profit after tax (PAT) for the quarter, after certain tax credits, was ₹ 165.1 billion, an increase of 37.1% over the quarter ended March 31, 2023.

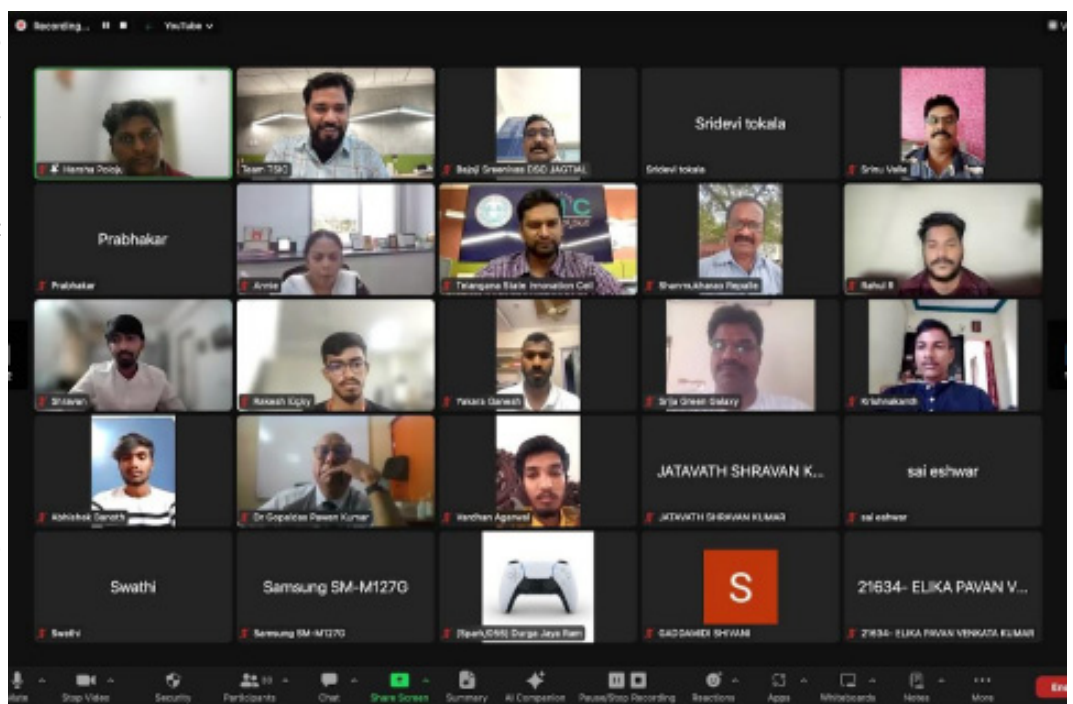
## T-Innovation Mahotsavam: TSIC Hosts Inspiring Webinar for World Creativity & Innovation Day

In celebration of World Creativity & Innovation Day, the Telangana State Innovation Cell (TSIC) hosted a dynamic webinar, "Celebrating the Spirit of Innovation," on April 20th, 2024, as part of the T-Innovation Mahotsavam. Over 800 attendees, including college students, aspiring and young entrepreneurs, representatives from NGOs, and grassroots innovators of Telangana, participated in the session. Industry leaders and Telangana's grassroots innovators shared their inspiring journeys, igniting a passion for innovation across the state. The free webinar fostered a dynamic environment for participants to connect, learn, and share. Innovators from across Telangana had the opportunity to network and exchange ideas, strengthening the collaborative spirit within the state's innovation ecosystem. Industry leaders offered practical guidance on nurturing and growing innovative ideas, empowering participants to translate their visions into reality. Additionally, Telangana's grassroots innovators, including A. Srija, Ganesh Yakara, Alladi Prabhakar, Ashok Gorre, Gopal Singh, T. Sridevi, Shanmukha Rao, Raju Mupparapu, Velle Srinivas, and Hemesh Chadalvada, shared their inspiring journeys of problem-solving for local issues. Their stories exemplified the power of creativity and perseverance in driving impactful change. Among the celebrated grassroots innovators from Telangana who spoke at the webinar, Ganesh Yakara's invention, the "Samskar Toy," captured

everyone's attention. This innovative toy educates children about the concept of good touch and bad touch. Hemesh Chadalvada's creation, the "Alpha Monitor," also garnered significant applause. This wearable device assists people with Alzheimer's by monitoring their well-being and alerting caregivers if they wander off. The session also featured expert talks by Ajit Rangnekar, CIO of Telangana; Annie Vijaya, CEO of ACIC-CBIT; Sravan Kumar of Navam Innovation Foundation; and Kranthi from Palle Srujana. These experts provided invaluable insights for the participants. They guided and answered the doubts of the innovators on how to scale their innovations and also educated everyone on how the Telangana innovation ecosystem works as a whole. This knowledge exchange empowered the grassroots innovators and instilled confidence to navigate the intricacies of bringing their ideas to fruition. "Telangana's grassroots innovators have a demonstrated track record of talent and creativity. The TSIC's webinar on 'Celebrating the Spirit of Innovation' provided a perfect platform to showcase their achievements and to

connect potential innovators with the resources they need to thrive. This well at-

the state on the importance of fostering a culture of innovation. By showcasing the



tended event is a part of our activities for fostering a culture of innovation across Telangana," said \*Ajit Rangnekar, CIO of Telangana. Conducted as part of the T-Innovation Mahotsavam, the webinar aimed to sensitize people and innovators across

successes of Telangana's grassroots heroes and providing practical guidance from industry experts, TSIC hopes to inspire a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs to contribute to the state's thriving innovation ecosystem.

# Dr. Ajai Kumar Agarwal Achieves Guinness World Records Award

Dr. Ajai Kumar Agarwal, National President of the International Chambers of Public Relations and Advisor to SME Chambers of India for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, has recently achieved a remarkable milestone: the Guinness World Records Award. To celebrate this historic achievement, a success meet was organized by Dr. Ajai Agarwal at Chubby Cho restaurant on Road No. 45, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad on April 18, 2024. The event was graced by the presence of Mr. Ajay Mishra ji, IAS (Retd), Former Special Chief Secretary, Govt of Telangana & Chairman of Red Cross Society Telangana, who attended as the chief guest.

Dr. Ajai Agarwal's name has been included in The Thickest Book of Guinness World Records for 23 Positive Changemakers in the World 2023. The award ceremony, organized by the London Organizations of Skill Development (LOSD), took place at the prestigious Lords cricket ground in London in December 2023.

Recently, Dr. Ajai Agarwal received the Award, Certificate, and a book containing the profiles of award winners from the organizing committee. As an esteemed figure in the field of Public Relation, writing, motivational speaking, and social activities, Dr. Agarwal has been honored with numerous national and international awards. He is widely recognized as the PR Magician.

Among his notable achievements, Dr. Ajai Agarwal was bestowed with the International Bharat Gaurav Award at the British Parliament in London and the Dr. KR Singh Memorial lifetime achievement award for his exemplary work in the field of PR by the Public Relations Council of India. He has also been awarded the Best PR Person at the national level by PRCI, and has been inducted into the Hall of



Fame by PRCI. Additionally, Dr. Agarwal has received the Indira Gandhi National Integration Award, the Unity Award, and the Kamal Patra Young Achiever Award, among others.

Dr. Ajai Agarwal has been invited as a keynote speaker to various international events, including the International Symposium on Democracy, Media & Politics in Rome, and has delivered lectures on crisis

communication and PR at prestigious universities such as Lewess University in the United Kingdom. Expressing his gratitude on this special occasion, Dr. Ajai Agarwal said, "

My aim is 'I don't want to die unheard' because I feel that whatever I am today is because of society, and I must give back to society through social services." Subhash Agarwal - President Telangana Pravasi

Samaj welfare Association, RN Gupta - National President Akhil Bharatiya Agarwal Samaj, Govind Agarwal - Past President Agarwal Samaj Telangana, Mangal Chand Agarwal - President Dakshin Bharat Agarwal Samaj, Prakash Jain - GM, Hindi Milap, Dr. Ghishulal Jain - President Telangana Chamber of Chemists and Druggists, TVS Narayan - VC PRCI, Sirisha Agarwal and Others were participated.

## How to load websites on Chrome before you even click them

Waiting for webpages to load can be annoying. One minute you're zipping through the internet and the next, you're stuck twiddling your thumbs while that spinning circle taunts you. Thankfully, Google Chrome has a handy trick to cut down on those frustrating delays – preloading web pages before you even click on them.

How does it work? The preloading feature in Chrome works by loading webpages in the background before you actually navigate to them. So when you do click that link, the page is already there instead of making you wait. Chrome uses some smart algorithms to predict which pages you're likely to visit next based on your browsing history and behaviours. It then preloads those pages secretly behind the scenes while you're browsing. How to turn on preloading on mobile

If you want to turn preloading on for Chrome on your Android or iOS device, follow these simple steps:

- 1) Tap the three dots menu icon and choose "Settings".
- 2) Go to "Privacy and security" and then click on "Preload pages".
- 3) Select either "Standard preloading" or "Extended preloading".

The "Standard" mode preloads pages Chrome thinks you'll likely visit next based on your history and cookies. The "Extended" mode takes it a step further by preloading more potential pages, even ones you haven't visited before. Do note the latter uses a bit more data. How to turn on preloading on PC To enable preloading on your desktop or laptop, follow these steps:



# The complex journey of transgender rights in Christianity

At a rally in Wisconsin on April 2, former US president Donald Trump accused President Joe Biden of hurting the sentiments of millions of Christians by recognising the Transgender Day of Visibility which, this year, happens to fall on the same day as Easter Sunday. Trump, while vehemently criticising his opponent, announced plans of celebrating November 5 as Christian Visibility Day.

A piece of research conducted by the Reverend Duncan Dormor, Dean of Chapel and Director of Studies for Theology at St John's College, University of Cambridge in 2015 reveals that a stark divide exists among Christians in the United States regarding the determinants of gender. According to the research, 63 per cent people assert that one's gender is fixed at birth and rooted in biological sex. On the other hand, an increasing number of Protestant denominations are embracing a more inclusive stance towards transgender individuals, welcoming them not only as congregants but also as ministers. Dormor's research illuminates this shift, characterising it as "a slow, sometimes grudging, but growing momentum for change among Christians within Protestantism especially." However, he also observes that "the overwhelming majority of the 2.1 billion Christians in the world belong to Churches which are officially unsympathetic to the claims of transgender people." Transgender rights in Christian debates In the realm of Christian theology, the interpretation of scripture plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards transgender rights and gender identity.

At the heart of this theological discourse lies the question of scriptural authority and its implications for understanding gender identity. While some denominations explicitly support gender transition, citing biblical passages that speak to the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, others maintain staunch opposition, invoking biblical references to God's creation of humanity as male and female.

The interpretation of the creation narratives in the book of Genesis underscores the theological debate surrounding transgender rights. The conservative Evangelical perspective, as articulated by American theologian Albert Mohler, emphasises the divine intention behind biological sex. He views the attempt to alter one's gender as a defiance of God's design. On the other hand, there are the progressive evangelical theologians of the likes of David Gushee, who has been a strong activist of LGBTQ rights. Gushee offers an alternative reading of scripture and suggests that gender is not rigidly binary but exists along a continuum of expression.

Early history of the Third Gender in the West Although the term 'transgender' is fairly recent, the pages of early European history are replete with references to eunuchs, cross-dressers, and gender fluid identities. The renowned classical Greek philosopher Plato in his writings as early as 385 BCE refers to a third sex. The fourth century BCE Greek physician Hippocrates

too mentioned the existence of cross-dressing individuals. Even amongst proponents of early Christianity, like the philosopher Clement of Alexandria, the body of Christ was said to have transcended the male-female binary.

Eunuchs held a special place in Byzantine society (Wikimedia Commons) Eunuchs held a special place in Byzantine society (Wikimedia Commons) However, with the advent of Christianity in the fourth century CE, the landscape of gender discourse underwent a profound transformation. As Christianity gained prominence, it codified and institutionalised patriarchal assumptions inherited from Roman culture, shaping perceptions of gender for centuries to come. Early Christian theologians of the time like St. Ambrose and St. Jerome perpetuated traditional gender norms. Consequently, eunuchs who had a special place in Byzantine society, were regarded as being morally deficient and unreliable.

Throughout medieval Europe, instances of cross-dressing were met with varying degrees of acceptance and condemnation. While women occasionally donned male attire to pursue unconventional paths, male cross-dressing was often viewed with suspicion and linked to the devil's influence. However, even among women, those like Joan of Arc, though celebrated for their valour, faced condemnation for their unconventional gender expression. She was accused of blasphemy for wearing men's clothes during her trial before being executed in 1456. The emergence of transgender rights in public discourse

In the 19th century, the landscape of gender identity and sexual orientation underwent significant evolution, thanks to the pioneering work of individuals like Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld. In 1867, Ulrichs, a German lawyer and writer, stood before the Association of German Jurists in Munich. Rumours of Ulrichs' same-sex love affairs had already cost him dearly, stripping him of his legal career and casting him as an outcast in his homeland. But on this day, he refused to be silenced, his voice ringing out amidst the scepticism and derision of his audience. "Gentlemen, my proposal is directed toward a revision of the current penal law," he began, his tone unwavering despite the jeers that punctuated his speech. Historian Robert Beachy, who chronicled Ulrichs' legacy in his book *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity*, reflected on the significance of this moment in history. "I think it is reasonable to describe him as the first gay person to publicly out himself," Beachy remarked in an interview with the *New York Times*. "There is nothing comparable in the historical record. There is just nothing else like this out there." Ulrichs' groundbreaking advocacy was underscored by his belief in the innate nature of same-sex attraction, which he viewed as a natural variation of human sexuality rather than a moral failing or psychological disorder. His stance, articulated in speeches and writings throughout the 1860s and 1870s, laid the groundwork for future LGBTQ+ rights move-



ments and contributed to a growing awareness of the diversity of human sexual expression. Karl Ulrichs (Wikimedia Commons) Karl Ulrichs (Wikimedia Commons) Meanwhile, Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician and sexologist, further advanced the understanding of transgender identity through his pioneering research and activism. His campaign began at the turn of the 20th century when a distraught soldier, his face etched with anguish, stood trembling on the doorstep of Hirschfeld's practice. In hushed tones, he confessed his deepest secret: he was an Urning, a term used to describe homosexual men in a society where such desires were condemned. In Germany, the infamous 'Paragraph 175' criminalised homosexuality, threatening those accused with the loss of their rank, title, and freedom. A homosexual himself and a Jew in a society rife with prejudice, Hirschfeld understood all too well the weight of societal expectations and the agony of living in the shadows. But despite his efforts to offer solace, the soldier tragically took his own life.

In the aftermath of this loss, the soldier's final words echoed hauntingly in Hirschfeld's mind. Entrusted with the soldier's private papers and a poignant letter, Hirschfeld was spurred to action. "The thought that you could contribute to [a future] when the German fatherland will think of us in more just terms," the letter read, "sweetens the hour of death." It was a call to arms that Hirschfeld could not ignore. Rejecting prevailing notions of homosexuality as a pathology, he championed the idea of a "third sex," advocating for the recognition of individuals whose identities transcended binary categories. Through his pioneering work at the Institute for Sexual Research, established in Berlin in 1919, Hirschfeld provided a sanctuary for those marginalised by society, offering groundbreaking treatments and affirming the plurality of gender identity.

Tragically, the vision of the Institute was cut short by the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany under which LGBTQ+ individu-

als, including transgender people, were targeted for persecution and violence. The institute was shuttered, and Hirschfeld's research was destroyed in the infamous book burnings of 1933. Many LGBTQ+ individuals fled the country to escape persecution, while others faced imprisonment, forced sterilisation, and even death in concentration camps. Despite the dark chapter of Nazi oppression, the legacy of Ulrichs and Hirschfeld endured, inspiring future generations of LGBTQ+ activists and scholars. Transgender rights in contemporary Christian society In the ever-evolving landscape of religious attitudes toward gender identity, the Catholic Church finds itself navigating complex terrain, influenced by both tradition and contemporary understanding. Inspired by psychoanalysis and studies of sexuality, modern notions of gender and gender identity have challenged traditional understandings of sex and gender within Catholic doctrine.

Professor of religion at Northwestern University Elizabeth M. Bucar in her essay *Bodies at the Margins* (2010), observes that while the Vatican lacks an official position on sexual reassignment operations, reports suggest a nuanced stance. For instance, documents circulated to papal representatives and bishops' conferences in 2000 and 2002 assert that sex change operations are superficial and external, incapable of altering an individual's inherent sex or gender. This position emphasises the primacy of one's sex assigned at birth, maintaining traditional gender roles and moral duties. Similarly, in 2014, the Southern Baptist Convention, the world's largest Baptist Christian organisation, adopted a resolution affirming that individuals are created within a gender binary of male and female. In more recent years, the Vatican has demonstrated a willingness to engage with contemporary discourse on transgender rights within the Catholic Church. In a significant step toward inclusion, the Vatican's doctrinal office announced in 2020 that transgender people, under certain circumstances, can receive baptism and serve as godparents.

# Iran-Israel conflict: Escalation could cast shadow on India's oil trade

Any escalation in the Iran-Israel conflict could impact India by way of costlier crude oil imports as geopolitical tensions in West Asia would bump up risk premiums, apart from fuelling concerns of potential supply disruptions from the oil-rich region. According to industry insiders, while the situation is still developing and it would take a few days to assess the real risk to regional and global oil flows, international oil prices could see high volatility in the immediate-to-near term. India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its requirement. Given the country's extremely high import dependency, India's economy is highly sensitive to oil price volatility. Apart from inflationary pressures, high oil prices have implications for India's trade balance, foreign exchange reserves, the value of the rupee, and the overall health of the economy.

International oil prices have seen a spurt over the past few days amid the build-up in tensions between Iran and Israel, with global benchmark Brent crude breaching the \$90-per-barrel mark. Prices were already seeing an uptick due to production cuts by major oil producers, and the rise in tensions in the Middle East are seen adding more upward pressure on prices. Some oil market analysts and industry watchers have started indicating that oil prices could be headed to \$100 per barrel and beyond if the Iran-Israel conflict majorly impacts physical availability of oil due to supply and transportation disruptions, or potential attacks on oil production and processing facilities. "Whenever there is a war-type situation in a region that is critical for oil supply or transportation, both speculative and real risks emerge. While the speculative risks (related to trading of oil) get built into prices fairly quickly, real risks (those related to actual production and supply) take slightly longer to emerge. Till the time the real risks are a bit clearer, there could be high volatility in prices," said Mukesh Kumar Surana, CEO of Ratnagiri Refinery and Petrochemicals, and former chairman of public sector refiner Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL).

To be sure, India currently does not import Iranian oil as Tehran is under sanctions from the United States (US). However, another major buyer — China — does import large volumes of Iranian oil. If the conflict leads to Iranian supply getting hit, India's competition with China for oil barrels from other suppliers — particularly Russia — is bound to intensify. India and China are currently the biggest buyers of the discounted Russian crude. "If something were to happen to Iran's crude production, it would first and foremost impact the flat prices of crude oil. Any bombing, any damage to infrastructure would lift oil prices well above \$90 per barrel. India, being one of the world's most import-dependent buyers of oil, would inevitably feel the pinch of higher prices," said Viktor Katona, head of crude analysis at commodity market intelligence firm Kpler.

India does buy large volumes of crude oil from other West Asian suppliers like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emir-

ates (UAE). Any major supply disruption in the wider region as a result of the conflict could impact supplies as well as prices. Officials in India's refining sector said that they are closely watching the developing situation to assess the impact on supply and prices. According to industry insiders, among the key things to watch out for would be the conflict's impact on oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, as the lion's share of India's West Asian oil supplies come from that route. With the Suez Canal-Red Sea shipping route already impacted by attacks from Iran-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen, a major disruption around the Strait of Hormuz could take a massive toll on global and regional oil flows. "For India, the biggest risk of a wider conflagration in the Middle East would be mostly its crude supply. All Iraqi and Saudi barrels moving to India pass through the Strait of Hormuz, so any shutting of that passage would trigger a panic buying spree with Indian refiners," Katona said. He, however, added that it is "very unlikely" that the Strait of Hormuz would get impacted as tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran are not high currently.

In March, Russia was India's top source of crude and accounted for 33 per



cent of New Delhi's total crude oil imports during the month, as per ship tracking data from Kpler. Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE had a cumulative share of almost 48 per cent in India's total oil imports in March. At this stage, refinery sector officials do not appear too concerned about availability of oil, even as concerns of a potential upswing in prices intensify. "We are fairly confident of securing our oil supply as India's supplier base is quite large and diversified. But price-related concerns will definitely be

there if the conflict intensifies. These are early days and we will wait and watch," a senior official with a public sector refiner said on the condition of anonymity. High oil prices are bound to exert pressure on refiners and fuel retailers' financials as they could end up incurring losses on fuel sales, unless they decide to hike retail fuel prices in line with global rates.

However, a price increase may not be feasible for the next few weeks in view of the Lok Sabha polls.

## From IT bots to AI deepfakes: The evolution of election-related misinformation in India

Take this pithy declaration in WhatsApp circulation from 2019, ahead of India's General Elections: UNESCO Declare India's "Jana Gana Mana" the World's Best National Anthem. By now, 'UNESCO declares India' anything is a recognisable template; the forward holds celebrity status on the misinformation runway. Try another. In a recent YouTube short, Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes to life. He speaks about freedom fighter Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Hindi, before continuing his speech in three other languages. His lip movements are in sync, the timbre of his voice maintained. The short has 190 views. Real or fake? A bit of both. This election season, misinformation has a new face. This time, it smiles, talks and woos the Indian voter with an ingenuity that is hard to detect and harder to regulate. Mr. Modi's almost believable speech is a peek into the wide and sweeping force of generative AI to disrupt the largest election season in history. The 2019 elections were no stranger to hate speech and disinformation campaigns, but the technology that enables this ecosystem has revolutionised at warp speed. The impulse to deceive has found a newer, more eager outlet in the last five years.

Rights agencies warn, louder than ever, that the average Indian voter in 2024 is at the highest risk of electoral misinformation. There are knowledge gaps in people's ability to detect what is real and what is AI, leaving them vulnerable to de-

ception and disenfranchisement. Social media companies are struggling to contain fake news and propaganda; the Indian Government is updating existing legislation to better handle the surge in deepfakes online. The chambers of synthetic chaos have limitless possibilities; in part undermining trust and truth in a democracy. The Hindu spoke with legal experts, activists, and even a professional deepfake maker to place misinformation in a continuum — tracing its growth and comparing its course.

The 2019 General Election was fought on social media. A majority of campaigns by leading parties "incorporated online misinformation into their campaign strategies, which included both lies about their opponents as well as propaganda," according to a 2022 paper. The researchers identified sophisticated campaigns using forwarded WhatsApp messages and the mass deployment of IT bots on Facebook to disseminate doctored photos, publish coordinated content and post fake videos. The vast majority of erroneous information came from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC); "both parties were also sources and targets of misinformation." Another report by the Digital Forensic Research Lab showed automated 'bots' were boosting hashtags and trying to manipulate traffic on Twitter in February 2019. The elections also stood out for two visible forces of falsity: ineffectual content mod-

eration in regional languages, and the spread of hate speech. A 2021 Reuters investigation found lapses in Facebook's policy to moderate regional content: the company did not hire enough workers who possessed the language skills or the local context to flag objectionable content in developing countries like India. The AI tools the company was using to identify these violating bits were ineffective. In the run-up to five State Assembly elections in 2021, Facebook partnered with eight fact-checking organisations to fact-check election-related content in Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, and Assamese. The 2019 online campaigning also routinely saw rousing tides of hate speech. But 80% of incendiary posts attacking caste and religious minorities stayed up on Facebook even after it was reported. Thenmozhi Soundararajan, the founder of Equality Labs, told The New York Times earlier. A Vice investigation also found that parties had "weaponised the platforms [of Whatsapp and Facebook] to spread incendiary messages to supporters, heightening fears that online anger could spill over into real-world violence." The old channels of mis- and disinformation this year are creating new, cavernous paths, according to experts. Take the infamous IT bots: today's large language models are enhancing bots with new features and efficiency, imbuing them with a deceptive human-like persona, according to a 2024 analysis published in PNAS Nexus.experts.

# Naseeruddin Shah and Ashok Lal write: Why religion must only be for adults

The lead headline of a prominent newspaper on April 5 reads, 'Government to record parents' religion to register births'. The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023, was passed by Parliament on August 11 last year. This Act mandates the maintenance of a birth and death database at the national level, which may be used to update various databases, including the National Population Register (NPR), electoral rolls, Aadhaar number, ration card, passport, driving licence, property registration, and others as may be notified.

The Amendment also mandates the registration of the religion of the parents, if they belong to different religions, against the column of the child's religion. This, deceptively, gives the law a liberal look. To us, labelling a child's religion at birth is a retrogressive and dangerous practice. Let us clarify the title: By adult, we don't mean the legal age for voting or marrying. An adult here means an individual who has grown up enough to develop an individualistic moral framework. Religion refers to organised religions. In legal terms, "adult" encompasses traits that are physical in nature. However, religion is quasi-meta-physical. To club it with the acquired DNA of the child imposes restrictions on their freedom and threatens to retard their growth. It is, in that sense, a violation of human rights. It is also a dangerous law because it damages the democratic fibre and promotes communalism, patriarchy and majoritarianism.

The fact that some states have passed a law against "love jihad", a romantic association or marriage of a Muslim male with a Hindu girl, points out that the provision may not be an innocent one. At the very least, it is patriarchal. First, the question of human rights. A child supposedly has to grow to adulthood to make an informed choice about voting or marrying. There is no law, though, which compels anyone to vote or marry. The adult child has the freedom to refrain from making a choice. However, organised religion imposes, sometimes surreptitiously, but often directly, dos and don'ts, as also rights and wrongs. The hapless child has no choice but to accept the mythological "truths" and the traditional "wisdom" of the parents and other elders, and social pressures — the so-called "sanskaar" or expected norms, rituals and rites. Such subtle but intense brainwashing interferes with the child's innate scientific temper, spiritual and individualistic growth. Research shows that 80 per cent of a child's brain development occurs within the first 1,000 days of life. The ambient orthodox, even liberal, surroundings during this period account for the child's life-long and indelible attitudes — and they could be grossly retrogressive, repressive, even inhuman. The impact of the environment shapes a child's development based on their own moral framework for what is right and wrong. Physical and mental impairments caused by DNA can potentially be recognised and corrected by technological or medical sciences, but the impairments caused by prejudices and predetermined "truths" to

one's belief system, humaneness, sensitivity, and behaviour tend to be permanent. The beliefs and persuasions that a child is born into become their reality, their truth.

In his journey, after the age of 30, it dawned upon Gautama Buddha that: "The life I have yet to live, / If it must be a mirror of my Self, / Then break free I must from my own boundaries / from the shelter of my illusory certainties." Had Gautama not attained spiritual maturity, he would have remained unaware of being ensnared in a web of beliefs and intuitions not truly his own, failing to recognise their misalignment with his authentic self. Consequently, the world would have been denied access to a humane life philosophy that has provided solace and direction to countless individuals worldwide. While not everyone can emulate Gautama Buddha, societal norms and the law should not present insurmountable barriers to a child's potential to forge their own unique path.

An established religion can exhibit extreme cruelty towards individuals of a scientific bent of mind, free thinkers and intellectuals. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, had branded the Italian physicist and astronomer Galileo as a heretic and subjected him to punishment. In 1633, the Church accused Galileo of endorsing the belief — deemed false and contrary to religious scriptures — that the Sun is the centre of the world and stationary and that the Earth orbits around it. Ironically, Galileo's groundbreaking discoveries not only laid the groundwork for the theories of Newton and Einstein but also paved the way for the development of modern phys-



ics as we know it today. The phrase "The Child is father of the Man", originating from William Wordsworth's poem 'My Heart Leaps Up', transcends mere poetic expression. It encapsulates the profound truth that children play a foundational role in shaping successive generations. The environment in which a child grows up holds the power to mould their mindset and, by extension, influence the world around them. However, this influence can carry a dual nature, posing a significant risk of the child either perpetuating or falling victim to divisive ideologies such as communalism,

casteism, and violent expressions of hatred, all under the guise of self-righteousness. Such tendencies can foster majoritarianism and desensitise individuals to social and economic inequalities. Even well-intentioned parents, entrenched in inherited beliefs spanning centuries, may inadvertently stifle the true essence of their child. Furthermore, lawmakers have the potential to perpetuate and institutionalise such forms of cruelty. Lal is an author, theatre and cine personality and Shah is a Hindi/Urdu playwright, poet and author. The lines quoted above are from a poem by Lal

## Tesla sacks over 14,000 employees including top executives, cites cost reduction

Tesla CEO Elon Musk is cutting down 10% of Tesla's global workforce, which could impact at least 14,000 employees globally as part of a major reorganisation and cost-cutting push.

The layoffs come just a few weeks after Tesla reported its first year-over-year drop in vehicle deliveries since 2020. In an internal email obtained by Electrek, Musk cited the need to "streamline the company for the next phase of growth" as the reason for the mass job cuts. "There is nothing I hate more, but it must be done," Musk wrote in the memo to employees. He explained that Tesla's rapid expansion to multiple factories worldwide has led to role duplication that needs to be trimmed.

Musk elaborated on X/Twitter that Tesla goes through a major reorganisation every 5 years or so as it gears up for its next growth cycle. This round is clearly designed to make Tesla leaner and meaner as it prepares to launch its next-generation vehicles. The layoffs are already

impacting high-level executives too. Senior VP Drew Baglino, who oversaw Tesla's powertrain and energy divisions during his 18-year stint, is among those departing. Rohan Patel, Tesla's head of policy, also seems to have been let go judging by his vanished company badge on X.

It's the latest bit of turbulence for Tesla amid slowing sales growth projections and a missed delivery target last quarter. The company is clearly trying to cut costs and boost productivity heading into Q2 earnings on April 23. The news comes amid rumours that Musk may announce plans to invest in a new Tesla factory in India during an upcoming meeting with PM Modi later this month.

You can read the full memo below: "Over the years, we have grown rapidly with multiple factories scaling around the globe. With this rapid growth there has been duplication of roles and job functions in certain areas. As we prepare the com-

pany for our next phase of growth, it is extremely important to look at every aspect of the company for cost reductions and increasing productivity. As part of this effort, we have done a thorough review of the organisation and made the difficult decision to reduce our headcount by more than 10% globally. There is nothing I hate more, but it must be done. This will enable us to be lean, innovative and hungry for the next growth phase cycle. I would like to thank everyone who is departing Tesla for their hard work over the years. I'm deeply grateful for your many contributions to our mission and we wish you well in your future opportunities. It is very difficult to say goodbye. For those remaining, I would like to thank you in advance for the difficult job that remains ahead. We are developing some of the most revolutionary technologies in auto, energy and artificial intelligence. As we prepare the company for the next phase of growth, your resolve will make a huge difference in getting us there.

# The strategic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The transformation of India's Look East policy into a robust Act East policy, a realisation of the critical importance of ocean power, and the rapid enhancement in the capabilities of the Chinese People Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, have brought a degree of seriousness to the imperative of developing Indian island territories in general, and the Andaman and Nicobar group in particular. The recent thrust on developing strategic infrastructure, both civilian and military, on the islands is welcome — and decades overdue. The neglect of this strategic island group betrays a lack of strategic maritime vision in the decades since Independence.

What is the strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands?

The islands are located 700 nautical miles (1,300 km) southeast of the Indian mainland. The Malacca Strait, the main waterway that connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, is less than a day's steaming from Port Blair. Sabang in Indonesia is 90 nautical miles southeast of Indira Point (on Great Nicobar island), and Coco Island (Myanmar) is barely 18 nautical miles from the northernmost tip of the Andamans. Should Thailand build the Kra Canal connecting the Gulf of Thailand with the Andaman Sea, its mouth would be about 350 nautical miles east of Port Blair.

The islands share four of India's international maritime zone delimitations with Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. They also give India substantial ocean space under the United Nations Conference on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) in terms of exclusive economic zone and continental shelf. In the foreseeable future, a serious challenge could emanate from a build-up of Chinese maritime forces at the eastern choke points of the Indo-Pacific, namely the Malacca (between Sumatra and the Malay peninsula), Sunda (between Java and Sumatra), Lombok (between Bali and Lombok), and Ombai-Wetar (off East Timor) straits. The A&N Islands should be the first line of offence against any attempt from the East to undermine India's maritime security. While some effort was made to leverage this locational advantage with the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) being constituted as a tri-services command in 2001, subsequent efforts have been grossly inadequate.

Why has the pace of developing strategic infrastructure in A&N been slow?

First, it is fairly recently that political decision-makers have realised that the islands are strategically critical for India's security. The reasons behind the realisation include the unprecedented expansion of the PLA Navy. Second, the distance from the mainland and difficulties of developing infrastructure have been used as an excuse to delay and stall various projects. Third, complex procedures for obtaining environmental clearances even for small projects have been a dampener. Regulations on the conservation of forests and native tribes have complicated issues of land acquisition. Fourth, the development of islands and strategic infrastructure is a

multi-dimensional project involving several ministries, departments, and agencies, that presents significant coordination challenges. Finally, the conflict between a long-term strategic vision and immediate political gains has often tilted in favour of the latter.

What should strategic infrastructure development in these islands focus on?

The first requirement of maritime security is to keep the vast area around the islands under surveillance. The security of all 836 islands, both inhabited and uninhabited, must be ensured against attempts at their occupation or use by entities engaged in unlawful activities. Second, a strong element of deterrence must be ensured against any naval misadventure from the East. Third, infrastructure that can bolster India's maritime economy must be built on the southern group of islands that is strategically located vis-à-vis the main shipping lane from the Indian Ocean to South East Asia.

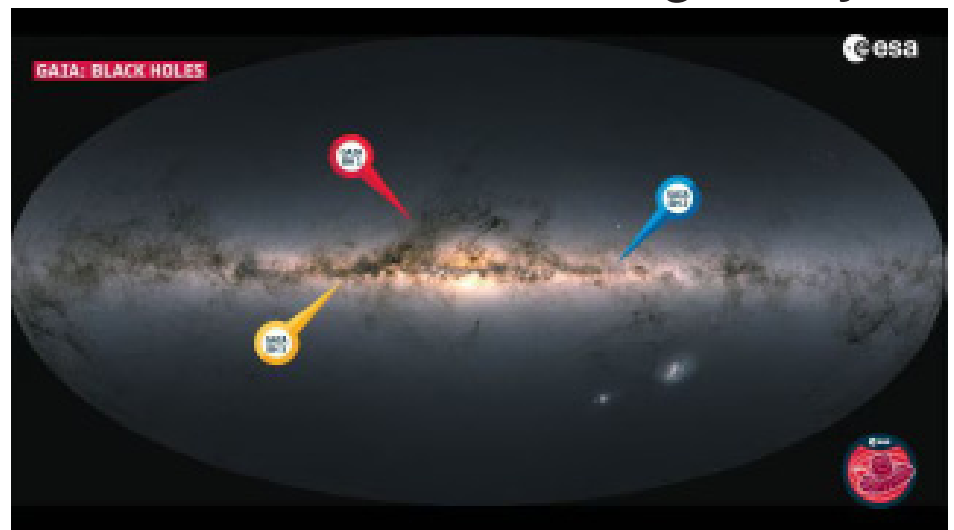
Fourth, ease of travel to and between the islands is key. Without rapid movement of people and goods, the pace of development will remain slow. Improved transportation will help to create and sustain the tourism potential of the islands. Fifth, the islands' dependence on mainland support, whether in respect of foodstuffs or relevant local industries that support maintenance, repair, and other services, must be reduced to the extent possible. And what kind of infrastructure should be prioritised on the islands? The islands stretch 420 nautical miles (777 km) from north to south. This sea area needs to be monitored and patrolled by aircraft and surface platforms. Separate airfields with long runways that can operate Boeing 737-sized aircraft are essential. Ports and fuel storages must be built in both the northern and southern groups of the islands for ships' operational turnaround without the need to return to Port Blair. The Army, Navy, and Air Force must not only commit more forces, but station the right mix of assets at the ANC. The presence of troops must match the requirement to keep the islands sanitised at all times. There is a need to ultimately base surveillance and fighter aircraft there, and frequent detachments must operate in the interim. Work on the Galathea Bay (Great Nicobar Island) transshipment port must be expedited. Maritime services such as repair and logistics must be developed for international and Indian shipping. Road networks, high-speed inter-island ferry services, and a seaplane terminal must be developed. The pace of development must be enhanced by sourcing suitable material from abroad, utilising international expertise on creating marine infrastructure, and using components that can withstand the weather and possible seismic shocks. Forest and environmental clearances must be accorded with minimum red tape. The concessions for defence infrastructure allowed along India's northern borders must be extended to the A&N Islands. Planned habitation of uninhabited islands should be considered by providing incentives such as free or subsidised



land, where eco-friendly entrepreneurial efforts could be encouraged. India could also explore the possibility of leveraging international

arrangements in the Indo-Pacific such as the Quad and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) to catalyse development efforts on the islands.

## 'Sleeping giant' black hole discovered in our galaxy



The European Space Agency on Tuesday said scientists uncovered a "sleeping giant" black hole in the constellation Aquila less than 2,000 light-years from our planet. It is nearly 33 times the mass of our Sun, and this is the first time such a big black hole of stellar origin this big has been discovered in the Milky Way.

In fact, black holes of this type have only been discovered in very distant galaxies and the new discovery challenges scientific ideas about how massive stars come about and grow. In a black hole, matter is so densely packed that nothing can escape its colossal gravitational pull, not even light.

Most stellar-mass black holes that scientists discovered are sucking in matter from a nearby star. This material falls into the black hole at such high speeds that it heats up and releases X-ray radiation.

Sometimes, black holes do not have any stars close enough for them to steal matter from and this means they do not generate any light, making them extremely difficult to spot. Astronomers call these black holes "dormant." They discover such black holes by carrying out complex tests on data of motions of billions of stars to see if anything is out of the ordinary. An invisible "dormant" black hole can affect the movement of stars that are close enough to it. While looking for such "odd stars," researchers discovered an old giant star in the constellation Aquila. They analysed a wobble in its path in detail and found that it was locked in an orbital motion with a dormant black hole with exceptionally high mass. This is the third dormant black hole discovered using the space agency's Gaia space observatory and has been named "Gaia BH3."