

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Pakistani producer announces film on Rabindranath Tagore's short story 'Shasti'

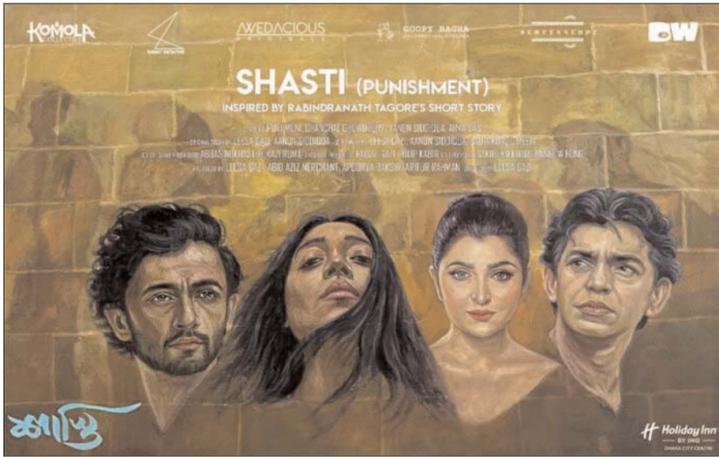
**KARACHI, MAR 9:** Pakistani producer Abid Merchant has announced an international co-production film based on Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's 1893 short story "Shasti" (Punishment).

The ambitious project, which would involve industry professionals from Pakistan, Bangladesh, United States, UK, Hong Kong and Australia, will be helmed by Bangladeshi filmmaker Leesa Gazi, known for her critically-acclaimed 2025 title "A House Named Shohana".

"We have chosen Leesa Gazi, a filmmaker from Bangladesh, to direct the film," Merchant, who will produce the movie through his banner Sanat Initiative, said.

The film's main cast includes two of Bangladesh's biggest stars — Pori Moni and Chanchal Chowdhury — alongside co-writer Aanon Siddiqua and Australian-Bengali actor Arka Das.

Merchant said the movie is a reimagining of Tagore's short story which revolved around two brothers and



their wives and is a murder mystery and courtroom drama.

"It's not an art-house project. It is a commercial venture but one that we want to release internationally in several languages," he said.

Asked about the absence of Pakistani actors from the cast, the producer said, "It is rooted in Bangladesh's cultural context, so authenticity is crucial."

The script has completed its first and second drafts and is currently being polished, with dialogue writing

underway. Budget discussions are also in their final stages," he said.

According to Variety, the film will draw from Tagore's source material.

"The film follows the mysterious death of influencer Lucky, allegedly at the hands of her sister-in-law Meera, which triggers a media frenzy. As a rigged trial unfolds, the narrative explores themes of family secrets, betrayal and manipulation within a city hungry for punishment," the report said. Pre-production is sched-

uled to begin in September, with filming planned for October and November in Dhaka.

Merchant's previous production venture "Wakhri" received international attention and had a theatrical run, but remains limited in terms of global streaming exposure.

Another of his productions, the 2020 drama "I'll Meet You There", starring Faran Tahir and Qavi Khan, was banned in Pakistan. "It was labelled anti-Islam," Merchant said. (PTI)

## Physical activity aligned with climate action offers greater combined benefits: Study

**NEW DELHI, MAR 9:** Well-designed physical activity initiatives that support walking, cycling and public transport can simultaneously contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation and promote health and equity, according to a study.

Researchers, including those from the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand, have developed a 'physical activity and climate change' model, a conceptual framework offering a practical basis for integrated, equitable and sustainable solutions.

"Aligning physical activity and climate change agendas is more powerful than addressing them separately, offering greater combined benefits for population and environmental health," authors wrote in the paper describing the model published in the journal Nature Health.

The paper is among a se-

ries of three indicating that current efforts directed at promoting engagement in physical activity are insufficient, and a coordinated action is required to ensure that physical activity contributes towards public health and society goals, including climate resilience.

According to the physical activity and climate change model, by making outdoor environments unsafe or inaccessible through extreme weather events such as heatwaves and flooding, climate change can undermine one's physical activity.

Conversely, physical activity initiatives, especially those related to active transport and urban design, can help mitigate climate change by reducing a reliance on motor transport and supporting a low-emissions living, the researchers said.

In another paper, published in the journal Nature

Medicine, researchers including those from the University of Texas at Austin, US, analysed physical activity data from 68 countries and found persistent inequalities in the ways people globally are active.

Access to active leisure, such as recreational exercise — the only activity type consistently driven by choice — was found to be 40 percentage points higher among socially advantaged groups (wealthy men in high-income countries), compared to the less-advantaged groups (poor women in low-income countries).

Physical activity driven by economic necessity, such as active labour, was found to be higher among disadvantaged populations.

In the third paper, published in the journal Nature Health, researchers including those from the University of Texas Health Science Cen-

ter at Houston, assessed 661 national policy documents to promote physical activity from 200 countries, developed between 2004 and 2025.

While most countries were analysed to have developed and adopted physical activity policies, evidence of implementation remains limited — 38.7 per cent (256) of the 661 policies analysed in the study assigned actions to three or more government sectors such as health and education, indicating a lack of cross-sectoral collaboration.

Through interviews with 46 key stakeholders — including government officials, academics, policy leaders, and civil society representatives — the researchers identified low but rising political priority for physical activity as a key barrier to implementation.

## Govt Says Air India Plane Crash Probe Report Will Be Out "Very Soon"

**NEW DELHI, MAR 9:** Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu on Monday informed the Rajya Sabha that the AAIB probe into the fatal crash of the Air India aircraft in June last year is progressing at a very good pace, and the investigation report will be out "very soon".

Replying to a supplementary query during the Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Naidu said the ministry is doing its best to ensure flight operations and to bring back Indians stranded due to the West Asia conflict.

The minister, responding to various queries, told the House that the probe report into the Air India plane crash would be out soon.

Air India's Boeing 787-8 plane operating the flight AI171 enroute to London-Gatwick crashed soon after take off from Ahmedabad on June 12, 2025, killing 260 people, including 241 per-



sons onboard, and the crash is being probed by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB).

"Regarding the AI171 crash that happened in June last year, the investigation is going at a very good pace, and all the resources that are required for AAIB, the primary agency which is looking into the investigation, the ministry is providing."

"And I would say that very soon, within the completion of the year, the report should be out," Naidu said.

been issued to passengers to ensure that there is no confusion, he added.

"From the Ministry side, I can tell the house that whatever best we can do in terms of having safe operations and making people travel from those destinations back to India, we can do with the help of the airlines. They (airlines) have also been very considerate," Naidu said.

While noting that airlines have been thoroughly looking at slots for operating the services amid the West Asia crisis, the minister said that around 90,000 people have been able to travel to India in the last week itself. "We are seeing the situation might get better in the days ahead, so that more people can also travel through civil aviation," he said.

The escalating conflict involving the US, Israel and Iran has significantly disrupted flight operations due to airspace closures in the West Asia region.

## Nepal polls: RSP wins 124 seats followed by NC 17

**KATHMANDU, Mar 9:** The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) is heading towards a two-thirds majority in Nepal's parliamentary polls, securing 124 seats under direct voting and over 40 lakh votes under the proportionate-voting system as on Monday morning.

The RSP has won 124 seats under direct voting and is leading in one, whereas the Nepali Congress (NC) has won 17 seats.

The CPN-UML has won eight seats, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) seven, and the Shram Sanskriti Party (SSP) three, while the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and an Independent candidate have won one seat each.

So far, the results for 161 of the 165



seats have been declared under direct voting. The outcome on the remaining four seats is expected to be declared in the afternoon.

Under proportionate voting, the RSP has secured 4049,604 votes, fol-

lowed by the NC at 13,60,281, the CPN-UML 1150,679, the NCP 591,940, the Shram Sanskriti Party 291,965, the Janata Samajwadi Party 1,16,463 and the Rastriya Parivartan Party 276,931.

With more than 40 lakh votes under the proportional representation system, the RSP is expected to secure at least 40 additional seats, taking its tally to around 164 seats in the 275-member House of Representatives, which is well above the 138 needed for a simple majority, political observers said.

Nepal is set to witness its first Madhesi prime minister — Balendra Shah — who will also be the youngest elected executive head in the history of the Himalayan country. (PTI)

## Indian mission in Houston commemorates 150 years of 'Vande Mataram'

**HOUSTON, MAR 9:** The Consulate General of India in Houston has hosted an event commemorating 150 years of the national song, "Vande Mataram".

The cultural gala held on Sunday was attended by over 800 members of the Indian diaspora and friends of India.

It featured a pan-Indian musical journey, representing the diverse traditions of India, and served as a grand musical homage to the iconic anthem composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1875.

The celebration highlighted the song's enduring role as the "heartbeat of India" and a symbol of national unity during the year-long global commemoration of this milestone, the mission said.



In his remarks, Consul General D C Manjunath said "Vande Mataram" remains a "message of unity, devotion, and love for the motherland that continues to inspire generations".

He said the 150-year legacy reflects an "unwavering connection to the motherland" shared by the global Indian community.

The event was organised in collaboration with the Centre for Indian Classical Music (CICMH) and Vallabh Priti Seva Samaj Haveli.

The evening opened with a high-energy performance by Moraya Dhol Tasha Pathak, setting a vibrant tone for the festivities.

The Metroplex Tamil Sangham presented a serene

Veena recital, followed by Carnatic classical interpretations of "Vande Mataram".

Students of Maestro Suman Ghosh performed stirring Marathi patriotic works, including B D Savarkar's "Sagara Pran Tal-malala", while the Tagore Society of Houston paid tribute to the song's Bengali roots.

The celebration reached its crescendo when Pandit Suman Ghosh and CICMH artists presented a Hindustani classical rendition of "Vande Mataram" in Raag Desh.

The evening was narratively woven together by Shashikala Ghosh.

The event also featured a specially curated historical exhibition titled "150 Years of Vande Mataram" and a Consular Information Desk to guide the diaspora. (PTI)

## House should discuss India's stance, citizens' safety amid wartime conditions: Akhilesh Yadav

**LUCKNOW, MAR 9:** Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Monday said that in view of the prevailing "wartime conditions" in the Middle East, India's priority should be to deliberate on key issues related to national security, foreign policy and the safety of its citizens stranded abroad.

In an X post, the Samajwadi Party chief said that when the Budget Session of Parliament went into recess, the issues before the country

were different; the current circumstances demand urgent attention to matters arising out of the conflict situation.

Yadav said the discussions should focus on India's official stance and opinion in the context of the war, and also examine "the issue of the country's foreign policy being mortgaged".

Raising concerns about decisions related to essential supplies such as oil, Yadav alleged that the country has

shifted from independent decision-making to "taking orders from the United States" in such matters.

Questions related to India's sovereignty and self-reliance should also be addressed in the current scenario, he said.

Yadav stressed the need to ensure the safety of Indian citizens working in or travelling to regions affected by the war and called for steps to bring them back safely.

He also referred to journal-

ists and media personnel who had travelled with Prime Minister Narendra Modi but were unable to return to the country due to the outbreak of the war, urging that arrangements be made to ensure their safe return.

In addition, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said, the government should ensure regular supply of essential commodities affected by the conflict and take measures to control rising prices. (PTI)

## Excise Policy: Delhi HC seeks stand of Kejriwal, Sisodia on CBI plea against discharge

**NEW DELHI, MAR 9:** The Delhi High Court on Monday sought the stand of former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others on a petition by the CBI challenging their discharge in the liquor policy case by the trial court.

Justice Swarasa Kanta Sharma listed the CBI's petition for hearing on March 16.

The court said it would pass an order asking the trial court to defer proceedings to a later date in the connected money laundering case

probed by the Enforcement Directorate.

On a request made by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, the court further indicated that it would stay the operation of the "prejudicial" remarks by the trial court on the CBI officials.

Mehta urged the court to decide the CBI's plea finally by fixing a time schedule for hearing.

He contended that the trial court order discharging Kejriwal, Sisodia in excise policy case was perverse and "turned the criminal law on its head".

Excise policy case was one of the biggest scams and clear case of corruption, he alleged.

Asserting that the trial court passed an order of acquittal in favour of Kejriwal, Sisodia and others without a trial, Mehta contended that meticulous evidence was collected by the agency to show conspiracy and bribe for a manipulated liquor policy. There is enough evidence against Kejriwal, Sisodia and other accused for framing for charges and the CBI's case was supported by the approvers and wit-

nesses, he added.

On February 27, the trial court discharged Kejriwal, Sisodia and 21 others, pulling up the CBI by saying its case was wholly unable to survive judicial scrutiny and stood discredited in its entirety.

Among the 21 people given a clean chit in the case is Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha.

The CBI has been probing alleged corruption in the formulation and execution of the erstwhile AAP government's now-scrapped excise policy. (Agencies)

**NEW DELHI, MAR 9:** Union Minister J P Nadda on Monday said the Opposition only wants "anarchy" as the Congress and other Opposition parties created ruckus and staged a walkout in the Rajya Sabha during a statement by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on the situation in West Asia.

Soon after obituary references and laying of listed papers, Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan called Jaishankar to make the statement.

However, Congress President and Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge sought permission to speak.

After being permitted by the Chair, he said the escalation in the West Asia conflict will affect the country's eco-



nomically and endanger the security and livelihood of Indian citizens working there.

"I request a short-duration discussion on emerging challenges for energy security and the fast-changing geopolitical situation in West Asia

affecting India's energy security," Kharge said.

The Chairman told Kharge he would come back to him, and again asked Jaishankar to make the statement.

As the minister started making the statement, MPs belonging to the Congress

and other Opposition parties were on their feet and insisted that Kharge be allowed to complete his remarks, and also demanded a short discussion.

Later, the entire Opposition staged a walkout from the House while the minister was making his statement.

After Jaishankar's statement, Leader of the House Nadda termed the Opposition's behaviour as irresponsible and said they only want to create anarchy and hooliganism.

The senior BJP leader also said that the Opposition parties have no interest in the country's development, and have been staging walkouts during ministers' replies on various debates and discussions.