

United Breweries makes truce with Telangana govt for now; Kingfisher beer flows into State

Hyderabad: United Breweries, maker of Kingfisher beer, has decided to resume the supply of beer to Telangana Beverages Corporation Limited (TGBCL) with immediate effect. In a filing to exchange on January 20, it said: "We wish to inform you that the company has decided to resume the supply of its beer to Telangana Beverages Corporation Limited (TGBCL) with immediate effect. We have been in talks with TGBCL, and these have been constructive discussions. TGBCL has assured us it will address our issues with pricing and outstanding payments in a timely manner." It, however, added that, "This is an interim decision in the interest of consumers, workers and stakeholders." UBL's share price jumped over 6 per cent on the BSE on January 20, following the announcement. On Tuesday (January 21), the shares were up 0.95 per cent and were trading at Rs 2,080.30 at 12:20 pm. UBL had suspended the supply of beer to the state-owned corporation due to the non-revision of the basic price of its beer from 2019-20 by the TSBCL. What irked the company more was that the Telangana

government had increased beer prices but did not increase the base price paid to the manufacturers. Moreover, the inordinate delay in payments from TGBCL has resulted in escalating losses, making its operations in the State unviable. UBL contributes more than Rs 4,500 crore to the State exchequer every year, sources said. Brewers Association of India Director General Vinod Giri told PTI that the dues to the alcohol sector for supplies made during the period February to August 2024 stood at Rs 3,900 crore. The Telangana government owes Rs 658.95 crore to United Breweries, according to State Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao. United Breweries' popular brands of Kingfisher are most popular in Telangana apart from Kalyani Black, Heineken, and Amstel Bier. In fact, Kingfisher beer brands account for 70 per cent of the total beer sales in the State, industry sources say. According to CNBC-TV18, United Breweries reversed its decision only after the Telangana government confirmed that it will hike prices in 30-45 days. The report also added that the outstanding dues are likely to be cleared in in-



stallments in the next 12 to 13 months. The UBL has appealed to the State government to increase beer prices by 33.1 per cent. However, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy rejected stating that the government would not give in to pressure tactics. As a result of

the fallout, around 1,500 workers of UBL at its two units near Sangareddy were laid off. CPI (M) leader Chukka Ramulu said the TGBCL was paying just Rs 25 to Rs 30 per beer to UBL while it was being sold at Rs 150 to Rs 160 in the open market.

Demand for larger homes takes a beating in Hyderabad for the first time in 6 years



Hyderabad: The positive sentiment of home buyers to have bigger living spaces that came up in Hyderabad over the last decade seems to have taken a beating in one year. The demand for more spacious flats in the city has primarily grown since 2019 and rose by 24 per cent till last year. According to the latest data released by Anarock on Wednesday, the average flat size in

Hyderabad in this six-year period rose from 1,700 sq. ft. in 2019 to 2,103 sq. ft. in 2024. However, the growth was stunted and between 2023 and 2024, Hyderabad had the average flat size decrease by 9 per cent from 2,299 sq. ft. in 2023 to 2,103 sq. ft. in 2024. Despite a significant rise in housing prices across cities in 2024, homebuyers continue their quest for bigger living spaces across the country. Stat-

ing this, Anarock based on its data, says the average flat sizes in the top seven cities rose by 8 per cent annually in 2024 – from 1,420 sq. ft. in 2023 to 1,540 sq. ft. in 2024. The data shows that Hyderabad however is the only city to see flat sizes decrease in this period. Anarock report says, "In Hyderabad, the average flat size rose 24% in this six-year period – from 1,700 sq. ft. in 2019 to 2,103 sq. ft. in 2024. Contrastingly, between 2023 and 2024, Hyderabad was the only city to see the average flat size decrease (by 9%)." Meanwhile, at 29 per cent, NCR saw the highest annual growth of average flat size – from 1,890 sq. ft. in 2023 to 2,435 sq. ft. in 2024. Anuj Puri, Chairman, Anarock Group

said, "This surge is primarily attributable to the increased new luxury housing supply in the region over the last one year. Developers here are closely tracking and responding to demand, which is why NCR has seen significant new supply in the above Rs 1.5 crore price bracket. Size is one of the key defining characteristics of luxury homes. Chronically space-constrained MMR saw the lowest average flat size growths in this six-year period," adds Puri. "The average flat size in MMR was 784 sq. ft. in 2019 and increased by 8% to 849 sq. ft. in 2024." Average flat sizes in the other southern cities – Chennai and Bengaluru – were 1,445 and 1,660 sq. ft. respectively in 2024.

More anger, chaos spill out on Day 2 of Gram Sabhas across Telangana

Hyderabad: Gram Sabhas across Telangana continued to be battlegrounds as villagers voiced their anger against the Congress government, accusing it of failing to deliver on its promises. For the second consecutive day, the public meetings were marred by protests, clashes and heavy police presence, reflecting widespread discontent over unfulfilled welfare schemes. The officials faced the people's ire, with mounting pressure to address grievances. In Paleru constituency, villagers in Chennaram and

Siddique Nagar dismantled Gram Sabha tents in frustration over the lack of access to government schemes. They alleged that deserving beneficiaries were ignored, while benefits were extended to ineligible individuals. Similar scenes unfolded in Karimnagar's Kataram mandal, where villagers accused authorities of prioritising the ineligible rich over the eligible poor. In Khammam district, tensions flared in Konijarl mandal as villagers expressed outrage over unkept promises.

It might be time for a dress code overhaul in sports

What do Serena Williams' catsuit, Magnus Carlsen's jeans, and the Norwegian beach handball team's shorts rebellion have in common? No, it's not a new Netflix drama, though it could be. They all exemplify athletes confronting outdated, often bizarre, and occasionally discriminatory dress codes in sports. From pristine tennis whites to buttoned-up chess suits, the rules governing athletic attire often seem like relics from an era when corsets were considered workout gear. Imagine enduring the heat of competition under glaring lights or braving the elements, only to have your outfit spark more controversy than your performance. The world of sports isn't solely about physical feats and strategy; it also involves navigating a tightrope of social norms, cultural politics, and power dynamics. Some of these rules are as rigid as the starched collars they enforce.

Recently, the spotlight fell on world chess champion Magnus Carlsen, who was disqualified from the World Rapid and Blitz Championships for wearing jeans—a garment deemed unfit for the “gentleman's game”. This incident has reignited debates about the relevance of dress codes and their impact on sportsmanship and inclusivity. Chinese grandmaster Zhu Jiner (right) lost to India's R Vaishali in the quarterfinals of the FIDE Women's World Blitz Championship. Photo: Michal Walusza/FIDE) Carlsen's disqualification wasn't the only controversy at the recent Blitz. Zhu Jiner, a Chinese Grandmaster, was fined 0 for wearing boots during the same tournament (Photo: Michal Walusza/FIDE)Origins of dress codes in sports

According to Mehendi Sharma, Assistant Professor of Fashion Design at Pearl Academy, sports dress codes often arise from practicality, tradition, and, at times, prejudice. She says, “Tennis whites symbolised purity in Victorian England, while gymnastics leotards prioritised movement. Chess adopted semi-formal attire to project its image as a refined and intellectual pursuit.” However, these codes frequently uphold exclusivity and rigid traditions. “Like museum exhibits, dress codes preserve the past while questioning the present. Are they about discipline, or do they silently referee culture?” Sharma asks. Carlsen's jeans scandal drew global attention not because dress code violations are rare, but because Carlsen is the “Messi of chess,” as Grandmaster Subbaraman Vijayalakshmi observed. Woman International Master Bommini Mounika Akshaya concurred, saying, “There are always many incidents related to dress code at the World Rapid and Blitz championships. Sometimes, even Grandmasters were not allowed to play the game because they did not follow the dress code.” Carlsen's disqualification wasn't the only controversy at the recent Blitz. Zhu Jiner, a Chinese Grandmaster, was fined \$200 for wearing boots during the same tournament. In a public letter, she said the incident disrupted her focus and cost her a match. Sexism continues to cast a long shadow

Are these dress codes perpetuating systemic biases? Take Serena Williams, for instance—an icon not just for her storied



career but also for her battles against discrimination, on and off the court. At the 2018 French Open, her choice of a functional catsuit designed to prevent blood clots post-pregnancy faced public criticism and an outright ban by the French Tennis Federation. The backlash carried racial and gendered undertones, sparking global outrage. Williams and her sister Venus Williams have faced relentless scrutiny over their attire, which many argue reflects implicit racial bias rather than genuine concern for the game's decorum.

Serena Williams Serena Williams stepped out in a Nike catsuit at the French Open in 2018. (File Photo)

Sexism continues to cast a long shadow over the world of sports, shaping dress codes that often prioritise optics over equity. At the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, the German women's gymnastics team made a powerful statement by donning full-length leotards, rejecting the sport's traditional leotards, often criticised for their overly sexualised designs. Meanwhile, the Norwegian women's beach handball team protested against mandatory bikini bottoms in 2021, further spotlighting the gendered double standards embedded in athletic attire. A 2020 study published in *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* found that the type of clothing worn—revealing versus concealing—can significantly affect women's performance on cognitive tasks. Furthermore, a 2024 study published in *Sport, Education and Society* revealed that 75 per cent of women surveyed had witnessed girls dropping out of school sports due to concerns about uniforms or body image. Classism also permeates sports attire, reinforcing barriers to entry for those outside the elite, as Professor Sharma emphasised. Sports like golf and tennis demand “pristine white” apparel, steeped in an upper-class aesthetic, perpetuating a sense of exclusivity, she added. Chess, though less physically demanding, mirrors this dynamic

through its enforcement of formal dress codes—a nod to its historical association with intellectual elites. Current dress code stipulations by FIDE allow for “national costumes”, but they must be approved by the FIDE Technical Delegate. “What even is a national costume in a country like India?” questions Pravin Thipsay, the first Indian to win the Commonwealth Chess Championship. “Why should we justify our cultural identity?” he adds. These rules, with colonial echoes, marginalise diverse cultural expressions and force athletes into a narrow mould of “acceptability”.

Roger Federer left, and Rafael Nadal pose for a photo prior to the start of the 2008 men's singles final at Wimbledon. (AP Photo) Sports like golf and tennis demand “pristine white” apparel, in some events like the Wimbledon, steeped in an upper-class aesthetic, perpetuating a sense of exclusivity. (AP Photo) Towards a new dress code paradigm

Thipsay highlights the importance of comfort. “Perfectly tailored suits can feel restrictive, especially for those unaccustomed to Western formal wear. Comfort must take precedence, as it directly impacts performance,” he asserts. He also questions the reasoning behind restrictive attire: “Why not Indian formals or cultural attire? Does a Tamilian in Singapore need to justify a kurta to the arbiter?”

Dipa Karmakar, the first Indian woman gymnast to compete at the Olympics, echoes this sentiment. “Uniforms should enhance, not hinder. I've always viewed mine as empowering, but comfort is non-negotiable for peak performance,” she says. Sports dress codes are no longer just about tradition or functionality—they are battlegrounds for representation, equity, and self-expression. And after all, as these trailblazing athletes prove, breaking the rules can sometimes mean making history.

HDFC Life shares soar nearly 12 pc after December quarter earnings

New Delhi: Shares of HDFC Life on Thursday jumped nearly 12 per cent after the firm reported a 14 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 415 crore in the December quarter.

The stock surged 11.15 per cent to Rs 660.55 on the BSE. At the NSE, it soared 11.67 per cent to Rs 663.60. The private sector insurer's profit stood at Rs 365 crore in the year-ago period, HDFC Life said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday. However, total income declined to Rs 16,914 crore in the latest quarter from Rs 26,694 crore in the year-ago period.

The company's solvency ratio also declined to 188 per cent from 190 per cent as



on December 31, 2023 as against the regulatory requirement of 150 per cent. For the nine-month period ended December, the life insurer posted a profit of Rs 1,326 crore as against Rs 1,157 crore in the corresponding period a year ago.

FOGSI Joins Hands with UNICEF to Launch 'Aarogya Yog Yatra' National Campaign in Tirupati

Hyderabad :The Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), India's largest professional organization representing more than 46,000 practitioners of obstetrics and gynecology, in collaboration with UNICEF has launched 'Aarogya Yog Yatra', a groundbreaking campaign on the holistic wellness of mothers and babies in India. Dr. Sunita Tandulwadkar, President of FOGSI, inaugurated this transformative campaign in the spiritual hub of Tirupati. The year-long national initiative, which will traverse 13 of India's most spiritually significant locations, aims to integrate spirituality into medicine and inspire a proactive approach to health among women and doctors. Addressing the audience, Dr. Sunita Tandulwadkar, President, FOGSI, said: "This one-of-its-kind campaign in the world is of great significance as our country has the oldest spiritual traditions in the world. In my 34 years of experience as a doctor, it is spirituality that enabled me to deliver my best every single day. It connects us with the universe's energy, guiding us to heal holistically. This Yatra is a way of sharing this realization with all FOGSI members and the larger community. This national campaign is also focused on fostering a proactive health management culture among women and nurturing healthy pregnancies. Both these can be gamechangers for women's health by drastically reducing female morbidity and mortality." Dr. Syed Hubbe Ali, Health Specialist, UNICEF India, said: "Mental health of pregnant women is a critical but often neglected issue. Pregnancy related stress affects 40% women, depression 20% and anxiety 33% in India. Through this campaign, UNICEF and FOGSI are committing to integrate maternal mental health in the medical community across the country." The inaugural event held at the SVMC Association Build-



ing in Tirupati was attended in strength by medical fraternity and experts, and graced by esteemed dignitaries including Dr. Arani

Srinivasulu, Hon'ble MLA, Tirupati, Dr. Cipai Subramanyam, Hon'ble MLC, Tirupati, Dr. R Sirisha, and Hon'ble Mayor, Tirupati, who

commended the initiative and highlighted its potential to create a profound impact on women's health.

GRMI and MEPSC: A Partnership Redefining Professional Education and Skilling in India

Hyderabad :Global Risk Management Institute (GRMI) and the Management and Entrepreneurship & Professional Skills Council (MEPSC) officially signed an MoU on January 13, 2025, marking a strategic partnership aimed at Risk Management education and skill development in India. The MOU signed between Col Anil Kumar Pokhriyal, CEO, Management & Entrepreneurship and Professional Skills Council (MEPSC) & Mr. Subhashis Nath, Dean & CEO, Global Risk Management Institute, aims at taking a big leap towards skill based professional education in India. The GRMI-MEPSC collaboration is a step toward redefining how professional education is delivered in India. By leveraging MEPSC's expertise and GRMI's innovative practice-oriented approach to risk management education, this alliance promises to create a generation of professionals who are skilled, certified, and ready to lead in a dynamic global business environment. How GRMI and MEPSC collaboration is meant to drive synergy? The jointly delivered programme by GRMI and MEPSC will ensure that the education programme meets stringent national regulatory standards, providing a significant edge in the employment market.

MEPSC's close ties with various industries and GRMI's practice oriented approach will ensure that the skills imparted are industry relevant and in demand. With MEPSC's robust monitoring and assessment mechanisms and GRMI's globally benchmarked institutional processes, the programme is expected to maintain high standards, fostering trust among students, employers, and policymakers. About GRMI - GRMI is a pioneer institute in India in the risk management domain, an Affiliated Member of EFMD Global and India's first EDAP Institute, offering a PGDRM 1-year full-time Post Graduation Diploma in Risk Management, which is recognized as a Level 7 Diploma by OTHM Qualifications UK. The institute offers comprehensive programs covering key areas such as Enterprise Risk Management, Financial Risk Management (FRM), Operational Risk Management, Cybersecurity Risk Management, IT Risk Management, Third-party Risk Management, ESG (Environment, Social, and Governance), and regulatory compliance. Founded and operated by a board comprising of risk professionals and corporate leaders, GRMI is the premier risk management institute in the country. It



operates largely to answer the gap between the economy's demand for trained

risk professionals and the actual supply of such professionals.

Home 2025 Trends & Predictions

Hyderabad :As the year draws to a close, the promise of 2025 brings with it new trends and factors for home technology. The advancements in AI, IoT, and sustainability might impact businesses' decision-making and end-user demand. The air purifier and smart cleaning tools markets are at the forefront of this evolution, driven by growing environmental concerns and heightened awareness of health and hygiene. Integration of Smart Technology Expect more devices like air purifiers that monitor air quality in real time and adjust their settings automatically. Imagine a self-cleaning vacuum like the Dyson WashG1TM paired with a formaldehyde-destroying purifier like the Dyson Purifier Cool TM Formaldehyde. Hands-free, intelligent cleaning and purification, promoting a healthier home environment, will be the standard. Enhanced Design and Quiet Operations

Noise reduction and aesthetic appeal will play a significant role in consumer decisions. Ultra-quiet models and sleek, design-forward air purifiers will align with modern decor preferences, making them suitable for diverse environments, from homes to offices. For example, the Dyson Purifier Big+Quiet™ produces only 56 decibels of noise at full power, this purifier therefore sets a new standard in quiet operation. Advanced Filtration Systems Air pollution is a year-round concern, with Air Quality Index (AQI) levels consistently exceeding WHO stan-

dards. This highlights the importance of choosing the right air purifier, not just during winter, but throughout the year. While HEPA filters remain a cornerstone of air purification, advancements in multi-stage filtration will become mainstream. Combining HEPA with activated carbon, UV-C light, and ionizers will enable purifiers to target a wider range of pollutants, including VOCs, bacteria, and viruses. These innovations will address growing consumer demand for enhanced indoor air safety. Drone-based and Mobile Air Quality Monitoring Drone technology is set to revolutionize air pollution tracking and management, especially in areas with limited infrastructure. Drone-based systems for air purification and monitoring are expected to support extensive environmental cleanup and tracking initiatives. Complementing this innovation, Dyson purifiers, with their powerful projection and cone aerodynamics, ensure clean air circulation across expansive areas. Strategically placing multiple units allows for consistent air quality maintenance in larger spaces. Multifunctionality Multifunctional devices, such as wet-dry vacuums capable of handling both spills and dry debris, are gaining traction. Furthermore, hybrid devices that combine vacuuming and mopping functions are expected to become more prevalent, offering a more streamlined and efficient cleaning experience. For instance, wet and dry-cleaning solutions like the Dyson V12s Detect Slim



Submarine™, an all-in-one vacuum solution that washes, reveals and detangles, offering a more convenient and effective way to clean your home.

FINANCIAL RESULTS (INDIAN GAAP) FOR THE QUARTER AND NINE MONTHS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024

Hyderabad :The Board of Directors of HDFC Bank Limited approved the Bank's (Indian GAAP) results for the quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2024, at its meeting held in Mumbai on Wednesday, January 22, 2025. The accounts have been subjected to a 'Limited Review' by the statutory auditors of the Bank.

CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS:

The Bank's consolidated net revenue was 652.8 billion for the quarter ended December 31, 2024. The consolidated profit after tax for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 was 176.6 billion. The consolidated PAT adjusted for trading & mark to market gains, prior year one-off provisions and prior year tax credits, grew by 13.1%. The consolidated PAT for the nine months ended December 31, 2024 was 519.6 billion. Earnings per share for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 was 23.1 and book value per share as of December 31, 2024 was 656.6.

STANDALONE FINANCIAL RESULTS:

Profit & Loss Account: Quarter ended December 31, 2024

The Bank's net revenue grew by 6.3% to 421.1 billion for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 from 396.1 billion for the quarter ended December 31, 2023.

Net interest income (interest earned less interest expended) for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 grew by 7.7% to ₹ 306.5 billion from 284.7 billion for the quarter ended December 31, 2023. Core net interest margin was at 3.43% on total assets, and 3.62% based on interest earning assets.

Other income (non-interest revenue) for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 was 114.5 billion as against 111.4 billion in the corresponding quarter ended December 31, 2023. The four components of other income for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 were fees & commissions of 81.8 billion (69.4 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year), foreign exchange & derivatives revenue of 14.0 billion (12.1 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year), net trading and mark to market gain of 0.7 billion (gain of 14.7 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year) and miscellaneous income, including recoveries and dividend of 17.9 billion (15.2 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous year). Operating expenses for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 were 171.1 billion, an increase of 7.2% over 159.6 billion



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during the corresponding quarter of the previous year. The cost-to-income ratio for the quarter was at 40.6%. Provisions and contingencies for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 were 31.5 billion as against 42.2 billion for the quarter ended December 31, 2023. Profit before tax (PBT) for the quarter

ended December 31, 2024 was at 218.5 billion. Profit after tax (PAT) for the quarter was at 167.4 billion. PAT, adjusted for trading & mark to market gains, prior year one-off provisions and prior year tax credits, grew by 13.6% over the quarter ended December 31, 2023.

TGSRTC calls reports on privitisation of bus depots untrue

Hyderabad: The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) on Wednesday described reports on privitisation of the bus depots as untrue and said all necessary operations except maintenance and charging of electric buses will be done under the auspices of TGSRTC.

The RTC was making environmentally friendly electric buses available to the citizens as per the Central Government's EV Policy and all operations of buses, including

electric buses at the depots, were being managed entirely under by the RTC.

TGSRTC has been implementing the EV policy adopted across the country in the use of electric buses since 2019. Direct purchase of electric buses is a costly task. In this context, as per the Central Government's EV policy, payments are made to the companies through the Gross Cost Contract (GCC) method, i.e. according to the kilometres the bus travels.

"Each depot has different routes such as rural, urban, etc. It is not possible to run electric buses on all routes. The corporation identifies routes based on the kilometers that electric buses can run. Each depot has a mix of electric and diesel. Like private rental buses, all electric buses are run by the RTC," officials said. The ticket revenue generated by those buses goes directly to the RTC. As per the agreement, cash is paid to the companies based on the kilometres travelled, they said.

Generative AI All India Free Scholarship Test to be held on 2nd ?????



Hyderabad: Quality Thought, a leader in software training, announced the Generative AI Scholarship Test at its Ameerpet institute. This initiative is designed to empower degree and B.Tech students as well as IT professionals, presenting an incredible opportunity to secure a spot in a prestigious Generative AI course valued at one lakh rupees, completely free of charge. On this occasion, Quality Thought's founder and CEO, Ramana Bhupathi, shared key insights about the scholarship test and outlined the numerous benefits available to participants. "This one-hour online Generative AI Scholarship Test, to be held on 2nd February 2025, is a significant step towards enhancing the skill sets of our future innovators," he said. "Our

aim is to provide a platform for both students and professionals to excel in the rapidly evolving field of AI. Eligible candidates can take this test online or offline, ensuring that accessibility is not an issue. We want to empower as many people as possible to take advantage of this opportunity." Alongside him were prominent team members, including Faisal, IT Research Analyst; Anji, Marketing Analyst; and Priyanka, Generative AI Course Manager, who elaborated on the initiative's goals and structure. Eligible candidates range from those who have completed a degree or B.Tech to IT professionals seeking to enhance their skills. Candidates who excel in the exam stand a chance to receive a full fee waiver.

India should align with OpenAI's mega AI Stargate Project

Let us get some context at the outset. A \$500 billion investment over a period of four years to build new artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, in what is less of a solo effort and something that's definitively collaborative. That bodes well for eventual success. This investment amount, which defines aspirations of OpenAI's Stargate Project, is roughly 10% of India's GDP, or gross domestic product. That is the scale. That is the ambition. For chairman Masayoshi Son and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman to credit US President Donald Trump's election as the pivotal moment for this investment, is perhaps the single biggest indicator of the country's intent to dominate the global AI ecosystem.

What's the plan with Stargate? As it is with much about AI, it is all about the models. Versatile, powerful models. The second element to that, is artificial general intelligence, or AGI, something OpenAI has talked about quite a bit in the past few months. They envision this smarter evolution of AI as we know it, as closer to reality than many expect. The reality, we'll only bear witness to eventually. This is, make no mistake about it, a wager to tilt the balance in the favour of the US as far as the AI stakes are concerned. "This infrastructure will secure American

leadership in AI, create hundreds of thousands of American jobs, and generate massive economic benefit for the entire world," OpenAI and Softbank's joint statement makes clear the plan of action. Is there a way for the rest of the world to match this ambition? Is there a way for India to match this ambition? That is, if at all.

While this may be worrying for India at least on the face of it, it may not exactly be so. Government estimates suggest AI adoption will add \$500 billion to India's GDP by the time this year draws to a close, and that'll be spearheaded by AI investments that are expected to the tune US\$ 881 million. But there's more to it than pure numbers. It is about holding the secret code that unlocks a place at the long table of power. Collaboration is key. The initial equity funders for Stargate are SoftBank, OpenAI, Oracle and MGX. The confirmed structure suggests SoftBank will hold financial responsibility, while OpenAI will be responsible for operations. Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son, will be the chairman of the new Stargate Project company. And since this is all about the cutting-edge tech of the future, OpenAI finds willing partners in Arm, Microsoft, Nvidia and Oracle. build the computer systems for this \$500 billion vision for AI dominance.

AI, Reels, Creators, and WhatsApp driving lead gen for auto OEMs and dealerships, reveals Meta and FADA Whitepaper

Hyderabad :Meta and Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) today unveiled a joint whitepaper and playbook highlighting the changing consumer behavior and preferences in the automotive segment driven by digital adoption. With digital influencing consumer behavior and powering the growth of the sector, the findings and recommendations from the whitepaper can unleash digital transformation of auto OEMs and dealerships across India. In 2023, Meta and FADA had launched 'Move with Meta', an upskilling and enablement program to upskill more than 3000 auto dealers across the country. The initiative aimed to help them build a social presence and digitize their customer outreach and lead generation using the Meta Platforms.

Since its launch, the program has delivered exceptional results, driving a 3X growth in dealer digitization and successfully upskilling 6,000+ dealers through the hyperlocal program, surpassing the initial commitment of 3,000 dealers. More than 3000 auto dealers had been upskilled before the start of the program, which takes the total number of auto dealers that have been upskilled to 10,000. The program resulted in improving leads and sales for auto dealers with 32% improvement in lead generation efficiency reported by dealers. In addition, the program has directly impacted sales for leading auto OEMs across the country. C S Vigneshwar, President, Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) said,

"At FADA, our vision is to empower dealers nationwide with the right digital tools and insights to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving market. Through our partnership with Meta, we've not only exceeded our commitment of upskilling 3,000 dealers—surpassing 6,000—but we've also seen a 3X increase in digitization and a marked 32% improvement in lead generation efficiency. This whitepaper underscores the potential of AI, Reels, and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp to strengthen customer relationships and drive growth.

We look forward to scaling this collaboration further, bridging the digital gap in automotive retail, ensuring that dealers across India are future-ready, and remain agile in these dynamic times." Saugato Bhowmik, Director, Auto, CPG, and D2C for Meta in India said, "Our platforms and products are well positioned to enable rapid and efficient digital customer acquisition and engagement for auto dealers in a hyperlocal manner.

Over the last two years we've upskilled nearly 10,000 dealers along with FADA to digitize their outreach and experiences through our unique hyperlocal solutions and key products ranging from Reels and AI to messaging. We're thrilled to deepen our partnership with FADA and take on the ambitious target of upskilling 5000 more dealers in the next 2 years. This program has not only benefitted thousands of auto dealers but also proven to drive strong sales results for leading OEMs."

Stop stonewalling talks on Indus treaty



India has for long contended that disputes with Pakistan over hydropower projects on shared trans-border rivers should be handled through a graded approach as provided under the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960. Pakistan, however, resorted to the unprecedented step of both seeking a World Bank-appointed neutral expert and approaching the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague to deal with disputes over the Kishenganga and Ratle hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir. The neutral expert's ruling this week that he is competent to adjudicate on the issue is a vindication of India's position. India has not participated in the proceedings at the Court of Arbitration and has taken a consistent position that the neutral expert's decision should be awaited before taking recourse to other approaches included in the graded mechanism under the Indus

Waters Treaty for handling disputes. India also gave notice to Pakistan last year about its intention to review and modify the 62-year-old treaty because of the neighbouring country's intransigence in handling disputes related to the sharing of waters of cross-border rivers. This process and the disputes over the two hydropower projects are continuing at a time when relations between the two countries are at possibly their lowest point. At a time when the climate crisis is wreaking havoc on glaciers and river flows, countries should be doubling down on joint efforts to handle ecological issues, including the management of cross-border rivers. The Indus Waters Treaty is undoubtedly the most durable agreement between the South Asian rivals, though it has become vulnerable to subcontinental tensions. Grandstanding on such a sensitive matter will not advance Pakistan's interests.

Ugly business; About 'The Substance'

Beauty is a dialogue between the beholder and the beheld. Today's It girl can become yesterday's news because of a crease on the skin. Women who conform to the patriarchal beauty ideal are valued more highly than those who don't. For beauty as a social currency is valuable but volatile, naked to the whims of gatekeepers and the ravages of time. How we respond to it is a result of social conditioning and the media we consume that airbrushes away the imperfections, the ugly, the gross realities of the human body. The beauty industry is one ugly business. It cannot survive without pushing beauty's goal posts. Soon as it is done milking your insecurity about one problem, it secures a chokehold on your soul with another. Not stressed over acne anymore? How about wrinkles and age spots? Everything is treatable as long as you are ready to consume. Don't have an insecurity yet? We'll invent one so we can exploit you. The commodification of beauty is endless in a capitalist framework. Body insecurities last a lifetime, all of it fodder for an industry that thrives on women judging each other and themselves. Joan Rivers once joked, "Hell is living in LA with a bad body." The joke gets a corrosive-as-cancer punchline in *The Substance*. Coralie Fargeat presents a hellish LA where the adverse effects of our pathological obsession with beauty and youth have been allowed to reach their fullest expression. Not far beyond the realm of Ozempic, microneedling and butt lifts lies a future with a more comprehensive remedy to the lifestyle-threatening disease of ageing. If the lecherous eyes that pervade such a world lines the epidermis of Fargeat's body horror, the monster of self-hatred engendered by toxic beauty standards makes up its spine. Demi Moore is Elizabeth Sparkle, once a movie star, now a daytime TV aerobics instructor, who is shown the exit door the very day she turns 50. The pressure to negate age pushes Elizabeth to try a back-alley treatment that can extend the expiration date Hollywood labels on women. When she injects a brat-green substance, an idealised younger self erupts from her spine, fully-formed and all set to pump it up in the shapely frame of Margaret Qualley. The Faustian bargain comes with strings attached. The two must swap bodies every seven days. No exception. Calling herself Sue, the skinny-me treats the seven-day limit like a gentle suggestion instead of an unbreakable rule. Intoxicated by her youth and rising star, she starts to rob more and more of Elizabeth's time. In a world where beauty equates life force, what this means for Elizabeth is her body deteriorates quite dramatically. Elizabeth retaliates by binge-eating in an attempt to transfer the excess body fat to Sue. "Remember: you are one!" a Substance customer service rep repeats on cue. Rest assured harmonious coexistence isn't on the cards. Not when Elizabeth/Sue have internalised the competitive hostility of a cruel industry rather than built up defences against it. Not when one version is getting a lot more out of the arrangement than the other. While Sue enjoys the highs of fame, the only joy for Elizabeth, if any, at first comes from living second-hand through her replicated self. As Sue's recklessness causes Elizabeth to

age beyond recognition, the rivalry reaches its bitter end.

Moore and Qualley, in artful lockstep with Fargeat, enliven a story of a woman at war with herself. Moore was herself a star in the 1980s and 1990s until cast aside when she didn't fit a certain mould. Hers was a career subject to all sorts of media scrutiny about her appearance and speculations about surgeries. So much of *The Substance*'s queasy power comes from Moore's performance, fraught with the pressures of her own Hollywood journey. As Sue, Qualley has the rascally confidence of a woman hypnotised by her own desirability. A face that jolts, not soothes, as John Waters might say. As she dancercises in her fitness show, the camera pans over her nubile body as if hungering to suck the dewy youth out of her. Raffertie's score makes the film throb and pulsate with electronic menace, as close-ups zero in on Sue's butt, her lips, her smile, same as they do on Elizabeth's wrinkles, her sagging skin and cellulite. Shots chop up their bodies into what is perceived as beautiful vs grotesque to remind us we are looking at the same woman at different stages of decay.

In fact, there is something more off-putting about the heightened montage of Sue's seemingly flawless body than Elizabeth's aging body. As with her debut feature *Revenge*, Fargeat co-opts the fetishizing gaze in order to confront it, plunging us into a precarious subjectivity to expose how it distorts how women see themselves. At the same time, she casts a warped mirror on an exploitative industry populated by slimy misogynists. Elizabeth's network boss is a repulsive cartoon of a man winkingly named Harvey (Dennis Quaid) who is filmed through a fish-eye lens screaming sexist remarks and leering at young women. Icky close-ups of his drooling mouth slurping down shrimp put the nauseating id of the men who make up Hollywood on naked display. In her 1970 essay *It Hurts to Be Alive and Obsolete: The Aging Woman*, Zoe Moss addressed a woman's feelings of invisibility on reaching middle age as something men couldn't begin to grasp. "What fat, forty-three and I dare to think I'm still a person?" the essay begins. "No. I am an invisible lump. I belong in a category labelled a priori without interest to anyone. I am not even expected to interest myself." *The Substance* is a story about a woman fighting against her forced obsolescence through an imperfect channel. Sue's increasing visibility comes at the cost of Elizabeth's increasing invisibility. If the sight of Sue on billboards and TV invite self-disgust in Elizabeth, the portrait of Elizabeth in a leotard invites disgust in Sue, so much so she hides it away — like Dorian Gray — in a back room she builds in the bathroom, the same place where she also keeps the hibernating Elizabeth. There is a scene in *The Shining* where Jack Nicholson finds an attractive young woman step out of the bath naked in Room 237. The two embrace and kiss before he looks in the mirror and sees the reflection of a decomposing old woman. Sickened over being duped into arousal, he steps back in horror. *The Substance* gives us the reverse shot. But don't mistake its blunt-force power for Stanley Kubrick's clini-



cal rigour. To be fair, wielding a mallet instead of a scalpel works in Fargeat's favour when tearing apart the cult of beauty and skewering the damaging version of self-care that can trigger paroxysms of self-hatred. Before its insistence through repetition threatens to clog its pores, a Grand Guignol climax boosts its radiance. Hours before her gig as host of the New Year's Eve telecast, Sue finds her own body starting to change. Desperation drives her to use the substance to turn back the biological clock, only to end up birthing a monster of her own — a mangled mutation with ridges and outgrowths, a toothy breast and Elizabeth's shell-shocked face on the backside that puts an exclamation mark at the end of a self-defeating pursuit of beauty. *Monstro* Elisaeue, as she is dubbed, is a manifestation of self-disgust metastasized, the culmination of a woman vampirised by her desire for perfection. When she gets dressed for the big event, it is meant to make us laugh despite ourselves. Glory and misery both seep from the pores of an outrageous climax. Fargeat opens the floodgates to arterial sprays on everyone in the audience because she makes us all complicit in the emotional and physical violence inflicted by the fetishization of youth and demonisation of ageing. Even if Sue more than Elizabeth seems divorced from her humanity, even if both seem more and more pathetic in their desire to stay young, Fargeat still leaves just enough room for sympathy

to ensure we re-examine our instinct to laugh at their expense. Physical beauty can be fickle and fleeting, same as fame. The film begins with an overhead shot charting Elizabeth's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame as it is cemented, venerated, cracked by time, dulled by the elements, stained by ketchup spilt and hurriedly wiped, slowly ignored and ultimately forgotten. Between the opening montage and the climactic bloodbath, flesh is subject to decay, mutilation and extreme distortion. But the film's most harrowing scene is also its most grounded. Elizabeth suffers an excruciating spiral of body dysmorphia while getting ready for a date. On her way out, she ends up doubling back to the bathroom to redo her makeup because she sees Sue on the comically giant billboard outside her window and then sees her own warped reflection on a door-knob. Perceived imperfection sparks off insecurity, which leads to self-doubt, which aggravates to self-disgust, and on it goes until sinking into shame-encrusted despair. The frustration culminates in Elizabeth mangling her lipstick, pulling her hair out and manically scratching her face like she wants to tear it right off. The scene embodies the violence society inflicts on women and women on themselves to meet unattainable beauty standards. To be a woman, as far as the appearance economy is concerned, is to forever stay young, beautiful and pliable — the optimum conditions for exploitation.

ISRO docks satellites as part of SpaDeX Mission

Bengaluru: ISRO on Thursday successfully performed the docking of satellites as part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX). "India docked its name in space history! Good Morning India ISRO's SpaDeX mission accomplishes historic docking success. Proud to witness this moment!", ISRO said in a post on 'X'. Earlier on January 12, ISRO brought the two spacecraft to three metres and then moved them back to safe distance in its trial attempt to dock the satellites. ISRO successfully launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on December 30, 2024. The PSLV C60 rocket

carrying two small satellites, SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target), along with 24 payloads, had lifted off from the first launchpad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, and about 15 minutes after liftoff, the two small spacecraft weighing about 220 kg each were launched into a 475-km circular orbit as intended. According to ISRO, the SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the demonstration of in-space docking using two small spacecraft launched by PSLV. In space, docking technology is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives.

Can Vice Chancellors be from outside academia?

Harold W. Dodds, president, emeritus of Princeton University, in his book, "How to choose a college President" wrote: "Above everything, trustees and regents should avoid becoming enamoured of prominent names, eminent public figures who may welcome a try at being a college president, only to become disillusioned and bored in the job. This is no place for a retired governor or general per se or a minister whose congregation or bishop wants to kick him upstairs. An equal chance is taken in the selection of a famous scholar merely for the sake of the prestige he will bring. The man to be desired is one whose fame will be made by how well he performs in the office. If he possesses the capacity for growth, if he is not an uncompromising educational sectarian unable to integrate sharply differing views, the job will make the man."

The above passage may need to be kept in mind while reviewing the draft guidelines for appointments and promotion of faculty in universities/faculties, by the Universities Grants Commission (UGC), has predictably created a buzz around the country. While teachers associations and university leaders have been vocal in their reactions over some of the provisions calling the guidelines too subjective and seeking to move away from established practices, States like Tamil Nadu have promised to seek legal remedy over the guidelines giving primacy to the Chancellor-Governor in Vice Chancellor selection/appointment process; and relegating the role of States in the process. The "Draft Regulations on Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges, and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education, 2025", aim at enhancing educational quality by establishing clear criteria for faculty appointments and promotions. Key highlights of the draft guidelines Eligibility criteria: The draft specifies minimum qualifications for various academic positions, including educational credentials, research experience, and other relevant criteria. Promotion guidelines: It outlines the requirements for career advancement, emphasizing performance metrics, contributions to academia, and adherence to institutional standards. Quality assurance measures: The regulations propose mechanisms to maintain and elevate teaching and research standards across higher education institutions. The UGC has sought feedback from stakeholders to refine these guidelines, ensuring they effectively address the evolving needs of the educational landscape.

Vice Chancellor appointment While the draft talks of an entire range of appointments to universities and the minimum standards and qualifications from assistant professors right up to the highest offices in any higher education institution or university, this article limits itself to offer insights and commentary only on the position of Vice Chancellor, which is deemed the highest office in any university. Addressing the issue of "Selection Procedure for the Appointment of Vice-Chancellor in Universities", the draft lays down the following:

"A distinguished person possessing

high academic qualifications and demonstrated administrative and leadership capabilities, strong alignment to constitutional values, strong social commitment, belief in teamwork, pluralism, ability to work with diverse people, with a flair for innovation and a global outlook in higher education, along with the overall vision of the institution and abilities to manage complex situations with a minimum of ten years of experience as a Professor in an HEI or at a senior level in reputed research or academic administrative organizations or at a senior level in industry, public administration, public policy and/or public sector undertakings, with a proven track record of significant academic or scholarly contributions, shall be eligible to be appointed as Vice-Chancellor. The selection for the Vice-Chancellor post shall be through an all India newspaper advertisement and public notification. Applications can also be sought through nomination or a talent search process by a Search cum Selection Committee. In a departure from earlier regulations, the draft guideline seeks to look beyond traditional academics for the post of a V-C and this perhaps also signifies how the role of a V-C is changing rather fast in an era marked by digital transformation, open flow of information through non-traditional media, and the increasing issues around state funded higher education system. The role of State governments in this issue is a separate debate, which this article, does not address. Ramkumar Ramamoorthy, who has served as a corporate leader (of India's top private sector employer), and also as a teacher and academic administrator, says higher education is today a composite of teaching, research and consultancy. At a time when many HEIs have become only teaching institutions, and breakthrough research in India has become a preserve of the industry, academicians need to look beyond traditional systems for the top post of an HEI.

While, a V-C has to be a strong academician and intellectual leader, today's role of a university head goes beyond academic activity. The V-C also needs more capabilities for making the university vibrant, sustainable and economically viable. "The Vice Chancellor's post has become almost entirely external facing ... be it raising funds, working with corporates for funding, research and student recruitment, working with government funding agencies," says Dr S Sadagopan, a distinguished academic, former V-C of IIT-Bengaluru, and who also advises and consults government and private sector for research, development and corporate strategy.

While the idea of selecting and appointing a V-C from outside the academic system is yet to take shape, Dr Sadagopan notes that academic leaders have become successful in corporates in several countries especially in the U.S. Today, it is no longer a mere narrative that State funding of higher education has not grown in proportion to the rise in the demand for higher education, as millions of new students enter university portals from outside the traditional swaths of population. First generation learners are more than 50 percent in many of the State



funded universities because of the low economic barrier for entry. However, most of the State universities are not ideally managed, in the sense the administrative and governance systems remain in 19th century mode and approach. A truism: no matter the size of the University, fundraising plays an outsized role in the V-C's job. The question is how many from the traditional academic system are ready for it.

In India, the role of registrar or Rector is donned by academicians from university systems but the question is their role remains complementary or subservient to that of the university's chief executive, namely the Vice Chancellor. Civil servants have taken on the role of Registrars or equivalent jobs in universities, but the present system does not create V-Cs with the acumen for fund-raising and making the universities viable. Their 3-4 year tenure could be partially blamed for the situation. A study by Deloitte University in the U.S. about six years ago showed that "fundraising/ alumni relations/donor relations" and "strategic planning" rank as the most important responsibilities in the university head's day-to-day. Fundraising, in particular, is essential from a president's first day in office, according to the survey, and only grows in importance over time in the position. It is here that highly qualified industry leaders, with a long experience in business and have played key roles in training,

learning and development in corporates, can make a difference. "It is possible that academic and intellectual capability can come not only from university systems, but also from industry," argues Ramkumar. He says there are several researchers and technology leaders in industry who have spent time both in research as well as publishing research papers and gained patents as part of the work. The more important question to ask is: Would search committees of universities look beyond traditional academic systems and also take the risk of appointing them as V-Cs? Going by the reaction so far for such forward looking reforms, it is clear academicians bristle at such a prospect. But if the Indian university system must move beyond mere teaching systems and look to create a robust research and industrial consultancy apparatus (which truly is the role of a university), it needs new blood. Perhaps an ideal candidate would be one with about 30 years of industry experience but his or her experience encompasses a long tenure in skilling, training, people development, or has done technology/research roles with publications and patents to boot. In other words, the 21st century Vice Chancellor is a strategist, a fund-raiser, a networker and a great storyteller, combined with financial acumen and academic / intellectual integrity. And, of course, he has resilience to navigate the minefield of present-day State universities.

Jio Platforms joins hands with Polygon Labs to debut in Web3 technology

New Delhi: Jio Platforms Ltd has partnered with Polygon Labs, the developer arm of Polygon Protocols, for its debut in Web3 technology in India, Polygon Labs said on Thursday. Under the partnership, Jio Platforms plans to add Web3 capabilities to some of its existing applications and services, owned and operated by the RIL Group firm, for its over 450 million customers. "Joining forces with Polygon Labs marks a significant milestone in Jio's journey towards digital

excellence. We are excited to explore the boundless possibilities of Web3 and bring unparalleled digital experiences to our users," JPL CEO Kiran Thomas said. The Web3 technology is built on blockchain technology that enables seamless access and control of a technology platform from multiple points without any compromise on security and experience. It also gives users control over their data. Polygon is known for developing a blockchain layer to scale up the cryptocurrency platform Ethereum.

The World of Mysore Pak, Mysuru's first experiential store, is reinventing the classic dessert

Many of us are familiar with the story of the royal cook, Kakasura Madappa, who curated the recipe of Mysore pak for King Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV in the 19th century, by blending together the simplest ingredients: gram flour, ghee, and sugar. Now in the dessert's birthplace of Mysuru, a new store is reimagining this timeless sweet. The World of Mysore Pak situated on Chamundi Hills Road is an experiential store devoted to Mysore pak.

They offer 11 varieties here: roasted almond, carrot, cashew, mango, figs, milk, millet, jaggery millet, jaggery, traditional and special Mysore pak. I sample all 11 varieties and am particularly impressed with roasted almond, mango, milk and the special Mysore pak. The sweets deliver a delicate balance, with the added flavours enhancing the experience but with the essence of the original flavours still intact. A subtle hint of spices lingers towards the end.

The store was started by three friends, who are now partners. Sowmya H S, who has an IT background says "The project started two years ago. We have done countless trials to perfect the recipe." Shruti Pavan Shroff adds, "There are many sweet shops offering Mysore pak, but none solely dedicated to this legacy sweet. Our goal is to give customers an immersive experience — they

can watch the sweet being made, taste samples, and share their feedback." Sowmya continues, "We were selective about the store location, since we wanted to attract tourists, who can take home local specialties. Mysore pak, being a popular choice, has long been a favourite souvenir of the city,"

As I walk past the counter, my attention is drawn to a variety of unique sweets featuring Mysore pak, like the paka sandwich and Mysore peda. "The paka sandwich is a layer of kaju barfi sandwiched between Mysore pak," explains Nikhil Mannar, the third partner and owner of Pataka, a popular chaats and sweet shop in Mysuru. "The Mysore peda draws inspiration from the famous Dharwad peda." Among the most popular offerings are the jaggery millet and jaggery Mysore pak, crafted for health-conscious customers. "We avoid synthetic flavourings, using only fresh fruit pulp. Every sweet is made with pure ghee, except for the original Mysore pak, where we use oil to achieve the hard and porous texture," Nikhil shares. He is also excited about a Mysore pak and ice cream combination that they are planning to roll out.

Technology meets tradition I am given a tour of the kitchen by Nikhil. Visitors can watch the making of Mysore pak through a



glass partition. Four machines are installed; two for mixing and blending, while the other two are for cutting and packaging. "All our machines are customised to suit our needs, sourced from cities including Delhi,

Coimbatore and Bengaluru" he tells me. "The Mysore pak cutting machine, which slices the sweet into perfect portions, is truly one of a kind. It took almost six months of research and development to create."

Chronicles in the language of ghosts, birds and beasts

The Satavahana era spanned the third century BCE to the late second century CE. The story I have translated is an excerpt from the Brihatkathamajari, an eleventh century Sanskrit novel in verse by Kshemendra, a polymath from Kashmir. Kshemendra, in turn, had based his work on a lost Paisachi language manuscript called Brihatkatha (meaning "Huge Story"), attributed to Gunadhya. Scholars date the Brihatkatha to the first century BCE. Though it must still have existed in Kshemendra's time, it is lost to modern readers. Sanskrit is the language of the elite in the society depicted in Gunadhya's story, but other, slightly less polished languages, Prakrit and Apabhramsha, were also widely spoken. Paisachi — the language of the original Brihatkatha — had an inferior status, and legend has it that it was understood by ghosts, as well as by birds and beasts. As we'll see, a Satavahana king is a major character in the story. One beautiful spring day, King Satavahana visited a pleasure garden, taking his queens with him. Playing in the pool, surrounded by pretty ladies, the king looked as handsome as Cupid. As the sunlight refracted off their jewels creating dizzying patterns of colour in the water, he began playfully splashing his companions with cool drops of water. One of the queens, whom the king had pelted rather hard, cried out "Your Majesty, don't splash anymore water on me!" Unfortunately, the queen had spoken in Sanskrit, a language at which the king was

a complete dunce. He thought she wanted sweets. "Have all the sweets in the palace brought to the pool side!" he ordered his retinue. The queen who had spoken in Sanskrit felt embarrassed for him. His other queens, who were all quite learned in Sanskrit and grammar, and even many of his retainers, caught the gaffe and started shaking with suppressed laughter. The king saw all this, and felt very upset. But then, it took even the wise sages countless years of penance and devotion to acquire learning, so what did the poor king expect? After that incident, the king went into a depression, turning away all his followers and refusing to speak to anyone. Sorrow at his own ignorance gnawed at him night and day. Some time later, I went to see him. His minister, Sharvavarman, was with me. The minister said to him, "Why are you so upset over a trifle? Is it important that you should already know everything on your own? You are an emperor, attended by wise scholars. Let them teach you!" This was my cue. I said, with an appearance of thoughtfulness, "I am Gunadhya. My name means 'rich in virtues and excellence.' Let's forget undue modesty — I live up to that name. I can turn Your Majesty into a scholar in five years." Sharvavarman then said, "Six months will be more than enough for me to turn His Majesty into an expert on Sanskrit. Gunadhya, people like you should just take it easy and leave this sort of work to me." I laughed, more in anger than in amusement. In a shrill voice, I screeched, "If you can do

this, Sharvavarman, I will stop speaking in the three tongues (Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsha)." He on his part said, "If I fail, I'll spend the next 12 years carrying your shoes on my head!" Well, Sharvavarman went off for a short while after this exchange. Rumour has it that he went to a cave and learned some magic tricks. I'm inclined to believe that, for only tantric magic can account for what happened next. Sharvavarman did manage to teach the king Sanskrit in a matter of mere months! Having lost the wager, I stopped speaking, in fulfillment of my vow. Taking two of my students, I left the kingdom (though the king had asked me to stay), and, in great sorrow, travelled north. Finally, we camped out in a forest, where I began speaking Paisachi — the language of spirits and fiends — since I had sworn to renounce the three tongues known to civilized men. After some years had passed, I had in my mind the plot of an enormous novel. It would be a huge cycle of tales revolving around seven emperors. I had also befriended a ghost, Kanabuthi (another long story). Anyway, my friend urged me to write my novel — a bit of a problem as I didn't have access to ink. "Write it in blood," my friend said (never one to be daunted). I mustered all my concentration and wrote down the story of seven sorcerer emperors, in about seven hundred thousand couplets. Now, I needed someone to publish my book and spread the word, so I had my students take it to King Satavahana. That dissolute king, all puffed up with the arrogance of the rich, in-

sulted my book. "What's this bizarre Paisachi language? And why is it written in blood, not ink? We all know that the writer is a crazy fool who refuses to speak any civilized tongue." With that, he dismissed my brainchild, my wonderful Brihat-katha (or "the huge story"). He didn't even try to understand the core of my work. Typical. Fools lack the insight needed to digest and appreciate my book. And here, I'd thought that my readers would be the most sophisticated and famous intellectuals in society. Gunadhya really took the rejection of his novel hard. Furiously, he started tearing out his manuscript page by page. He would tear out a page, read it out to his students — who tried to commit it to memory because they loved the tale so much — and then burn it. As he did this, the birds and beasts of the forest gathered around to listen to the story. So absorbed were they that they forgot to eat. They just listened all day to his stories, their eyes full of wonder. I even saw some of them cry. Meanwhile, King Satavahana fell sick due to the poor quality of the meat he was getting. When he recovered, he made enquiries and found out that the reason the meat was so poor was because hunters couldn't get hold of any well-fed animals. All the animals wanted to listen to Gunadhya's story even more than they wanted to eat! The Prakrit script. "Sanskrit is the language of the elite in the society depicted in Gunadhya's story, but other, slightly less polished languages, Prakrit and Apabhramsha, were also widely spoken."