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## 600 kg stale chicken, meant for supply to fast food centres, seized in Hyderabad's Begumpet

Hyderabad: The police raided two chicken shops in Begumpet and seized over 600 kg of stale and rotten chicken waste meant for supply to fast food centres. During the raids carried out by the Task Force (North) team, along with the Sanitary Officials of the Secunderabad Cantonment Board (SCB), two persons — M Bhaskar, owner of SSS Chicken Shop in Rasoolpura and B Raveender, owner of Ravi Chicken Shop in Balamrai — were caught. The officials seized 600 kg of frozen and stored noxious chicken waste and bones. According to the Task Force officials, the duo, who run chicken shops, plotted to sell chicken waste and bones by storing them up for several months to fast food centres and eateries located close to wine shops at lower prices than the market price.

## From F-35 fighter jets to doubling US-India trade: Key takeaways from Modi-Trump meet

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with US President Donald Trump in Washington DC on Friday and discussed deepening of India-US partnership across various segments while also affirming their faith in the atomic energy. The two leaders held discussions on wide-ranging issues, ranging from firming up the defence framework between two nations and also boosting ties in fields like energy, trade and more. As the two leaders met and exchanged pleasantries, their warm hug stole the limelight. Trump described PM Modi as a 'great friend' and also said, "We missed you, we missed you a lot" while embracing him.

A renewed push for 'making more atomic reactions' in India was among the most prominent agenda on table, as the two leaders discussed ways to enhance co-operation in energy sector. They agreed to work together on US-designed nuclear reactors in India 'through large-scale localisation and possible technology transfer'. Their joint statement read, "Both sides welcomed the recent Budget announcement by Government of India to take up amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) for nuclear reactors, and further decided to establish bilateral arrangements in accordance with CLNDA, that would address the issue of civil liability and facilitate the collaboration of Indian and US industry in the production and deployment of nuclear reactors," the statement read. Speaking to reporters after bilateral meet, PM Modi said, "We have ... set ourselves the target of more than doubling our bilateral trade to attain \$500 billion by 2030. Our teams will work on concluding very soon, a mutually beneficial trade agreement." Trump announced that United States will increase military sales to India by billions of dollars in near future, including the supply of F-35 fighter jets. This would bring India at par with NATO allies, as only these select countries enjoy the privilege of buying F-35 stealth fighters. The only two other nations who have been bypassed of 'restrictions' are Israel and Japan. "We will be increasing military sales to India by many billions of dollars. We are also paving the way to provide India with the F-35 stealth fighters ultimately,"



Trump stated.

MIGA was the new acronym coined during PM Modi-Trump meet and is bound to reverberate in days to come. On the lines of Donald Trump's signature campaign slogan, 'Make America Great Again', PM Modi shared his vision of the Viksit Bharat and also pitched it as 'MIGA' (Make India Great Again) in an American context. "President Trump often talks about MAGA. In India, we are working towards a Viksit Bharat, which in American context translates into MIGA. And together, the India-USA have a MEGA partnership for prosperity," PM Modi said in a post on X.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the efforts of United States towards resolving the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine and also reiterated India's position that the war should be resolved on the negotiating table. He also rejected the perception of 'India being neutral' and said that India has clearly taken a stand and that is towards peace. "I have met the leaders of both countries. Many people are in a misconception that India is neutral, but I want to reiterate that India is not neutral; we are on a side, and that is peace," PM Modi said in a joint presser. Trump said that India and US would work together to build the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), describing as 'one of the greatest trade routes'. He said that the route will operate from Israel to Italy and onward to the US. "We agreed to work together to help build one of the greatest trade routes in all of history. It will run from India to Israel to Italy and onward to the US."

## BJP government in Delhi likely to be sworn in by February 20, 2025

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

The swearing-in ceremony of the BJP government in Delhi is likely to take place on February 19 or 20 and the new dispensation will give priority to clean drinking water supply, improved civic infrastructure, among other things, party leaders said. The Prime Minister is coming back from his foreign visit and soon the observers for a meeting of the BJP Legislature Party will be appointed, newly-elected BJP MLA and national secretary of the party Manjinder Singh Sirsa told PTI. "The new government will start working around February 19-20," said the Rajouri Garden MLA who is considered a contender for the post of Chief Minister or a ministerial berth. Mr. Sirsa said that he expected that the BJP legislature party meeting would be held around February 18-19 and added "The new government will be formed, I think, by February 20, after the swearing-in ceremony." The newly elected BJP MLAs laughed off any race for the post of Chief Minister of Delhi, saying such talks were merely speculations by the media. "There is no race for the post of Delhi chief minister. In our party the CM or the leader of the legislature party is elected in a meeting of the MLAs," said second-time MLA from Laxmi Nagar seat Abhay Verma. Mr. Verma, a Purvanchali, is also talked about as a prospective candidate for the top post of the Delhi government. "We have come to serve the people and now thinking about addressing issues like development, clean water supply and clean air for the people as well as how to free the Yamuna from pollution," he said.

The BJP MLAs asserted that as per the Prime Minister's promise, the Ayushman Bharat health scheme obstructed by the AAP government, will be implemented



in Delhi in the first meeting of the new Cabinet. The Prime Minister has already announced that the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme will be implemented through the first meeting of the new Cabinet. Mr. Sirsa said that providing clean drinking water, ensuring sanitation in the city and starting work to deal with air and Yamuna pollution, will be priorities of the new government within 100 days in power. Sixth-time MLA Mohan Singh Bisht said the new Chief Minister of Delhi will be elected from the 48 BJP legislators. The Mustafabad MLA, also reiterated his proposal for changing the name of the minority dominated constituency to "Shiv Vihar" or "Shiv Puri". "There are around 42% people of one community (minorities) and on the other hand are 58 per cent people (Hindus)... So, the public sentiment must be respected," said the senior BJP MLA. He also said that the BJP government will ensure removing pollution in the Yamuna by setting up sewage treatment plants (STPs) to tap 28 major drains flowing into the river.

## Hope Modi told Trump deporting Indians in shackles not right says Congress MP Tharoor

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday (February 14, 2025) expressed hope Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed to U.S. President Donald Trump that deporting Indians in shackles in a military aircraft was not right and added the two leaders' press conference suggested they had a good meeting. Mr. Trump hosted Mr. Modi for talks at the White House early on Friday (February 14, 2025) during which they discussed bilateral, regional and global issues. "I hope, behind closed doors, he (Modi) said to the Americans, 'You can't insult our people. You can send them back, they are illegal, we will look after them, they belong in our country but don't send them back in shackles and handcuffs on a military aircraft... That is not right!'" Tharoor told PTI. Videos on the sidelines of the Invest Karnataka summit. "I hope he (Modi) has said it behind closed doors. We don't know," the Thiruvananthapuram MP added. A U.S. military aircraft brought back 104 Indians living illegally in the U.S. earlier this month — the first such batch of Indians deported by the Trump administration as part of a crackdown against illegal immigrants. The deportees had claimed their hands and legs were cuffed throughout the journey and that

they were unshackled only after landing in Amritsar. Mr. Tharoor said the joint press conference addressed by the two leaders suggested that the talks were good. "...on other matters, including Ukraine peace and so on, the press conference suggested that the two of them had a very good meeting," he said. "To hear a man like Donald Trump, whose defence secretary yesterday (Thursday) called him the greatest negotiator in the world, announcing that the Indian prime minister was a better negotiator than he was, that sounds like something Mr. Modi can put in the bank, that sounds very good," he added. Issues relating to trade and tariffs figured extensively in the meeting between Trump and Modi that took place hours after the US president announced a new reciprocal tariff policy for all its trading partners. Asked about the issue, Tharoor said a way had to be found as exports were important for the economy to grow. "India, particularly under the BJP government, does have rather high and somewhat protectionist tariffs in some areas. Their argument is, 'We want to protect Indian industry'... The Americans say, 'We want to sell goods to you'... So you have to make it more feasible," the Congress MP added. Mr. Tharoor suggested that "some midpoint" would have to be found on the matter.

## Secunderabad Railway Station's entrance façade to get major facelift

Hyderabad: There are many iconic locations in Hyderabad, and Secunderabad railway station stands among the first ten on the list. For many people from the Telugu States, the entrance façade of the railway station is a distinct memory.

However, the British-era station building is now undergoing a major revamp, and these works to reshape the station, has the entrance façade being demolished. As part of the modernisation of the Secunderabad railway station, the authorities are demolishing the walls of the main entrance of the building, which has a history of decades.

## Modi is not BC, but a legally converted one, says Revanth Reddy

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

HYDERABAD: Triggering a controversy, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not a born Backward Class (BC) member but was a legally converted BC. In fact, till 2002, Narendra Modi was an upper caste member. After becoming the Chief Minister, he included his caste in the list of BCs, the Chief Minister said at Gandhi Bhavan here on Friday. "Modi is not BC, but a legally converted BC. I am not making vague comments and I have thoroughly checked about Modi's caste. Now, it is up to you (people)" Revanth Reddy said.

He demanded that the Prime Minister conduct a nationwide socio-economic and caste survey along with population census to enumerate castes and sub-castes and their socio-economic conditions. Further, the Chief Minister accused the opposition parties of misleading people over the socio-economic caste survey conducted by the Telangana government. The caste survey was conducted in all aspects and in a transparent manner. The opposition parties were conducting false campaign to derive political mileage, he maintained. For the convenience of households, who could not participate in the first phase of the survey, the government was conducting a re-survey and people should make good use of the opportunity, he said. "BRS supremo



K Chandrashekar Rao, former Ministers KT Rama Rao and T Harish Rao had not participated in the first survey. They should participate in the resurvey, if not, they should be ostracised," Revanth Reddy said. Earlier while addressing the Youth Congress leaders at the same venue, the Chief Minister said the BJP led union government was discriminating against Telangana. Funds and projects were being sanctioned to Gujarat and Bihar States, while no support was being extended to Metro phase II, River Musi rejuvenation and other projects. Union Minister G Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay should give an explanation, he demanded.

## Harish Rao to Launch 'Porata Yatra' from February 24 for Water Rights

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Hyderabad: Senior BRS leader and former minister Harish Rao has announced a 'Porata Yatra' (Struggle March) starting from February 24 to fight for water issues in Telangana. The yatra will cover Zaheerabad, Sangareddy, Narayankhed, and Andole constituencies. Harish Rao accused the Congress government of neglecting key irrigation projects like Sangameshwara and Basaveshwara, which are crucial for farmers in the region. He stated that BRS will continue to fight until these projects are completed and ensure water for Telangana's agricultural needs. The former minister urged people to support the movement and criticized the Congress for allegedly failing to implement promises related to irrigation development.



## PM Modi, Rahul Gandhi to meet next week to name CEC Rajiv Kumar's successor

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

A selection committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to meet early next week to finalise the name of the next chief election commissioner, sources said on Friday (February 14, 2025). The panel also comprises the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and a Union Cabinet minister nominated by the prime minister. The panel could meet either on Sunday or Monday ahead of the retirement of incumbent Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on February 18. It will recommend a name from among the candidates shortlisted by a search committee. The president will then appoint the next CEC based on the recommendation. After Rajiv Kumar, Gyanesh Kumar is the senior-most election commissioner. His tenure is till January 26, 2029. Sukhbir Singh Sandhu is the other election commissioner. So far, the senior-most election commissioner (EC) was elevated as CEC following the retirement of the incumbent. However, after a new law on appointments of the CEC and ECs came into force last year, a search committee shortlists names of five secretary-level officers for consideration by a prime minister-led panel for appointment to the posts. Besides the CEC, a new EC could also be appointed to fill the vacancy created by Rajiv Kumar's retirement.

While provisions of the "Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023" are being applied for the first time to appoint a CEC, it was used to appoint ECs Gyanesh Kumar and Sandhu to fill the vacan-



cies created by the retirement of Anup Chandra Pandey and the resignation of Arun Goel last year. According to the law, the CEC and ECs will be appointed by the president on the recommendation of a selection committee headed by the prime minister and comprising the Lok Sabha opposition leader and a Union Cabinet minister to be nominated by the prime minister.

The sources said the same set of candidates could also be used to appoint a new EC. According to the law, the CEC and other ECs will be appointed from among persons who are holding or have held a post equivalent to the rank of secretary to the government of India and will be persons of integrity with knowledge of and experience in management and conduct of elections. In other words, serving and retired secretary-level officials can be appointed as the CEC and ECs.

## Congress' desperate bid to engineer defections falters as BRS MLAs hold back

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Hyderabad: The Congress government in Telangana appears to be on shaky ground as its frantic attempts to lure BRS MLAs into its fold are failing to yield the desired results. Even as two petitions against the 10 defected MLAs are pending before the Supreme Court, the ruling party has stepped up its propaganda in media organisations that are friendly. However, the apparently coordinated media coverage has only exposed the party's desperation to shore up numbers through undemocratic means, political analysts say. A section of media has reported about attempts to get more BRS legislators to avoid anti-defection law provisions against those who already defected to the Congress party. The BRS leaders have slammed the Congress for resorting to "political horse-trading" instead of focusing on governance. While speculation was triggered about backroom negotiations following media reports, the Congress' inability to secure defections had only highlighted the growing unease among defected MLAs over the ruling party's stability and credibility. According to BRS sources, the ruling dispen-

sation was propagating rumours about defections of some MLAs and that the party was making grand promises, including ministerial berths and other incentives. But the plight of the already defected legislators in the Congress was itself acting as a deterrent for anyone to join the Congress. The defected legislators have already been facing stiff opposition from Congress leaders in their respective constituencies and the general negativity about the Congress rule among the public is also causing concern to them. The Congress failed to deliver on promises made both to the people and to those who had already defected from BRS earlier, while the tide is turning in favour of former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao. "Why would any MLA risk their political future by joining a government that has already lost public confidence?" questioned former Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav, terming the reports about BRS MLAs switching over as mere speculations. "Those who switched sides earlier were promised ministerial berths and key positions, but they have been left in the lurch."



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## RBI's rate cut

THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has finally pulled the trigger on a much-anticipated rate cut, lowering the benchmark repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first such move in nearly five years and signals a shift in the central bank's approach to balancing economic growth and inflation. The decision comes at a time when India's economic momentum has been slowing. With GDP growth projected at 6.7 per cent for FY26 — well below the 8.2 per cent seen in 2023-24 — the RBI appears to be prioritising growth, even as inflation remains above its 4 per cent comfort level. Governor Sanjay Malhotra, in his first policy review, however, dismissed speculation of a prolonged rate-cut cycle. While the move has been welcomed by industry leaders, its impact on borrowing costs remains uncertain, with some saying it is a case of too little, too late. Banks, already facing liquidity constraints, may not immediately pass on the benefits to borrowers even as there are expectations of loan EMIs going down after the rate cut.

Beyond the monetary policy, the RBI also introduced measures to enhance cybersecurity in financial transactions, requiring banks to shift to the 'bank.in' domain and non-banks to 'fin.in'. Aimed to curb digital fraud and enhance consumer trust in online banking, this additional security measure is welcome in view of the rising cybercrime. Additionally, Malhotra's deferment of the proposed stringent banking norms that were to be implemented from April 1 hints at a more flexible regulatory stance compared to his predecessor. It offers banks more time to adapt to liquidity and capital requirements without disrupting credit flow. However, global uncertainties — including volatile energy prices and US monetary policy — continue to pose risks. But, for now, the RBI's cautious shift reflects an attempt to revive growth without jeopardising financial stability.

## 'Dunki' route across 16 nations, 21 days of detention at US border: Deported Sonipat teen describes journey

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Over the last several months, 19-year-old Nishant Kumar travelled to 16 countries before finally managing to enter the United States through its border with Mexico on January 13, only to be held by border patrol as soon as his group reached San Diego in California. A resident of Haryana's Sonipat, Kumar is among the 104 illegal immigrants who were deported by the US government and sent to Amritsar in Punjab on a US military plane Wednesday.

Like the other immigrants who entered the United States illegally, Kumar had only one thing on his mind: the hope of a better life in a foreign land. "It was my dream to go and live in America. I wanted to work as a truck driver there... I knew that people who go there can also work as storekeepers. My friends and relatives who had gone earlier were earning very good money," he told. "One of my very close relatives is working and living there... He told me life is wonderful there. I wanted to live that life." Kumar's father is a farmer who "grows sugarcane, wheat and rice on his six killa (almost an acre)" land. The youngest of four siblings, he has three older sisters. "My father knew that I was very keen to go. He helped... I wasn't the first to go from my area. My father knew that. It wasn't an issue."

A known 'dunki' agent from Kamal was recommended to him and in May last year he started speaking to the agent, he said. 'Dunki route' refers to unauthorised and risky ways of entering the US that usually involve travelling through several countries using various modes of transport. "On May 27, I started my journey. My agent sent me to Dubai with a promise to send me ahead in a week but I had to stay for a month in Dubai. My visa expired and I had to stay another 11 days till my agent brought me back. I had to pay a fine there," Kumar added. "I was very upset. My first attempt had failed. The agent, however, insisted that he would succeed in sending me to the USA."

He said the 'dunki' agent contacted him again in July. "On July 11, I went to Sri Lanka. I stayed there for 12 days waiting for a way to head towards the USA." I had to return because the agent couldn't make an arrangement." By then, he had lost hope and wanted to change the agent. "But the agent was adamant. He promised that he would send me somehow," Kumar added.

To Amsterdam, then across South America on September 6, he was finally sent to Guyana with a group of 13 other men from India, he stated. "We went through Amsterdam and Port of Spain to arrive in Guyana." He said he stayed in Guyana for 15 days, from where they were sent to Brazil in two taxis. "We were all led by a man from Guyana," he said.

"After staying in Brazil for three days, we were sent to Bolivia in two buses. There, we found another group of people who were also en route to the USA," Kumar said, adding that after staying there for two days, their 'dunki' agent took them to Peru in another set of buses. Kumar said that while staying in Bolivia, his passport was taken away by the 'dunki' agents and their associates. "After staying in Peru for a day, we were sent to Colombia via Ecuador in another set of buses," he said. "We stayed in Colombia for three months," he recounted. They were told that they would have to walk and travel in boats to reach Panama. "It took us a week to cross the border of Colombia and enter Panama."

"In our group, there were people from Vietnam, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan. We crossed several forests and vacant lands, surviving on biscuits and fruits during those days," Kumar said. From Panama, they reached Costa Rica where they stayed for a day. "Here we were given a bus to reach Nicaragua. Staying there for a few days, we were sent to Honduras in buses," Kumar said. From Honduras, an agent took them to Mexico. "There, I was given a Nepali passport and ID and sent to Tijuana on a flight," he added. "After staying at the Tijuana border for a day, we were sent to San Diego on January 13. Our agent told us that as soon as we crossed the border, the San Diego Police would conduct a check on us and then we would be allowed to go but we were kept at a detention centre," he said. Kumar said that to enter San Diego, they had to walk 15 miles. "The cars dropped us at the border from where he had to walk," he said. He further said that earlier those who went to the USA via the 'dunki' route would stay in detention for three-four days. Instead, they were kept under detention for 21 days. "There was nobody there (at the detention centre) to listen to us. They would give us food five times a day, and the officers would take our attendance thrice a day," Kumar said. They were given silver foil blankets to protect themselves from the cold.

## RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat meets RG Kar rape-murder victim's parents in Kolkata



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday met the parents of the RG Kar Hospital rape and murder victim in Kolkata and reportedly assured them that he would do whatever he could to help them get justice. Bhagwat is on a 10-day tour of West Bengal. "Mohan Bhagwat said he is with us in our fight for justice, he will help us as much as he can. We spoke to him for an hour and he also invited us to have lunch with him."

We have given him a letter on everything that has happened and our fight for justice. He assured us he will do everything he can to ensure we get justice," the deceased victim's father told after meeting the RSS chief at Newtown Guest House.

The victim's father said that they have sent letters and emails to the offices of the President, Prime Minister and home minister seeking an appointment but were yet to get a response. The rape and murder of a junior doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in August last year had sparked outrage and triggered protests across the state. In October last year, Bhagwat had slammed the alleged attempts to cover up the incident. "What happened in Kolkata in the RG Kar Hospital was a shameful incident, which is an insult to all of us," he had said while addressing RSS workers at the annual Vijayadashami Utsav in Nagpur. Last month, West Bengal BJP president and Union minister Sukanta Majumdar had visited the parents of victim and assured them that he would forward their grievances against the CBI to "appropriate authorities". On the same day, the parents had also met West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose, who reportedly assured them that they would get justice.

## Triumphant BJP workers gather outside Arvind Kejriwal's residence, chant 'Jai Shree Ram'



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

As the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) defeat in the Delhi Assembly polls became apparent on Saturday, its leaders began making their way to the residence of party convenor and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Firozeshah Road. One by one, cars pulled up, while a throng of journalists gathered near the gate, eager for a statement, a fleeting glimpse, or even the briefest reaction from Kejriwal or his senior colleagues. Beyond the huddled press and political aides, the city moved on. Traffic flowed briskly, though many commuters slowed their vehicles, phones in hand, capturing the unfolding scene. Autos adorned with saffron flags zipped past, blaring triumphant music. Passengers inside the autos, catching sight of Kejriwal's residence, leaned out and shouted 'Jai Shree Ram' louder and with more vigour.

In the afternoon, a man draped in a saffron BJP scarf emerged before the former chief minister's residence, a polythene bag in one hand, and a plate in another. The plate's contents are unmistakable — the golden fried samosas and sticky swirls of jalebis. He held them before him, an offering laced with derision. "Kejriwal ne jis tareeke se keechad failaya hai, usi wajah se aaj kamal khila hai (The way Kejriwal has spread muck in Delhi is the reason why the lotus has bloomed today)," he declared to the cameras before him.

A couple of hours later, a few passing autos slowed, their passengers peering curiously at the unfolding spectacle. From one of them, a man with a single leg carefully disembarked, his walking frame held steady by aides wrapped in BJP scarves and flags. As the press turned their cameras toward him, he suddenly lifted the frame high above his head, his voice rising in a fervent chant 'Jai Shree Ram!' The crowd of supporters around him shouted in unison. "This country is a Hindu Rashtra, and we are overjoyed that the BJP is coming to power in Delhi," declared Puneet Vohra, his walking frame still aloft like a man miraculously healed. His companions, members of Mahadev Auto Sanchalak, an auto drivers' union, nodded in agreement. One of them said they had been en route to the BJP headquarters for celebrations but had made a pit stop here, drawn by Kejriwal's house — a battlefield where victory had to be rubbed in. Amid the revelry, two figures stood apart, their presence stark against the saffron tide. Dressed in blue and yellow, their AAP badges catching the dim sunlight of the evening, they watched in solemn silence. Khurshid Alam, an elderly man in a cardigan, broke the hush. "We never imagined Kejriwal could lose in Delhi," he murmured, his voice carrying the weight of disbelief. Alam had come all the way from Bhatinda in the last week of January to campaign for the party. Now, as he stood outside the besieged residence, his companion Pramod Kumar Sharma's voice took on the sharp edge of discontent — "I hate to say this, but the party lost because it abandoned its own workers. They favoured defectors over loyalists, and this is the price we have paid." His words were heavy with foreboding — "Mark my words, if they continue like this, Punjab will be next." When asked why they had come, why they stood there in the midst of triumph and taunts, Alam's response was simple, "You stand by people in both their moments of joy and despair." Sharma, however, was less forgiving. His gaze was distant, but his words cut close — "The party did great work in Delhi, yet it lost. Agar raja acha ho lekin uski sena uska saath na de, toh jung woh haarega hi (If a king is noble but his army does not stand with him, he is bound to lose the war)."

## Ex-Karnataka CM Yediyurappa gets protection from arrest; Pcco case reset to cognisance stage



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Anticipatory bail granted by the Karnataka High Court on Friday to former chief minister B S Yediyurappa in a case filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act is set to protect the veteran BJP leader from arrest as the case returns to a special court for Pcco cases. With the HC also refusing to quash the Pcco case against the 81-year-old Yediyurappa — while striking down the July 4, 2024, decision of the special court to take cognisance of the chargesheet filed by the Criminal Investigation Department of the police — the case has been reset to the cognisance stage again.

The HC ruled that the special court judge had erred in the application of mind while taking cognisance of the chargesheet against the former CM since no reasons were stated by the court for the decision to take cognisance after studying the chargesheet. "The Writ Petition is allowed in part. The order of taking cognisance by the concerned court dated July 4, 2024 qua accused number one stands obliterated," Justice M Nagaprasanna said in his order.

"The crime, the investigation and the final report all remain intact. The matter is remitted back to the concerned court to pass appropriate orders on the final report so placed before it by the CID bearing in mind the observations made in the course of the order," the HC ruled. The HC has stated that the special court must make a reasoned order for taking cognisance of the chargesheet filed by the CID. "The court is expected to record reasons for taking cognisance. Though the reasons need not be so elaborate when it records framing of charges or conviction, nonetheless, it must bear application of mind to set further proceedings in motion, as taking of cognisance or issuance of process has some judicial sanctity," the HC said.

The HC's order implies that the special court for Pcco cases, to which the matter will return soon, will now have to provide valid reasons for taking cognisance of the chargesheet in order to facilitate the trial of the case, legal sources said. Incidentally, the CID police, which investigated the Pcco case against Yediyurappa, has filed an additional chargesheet in the case and this would also need reasoned cognisance by the special court when the case resumes.

The special court noted on July 31, 2024, that "the

Special Public Prosecutor for the state filed a memo along with an additional chargesheet". The Pcco case has been in limbo since Yediyurappa approached the HC to quash the case. The next date for the Pcco case is February 28, but the special public prosecutor is likely to seek an advancement of the hearing in the wake of the HC order cancelling the earlier cognisance taken by the court while keeping the case intact, sources said.

The Supreme Court and the HC have mandated adherence to section 35 of the Pcco Act — which specifies that the evidence of the child victim of sexual offences must be recorded within 30 days of the trial court taking cognisance of a case and that the trial must be completed within one year. In a 2021 judgment by Justice B V Nagarathna and Justice M G Uma, the HC directed judges of special courts for Pcco cases to comply with section 35 of the Act. An FIR was registered on March 14, 2024, against Yediyurappa by the Bengaluru police on the basis of a complaint by the mother of a teenager stating that her daughter had been subjected to sexually inappropriate behaviour by the former CM during a visit to his house on February 2 that year.

The CID filed a chargesheet against the BJP veteran and three others on June 27, 2024, under section 8 (sexual assault) of the Pcco Act 2012 as well as Indian Penal Code section 354 A (sexual harassment), sections 204 (destroying evidence) and 214 (offering gifts to silence the victim). A special Pcco court took cognisance of the chargesheet on July 4, 2024, and issued a summons for the former CM and others to appear in court to face trial.

Yediyurappa approached the HC for the quashing of the case and the court ruled on June 14, 2024, that the former CM should not be arrested. Later, on July 12, it allowed the exemption of Yediyurappa and three others from appearing in the special court based on the July 4 summons.

Although no stay was issued by the high court against the proceedings in the special court, the Pcco court proceedings were stalled since July 4, 2024, on account of Yediyurappa seeking the quashing of the chargesheet in the high court. Anticipatory bail under special considerations The former CM has been provided protection against arrest by the HC while also allowing the case proceedings to resume in the special court from the stage of taking cognisance — through separate orders passed on Friday. Yediyurappa was granted anticipatory bail by the HC under special considerations such as his eminence as a former chief minister and his age. "In the light of the filing of the final report by the CID, the petitioner would undoubtedly not be required for any custodial interrogation, as no investigation is pending against the petitioner," the HC said. "The petitioner, as observed hereinabove, is an octogenarian and has held the position of the Chief Minister of the State of Karnataka, and there can be no apprehension that he would not cooperate with the trial on its ensuing."

## Maximum charge increased to Rs 90, special discount on smart cards during weekends and non-peak hours

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Commuters using Bengaluru's Namma Metro will have to pay revised fares from February 9, following the approval of a new fare structure recommended by the Fare Fixation Committee (FFC). The committee, chaired by a former Karnataka high court judge, submitted its recommendations in December 2024. As per the Metro Railway (O&M) Act, 2002, its suggestions are binding on the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL). The hike comes a month after the Karnataka government increased bus fares by 15 per cent. After revision, the minimum and maximum fares stand at Rs 10 and Rs 90, respectively. The maximum ticket fare has been hiked by 50 per cent from Rs 60 to Rs 90. Under the new fare system, the cost of Bengaluru Metro travel is structured as follows: Discounts and smart card benefits

BMRCL has retained the 5 per cent discount on smart cards and introduced additional benefits for commuters. An extra 5 per cent discount will be available for travel during off-peak hours, making the total discount 10 per cent. Off-peak hours are defined as travel before 8 am, between 12 pm and 4 pm, and after 9 pm on weekdays. Additionally, a 10 per cent discount on smart cards will be applicable on Sundays and national holidays, including January 26, August 15, and October 2. The minimum balance required for smart cards has been increased to Rs 90. Changes to tourist and group tickets

Tourist passes have been revised, with a one-day pass now priced at Rs 300, a three-day pass at Rs 600, and a five-day pass at Rs 800. Group tickets will offer discounts ranging from 15 per cent to 25 per cent, depending on the group size. Additionally, a flat fare of Rs 60 per person will apply for certain travel patterns, while for larger groups, the rate will be Rs 50 per person. The revised fare system, according to BMRCL, is designed to balance affordability and financial sustainability for metro operations. BMRCL currently operates a 77-km network, with the Purple Line covering 43.5 km and the Green Line spanning 33.5 km.

Since commencing operations in 2011 with the Baiyappanahalli-MG Road route, BMRCL has faced financial challenges, incurring a cumulative loss of Rs 1,280 crore over the past three years. However, the corporation reported reduced losses from Rs 476 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 341 crore in 2023-24, partly due to daily ridership reaching 8.5 lakh on non-holiday weekdays. 'A pinch in the pockets', say commuters. However, the decision has drawn criticism from commuters who are dissatisfied with the lack of improvements in Metro services. Complaints include insufficient service frequency on operational lines and delays in opening the Yellow Line from RV Road to Bommasandra due to a shortage of metro coaches. In fact, Bangalore Central MP PC Mohan, criticising the move, had requested that BMRCL reconsider revising the fares. He stated that it would force people to switch to private transportation, eventually leading to congestion. Rathan Sreenivas, a daily commuter, said, "This increase will pinch our pockets. In return, we expect the government to speed up the metro networks, add more trains and streamline the services more effectively." Echoing the same sentiment, Nidhi Prashanth Uchil, another commuter, said, "The new metro fares seem quite expensive, especially with the growing number of commuters. If prices are being increased, it would be more reasonable to also increase the number of trains, making the higher fares more justifiable." Rajkumar Dugar, convenor of the Citizens4Citizens forum, said, "Tariff rise should have been avoided. This also highlights that people will ultimately have to pay for each rupee. Lower tariff equals higher patronage and eventually lower congestion on roads." Opposition party Janata Dal (Secular) on X said, "The corrupt @INC Karnataka government has hiked metro fares by 46%. At a time when the people of Karnataka are already struggling with rising costs, the @siddaramaiah government has once again burdened them with another price hike. Previously, the government had increased bus fares, milk prices, electricity tariffs, fuel prices (petrol and diesel), stamp duty, fees for birth and death certificates, and medical treatment charges at government hospitals. Now, metro fares have also been increased, effective from tomorrow. By relentlessly exploiting the people every day in some way or another to fill its coffers, this loot-driven Congress government has become a curse for Karnataka."

## 'Congress, AAP did not put their egos aside': INDIA allies say a united front could have defeated BJP in Delhi election

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

After the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) experienced a crushing defeat in the Delhi Assembly election, leaders from its INDIA bloc partners criticised the Congress and the AAP for their lack of unity during the polls. They said if both parties had contested together as an alliance, they could have defeated the BJP. The BJP is poised to win 48 seats in the 70-member Delhi Assembly, with the AAP being reduced to just 22 seats. The Congress has not won any seats. Nationalist Congress Party (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar, in a post on X, congratulated the BJP for its success but said the arrogance of the Congress and the AAP resulted in the drubbing in Delhi elections and had the parties contested together, the BJP would not have won even 20 seats. "My personal feeling was that the government should have been formed under the leadership of the AAP in the Delhi elections. While fighting against a superpower like BJP, which is fighting elections using all appropriate and inappropriate means, parties with similar ideologies needed to take a step back or two. But unfortunately, the parties in the INDIA bloc did not put their egos aside. As a result, the BJP pulled off an impossible victory. All leaders fighting in the traditional way should take note of this matter," said Pawar. He also remarked that the Congress and the AAP appeared to operate as a "B team" for the BJP and questioned whether the INDIA bloc partners would finally learn a lesson. "In Delhi's Jangpura, Manish Sisodia was defeated by 700 votes, while Congress's Suri got 7,350. In New Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal was defeated by nearly 3,400 votes, while the Congress's Sandeep Dixit got more than 4,500 votes... The situation is similar in more than 20 constituencies. The two parties did not coordinate with each other," he added. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut also said if both parties had contested together, they would have indeed defeated BJP. Shiv Sena (UBT) announced its support for Arvind Kejriwal's AAP during the Delhi Assembly elections.



## Hanged in Pune, this daredevil rebel had struck fear into the hearts of British



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

One meets lawyers in black and white and people with grim, worried faces within the gates of Mamledar Kacheri in Pune's Shukrawar Peth. Rows of tables and chairs placed outside the main office are a hive of activity as leases get drawn, letters written and stamp papers formalised. It takes only a turn into a short lane to enter an open, less-crowded area and come face to face with a dark chapter in Indian history. A historic revolutionary, Umaji Naik, was imprisoned here before he was hanged on the premises on February 3, 1832. A peepul tree soaring towards the sky gives a chilling piece of information – it was from this tree that Naik's body was hung for three days as a deterrent to anybody who dared to rise against the British. The Adykrantiveer Rajee Umaji Naik Hutatma Smarak, a memorial where you are expected to remove your shoes before entering, smells of incense emanating from the space where Naik was hanged. A chandelier sparkles from the ceiling where poles used to be stretched for hangings. The tiled floor conceals a well where a wooden platform was placed for the hanging. "In the last five to 10 years, there has been an increase in the number of people coming here but it is not enough. At a nearby colony, where there are 150 quarters, only 10 per cent of the people know about this historical place or about Umaji Naik. People living on the other side of the wall don't know about him so what can we say about those living in other parts of Pune and India?" says Sunil Jadhav, secretary of the Adya Krantiveer Umaji Naik Kshatriya Ramvanshi Sanghatna (AKUNKRS), an organisation that is attempting to document the freedom fighter's life and spread awareness about his role in India's Independence. The king against a foreign power

A collection of swords, guns and handcuffs displaced against a red background in a case at the office of

AKUNKRS is a tangible reminder of Naik's fights. An archived news article, "Disturbance near Poonah" reveals that "a very large detachment composed of regular and irregular troops, has been employed for many months in the country around Poonah in suppressing a disturbance among the tribe of Ramoossies." It went on, "It appears that the notorious Ramoosy chief, Oomiah Naik, who, some years ago, kept that part of the country in such a very disturbed state, burning, plundering and levying contributions from the villages, killing and murdering in cool blood not only the inhabitants but also our own Sepoys.... broke out again last year into open rebellion..." According to Government of India records, Umaji Naik was born on September 7, 1791, in the Ramoshi tribe which had migrated from Telangana and put down roots in Maharashtra. Entrusted with night patrolling and policing by the Marathas, the Ramoshis were given the right to raise taxes in a few villages. The rise of the British after the defeat of the Marathas in 1818 started a difficult period for the tribe. "The Ramoshi tribe is exceptionally brave. Veer Bahirji Naik, who was in charge of intelligence during the period of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, belonged to the Ramoshi tribe," says Jadhav.

Naik, imbued with the boldness and daredevilry of his tribe, decided to go up against the British and raised an army. In 1826, he declared himself a king. He issued a proclamation that included killing British infantry and cavalry and looting their property. One of his dreaded attacks was on the Jejuri police headquarters where policemen were killed. British loyalists were brutally punished. "Though he was feared, Umaji Naik had strong support among the common people," Jadhav adds. Finally, the British, led by Captain Alexander Mackintosh, arrested Naik with the help of Nana Raghunath Chavan, who received Rs 10,000 from the government for his service. Naik was placed in solitary confinement at the site of the present memorial and tried on an upper floor. A wooden door, marked Andhar Kothari, is a reminder of the route to his cell. The door is kept locked and the underground has been sealed off. It was also here that Captain Mackintosh, possibly, wrote his important work, An Account of the Origin and Present Condition of the Tribe of Ramoossies, including the Life of the Chief Oomiah Naik. "They were all children of Bharat Mata and she loves them equally, so why do we know of some freedom fighters and not others? In books and on social media, we talk of only a few freedom fighters. The government and the public should take the initiative to keep the memories of less-known freedom fighters alive," Jadhav says.

## HC sends SP Afroz transfer case to earlier bench



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

The division bench of Chief Justice Gurmeet Singh Sandhawalia and Justice Satyen Vaidya on Friday forwarded the matter concerning the reinstatement of 2018 IPS officer Ilma Afroz to the previous bench that had, on September 9, 2024, directed that she not be transferred without prior court permission. The next hearing has been scheduled for February 28. The bench also forwarded the state government's application seeking modification of the earlier order, passed by the division bench of Justice Tarlok Singh Chauhan and Justice Sushil Kukreja, which prohibited the transfer of Afroz from her post as SP Baddi. Meanwhile, the state government did not submit a panel of three IPS officers as instructed by the high court.

Advocate General Anup Kumar Rattan informed the division bench that the state government was not inclined to submit the panel at this stage. Instead, the government filed an application seeking modification of the September 9, 2024 order, which stated that Afroz shall not be transferred. The government had previously claimed that Afroz had herself sought a transfer from Baddi and was subsequently posted to the Police Headquarters (PHQ) in Shimla. In its order, the division bench observed: "This application has been filed for transferring Superintendent of

Police, Baddi, District Solan. It is brought to our notice that a Co-ordinate Bench comprising Justice Tarlok Singh Chauhan and Justice Sushil Kukreja passed a detailed order on October 23, 2024, wherein certain directions were issued and a compliance report filed. Vide order dated September 9, 2024, directions had been issued that the officer, i.e., Superintendent of Police Ilma Afroz, who was also present when the abovesaid interim order was passed, shall not be transferred from the Police District, Baddi. In such circumstances, we deem it appropriate that the matter be heard by the same bench. List on February 28 before the same bench along with connected matter." Advocate RL Chaudhary, representing petitioner Sucha Ram, argued that the case should be handled by the earlier division bench, which ordered Afroz's continuation as SP Baddi. Afroz, who was posted as SP Baddi, went on a 15-day earned leave starting November 7 amid reports of differences with Congress MLA from Doon, Ram Kumar Chaudhary. The charge of SP Baddi was subsequently handed over to HPPS officer Vinod Kumar Dhiman on November 14. After returning to duty on December 17, Afroz has not been assigned a new posting and remains stationed at the PHQ in Shimla. Petitioner Sucha Ram alleged that Afroz was pressured into taking leave and argued that law and order in the Baddi-Barotiwala-Nalagarh Development (BBND) area had deteriorated since her transfer. He praised Afroz for her strict action against illegal mining, the drug menace, and organised crime during her tenure. The petition also highlighted the September 9, 2024 court order restricting her transfer. During the Vidhan Sabha's monsoon session, MLA Ram Kumar Chaudhary had filed a privilege motion against Afroz, accusing her of breaching his privacy. The matter was referred to DIG Abhishek Dullar for inquiry. Chaudhary, who has denied involvement in Afroz's transfer, was among six Chief Parliamentary Secretaries removed from their positions after the Shimla High Court invalidated the Himachal Pradesh Chief Parliamentary Secretaries Act, 2006, on November 13. Ilma Afroz is an alumna of St. Stephen's College, Delhi, and a Rhodes Scholar who studied at the University of Oxford, England.

## Poor infra at Panchkula Topiary park infuriates panel, penalties ordered

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Panchkula The chief administrator has also been advised to identify the executive engineer responsible for installing the rainwater harvesting structure near the fountain which is of no use keeping in mind the topography of the park. Taking note of the poor quality of infrastructure at Panchkula's Topiary Park (Sector 6), the Haryana Right to Service (RTS) Commission has ordered strict action along with penalties on officials for negligence in work. After a recent visit to the park, a team headed by Commission Chief Commissioner TC Gupta, a former IAS officer, observed that a path in the park was laid only recently and despite having a three-year warranty and constructed by importing the material, it got damaged within few months of its construction, clearly indicating "non-supervision during construction and possible corruption".

According to a spokesperson of the commission, it was ascertained that superintending engineer-level officer of Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) got this work executed and, therefore, chief administrator of the HSVP has been asked to conduct an inquiry into it, fix responsibility for this lapse and send a report to the commission by January 31 this year. "Since maintenance of park is a notified service, the construction of a substandard path (made from EPDM rubber) by spending public money amounts to non-maintenance of park and, therefore, the commission will consider imposition of penalty on the concerned under whose supervision this EPDM path was laid," the spokesperson said. The chief administrator has also been advised to identify the executive engineer responsible for installing the rainwater harvesting structure near the fountain which



is of no use keeping in mind the topography of the park. "He may consider recovering the amount of infructuous expenditure spent on its construction from him by issuing a chargesheet", the commission said. The commission has imposed a penalty of Rs 5,000 on the officials after the chief commissioner observed that the washrooms were in a dilapidated state and unfit for public use. It would be deducted from the salary of the executive engineer and the sub divisional engineer or other officials concerned. In addition to general maintenance and cleanliness issues, the flush was found to be non-functional. According to the commission spokesperson, it was also complained by many residents that the park's musical system was being operated at the whims and fancies of the operator. In this regard, the executive engineer concerned has been advised to identify the person and display his name on the notice board in the park along with names of other officials responsible for maintenance of the park.

## Visually impaired student duped of Rs 50,000, cyber cell recovers amount

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

A visually impaired student residing at the Jadavpur University hostel, recently, fell victim to an online fraud, after he was duped of Rs. 50,659 by a fraudulent astrologer. The incident occurred last year in November while the student was listening to a spiritual content on YouTube, when he encountered a contact number for an astrologer, who promised to enhance his career prospects and bring him good luck. The student, believing the fraudulent claims, paid the astrologer Rs. 50,659 in three installments as demanded. Subsequently, the astrologer blocked all communication with the victim. Deceived and distressed, the student contacted the South Suburban Division (SSD) Cyber Cell to report the incident. "Taking the complaint seriously, the Cyber Cell initiated an investigation, lodged a complaint with the MHA NCRP Portal, and contacted the beneficiary bank. Through these efforts, the Cyber Cell successfully blocked the fraudster's bank account and recovered the entire amount of Rs. 50,659, which was subsequently returned to the victim's account," said a senior SSD police official. The student acknowledged the Kolkata Police and Cyber team's efforts who retrieved the amount within 21 days. "I want to give a special thanks to the Kolkata police and the cyber cell. The cyber team of South Suburban



Division acted swiftly and recovered the entire amount within 21 days. I am visually impaired and studying in Jadavpur University... My father is a senior citizen and can't work properly. I am continuing my education with the help of scholarships. On November 7, 2024 I was duped of a large amount of money. I was depressed. On November 27, I filed a complaint. Kolkata SSD Cyber Cell started the probe and within a month I got my money back. I would request everyone if they have faced any cyber fraud, please don't hesitate, go to the cyber cell," he wrote.

## Gurpreet Gogi, Ludhiana AAP MLA, dies of gunshot wound to head

Punjab MLA Gurpreet Gogi, 58, died of a gunshot wound to his head at his residence in Ludhiana late on Friday. While a senior police official said that prima facie it seemed like the incident took place while the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA from Ludhiana West was cleaning his weapon, the city police chief said it was being verified "if it was a suicide or accidental fire". The incident took place at Gogi's residence in the Ghumar Mandi area. He was rushed to Dayanand Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) but was declared dead on arrival. The incident took place at Gogi's residence in the Ghumar Mandi area. (Express photo by Gurmeet Singh)

"The MLA received a gunshot injury in his head. The

autopsy report will confirm other details. It is being verified if it was a suicide or accidental fire," Kuldeep Singh Chahal, Police Commissioner, Ludhiana, told The Indian Express. "Prima facie, it was an accidental fire when the MLA was cleaning his weapon. He received a gunshot injury in the head from his 25-bore pistol. Autopsy report will ascertain other details," Shubham Aggarwal, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Investigation), Ludhiana, said. A four-time Congress councillor in Ludhiana Municipal Corporation and former district president of Ludhiana Congress (Urban), Gogi quit the Congress after 22 years to join AAP ahead of the Punjab elections in 2022 and was given a ticket from Ludhiana West. A first-time MLA, he had defeated former Congress minister and two-time MLA Bharat Bhushan Ashu by more than 7,000 votes.

## 'Verandah before court room no. 1': SC stays HC order, as UT flags UNESCO heritage status

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

With the Chandigarh Administration flagging the UNESCO heritage status of the Punjab and Haryana High Court building, the Supreme Court Friday stayed the HC's directions asking the administration to begin the construction of a "verandah before court room no. 1" of the HC building. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta also stayed the contempt notices against the UT Chief Engineer.

The Punjab HC, while hearing a PIL by Vinod Dhatterwal, secretary of the HC Employees Association, had on November 29 asked the administration to start the construction of the verandah. The petition sought implementation of the High Court's holistic development plan, which envisaged setting up of multi-storey buildings to cater to the requirement of additional space. The HC ordered start of construction of verandah in front of court room no. 1 in line with the one already existing before court room nos 2 to 9 within a period of two weeks and to complete the work within four weeks thereafter. However, finding that the Chandigarh Administration had not commenced the construction despite its directions, the HC on December 13 issued a contempt notice to the Chief Engineer of the Administration. The Chandigarh Administration, meanwhile, approached the SC challenging the HC order. The appeal contended that the construction of the verandah would require approval from the United Nations Educational, Scien-



tific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee since the HC building is part of the Capitol Complex designed by famous French architect Le Corbusier. It was designated as a World Heritage site in 2016. Hearing the appeal, the SC issued notice to the Registrar General, Punjab and Haryana High Court, returnable within two weeks. The SC Bench said that in the meantime, the High Court shall proceed further with the pending PIL and other connected matters but the directions for constructing the verandah as well as the contempt notices shall remain stayed. "Until further orders, the direction relating to construction of verandah before Court Room No.01 by the Union Territory of Chandigarh Administration and the contempt notices against the Chief Engineer shall remain stayed," the order said.

## BJP to suspend party workers accused of forging letter against Amreli Vekariya



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Kaushik Vekariya The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has initiated the suspension of its members implicated in the alleged forgery of a letter that defamed Kaushik Vekariya, the party's MLA from Amreli and deputy chief whip. (X) The BJP has begun the process of suspending its members accused in the alleged forged letter defaming the party's Amreli MLA and deputy chief whip Kaushik Vekariya, The Indian Express has learnt. Meanwhile, Congress leader and former Amreli MLA Paresh Dhanani has extended his 'Nari Swabhiman Andolan' dharna, demanding justice for a woman who is among the four accused, by a day.

Four people, including two BJP members and the Patidar woman, are accused in the forgery case. "After the names of Manish Vaghasiya and Ashok Mangrolia (Jashwantgarh Sarpanch) came out during investigation, we have asked the taluka BJP president to suspend both of them. The suspension letter has been made and they will be suspended shortly. Manish Vaghasiya is president Amreli district coordination committee member of the party," Amreli taluka panchayat president Kishor Kanpariya told. Kanpariya's official letterhead was allegedly misused to write the said forged letter addressed to BJP general secretary in charge of Gujarat, Ratnakar, with a copy to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, as per the FIR. "Manish Vaghasiya (one of the accused), who was earlier the Amreli taluka BJP youth wing president, took blank pages from my letterpad around eight-nine months ago. It was usual for him to take such pages from me for use during any de-

velopment works to be done in the villages through gram panchayat and taluka panchayat. But he misused the letterpad, and hence, I filed a complaint before the Amreli police," he added. Kanpariya is the complainant in the case lodged at the Amreli town police station under various sections, including forgery. Barring the woman who is out on bail, the other accused are in judicial custody. "The police have also recovered blank letterpads of three members of Amreli taluka panchayat and five letterpads of sarpanch of various districts (from the accused)," he claimed. Dhanani, the former Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader, who is on a protest dharna against the alleged parading of the woman accused during a "reconstruction" of the crime scene on December 29, said he will take the protest to Surat Monday. However, Kanpariya backed the woman and her family. "They are residents of my own village and from day one, I was in support of them but due to the intervention of other people, we were on the backfoot," he said.

## High Court summons Chandigarh SSP over contradictory threat perception report

Finding a recent threat perception report concerning a High Court judge "contradictory" to earlier submissions, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has summoned the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Security and Traffic, Chandigarh Police. The court was hearing a suo motu matter related to an incident in Amritsar where a man shot himself using the pistol of an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) assigned to the judge's security. Following the incident, the High Court had ordered the deployment of 3-4 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel for the judge's protection. The incident occurred on September 22, 2024, at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. A man snatched the pistol from the ASI accompanying the judge and used it to take his own life.



# Why are Apple and Epic facing off against each other again?



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

The story so far: On February 3, an app platform AltStore introduced a new app as “the world’s 1st Apple-approved porn app.” The new pornography app and the way it was cheekily advertised has reignited a long-time feud between iPhone-maker Apple and the game-maker Epic. Though Apple does not allow pornography apps on App Store, users in the European Union can still download this particular adult app on their iPhones. That’s because of the bloc’s anti-competitive policy that allows non-Apple app marketplaces to offer their own line-up of products to Apple customers. Previously, they could only download apps from the App Store.

Which app is causing the problem?

‘Hot Tub’ app is at the centre of this new discontent between Epic Games and Apple. The adult content browser app provides its users privacy and security without sending ads or tracking their location. Rated for users aged 18 and above, the app is available for download through the AltStore PAL—an open source, alternative app marketplace in the EU. AltStore enjoys financial support from Epic Games, per AP. The Fortnite videogame maker’s founder and CEO Tim Sweeney is a strong critic of Apple as the iPhone maker collects 30% commission from app developers that charge their users for in-app purchases. In 2020, Epic sued Apple on antitrust grounds in the U.S. and the two companies faced off in court for more than a couple years. Meanwhile, in the EU, the Digital Markets Act (DMA) sought to foster competition by making Apple let its iOS and iPadOS users install apps from alternative app marketplaces or even from an authorised developer’s website. Apple was reluctant to allow this.

What is Apple saying about the matter?

Apple is deeply unhappy about the recent developments. The iPhone-maker stressed that AltStore’s statement about the porn app being “Apple approved” was false, and that it would never offer Hot Tub through its own App Store, per AP. “The truth is that we are required by the European Commission to allow it to be distributed by market-

place operators like AltStore and Epic who may not share our concerns for user safety,” Apple was quoted as saying. The iPhone-maker also expressed concern for children’s safety in the EU due to the presence of the porn app. Apple has in the past raised concerns about the security risks of opening up its app marketplace ecosystem to rivals, but the process is not a free-for-all. Instead, Apple has a review mechanism called “notarization” to ensure that all apps from diverse distribution channels meet fundamental accuracy, functionality, safety, security, and privacy standards. However, Apple warned that “even with these safeguards in place, many risks remain.” AltStore, in turn, claimed that Hot Tub was indeed “approved” by Apple since it passed the tech company’s notarization process and was not rejected. “To be perfectly clear, Apple has not endorsed Hot Tub in any way. However, they did approve it,” said AltStore in an X post on February 5. AltStore further noted that users will have to add Hot Tub’s source (URL) to make it appear in the AltStore PAL marketplace, meaning that people who do not wish to see the porn app cannot stumble across it by accident.

What is Epic’s argument?

Epic Games’ Sweeney has lashed out against Apple’s statement, claiming that it is false and calling the company “extremely disingenuous.” In an X thread on February 4, Mr. Sweeney raised the counter-argument that Apple did indeed allow “hardcore” pornography by hosting other apps with adult content or pornography—such as Reddit—on its own official app store. “So, if this Hot Tub app available through AltStore continued to host its current porn, and also added lots of non-porn content, the Apple’s App Store terms would welcome it. And if they treated it like Reddit, they’d even give it a 17+ (!!!) rating and Editors Choice Award,” Sweeney posted. Separately, the CEO claimed that the Epic Games Store for PC and mobile did not host any porn apps.

What is the EU’s stance?

The EU calls the DMA “one of the centrepieces of the European digital strategy” to maintain fair competition among businesses in the region by identifying tech behemoths, or “gatekeepers” such as Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, ByteDance, Meta, and Microsoft, and holding them accountable. The DMA is meant to protect consumer choices and level the playing field by making sure gatekeepers do not abuse their dominance in the marketplace. On the flip side, the availability of a native pornography app on iPhones and iPads in the EU raises serious questions. For one, it brings up the issue of not just who offers apps to Apple product users, but also what type of apps these marketplaces host. That being said, many social media users were quick to point out that an Apple customer trying to watch pornography could simply open up the company’s Safari browser and start typing away, with or without the DMA.

# Restoring heritage through temple care in Andhra Pradesh

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Guvvalakunta, a sleepy village with a population of over 4,000 in the Nandyal district, woke up to a buzz on the morning of December 15, 2024, when over 100 people clad in traditional attire entered and unassumingly began cleaning its centuries-old stepwell. Located 60 km away from the district headquarters, the journey to the village is nearly two hours long, and one has to drive through the dense Nallamala forest ranges of the Atmakur division

Not many in Guvvalakunta, especially the youth, knew about the historical significance of the dilapidated stepwell in their village or were aware of the treasure trove of art and heritage it quietly safeguarded over the years. The volunteers of the ‘Mana Ooru - Mana Gudi - Mana Badhyatha’ (Our Village - Our Temple - Our Responsibility) community initiative became aware of the neglected stepwell when a history enthusiast’s social media post about it received a response from Minister Nara Lokesh. “It’s our collective responsibility to safeguard our cultural legacy and historical treasures. We’re committed to restoring this magnificent well to its former glory and ensuring its preservation for future generations,” Lokesh said. “When our team visited the village, the stepwell was in a poor condition. Garbage, empty liquor bottles and plastic waste were discarded there. We understood that it was not an easy task to clean it.” Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Nandyal chapter convenor M.V. Shivakumar Reddy recalls. Shivakumar, the Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories by profession, is the brain behind the community initiative, which has made its mission to restore and revive old and neglected temples in the State since its inception on May 12, 2022.

“After clearing the garbage and pumping out the water, we were astonished to find beautiful sculptures that were carved on the walls of the well. We uncovered sculptures of various Indian dance forms and artists playing musical instruments,” Shivakumar says. Later, the volunteers learnt that the water from the stepwell was used to perform the ‘Abhishekam’ ritual in the local Lord Shiva temple in the olden days. The sculptures of the ‘Dasavatarams’ (the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu) presented themselves as the volunteers went deeper to clean the well, and later, they learned that an idol of a peacock was stolen by treasure hunters even as the well was abandoned decades ago after the farmer on whose land it exists ignored it. “Temple cleansing gives us spiritual satisfaction. Cleaning and restoring the stepwells and temple ponds is also spiritually rewarding even as it helps us bring the cultural legacy of the place back to light,” he says.

The voluntary initiative, with over 1,100 members, has cleaned 124 temples, including prominent ones like the Kanchi, Abhobilam, Arunachalam, Srisaalam, Mantralayam, Kasapuram Anjaneya Swamy, and the nine Nandi temples in Nandyal, he says. They began cleaning the Pradama Nandi temple in Nandyal. “When I got the idea of cleaning and restoring old temples, I asked about 100 of my friends and colleagues. At least 70 of them said they would join, but only 13 turned up on the day,” he recalls. Shivakumar also recalls that cleaning Prahlada Varada Koopam at Bachepally near Abhobilam in the district was another great experience for the team. “Like any other temple pond or a well, this place was littered with garbage and plastic waste. But after cleaning it, we discovered a magnificent structure,” he says.

“The well has holes specially designed for the snakes to slither out when people enter it to draw water. After we cleaned the well, the locals have begun to maintain it properly,” he says. The volunteers of ‘Mana Ooru—Mana Gudi—Mana Badhyatha’ come from all walks of life—doctors, software engineers, students, and youth—and from various places like Nandyal, Kurnool, Hyderabad, and Tenali.

Among them is 69-year-old J. Karthiki, the Head of the Department of Gynaecology at Nandyal-based Dr.



Shantiram Hospitals. “I was part of the team that cleaned several temples, ponds and stepwells. Initially, I hesitated to get into the stepwell at Abhobilam. Still, seeing the enthusiasm of the others joining the initiative, I was inspired to even climb down the temple ponds and clean them,” she says. Dr. Karthiki adds that initiatives like theirs go a long way in preserving our culture and rich heritage. “Not just providing education, but we also have to safeguard and pass on our culture and heritage to the future generations,” she adds. She was a part of the 100-odd volunteers who cleaned the Kanchi Kamakshi temple in Kancheepuram of Tamil Nadu. “The temple pond was full of shrubs and bushes. We removed three truckloads of garbage from it,” she says.

She adds that it has now become a regular activity for her to participate in the temple cleaning rituals. “Sunday is a holiday for me. Instead of sitting at home and watching television, participating in this kind of activity keeps my mind fresh,” she said. The volunteers also share a special bond after collectively participating in the temple cleansing activities over the years. “We plan our activity meticulously and in advance. The local teams would visit where we plan to take up our cleaning activity and assess the number of volunteers needed. Later, we fix a day and reach the spot in advance. We provide accommodation to all those visiting from other places,” Shivakumar says.

Dr. Karthiki adds that participating in the activity and having lunch together helped the volunteers develop a bond with each other. “We volunteer to serve food and clear the plates after the volunteers eat,” she adds. A Shankar Reddy, a 65-year-old retired employee from Nandyal, says they are happy to be a part of an activity that protects and preserves the place’s rich culture and history. “We now see more youth joining our activities. When we cleaned the Srisaalam hill shrine and the pond there, nearly 40 software engineers from Hyderabad joined us,” he says.

Inspired by this community initiative, we now started cleaning the smaller local temples once every 10 days, says Shankar, the retired Deputy General Manager of Vijaya Dairy. Shankar, who, along with some members of the organisation, went to Prayagraj to participate in the cleaning of ghats at the Mahakumbh Mela on February 5, says they experienced a positive feeling while participating in temple cleaning. “This kind of activity should be taken up in every village to protect and preserve our values and culture,” he asserts.

The organisation’s latest activity was at Srisaalam, where the volunteers cleaned the temple town on the first day and the Enugu (Elephant) Cheruvu near the Sri Bhramarambha temple on the second day. “To our astonishment, we found a well within the Enugu Cheruvu from where water was oozing,” Shivakumar says. Once called the Bogavati Cheruvu, the well got its name ‘Enugu Cheruvu’ after elephants began to visit the lake to bathe. It is said that the Nallamala forests used to be an elephant habitat once. There is evidence that elephants were used to lift heavy stones to construct the Srisaalam temple, says Shivakumar. The members will contribute the tools and equipment needed for cleaning and the expenses for serving lunch, accommodation, and other facilities. “

# ‘Take up work on Thiruneermalai Periya Eri, Nattu Kalvai on a war footing’



Thiruneermalai Periya Eri is a supersized waterbody lying spread-eagle and claiming pieces of three wards (29, 30 and 31) within Tambaram Municipal Corporation limits. This waterbody has a neighbour, only a few addresses removed, named Veeraraghavan Eri.

Pachai Malai, a dwarfish hill in Tambaram Sanatorium, “supplies” rainwater to Chitlapakkam Lake on its east and Veeraraghavan Eri on its west. Filled-up, Veeraraghavan Eri disgorges rainwater, which gushes into Thiruneermalai Periya Eri. Thiruneermalai Periya Eri spits out the excess water into a rainwater-carrying channel called Nattu Kalvai, which courses through residential areas, slithers under the Maduravoyal-Irumbuliur Bypass Road and meets Adyar river. The course of Nattu Kalvai being beset with challenges, neighbourhoods on both sides of it face flooding during NE monsoon, says B. Saravanan, a resident of Thiruneermalai and a member of Thiruneermalai Periya Eri Paathukappu Kuzhu and a social activist, while presenting this graphic picture to nail the rainwater-flow dynamics of the region.

“It is the Thiruneermalai Periya Eri Paathukappu Kuzhu’s plea that the Chief Minister prioritise this project and sanction it so that work could be executed during summer and residents are spared flooding during NE monsoon.” Prominent members of Thiruneermalai Periya Eri Paathukappu Kuzhu, including Perumal, Arulmozhi, Kumaran and Saravanan are in the forefront of a drive to have residents’ concerns about flooding in these parts heard by officials in government line agencies that can reverse this situation. On May 4 and July 28, both in year 2024, the group organised a clean-up drive at Thiruneermalai Periya Eri and an awareness rally around the issue respectively. Saravanan continues: “If you imagined a funnel, you would gain a mental picture of Nattu Kalvai. Where the Nattu Kalvai nuzzles close to Thiruneermalai Periya Eri, it is 60 feet wide, serving as a Kalangal, a catchment area for water overflowing from the lake.” And a 50-metre amble later, when it crosses over to the other side of Thiruneermalai Main Road, it appears emaciated, reduced by half (just 30 feet wide now), as if it had been through an ill-advised diet plan.

“When it crosses Saraswathipuram First Street, it would be 20 feet wide, and while running parallel to Saraswathipuram Fourth Street Extension, it gets narrower

# Tirunelveli district gets 2 more industrial estates and an IT Park

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Even as the Gangaikondan SIPCOT Industrial Growth Center is overflowing with industries and the land acquired for this complex has almost got exhausted after the entry of TP Solar and Vikram Solar, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has announced that the district will get two more industrial estates — one at Nanguneri and the other one at Moolaikkaraipatti.

Addressing during a function held in Palayamkottai on Friday (January 7, 2025), Mr. Stalin said the industrial estate to be developed by SIPCOT at Marukaikurichi near Nanguneri on Tirunelveli – Kanniyakumari Highway would come up on 2,200 acres while the second industrial estate would be created on 1,060 acres at Moolaikkaraipatti, situated about 20 km from Palayamkottai. Since there is a spacious government land near Perumalpuram police station on which the temporary bus-stand was functioning a couple of years ago and was used as the terminus for omni buses for a while, the proposed IT Park will come up on this land and also on the adjacent land on which the Sri Lankan refugee camp is now situated. In all, more than 4 acres of land is available in this location, which will be used for creating the IT Park.

“We’ve identified the land for relocating the refugee camp where the houses will built,” the officials said. Since Tamirabharani, the backbone of irrigation and drinking water purposes of the southern districts, is getting seriously

polluted by the domestic and industrial sewage flowing into the perennial river, a sewage treatment plant will come up in Tirunelveli to treat underground drainage to save the river from pollution. The treated water will be used for industrial purposes. The Chief Minister’s promise of constructing a ‘Y-shaped rail overbridge at Kulavanigarapuram’ manned level crossing has brought much relief to the residents of Melapalayam area as the earlier proposal for constructing a ‘straight-line ROB’ at this busy point, where the gate is closed for 14 times a day, triggered objections from them. If a ‘Y-shaped ROB’ is built, it will allow the residents of Melapalayam and those living in Perumalpuram and beyond can easily cross the manned level crossing.

“They made good their promise, arriving for an inspection by the end of October in 2024. We were present during the inspection and raised our concerns. They heard us out and promised to carry out a temporary measure ahead of the NE Monsoon. They pointed out that they would need to have three more box culverts, each ten feet high to increase the width, thereby facilitating easy flow of rainwater past the bypass road. They said this has to be communicated to the regional office with a clearly drawn estimate to find out if it could be cleared with permission from the regional office or from the head office in Delhi. Meanwhile, as a temporary measure, workers were employed to clear the sediment formed under the Veeranam pipeline to ensure smoother flow of rainwater. The help from this measure was negligible.” Saravanan notes that an RTI petition he had sent to the state government had elicited a reply on October 10, 2024, stating that a project plan for a Water Resources Department-led restoration of Thiruneermalai Periya Eri and Nattu Kalvai at a cost of ₹53.3 crores had been drawn up. It was awaiting sanction, having been placed on a priority list. Saravanan observes: “It is the Thiruneermalai Periya Eri Paathukappu Kuzhu’s plea that the Chief Minister prioritise this project and sanction it so that work could be executed during summer and residents are spared flooding during NE monsoon,” says Saravanan. “What is required to prevent flooding in these parts is deepening and desilting of Thiruneermalai Periya Eri, creation of walkways on the bunds, which would ensure protection of the lake and also ensure the bunds would not be broken during heavy rains. Nattu Kalvai is shallow just two to 2.5 feet deep; it has to be deepened, and the side wall raised higher so that water does not overflow. Besides, Nattu Kalvai should be made a closed channel. In addition to this measure by WRD, provision of additional box culverts at the bypass road by NHA will ensure flooding-free residential areas in these parts during NE Monsoon.”



polluted by the domestic and industrial sewage flowing into the perennial river, a sewage treatment plant will come up in Tirunelveli to treat underground drainage to save the river from pollution. The treated water will be used for industrial purposes. The Chief Minister’s promise of constructing a ‘Y-shaped rail overbridge at Kulavanigarapuram’ manned level crossing has brought much relief to the residents of Melapalayam area as the earlier proposal for constructing a ‘straight-line ROB’ at this busy point, where the gate is closed for 14 times a day, triggered objections from them. If a ‘Y-shaped ROB’ is built, it will allow the residents of Melapalayam and those living in Perumalpuram and beyond can easily cross the manned level crossing.

# New bridge across the Cauvery between Nerur and Unniyur to be completed by June



The construction of a new bridge across the Cauvery between Nerur in Karur district and Unniyur in Tiruchi district is expected to be completed by June.

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

The new bridge coming up across the Cauvery between Nerur in Karur district and Unniyur in Tiruchi district. The new bridge coming up across the Cauvery between Nerur in Karur district and Unniyur in Tiruchi district. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

trict and Unniyur in Tiruchi district is expected to be completed by June.

About 85% of the construction work on the bridge had been completed so far, sources in the State Highways Department (Projects Wing) told. The decks have been completed and work is under way on building the approach road on the two sides. Only construction of parapet and a few other allied work remains to be finished. We plan to complete the work by May or June,” said an official of the department. The construction of the bridge would come as a huge relief to residents on either side of the river. Unniyur is 4 km from Kattuputhur in Tiruchi district and villagers have to now travel about 30 km to reach Nerur on the other side. Nerur is about 11 km from Karur. The construction of the bridge would reduce the travel time drastically for the villagers.

The Sri Sadasiva Brahmendral Adhishthanam located at Nerur attracts a large number of tourists. The bridge would significantly improve road connectivity in the region and the travel time between Tiruchi and Karur and between Karur and Chennai would come down significantly once the bridge is opened to traffic. The high level bridge would be 1.1-km long with 26 spans. The overall width of the bridge would be 12.90 metres, including pavements on both sides. A minor bridge would be constructed across a canal as part of the approach road on Unniyur side.



# War-torn Lebanon forms first government in over 2 years



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Lebanon's new Prime Minister on Saturday (February 8, 2025) formed the country's first full-fledged government since 2022. President Joseph Aoun announced in a statement that he had accepted the resignation of the former caretaker government and signed a decree with new Prime Minister Nawaf Salam forming the new government.

Mr. Salam's cabinet of 24 ministers, split evenly between Christian and Muslim sects, was formed less than a month after he was appointed, and comes at a time where Lebanon is scrambling to rebuild its battered southern region and maintain security along its southern border after a

devastating war between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group. A US-brokered ceasefire deal ended the war in November.

Lebanon is also still in the throes of a crippling economic crisis, now in its sixth year, which has battered its banks, destroyed its state electricity sector and left many in poverty unable to access their savings. Mr. Salam, a diplomat and former president of the International Court of Justice, has vowed to reform Lebanon's judiciary and battered economy and bring about stability in the troubled country, which has faced numerous economic, political, and security crises for decades. Though Hezbollah did not endorse Salam as prime minister, the Lebanese group did engage in negotiations with the new prime minister over the Shiite Muslim seats in government, as per Lebanon's power-sharing system. Lebanon's new authorities also mark a shift away from leaders that are close to Hezbollah, as Beirut hopes to continue improving ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations that have been concerned by Hezbollah's growing political and military power over the past decade. In early January, former army chief Aoun was elected president, ending that position's vacuum. He was also a candidate not endorsed by Hezbollah and key allies. Mr. Aoun has shared similar sentiments to Salam, also vowing to consolidate the state's right to "monopolize the carrying of weapons," in an apparent reference to the arms of Hezbollah.

# Trump says he's ending Biden's classified intelligence briefings in payback move

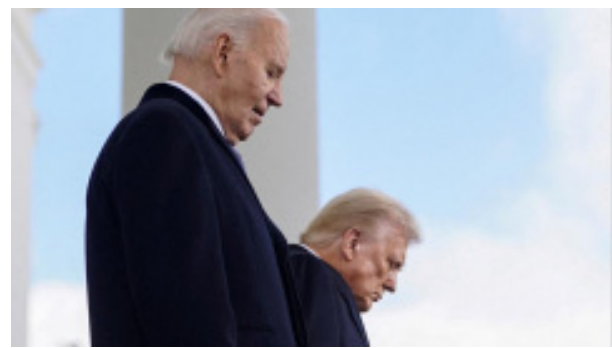
GNS News Agency, Feb 14

President Donald Trump said Friday that he's revoking former President Joe Biden's access to government secrets and ending the daily intelligence briefings he's receiving in payback for Mr. Biden doing the same to him in 2021. Trump announced his decision in a post on his social media platform shortly after he arrived at his Mar-a-Lago home and private club in Palm Beach for the weekend.

"There is no need for Joe Biden to continue receiving access to classified information. Therefore, we are immediately revoking Joe Biden's Security Clearances, and stopping his daily Intelligence Briefings," Trump wrote. "He set this precedent in 2021, when he instructed the Intelligence Community (IC) to stop the 45th President of the United States (ME!) from accessing details on National Security, a courtesy provided to former Presidents." The move is the latest in a vengeance tour of Washington that Trump promised during his campaign. He has previously revoked security clearances from more than four dozen former intelligence officials who signed a 2020 letter saying that the Hunter Biden laptop saga bore the hallmarks of a "Russian information operation." He's also revoked security details assigned to protect former government officials who have criticized him, including his own former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who faces threats from Iran, and former infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci. Mr. Biden ended Trump's intelligence briefings after Trump helped spur efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election and incited the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. At the time, Mr. Biden said Trump's "erratic" behavior should prevent him from getting the intel briefings.

Asked in an interview with CBS News what he feared if Trump continued to receive the briefings, Mr. Biden said he did not want to "speculate out loud" but made clear he did not want Trump to continue having access to such information. "I just think that there is no need for him to have the intelligence briefings," Mr. Biden said. "What value is giving him an intelligence briefing? What impact does he have at all, other than the fact he might slip and say something?"

In 2022, federal agents searched Trump's Florida home and seized boxes of classified records. He was indicted on



dozens of felony counts accusing him of illegally hoarding classified records and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back. He pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing. A judge dismissed the charges, ruling the special counsel who brought them was illegally appointed, and the Justice Department gave up appeals after Trump was elected in November. In his post, Trump cited the special counsel report last year into Mr. Biden's handling of classified documents, saying, "The Hur Report revealed that Biden suffers from 'poor memory' and, even in his 'prime,' could not be trusted with sensitive information." He ended his post by saying, "I will always protect our National Security — JOE, YOU'RE FIRED. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!" Special counsel Robert Hur investigated Mr. Biden's handling of classified information and found that criminal charges were not warranted but delivered a bitingly critical assessment of his handling of sensitive government records.

The report described Biden's memory as "hazy," "fuzzy," "faulty," "poor" and having "significant limitations." It said Biden could not recall defining milestones in his own life such as when his son Beau died or when he served as vice president. Trump has the right to end the briefings for Mr. Biden because it is a sitting president's decision on whether a past president should continue to have access to classified information. Steven Cheung, the president's communications director, shared Trump's post on the X social media platform and said, "Hit the road Jack and don't you come back no more!"

# Hamas hands over three more Israeli hostages for dozens of Palestinian prisoners under Gaza ceasefire



GNS News Agency, Feb 14

Hamas-led militants released three more hostages, all Israeli civilian men, to the Red Cross on Saturday (February 8, 2025), and Israel was to free dozens of Palestinian prisoners as part of a fragile agreement that has paused the war in the Gaza Strip. U.S. President Donald Trump's stunning proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza, welcomed by Israel but vehemently rejected by the Palestinians and most of the international community, does not appear to have affected the current phase of the truce, which runs until early March.

But it could complicate talks over the second and more difficult phase, when Hamas is to release dozens more hostages in return for a lasting ceasefire. Hamas may be reluctant to free more captives — and lose its main bargaining chip — if it believes the US and Israel are serious about depopulating the territory, which rights groups say would violate international law. The three hostages — Eli Sharabi, 52; Ohad Ben Ami, 56; and Or Levy, 34 — appeared very gaunt and pale as armed Hamas fighters led them from a white van onto a stage set up in the town of Deir al-Balah. All were abducted during the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, that sparked the war.

Before a crowd of hundreds of people, Hamas fighters pointed a microphone at each of the three in turn and made them make a public statement, before handing them over to waiting Red Cross officials. It was the first time hostages freed during this phase of the ceasefire have been made to make public statements during their release. Hours before the release, dozens of masked and armed Hamas fighters, some driving white pickup trucks with guns mounted on them, lined up at the location of the exchange near the territory's main north-south highway in Central Gaza. This was the fifth swap of hostages for prisoners since the ceasefire began on January 19. Before Saturday, 18 hostages and more than 550 Palestinian prisoners had been freed. The first phase of the ceasefire calls for the release of 33 hostages and nearly 2,000 prisoners, the return of Palestinians to northern Gaza and an increase in humanitarian aid to the devastated territory. Last week, wounded Palestinians were allowed to leave Gaza for Egypt for the first time since May.

Who was released on Saturday?

Sharabi and Ben Ami were both taken hostage from Kibbutz Beer, one of the hardest-hit farming communities in the Hamas attack. Levy was abducted from the Nova music festival, where he was taking shelter in a saferoom when the militants arrived. Sharabi's wife and two teenage daughters were killed during the October 7, 2023, attack, while his brother Yossi was also abducted and died in captivity. Levy's wife was also killed during the attack. His now 3-year-old son has been cared for by relatives for the past 16 months. Ben Ami, a father of three, was kidnapped with his wife, Raz. Raz Ben Ami was released during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. Relatives of the hostages cheered, clapped and cried as they watched live footage of their loved ones being released. Or Levy's brother Michael

said his brother's young son, Almog, was already informed his father was on his way. "Mogi, we found daddy," Michael Levy said he told the boy, using his nickname, in an interview with Israeli Channel 12. "We haven't seen happiness like that in him for a long time." The 183 Palestinian prisoners to be released by Israel on Saturday include 18 people serving life sentences for committing deadly attacks, 54 serving long-term sentences and 111 Palestinians from Gaza who were detained after the October 7 attack. All are men, ranging in age from 20 to 61.

While Israel considers them to be terrorists, Palestinians view them as heroes battling Israeli occupation. Virtually every Palestinian has a friend, relative or acquaintance who has been imprisoned. More than 100 hostages were released during a weeklong ceasefire in Nov. 2023. More than 70 are still in Gaza, and Israel has said 34 are believed to have been killed in the initial attack or to have died in captivity. Israel says Hamas has confirmed that eight of the 33 to be released in the first phase of the ceasefire are dead. Ceasefire is holding but next phase is uncertain it is not clear whether Israel and Hamas have begun negotiating a second phase of the ceasefire, which calls for releasing the remaining hostages and extending the truce indefinitely. The war could resume in early March if an agreement is not reached. Israel says it is still committed to destroying Hamas, even after the militant group reasserted its rule over Gaza within hours of the latest ceasefire. A key far-right partner in Netanyahu's coalition is calling for the war to resume after the ceasefire's first phase. Hamas says it won't release the remaining hostages without an end to the war and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

In the October 7 attack that started the war, some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed. More than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's retaliatory air and ground war, over half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were militants. The Israeli military says it killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence. It blames civilian deaths on Hamas because its fighters operate in residential neighbourhoods. Senior militants among Palestinian prisoners set for release

Of the 72 security prisoners being released Saturday, five hail from east Jerusalem, 14 from the Gaza Strip and the remaining 53 from the occupied West Bank. Seven are set to be transferred to Egypt ahead of further deportation. A total of 47 prisoners will be set free Saturday from Ofer prison, in the West Bank, and transferred to Palestinian custody at the Betunia crossing point near the administrative centre of Ramallah where scores of relatives, friends and supporters were preparing a hero's welcome for the returnees. The Palestinian security prisoners were detained over offenses ranging from bomb attacks to involvement in militant organizations, in some cases dating back decades.

Among them is Iyad Abu Shakhdam, 49, who has been locked up for nearly 21 years over his involvement in Hamas militant attacks in crowded civilian areas that killed dozens of Israelis during the Palestinian uprising of the early 2000s. That included a notorious 2004 suicide bus bombing in Israel's southern desert city of Beersheba that killed 16 people, including a 4-year-old child. Another is Jamal al-Tawil, a prominent Hamas politician in the occupied West Bank and former mayor of the village of al-Bireh, abutting Ramallah. He has spent nearly two decades in and out of Israeli jail, with the military reporting his last arrest in 2021 over his alleged participation in violent riots and efforts to entrench Hamas' leadership in the West Bank. He was transferred to administrative detention, a repeatedly renewable six-month period in which suspects are held without charge or trial. Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state.

# Judge blocks Trump from placing thousands of USAID workers on leave and giving them 30-day deadline

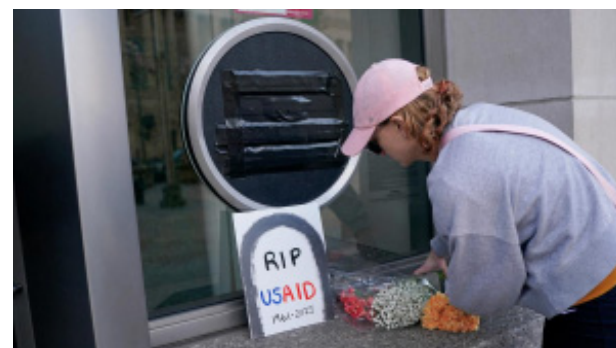
GNS News Agency, Feb 14

A federal judge ordered a temporary block on Friday (February 7, 2025) on Trump administration orders that would have placed thousands more workers of the U.S. Agency for International Development on leave, and would have given agency workers abroad just a 30-day deadline to return to the U.S. U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump appointee, agreed with arguments by two government employee associations that both orders exposed U.S. aid and development workers abroad to unwarranted risk and hardship. Closing down of USAID The judge declined to grant a temporary block on a Trump administration funding freeze that has shut down the six-decade-old agency's aid and development work around the world, ahead of a fuller court review and arguments on the employees' case. "CLOSE IT DOWN," Mr. Trump said on social media of USAID before the judge's ruling. People hold placards outside the USAID building, after billionaire Elon Musk, who is heading U.S. President Donald Trump's drive to shrink the federal government, said work is underway to shut down the U.S. foreign aid agency USAID, in Washington, U.S., February 3, 2025. The American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees argue that Mr. Trump lacks the authority to shut down the six-decade-old aid agency without approval from Congress. Democratic lawmakers have made the same argument.

Trump's administration moved quickly on Friday to literally erase the agency's name. Workers on a crane scrubbed the name from the stone front of its Washington headquarters. They used duct tape to block it out on a sign and took down USAID flags. Someone placed a bouquet of flowers outside the door. The Trump administration and Mr. Musk, who is running a budget-cutting Department of Government Efficiency, have made USAID their biggest target so far in an unprecedented challenge of the federal government and many of its programs.

USAID staffers face crisis Administration appointees and Musk's teams have shut down almost all funding for the agency, stopping aid and development programs worldwide, placed staffers and contractors on leave and furlough and locked them out of the agency's email and other systems. According to Democratic lawmakers, they also carted away USAID's computer servers. "This is a full-scale gutting of virtually all the personnel of an entire agency," Karla Gilbride, the attorney for the employee associations, told the judge.

Department of Justice attorney Brett Shumate argued that the administration has all the legal authority it needs to place agency staffers on leave. "The government does this across the board every day," Shumate said. "That's what's happening here. It's just a large number." Within the State Department itself, employees fear substantial staff reductions following the deadline for the Trump administration's



offer of financial incentives for federal workers to resign, according to officials who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. A judge temporarily blocked that offer and set a hearing Monday. The administration earlier this week gave almost all USAID staffers posted overseas 30 days, starting Friday, to return to the U.S., with the government paying for their travel and moving costs. Diplomats at embassies asked for waivers allowing more time for some, including families forced to pull their children out of schools midway. In a notice posted on the USAID website late Thursday, the agency clarified that none of the overseas personnel put on leave would be forced to leave the country where they work. But it said that workers who chose to stay longer than 30 days might have to cover their own expenses unless they received a specific hardship waiver.

Judge's ruling setback for Trump Friday's ruling is the latest setback in the courts for the Trump administration, whose policies to offer financial incentives for federal workers to resign and end birthright citizenship for anyone born in the U.S. to someone in the country illegally have been temporarily paused by judges. Earlier Friday, a group of a half-dozen USAID officials speaking to reporters strongly disputed assertions from Secretary of State Marco Rubio that the most essential life-saving programs abroad were getting waivers to continue funding. None were, the officials said.

Among the programs they said had not received waivers: \$450 million in food grown by U.S. farmers sufficient to feed 36 million people, which was not being paid for or delivered; and water supplies for 1.6 million people displaced by war in Sudan's Darfur region, which were being cut off without money for fuel to run water pumps in the desert. The judge's order involved the Trump administration's decision earlier this week to pull almost all USAID workers off the job and out of the field worldwide. Besides the 2,200 workers temporarily protected from being put on leave, the fate was not clear of others who work with the agency and have been laid off, furloughed or put on leave. Trump and congressional Republicans have spoken of moving a much-reduced number of aid and development programs under the State Department.

# Missing commuter plane found crashed on Alaska sea ice, all 10 aboard killed

GNS News Agency, Feb 14

A small commuter plane that crashed in western Alaska on its way to the hub community of Nome was located Friday on sea ice, and all 10 people on board died, authorities said. Mike Salerno, a spokesperson for the U.S. Coast Guard, said rescuers were searching the aircraft's last known location by helicopter when they spotted the wreckage. They lowered two rescue swimmers to investigate.

The Bering Air single-engine turboprop plane was traveling from Unalakleet on Thursday afternoon with nine passengers and a pilot, according to Alaska's Department of Public Safety. The Cessna Caravan left Unalakleet at 2:37 p.m., and officials lost contact with it less than an hour later, according to David Olson, director of operations for Bering Air. There was light snow and fog, with a temperature of 17 degrees (minus 8.3 Celsius), according to the National Weather Service. Officials lost contact with the plane less than an hour later. The Coast Guard said it went missing about 30 miles (48 kilometers) southeast of Nome. The aircraft was 12 miles (19 kilometers) offshore, according to the Coast Guard said. It was operating at its maximum passenger capacity, according to the airline's description of the plane. Radar forensic data provided by the U.S. Civil Air Patrol indicated that about 3:18 p.m., the plane had "some kind of event which caused them to experience a rapid loss in elevation and a rapid loss in speed," Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Benjamin McIntyre-Coble said. "What that event is, I can't speculate to." McIntyre-Coble said he was unaware of any distress signals from the aircraft. Planes carry an emergency locating transmitter. If exposed to seawater, the device sends a signal to a satellite, which then relays that message back to the Coast Guard to indicate an aircraft may be in distress. There have been no such messages received by the Coast Guard, he said.

All 10 people on board the plane were adults, and the flight was a regularly scheduled commuter trip, according to Lt. Ben Endres of the Alaska State Troopers. Local, state and federal agencies assisted in the search effort, combing stretches of ice-dotted waters and scouring miles of frozen tundra. The plane's disappearance marks the third major U.S. aviation mishap in eight days. A commercial jetliner and an Army helicopter collided near the nation's capital on Jan. 29, killing 67 people. A medical transportation plane crashed in Philadelphia on Jan. 31, killing the six people on board and another person on the ground. Most Alaska communities are not connected to the state's main road system, and airplanes are often the only option for travel of any



distance in rural areas, particularly in winter. The region is prone to sudden snow squalls and high winds in the winter. Bering Air serves 32 villages in western Alaska from hubs in Nome, Kotzebue and Unalakleet. Most destinations receive twice-daily scheduled flights Monday through Saturday. Two Bering Air planes appeared to be searching in a grid pattern just off the coastline Friday morning, according to the flight tracking service Flightradar24. Unalakleet is a community of about 690 people about 150 miles (about 240 kilometers) southeast of Nome and 395 miles (about 640 kilometers) northwest of Anchorage. The village is on the Iditarod trail, route of the world's most famous sled dog race, during which mushers and their teams must cross the frozen Norton Sound. Nome, a Gold Rush town, is just south of the Arctic Circle and is known as the ending point of the 1,000-mile (1,610-kilometer) Iditarod. The city said prayer vigils would be held Friday for those on board the plane, friends and family and those involved in search efforts. Alaska's U.S. senators, Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, issued statements saying their thoughts and prayers were with the passengers, their families, rescuers and the Nome community. U.S. Rep. Nick Begich said on the social platform X that he was ready to assist Nome and Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy "in any way we can."



## Amid falling rupee, RBI governor says shouldn't worry about daily fluctuations



Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra at a press conference after the 613th Meeting of Central Board of Directors (CBD) of the RBI, in New Delhi, Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025. (PTI Photo) RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra at a press conference after the 613th Meeting of Central Board of Directors (CBD) of the RBI, in New Delhi on Saturday. Malhotra said most of rupee's depreciation can be traced to global uncertainties fuelled by US President Donald Trump's tariff-related announcements.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Saturday reiterated that the central bank doesn't target a particular "price level" of the rupee and said people shouldn't worry about daily fluctuations in the Indian currency. On Friday, the rupee closed at 87.5 against the US dollar, recovering slightly after the RBI cut rates by 25 basis points (bps) earlier in the day — the first reduction in

nearly five years. One basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point. Only a day earlier, rupee had hit a fresh low. In fact, since the start of 2025, the domestic currency has depreciated over 2 per cent. Addressing the media after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met the RBI board for the customary post-Budget meeting, Malhotra said that the focus instead should be on medium- to long-term changes in rupee's value.

"Our effort is to curb excessive volatility. Prices of any asset can see daily fluctuations — be it Sensex, Nifty or gold. We shouldn't pay attention to it (daily fluctuations). We should focus on medium- to long-term changes. Our (dollar exchange) market forces are well-developed, efficient, and have our trust. We depend on market forces to determine price levels," said Malhotra, who took charge at Mint Road on December 9, 2024. The former revenue secretary said a 5 per cent depreciation in the value of rupee impacts domestic inflation to the extent of 30-35 bps. Assuring that there was no directional change in the thinking of the RBI, the Governor pointed out that most of rupee's depreciation can be traced to global uncertainties fuelled by US President Donald Trump's tariff-related announcements. "... hopefully that should settle down and that should help us in the downward movement of inflation," he said.

After the three-day Monetary Policy Committee meeting of the RBI this week, the governor had said the RBI's forex market interventions were focussed on "smoothing excessive and disruptive volatility". The central bank isn't targeting any specific exchange rate level or band, he had then said. On Saturday, Malhotra also continued his message that the RBI will be "nimble and agile" to maintain adequate liquidity in the banking system. Last month, the central bank announced a trioka of measures to ensure liquidity in the market. As part of the move, RBI would buy Rs 60,000 crore of government securities through open market operations (OMOs), conduct a Variable Repo Rate (VRR) auction of 750,000 crore, and hold a \$5-billion dollar/rupee buy/sell swap auction.

## Sebi bans Asmita Patel, the 'She Wolf of the stock market' and others from trading

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has barred Asmita Patel Global School of Trading Pvt Ltd (AGSTPL); influencer Asmita Patel, who called herself the 'She Wolf of the stock market'; her husband Jitesh Jethalal Patel and three others from accessing the securities markets for allegedly providing unregistered investment advisory services and research analyst activities. The markets regulator, in its interim order, has directed that an amount of Rs 53.67 crore be impounded from these six entities.

The other entities who have been banned by Sebi include Jitesh Jethalal Patel; Sagar Dhanjibhai, proprietor, King Traders; Suresh Parmashivam, proprietor, Gemini Enterprise; and Jigar Rameshbhai Dawada, proprietor, United Enterprises. Asmita Jitesh Patel, who also referred to herself as the 'options queen', is a director of AGSTPL, a company engaged in providing advisory services in securities market. She has a significant presence in the electronic media through the website — asmitapatel.com — and on social media platforms such as YouTube (526,000 subscribers), Instagram (290,000 followers), Facebook (73,000 followers), LinkedIn (1900 followers), and X (4200 followers).

"Noticee Nos. 1 to 3 (Asmita, Jitesh and AGSTPL) are restrained from buying, selling, or dealing in securities, either directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further orders," Sebi's Whole-Time Member Kamlesh Varshney said in the interim order. The regulator has directed Asmita, Jitesh, and AGSTPL to cease and desist from offering unregistered investment advisory and research analyst services from acting as or holding themselves out to be investment advisor/research analyst. "An amount of Rs 53,67,46,384/- being the total unlawful gain earned prima facie from the alleged unregistered investment advisory and research analyst business, shall be impounded jointly and severally from the Noticee no 1 to 6 (Asmita, Jitesh, AGSTPL, and other three entities)," the order said. Sebi directed banks that no debits should be made without its permission in respect of the bank accounts held by the six entities. However, debits in the bank accounts may be allowed for amounts available in the account in excess of the amount to be impounded Rs 53.67 crore.

The Sebi action came on complaints filed by 42 persons who had enrolled for various courses offered by AGSTPL. They had enrolled for the educational courses, Master's in Price Action Trading 16 (MPAT 16) and MPAT 17 that were conducted during 2021 and 2022, while a few of them also subscribed to the Let's Make India Trade (LMIT) course. Several complainants paid Rs 7 lakh plus 18 per cent GST (in most cases) to AGSTPL and received confirmation of the payment made through email and WhatsApp messages. King Traders, Gemini Enterprise, and United Enterprises are proprietary firms through which, based on the advice given by AGSTPL, some course par-



ticipants allegedly paid the fees into the bank accounts of three proprietary firms. As per the complainants, Asmita claimed to have mentored over one lakh students/investors/participants worldwide and also managed assets to the tune of Rs 140 crore using her proprietary system.

"The Noticee no.2 (Asmita Patel), through the Zoom meets of Pre-MPAT and LMIT sessions insisted students/investors/participants to liquidate their existing mutual fund investments as well as gold and to borrow from various sources such as banks, friends and family, to enable them to subscribe to the course and bring in more capital towards trades that would be suggested on the telegram channel," the interim order said. During the LMIT event, Asmita induced and misguided the students/investors/participants that MPAT would lead to financial success through proper hand-holding and guidance. She acted as a broker herself and advised the complainants that if they already had accounts, the same should be transferred to her branch. "The complainants claimed that they were told to invest in certain stocks so that they will be millionaires soon as she got insider information for the complainants, which was pivotal to get access in the market," the order said. Despite implementing the prescribed strategies, students/investors/participants failed to achieve profits and instead made substantial financial losses, it said. By acting as an unregistered investment advisor and research analyst, AGSTPL has been able to circumvent all the regulatory requirements pertaining to an investment advisor and research analyst and has collected large amounts of fee from the investors along with providing educational training related to securities market and thereby harming investors' interest, Varshney said in the interim order. This, he said, has resulted in compromising investor interest which has subsequently resulted in a large number of complaints. "The Noticee no.2 (Asmita Patel) has significant presence over the social media websites such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram. There is a likely chance that being influenced by the social media presence and followership, gullible investors may continue to fall prey to the unregistered investment advisory/ research analyst activities of the Noticee no. 1 (AGSTPL)," the interim order said.

## Fiscal and monetary measures to boost consumption, pvt investment, says FM Sitharaman

New Delhi: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at a press conference after the 613th Meeting of Central Board of Directors (CBD) of the RBI, in New Delhi, Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025. (PTI Photo/Shahbaz Khan) (PTI02\_08\_2025\_000176B) Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at a press conference after the 613th Meeting of Central Board of Directors (CBD) of the RBI, in New Delhi,

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said fiscal and monetary measures announced recently will help boost consumption and promote private investment. The Budget presented by the Finance Minister on February 1 proposed a slew of measures including significant income tax cuts for the middle class. Individuals earning up to Rs 12.75 lakh in a year will not have to pay any taxes, benefiting 1 crore taxpayers. On the monetary side, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday cut policy rate by 25 basis points, the first rate cut in five years to support growth.

"After the Budget, the few inputs I've had from some business leaders is that the orders for fast-moving consumer goods for April-June are already getting booked, and the industry is clearly seeing signs of a possible recovery of consumption," she said at a media interaction after addressing the Board of the RBI in the customary post-budget meeting. As a result, she said, many of them are looking at reviewing their capacity utilisation itself, which means you can safely see that the triggers for a consumption-driven



cycle are clearly being felt by those who have to make investment decisions. "So, I see this as a positive sign and with yesterday's decision of the RBI, together things can move in alignment and the required traction we made in this course," she said. She also said both the government and the Reserve Bank of India will continue to work in a well-coordinated fashion to prop up growth and contain inflation.

## Janhvi Kapoor shares mirror selfie showing sunburnt back; experts share common mistakes to avoid



Janhvi Kapoor's 2025 has started off with a beachy getaway, spent lazing around in the sun. Now that she's back in Mumbai and working out at the gym, a mirror selfie showed a hint of her sunburnt back—courtesy of the beach. Sunburn is a common issue many of us experience under harsh sunlight, and beyond the visible red patches, the pain that comes with it makes the ordeal even tougher. As usual, internet hacks and DIY treatment advice from well-meaning friends and family often add to the problem and delay recovery. Indianexpress.com consulted dermatologists to identify common mistakes to avoid so the affected area heals faster.

"Start treatment immediately—cool the skin with a cold shower or compress (never ice directly) to reduce inflam-

mation. Skip hot showers, scrubbing, or exfoliating as they strip moisture, irritate sensitive skin and worsen peeling. Stick to gentle, fragrance-free cleansers and let peeling happen naturally," said Dr Mikki, medical director at Bodycraft Clinics and Salons, Bengaluru and Gurugram. Hydration is key—drink plenty of water and electrolyte-rich fluids to help your skin heal from the inside out," she said.

According to her, wearing tight or synthetic fabrics can worsen irritation, so choosing loose, breathable clothing like cotton or bamboo is essential. "If you must go outside, avoid further sun exposure—wear loose protective clothing and apply a broad-spectrum SPF 50+ sunscreen once peeling subsides. Also, stay away from home remedies like vinegar, toothpaste, or lemon juice, as these can cause further irritation or chemical burns," she said. Dr Shareefa Chause, dermatologist at Dr Shareefa Skincare Clinic, Mumbai, said that applying a generous amount of aloe vera-based or fragrance-free moisturising lotion can help soothe the skin. She advised against picking at peeling skin or popping blisters, as this increases the risk of infection and scarring. If the burn is severe, painful, or accompanied by fever or dizziness, she recommended seeking medical attention immediately. "Sunburn healing takes about five to seven days, but prevention is always best. Next time, apply sunscreen generously and reapply every two hours to keep your skin safe," said Dr Chause.

## A new school year can see friendships change — this is tough on kids, but parents can help

The start of the school year means new classes, routines, after-school activities and sometimes even a new school. This can be a really exciting time for kids, but these changes can also disrupt existing friendships. Students might feel stressed about not having certain friends with them in class or confused about why old friends are behaving differently. How can you coach your child through changing friendship dynamics? How parents help

Research shows supportive friendships play an important role in maintaining students' wellbeing. Having good friends is linked to better mental health as well as better school attendance and academic achievement. Research also shows us parenting plays an important role in helping children make and keep friends. Our research has found parents can improve how well a child is accepted by peers by doing three things: listening and asking questions to help their child think through a situation helping their child plan how to address the issue supporting their child to have contact with peers.

Listening to your child's helpful to check in with your child regularly so you can provide support if they need it. When children tell you about a conflict or problem, simply start by listening actively. This means reflecting back in your own words what your child said, including feelings. For example, "So it sounds like you are feeling upset Shelley wants to hang out with kids in her new class? It's also helpful to empathise with your child about how they feel: I think I would feel sad too if that happened to me. This helps your child feel like someone else understands them — and they are not dealing with this on their own. For older children and teenagers, you may want to check if the child wants your help to work out how to solve the problem. Sometimes listening is all that is needed.

Working out what to do next if needed, parents can then coach children how to manage any concerns. They can start by helping a child understand why another child may have acted as they did. For example, if the parent says "Why do you think Shelley said this?", perhaps the child might respond that "Shelley doesn't like me anymore". The parent could offer an alternative explanation — perhaps Shelley is worried about making friends in her new class. The parent could ask the child what they want — in the above example, the child may want to still be friends with Shelley. The parent can then prompt the child to think of a range of ways to improve the situation, weigh up what might work best and encourage the child to give this a go. Often children can think of solutions themselves, if asked What could



you do to improve things? What else could you do?. In our example, this might include organising a play with Shelley on the weekend. Alternatively, the child might plan to check in again with Shelley after a few days. This type of coaching is helpful as it supports the child thinking through the problem and coming up with their own solution, which they are more likely to put in place than if simply told what to do.

Parents can also support their child to strengthen friendships by helping them connect with friends outside school through activities, play dates and online contact.

We hear a lot about "BFFs". However, it is not unusual for friendship groups to change over time, as children mature and develop particular interests. When children are placed in a new class or school with no close friends, children often cope through what researchers call "transitional friendships". For example, it's common for children to start high school with no firm friends, but still know some peers from primary school. These acquaintances can provide companionship until children form closer friendships. Parents can help their child in making close friends at high school by supporting them to catch up and connect with new friends out of school. Similarly, if a child is missing their old friends, a parent can coach their child in finding ways to stay in touch — like texting, a weekend sleepover or joining an out-of-school activity together. If you still have concerns if friendship concerns or worries are having an ongoing, negative impact on your child's mental health, parents should seek further support from a health professional. You can start with your GP, who may suggest a referral to a psychologist. You may also like to talk to your child's teacher — they may be able to help your child get to know potential friends through class activities.

## Is it possible to be pregnant without a baby bump?

In a surprising revelation, digital creator Nicole shared her experience of going through an entire pregnancy without ever developing a visible baby bump. Curious to understand this phenomenon, indianexpress.com reached out to a health expert for insights.

Can you be pregnant without showing a bump?

"Yes, it's possible to be pregnant without showing a noticeable bump, especially in the early stages or due to factors like height, strong abdominal muscles, or certain medical conditions such as an anterior placenta," said Dr Kavitha Kovi, head of obstetrics and gynaecology at Aster Women and Children Hospital, Bengaluru. She also said that body type and weight of the mother and the baby's position also influence how visible the pregnancy appears. Some women may not develop a prominent bump until the later stages, while others might not show at all, according to her.

What is a cryptic pregnancy?

"A pregnancy that remains undetected—where hormonal levels or body



structure mask typical pregnancy signs—is known as a cryptic pregnancy," said Dr Kovi. "It can occur due to factors such as strong abdominal muscles, obesity, or a retroverted uterus that hides the bump. It's more common during a first pregnancy or when the baby lies towards the back," she said. In some cases, women may not realise they are pregnant until their third trimester—or even during labour—due to minimal symptoms. "A rare condition called pseudocyesis, or false pregnancy, can cause women to experience physi-

cal and emotional pregnancy-like symptoms such as missed periods, breast tenderness, nausea, weight gain, and even the sensation of foetal movement, despite not being pregnant," she said.

Is it risky?

Dr Kovi cautioned that undetected pregnancies can lead to risks, particularly if a woman is unaware of foetal movement and misses out on prenatal care. This can result in complications such as gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, or foetal growth issues. "Without pre-

natal vitamins, appropriate nutrition, or medical supervision, the baby's development may be affected. However, if diagnosed in time, medical intervention can help manage the pregnancy safely," she said. What should you keep in mind to avoid such circumstances? While cryptic pregnancies are rare and cannot always be predicted, women can reduce the chances by monitoring their menstrual cycle, taking pregnancy tests if their period is late, and staying informed about early pregnancy symptoms.



## ‘When I was in jail...’: Salman Khan dismisses ‘motivational talk’ as he gives gyaan on nephew Arhaan’s podcast



ing things and coming out on top, Salman said, “When we used to play a sport, and get tired, and start panting, we still had a wide smile on our faces. We wanted to get back and do the same thing all over again. Nowadays, we lose that enthusiasm and get complacent. Never let go of that enthusiasm.” The Ek Tha Tiger actor also stressed on the importance of not letting complacency become a way of life. “If you let go off this enthusiasm, you are allowing yourself to become a much older version of yourself. That should never happen. You don’t say, ‘I am tired...’ Get up, and do something. Don’t say ‘I can’t sleep...’ Just do something long enough for your body to get tired and fall asleep.”

Salman also spoke about his haphazard sleep cycle. “I generally sleep for a couple of hours, and once a month, I get 7-8 hours a day. Sometimes, I sleep when I get a few minutes’ break between shoots. I can only sleep when I don’t have anything else to do. So, I slept nicely when I was in jail. I sleep when there is turbulence in an aircraft because there is nothing I can do in such a situation,” said Salman. “You need to consistently put all your efforts into work, family, and friends. You just need to be there for them. Work really hard, and when you finally make it, do share the credit with all the people who helped you make it,” said Salman, who went to share that the common mistake many successful people do is to assume complete responsibility for success. “You can take absolute responsibility for your failures, but success is never just yours. If you allow it to go to your head, you will get messed up, for sure.” On the movie front, Salman, who was recently seen playing cameo roles in Baby John and Singham Again, is awaiting the release of AR Murugadoss’ Sikandar, which is speculated to hit the screens this Eid. Salman spent time in jail for his conviction in a poaching case.

Observing Salman Khan in his public appearances, it is clear that the ‘Bhai’ of all seasons has very clear ideas about what it takes to achieve success. He often shares his learnings with the younger generation. So, imagine the kind of conversations he’d have with his nephew, Arhaan. Arhaan has made his podcast debut with an appearance on Arhaan Khan’s Dumb Biryani YouTube channel. Arhaan operates the channel along with his friends, Dev Raiyani and Arush Verma. During the chat, Salman expressed his feelings about a number of topics, and voiced the complete disregard he has for ‘motivational talks.’ “If you actually want to learn, you can even learn from the tree or the wall. Of course, you need to listen to your guru, but that can even be Google or YouTube. All you need is to be disciplined,” said Salman, who expressed his dislike for people wanting external motivation to do basic activities. “I don’t believe in this motivation bull\*\*\*\* talk. Brush your teeth, and get out. Nobody likes to go to the gym or learn something. It is painful, and it’s about willingly making a fool out of yourself. But you need to put yourself at that end, and get as good as possible.”

Talking about holding on to the enthusiasm to do tax-

## Naga Chaitanya says he was ‘treated like a criminal’ after divorce from Samantha: ‘I come from a broken home...’

It isn’t easy being a celebrity today, when every move is either scrutinised or sanitised. In such times, things get even worse when a celebrity goes through a setback. There are never-ending speculations, and their subsequent social media posts get flooded with overwhelming negativity with many of them taking sides or fuelling rumours. When Naga Chaitanya and Samantha announced their mutual separation in 2021, after almost four years of marriage, social media was divided. Talking about the criticism that he received on social media, Naga Chaitanya told Vamshi Kurapati on the Raw Talks with VK podcast, “When we announced our separation, we put out a post saying we had our own reasons, and we were moving on. What other explanation is actually required? I hoped that the audience and media would respect our request for privacy. But it just became headlines, talking points, gossip, and basically, entertainment.” Naga Chaitanya argued that if he goes on to say anything else, that, too, would become news. “That video byte would give rise to more articles, more gossip, etc... Even now, years after we went our separate ways, there would be interviews where someone would try to provoke an answer out of me. See, I have moved on with grace, and so has Samantha. We have so much respect for each other. Whatever happened was for the betterment of us. I have repeated this many times, and yet, the questions keep on coming. So, how do I even try to put a full stop to something that I haven’t written.”

Asking his detractors to train their focus on better things, including their own lives, Naga Chaitanya said, “Spread positivity instead. See, I have come out of the marriage, gained strength, found love again, and moved on. Also, whatever happened in my life isn’t something that hasn’t happened in anyone else’s life. So, why am I treated



like a criminal?” Naga Chaitanya’s parents — actor Nagarjuna and Lakshmi Daggubati — separated when he was a child, and remarried afterwards. Adding that divorce and breakups are rather sensitive topics for him, the Laal Singh Chaddha actor said, “I come from a broken family. I know that experience. Ahead of breaking a relationship, I would think at least 1000 times about it because I genuinely understand the repercussions. Breaking the marriage was a mutual decision, and we went our own ways. Of course, I feel bad that it happened, but everything happens for a reason. I believe it is up to you to build yourself and keep progressing. You will find the right path soon.” Naga Chaitanya, who married Samantha in 2018, announced his separation from the actor in October 2021. He recently married actor Sobhita Dhulipala in 2024. On the acting front, Naga Chaitanya was seen in this Friday’s release, Thandel, directed by Chandoo Mondeti and starring his Love Story co-star Sai Pallavi as the other lead.

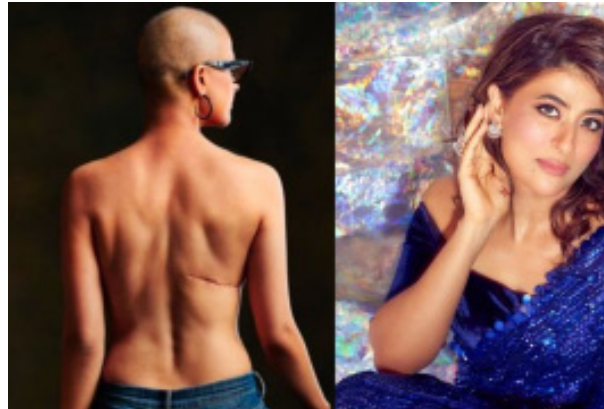
## Tahira Kashyap says parents ‘refused’ to talk to her because she posted a hairless picture of herself: ‘They were very upset with me’

In 2018, Tahira Kashyap was detected with breast cancer. The filmmaker took to her Instagram account to share a note about her cancer diagnosis. She had also joked about giving competition to the Kardashians after getting the opportunity to enhance her features. In an interview, Tahira reflected on her parents’ reaction to her posting a picture of her bald head on social media. Speaking to Filmfare, Tahira said, “I was like doctor, do this to me. Now you have an opportunity. I have been wanting some lovely nice assets all my life, now is the time since I am going under the knife. I might as well. But, he didn’t and I was so disappointed in him. I was like, ‘Listen, I gave you an opportunity’, but I made light of the situation and very honestly, I don’t take myself too seriously and I think none of us should.”

In her original post, she had written, “I was detected with DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ) in my right breast with high-grade malignant cells. Simply put stage 0 cancer/ pre-cancerous stage, with cancer cells multiplying in a contained area. The result I have become a half Indian version of Angelina Jolie (since only one breast was involved)! I told my doctor now is the time to give some competition to the Kardashians since Pamela is passé.” She added, “But no one listened to me, so now I have a portion of my back tissue in my breast. Perhaps now I can do chin-ups with my breasts!”

In the same interview, she also spoke about her parents’ reaction to her Instagram post. She joked that her father gets a heart attack every time she posts something. She shared, “My parents got really upset with me when I put my bald picture of myself (after the cancer diagnosis). A bald look for a woman is synonymous for a disaster somehow, so they refused to talk to me and were forcing me to take it down. But I said, ‘I am not doing that. I am celebrating right now, which you need to understand.’ They actually thought I have lost it. They were like how can you celebrate physical illness?”

She added, “I didn’t know how to make my parents speak to me so I video called my mother and showed myself to her. I said, ‘Look at me, this is how I look right now and I am loving it.’ I was also wearing goggles and she sort



of laughed and smiled. And then I told her this is how life is, and I am happy and you need to be happy for me. They were still clueless about ‘feeling happy.’ Ever since her cancer diagnosis, Tahira often shares awareness about the illness on her social media handles. She made her feature directorial debut with Sharma Ji Ki Beti, which was released last year.

## Nick Jonas soaks up Indian tradition at brother-in-law Siddharth Chopra’s wedding

Mumbai: Priyanka Chopra’s brother Siddharth Chopra’s wedding nuptials with Neelam Upadhyaya have become the talk of the town. PeCee’s American singer and actor husband Nick Jonas also landed from Los Angeles to be a part of the wedding celebration. The wedding took place according to the Hindu customs with Haldi, Mehendi, and Baarat. The ‘If I Fall’ singer also performed all his duties as the jiju (brother-in-law) according to the desi traditions. Going by a video shared by Dr Madhu Chopra,

## Interstellar re-release box office collection: Christopher Nolan’s sci-fi classic beats Loveyapa with Rs 2.5 crore haul



Interstellar re-release box office collection: The sci-fi drama opens to an impressive Rs 2.5 crore More than 10 years back, Christopher Nolan released a film that he might have not known would become a classic for the ages. Of course, Interstellar was unlike any film he had made till then. It blended human emotions and sci-fi elements, in a story that was as intimate as it was sweeping. Such has been the following for the film that when it was re-released all over the world in IMAX theatres, Indian fans expressed their disappointment about not getting to see Interstellar in the premium format

due to the release of Pushpa 2: The Rule. But, finally, Interstellar has been re-released in India, and fans turned up in droves. According to trade website Sacnilk, Interstellar, which has been released in 2D and IMAX formats for a limited period of time in India, opened to almost Rs 2.5 crore on Friday. It is reportedly one of the biggest re-release openings for an English film in India. With photos of packed houses, and long-winding lines coming in from various theatres across the country, it is clear that Interstellar will only grow from strength to strength over the weekend.

Incidentally, this week has been one of the most lucrative for re-releases in recent times, as the 2016 Hindi film Sanam Teri Kasam earning Rs 4.5 crore on Friday. Interstellar and Sanam Teri Kasam have challenged this week’s new releases, Loveyapa and Badass Ravikumar, which managed to gross Rs 1.25 crore and Rs 2.75 crore, respectively. Nevertheless, the impact of Nolan and Interstellar on the Indian audiences is there for everyone to see, as social media is flooded with reactions of fans watching the film for the first time on the big screen. The film, which was headlined by Matthew McConaughey, Anne Hathaway, Jessica Chastain, and Michael Caine, continues to inspire conversations about the effective marriage of science fiction and human emotions. Interstellar grossed over \$700 million worldwide, and received positive reviews at the time of its original release.

## Salman Khan addresses Arbaaz Khan-Malaika Arora’s divorce, says nephew Arhaan has gone through his own ups and downs: ‘You have to make it on your own’

Salman Khan recently participated in a candid conversation with his nephew Arhaan Khan, on Arhaan’s YouTube channel Dumb Biryani. This marks Salman Khan’s podcast debut. During the conversation, Salman shared several pieces of advice with Arhaan and his friends, Dev Raiyani and Arush Sharma. He also talked about Arbaaz Khan and Malaika Arora’s divorce, sharing that Arhaan had to go through his own share of ups and downs, and will have to make it on his own. The three friends were having a conversation with Salman Khan in English, when the actor advised them to conduct the show in Hindi. He said, “First of all, you all should be doing this in Hindi.” To this, Arhaan quickly replied, “They don’t know Hindi.” Salman then joked, “Going forward, you guys speak to me in Hindi for this interview. I will fix your Hindi.”

This left the boys in splits. Salman continued, “You all should be ashamed of yourself for not knowing Hindi. If you are making this for the people, then make it in Hindi.” He then asked, “Or is it just a thing you all are doing for yourself?” The conversation then turned towards the topic of Arhaan’s future plans. He asked, “What’s this guy up to?” Arhaan’s friends replied, “He wants to open a restaurant.” Salman then turned to Arhaan and asked, “If you want to run a restaurant then what’s with all the classes you have joined? Fighting, gymnastics... these things you are doing for the restaurant?” Later in the conversation, Salman shared the importance of being respectful towards others. He said, “Irrespective of the number of years you have had a rela-



tionship for, the moment you realise that you have been stabbed in the back, you should have the power to leave that person and move on in less than 30 seconds.” He also briefly spoke about Arbaaz Khan’s divorce from Malaika Arora in 2017 after nearly 20 years of marriage. Pointing at Arhaan, he said, “This dude out here has gone through his ups and downs. After your mom and dad’s relationship (separation), you have to make it on your own. One day you will have your own family and unit. So this is what you have to work on to have your own family. The culture of having lunch and dinner with family should always be there and there should always be a head of the family, who should be respected.”

## Naga Chaitanya praises wife Sobhita Dhulipala for withstanding ‘hate’ over his separation from Samantha: ‘She is a true hero’



Showering Sobhita with a lot of praise, Naga Chaitanya expressed his gratitude for her understanding about the negativity against him following his separation from Samantha

The much-publicised wedding of actors Naga Chaitanya and Sobhita Dhulipala happened in December, 2024. While there was a lot of positivity surrounding the wedding with people showering love and affection towards the couple, Naga Chaitanya received targeted hate over his new relationship, and the hate spilt over to Sobhita’s social media too. For the unversed, Naga Chaitanya was previously married to actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu, and they mutually separated after almost four years of marriage in 2021.

Immediately after the separation, camps of fans were formed. Some supporting Naga Chaitanya, while others supported Samantha. In a recent podcast interview with Vamshi Kurapati on the Raw Talks with VK podcast, Naga Chaitanya, who was promoting his recent film, Thandel, opened up about how this hate and speculation about his personal life impacted his now-real wife Sobhita. “I feel bad for her actually. She was not at all at fault, and doesn’t de-

serve whatever came her way,” said the Thandel actor.

Talking about how Sobhita entered his life, Naga Chaitanya said, “We met in an organic and beautiful way. Our friendship started after a chat on social media. It built beautifully, and honestly, she wasn’t connected to my past in any way. That’s why I get really angry and disappointed to see her be at the receiving end of spill-over hate over my previous relationship.” Showering Sobhita with a lot of praise, Naga Chaitanya expressed his gratitude for her understanding. “I must thank her for understanding everything. She displayed a lot of maturity to navigate through all of this. It is not easy to face all this. Sobhita is a true hero for me.” In an earlier interview with The New York Times, Sobhita and Chaitanya said that they first spoke a year after his separation from Samantha. “It was cute, and it was steady. It’s not a case of two tender hearts falling in love. It was more like two metals being welded by the same wants from life, and we were able to speak about those things freely without inhibitions. That moved me,” she said.



## India's junior athletes will no longer get cash prizes for international medals after government amends policy



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athletics doping, junior athletes Doping, curb doping, junior athletes age fraud, Doping, Junior World Championship, Indian express news, current affairs "We noticed that only India follows a model where junior championships are given over-importance. As a result, we have noticed that athletes work so hard at this level that by the time they reach the elite stage, they are either burnt out or have lost the hunger," the official said. Junior athletes winning international medals will no longer receive cash awards from the government. This major Sports Ministry policy shift, which came into effect on February 1, is aimed at tackling the twin menace of doping and age fraud as well as "keeping the hunger of youngsters alive". According to the old system, a gold medal at the Junior World Championship would fetch an athlete approximately Rs 13 lakh while a top of the podium finish at Asian or Commonwealth had a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh.

A Sports Ministry official said one of the key factors behind this decision was to promote junior competitions as developmental events rather than making it all about a podium finish. "We noticed that only India follows a model where junior championships are given over-importance. As a result, we have noticed that athletes work so hard at this level

that by the time they reach the elite stage, they are either burnt out or have lost the hunger," the official said.

The award policy for senior athletes, too, has seen a rewrite. The Ministry has removed Commonwealth Championship and South Asian Games from the events on the award list. Chess players winning International Master or Grandmaster norms, too, will no longer be incentivised. In an apparent change of stance, following shooter Manu Bhaker's unprecedented two bronze medals at last year's Paris Games, sports persons and their coaches will now be rewarded for "each medal won" at the Olympics and World Championships. Akhara or academy where a medalist trained will be eligible for awards as well. The clause that barred an athlete's "spouse, father, mother, brother and sister" from receiving the award has been removed from the revised policy. Over the years, cash incentives were seen as one of the reasons that pushed the athletes and their coaches into committing age fraud and doping offences. According to National Anti-Doping Agency data as of January 13, more than 10% of the dope offenders in India since 2022 are minors — 22 out of 204. And while there is no central system monitoring the number of athletes who fudge their age, hundreds have been suspended over the few years across sports — with many more escaping the net. "It can be said that the cash awards are one of the reasons athletes are lured into adopting unfair means. Most of them come from humble backgrounds, so it is a case of high risk, high reward for them," said another official. The decision to drop events like the Commonwealth Championship and South Asian Games, too, was taken to ensure athletes remain focused on competing in tougher and more important international events, like the continental and world cups/championships. Meanwhile, athletes winning events like the All-England Badminton Championship or the Candidates Tournament in chess will be given the same amount of cash prize as World Championship winners, given the high standard of competition there.

## Headstands and a headstart

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Wearing colourful tights, their foreheads smeared with three strokes of white ash and a tilak, sisters Purva Shivram Kinare and Prapti contort and bend in seemingly impossible ways, rhythmically moving to the beats of a Bollywood number. In front of them, over a dozen officials — judges, jury members and a stage manager — peer closely into their laptop screens at this display of stunning flexibility.

Purva, 24, and Prapti, 22, are yogasana athletes, practitioners of one of the youngest competitive sports at the 38th National Games in the Uttarakhand town of Almora. Ahead of the sporting event, yogasana and mallakhamb (yoga-like postures done on a vertical pole or rope) were classified as demonstration sports by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), but were later listed as medal sports. This is yogasana's third straight appearance at the National Games as a medal sport, after the 2023 and 2024 editions. Over the last couple of years, yogasana, an activity hitherto confined to community parks, homes, yoga studios and smaller, local competitions, has gained a sharp edge. Recognised as a competitive sport in 2020, Yogasana Bharat, the governing body of the sport in India, attained associate membership of the Indian Olympic Association in 2021.

India is also making a pitch for yoga, along with Twenty20 cricket, kabaddi, chess, squash and kho kho, to be included in the 2036 Olympics that the country hopes it can host. Incidentally, at the Paris Olympics in 2024, yoga sessions were held at the Louvre. For the first time, the Asian Games to be hosted at Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, next year will feature yogasana as a demonstration event.

yoga sisters Sisters Purva Shivram Kinare and Prapti, qualified engineers, have won multiple medals at the National Games, since Yogasana was included at the 2023 edition in Gujarat. The sport has a popular brand ambassador, too, in yoga guru and businessman Baba Ramdev, who, besides heading Yogasana Bharat, is the founding president of World Yogasana, the body dedicated to promoting yogasana as a sport globally. Yogasana, in its sport form, is rigorous, and full of verve, far removed from the stretches and pranayama that it is popular for. The giant marquee tent at the HNB Sports Stadium in the heart of Almora — where Purvi and Prapti are competing in the artistic pair category — has a modern sports arena feel to it with a doctor's room, lounge for athletes, a warm-up area, a designated space for technical officials and anti-doping officials, strobe lights and giant screens. The sisters represent Maharashtra, one of the 22 states that have together sent 171 yoga athletes to the Games. Haryana topped the tally at the Games with six medals, followed by Uttarakhand and Maharashtra with five each and West Bengal with four.

Until half a decade ago, the sport had no centralised governance system; instead, over 200 disparate yoga associations across the country functioned parallelly, holding demonstrations and small-scale competitions. It was in 2020 that World Yogasana set the ball rolling to bring various yoga factions under one umbrella. That, along with the government's recognition of yoga as a competitive sport, meant that yoga would make a giant leap to match the most complex of its asanas. For yogasana's new avatar as a sport, an updated and clearly defined points system for each asana was created, athletes started to compete in gymnast-like leotards and the size of mats were standardised.

Jaideep Arya, secretary of World Yogasana, credits Ramdev for expanding the scale of yoga by "catching them young". "Earlier, people would come to yoga after the age of 30, if they have ailments, but that has changed. Now, there are thousands of athletes between the ages of 8 and 10. We have aspirations to reach the global stage and have set our eyes on the Olympic pathway," says Arya.

Sports-quota jobs for medalists at the National Games, too, contributed to the allure of yogasana, moving it away from the confines of a fringe sport and closer to the mainstream. Plans are afoot for a yoga league, to be officially announced in March, with the first edition scheduled for October-November this year. "Private players and universities have shown interest in the 12-team league," adds Arya. Though Ramdev is one of the most recognisable faces of yogasana, Arya also credits other imminent yoga practitioners for throwing their weight behind the sport — among them, H R Nagendra, a yoga therapist and founder-vice chancellor of the Bengaluru-based Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana University, and spiritual leader and Padma Bhushan awardee Kamlesh D Patel.



Arya says Rishikesh-based American yogaphile, Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, will be brought on board to push yogasana's global expansion. "This is the third edition of yogasana at the National Games. After the government officially recognised yogasana as a competitive sport in 2020, there has been a boom, not just in India, but globally too. Over 12 countries, including Zambia and Tanzania, have conducted their national competitions," says Rohit Kaushik, an executive committee member of Yogasana Bharat.

Over 5,000 registered athletes and 350-plus technical officials are listed on the Yogasana Bharat website. Uttarakhand is an early mover, with the state government last year announcing plans to become the first state to implement a yoga policy. While Haridwar and Rishikesh are yoga hubs, Almora is not far behind. The National Games venue is walking distance from the Soban Singh Jeena University, a popular learning centre in Kumaon that offers PG Diploma, BA, MA and PhD courses in yoga.

Naveen Chandra Bhatt, the head and convener of the Department of Yogic Science at the university, says seats for all courses are getting filled up. The first course, PG Diploma, was introduced in 2005 in the university's Almora and Nainital campuses. "In the beginning, we had 40 seats for PG Diploma. Two years later, we started MA and kept adding courses. PhD courses began in 2017. Today, we have 350-plus seats for ALL courses," Bhatt says. Aarti Pal, Assistant Professor (Yoga Science) at the University of Patanjali in Haridwar, insists yogasana has the credentials to match sport climbing and breaking, two new sports added to the Paris Olympics last year. "Yoga is no longer associated with senior citizens in a park. The youth are coming to participate in yogasana in droves; asanas have competitive forms. It's an attractive sport, beneficial for both the mind and body. Songs complement asanas and synchronisation is key, and athletes work on strength, agility and endurance. So why not yoga at the Olympics in the future?" Pal asks.

Gymnastics-like in its presentation, minus the high somersaults and flips, yogasana's modern version induces jaw-dropping awe as athletes stretch, twist and end up in the knottiest of positions. At Almora's HNB Sports Stadium, where the artistic pair event is underway, physios, coaches and managers, who have travelled with the teams, stand outside the playing area, intently watching the participants. The officials use a complex point scoring system to rank the athletes — face make-up, expressions, smart themes and imaginative designs on costumes earn points, while human pyramid formations take difficulty levels a notch higher. The greater the area the athletes cover on the mat or field of play, the more the points.

At the Games, yogasana has clearly defined events: traditional, artistic single, artistic pair, artistic group and rhythmic pair. There are at least five categories: forward bending, backward bending, body twisting, leg balance and hand balance. Athletes in the artistic pair event that Purva and Prapti are competing in must complete 10 different asanas each. Rhythmic pair participants, on the other hand, must choose the same asanas. The number of judges also vary, 10 in traditional and up to 13 in artistic. The fledgling sport already has its stars. Purva and Prapti, both engineering graduates from Ratnagiri in Maharashtra, have won multiple National Games medals, across categories. Purva recently hit the headlines when she was nominated for the prestigious Shiv Chhatrapati Award, Maharashtra's version of the Padma awards. "Yoga was recently added to the sports category for the awards. When Purva receives the award later this month, it will be a major moment for our indigenous sport," say Purva and Prapti's coach Ravi Bhushan Kumthekar.

## Dimuth Karunaratne walks back for the last time in Tests to applause from Australia players



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Sri Lankan opener Dimuth Karunaratne left the field of his last Test match to a standing ovation by the Australians in the 3rd day of the 2nd Test. The Lankan player, who was also playing his 100th Test match, scored just 14 runs in the second innings before he nicked one behind to wicketkeeper Alex Carey off Matthew Kuhnemann. Before walking off, he shook hands with Nathan Lyon and Steve Smith and shared a hug with long time batting partner Dinesh Chandimal even as the Aussie players stopped celebrating and applauded him. The Sri Lankan batter scored 7222 runs in 100 Tests at an average of 39.25 with 16 centuries and 39 fifties with a high score of 244 runs. On Thursday, Karunaratne became the seventh Sri Lanka cricketer to reach the 100-

Test milestone after current head coach Sanath Jayasuriya (110), Muttiah Muralidaran (132), Chaminda Vaas (111), Kumar Sangakkara (134), Mahela Jayawardena (149), and Angelo Mathews (117).

Karunaratne's 16 Test tons are the joint-fourth for Sri Lanka alongside Marvan Atapattu, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Dinesh Chandimal and Mathews. Only Sangakkara (38), Jayawardena (34) and Arjun Ranatunga (20) have recorded more centuries in the format. Earlier in the day, Australia were edging towards a 2-0 series sweep over Sri Lanka after Alex Carey's breathtaking century moved the visitors into a formidable position in the second test. On Day 3, the visitors racked up an imposing 414 before being bowled out just before lunch, securing a first-innings lead of 157 runs. Sri Lanka lost the first test by an innings and 242 runs, also in Galle — Sri Lanka's worst defeat in test cricket. Carey was in scintillating touch, showcasing his mastery of the sweep shot to counter Sri Lanka's spin-heavy attack. As the hosts attempted to stifle the scoring by crowding the leg-side, Carey responded with audacious reverse sweeps, keeping the bowlers on the back foot. In the process, the Australian wicketkeeper carved out a career-best 156, the highest score by an Australian glove man in Asia, eclipsing Adam Gilchrist's 144. Steve Smith, too, made his presence felt with a well-compiled 131 — his second century of the series. However, unlike Carey's assured stroke play, Smith had a few nervous moments early on. Once settled, though, he dug in, contributing to a mammoth 259-run partnership for the fourth wicket — the highest stand at that position by a visiting team in Sri Lanka.

## AB de Villiers hopes to see 'more Indian friends' play in SA20, calls for women's T20 league in South Africa

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Participation of India's male cricketers in leagues outside the IPL is still not a reality but in the ongoing SA20 — South Africa's franchise-based T20 tournament — the recently retired Dinesh Karthik made his debut. It is something AB de Villiers hopes to see more of, as the South African stalwart hoped to see more Indian players take part in the league in the near future. "I have no idea whether it is going to work or not. The BCCI is the most powerful board and they know what they are doing. They make the decision on behalf of the players and on behalf of the business they are running. So, it's not easy for them to just release their players," De Villiers is quoted as saying by PTI in a media interaction ahead of the SA20 final between MI CapeTown and Sunrisers Eastern Cape.

"This year we had Robin Uthappa (former India batter) in the commentary box and Dinesh Karthik played for Paarl Royals. I really wish that we can have more Indian friends playing here. I can see it happening but it's not going to happen next season. It is going to take time," he said. The BCCI restricts India's active male cricketers from playing leagues other than the IPL to retain exclusivity. While the leading female cricketers take part in tournaments like WBBL, The Hundred and Caribbean Premier League, only retired male players can participate in leagues other than



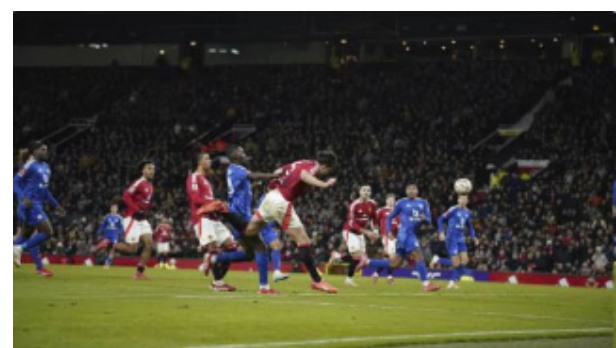
IPL. Incidentally, De Villiers also mooted the idea of a women's SA20 league too. "I have seen some very successful women's leagues, the incredibly successful women's T20WC that South Africa played not very long ago. Women's cricket in general is growing incredibly fast and there is no reason why there shouldn't be an SA20 women's league," the former SA captain said. "We can pace up as we have got the model and recipe, we can just copy and paste and it would be great for women's game in the country," he said. South African women have reached the final of the last two editions of the T20 World Cup as well as the recent U19 World Cup where they lost to India in the title clash.

## We are defeated in offside time, not Fergie time: Leicester City manager Ruud van Nistelrooy after Manchester United win FA Cup tie with controversial goal

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Leicester City manager Ruud van Nistelrooy was left fuming after Manchester United's Harry Maguire scored a late controversial goal which dumped the Foxes out of the FA Cup. "We are not defeated in Fergie time, we are defeated in offside time," Nistelrooy said after the match. Television replays showed Maguire appeared to be offside, but the linesman did not raise his flag and VAR is not used in the FA Cup until the fifth round. "VAR wasn't necessary. Look, VAR you have a couple of centimetres, couple of inches. This was half a metre clear in line. It's a hard one to take. We deserved to go into extra time and go for the battle in extra time and maybe penalties," the former Dutch forward said.

The result handed United only their third win in their last eight games at Old Trafford across all competitions, and the fans something to cheer about after a smattering of boos saw the team off at halftime. In the match, holders United were poor in the first half and Leicester capitalised in the 42nd minute when Wilfred Ndidi's shot was blocked by keeper Andre Onana but Bobby De Cordova-Reid was there to head in the rebound from close range. Zirkzee



levelled in the 68th minute when Alejandro Garnacho sent a cross into the box but Rasmus Hojlund's effort was blocked by defender Caleb Okoli. The ball fell perfectly for Zirkzee to tap home just three minutes after he entered the game. Garnacho made an immediate impact down the left as a second-half substitute and squandered a terrific chance when he tried to squeeze a shot inside the near post but hit the side netting, with a frustrated Rasmus Hojlund open in front of goal.

## Kohli's return sparks selection dilemma as India eye series win over England

Cuttack: The barren run of skipper Rohit Sharma and the selection conundrum that Virat Kohli's possible return poses are the towering obstacles in India's quest for a series win against England in the second ODI here on Sunday. India had taken a 1-0 lead after their four-wicket win at Nagpur, but Kohli getting rested owing to a "sore right knee" had raised concerns about his fitness ahead of the Champions Trophy later this month. However, vice-captain Shubman Gill had indicated that Kohli could be back for the second match, which will be played at a venue where the latter made a match-winning 85 against the West Indies in 2019. Kohli had also travelled to Cuttack along with his teammates and he looked relaxed. The Indian team will certainly elcome that sign, but it also raises a challenge in terms of selection.

Shreyas Iyer, who came in for Kohli at the last minute by his own admission, made a rollicking 36-ball 59 that has made dropping him an almost unthinkable act. If the past norms are followed, then Kohli will walk in for Shreyas, but it is more likely that Yashasvi Jaiswal could be the one who will have to make for the batting icon. It means that Gill might rejoin Rohit at the top, and Jaiswal did not have a blazing match either at Nagpur. It remains to be seen how the team think tank led by Gautam Gambhir, which has shown a penchant for left-right combination, navigates this situation.

Combination questions apart, Kohli too is in need of runs, and he will need a good outing here if he indeed makes a return. Kohli's form has been under scrutiny in recent months, especially after his struggles in Australia, where he repeatedly nicked deliveries to the slip cordon or wicketkeeper. His last competitive outing — for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy — too was a low-yielding one, managing just six before getting bowled by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan. But One-day cricket is Kohli's staple format, and the 36-year-old needs just 94 runs to become the third batter to reach 14,000 runs in the format after Sachin Tendulkar (18,426) and Kumar Sangakkara (14,234). Having played 283 ODI innings, Kohli can also become the fastest to this milestone ahead of Tendulkar (350 innings) and Sangakkara (378). Rohit's struggles continued as he perished for just two in the first ODI, failing to shake off the disastrous run in the Test series against Australia. His dismissal — a mistimed lofted shot off Liam Livingstone that ballooned to midwicket — reflected his desperation for runs. The Mumbai man has not scored a fifty in any format since August last year when he made 64 against Sri Lanka in Colombo in the third match. If Rohit fails to get going in these two ODIs against England, it could raise deeper concerns about his form and future.