

## Ramzan vibes kick in as Hyderabad gears up for the holy month

Hyderabad: With just a fortnight remaining for the Islamic month of Ramzan, considered one of the holy months in the Hijri calendar, hectic activity is seen across the city. All the mosques across the city are being refurbished in view of the large attendance witnessed for prayers during the month. The management committees are busy selecting and hiring 'hafiz' (a Muslim who has memorised the Quran) to lead 'Taraweeh prayers' — special prayers wherein chapters of the Quran are recited and arranged during Ramzan.

Apart from mosques, the Taraweeh prayers are planned to be arranged for women at function halls, gated communities, private schools and auditoriums. "In Mecca Masjid, the taraweeh prayers will be held after sighting the new crescent of Ramzan month. Daily, three chapters of the Quran will be recited," said the khateeb of the Mecca Masjid, Maulana Rizwan Qureshi. As everyone is aware a variety of food items,

including haleem, dahi vada, pathar ka ghost, etc are especially prepared during the Ramzan month at restaurants and roadside eateries.

People from across the city visit Tolichowki, Shahalibanda, Pathergatti, Barkas and Charminar, particularly for Haleem. Due to the rise in the prices of ingredients used for preparing haleem, it is likely the restaurant owner might increase the price by Rs 10 or Rs 20. "So far we have not yet decided about increasing the price. I can say there will not be much difference in prices and people need not worry about it," said a haleem maker from the Old City. Traders in the markets have stocked the merchandise in view of the Eid ul Fitr festival celebrated at the end of the Ramzan month. In view of busy schedules in the Ramzan month, some families prefer to shop for the festival before the beginning of the holy month. Shopkeepers, keeping in mind such customers, have stocked up the latest mer-



chandise at their establishments. "People have started shopping for Ramzan month and the Eid ul Fitr festival. New stocks ar-

rived a fortnight ago and have been put up for sale. We hope we do good business during the month," said Syed Muqtadar, a trader.

## Does the sight of a doctor raise your BP? All you need to know about White Coat Hypertension



Hyderabad: The sight of a doctor's white coat might reassure and comfort a patient. But inadvertently, it is this white coat only that could end up elevating the blood pressure and has the mercury rising in the sphygmomanometer. A common condition, referred to as White Coat Hypertension (WCH), has many patients ending up recording an elevated blood pressure in medical settings than during home monitoring.

WCH is believed to be the result of a patient experiencing anxiety during medical appointments and a reflex to having the blood pressure checked. From reaching the health centre to entering the examination room and having the inflatable arm cuff wrapped, all could contribute to subconscious anxiety and take the blood pressure reading a few

notches up. Medical professionals attribute the syndrome to stress of a health check and fear of negative outcomes that patients nurture as they arrive at the hospital. "A patient, while meeting a doctor, is a little stressed about his health condition and apprehensive as to what he will be diagnosed with and informed of," explains Dr A Sreenivas Kumar, senior consultant cardiologist and director, Cardiology & Clinical Research, Apollo Hospitals. Dr A Sreenivas Kumar

This results in the blood pressure readings being more in the presence of white coats than what the patient could have monitored at home. The senior cardiologist says doctors take this possibility into consideration while assessing the health of a patient and coming up with a treatment plan. "The

WCH variation differs from patient-to-patient and on their levels of stress. The variation could be 20 millimetres of mercury (mmHg) to 30 mmHg or even more," he says. However, on the flipside, this variation is also seen as one that reveals the risk for hypertension in future. "WCH could also be a precursor for high blood pressure and its

associated health complications in future," he says. Interestingly, Dr Sreenivas Kumar adds that WCH usually comes down to normal levels when the 'doctor becomes old for a patient'. "When a patient is getting treated by a doctor over a period of time and their comfort levels go up, the White Coat Hypertension effects goes down," he adds.

## BRS Australia unit holds tree plantation drive to celebrate K Chandrashekhara Rao's birthday

Hyderabad: BRS president and former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao's birthday was celebrated with great enthusiasm across Australia. Under the leadership of BRS Australia president Kasarla Nagender Reddy, members organised special prayers, and a tree plantation drive to mark the occasion in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane. Speaking at the event in Sydney, Rajesh Rapolu praised Chandrashekhara Rao's visionary leadership, including his success in achieving the long-cherished dream of a separate Telangana and transforming the State into a model for development and welfare over nine and a half years. He wished the BRS chief a long and healthy life and expressed hope for

his return as the Chief Minister of Telangana. The tree plantation drive was conducted by Ravinder and Sujatha, with enthu-



siastic participation from BRS members. Several individuals, including Chandramouli, Arun Masna, Yadamma, Navya, Vidya, Sangeeta Dupati, Rabia Begum, Madhu Rao,.



# Fast lanes and fatal fates in Hyderabad's streets

The night of January 28 shimmered with devotion and festivity as the Muslim community in Hyderabad gathered to observe Shab-e-Miraj, the first sacred night of worship before Ramzan. At Bahadurpura crossroads in Old City, the rich aroma of biryani curled through the air, wafting from 'AK Caterers & Cooking Services' where Mohammed Ilyas battled the chaos of a bustling kitchen. The day had been relentless — orders piled up, customers crowded in, and the rhythmic clatter of pots echoed through his busy office. Outside, his only son, 10-year-old Mohammed Ahmed, roamed the neighbourhood with his closest friends — 15-year-old Maaz and 17-year-old Syed Imran. Their laughter rippled through the evening air, carefree and unguarded. As the call to prayer echoed through the alleys around dusk, the boys made their way to the mosque, their young voices blending into the city's solemn chorus of faith. At home, Ilyas' wife waited for the father-son duo to return for dinner. She called up Ahmed, who informed her that he was heading to Hashtam Khan Masjid for another round of prayers. In reality, the three young boys had other plans — a late-night joyride through the city, chasing the thrill of speed and freedom. They reached out to another childhood friend, Mohd Owais, who chose to stay home, blissfully unaware of the twist of fate that awaited.

An hour and a half later, his phone rang, shattering the night's calm. The voice on the other end was choked with grief — his best friend was no more. On the newly inaugurated four-kilometre Aramghar flyover, which lacked CCTV surveillance, the boys' swanky two-wheeler allegedly spun out of control. The bike crashed into a streetlight pole, the impact hurling them against the divider. The force was brutal. There were no second chances. Around midnight, Ilyas' phone rang. He expected to hear his son's voice, maybe an apology for staying out late or a promise to be home soon. Instead, he was met with the panicked, trembling voice of Quadri's mother, Munwar Unnisa. There had been an accident. In that moment, the night grew unbearably heavy. Two-wheeler and four-wheeler drivers jump signals in the absence of traffic police personnel at a junction in Hyderabad. Seated in his office — a modest yet dignified room with a three-seater couch, a cocobolo desk, and his chair — Ilyas recounts the night that shattered his world. His hands tremble as he wipes tears from his eyes, his voice barely steady. "We rushed to the spot," he says, his words heavy with grief. "The police told us that passersby had taken the boys to Osmania General Hospital," he pauses, swallowing the lump in his throat before adding, "We went there directly."

Nothing could have prepared him for what he saw next. "When I finally saw my son's body...", he says as his voice chokes. "It felt like the ground had slipped from under my feet. Blood covered his tall frame. His young, innocent face was unrecognisable." His breath hitches, his anguish raw and unfiltered. "I didn't know what to do. I wish they never had the two-wheeler that day. I wish some traffic police personnel had stopped them," he sighs. Owais, who chose not to join the trio that night, is still struggling to accept the harsh reality: "We grew up together. We

were more than friends, we were like brothers. We never talked much about the future, but we did share one dream... we wanted to build a house together."

Tragic toll of night-time commute As the city winds down and the hum of traffic fades, a deadly paradox emerges. The very roads that promise smooth, easy travel at night turn death traps. Data reveals a chilling trend — nearly half of all road fatalities in 2024 occurred between dusk and dawn. According to traffic police records from the tri-commissionerates, 960 lives were lost in overnight crashes last year, accounting for 49.48% of all road accident deaths for 2024. The statistics paint a grim picture of the city's nightlife, raising serious concerns about speeding, reckless driving, and inadequate night-time enforcement. Among the three commissionerates, Cyberabad recorded the highest toll with 481 deaths from 1,898 accidents between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Rachakonda followed with 395 deaths in 1,578 accidents, while Hyderabad city registered 84 deaths for the 12-hour period. Every day, 18 lives are lost on Telangana's roads — tragedies that are often preventable. According to the latest data from the Telangana Transport Department, the State accounts for 4.56% of the country's total road accidents and 4.57% of all fatalities, placing it among the top 10 most accident-prone States in India. The odds of surviving a crash in Telangana are bleak. With a fatality rate of 29.81% per accident — slightly above the national average of 29.5% — nearly one in three accidents results in death. Ahmed's death is not an isolated incident. Every other day, families in Hyderabad wake up to the news of losing a loved one in a road accident. Since its inauguration on January 6, the Aramghar flyover alone has witnessed three accidents, one of them fatal, according to information shared by the Rajendranagar and Bahadurpura traffic police. Just three days after Ahmed's fatal crash, on February 1, another tragedy unfolded — this time, barely eight kilometres from the previous accident site. The air still carried traces of wedding laughter as V. Jaswant and Bhoomika Reddy, young doctors in their mid-20s, were driving home through the quiet streets of Khanapur, Narsingi, in the city. Speeding down an empty stretch, their hatchback suddenly veered out of control, slamming violently into a hoarding pole on the road divider. The silence of the night was shattered — first by the screech of tyres, then by the wail of sirens, and finally, by the cries of grieving families. Jaswant died instantly, his dreams and ambitions wiped out in a heartbeat. Beside him, Bhoomika lay critically injured, her body broken but her will to live fighting on. For days, doctors battled to save her as loved ones clung to hope outside the ICU. But, on February 9, after an excruciating battle, she too succumbed to the catastrophic neurological damage caused by the crash.

Jaswant and Bhoomika were house surgeons at Kamineni Hospital in L.B. Nagar, standing at the threshold of promising medical careers. Yet, like so many before them, their story became just another statistic — two more lives lost to Hyderabad's roads, while the city moved on, unchanged. Lack of



enforcement Rajesh Kumar, a member of the Traffic Forum of the Society for Cyberabad Security Council, points to speeding as one of the biggest culprits. The thrill of an open road, coupled with the urge to test limits, often leads drivers, especially younger ones, to push high-powered vehicles they barely have experience with. "The growing trend of automatic cars with rapid acceleration adds to the challenge, as drivers overestimate their control and react too late when things go wrong," he explains. Compounding this issue is the lack of enforcement during late hours. Most traffic signals operate on a free-run mode, meaning drivers assume an uninterrupted passage, increasing the risk of high-speed collisions. Cyberabad Joint Commissioner (Traffic) D. Joel Davis agrees, adding that a majority of accident cases stem from the driver's behaviour. "Unlike daytime, when congestion forces vehicles to slow down, the night offers wide, empty stretches that encourage overspeeding," he says. Self accidents, often involving two-wheelers, are on the rise due to drowsy driving, overspeeding and poor vehicle conditions, with many cases involving collisions with dividers or trees, he points out. Enforcement challenges As night falls, the city's roads become a free-for-all, patrolled by a skeletal police force struggling to curb reckless driving. While enforcement levels vary across the tri-commissionerates, one thing is clear: there simply aren't enough officers on duty. Figures suggest that enforcement during the day is between 15-25 times higher as compared to the night across all three commissionerates. Keeping traffic signals operational throughout the night would also compel drivers to slow down, breaking the illusion of a free run, suggests Rajesh Kumar, a member of the Traffic Forum of the Society for Cyberabad Security Council. Keeping traffic signals operational throughout the night would also compel drivers to slow down, breaking the illusion of a free run, suggests Rajesh Kumar, a member of the Traffic Forum of the Society for Cyberabad Security Council. | Photo Credit: RAMAKRISHNA G. In Cyberabad, about 30 officials are tasked with patrolling the vast road network between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. This number is about 450 at any given hour of the day. Meanwhile, in Hyderabad, between 30 to 40 officers hit the streets, but in two short shifts — 10 p.m. to midnight and 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., leaving a criti-

cal gap in enforcement during the deadliest hours of the night. This is in stark contrast to the 1,720 officials deployed across 355 key intersections and junctions (duty points) in two shifts from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. In Rachakonda, of the total 600-odd traffic cops, about 25 are deployed during the night at main junctions to handle movement of inter-State and inter-city buses. "The Vijayawada bus stop in L.B. Nagar is one such junction," said DCP II (traffic) Rachakonda, Sreenivasulu. However, this still leaves the majority of the city roads unmonitored and vulnerable to speeding, reckless driving, and fatal crashes. With such limited oversight, Hyderabad's night roads become a playground for reckless driving, where speed limits are ignored, and accidents occur unchecked. Davis agrees that the lack of police presence encourages violations like signal-jumping, wrong-side driving, and triple riding. "We are planning to increase the number of traffic marshals, and if we have adequate manpower, we plan to strategically deploy them at accident-prone spots like Wipro Junction and Aramghar flyover," he explains. Each accident is being closely analysed, focusing on factors like road illumination and CCTV camera coverage, while concerns are being addressed promptly, he adds. Bridging the gaps A visible police presence is essential to deter reckless driving, especially near pubs, clubs, and other late-night hotspots. Strategically placed warning hoardings, flashing safety messages, reminders at parking spots, and surveillance cameras with active monitoring can create a sense of accountability, suggests Kumar. Beyond enforcement, public awareness is key — targeted campaigns and consistent safety reminders at high-risk zones could make a difference. Beyond enforcement, public awareness is key — targeted campaigns and consistent safety reminders at high-risk zones could make a difference. | Photo Credit: NAGARA GOPAL Keeping traffic signals operational throughout the night would also compel drivers to slow down, breaking the illusion of a free run. Beyond enforcement, public awareness is key — targeted campaigns and consistent safety reminders at high-risk zones could make a difference. "To curb early morning accidents and ensure road safety, we have deployed special night teams at key junctions across Hyderabad since mid-January."

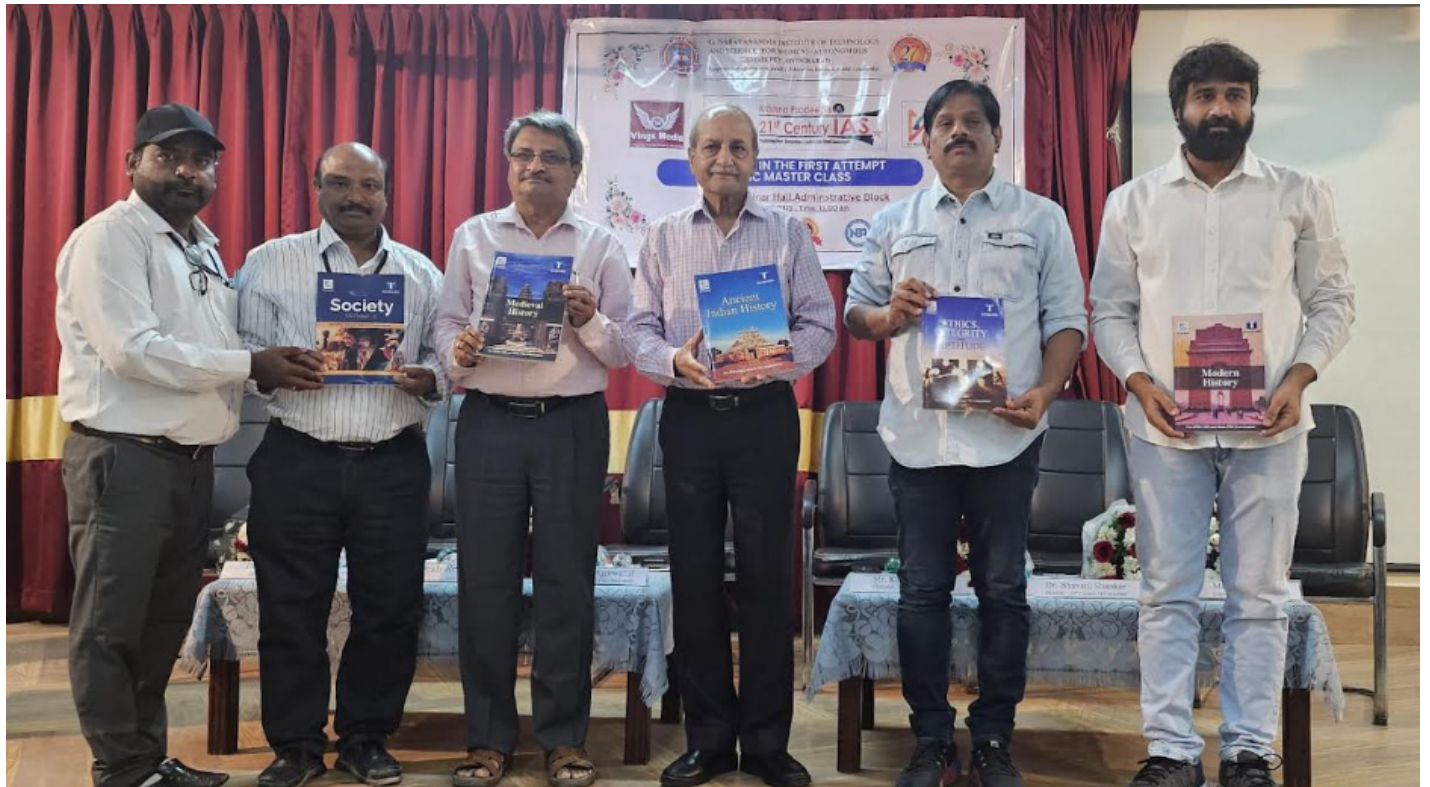


# Seminar on “How to Crack Civil Services in the First Attempt” Held at GNITS, Hyderabad.

Hyderabad, 17/2/2025:

Dr. D.P. Agarwal, Former UPSC Chairman, addressed aspiring civil servants at a seminar titled “How to Crack Civil Services in the First Attempt,” organized by Vings Media and G5 Media Group in collaboration with 21st Century IAS Academy at G. Narayanamma Institute of Technology and Sciences (for Women), Hyderabad. Speaking to an enthusiastic audience, Dr. Agarwal emphasized the importance of having a strong vision and leadership mindset. “Look at a dream job; only then will you become a good leader,” he remarked, encouraging students to consider the UPSC exam as their top priority. Highlighting the growing participation of engineering graduates in the UPSC examination, he noted that nearly three lakh engineers apply each year.

He advised students to approach the exam strategically, stressing that analyzing previous years' question papers could cover up to 80% of the preparation. Mr. P. Krishna Pradeep, Chairman of 21st Century IAS Academy, interacted with students and elaborated on the legitimate authority that civil servants hold to serve society. He emphasized the importance of commitment in achieving the goal of becoming a civil servant and driving societal change. Citing an example of Mr Krishna Teja who is an IAS officer at Kerala, he said that he had evacuated 2.5 lakh people and sent to rehabilitation centre during 2008 floods with the powers he had as an IAS officer in just 48 hours. He advised students to think big and grow in their career. Told them to prepare



for UPSC right now and attempt at the age of 21 and get qualify.

Dr. Bhavani Shankar, Chief Mentor of 21st Century IAS Academy addressed the students. He share an overviews insights on UPSC with a power point presentation. Dr. Shankar, emphasized the role of strategy,

discipline, and time management in cracking the UPSC exam. He noted that questions often derive from topics covered as early as the 6th standard curriculum, underscoring the need for a strong foundational understanding.

Dr B Venkateshulu, Dean - Alumnae re-

lating and higher education welcomed the gathering and advised students to take the key points and announced the launch of Civils aspirants club at their college. Principal Dr K Ramesh Reddy, Dean Administration G.V. Avadhani, Editor of Vings Media Mr Ganesh and other faculty members were present during the seminar.



Bachpan School Annual Day Celebrations Highlight Students' Talent and Teachers' Dedication“- Prof. Raghavendra Rao Emphasizes Social Responsibility Along with Education“-Vikarabad, February 17(Praja Jyothi) : The Annual Day celebrations at Bachpan Play School in Vikarabad showcased the remarkable talents of students,

while also recognizing the dedication of teachers in shaping their future. Speaking at the event, Prof. C. Raghavendra Rao, retired professor from Hyderabad Central University, highlighted the importance of teaching students social responsibility alongside academics. He urged parents and teachers to nurture children as responsible individuals

rather than relying solely on textbook learning. “Prof. Raghavendra Rao emphasized that excessive exposure to television, mobile phones, and social media is affecting children's concentration levels. He encouraged educators and parents to promote active listening skills to help students retain knowledge effectively. He cited the Mahabharata, where Lord Ganesha carefully listened to sage Vyasa before writing the epic, as an example of the power of attentive learning. Additionally, he advised parents to instill discipline by ensuring children wake

up on time and maintain a healthy diet, which plays a crucial role in enhancing focus and academic performance. The event featured cultural performances, dances, and activities by students, impressing the audience with their creativity and enthusiasm. The best-performing students were honored with awards, presented by the chief guest. “School Director Rajyalakshmi, Principal Swetha Prashanthi, teachers, staff, and parents actively participated, making the event a memorable celebration of student achievements and teacher efforts. “End

## Airtel Payments Bank is Offering Safe Digital Banking to Millions at Maha Kumbh Mela 2025

Hyderabad :Airtel Payments Bank is enhancing the experience at the Maha Kumbh Mela by offering a seamless and safe digital banking experience to both devotees and merchants, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative. With millions of devotees taking the holy dip, the bank is providing easy access to financial services, ensuring safe transactions, and contributing to the smooth functioning of the event. This initiative not only supports the spiritual journey but also strengthens digital financial inclusion at one of the world's largest religious gatherings.

As part of its efforts, Airtel Payments Bank has set up 10 strategically located kiosks across the vast Mela grounds. These kiosks are offering essential banking services, allowing devotees to withdraw money from their accounts and transfer funds to any



bank account. Customers of any bank with an Aadhaar-linked bank account can also benefit from the service. This will help address the challenges of cash handling and ensure that devotees can access their funds as and when required during their visit.

Moreover, local merchants can deposit their daily earnings directly into their accounts through these banking kiosks. It will eliminate the need for merchants to carry cash from their shops to residential areas, thus enhancing their safety and operational efficiency.



# PhonePe unveils Device Tokenization Solution for secure Card Transactions

Hyderabad :PhonePe, today announced the launch of a device tokenization solution for Credit and Debit cards. With this launch, users will be able to tokenize their cards on the PhonePe App, and use the card tokens seamlessly across all use cases on PhonePe such as Bill Payments, Recharges, booking travel tickets, making insurance purchases, making payments on Pincode, as well as at Online Merchants where the PhonePe Payment Gateway services are integrated. For consumers, tokenizing their cards has several benefits. They will no longer need to save their card details on merchant platforms or enter a CVV for every transaction, leading to higher success rates and fewer drop-offs at check-out.

With tokenized cards securely linked to devices, fraud risks from stolen or leaked card details are also significantly reduced, giving consumers an extra layer of security and boosting consumers' confidence in online payments. To begin with, consumers

will be able to tokenize their Visa Credit and Debit Cards. For merchants, the advantage goes beyond security - it means tapping into a constantly expanding network of tokenized cards, ensuring faster transactions and higher conversions. As more consumers adopt this seamless payment method, businesses will naturally benefit from higher success rates, improved customer retention, and a frictionless checkout experience that fuels growth. PhonePe PG merchants will also have access to this solution. Commenting on the launch, Rahul Chari, Co-founder & CTO, PhonePe, said, "This launch will be a step forward in making digital payments more secure and seamless. We plan to expand this offering by integrating with more card payment networks and enabling access to the device tokenised cards to all PhonePe PG merchants. At PhonePe, we have always focused on building innovative solutions that enhance customer trust and convenience. As digital payments evolve, we remain committed to delivering offerings that make trans-



actions safer, faster, and frictionless for both businesses and consumers." About PhonePe Group: PhonePe Group is India's leading fintech company.

Its flagship product, the PhonePe digital payments app, was launched in Aug 2016. Since then, the PhonePe app has become India's leading consumer payments app. As

of Jan 25, PhonePe has over 59 Crore lifetime registered users and a digital payments acceptance network spread across over 4 Crore merchants.

PhonePe also processes over 31 Crore transactions daily with an Annualized Total Payment Value (TPV) of over INR 145 lakh crore.

## Google Group Presents

Hyderabad :Telangana Fitness Festival By Shafi Sami Classic With The Support of Telangana Sports Chairman Shri Shivasena Reddy Garu and He's presence On in The show to Encourage The Youth, and promote the education of health. Our Top Three Finalist Om Singh Bodybuilding Winner From Telangana. Classic physique Haider Malik From Delhi. Men's Physique Shohaib from Telangana,

Presence of shri Mittu Sai Garu Fisher Committee Chairman

Osman Alhajri Contested MLA Karwan & Incharge &

Shaik Akbar Contested MLA Malakpet & incharge and Others



## Ganges Valley School Hosts Live SAMVADH Session for Parents and Educators

Hyderabad:Ganges Valley School hosted a live edition of SAMVADH, an insightful platform designed to empower parents and educators with practical parenting strategies with an understanding of child development, neuroscience and psychology at Avasa Hotel, Hitech City, Hyderabad on 17th February, 2025. Originally launched as a series of YouTube discussions, SAMVADH has evolved into a live event, bringing together experts and participants to explore essential topics in parenting.

The event featured esteemed speakers Ms. Vani Raju, Executive Director of Ganges Valley School, and Ms. Aarti C. Rajaratnam, a renowned psychologist and best-selling author. Together, they explored the thought-provoking theme, "Hyperconnected yet Disconnected," high-

lighting the challenges and opportunities parents and educators face in today's digital age.

During the session, attendees were encouraged to engage directly with the experts, fostering a collaborative environment for asking questions and discussing strategies to strengthen relationships with children. Vani Raju remarked, "In our fast-paced digital world, it is crucial for parents and educators to cultivate meaningful connections with children, despite the distractions that technology often brings. Events like SAMVADH create a profound impact by sharing insights that empower us to navigate these challenges."

SAMVADH continues to grow as a vital platform for learning, reflection, and community-building. The links to the videos are available on the Ganges Valley School Website and YouTube Channel.





# Vulnerable students and India's need for an inclusive academic system

Students invest immense efforts in securing admission to premier educational institutions. While many are able to turn their dreams into reality, others get left behind. There are times when both students who are unable to get admission and those who join these institutes take extreme steps. A victim's mother once said, "I gave him an IIT dream." Despite various preventive measures, students ending their lives is a tragic loss. In 2024, around a dozen suicides were reported from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT); there have already been over 100 cases in the decade, 2014 to 2024. In 2025, there have been incidents reported from IIT Indore, IIT Kharagpur, and the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, and six cases of admission-seekers in Kota in Rajasthan, which is famous for its coaching institutes. According to the 2022 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, there were 13,044 student suicides in India, or 7.6% of all suicide cases. Among these, 2,095 were linked to examination failure. These tragedies have sparked much concern. In 2023, the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, called for a humanitarian approach, urging "all stakeholders to help students beat negative thinking and take study pressure in a positive way". The Supreme Court of India has directed academicians to explore innovative out-of-the-box solutions. The Council of Indian Institutes of Technology has proposed a slew of measures while the University Grants Commission (UGC) has included a representative of the vulnerable group in the Grievance Redressal Committee to effectively safeguard their interests. In January 2025, the Supreme Court, addressing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by the families of victims, directed the UGC to collate data on the establishment of Equal Opportunity Cells (EOCs), complaints received, and action taken reports from all universities, as per its 2012 regulations. Despite these interventions, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable.

Academic stress and caste-based discrimination remain the primary causes of these tragedies. But there are several other factors. It is a misconception that this is an issue that concerns only academically weaker students. There are cases of high achievers, including an Olympiad winner, taking drastic measures. Additionally, students face societal pressure to "succeed", along with the 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) syndrome and constant comparison with peers. Setbacks and mental health struggles that young people experience are often stigmatised, while failure is viewed as a personal flaw. Institutional policies tend to be reactive rather than preventive, leaving students to chase unrealistic standards with little room for recovery or personal growth. This creates a cycle of isolation, despair, and hopelessness. A Lancet Commission Report (2022) acknowledged that many of us experience some degree of mental ill health in our lifetime, but tackling stigma and discrimination is essential to changing the status quo. Stigma and discrimination in mental health not only violate basic human rights but also deepen marginalisation and social exclusion. To reduce stigma effectively, policies based on social contact should be prioritised, empowered, and supported to drive meaningful change. The effectiveness of existing measures

So, are the measures-in-place counter-productive? Current prevention measures such as counselling, complaint handling, remedial classes, and reduced academic load have their limitations. This stems mainly from the unintended consequence of these measures which end up isolating these individuals in their time of need. Counselling plays a crucial role in promoting wellness skills and improving mental health during normal times. However, challenges may arise during critical moments such as when depression escalates. An IIT Jodhpur study, using data from the 75th Round National Sample Survey (2017-18), revealed that self-reporting of mental illness in India is less than 1%, primarily due to societal stigma, leading to isolation during such critical phases. Combating caste-based discrimination through a complaint-driven approach has significant flaws. It often results in no action in time, delayed or punitive actions, and instils fear of repercussions. The case of a student from IIT Kharagpur, in June 2024, exemplifies this, where the victim allegedly made a complaint and was later found dead. Later, a medical report showed murder, and not suicide. In another instance, at IIT Delhi, in 2023, in the case of two students, the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe cell saw no complaints, despite administrative efforts. It shows that a complaint-based system can discourage victims, only to worsen their suffering, and isolate complainants. A similar issue exists with remedial classes and tutorials for academically weaker students, who are identified based on semester-end results. While these classes may help some students improve their academic performance, there is an inherent flaw. Participants are labelled as being academically weak, causing isolation from their peers. Although most manage to pass, some may struggle due to the stigma and other factors, which when combined with underlying mental health triggers, could lead to tragedy. Thus, the prevention measures have inherent built-in-flaws. They unintentionally label vulnerable individuals, leading to isolation and exclusion. The need for a change in approach. Exclusionary approaches worsen the struggles of victims and hinder integration. A paradigm shift is needed to ensure immediate and inclusive support in critical moments. The key to prevention lies in keeping students integrated, and free from stigma or fear. There is also the point of early detection and flexible assessment. Instead of labelling weaker students at semester-end, early detection through performance in initial assignments or behavioural signs such as missed classes and reduced interaction can help before there is a crisis. A flexible assessment system that is tailored to the varying strengths and interests of students is an effective solution. It should be noted that the same size does not fit all. Offering assignments of different difficulty levels is an approach that supports vulnerable students, boosts their confidence, and ensures that no one is left behind. The writer's successful implementation of this method over three decades highlights its potential to transform student outcomes. This approach does not require reducing academic rigor for all, as doing so has its pros and cons. While it may ease stress for some, it could also affect the global competitiveness level and reputation of elite institutions. Second, transform discrimination into inclusion. Proactive caste-



based inclusion strategies are needed instead of complaint mechanisms that risk alienation and retaliation. Complaint resolution should be handled instantly online by an independent third party, ensuring transparent and empathetic intervention beyond mere rule enforcement. Additionally, caste labels are no longer required after admission, so caste-related data should be removed from all public records. Third, improve mental health collectively. Embracing community-oriented living over individualism fosters mutual support, shared responsibility, and emotional well-being. Encouraging students to socialise reduces isolation, strengthens social networks, and promotes empathy. By prioritising relationships over competition, community living nurtures mindfulness, belonging, and resilience, which are essential for mental health. Creating a supportive en-

vironment wherein students thrive without fear of failure is key to suicide prevention. No single solution fits all, but fostering inclusion and social connection can help. Preventing alienation ensures that no student feels left out, reducing stigma and fear. What truly matters is genuine care, integration, and collective action to build a compassionate educational system. Rajeev Kumar is a former computer science professor at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, Birla Institute of Technology And Science (BITS) Pilani, and the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and a former scientist at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Department of Science and Technology (DST), with over 40 years of experience in academia and research and development

## What's a DDoS cyberattack that hit Karnataka's Kaveri 2.0 portal?

Story so far: In January, web-based portal Kaveri 2.0, which streamlines property registrations in Karnataka, faced sporadic, crippling server outages. As a result, property registration and document-related citizen services went almost to a standstill in the state. On investigating the outage, the Revenue Department and E-Governance Department concluded that it was not due to "technical glitches" but a "motivated Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack" on Kaveri 2.0 - a portal launched in 2023 to reform land registration. The sustained cyberattack on the portal, orchestrated by unidentified miscreants, highlights the vulnerability of critical online services to cyber threats.

What happened after the attack?

Following the incident, K. A. Dayananda, Inspector General of Registrations and Commissioner of Stamps (IGR & CS) lodged a complaint with the cyber-crime police. The Cybercrime, Economic offences, Narcotics (CEN) police registered a case under the Information Technology Act, 2000, against the unidentified miscreants. "The Kaveri 2.0 faced some performance issues during December 2024. Upon analysis and inputs from the Centre for Smart Governance [CSG], it was found that these issues were caused by a malicious DDoS attack using automated

tools or bots," the FIR said.

What is a DDoS attack?

A DDoS attack is a malicious attempt to disrupt the normal functioning of a targeted server, service, or network by overwhelming it with a flood of internet traffic. Unlike a Denial of Service (DoS) attack, which typically involves a single source, a DDoS attack leverages multiple compromised systems, often infected with malware, to generate the traffic. These compromised systems are collectively known as a botnet. Such attacks may be aimed at saturating the bandwidth of a particular site, exploiting weaknesses in the network protocol stack, or targeting specific weaknesses in applications or services.

How does DDoS attack affect web portals?

DDoS attacks can lead to a service downtime, which is the primary goal of a DDoS attack -- to render a service unavailable, leading to a disruption or potential loss of revenue. While DDoS attacks do not directly steal data, they can be used as a distraction while other forms of cyberattacks, such as data breaches, are executed. Organisations that fall victim to DDoS attacks may suffer reputational damage, as customers and partners question their ability to protect against cyber threats.



# Three reasons why the Honda-Nissan deal collapsed

Talks between Honda Motor and Nissan Motor for a potential merger, a multi-billion deal that would have resulted in the creation of the world's fourth largest automaker in terms of vehicle units sold, have collapsed. One, the merger, proposed in December, was never a deal between equals, though there was pressure to portray it as one. Honda had started the negotiations from a position of strength, given that it is a popular brand globally and sells way more cars than Nissan. Nissan, on the other hand, is ailing and desperately needed the merger to regain its competitiveness, especially after its divorce from French auto major Renault. The problem, though, is that Nissan indicated through the duration of the talks that it wants to be seen as an equal partner, spurning any possibility of it being viewed as a junior player or a subsidiary. Jesper Koll, from Japanese online trading platform operator Monex Group, was quoted by the BBC as saying that the "pressure to make it appear like a merger of equals in Japan is very strong". "Having somebody leading this would seem almost offensive to the other party."

Honda's chief Toshihiro Mibe had said any merger would be "based on the assumption that Nissan completes its turnaround action". That was a stiff ask: despite Nissan having slashed 9,000 jobs — about 6 per cent of its global workforce — and reducing global production capacity by 20 per cent after having reported a quarterly loss of 9.3 billion yen (over \$60 million) in October. Second, a partnership by the two companies on electric vehicles, which was announced by them well before the merger talks commenced, will continue. So, technically, the collapse of the merger talks does not upend this crucial EV collaboration. This is important given the popularity of electric and hybrid vehicles made by China's BYD Co. and other Chinese companies such as Xpeng, Nio and Li Auto eclipsed Japan's automakers from the leadership position that they once enjoyed across markets. Honda and Nissan have been losing their share of the Chinese market for some time and both Japanese automakers, according to analysts, were expected to announce large capacity cuts to at least cover some of the fixed-cost exposure they have in China. Nissan and Honda are also facing the prospect of tariffs in the US, another major market. Third, there were more suitors wanting to wriggle into this alliance, making it a somewhat crowded field. Taiwan-based Foxconn, a leading contract manufacturer, said Thursday it is open to buying Nissan shares and exploring collaborations with Renault, which has an over 35 per cent stake in Nissan after rescuing the latter from going belly up in 1999. Renault, on its part, called the terms of the proposed merger deal "unacceptable". What is clear, though, is that without the merger with Honda, Nissan could face a really bumpy road ahead. If a merger had gone through, both companies hoped to leverage their substantial synergy across various markets and technologies. Nissan, for instance, is strong in the European market while Honda does not produce vehicles in Europe anymore. Nissan makes great body-on-frame utility vehicles, while Honda is a superlative petrol

engine maker, which also happens to make cars. Also, Honda is a relative newcomer in the battery electric segment, while Nissan is one of the long-standing EV pioneers. The company was ahead of everyone when it launched the Nissan LEAF about 15 years ago, but they've kind of dropped the ball since then. A joint effort could have helped Nissan regain lost glory and enabled Honda scale up the learning curve in the EV segment. For their business in India too, a merger might have been a net positive. Both companies had tasted some degree of success in India, but struggled to build on this. Honda has consistently held the top slot in the mid-level sedan market with its brilliant City, but failed to make a dent in other segments of the Indian car market. The company was a pioneer in affordable hybrid technology in India with the City Hybrid, but has since given up the leadership slot of the Maruti Suzuki-Toyota combine. Nissan too had seen some success with the Magnite mini-SUV, but failed to capitalise on that or launch more



models that would gain consumer acceptance in the Indian market. A joint effort could

have potentially helped both companies in the world's third largest car market.

## How Siddharth Singh is pushing India's MMA dream forward

New Delhi: At age 12, Siddharth Singh was thrust into the boxing ring at the Doon boarding school in Dehradun, following in his older brother's footsteps. Little did he know that he would chart a path of a maverick, as a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu fighter and a top Indian coach in Mixed Martial Arts. For six years, Singh experienced defeat after defeat, fighting in an arena where the entire school gathered to watch. But something changed in his final year that earned him a spot in the Uttaranchal state boxing team. "I was so focused on being technical and wasn't looking to win necessarily," Singh told HT at the Saket branch of his Cross Train Fight Club. "Finally, I really trained very hard and won my weight class."

His transformation from reluctant boxer to martial arts innovator took an unexpected turn during his time in North London during his higher studies. Unable to find a boxing club, Singh stumbled upon Muay Thai, the Thai martial art that opened his eyes to the power of kicks. But it was a humbling experience with Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) that ultimately changed his life's trajectory. During a free BJJ seminar at his Muay Thai academy, Singh — then a 70-kilogram trained fighter — found himself paired with a 45-kilogram female fighter from West Asia. What happened next still brings a smile to his face. "I woke up looking at stars," he laughs, recounting how the much smaller but more skilled opponent had rendered him unconscious twice in quick succession. This experience in 2009 sparked a revelation about the effectiveness of martial arts and its potential impact in India, particularly self-defense. By 2012, Singh had made the bold decision to leave his cushy 9 to 5 job in UK and return to India and establish his own MMA training center. Though he initially approached it as a business venture, he quickly realized there was



a crucial gap to fill because India lacked qualified MMA coaches. Singh is India's first brown belt in BJJ and holds the Gold Mongkol 'Master' title in Muay Thai and hence, he fit right in as a coach. "The goal was to not become a coach at all," he said. "But what I've been trying to do is to guide the upcoming fighters the right way, build a system where we would hand-pick these guys who we see have potential and then guide them to, hopefully, the UFC." Anshul Jubli and Puja Tomar — the only two Indians to hold a UFC contract at the moment — have been coached by Singh at Crosstrain Fight Club in some capacity. Today, Singh's mission has extended far beyond business metrics. His academy sponsors about 60% of their serious fighters, either fully or partially.

"I think once people get to realise this and recognise that they're actual people doing it, they're not some crazy gladiators," he said. "To put Indians at the highest level it's

required a lot of sacrifice but at the same time the goal kind of changed from a purely commercial entity to trying to grow the sport in the country." Despite facing challenges within India's fragmented martial arts landscape with multiple federations fighting for legitimacy, Singh has maintained his independence, refusing to align with any single federation to ensure his fighters can compete anywhere. In Indian MMA, if a fighter is associated with a specific federation, he cannot compete in tournaments organised by other federations. This decision has made him "enemy number one" for most of these organizations, but he stands firm in his conviction that it's the right approach for the sport's development. "I didn't strategize that one through," jokes Singh. "Initially I lot of hate I got but now, I think they've all understood that I am not taking anyone's side." His ultimate goal? To see an Indian UFC champion within the next decade. "I know for a fact that there will be an Indian UFC champion in the future," Singh asserts confidently. "



# What's new in the Income Tax Bill, 2025

The Income-tax Bill, 2025, which was introduced in Lok Sabha on Thursday, intends to simplify India's six-decade-old structure of direct taxation by streamlining provisions, removing obsolete references, and creating a crisper and simpler legal framework. Once passed by Parliament, the new law will likely come into effect on April 1, 2026. In FAQs released on Thursday, the Income Tax Department said the Bill is straightforward, clear, and easier to understand, with more than 57 tables compared to 18 in The Income-tax Act, 1961. Details that are of direct interest to taxpayers, including deductions, TDS/ TCS rates, and exemptions have been provided in tabular form. It is shorter — all provisos (about 1,200) and explanations (about 900) have been removed, the word count almost halved to 2.60 lakh from 5.12 lakh, and all redundant provisions, including those for capital gains, deductions, and dispute resolution that have seen amendments over the years, omitted. There is no major change in the direct taxation structure, ensuring continuity and stability. The Bill differs from the existing Act in one significant way: while it specifies deductions for rent paid, life and health insurance premia, contribution to provident fund, and home loan among others, it does not provide a table for the tax rates for the old tax regime. Tax slabs in the new tax regime are provided in tabular format. There are 536 sections in the Bill, compared to the 819 effective sections in the Act. The Act mentions only 298 sections, however; over the years, new sections were numbered in continuation with existing sections. For example, provisions relating to tax in special cases were inserted as part of the 115 series, viz., 115 AC, 115AD, 115JB, 115VP, etc., the government said.

**TAX YEAR, NO AY** The Bill introduces the concept of "tax year", which has been defined as the 12-month period beginning April 1. In case of a business or a newly-set-up profession, the tax year will begin from the date it was set up, and will end with the said financial year. Income tax will be levied on the basis of the economic activity and income earned in a tax year. At present, income tax has the concept of "assessment year" (AY), which assesses tax on income earned in the "previous (financial) year". For instance, income earned in the financial year (FY) 2024-25 (April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025) is assessed in AY 2025-26 (beginning April 1, 2025). Prior to 1989, the concepts of "previous year" and "assessment year" were there because taxpayers could have different 12-month previous years for each source of income. From April 1, 1989, the previous year was aligned to the FY in all cases. However, AY continued to be used for various proceedings under the Act. Thus, a taxpayer had to track two different periods, the previous year and the AY, the FAQs say.

**SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESS** "Virtual digital space" has been defined in the powers to call for information by income tax authorities during surveys, searches and seizures to include email servers, social media accounts, online investment, trading and banking accounts, remote or cloud servers, and digital application platforms. **CRYPTO AS PROPERTY** Virtual digital assets such as cryptocurrencies have been included in the definition of property to be counted as a capital asset of the assessee along with existing categories of immovable property such as land and building, shares and securities, bullion, jewellery, archaeological collections,



drawings, paintings, sculptures, and any work of art. The Income Tax Department said there is no change in the scope of 'virtual digital assets' under the Income-tax Bill, 2025. The definition under the Bill incorporates the amendment already proposed under the Finance Bill, 2025. **DISPUTES RESOLUTION** The section on Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP) in the Bill provides the points of determination, decision, and the reasons behind it, marking a shift from the earlier section, which lacked clarity on the manner of issuing DRP directions.

**CAPITAL GAINS EXEMPTIONS** Section 54E of the Act, which details exemptions for capital gains on transfer of capital assets prior to April 1992 has been removed in the Bill. Deductions have been streamlined, and outdated exemptions removed. Deductions from salary such as standard deduction, gratuity, and leave encashment have been detailed in tabular form. The scope and definition of income has been expanded to include evolving income sources. Exempt income, conditions for claiming exemptions, deductions, TDS and TCS (tax collected at source), have been provided in tabular form in separate schedules for better understanding. Income tax slabs announced in any year's Budget will be included in the Finance Act of that year. As of now, the income tax rates announced in Budget 2025-26 have been included in the Income-tax Bill. Tax experts said the simplified language and concise form will help taxpayers understand the income tax provisions better. The multiple cross-referencing among sections and rules currently often give rise to complications and disputes. "In addition to removal of 'provisos', 'explanation', and redundant provisions, formulae, tables, and structures have been used to enhance clarity in the new bill. To the extent possible, provisions involving the same issues, which were present in different chapters in the current Act, have now been consolidated. Redundancy has been removed and definitions at multiple places have been consolidated," the tax department said in its FAQs. The proposed Bill follows the government's announcement in the Interim Budget presented in July 2024. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said a comprehensive review of the Income-tax

Act, 1961 would be completed in six months. In her Budget speech on February 1 this year, Sitharaman said the government had earlier replaced the Bharatiya Danda Sanhita with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, "and the new income-tax bill will carry forward the same spirit of nyaya". The Bill, she said, would be close to half the size of the existing law in terms of both chapters and words, and would be simple to understand, leading to tax certainty and reduced litigation. However, tax experts pointed out that the new Bill lacks any major tweaks in penalty or compliance provisions; by removing the redundant provisos and explanations, it has mainly only made the law more concise.

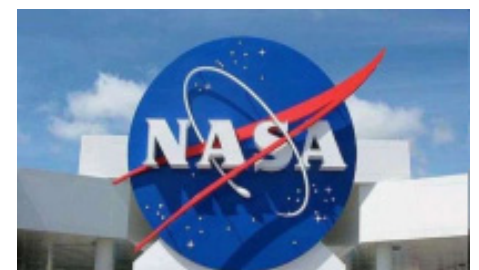
The government has attempted to simplify the Income-tax Act on several occasions previously. In 2018, a task force was formed to draft a new direct tax law that submitted its report in 2019. The UPA government had proposed a Direct Taxes Code (DTC), and a draft Bill was tabled in Parliament in 2010. After review by the Standing Committee, the draft was revised twice, in 2012 and 2014, but it lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha. The new Bill will go to a Parliamentary Committee, after which it will return to the government. After a call is taken on including any proposed amendments, the government will decide the date for rolling out the new income tax law.

## NASA says Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore to return to Earth earlier than scheduled

New York: NASA and SpaceX are accelerating the target launch and return dates for the upcoming crew rotation missions to and from the International Space Station (ISS), which will bring the agency's stranded astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore back home.

The agency's Crew-10 launch now is targeting March 12, pending mission readiness and completion of the agency's certification of flight readiness process, NASA said late on Tuesday, Xinhua news agency reported. The Crew-9 mission, consisting of Williams, Wilmore, NASA astronauts Nick Hague along with Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, is planned for return to Earth following a several-day handover period with the newly arrived Crew-10 crew.

The previous launch date for Crew-10 was no earlier than late March. The Crew-10 mission will carry NASA astronauts Anne McClain, and Nichole Ayers, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Takuya Onishi, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Kirill Peskov, to the space station. The earlier launch opportunity is available following a decision by mission management to adjust



the agency's original plan to fly a new Dragon spacecraft for the Crew-10 mission which requires additional processing time, according to NASA. The flight now will use a previously flown Dragon, called Endurance, and joint teams are working to complete assessments of the spacecraft's previously flown hardware to ensure it meets the agency's Commercial Crew Programme safety and certification requirements. This comes as US President Donald Trump asked SpaceX CEO Elon Musk to facilitate the return of both Williams and Wilmore as soon as possible. Musk claimed that it was "terrible" that the pair were left "stranded" at the ISS for so long, even though NASA had already roped in SpaceX months ago to return both astronauts as part of its Crew-9 mission.



# After Trump's call with Putin, there are openings for peace

Almost three years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, prospects for peace have emerged following a phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump said that negotiations to end the war would begin "immediately" after the "lengthy and highly productive" phone call. He even expressed optimism about reaching a peace agreement. But even while advocating negotiations, the author of *The Art of the Deal* seems to have sacrificed leverage by revealing the American position. Just before the call, in Brussels, his Defence Secretary, Pete Hegseth, laid out the American contours of the deal. He told a meeting of NATO allies that a return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders — before Russia annexed Crimea — was unrealistic, and that the US did not see Ukraine's membership of NATO as part of the solution. Hegseth added that US troops would not be part of any post-war security presence in Ukraine.

Major obstacles exist in working out a peace agreement. The biggest, perhaps, is the need for territorial concessions by Ukraine and its need for credible security guarantees to guard against future Russian aggression. Russia currently occupies about a fifth of the country and has demanded that Kyiv cede the territory in a future settlement and become a permanently neutral country thereafter. Ukraine, on the other hand, seeks a Russian withdrawal from all its territory and a membership of NATO to guarantee its security. Twice in recent days, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he is willing to negotiate with Putin if Western allies offer security guarantees as part of the settlement. All this is a distinct shift in the tone of the conversation between the US and Russia. Note that former president Joe Biden had not spoken to the Russian president in nearly three years because he saw the latter's actions as those of a war criminal. The war is currently more or less at a stalemate. For more than a year now, the battlefield advantage has been with Russia, though it has lost more troops compared to Ukraine. Just how serious the manpower issue is for Moscow is evident from the North Korean troops fighting for Russia, along with an assortment of other foreigners, including some from India. NATO's support for Ukraine in the last three years has been less than stellar. Aid came through bilateral channels, not NATO's coordination. Equipment has come in penny-packets and logistical challenges have hindered the quick delivery of ammunition and spare parts. The alliance was itself poorly prepared for a full scale war in Europe and its own stocks of equipment and ammunition were depleted. Even the Biden administration provided aid in bits and pieces, and sometimes grudgingly, keeping in mind the dangers of escalation. There have been internal differences on any move to offer Kyiv accession into NATO. The US, Germany, Spain and Belgium have made their hesitation on that account clear. The Ukrainians worry that if Russia is given control of the economically and militarily important Donbas region, it could adversely affect their ability to defend themselves in the future. In any case, Kyiv has seen Moscow break the post-Cold War security guarantees offered by the Budapest Memorandum and forcibly

occupy Ukrainian territory. As for Russia, it retains a grudge against NATO for breaking its oral commitment not to expand eastwards. Viewed in balance, there may be some value in the current American strategy. A "no-NATO" concession may persuade the Russians to come to the negotiating table. As for Ukraine, note that the Americans have not, as of now, said that all the territory captured since 2014 would become part of Russia. There is room for negotiation here. But the Americans have made the alternatives clear to their own allies who want to fire their guns off the shoulders of the Ukrainians. The US may continue to supply weapons to Ukraine as part of a separate "minerals for weapons" deal, but it's clear that it will not be a security guarantor. That leaves the Europeans holding the can. Under any deal, this is an opportunity for the European Union which must work out a way of leading its own military revival as a precondition for



any kind of security guarantee for Ukraine. They have already taken some first steps, like ramping up munitions production, but they need to do much more.

## A big, beautiful Trump deal with China

IT SOUNDS ODD, but hints keep piling up that President Donald Trump is tempted by a big, beautiful deal with China's Xi Jinping. That runs counter to campaign-trail vows to hit China with crippling tariffs. A great-power bargain that Mr Xi could accept—perhaps bundling economic trade-offs with a divvying-up of the world into spheres of influence—would surely outrage hawkish Trump aides, from the national security adviser, Mike Waltz, to the secretary of state, Marco Rubio. Congress would be appalled and allies in Europe and Asia aghast. And yet Mr Trump keeps signalling that he is in dealmaking mode. He has invited China to help with peacemaking in Ukraine, says he would rather not impose swingeing Chinese tariffs and questioned whether TikTok, a Chinese-owned app, really harms American national security.

Well-connected officials and scholars in America, China and Europe are thinking hard about "G2" talks and how far they could get. Converging world views make a deal conceivable, for Mr Trump's might-makes-right outlook resembles Mr Xi's. Diverging national interests are the obstacle. There is, for instance, a winner-takes-all edge to some important technological contests, from the race to dominate artificial intelligence to competitions over space warfare. That places severe limits on co-operation. In Washington, conventional conservatives draw comfort from the first Trump presidency. They admit that, in private, Mr Trump made startling statements about China. The memoirs of former aides describe Mr Trump scorning the democratic island of Taiwan as a small and troublesome place, just off the coast of mighty China. There are accounts of Mr Trump telling Mr Xi he was right to lock up Muslim Uyghurs in the western region of Xinjiang. But in the end, conservatives counter, Mr Trump approved tough China policies, selling weapons to Taiwan, calling repression of Uyghurs a genocide and curbing technology exports. Today a conventional spin can be put on Mr Trump's approach to Ukraine. China has leverage over President Vladimir Putin as a vital energy buyer and supplier of components for Russian



armsmakers. Maybe Mr Trump just wants China to stop exporting weapons parts and tell Mr Putin to stop fighting. Alas, soothing spin must reckon with something jarring: Mr Trump's echoing of Chinese talking points about the war. In early January he said he could "understand" why Russia feels threatened by potential NATO membership for Ukraine. Days after his inauguration he told Fox News that Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, should have sued for peace and not fought back after being invaded by "much more powerful" Russia. Mr Trump called the conflict a costly mistake, allowed to drag on because America "started pouring equipment" into the war. That is the line peddled in world capitals by Chinese envoys for three years, almost verbatim.

Chinese experts welcome a chance for dealmaking. Currently, Russia is heavily reliant on China, says Yang Cheng, a professor at Shanghai International Studies University and former Chinese diplomat in Moscow. But the gains from that dependence are outweighed by harm to China's ties with America and Europe, where China is wrongly seen as being in lockstep with Russia, he argues. A role in Ukraine peace talks would be a "proving-ground" for China's diplomacy, and bolster its ambitions to be

recognised as a "provider of public goods for global governance". China's price for help could be a new joint communiqué in which America unequivocally "opposes" Taiwanese independence, shifting from its stance of "not supporting" the island's claim to statehood, suggests Xiang Lanxin, a Shanghai-based veteran of high-level, semi-official talks between America and China. An American "No" to independence would advance China's core interests, he says, transforming politics inside the island and pouring cold water on Western governments that have taken up Taiwan's cause as a test of democratic solidarity. In return, China might divert exports from America to other markets and avoid mounting challenges to the dollar's global dominance. As for Mr Trump's swaggering ambitions in his near-abroad, neither Panama nor Greenland are "vital" Chinese interests, while his upsetting of allies is "great" for China, says Professor Xiang. As a senior colonel in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Zhou Bo oversaw Chinese peace-keeping missions. If invited by the warring parties, China "stands ready" to send thousands of PLA monitors to Ukraine, perhaps with Indian and Brazilian counterparts, he says. That would avoid the presence of peacekeepers from NATO countries, which Russia would surely oppose.