

Alarming rise of cyber threats in Telangana

Hyderabad: In a significant escalation in cyber threats, the Telangana State has emerged as one of the most targeted States in India, accounting for 23 per cent of all malware detections nationwide in 2024, with over 6.25 million incidents recorded, a Telangana Cyber Threat Report-2025 released by Seqrite, the enterprise arm of Quick Heal Technologies Ltd, on Monday said. The report reveals that identity theft is the most reported cybercrime in Telangana, with nearly 30,000 incidents registered. This includes 11,125 cases of unauthorised transactions, and 5,369 incidents of KYC updation fraud.

Impersonation frauds accounted for a concerning 18,647 cases, which included courier frauds, police impersonation and digital arrest scams. With several growing economic hubs in the state, people also fell prey to nearly 26,000 business and investment scams. Advertisement fraud (17,669 cases) and loan fraud (12,589 cases) comprised other prominent forms of fraud detected in the State. Apart from digital frauds, ransomware attacks also surged alarmingly, with an average of 47 attacks per day and a total of 17,505 incidents last year. Among the

most affected sectors were IT/ITES, manufacturing, and education, which saw repeated disruptions due to cyberattacks, the report said.

Seqrite's report details several high-profile incidents that underline the severity of the threat landscape. A ransomware attack on Narayana Group hospitals and educational services disrupted critical patient care and administrative operations by encrypting electronic medical records (EMR) and billing systems. Similarly, Sivaraj Medical Colleges suffered a devastating breach that compromised sensitive student records, financial transactions, and faculty payroll systems. Both attacks exploited vulnerabilities such as phishing emails and weak access controls to gain entry into critical systems, the report said.

Hacktivist groups operating through platforms like Telegram have also intensified their activities in Telangana. These groups have targeted government portals such as data.telangana.gov.in and educational institutions like Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University. Sensitive citizen data, login credentials, and governmental documents were leaked online, while



website defacements tarnished the reputations of public institutions. For instance, the Deputy Chief Minister's website was breached, exposing internal documents that raised serious concerns about data privacy and security. Vishal Salvi, CEO, Quick Heal Technologies Limited said, "Telangana is becoming a key IT hub, driving India's digital

economy through robust infrastructure and innovation-driven policies.

As the State develops, the rise in cyber threats is inevitable. Corroborating this, the Telangana Cyber Threat Report 2025 provides detailed insights that clearly highlight the need to strengthen the State's cybersecurity posture."

Khammam's Puligundala set to become an ecotourism destination in Telangana



Khammam: The scenic Puligundala tank surrounded by thick forests and hillocks is set to become an ecotourism destination in the State as the Khammam district administration and the Forest department have embarked on an ambitious project of establishing a Nature Conservation Park in the area. The tank is located in the Kanakagiri reserve forest block of Tallada range of Sathupally division in the district. The deciduous bamboo forest is spread over an area of 14,422 hectares. It is located 11.5km from Ramakrishnapuram village on the Khammam to Aswaraopet State Highway-42. The project, initiated seven years ago, gained momentum recently as

District Forest Officer Siddharth Vikram Singh prepared a plan to develop facilities for eco-tourism promotion with an estimated cost of Rs.67 lakh, which would be provided by the district Collector. The park would be developed by the Forest department, while running and maintenance would be done by Zoos and Parks Authority of Telangana (ZAPAT) by involving local communities and tribes. Two watchtowers – a Palapitta Watchtower and a Leopard Watchtower – with a selfie point on top of the hillock nearby have been set up for the visitors to admire the picturesque hills. Speaking to Telangana Today, Vikram Singh informed that the Puligundala project has immense potential to emerge as a favoured eco-tourism desti-

nation because of its scenic beauty and diverse wildlife. As many as 10 leopards, 10 sloth bears, besides huge numbers of chousinghas, spotted deers and Indian gaur have been spotted in the region, he said. The Nature Conservation Park that supports flora and fauna including migratory birds is ideal for bird watching, sky gazing and adventurous trekking. It is planned to introduce boating in the tank spread over around 40 acre. Mini-water fall, which comes alive in monsoon, at Puligundam is an added attraction, the DFO said. For wildlife safari and trekking, a 6 km track connecting with the Puligundam waterfall and a 15 km track covering the ghat

portion to the Leopard Watchtower have been set up. The ghat portion has to be reached with 4-wheel drive vehicles. A parking place is being developed on one acre of open forest. Safari rides would be operated across the year except during the rainy season. It is planned to build non-permanent wooden tree houses and cottages for the stay of tourists, Vikram Singh said. It is planned to provide livelihood to nearby villagers by engaging them in motor boat operation, non-permanent eco-cottages maintenance, parking and entry fee, food arrangement to tourists, wildlife safari and nature trail guide fee, operation of cafe point and others, he added.

Dvi Dance Festival returns to Hyderabad, showcasing classical excellence on March 2

Hyderabad: The second edition of the Dvi Dance Festival is all set to be held at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Auditorium, Basheerbagh, on March 2. The unique event, celebrating the grace and depth of Indian classical dance, will feature performances by two exceptional male artists – Pritam Das and Sai Venkata Gangadhar.

Pritam Das, a Bharatanatyam artist based in New Delhi, is known for his passion and dedication, embodies grace and mastery in his performances. Trained under the guidance of Rama Vaidyanathan, he has performed at numerous prestigious festivals,

including the Spirit of Youth, HCL Concert Series, and the Mid-Year Dance Festival. Sai Venkata Gangadhar is a dynamic Kuchipudi dancer and teacher, based in Hyderabad trained under Sandhya Raju for over 16 years. A postgraduate in Performing Arts (Kuchipudi), he has performed at esteemed venues and festivals such as the Nritya Pratibha Festival and Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre. Recently, Gangadhar showcased his talent in Italy, where he performed during Diwali celebrations. The DVI Dance Festival is coordinated by Sravya Subramanyam, a passionate Kuchipudi dancer and visual designer from Hyderabad.

Why is the three-language policy controversial? | Explained

The story so far: The Union Government has withheld ₹2,152 crore in funds due to Tamil Nadu under the Samagra Shiksha scheme for refusing to join the Prime Minister Schools for Rising India (PMSHRI) initiative. While T.N. is eager to participate in the PM SHRI scheme, it staunchly opposes the accompanying mandate to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. One of the State's core objections to the NEP is its insistence on adopting a three-language formula in schools. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has rejected any concessions, insisting that T.N. must align "with the Constitution". Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, questioning which provision of the Constitution justifies such mandates, has declared that the State will not submit to "blackmail" or abandon its historically adopted two-language policy.

What does the NEP 2020 state?

The NEP 2020 has retained the three-language formula, a concept first introduced in the NEP of 1968. The key difference, however, is that back then the NEP advocated for Hindi to be a compulsory language across the nation. Hindi-speaking States were required to teach Hindi, English, and a modern Indian language — preferably a south Indian language — while non-Hindi speaking States were expected to teach the local regional language, Hindi, and English. In contrast, NEP 2020 offers greater flexibility, technically not imposing any specific language on any State. It states that "the three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and, of course, the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India." This means, in addition to the State's language, children would be required to learn at least one other Indian language — not necessarily Hindi. The policy also emphasises bilingual teaching, particularly in the home language/mother tongue and English. Conspicuously, it places significant emphasis on Sanskrit as an optional choice within the three-language formula.

Why is there opposition to this policy in T.N.?

Tamil Nadu has long resisted the 'imposition of Hindi'. In 1937, when the C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) government in Madras proposed making Hindi a compulsory subject in secondary schools, the Justice Party fiercely opposed it. Two young men, Thalamuthu and Natarajan, who participated in the agitation, died and became icons in the anti-Hindi imposition movement. Rajaji eventually resigned, and the British government withdrew the order. In 1965, as the deadline for adopting Hindi as the sole official language across India approached, the State witnessed violent protests that led to the deaths of at least 70 people in police shootings or self-immolations. The agitation resurfaced when Parliament adopted the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967, and the Official Language Resolution, 1968, which mandated the teaching of Hindi as part of the three-language formula. In January 1968, the Madras Assembly, led by the C.N. Annadurai-led first Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government, adopted a resolution calling for the scrapping of the three-language formula and the elimination



of Hindi from the curriculum in T.N. schools. Since then, the State has steadfastly followed its two-language policy teaching Tamil and English. Major political parties, including the ruling DMK and the principal opposition All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have consistently opposed any efforts to alter this policy. In 2019, backlash led the Kasturirangan Committee to remove the mandatory Hindi learning clause from the draft NEP.

Why is the three-language policy seen as an attempt to impose Hindi?

Political parties and activists in T.N. view the three-language policy as a "smokescreen" and a "backdoor" attempt to impose Hindi. They argue that, in practice, the implementation of a three-language scheme would inevitably lead to the teaching of Hindi, given the limited resources for providing additional language teachers and learning materials. Moreover, the Union Government and prominent BJP leaders have periodically advocated for the promotion of Hindi. In 2019, the Union Budget allocated ₹50 crore to support the appointment of Hindi teachers in non-Hindi speaking States. Critics contend the Centre's actions do not match its rhetoric on promoting regional languages, as evidenced by the lack of efforts to hire adequate regional language teachers in Kendriya Vidyalayas or to ensure south Indian languages are taught in schools above the Vindhyas. Mr. Pradhan has defended the withholding of funds to T.N., making it clear that adherence to the three-language policy is non-negotiable. He urged Mr. Stalin to "rise above political differences" and criticised the State for viewing the NEP 2020 with a "myopic vision". In response, Mr. Stalin has accused Mr. Pradhan of attempting to "impose Hindi" under the guise of the NEP's policy. Mr. Stalin has vowed that, as long as the DMK and he are around, Tamil and T.N.'s interests will not be compromised.

What is the way forward?

The only viable solution lies in constructive dialogue and a practical compromise between the Centre and the State on an issue like education, which was transferred from the State to the concurrent list during the Emergency. Notably, T.N., with its long-standing two-language policy, has consistently

outperformed many other States in key metrics such as Gross Enrolment Ratio and reduced school dropout rates. Disagreements over teaching a third language should not be allowed to derail funding for Samagra Shiksha, a comprehensive programme for education.

Majorana 1: A quantum phenomenon

In a head-turning announcement earlier this week, Microsoft unveiled a new quantum chip called Majorana 1. According to its press release, it consists of four qubits made of a "new state of matter". Qubit is short for 'quantum bit', the fundamental unit of operations in a quantum computer, similar to classical bits in conventional computers. A single qubit represents more information than a single bit. A quantum computer heightens the advantages of this ability using quantum phenomena like superposition and entanglement to solve complex mathematical problems in fewer steps than perhaps the most powerful conventional computer.

Quantum computers differ depending on their choice of qubit. For example, Google's Willow chip uses small circuits that mimic the properties of atoms in a quantum state. Microsoft has said its new chip uses Majorana particles, elusive subatomic entities supposed to appear in materials called topological superconductors. These particles have unusual properties that physicists believe could be used to build qubits that are less error-prone than the designs Google and IBM use. "Topological qubits can win if, and only if, they turn out to be so much more reliable that they leapfrog the earlier approaches..." University of Texas at Austin professor Scott Aaronson wrote on his blog. "Whether that will happen is still an open question, to put it extremely mildly." A physics primer

If you cool some water vapour, it will

become water and then ice. If you keep lowering the temperature until nearly absolute zero, the system will have minimal thermal energy, allowing quantum states of matter to show. In the 1970s, Michael Kosterlitz and David Thouless found that the surface of superfluid helium sometimes developed microscopic vortices that moved in pairs. When they raised the temperature, the vortices decoupled and moved freely. It was a new kind of quantum phase transition: the object's topological attributes changed in response to changes in energy.

Topology is the study of the properties an object retains when it is deformed continuously, e.g. when it's stretched but not ruptured. Topological materials are materials with topologically protected states: the 'protection' keeps the state stable against impurities or small disturbances. For example, a vortex in a bucket of water will fade as it loses kinetic energy. But vortices in superfluid helium are topologically protected. With the right internal conditions, they will keep spinning. Only quantum physics allows this. Similarly, topological superconductors are materials whose ability to conduct an electric current without resistance is topologically protected. The signature of a topological superconductor is its ability to host Majorana particles. These materials are not found in nature. Instead, scientists engineer them in the lab to have the combination of internal properties that allows Majorana particles to exist. Microsoft has reportedly used indium arsenide with aluminium.

Rotary Club of Lake District Moinabad Partners with KPMG to Host Successful Blood Donation Camp

Hyderabad;The Rotary Club of Lake District Moinabad, alongside Rotary District 3011, KPMG, and the Rotary Challa Blood Centre, successfully organized a Blood Donation Camp to support patients requiring life-saving blood transfusions. The event took place at KPMG's office in Raidurg, Hyderabad, highlighting the power of community-driven initiatives. The initiative stressed the importance of voluntary blood donation, with the message that "every drop of blood given is a valuable gift for patients who need a transfusion." Volunteers from across the city played an essential role in making this event a success. Under the direction of Rtn. Rajashekar Vodela, Director of Service Projects at the Rotary Club of Lake District Moinabad, and with assistance from Rtn. Amit Arya, Assistant Governor of Rotary District 3011, the camp witnessed a remarkable turnout. Coordinating efforts with Mr. Raghavendra from the KPMG Team, the camp collected a total of *73 units of blood*, which will assist cancer patients and others in critical need. This donated blood will be allocated to hospitals based on patient requirements, prioritizing government hospitals and cancer care. Commenting on the initiative, Mr. Chiranjeev Saluja, President of the Rotary Club of Lake District Moinabad, stated, "Blood donation is one of the simplest yet most powerful ways to save lives. It is heartening to see so many individuals step up for this cause. At Premier Energies and Rotary, we believe in empowering communities, and this camp is a testament to that commitment."

Ms. Dimple Agarwal, Secretary of the Rotary Club of Lake District Moinabad, reflected on the event, saying, "Seeing the en-



thusiasm of donors today reinforces the fact that small actions can lead to significant change. We are proud to partner with like-minded organizations and individuals who

are dedicated to community well-being." Mr. Uday Pilani, Founder of the Rotary Club of Lake District Moinabad, emphasized, "The impact of a single blood donation extends far

beyond the donor. It gives hope, strength, and life to those battling illnesses. Such initiatives are vital, and it's wonderful to see the community come together for this cause."

Ride apps switch to subscription model amid conflicting rulings on GST liability

Uber has switched to a cash-only model for auto rickshaw rides, joining competitors Namma Yatri, Rapido, and Ola, despite conflicting tax rulings by the Authority for Advanced Ruling (AAR) on whether ride aggregators must continue collecting Goods and Services Tax (GST) from passengers. Since February 18, after it shifted to a subscription model for its auto drivers, Uber has stopped levying 5 per cent GST on auto rides, a tax it previously collected under its commission-based model. The Karnataka bench of the AAR had ruled in November 2024 that Uber remains liable to collect and pay 5 per cent GST under the subscription model, even when it is not collecting any payment from passengers. In contrast, a September 2023 ruling by the same bench on an application by Namma Yatri stated it was not required to collect GST from passengers, on the grounds that it only links drivers to passengers without being directly involved in the transport service. Passengers now have to select 'cash' as their payment method and can use cash or UPI to pay the fare directly to auto drivers, who, in turn, pay a periodic fee to Uber for platform access under its subscription model. As no GST is being levied on passengers, Uber is only generating

a receipt and "not a tax invoice" after the completion of auto rides. The receipt is not a tax invoice as Uber claims the transactions between passengers and drivers occur independently of its platform. Under Section 9(5) of the CGST Act, 2017, which stipulates GST rates for services provided through e-commerce operators, ride aggregators are charged 5 per cent GST for passenger services. As per government estimates, in 2023-24, GST revenue collected from passenger transport services under the section was Rs 1,545 crore. The industry has reached out to tax authorities seeking a clarification on the 5 per cent levy under the subscription model for ride aggregation. The Indian Express has learnt. By switching from commissions that consumed up to 30 per cent of daily earnings of auto drivers to fixed subscription fees, ride-hailing apps aim to attract more auto drivers onto their platforms under the subscription model. Uber's adoption of the model came after competitors Namma Yatri, Rapido, and Ola made the switch, fearing loss of market share in the three-wheeler space. While Namma Yatri and Rapido have also switched to subscription fees for cab drivers, both Ola and Uber, which have a firmer footing in the four-wheeler space, are yet to make the change for cabs. In its appli-

cation before the Karnataka bench of AAR in November 2024, Uber India Systems Pvt Ltd argued that transportation services to passengers are not provided "through" it under the subscription model. Rather, it is "only involved in connecting the supplier of services and consumer of the services with no further involvement (like a Just Dial, yellow pages, or business linking services). At the time, Uber had piloted a subscription-based plan for auto drivers in some cities, including Chennai and Kochi. Under the subscription model, Uber provides an estimated fare based on its algorithm, which can be further negotiated by the driver and the passenger. The fare is also paid directly to the driver by the passenger, and Uber maintains no record of the final amount paid. "As the Applicant has not collected any payment on behalf of the supplier, the question of collecting tax on behalf of the supplier does not arise", Uber told the AAR. The tax authority, on the other hand, observed that "there is no indication that the fare is an estimated fare" after scrutinising screenshots of the app. "Thus, the fare is also fixed by the app, and the same forms the basis for effecting the transaction between the rider and driver using the app," it said. It added that Uber "does not merely connect the rider with the driver but provides

a platform for communication between the driver and rider without which the contract for providing the passenger transport service cannot be completed". The AAR also noted that an e-commerce operator need not collect the payment due to drivers for it to be held liable to collect and pay GST. In the Namma Yatri (Juspay Technologies Pvt Ltd) case in 2023, which also connects auto drivers with passengers under the subscription model, the AAR, Karnataka, had said the app "doesn't take responsibility for the operational and completion of the ride". It ruled that Namma Yatri does not carry tax liability as the "supply of services are not through the electronic commerce operator, but are independent". The Namma Yatri app states the fare, provides safety support, and tracks the ride. Currently, the aggregator does not levy GST on auto rides. "We would like to clarify that Namma Yatri functions as a platform facilitating direct transactions between riders and drivers. In accordance with our current operational model, GST applicability is determined accordingly," a Namma Yatri spokesperson told. In July 2024, the AAR, Karnataka, had also ruled on an application by Rapido (Roppen Transportation Services Pvt Ltd) seeking clarification on GST liability under the subscription model.

Calcutta through a bookseller's eyes: The legacy of Dasgupta & Co.

From being the seat of the British Empire to serving as the first stop for traders, industrialists, and explorers from around the world, to becoming the hub of communism in post-independence India, Bengal has for centuries been a sagacious witness to history unfolding in the Indian subcontinent. The Bengal Memory Project weaves the story of Calcutta and its hinterlands through the vivid recollections of its residents. From iconic booksellers and musicians to sweetshop owners and beyond, this project uncovers the untold tales of those who lived it. Through their stories, passed down from generation to generation, we trace the fascinating journey of Bengal's transformation over the decades. With the rhythmic clatter of trams in the background and the unmistakable scent of countless books in the air, Arabinda Dasgupta reflects on the pivotal moment in 1975 when he first stepped into the family bookstore, Dasgupta & Co. "I must have been 24 or 25 when my father insisted I join the shop — I wanted no part of it. I fled after just two hours, convinced I'd never return. But this place had a way of pulling me back. Slowly, inevitably, it became a part of me."

Born in 1951, Dasgupta became the fourth generation to carry forward a legacy that began in 1886 with his great-grandfather, Girish Chandra Dasgupta, who founded the bookstore. By the time he joined, Dasgupta & Co. was already a century-old institution. "Just as some children grow up surrounded by parents and grandparents, I grew up surrounded by books," he recalls. His childhood home on Beniatola Lane, close to the bookstore on College Street in central Calcutta, was filled with binderies where young Arabinda would spend hours observing artisans meticulously binding books. To him, nothing rivaled the scent of freshly bound books. When he wasn't watching the craftsmen, he'd lose himself in the storeroom of their two-story house, eagerly tearing into cartons of newly imported international literature destined for the shop's shelves. This is the story of Calcutta's iconic bookstore, Dasgupta & Co., through the eyes of its managing director, Arabinda Dasgupta. Girish Chandra Dasgupta: The pioneering bookseller of the Bengal Renaissance. Girish Chandra Dasgupta arrived in Calcutta from Kalia, Narail District (now in present-day Bangladesh) during the peak of the Bengal Renaissance. It was an era of intellectual and cultural awakening. In the late nineteenth century, the newly founded Dasgupta & Co. was actively building its sourcing networks to cater to the Bengali bhadralok (intelligentsia). Medical books were shipped from Bombay, religious texts arrived from South India, and Urdu publications came from Aligarh — transported by sea, as the railway had yet to connect these distant places.

The 1905 Partition of Bengal, aimed at undermining Bengali nationalism, ignited the rise of extremist tactics led by figures such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. Secret societies like the Atmonnati Samiti and Anushilan Samiti laid the groundwork for more radical resistance to colonial rule. This period also saw the strengthening of networks among the Bengali bhadralok, with organisations like Dasgupta & Co. play-

ing a crucial role in mobilising resources and support for the growing nationalist movement. Luminaries such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy, and Rabindranath Tagore were among the many distinguished visitors to Girish Chandra's bookstore at 54/3 College Street. "I remember being told by my great-grandfather that certain books on the extremist movement were kept hidden and sold discreetly at the store," Arabinda recalls. "The British authorities would often seize them, yet the rest of the collection was left untouched." Beyond bookselling, Girish Chandra ventured into publishing, establishing Mahesh Press in the final decade of the 19th century. The press, according to Arabinda, was a tribute to Girish Chandra's long-time friend and homeopathic doctor, Mahesh Bhattacharya. Here, he published books on Swaraj and India's independence. Dasgupta & Co. was among the first bookstores in colonial India to import international literature from the United Kingdom with shipments arriving via the Suez Canal after an 18-day journey. Express photo by Shashi Ghosh Express photo by Shashi Ghosh As the decades passed, College Street evolved into the intellectual heart of the city, surrounded by institutions such as Hindoo School, which was later renamed Presidency College (1817), Hare School (1818), and Calcutta Medical College (1835). In this thriving academic environment, the bookstore flourished. Kshitish Chandra Dasgupta: Navigating communism & Swadeshi movement "My grandfather, Kshitish Chandra Dasgupta, took over (the bookstore) from 1910 to 1944," Arabinda recalls. "Despite the political turbulence of the time, our bookshop never saw a decline in readers."

While novels were not in high demand, books related to the Communist Movement — Lenin, Stalin, Das Kapital, and Mao's Little Red Book — were immensely popular. A particularly intriguing genre was the so-called 'underground literature,' where revolutionary writings were discreetly tucked into journals and magazines, purchased by members of the Communist Party, he says. The store was more than just a bookseller; on the third floor, a mess housed a group of male students, some of whom were involved in revolutionary activities against the British. The bookstore had its own silent code to protect them — when danger approached, a sharp whistle would signal the students to flee, dashing across rooftops to safety. Arabinda added that between 1905 and 1921, literature centered on the Swadeshi movement saw brisk sales, reflecting the surge of nationalist sentiment. Interestingly, women readers of the era had their own literary preferences. "To our surprise," Arabinda notes, "they would arrive post-sunset in horse-drawn tongas, seeking all kinds of religious texts — the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Quran, and so on." Amulya Dasgupta: Selling books through Partition and in a newly independent India

Arabinda's father, Amulya Dasgupta, joined the bookstore in 1929 after graduating from Presidency College, dedicating himself to its operations until 1995. It was during his tenure that one witnessed a major shift in the publishing industry — the introduction of affordable paperback books by Penguin in the 1930s, which revolutionised readership and



accessibility. His time at the store also coincided with some of College Street's most turbulent years, as the area was swept by waves of student protests and political unrest in post-independence India. Among them was the Bengal Food Movement of 1959 — a desperate struggle against food shortages, soaring prices, and near-famine conditions. Between July and September of that year, the movement escalated into widespread protests. Shops across College Street were impacted, but my father and his generation remained resolute. "They were steady and patient," Arabinda reflects. "They led their lives with immense composure, always believing that books could never be forgotten, and that, no matter what, readers would return." Arabinda Dasgupta: Caught between legacy of the past and hopes for the future Not much has changed, according to Arabinda — at least, not in sudden upheavals. Readership shifted in the 1960s when the Communist Party split, but the real transformation has been a slow, relentless decay. Between the late 20th century and today, it is not just readership that has dwindled, but also the quality of booksellers and publishers alike. "There was a time," Arabinda reflects, "when if you asked for a book on quantum mechanics or Socrates, the bookseller would know exactly what to give you. Today, that knowledge is scarce. And when

knowledge fades, a bookshop cannot truly survive." Despite everything, Arabinda remains confident that Dasgupta & Co. will endure. The bookstore has weathered world wars, the Partition, the Communist Struggle, and numerous other challenges. Today, as the managing director, he sits in a quiet corner of the store, greeting a steady stream of loyal buyers, curious tourists, media personnel, and old friends. While overseeing the sourcing and sale of books, he also devotes time to mentoring the next generation of Dasguptas, teaching them the art and craft of being a true bookseller. College Street, too, has stood the test of time, its charm unchanged by the passing decades. The rows of book-laden stalls, the vendors shouting for the best deal, the students lost in conversation at the Coffee House — everything continues to breathe life into this historic street. Rickshaws weave through the hustle, while the tram wheels turn with rhythmic precision. Amidst the lively chaos, hundreds of dreamers and doers gather, each one determined to carve out a successful future. But despite this vibrancy, a lingering fear weighs on Arabinda's mind. "I worry not that books won't sell," he says, "but that what people seek will change — shifting from Franz Kafka to quick-fix novels, from great academic literature to question banks that promise easy grades."

New Mother Station in Hafeezpet to easily availability of CNG

Hyderabad: Bhagyanagar Gas Limited (BGL) has opened its second Mother Station at Hafeezpet on Thursday making CNG more easily available in Hyderabad.

The new facility was inaugurated by CMD of GAIL Sandeep Kumar Gupta and BGL Chairman Amit Garg. The new station will make it more convenient for vehicle owners to fill up without long waits or supply shortages.

Hitherto, the offline CNG outlets in the city depended on gas transported from

Shamirpet, but with the new station at Hafeezpet, CNG will be available closer to city, cutting transport time and ensuring steady supply.

The Hafeezpet station has a compression capacity of 50,000 kg/day. This would ensure no dry out at any of the CNG Stations in the Hyderabad city, a company press release said on Thursday. GAIL CGM Dev Kanth Sinha, HPCL CGM Benny C Thomas, BGL MD Ram Mohan Rao Karnati, and BGL Director Commercial Y. Danuta graced the occasion.

“Nobody can occupy the dreams of a people,” says Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi

The situation in Gaza, where 62-year-old Rashid Masharawi was born and raised in the Shati refugee camp, has spurred the filmmaker to produce *From Ground Zero*, an anthology of 22 short films that capture the plight of Palestinians under siege for over a year now. *From Ground Zero* was screened this month at the 12th Ajyal Film Festival in Doha and at the Cairo International Film Festival, where Masharawi's latest directorial, *Passing Dreams*, was the opening night title. The film is covering a lot of ground the world over. However, last month's Dharamshala International Film Festival, dedicated to independent cinema, was denied "official permission" to screen the anthology. Earlier this year, the 77th Cannes Film Festival shunned the film because the organisers wanted to keep politics out of the official selection. In protest, Masharawi held a screening outside the festival venue and attended the event sporting a necktie made of the Palestinian keffiyeh.

Speaking on the sidelines of Ajyal, where *From Ground Zero* was part of a special exhibit, Masharawi asks: "Why was it cancelled [at Dharamshala]? Did they watch it or only saw its title before deciding that the film wasn't fit for screening?" He quips: "Gandhiism is over but we still have it, not in India but elsewhere in the world (referring to the resistance and resilience of Palestinians fighting never-ending occupation)." Immediately after a wave of Israeli attacks on Gaza began in October last year, Masharawi, who lives between Ramallah and Paris, set up a fund to help filmmakers from the region tell their stories. "It was easy for me to convince the young filmmakers to show the world what they are going through. For them, however, it wasn't easy to follow my ideas," he says, adding, "People want to save their lives. They want food and electricity as they move from one place to another as refugees inside Gaza." Making cinema, Masharawi admits, wasn't top priority for these young Gazans. But stories, he asserts, cannot wait. They have to be told.

Voices amid the rubble *From Ground Zero* records the personal experiences of the filmmakers. It embraces various forms — fiction, documentary, cinematic experiments, animation, video art and even a story told with marionettes. "Every idea was welcome," says Masharawi. "Our resources were seriously limited. We had to make do with what we had and innovate." The subjects that the anthology film deals with reflect the diversity of the directors. Among them are painters, theatre professionals, writers and filmmakers. "The selection was focused more on the stories than on the personnel," Masharawi continues. "I insisted that we should tell untold stories in an artistic way." Nothing represents the spirit of Palestine more than *Awakening*, a film that artist Mahdi Karirah contributed to.

It emerged from rubble, literally. Karirah's home was bombed. All his marionettes, tools and colours were destroyed. He picked up things from the garbage, created marionettes and made the film. "This is resistance," says Masharawi. "Nobody can occupy these people. They are fighting for their lives. They have a life. They are life." Not everybody who wanted to be a part of the project made the cut. "Many aspirants were

not selected. Some who could not complete their film," Masharawi recalls. "People sometimes want to complain and spark angry political debates. For sure, all this is in *From Ground Zero* but we are not saying anything directly. When you see the film, you will say that it is about genocide. I do not have to say it. I do not want to use the methods of television news. I would rather employ purely cinematic means to make my point." That is precisely what the seasoned director has done in his latest, *Passing Dreams*, a simple, gentle and non-confrontational 'Palestinian road movie' about a 12-year-old boy in the Qalandia refugee camp in East Jerusalem who sets out to search for his missing pigeon. "The boy goes to Bethlehem and Jerusalem before he ends up in Haifa [where the original owner of the pigeon lives]," says Masharawi. "The film is not about the pigeon. It is about the region. It is about the beauty of Palestine's landscape, about its problems, about its history and about the primacy of hope." *Passing Dreams*, Masharawi reveals, was filmed on real locations before October 7 last year — in a refugee camp, in Bethlehem, in the old city of Jerusalem near the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The film was in post production even as Gaza was battered and the producer-director soon got busy with



From Ground Zero. Masharawi, who has been making films for 40 years and is a role model to an entire generation of Palestinian directors, swears by cinema as a tool of record and resistance. "Cinema is essential when you want to talk about history and memory," he says. "The stories we tell enable us to assert our identity and defend our

culture. Nobody can occupy the dreams and imagination of a people." His career is a testament to freedom, defiance and assertion. "I never take permission to film," he says. "Seeking permission would be tantamount to legitimising the occupation. It is my country. I shoot when and where I want. I know that the authorities can create problems, but this, no matter what, is my land."

All you need to know about preventive genomics

Did you know that in India, every four minutes, a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer? In fact, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in the country. While the exact cause of the disease remains unknown, several risk factors can increase the likelihood of developing it. In approximately 10 per cent of cases, normal breast cells may become cancerous due to abnormal genes inherited from one's parents. An important aspect of breast cancer prevention and recovery is early detection. The online session 'Decoding Breast Cancer Risk with Lord's Mark', presented by Lord's Mark Microbiotech Pvt Ltd in association with Hindustan Times, focused on raising awareness about breast cancer. It explored how preventive genomics can empower women with valuable insights into their genetic risk factors for the disease. Identifying the risk early

Traditional breast cancer screening methods, such as self-examination or examination by a gynaecologist or even a mammogram, often detect the disease at later stages. This could limit treatment options and impact survival rates because the cancer is detected after it reaches the tissue level. "When the disease has spread in the tissues, there is no option but to go for aggressive treatment, like a mastectomy followed by chemotherapy or radiotherapy. This is not only a financial burden but also an emotional burden on the female. The prognosis, or the survival rate in case of breast cancer, is still 50 per cent in the country because there are chances that the cancer would have metastasised into other organs," said Subodh Gupta, Chief Executive Officer, Lord's Mark Microbiotech Pvt Ltd. The role of genetics With the help of tools such as the polygenic risk score, women can take con-

trol of their health, identifying risks early and implementing strategies to reduce them before they develop into something more serious. Towards this, preventive genomics is reshaping breast cancer awareness and enabling a shift from reactive treatments to proactive treatment. "With preventive genomics, we can identify the risk of breast cancer at a very early stage.

If a female is identified with a high risk of breast cancer, they can go for very aggressive early interventions so that the survival rate goes up. If at all it has to happen, then the chances of metastasis and other complications are reduced to a great extent. Preventive genomics helps to identify the risk factors at a much earlier stage," Gupta further said. Knowing the risk early does not guarantee the prevention of cancer. After a preventive genomic test, if a female is identified as high risk for breast cancer, there is still an 80 per cent chance that she will develop breast cancer at some point of time in life.

However, awareness of this high-risk status allows patients to act proactively, starting aggressive investigations without waiting for physical symptoms to appear. This approach explains why several prominent public figures have opted for preventive mastectomies to reduce the likelihood of cancer developing and spreading later in life.

What is your polygenic risk score?

Although breast cancer is more prevalent in women over the age of 50, it is possible to assess your risk as early as 20 to 25 years of age through a polygenic risk evaluation. This simple, saliva-based test extracts and analyses DNA to determine an individual's genetic predisposition to breast cancer. "The polygenic risk score essentially



tracks any changes in the sequence of nucleotides, which our DNA is made of. There are more than 11 genes that are linked to the issue of breast cancer. A polygenic risk score is a total of all these SNP variations. In a healthy female, single nucleotides are arranged in a particular fashion, and in the females who are prone to have breast cancer, this particular sequence would have changed, which leads to a higher risk of breast cancer. The total of all these changes leads to a polygenic risk score," he said.

Taking charge of the polygenic risk score is high, the chances of the female developing breast cancer at some point in their lifetime are also high. After the knowledge that the risk is high, females can make changes to their lifestyle or even go for interventions such as a preventive mastectomy. What happens if you go for the test and come out as high-risk in the report? "Our intention is not to create anxiety.

We have a team of trained, board-certified genetic counsellors who walk the patient through their genetic profiling report. If at all a patient is identified as high risk for a certain kind of a condition or a disease, our genetic counsellors also help them understand why it is high risk for them, what lifestyle changes they should bring about to delay the disease, and what are the other investigative tests which they should go for.

What is India's dilemma over fighter jets? | Explained

The story so far: The two foremost Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) of Russia and the U.S., the SU-57 and F-35, got a lot of attention at Aero India, which was held from February 10-14 in Bengaluru, with the former undoubtedly being the showstopper with its manoeuvres. Just as that wound up, U.S. President Donald Trump, addressing a press meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said the U.S. is also paving the way to "ultimately" provide India with F-35 stealth fighters.

What's the F-35?

The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is a single seat, single-engine strike fighter jet with three variants, F-35A, which has a conventional take-off and landing for the Air Force, F-35B short take-off/vertical landing for the Marine Corps and an F-35C aircraft carrier variant for the Navy and the Marine Corps. In addition to the U.S., the programme has seven international partners, and 10 foreign military sales customers, and the jets are expected to be in service well into the 2080s. As of January 30, 2025, 1,110 F-35s were delivered, according to the lead contractor Lockheed Martin, with 20 participants in the programme. Noting that it wasn't a firm offer yet and what Mr. Trump meant was that they will look at a roadmap for making the F-35 available, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said recently that India "will look at that offer once it becomes a firm offer." Pointing out that there is a protocol to be followed, he said that first requirements have to be raised by the services, and only then are options on offer studied. "Creating an option of this type is important for us and we will certainly look at it with an open mind," he said.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), which is mandated by the U.S. Congress to review the programme, said in a May 2024 report that the Department of Defence estimates that these development efforts — as well as the costs to maintain and operate the 2,470 planned aircraft through 2088 — will exceed \$2 trillion. Based on various estimates, the F-35 costs upwards of \$100 million per aircraft with armaments and associated costs. India has never operated a U.S. fighter, and an advanced fighter like the F-35 will need new facilities for training and maintenance.

What is the status of the Russian fighter jet?

It is pertinent to note that in 2010, India and Russia signed a preliminary design agreement to jointly produce the FGFA, now the SU-57, for use by both countries after which each had invested \$295 million for preliminary design which was completed in 2013. But protracted negotiations followed over the high cost and limited technology transfer. One of the limiting factors was that it was a single seater and the creation of a twin-seat variant, the IAF's preference, would mean a steep rise in costs. India eventually pulled out of the FGFA project and decided to go with its indigenous FGFA, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

What is the IAF's squadron strength?

The IAF has a sanctioned strength of 42.5 fighter squadrons, but, is languishing today at 31 squadrons with a significant proportion of ageing platforms. "Somewhere In-

dia got left behind and is stuck in the middle. There is a big gap and major countries have moved forward," noted a senior official. China, Russia and the U.S. have already fielded fifth generation fighter jets, with China recently stealing a march over everyone else as it flew two advanced fifth generation fighters, dubbed by some as a sixth-generation jet, in addition to the two jets already developed and inducted. Reports suggest that Pakistan is looking to acquire 40 J-35 fifth generation jets from China. In December, the government constituted a high-level committee led by the Defence Secretary to chalk out a roadmap for the IAF and address operational gaps. The report which was scheduled to be submitted by end-January, is still in the works, officials confirmed.

What is in the pipeline?

India has an ambitious plan to acquire over 500 fighter jets, a bulk of them variants of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) and the AMCA, that is at least a decade away from induction. There has been a delay in the deliveries of 83 LCA-Mk1A already contracted, with 97 more to be ordered. The delay in deliveries has been partly due to engine delays from General Electric (GE), and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has now assured that 12 jets will be delivered to the IAF this year; the order for 83 jets will be completed in three-and-a-half years. Officials said that the more capable LCA-Mk2 is expected to make first flight in early 2026. The AMCA prototype is expected to roll out by end-2026 or early-2027, certified by 2032 and ready for induction by 2034. In addition, there is the proposal for 114 Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) to be imported and licence-manufactured locally but has seen no progress for many years, with the Request For Information (RFI) issued in April 2019. However, given the gap in numbers, the MRFA as envisaged may now be too expensive and too late to address the crisis. Last October, IAF chief Air Chief Marshal A. P. Singh said the MRFA was "needed as on yesterday." While several experts and observers pitched for two F-35 squadrons as a stopgap, given the complex process and timelines, it would be a decade before the jets arrive. The 36 Rafale deal contracted at \$7.87 billion from France in 2016 is a case in point. In addition, India had paid over \$1 billion in one-time research and development costs for India-specific enhancements on the Rafales. Speeding up the domestic programmes is of critical importance as any new addition to the IAF's already diverse fleet will create a maintenance nightmare and also take away focus and resources from indigenous efforts.

When did diversification begin?

Russian military hardware has constituted a bulk of the Indian military inventory, including the IAF, for decades and diversification began in the early 2000s. However, diversification shouldn't mean moving from one dependency to another. As per the current plan, by early 2040, the IAF will have 220 LCA-Mk1 variants, at least 120 LCA-Mk2s and the initial batch of AMCAs, all powered by the GE F-404 and F-414 jet engines, a significant proportion of the fighter fleet. The licence manufacture of the F-414 engine or



the new 110KN engine, likely to be co-developed and co-produced with France for the AMCA-Mk2, will mean that India would be dependent on others for the most critical systems.

The Indian aero engine space for both fixed wing and helicopters will be powered by the U.S. and France for the rest of the

century, as French co-developed engines power India's indigenous helicopters. So adding new fighters, that too of the highest technological threshold of the U.S., would surely come with a lot of riders, some intrusive and some that could stymie operational flexibility and impact plans on indigenous manufacturing.

What is it like to pursue an MBA while working full-time?

Pursuing an MBA is often seen as a full-time commitment; a step into a world of case studies, group projects, and networking events. However, a 2023 Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) report shows that nearly 60% of MBA students globally are working professionals, balancing their careers alongside academic pursuits; a test of resilience, time management, and the ability to integrate theory and practice in real time. As someone navigating this dual role, I have come to see the hidden curriculum of working while studying as an invaluable, albeit challenging, component of my education. One of the greatest benefits of working while studying is that the theory you learn in class can be applied immediately. Ideas such as data-driven decision-making, stakeholder analysis, and strategic communication aren't mere academic constructs. They are devices I employ in my daily job. For example, by learning about predictive analytics, I am now able to predict media trends and customise campaigns accordingly. Additionally, participating in thoughtfully curated volunteering events bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, offering invaluable personal experiences that no classroom environment can replicate. Next comes balancing work, study, and your personal life. Deadlines may collide when an urgent campaign overlaps with an important assignment. It can be an overwhelming mental juggling act. Still, these moments provide invaluable lessons in prioritising and managing ideals. I have had to learn to manage time to take care of work, studies, family and self-care. Traditional MBA programmes allow for cohort networking but, for working professionals, they offer the opportunity to build networks within their indus-

tries. At work, I meet an array of professionals, from media executives to corporate leaders. The dual exposure enhances my perspective on industry dynamics and gives a competitive advantage in the market. Flexible MBA programmes with weekend or online lectures appreciate the strength of pairing professional experience with academic knowledge. Institutions are recognising this demand and tweaking their offerings with more courses tailored for working professionals, asynchronous learning modules, virtual networking events, dedicated mentorship programmes and so on. Studying and working is not merely a means of survival; it's about harnessing a two-fold role for faster career development. What I learnt from my MBA has had a direct influence on how I view PR strategy, while the demands of managing both have forced me to develop my leadership and organisational skills. Therefore, this becomes a unique selling point, as more rank adaptability and resilience as top priorities in a prospective worker. However, the sacrifices one makes to work and study can be part of the hidden curriculum. Personal time tends to go by the wayside, and the pressure can feel non-stop. But the rewards outweigh the challenges. Skills like adaptability, practical knowledge, and connections are some of the intangibles that traditional students are not likely to have the benefit of refining or acquiring. Pursuing an MBA while working full-time is a marathon, not a sprint. It's not just about getting a degree; it's about finding to balance and learning a lesson from every challenge. I have learnt to understand that the real MBA — one that readies you for real life — typically starts past midnight and really takes off in those quiet moments of introspection, study, and grit.

Converting court case backlogs into treasure troves

Every Chief Justice of India coming into office has the spectre of the legal system's backlog haunting him or her, as does every senior and concerned member of the higher judiciary. It is an ever present phenomenon — currently, the Supreme Court of India has 82,000 cases, the High Courts over 62 lakh, and the lower courts close to five crore. Nearly 50 lakh cases have been pending for more than 10 years.

It is an adversarial system. It is not that our judges are not hard working or efficient; the great majority of them are. But we are a country with a vast population that is used to thinking that the court will resolve disputes with whoever it may be — neighbour, shareholder, supplier, government, et al. We have one of the lowest judge to population ratios — 21 judges for every million citizens. And we rely on the adversarial system which means that virtually every case sees multiple interim applications during its passage, and plural appeals after the first passage is crossed. We also have shortages of infrastructure and capacity, in terms of brick and mortar, and finance and human resources. Just keeping the judiciary going on functional mode is a Herculean task — so daunting by itself that reform and restructure, while certainly the subject of well meaning and some well-thought-out initiatives, rarely gain the prominence and push to make for system game-changing.

Data governance is one field where sensible classification will avoid repetitive engagement and make for quicker disposal. Appointing retired judges to serve in ad hoc capacity does help to ameliorate the situation to a limited extent. Wider perspective solutions would require a focus on large swathes of litigation, for example, landlord tenant disputes and cheque bouncing cases, to see whether tweaking the law can make it less than advantageous to have the matter taken to court. Compensatory or even punitive costs are commonly used abroad to deter frivolous or unnecessary litigation. We use them rarely since we prize access to justice and want to avoid roadblocks. The elephant in the room is of course the government. Being a player in nearly half the disputes coming to court, reform will be stunted unless it learns to litigate less and becomes more amenable to settlement options. There is hope on this latter score, but for now, we move to another possibility for reform. This is the gigantic backlog, the enormous waiting room, with its cavernous vaults and storage shelves and racks bursting with the claims for redress and justice of millions of citizens and causes. Long stay here is by itself denial of justice. Sometimes when the case is dusted for delivery to the judge's table, the cause is forgotten or less crucial, or the original proponents are in another world, hopefully a litigation free one. But it is this spectre of unfinished business, a too obvious sign of failure of delivery, that haunts judges. There is nothing good about the backlog.

But there may be. Unlikely as this may sound at first, this may be yet another instance of a problem masking a solution. Let us consider the process of mediation. Nascent and fledgling in the 1990s, mediation

started to make its mark in 2005 in India, primarily as an adjunct of the court sector. Lawyer led and judge guided, it provided the opportunity for disputants to sit with a trained neutral, in an atmosphere of confidentiality, with no one imposing a result; just a bit of guidance and nudging to make the parties come up with options for a practical, fair and mutually acceptable solution. A focus on long-term interests, some legal realism and a dose of the rather grim alternatives to settlement propel the shift from attacking the other to jointly attacking the problem. The cases come from a swathe of civil and commercial, personal and property, and matrimonial and mercantile disputes. The results are encouraging. So too is the ready adoption by the Bar of this alternative (now christened as appropriate) method of dispute resolution, as witnessed by the thousands of willing mediators. It has now to move to full-fledged professional avenues, drawing in better usage from business, government and other disputants, and in the process, providing gainful remuneration to practitioners of this new vocation. But certainly, mediation has caught on in the judicial system, and there is hardly any judge who does not speak of its merits and how it is the way of the future. So, to get to the point, finally. For the judge the backlog is a burden. For the mediator, it is a treasure trove. In front of us, or rather hidden in courtly dungeons, are the hundreds of cases which just have to be assigned to mediators to handle. And the mediators are there in sufficient numbers and backed by years of experience. All it needs is a simple system of primary identification of these cases, asking parties to choose their mediator or assigning them a trained and experienced one, and ensuring that a reasonable fee is paid for the service. When you com-



pare the cost of mediating a case, for the system and for the parties, it is a fraction of litigating that case. You do not need vast logistical and administrative infrastructure, and you are saved multiple hearings spread over indeterminable time spans. Most cases in mediation take just a handful of sessions; complex ones take more but this is nothing when compared to the boxes of litigative papers to deal with and the swallowing up of

calendars. And when it works, the results achieved in mediation outweigh by far anything you can get in litigation — not just a practical solution which both parties accept, but often a restoration of relationships. So, perhaps it is time we take the keys, rechristen our chamber of horrors as the birthing place for mediations, and apply the principle by which mediators live and work — turning the problem into the opportunity for solution.

How Infosys' freshers layoff sparks debate on India's programming education crisis

The recent news about Infosys laying off freshers caused outrage in higher education circles. The justification of the company was that these graduates were trained and given three attempts to clear the evaluation and, in spite of all that, they failed; and hence they were fired. Reports often say only a small fraction of Indian computer engineers have basic programming skills. This makes us ponder upon this question - are Indian graduates incompetent at programming? Like Mathematics, programming excellence comes with practice. Unfortunately, not only are the engineering institutions' syllabi outdated, they don't have a culture of coding practice. Most engineering institutions offer less than 20 programming exercises per lab, and the same exercises come in the final lab exams as well. Students memorise them, instead of understanding.

Some private universities have invested in cloud-based coding practice platforms for running their lab courses. However, using such software alone wouldn't guarantee the intended outcomes. With GenAI tools

readily available, students find creative ways to bypass learning, easily escaping detection in traditional assessments. Beyond automation

While machines handle repetitive tasks, humans pursue intellectual work. Today's tech industry thrives on this human-machine synergy. Programming education must reflect this reality. Higher Education Institutions must adopt a hybrid approach. While coding platforms provide the foundation, significant weightage must be given to viva-voce and one-on-one sessions. These evaluations should go beyond simple conceptual questions. Instead, students must explain their code flow and implementation choices. When students explain their own code, the questions naturally flow from their implementation choices. Why did they use a particular loop structure? How did they handle edge cases? What made them choose specific variable names? A student who truly wrote and understood the code can easily explain these decisions. However, those who used AI tools or copied code typically struggle to

justify their choices or explain the underlying logic. Unlike traditional viva-voce with standard questions, a code walkthrough creates a unique evaluation for each student based on their own work. This makes it an effective tool to verify authentic learning and programming competence. Code explanation is also a hiring technique used by many IT companies during their interviews. A robust assessment framework requires both automated and human evaluation components. Higher Education Institutions should implement a 70-30 split between these components. Automated assessment through cloud-based coding platforms should focus on timed programming tests with multiple test cases. The human evaluation should comprise rolling viva-voce sessions where students do a code walkthrough from the automated tests. For effective implementation, institutions must maintain an optimal student-faculty ratio of 60:1 or lesser. Faculty members should ideally conduct 15-minute viva-voce sessions spread across the semester, ensuring thorough evaluation of each student.

The long and winding road of India-China relations

India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri was in China in January 2025, during which India and China made several announcements on the future of their bilateral relations. He met Wang Yi, who is China's Foreign Minister, the Director of the Office of Central Commission of Foreign Affairs and also a politburo member of the party, and also Liu Jianchao, Minister of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party. The Indian statement after this meeting indicated that the process of restoration of several aspects of bilateral relations including media and think tank exchanges, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, and bilateral flights is on the cards for the summer of 2025. Possible reasons

India and China have attempted to move forward after more than four years of tense and stalemate-based relations since the clashes in Galwan in June 2020. Stalemates cannot be permanent. Both sides have made their points and moved to the détente. One can argue that there are several reasons for the timing of this bilateral agreement, the main being the election of Donald Trump, who is a known disruptor and unpredictable in his ways of doing business. The other is about economic concerns in China and in India in recent times. India and China have been bracing for the Trump impact especially when by the middle of October last year his election was already beginning to look more likely to happen. This possibility may have pushed the October 2024 de-escalation agreement between India and China, and Mr. Trump's gigantic electoral victory in November 2024 may have pushed the January 2025 agreement between India and China. There is a historic logic to this as well. China agreed to normalising relations with India, after the 1962 war, only in the backdrop of the backlash in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Again, China may have agreed to normalise its relations with India given that it had to brace for the Trump impact. Thus, there is both internal and external logic around the restoration of normalcy. However, since we do not know whether patrolling rights have been/are fully restored or whether demobilisation is in its advanced stages, such an absence of communication on the part of the government raises doubts and questions needlessly.

The Government of India has maintained absolute silence on the status of de-escalation, demilitarisation and demobilisation of the fairly large number of troops. Troops were mobilised and deployed on the border, first during the tensions of May-June 2020, and then in even larger numbers in the aftermath of the June 15, 2020 clashes. These troops were on active duty or in newly created barracks close to the six points of tension along the border including in Galwan, Depsang Bulge, Charding Nala, Gogra Post and Hot Springs and on the north bank of the Pangong lake. There is also no clarity whether the large number of People's Liberation Army troops on the Chinese side, before and after the clashes, have retreated to their bases. Confirmation of this would mean that the actual restoration of normalcy on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been achieved. India has also made it clear in the aftermath of 2020 that it was China that had



violated the several agreements and protocols the two sides had signed. One is not sure about whether these have been rectified in a verifiable way. This in turn can only be established when patrolling rights have not only been agreed to but also exercised. The briefing in October 2024, by the Foreign Secretary, prior to the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan in this respect, was already guarded. It only alluded to an agreement that would lead to the "process of disengagement and resolution of issues that emerged in 2020". A follow-up briefing on this issue would have been useful and necessary to make it clear that India had not given

up on its position on the bilateral relations. India's principled stand in dealing with China in the aftermath of the 2020 crisis has been that the stability on the border and the restoration of the status quo ante are the preconditions to progress in other aspects of bilateral relations. However, it was China that reiterated that India should move on from the clashes and not let the border standoff be a hindrance to the development of overall bilateral relations in the economic, political and social sectors. India's silence on the progress on the status of restoration of status quo ante makes it appear as though the Chinese position of "moving on" is succeed-

ing and that India is abandoning its position of stability and restoration before there is progress on other aspects. It was always known that the process of restoring normalcy would be long drawn and fraught with challenges.

In addition, the worldviews of India and China will remain divergent as their ideas about the world order are not going to converge anytime soon. India-China relations have seen several cyclical ups and downs in the Xi Jinping era. Therefore, abundant caution would be the best way forward. The Indian government's lack of clarity does not boost one's confidence.

Nepal PM Oli hoping for invitation to visit India in first half of 2025: FM Arzu Rana

Nepal awaits an invitation for its Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to visit India, Nepali Foreign Minister Arzu Deuba Rana said on Saturday, February 22, 2025. Speaking to The Hindu, she expressed her hope that Mr. Oli and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet on the sidelines of the upcoming BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok in April and that Mr. Oli would be invited to New Delhi in the "first half" of 2025. The comments by Ms. Rana, who has visited Delhi twice since the Oli Government took charge in July 2024, indicate a strain in ties between Delhi and Kathmandu over the Modi Government's unusual delay in hosting the Nepali PM. After sensing a delay from India, Mr. Oli travelled to Beijing in November 2024, which is believed to have further broadened the divide. Ms. Rana, however, said she had held cordial talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Conference in Muscat last week, where they discussed a number of other issues, including on quality control clearances

for Nepali goods, progress on hydropower projects, and a long-pending resolution on overflight rights for Nepali airports at Pokhara and Bhairahawa. When asked about whether the two Foreign Ministers had agreed on a specific date for Mr. Oli to travel to India, Ms. Rana said that he would visit "whenever he is invited", indicating that no invitation has been proffered so far. "That's the only answer I can give, and I hope it's going to be in the near future," Ms. Rana told The Hindu in an interview in Muscat. When asked why there had been such a delay in the traditional invitation, although Mr. Modi and Mr. Oli had met in person in New York in September 2024, Ms. Rana cited State Assembly elections in India. "I think primarily what I heard was because the Indian Prime Minister was busy with all the elections, and hopefully, by the first half of this year, Prime Minister Oli will have a visit," she added. The two leaders will both attend the next BIMSTEC summit between April 2 and April 4 in Thailand, and are expected to meet there as well. "Still

non-aligned despite BRI'Ms. Rana dismissed suggestions that India's reticence stemmed from Mr. Oli's visit to China and the announcement of a Framework Agreement for Belt and Road Initiative Cooperation there, saying that India had not objected formally to any of China's BRI projects for infrastructure, including ports, roads, railways, power grids, and telecommunication thus far. India opposes the BRI, although many South Asian neighbours including Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Pakistan are part of the BRI network. "We have not signed anything that says Nepal has strategically now moved away from its non-aligned status and moved towards any country. And Nepal can never afford to do that," Ms. Rana said, defending the Nepali government's decision to join the BRI in 2017. When asked if the BRI agreements would involve more indebtedness to China, she said that this is a "non-relevant" issue, as the Nepali government would only enter into sovereign projects on an aid.