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## Life convict hurls slipper at judge in Hyderabad's Ranga Reddy court

Hyderabad: A life convict hurled a slipper at the ninth Additional District Judge in the Ranga Reddy court complex at LB Nagar on Thursday.

The man was three days ago convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in an attempt to murder case registered at Jagathgiri police station. He was later sent to Central Prison Cherlapally. On Thursday, the man was again brought to the LB Nagar court and was to be produced before the same judge in connection with a murder case registered at Narsingi police station.

## PM Modi likely to meet Elon Musk, Starlink's entry in India to be discussed



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet Elon Musk during his visit to the United States and Starlink's entry in the South Asian Market could be discussed during the meeting, Reuters reported, citing two people familiar with the plans. Mr. Musk is likely to hold a meeting with PM Modi and the Indian government expects these could include Starlink's plans to start satellite broadband services in India,

according to the report citing two sources, who did not want to be named as the plans are private. Starlink wants to start operations in India. The Indian government has backed Mr. Musk's idea that spectrum should be assigned rather than auctioned. However, Starlink's licence application is still being reviewed. "Musk is agreeable to give assurances on India security concerns, which includes storing data locally," one of the sources told Reuters. Earlier in December, Mr. Musk announced Starlink satellite internet was inactive in India after authorities seized two of the company's devices, one in an armed conflict zone and another in a drug smuggling bust, according to Reuters report. It was not clear whether Tesla's entry into India would come up for discussion between PM Modi and Musk, Reuters reported, citing sources. However, increased sourcing of electric vehicle components from India is likely to be discussed during the meeting. PM Modi is set to meet U.S. President Donald Trump during his two-day visit to the US. PM Modi is travelling to the US after concluding his three-day visit to France. This will be the first visit of Prime Minister Modi to the United States since the inauguration of the second presidential term of President Donald Trump.

## Kavitha demands separate Bills for BC reservations, accuses Congress of deception

EMS News Agency, Feb 13

Jangaon: BRS MLC and Telangana Jagruti founder K Kavitha has demanded that the Congress government introduce three separate Bills in the Legislative Assembly to ensure BC reservations in education, employment, and political representation. She warned that bundling all BC-related issues into a single Bill and merely forwarding it to the Centre would be a betrayal of the backward classes.

Speaking to mediapersons at Pembarthi in Jangaon district on Thursday, Kavitha pointed out discrepancies in BC population estimates, stating that the K Chandrashekhar Rao government's survey pegged BCs at 51 per cent, whereas the Congress government's figures have reduced it to 46 per cent. Based on this, she demanded 46 per cent reservations for BCs in education and jobs through two separate Bills, and a separate Bill for 42 per cent reservations in local bodies, as promised in the Kamareddy Declaration by the Congress.

She also feared that the Congress government is deliberately delaying local body elections by announcing plans to introduce the BC reservation Bill, expecting it to be entangled in legal disputes. "The State government cannot dust off its hands by introducing the Bill in the Assembly and forwarding it to the Centre. It must take measures to conduct the local body polls, immediately, to prevent any court cases," she said. Meanwhile, the BRS MLC stated that Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka announced



another round of caste census, and wanted the State government to give wide publicity to ensure that all those who missed out the survey, register themselves. She said the announcement of the BC reservation Bill is a first victory, urging BC leaders and intellectuals to continue the fight until comprehensive implementation. Kavitha recalled Telangana Jagruti's past struggles, including the installation of the Ambedkar statue in the Assembly 13 years ago and its fight for BC reservations. She charged the Congress with making false promises and insisted that the struggle for the BC reservations Bill must continue. She also demanded the development of Pembarthi as a tourist hub and a handicrafts centre.

## President's rule imposed in Manipur

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The Centre on Thursday (February 13, 2025) announced that President's rule has been implemented in Manipur, four days after CM N. Biren Singh's resignation on Sunday (February 9, 2025). A Union Home Ministry notification said that the Manipur Assembly has been put under suspended animation. Announcing the proclamation of the central rule, a notification issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs said President Droupadi Murmu is of the opinion that "a situation has arisen in which the government of that state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution".

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 356 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling me in that behalf, I hereby proclaim that I - assume to myself as President of India all functions of the Government of the State of Manipur and all powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor of that State," the notification said. The announcement comes amid the BJP in Manipur continued to struggle to find a successor to Mr. Singh. Sambit Patra, the BJP's in-charge of Manipur, had met Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla for the third time in as many days. However, there was no information from the Governor's office or the BJP on what transpired during their meeting for more than an hour. However, BJP legislator Karam Shyam had dismissed speculations about the imposition of the President's Rule. "Contrary to the hypotheses, there will be no constitutional crisis. We have reasons to believe our central leaders will resolve the matter in consultation with the party's State unit," the MLA representing the Langthabal constituency said.

Meanwhile, the Congress on Thursday (February 13, 2025) said Article 174 of the Constitution, which stipulates that there cannot be more than a six month gap between two Assembly sessions, has been "violated" in Manipur and alleged that this is a "deliberate contempt of the Constitution." Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the breakdown of constitutional machinery in Manipur and the agony of the people of the State continues as they still await a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi "who goes everywhere but Manipur." "Article 174 of the Constitution of India states: 'The Governor shall from time to time summon the House or each House of the Legislature of the State to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session,'" Mr. Ramesh said on X. "The Governor of Manipur had convened the Assembly session to begin on February 10, 2025 and a no-confidence motion submitted by the Congress was to be taken up," he pointed out. "The CM resigned the previ-



ous night and the session was later declared "null and void", Mr. Ramesh noted. Earlier in the day, Mr. Bhalla was briefed on the deployment and operational activities of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) during a meeting with officials of the paramilitary force at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal. The outgoing Inspector General of the Manipur and Nagaland Sector, CRPF, Dr. Vipul Kumar, and the newly designated IG, Rajendra Narayan Dash, held a meeting with Mr. Bhalla, a statement said.

## FM Sitharaman introduces new Income Tax Bill in Lok Sabha

GNS News Agency, Feb

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the new Income Tax Bill, 2025, in the Lok Sabha on Thursday as part of the tax reforms to streamline and simplify the provisions so that they are easier to understand and reduce the scope for legal disputes. The legislation will replace the Income Tax Act, 1961, which has grown extensively due to numerous modifications carried out over six decades.

The Bill will be sent to the Select Committee of Parliament before it comes up for final approval in Parliament. The new law is expected to take effect on April 1, 2026. The first part of the Budget Session of Parliament also came to an end on Thursday and the second part of the session will resume on March 10. The Budget Session is being held in two parts - from January 31 to February 13 and between March 10 and April 4. The primary objective of the new Income Tax Bill is to simplify the tax laws, ensuring that they are more transparent, easier to interpret, and taxpayer-friendly.

## Mounting debt drives tribal farmer to suicide in Telangana's Nalgonda

Nalgonda: In yet another instance of a farmer ending his life due to mounting debts in Telangana, a tribal farmer hanged himself to death in Nalgonda district on Thursday. According to information available, Nannavath Harya, who belonged to Errakalva thanda under Kothapet gram panchayat in Miryalguda mandal, ended his life by hanging himself from a tree near his paddy fields. Harya, who was struggling with mounting debts, took the extreme step out of sheer desperation. More details are awaited. Earlier in the day, a young farmer had attempted suicide as his crops were left dried up due to a severe water crisis in Kudakuda village of Suryapet district.

## CM Revanth Reddy Inaugurates Microsoft's New Campus in Hyderabad; Major AI Investment Announced



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy inaugurated Microsoft's newly constructed, state-of-the-art campus in Gachibowli. Spread across 1.1 million square feet, the advanced facility can accommodate up to 2,500 employees, further strengthening Hyderabad's position as a global technology hub. The inauguration was attended by IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu and senior Microsoft executives. As part of the event, the Telangana government and Microsoft signed a landmark agreement to set up a cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence (AI) Center at Hyderabad's AI City. The company also announced a massive investment of ₹15,000 crore in the AI sector within the state. As part of its collaboration with the state, Microsoft unveiled three

major AI training programs aimed at upskilling over 1.2 lakh individuals in Telangana. Additionally, Microsoft has committed to expanding its investment in hyper-scale AI data centers within the state. The company plans to invest an additional ₹15,000 crore in the coming years to support AI infrastructure development. Speaking at the event, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy emphasized the significance of Microsoft's expansion in Hyderabad. As the world moves toward Artificial Intelligence-driven advancements, Microsoft's new facility in Hyderabad is a matter of pride. This expansion will not only create more jobs for our youth but also empower them with cutting-edge skills," he said. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella's visit to Hyderabad in January played a key role in finalizing this agreement. Under the MoU, Microsoft will assist the Telangana government in modernizing IT infrastructure and expanding cloud-based services powered by AI. "Hyderabad and Microsoft share a long-standing relationship. The launch of this new facility marks another milestone in our journey together. Hyderabad has emerged as a global technology powerhouse, attracting top talent and fostering innovation. We look forward to a stronger future with Microsoft," CM Revanth Reddy added. The event was attended by Minister Sridhar Babu, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Chairman Arekapudi Gandhi, Industries Department Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, and Microsoft India Development Center Managing Director Rajiv Kumar, among other dignitaries. With this new partnership, Hyderabad is set to strengthen its position as a leading AI and technology hub, paving the way for further innovation and job creation in the sector.

## Congress MP Mallu Ravi, MLA Narayan Reddy face people's ire over Rythu Bharosa delay in Rangareddy

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

RangaReddy: Nagarkurnool MP Mallu Ravi and Kalwakurthy MLA Kasireddy Narayan Reddy faced the people's ire over the delay in Rythu Bharosa financial assistance and tardy implementation of the crop loan waiver. Tension prevailed at Madgula mandal when the Congress leaders arrived to participate in a few development programmes at Ervin and Kubya thandas on Wednesday. Soon after the leaders' convoy arrived in the village, residents stopped their vehicles and questioned as to why they had arrived in their villages.

In a few videos that are going viral on social media platforms, the villagers holding placards are demanding the Congress leaders to keep their promises. A woman is seen questioning Narayan Reddy on a few issues, including Rythu Bharosa assistance, Rs.2500 monthly assistance for women and the demand to construct a bridge across the Andugula canal. The villagers said they were facing severe hardships due to lack of a bridge across the canal and the same was brought to the notice of the leaders. Though they had promised to construct the bridge, works were not taken up so far. Irked over the delay, the villagers stopped the leaders' vehicles, forcing the leaders to leave the village without inspecting the canal. They also de-



manded that Ervin village should be upgraded as mandal headquarters. As the situation was going out of control, police intervened and escorted the leaders outside of the village.

## Harish Rao blames Congress for neglecting primary healthcare

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Hyderabad: Former Minister and senior BRS MLA T Harish Rao criticised the Congress government for crippling the State's primary healthcare system and neglecting the poor. He blamed the government over its failure to support Palle and Basthi Dawakhanas, leaving underprivileged communities without basic medical services.

"The credit for opening these hospitals goes to the previous BRS government, while the current Congress government has turned public healthcare worse," he said, demanding immediate intervention from Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Health Minister Damodar Rajanarasimha to strengthen Palle and Basthi Dawakhanas and the Telangana Diagnostic Services. In a full throttle attack, Harish Rao pointed to the locked Keesara Health and Wellness Centre in Medchal Malkajgiri district as a glaring example of mismanagement. He questioned why the government was ignoring failing Basthi Dawakhanas across Hyderabad, Nizamabad, Adilabad, and Mahabubnagar districts.

"Out Patient services in these Palle Dawakhanas have drastically declined, while the Basthi Dawakhanas are being shut down depriving free primary healthcare to the poor and the needy under Congress rule," he said. The former Health Minister reminded that under former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao's leadership, Telangana's healthcare system was a national model, with over 500 Basthi and Palle Dawakhanas, as well as 134 free diagnostic tests through T-Diagnostics. However, these institutions were now struggling due to staff shortages, lack of medicines and mismanagement. "Even after 14 months in power, the Congress government hasn't conducted a single review meeting on healthcare," he said, warning that the poor were now forced to pay at private hospitals. He accused the government of ignoring medicine shortages and failing to pay salaries on time, pushing Telangana's once-thriving public healthcare sector into crisis.

### अदालती सूचना

न्यायालय श्रीमान अपर प्रमुख परिवार न्यायाधीश कोर्ट संख्या-3 कानपुर नगर वाद सं. 3126 सन 2022

### बनामा

तूलिका मेहरोत्रा उर्फ तूलिका श्रीवास्तव उर्फ लगभग 42 वर्ष पत्नी गौरव मेहरोत्रा निवासिनी 8/126, आर्य नगर, कानपुर नगर-208002 याचिनी बनाम गौरव मेहरोत्रा वयस्क पुत्र स्व. राजकिशोर मेहरोत्रा निवासी म.न.55-100 सेक्टर सी-1 एल.डी.ए. कालोनी, कानपुर रोड मातारानी की बगिया के पास लखनऊ मौजूदा निवासी फ्लैट नं. 301 ही-राइस पैराडाइज अपार्टमेंट बेचू पल्ली हैदराबाद तेलंगाना 500090 याचिनी ने आपके विरुद्ध धारा (13) (1) (i) व (13) (1) (i ए) एवं 13 (1) (i बी) मय सेक्शन 25 हिन्दू विवाह अधिनियम के अन्तर्गत वाद संस्थित किया है आपको इस न्यायालय में तारीख 28.02.2025 को दिन में 10 बजे वादोत्तर के लिए उपसंजात होने के लिए सम्मन किया जाता है न्यायालय में आप स्वयं उपस्थित होकर अपनी आपत्ति अगर कोई होते प्रेषित करे आपकी अनुपस्थिति में आपके विरुद्ध एक पक्षीय आदेशपारित होगा। यह आज दिनांक 30.01.2025 को मेरे हस्ताक्षर और न्यायालय की मुहर लगाकर जारी किया गया।

आज्ञा से- मुन्सरिम/रीडर

न्यायालय अपर प्रमुख परिवार न्यायाधीश कोर्ट सं.3 कानपुर नगर



# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Justice delayed

OVER four decades have passed, but for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, time has not dulled the wounds of injustice. The Supreme Court's remarks on Monday questioning the Delhi police's laxity in prosecuting cases — especially their failure to challenge acquittals — highlight a troubling reality: justice for the victims remains elusive. Out of the 650 registered cases, charge sheets were filed in only 362 cases, and convictions secured in a mere 39. The rest — more than 300 — resulted in acquittals, many unchallenged by the prosecution. The apex court's observation that "prosecution must be carried out seriously, not just for the sake of it" underscores a decades-long pattern of neglect. When the Justice Dhingra Committee — which was set up following a PIL filed by former Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee member Gurlal Singh Kahlon — found in 2020 that several investigations had been derailed, there was a flicker of hope for accountability. Yet, even now, the appeals against acquittals seem more perfunctory than purposeful. For survivors, the trauma is not just about the horror they witnessed but also the systemic betrayal that followed. Statements given in court paint a grim picture — families torn apart, homes burned and a justice system that remains indifferent. The Supreme Court's intervention offers a chance to correct past wrongs, but will it amount to real action? The Delhi police's excuse of "lack of evidence" after nearly four decades is an indictment of their own inefficiency, if not complicity.

Justice cannot be an afterthought or a delayed formality. The court's scrutiny must translate into concrete steps — proper legal representation, fresh investigations where needed, and, above all, an unwavering commitment to ensuring that the guilty do not walk free. Until then, the victims of 1984 will continue to wait for a closure that seems forever out of reach.

### At 79, this woman is looking to become oldest to earn an MBA



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

"I am a warrior," said Usha Ray, who, at 79, is currently pursuing an MBA specialising in hospital and healthcare management at Dr D Y Patil Vidyapeeth Centre for Online Learning in Pune. She balances her studies with her regular job at Lovee Shubh Hospital in Lucknow in the accounts and administration department.

Ray will become the world's oldest person to earn an MBA if she completes her degree. This record is currently held by Dr Peter Fung, 76, who graduated from the University of California, Berkeley.

After teaching and travelling the world, Ray decided to return to being a student, proving that age is just a number. "An empty mind is the devil's workshop. There was no point in just sitting around. I would be free in the evening after my job, and I thought I was wasting my mind. I wanted to do something for myself," she said. "Not having an MBA used to give me an inferiority complex at work. I didn't feel like I was on the same level as those who held an MBA. However, I eventually realised that nothing was stopping me from achieving that big dream. Now, once I earn my degree, I'll be unstoppable." The availability of online MBA courses at Dr D Y Patil Vidyapeeth Centre for Online Learning has played a vital role in Ray's journey. From Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, she attends online classes regularly and diligently. Despite the challenges posed by advanced technology for many people her age, she demonstrated remarkable dedication and managed to thrive. "I didn't know how to use a laptop, but I bought one anyway. I practised, and I am still learning, but I wasn't going to let that hold up my classes. I owe a lot to the university and its staff, who supported me throughout the whole process. It is so accessible and user-friendly that I can navigate it without fear," said the woman, who has been living on her own since her husband passed away in 2010, while her son resides outside of Lucknow.

"Usha Ray is a remarkable example of strength and determination. At 79, she has demonstrated that her passion for learning knows no boundaries. Her journey serves as an inspiration to us all," said Dr Safia Farooqui, the director of the Dr D Y Patil Vidyapeeth Centre for Online Learning. The MBA course at DY Patil is approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). While it is offered online, the syllabus is the same as traditional courses.

The university's staff is hopeful and excited for Ray to achieve this milestone. "When we realised Usha Ray's extraordinary journey could set a world record, we knew it deserved recognition. Our institution believes in lifelong education, and we've supported her by providing resources, encouragement, and a strong academic environment," added Dr Farooqui. For Ray, Dr Saurav Bhowmik, Dr Sohail Kannig, and Dr Safia Farooqui have been her biggest supporters, and she calls them the "three pillars" helping her sail through the course.

Ray's journey has not always been easy. While she was working as a professor, life threw a curveball her way. In 2003, she battled stage four cancer and survived. Then, in 2020, the disease returned, but she fought it once more and emerged stronger than ever. Despite her impressive accomplishments, Ray shows no signs of slowing down. She aims to reach new heights, and her next goal is to pursue a PhD. "I hope to achieve that. I don't know what the future holds, but I am excited about possibly accomplishing anything I set my mind to."

## Contractual workers of Navi Mumbai civic body to launch strike for equal pay, threatening essential services

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

navi mumbai, protest, strike, better conditions, nmmc, indian express The workers have been protesting wage disparities for several months, with some participating in a hunger strike outside the municipal headquarters since December. Thousands of contractual workers in Navi Mumbai, employed by the Municipal Corporation (NMMC), are poised to launch an indefinite strike on February 10, demanding equal pay for equal work. Around 8,000 workers, covering vital services such as sanitation, water supply, and healthcare, argue that despite their efforts, wage disparities persist, with protests dating back months, including hunger strikes since December. The strike threatens to disrupt essential civic services, including sanitation, water supply, and healthcare. The workers have been protesting wage disparities for several months, with some participating in a hunger strike outside the municipal headquarters since December.

The strike, led by the Samaj Samata Kamgar Sangh union, emphasizes the urgency of wage parity across municipal departments. "We work across essential services, and if our demands are not heard, we will progressively cease operations," said Mangesh Lad, the union's secretary. NMMC, however, has refuted these claims, stating that it has consistently ensured fair wages, bonuses, provident fund contributions, and other statutory benefits



as per the Minimum Wages Act. The civic body also emphasized that it sought guidance from the Maharashtra government regarding wage parity for contractual workers, but no additional funds were allocated for this purpose by the state. Following this, the municipal commissioner appointed a special committee, led by an additional commissioner, to examine the legal and financial feasibility of the workers' demands. The committee's report, based on legal provisions and past court rulings, was shared with labour unions, which were then rejected by them. While NMMC continues talks with union leaders and has pledged to protect workers' rights, the union remains steadfast, escalating concerns over potential service disruptions.

## Mamata announces formation of single-window interface for industry approvals, says promise kept

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The West Bengal government has published a notification to form the State Level Investment Synergy Committee to "simplify and expedite" the processes for obtaining approvals to set up and operate industrial projects and other investments. "As I promised in the BGS 2025, the formal notification for formation of the State Level Investment Synergy Committee is issued today (see below). This will accelerate the pace of Bengal's industrialisation," Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote on X on Saturday. The notification, dated February 7, 2025, said the committee, promised at the recent Bengal Global Business Summit, would "facilitate industrial growth and enhance the ease of doing business in the state".

As I promised in the BGS 2025, the formal Notification for formation of the State Level Investment Synergy Committee is issued today (see below). This will accelerate the pace of Bengal's industrialisation. pic.twitter.com/EdeDaN9g2m According to the notification, "This initiative is to provide a streamlined, single-window interface for approvals, enabling entrepreneurs and investors to obtain required clearances without unnecessary delays. The steps are to ensure seamless flow of information, efficient redressal of issues, and institutionalise best practices from within the departments. This new system shall also build an effective monitoring and follow-up mechanism, synergise inter-departmental coordination, increase efficacy and transparency in the system, and integrate with other related online portals to create a single bucket of information for intending investors."

"There will be an Investment Synergy Committee (ISC) at the State level chaired by the Chief Secretary, with heads of the following Departments, Directorates and Organiza-



tions: Industry Commerce and Enterprises Department – Convener, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles Department, Fire and Emergency Services Department, Home and Hill Affairs Department, Labour Department, Land and Land Reforms and Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Environment Department, Finance Department, Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Department, Power Department, Public Health Engineering Department, Forest Department, Tourism Department, Public Works Department, Information Technology and Electronics Department, Law Department, Police Directorate, and Pollution Control Board," the notification read. "The Chief Secretary may include the head of any other relevant department, directorate or organization in the Committee as a regular member or invitee member as required." An ISC will be formed at the district level also, chaired by district magistrates, to ensure coordination and a collaborative approach to resolving issues, according to the notification.

## Priyank Kharge says social media platforms restricting content critical of PM Modi, Amit Shah, BJP: 'Suppression undermines democratic discourse'

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Karnataka minister Priyank Kharge Sunday accused social media platforms of restricting content critical of the Central government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. The platforms he named are X, Meta, YouTube and Facebook. In a post on X, Kharge said he was "increasingly convinced" that social media platforms were deliberately limiting or restricting the visibility and reach of posts critical of PM Modi, Shah and the BJP regime. "This suppression not only undermines democratic discourse but also skews public perception by silencing dissenting voices," he said. The Congress leader added, "This pattern of restricting critical content not only stifles free expression but also distorts the democratic process by preventing citizens from accessing a diverse range of perspectives. Such actions erode public trust in the social media platforms, highlighting the need for greater transparency and accountability in content moderation practices." Almost all of the social media users in the country have accounts in either one of the platforms Kharge tagged in the post.



Priyank Kharge is a Congress MLA from Chittapur and he holds the portfolios of Electronics, information technology, biotechnology, rural development and panchayat raj in Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's Cabinet in Karnataka. He is the son of All India Congress Committee (AICC) president Mallikarjun Kharge.

## If Uddhav Thackeray had felt assured of Maharashtra CM post in 2019, he should've at least discussed it: Fadnavis

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Speaking about the breakdown of the long-time alliance between the BJP and the undivided Shiv Sena after the 2019 Assembly elections, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis alleged on Saturday that Uddhav Thackeray had had a tacit understanding with NCP founder Sharad Pawar. "If you (Uddhav Thackeray) were under the impression that you were told you would be made CM behind closed doors, you could have at least discussed it. You didn't discuss it because you had decided since the first day... Sharad Pawar ji had a pre-poll tacit understanding with them." The senior BJP leader was speaking at an event hosted by The Jaipur Dialogues, a right-wing website, in Pune. Fadnavis said that when Thackeray demanded the chief minister's post for 2.5 years after the 2019 polls, he discussed it with Amit Shah, who outright refused to entertain the idea.

According to Fadnavis, he then told Thackeray, "We can't give you the CM post for 2.5 years. We are the largest party and will be the largest party in the future as well, so

the CM post will remain with us for 5 years. We did not give you the deputy CM post last time. We can offer that this time." Fadnavis said the alliance broke down at that point, but Thackeray reached out for talks after four days. At this point, Fadnavis said, Thackeray had given up his demand for the CM post and was instead seeking the Palghar Lok Sabha seat. "Amit bhai and others told me that they are our old partners. 'One seat doesn't matter; you give it to them'. So we gave them the seat with the candidate," he added. Thackeray later requested a meeting with Shah before a press conference, where they spoke privately for around 10 minutes. After this meeting, Fadnavis said, he spoke at press conferences as agreed to by both parties, but Thackeray later claimed that another press conference that "all their options were open". "If you (Uddhav Thackeray) were under the impression that you were told you would be made CM behind closed doors, you could have at least discussed it... The day their (Maha Vikas Aghadi) government was formed, I tried getting in touch with Uddhav Thackeray, but he even refused to answer my call," the BJP leader said.

## Toto driver arrested for New Town girl's rape and murder in 'den of anti-socials'

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

new town rape murder case On Saturday, police arrested Soumitra Roy, a 22-year-old Toto driver, in a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act case registered over the incident. A minor girl from Gouranganagar, New Town, near Kolkata, was found murdered early on Friday, around 6 km from her home, which she left after an argument with her mother and sister late on Thursday. Her body was discovered in a bush next to a canal, close to a premium housing complex. On Saturday, police arrested Soumitra Roy, a 22-year-old Toto driver, in a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act case registered over the incident.

According to police, they learnt after reviewing CCTV footage from several cameras that around 11.30 pm, the girl approached the three-wheeler driver, who agreed to drop her off after other passengers. The driver then drove around with the girl before taking her to an isolated location, where he allegedly assaulted her sexually around 12.30 am. When she attempted to scream, he allegedly strangled her and fled the scene. CCTV footage captured the girl walking nearly 2 km from her home before she was seen speaking to a biker who slowed down upon noticing her, the police said, adding that only the arrested accused was involved in the crime. Around 6.30 am on Friday, morning walkers discovered the girl's body with multiple bruises and scratch marks on a 1.7-acre plot owned by the West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation. Although the area is secured by steel mesh, the police discovered a section that had been cut. Locals say the lack of lighting in the area contributes to numerous anti-social activities after dark.

Because the accused was not using a mobile phone, tracking him was challenging for the police. Eventually, they located his wife, who revealed that he was at the Kolkata Book Fair, leading to his arrest from there. It was only when it began to get late that the girl's mother raised an alarm and began searching for her daughter with neighbours. A missing-person report was filed at the New Town police station at 5.30 am on Friday. Within an hour, the police received a call about the body next to the canal. According to the police, the accused has confessed to the crime. They plan to request his custody for further investigation when he is presented in court.

## Men posing as 'CBI and RBI directors' dupe woman of Rs 95 lakh: Punjab police

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

chandigarh police Police said after a preliminary inquiry, an FIR was registered for cheating at the Sector 34 police station in Chandigarh. The Chandigarh Police on Saturday booked two unidentified men for duping a city woman of Rs 95 lakh claiming her husband was caught by the CBI in a case. In her complaint, the woman stated that on January 15, 2025, she received a WhatsApp call from an unidentified number and the caller claimed that her husband's Aadhaar card was found linked to a money laundering case.

Under this pretence, the fraudsters obtained bank details and later initiated multiple unauthorised transactions from the complainant's account, police said. The woman told the police that "the accused identified themselves as a CBI Director and an RBI Director to gain her trust." Following their instructions over the phone, the woman transferred large sums of money from her accounts. However, later she realised that she had been cheated and lodged a formal complaint, police said.

A police officer said the investigation into the case is in progress, and the account details and mobile numbers of the accused were being verified to trace them. Based on the complaint, an FIR was registered at the Cyber Crime police station, police said. Meanwhile, in another case of cheating, a retired Army officer was duped of Rs 10 lakh, police said. Complainant, Col Manjit Singh (Retd), resident of Sector 46/D, Chandigarh, alleged that accused Neeraj Bhanot of Sector 46/C, Chandigarh, allegedly cheated him of Rs 10 lakh in an investment fraud on assurance of high returns. Police said after a preliminary inquiry, an FIR was registered for cheating at the Sector 34 police station in Chandigarh. The Operations Cell arrested a proclaimed offender in a 10-year-old theft case, the Chandigarh Police said on Saturday. Police said acting on an information received on February 8, proclaimed offender Malkit Singh, alias Mitti, a resident of Dadu Majra Colony, Chandigarh, was apprehended from Banur in Mohali by a team of the Operation Cell, Sector 26, Chandigarh. Police said the accused was declared proclaimed offender by the Court of Dazy Bangarh, JMFC, Chandigarh, on January 2, 2014 in connection with a theft FIR registered on July 19, 2007.

## Digi Yatra services launched at new Pune airport terminal

Even after Pune airport's operations began in July, numerous complaints regarding non-functional Digi Yatra services were received, sparking outrage among passengers. Even after operations began in July, numerous complaints regarding non-functional Digi Yatra services were received, sparking outrage among passengers. While most flight operations have moved to the New Integrated Terminal Building (NITB) at Pune International Airport (PIA), discussions on demolishing the old terminal are underway, said Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol at the Digi Yatra inaugural ceremony.

Almost a year after the NITB's inauguration, the wait is finally over, and the Digi Yatra service has been rolled out in the presence of Mohol, BJP Working President MLA Ravindra Chavan, State General Secretary Rajesh Pandey, and Pune Airport officials. The new terminal, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March 2024, spans 22,000 square metres and has an annual passenger handling capacity of ten million. However, due to technical reasons and a lack of necessary permissions, the Digi Yatra facility had been pending for the past year. Even after operations began in July, numerous complaints regarding non-functional Digi Yatra services were received, sparking outrage among passengers. According to the Minister, this service will now bring relief to passengers flying from Pune and streamline the boarding process. He said, "Digi Yatra is available at 24 airports across the country, and so far, 4 crore (70 percent) passengers have benefited from it."



## The lessons from a spectrum of areas



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The 2004 tsunami affected a number of countries, making it a truly global disaster. There are six critical lessons we must consider. First, the importance of mangroves in providing natural protection to coastal areas — they serve as vital buffers against waves. Unfortunately, the significant destruction of mangroves in India and other countries — to promote shrimp farming, meet basic wood and fuel needs, and for tourism — has disrupted the natural ecosystem. In many cases, the construction of artificial barriers (brick and mortar walls), may actually increase people's susceptibility to the damaging effects of waves. Social changes Second, keeping common resources such as beaches in the public domain is crucial. In Thailand, the privatisation of coastlines during the 1980s and 1990s allowed private interests to develop hotels and leisure activities, displacing local communities. This led to significant changes in labour, including the rise of the sex industry. Additionally, a large section of the population transitioned to informal sector jobs. Thailand's economy became highly vulnerable to global fluctuations, and is a lesson for India.

Third, the tsunami created winners and losers in the market. Rents, the price of land, goods, and services all rose, benefiting only asset owners and service providers. The disruption of local markets led to the replacement of local products with externally sourced goods, disrupting interdependent local economies. A number of people transitioned from traditional livelihoods to casual, low-paid labour. The push for mechanised fishing became particularly noticeable, displacing traditional artisanal fishing practices using catamarans. The degradation of natural resources intensified, leading to over-fishing, waste accumulation, loss of fish breeding areas, and further erosion of beaches and soil. Addressing these economic processes of production, consumption, and exchange — aggravated by privatisation and liberalisation — is a challenge. Unfortunately, no studies exist to measure these patterns. A worsening of inequalities Fourth, there are lessons to be learned about relief efforts and long-term rehabilitation. It is not surprising that the social structures that create and sustain discrimination, injustice, and exclusion in society continue do-

ing so during and after disasters. In a highly stratified society such as India, relief and rehabilitation efforts can often reinforce and even exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, discrimination, and marginalisation. Evidence from tsunami-affected countries suggests that social divisions significantly affected access to relief and rehabilitation services. There was a notable tendency to overlook the needs of vulnerable groups, including labourers, Dalits, tribes, immigrants, ethnic minorities, widows, and single women, in the distribution of relief and rehabilitation unless some vocal groups advocated their cause. In Thailand, undocumented Burmese or Lao migrants, many of whom suffered serious injuries and required urgent medical attention, had to go into hiding to avoid arrest. In Sri Lanka, Tamil minorities in the east and northern regions received significantly less assistance despite suffering much greater devastation. Furthermore, asset-based damage assessment tended to favour better-off segments of the affected. Within India's fishing community, labourers engaged in fishing, retail businesses, and ancillary activities continued to suffer until fishing activity resumed but received little compensation. In some communities, the relief provided barely met basic subsistence needs, while others experienced excessive aid.

Fifth, gender-insensitive relief and rehabilitation policies often accentuated the vulnerability of women. In Indian fishing communities, women are typically involved in activities related to the processing and marketing of fish or in non-fishing jobs such as collecting shells or running food stalls. They rarely own property or assets in their name. During the relief and rehabilitation, in many cases, their livelihood needs were overlooked. Relief and rehabilitation packages were distributed based on lists of affected persons prepared by the fish worker panchayats, leading to women lacking access to relief measures. Widows from fish worker communities faced difficulties in receiving assistance, as they did not possess identity cards issued by the Fisheries Department. The important takeaway is that social divisions must be carefully addressed at every stage of relief and rehabilitation. Engagement with local structures Sixth, it is crucial for relief agencies to respect community-based local institutions, especially in coastal communities where organisation revolves around the concept of commons. Unlike agrarian or urban areas, democratic practices in fishing communities, such as kuppams, rely on active debate rather than elections. The tsunami revealed that outside agencies often imposed their own notions of democracy, which undermined local capacities and resilience by fostering individualism and dependence. While issues such as gender insensitivity exist within these communities, a critical and long-term engagement with local structures would be more effective in addressing these concerns rather than demonising them. Pushpendra Kumar is a former professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He worked in tsunami relief and rehabilitation in affected countries

## Sweeping policy decisions, controversies that reshaped India's education sector in 2024



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

India's education sector witnessed a year of major changes in 2024, marked by sweeping policy decisions, controversies, and efforts to streamline processes. From the Union Cabinet's ambitious 'One Nation One Subscription' initiative to reforms in the structure of national entrance exams, these developments reflect a transformative phase for the nation's education ecosystem. Here's a look at the major events that defined this year: In a move set to revolutionise access to academic resources, the Union Cabinet approved a budgetary allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for the 'One Nation One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme. Aimed at centralising journal subscriptions for nearly 6,300 government-run higher education institutions (HEIs), the initiative promises equitable access to 13,000 scholarly journals under a single platform. Currently, HEIs rely on fragmented library consortia, such as the UGC-Infonet Digital Library Consortium managed by the INFLIBNET Centre in Gandhinagar. This disaggregated approach often creates barriers to accessing vital academic material. Set to launch on January 1, 2025, ONOS will consolidate journal access for state and central government institutions, fostering a uniform academic environment. By simplifying access to critical resources, the scheme aspires to elevate research output and academic excellence across India. The year's most contentious issue arose from allegations of irregularities during the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) (NEET-UG), the gateway to India's medical colleges. Held on May 5, the examination was marred by claims of question paper leaks and malpractice. Social media was rife with accusations, prompting swift denials from the National Testing Agency (NTA). However, arrests in Bihar and Gujarat corroborated concerns. In Bihar, 13 individuals, including four examinees, were detained for allegedly paying exorbitant sums to access the question paper in advance. Meanwhile, a raid in Godhra uncovered a

teacher facilitating cheating at an exam centre, leading to multiple arrests and a subsequent CBI investigation. The controversy deepened when the NTA's decision to award grace marks to 1,563 students sparked criticism. Although Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan dismissed allegations of corruption, the incident raised questions about the integrity of national examinations. CUET revamp: Streamlining admissions Another major reform came in the form of changes to the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for undergraduate admissions. Responding to feedback and logistical challenges from previous years, the University Grants Commission (UGC) announced that the 2025 CUET-UG will be entirely computer-based. Additionally, the number of subjects offered will be reduced from 63 to 37, with admissions for dropped subjects relying on a General Aptitude Test (GAT).

"We aim to provide a more efficient and student-friendly examination process," said UGC Chairperson M Jagadeesh Kumar. An expert panel's recommendations, which addressed test structure, duration, syllabus alignment, and operational logistics, shaped these changes. The reforms reflect an effort to ensure fairness and accessibility in university admissions, streamlining the process for millions of aspirants. JNU's admission exam debate Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) faced its own challenges this year. After the UGC National Eligibility Test (NET) was cancelled in June over concerns about compromised integrity, JNU proposed a return to in-house PhD entrance exams. However, the plan has stalled due to a lack of consensus among school deans and faculty members. While faculty claim they submitted written feedback over a month ago, university officials state no formal responses have been received. This impasse underscores the broader uncertainty surrounding PhD admissions in the wake of the cancellation of NET, which had long served as a critical qualifier for teaching and research positions. Scrapping the no-detention policy In a landmark decision, the Central government scrapped the no-detention policy for students in classes 5 and 8 in schools under its jurisdiction. This policy reversal impacts approximately 3,000 institutions, including Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Sainik Schools, and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS). The move follows a 2019 amendment to the Right to Education Act, 2009 which allowed states and Union Territories to decide on retaining students in these grades. With 18 states and UTs having already abolished the no-detention policy, the Ministry of Education's recent notification aligns Central schools with this trend. Proponents argue that the decision will improve academic rigor and accountability, though critics warn it may exacerbate dropout rates.

## In 2024, detection rate up by 87% in chain snatching cases: Vadodara police commissioner



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The Vadodara city police has recorded an 87 percent detection rate in cases of chain snatching — the highest in Gujarat — as well as an increase of 50 percent in cases lodged by the crime branch in 2024, Vadodara Commissioner of Police Narasimha Komar said on Tuesday. Claiming that the "focus was on prevention and detection", Komar said, "The Detection of Crime Branch registered 296 offences in 2024 compared to 197 in 2023 and it is a rise of more than 50 percent... We are proud of our team and we congratulate them. There is an atmosphere in the city that the police will get the criminals and crimes will be prevented. Strong elements, sexual offenders, cyber offenders, bootleggers, and private money lenders who are repeated offenders are kept on a watch and there are constant attempts to ensure rigorous enforcement and vigilance." The Vadodara city police said they have detected 208 of the 485 cases of vehicle and mobile theft in 2024, of

which 150 were detected by the Crime Branch. Komar added that repeat offenders from Anand district and Rajasthan have been nabbed.

On Tuesday, the Crime Branch arrested Arvind Vyas, a resident of Lunva village in Mehsana district, for an alleged theft of 31 motorcycles, amounting to Rs 6.85 lakh in 29 cases registered across police stations in the city. According to the police, Vyas has more than 50 previous cases of vehicle theft against him in Ahmedabad, Palanpur, Surat, Dahod, and Godhra. He added that police "successfully detected all 29 cases of murder" that took place in the city, including one of a senior citizen in Tarsali earlier this year, in which the "culprit" was arrested within 48 hours. Komar said, "The case of gang rape, which occurred (on the outskirts) during Navratri and was technically under Vadodara Rural police, was also successfully detected by the city crime branch as a part of inter-district coordination as is our duty." The city had not registered a single case of dacoity in 2024. "Out of the total 16 cases of robbery, all have been detected and eight were detected by the Crime Branch, including one big heist in October 2024, during the rumour mongering about thieves attacking... We also registered 43 cases of chain snatching, of which 37 have been detected, which is an 87 percent detection rate and the highest success in the state this year," Komar said. The city police have also detected 90 of the 236 cases of house break-ins and nabbed 168 offenders who jumped parole and furlough, including a murder convict, who was on the run for over seven years, Komar said. Komar added that four accused nabbed had been on the run for 18, 20, 21 and 23 years, respectively.

## Pune to have 4,000 women-driven autorickshaws in 2025 under pink e-rickshaw scheme



A committee was formed to implement the scheme under the chairmanship of the district collector, with members from the women and child development department, regional transport office and the Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal. A committee was formed to implement the scheme under the chairmanship of the district collector, with members from the women and child development department, regional transport office and the Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal. Pune could see as many as 4,000 pink e-rickshaws on its roads in 2025 under a scheme implemented by Maharashtra's women and child development department. So far, 566 women have applied for the scheme and 353 of the applications have been approved.

The Government has an objective of introducing 10,000 women-driven electric autorickshaws across the state, with 1,400 initially allocated to Pune. Manisha Biraris, district women and child development officer, said the number of beneficiaries in Pune was increased first to 2,800 and later to 4,000. Nevertheless, she clarified that the overall state-wide target remains unchanged at 10,000 beneficiaries.

Biraris said the scheme aims to uplift women drivers and empower them economically. "The pink e-rickshaw scheme has been introduced to promote employment op-

portunities for women, enabling them to become self-reliant and independent. Earlier, Pune's allocation was 1,400 e-rickshaws, but now it has been revised to 4,000. We will do our best to recruit all eligible beneficiaries this year," she said. Biraris explained that there will be no educational requirements to apply for the scheme. However, the department has revised the eligibility age from 18-35 to 20-40 to provide educational opportunities to women who do not complete their studies by the age of 18. Applicants must also have a valid driving licence and a family income not exceeding Rs 3 lakh per annum. They must be domiciled in the state. Documents such as Ladki Bahin Yojana certificates, birth certificates, school certificates, and ration cards will be considered for this purpose. Biraris said many applications are now coming from women in their late 30s. The beneficiaries will have to bear only 10 per cent of the cost of the e-rickshaws initially. The state government will cover 20 per cent of the cost, while the remaining 70 per cent will be financed through a government-facilitated loan that beneficiaries must repay within five years.

A committee was formed to implement the scheme under the chairmanship of the district collector, with members from the women and child development department, regional transport office and the Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal. Additionally, the commissioners of the Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad municipal corporations are invited to be part of the initiative. "We urge more women to apply. The scheme includes free maintenance of e-rickshaws for the first five years, and charging stations will also be developed. The vehicles will operate on dedicated routes inspected by the RTO. While preference will be given to women and child commuters, the services will not be restricted to them," Biraris said. To ensure the safety of women drivers, Biraris suggested measures including having more surveillance cameras along the designated routes.

## How Mumbai police traced auto-rickshaw driver and recovered jewellery worth lakhs left behind by passenger

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The Mumbai police Monday traced an auto-rickshaw driver and recovered 250 gram of gold and silver jewellery belonging to a woman who forgot the items in the vehicle on December 20. According to the police, the woman reported the incident at the Bangur Nagar Police Station in Goregaon, saying she had forgotten her bag containing her jewellery in the auto-rickshaw. The Bangur Nagar police handed the jewellery to Brinda Rai, 48, Monday. "The woman and her family were planning to travel to Gujarat for a wedding. She had retrieved the jewellery from her bank's safe and was taking it home. To ensure its safety, the woman kept the bag full of jewellery in the vacant area behind her seat," said a police officer. The police said they analysed footage from more than 100 CCTV cameras and conducted inquiries with several passengers to trace the driver plying at Poisar in Borivali. "It occurred late at night and due to the high beam of lights on the rickshaw, it posed difficulty in tracing the driver. We went through over 100 CCTV cameras in the vicinity because the registration number was not easily discernible from the footage," said the officer. "While the case was originally registered as a lost property incident, we treated it as a serious crime, dedicating significant time and resources to ensuring the woman's



belongings were returned," the police officer said. In the search for leads, investigators tracked down and got in touch with passengers who had travelled in the auto-rickshaw that night.

Eventually, they located the driver near Poisar in Borivali, and he immediately handed over the bag full of jewellery. During the inquiry, the driver told the police he had plied many passengers on December 20. "He spotted the bag in the morning on December 21. The driver informed us that he did not know who it belonged to and was confused about which police station he should report the bag to," the officer added.

## Heel-to-toe walk, horizontal gaze test: Vadodara police make drivers undergo field sobriety tests



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Some motorists were asked to walk, coordinating the front toe and heel on the white divider strips on the street. Some motorists were asked to walk, coordinating the front toe and heel on the white divider strips on the street. The Vadodara city police, which have been deployed at important points across the city in preparation for New Year's Eve, put several motorists to the Field Sobriety Test (FST) on the intervening night of Tuesday as a part of the crackdown on alcohol consumption and drug abuse. At the Akota Dandia Bazar flyover, police personnel were seen asking motorists to perform sobriety tests to check for intoxication by assessing their balance, coordination, and attention. Some motorists were asked to walk, coordinating the front toe and heel on the white divider strips on the street.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Zone 2 Abhay Soni, told The Indian Express, "The FST is an accepted primary test to detect a drunk or intoxicated state in motorists, even if blood levels are low and the breath analysers are unable to detect the intoxication. In the West, it is an accepted test and even admissible in a court of law. But, in India, we use it for a preliminary exam and then proceed for blood tests to gather evidence." Soni added that while the motorists in Vadodara were asked to walk in foot coordination on the white dividing lines, other tests include the horizontal gaze test, which involves asking the drivers to watch objects

move slowly from side to side. Soni said that while the police teams did not find any suspected cases on Tuesday, the sobriety tests could come in handy to find offenders under the prohibition law or NDPS during the New Year's deployment.

## Mancherial collector says efforts on to control illegal mining, transportation of sand

Mancherial: Collector Kumar Deepak said that steps were being taken to strictly control illegal mining and transportation of sand. He addressed the media persons here on Tuesday.

Kumar stated that 32 cases were booked, while fines worth Rs 10.77 lakh were imposed against those who flouted the norms in 2023. He informed that four cases were registered and fines worth Rs 2.12 lakh were levied against illegal miners in 2024. As many as 556 metric tonnes of sand were seized in the previous year, while 2,744 metric tonnes of sand were seized in 2024. The Collector further said that sand reaches, mining and other relevant processes were being organized transparently.





## On India's international obligations towards Rohingya refugees | Explained



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The story so far: A recent study examining the plight of Rohingya refugees detained in India, conducted jointly by The Azadi Project, a U.S.-registered non-profit, and Refugees International, an American organisation advocating for displaced populations, has highlighted "gross violations of constitutional and human rights" and criticised India's "failure to uphold its obligations under international human rights treaties." Based on interviews with detainees, their families, and legal representatives, the report reveals that "a significant number of Rohingya refugees continue to be incarcerated even after serving their prescribed sentences."

How are Rohingya refugees protected under international law?

The Rohingya of Myanmar constitute the world's largest stateless population, estimated to number approximately 2.8 million. Denied citizenship and subjected to decades of persecution by Myanmar's military authorities, the majority of the Rohingya have been compelled to flee their homeland due to genocidal violence. At present, they are dispersed across multiple countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nearly 22,500 Rohingya refugees currently reside in India. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol enshrine the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits states from expelling individuals under their jurisdiction when substantial evidence suggests they would face persecution, torture, or other severe human rights violations upon return. This principle is a cornerstone of human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. Moreover, its status as customary international law imposes binding obligations on states regardless of formal assent. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has reiterated that "the principle is characterized by its absolute nature without any exception". Additionally, in a 2007 advisory opinion, the UNHCR affirmed that non-refoulement constitutes customary law and is binding on all states, including those not parties to the Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol.

What is India's stand?

As India is neither a signatory to the Refugee Convention nor a party to key international instruments such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, it maintains that it bears no legal obligation to provide asylum or adhere to the principle of non-refoulement. India continues to detain Rohingya refugees under archaic domestic legal frameworks, notably the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Passport Act, 1967. These legislations confer sweeping executive powers to regulate the presence of foreigners and enable authorities to categorise Rohingya refugees as "illegal migrants." In response to a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court seeking the release of detained Rohingya refugees, the Union government clarified in March that while they are entitled to the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, they do not

possess the right to reside or settle in India. In 2021, the top court in *Mohammad Salimullah and Anr. v. Union of India*, rejected a plea to prevent the deportation of 170 Rohingya refugees detained in Srinagar accepting the Centre's national security concerns. In October 2024, the Delhi High Court dismissed a PIL seeking directions to the authorities to admit Rohingya refugee children in local schools. The court noted that the matter involved international implications and required a policy decision to be taken by the Union government.

What are India's international obligations?

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which India is a party, implicitly obligates member states under Article 7 to refrain from refouling individuals to places where they may face torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The U.N. Human Rights Committee has unequivocally affirmed this interpretation. Similarly, the principle of non-refoulement is enshrined in other significant international instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which India has ratified. Further, the Convention Against Torture makes an express mention of non-refoulement under Article 3. While India's position as a signatory but not a ratifier renders its provisions non-binding, any deviation from the convention's principles would compromise the commitment India demonstrated by signing the treaty. Although India lacks a domestic refugee law, the Supreme Court in landmark rulings such as *Vishaka & Ors. v. State of Rajasthan* (1997) and *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014), has affirmed that in the absence of domestic legislation on a matter, international conventions and norms must be applied by municipal courts to ensure the dignity of human life. Additionally, Article 51(c) of the Constitution mandates that the State must strive to promote respect for international law and treaty obligations. Several High Courts in India have also interpreted the principle of non-refoulement as integral to Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. Notable examples include the Gujarat High Court's decision in *Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi v. Union of India* (1998) and the Delhi High Court's ruling in *Dongh Lian Kham v. Union of India* (2015), both of which involved refugees from different countries seeking protection from deportation.

What are the existing concerns?

The absence of a standardised refugee policy has led to disparate treatment of different refugee populations, driven by India's shifting geopolitical and diplomatic interests. While groups such as Tibetans, Sri Lankans, and Afghans are granted refugee certificates or long-term visas by the government, most Rohingya refugees — despite being registered with the UNHCR — often face arbitrary detention and criminal imprisonment. Further, the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, excludes persecuted Muslim minorities, such as the Rohingya, from its ambit. The lack of legal representation and aid for detained Rohingya refugees also poses a severe concern. The report by Azadi Project and Refugees International highlights that civil society organisations working on behalf of Rohingya refugees in India are starved of funding as most Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) licenses that allow for the receipt of foreign funding have been revoked. This has made lawyers reluctant to take on cases involving the Rohingya, fearing unfavourable outcomes and potential repercussions. Moreover, detention centres housing Rohingya refugees, including pregnant women and children, are plagued by dehumanising living conditions. In light of the appalling conditions at the Matia Transit Camp, the Supreme Court in October, directed the Assam State Legal Services to conduct surprise visits and evaluate the conditions in which the refugees are living.

## Secrets of the magician's shroud



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Some secrets are better left undiscovered. Especially those that create awe, evoke wonder, and leave us wide-eyed with amazement. Why reveal the tricks of the trade and spoil those jaw-dropping moments? India's world-renowned magician PC Sorcar is scheduled to visit Hyderabad in early January 2025. Am I excited? Perhaps I would have been, had I not already seen every episode of 'Magic's Biggest Secrets Finally Revealed' on TV. That show, hosted by a spoilsport called the Masked Magician, systematically destroyed the enchantment of magic for many, unravelling illusions that should have remained cloaked in mystery. It felt as if the childlike wonder in us had been unceremoniously silenced.

I still remember the thrill of witnessing a magic show at school, back when I was in the third or fourth grade. Each trick was mesmerising — whether it was one of our school-

mates floating mid-air or the grand finale where the magician and his wife swapped places in the blink of an eye, with one tied up inside a trunk and the other standing on top. It was a performance that left our young minds racing with questions yet content with the mystery. Later, I had the privilege of watching PC Sorcar Jr's shows a couple of times. Even though his performances did not vary much, they never failed to intrigue. The illusionist brought style and charisma to the stage, commanding the attention of audiences like a film star. I also had the chance to see K Lal and his 'maya jaal' (web of illusion), another celebrated magician who left audiences spellbound. Both Sorcar and Lal earned not just fame but respect as true craftsmen of magic.

The disenchanting age of revelation but times have changed. Thanks to YouTube and TV shows like 'Magic's Biggest Secrets Revealed', the allure of magic has faded. Even the greatest magicians — whether it's David Copperfield, Criss Angel, David Blaine or any other international performer — struggle to impress in an era where every illusion can be Googled. Watch them escape from chains or levitate in the air, and the mind immediately races to mundane explanations: mirrors, mechanical cranes, green screens, or CGI. I hope PC Sorcar's visit brings something new — tricks that are immune to the unrelenting scrutiny of cameras and digital detectives. Magic deserves to be magic: inexplicable, bewildering, and magical. Even so, I'll attend his show with my granddaughter. She is just three, and her eyes will light up with wonder. If she tugs at my sleeve and asks, 'Thatha [grandpa], how did he do that?' I may smile and say, 'I don't know, baby'. Some mysteries, after all, are better left unsolved.

## Cabinet sub-committee reviews new guidelines on extending Rythu Bharosa

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Hyderabad: Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Sunday emphasised that the government would fulfil promises made to the farming community. The Cabinet sub-committee on Rythu Bharosa, which met at the Secretariat in the day, discussed the new guidelines to extend the aid for the upcoming Yasangi season. Bhatti Vikramarka and committee members — Thummala Nageshwar Rao, D Sridhar Babu, and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy — discussed the feedback received from farmers during the Cabinet sub-committee's State-wide tours, and the information collected by officials. Bhatti Vikramarka reiterated the government's commitment in fulfilling its pre-election promise of providing Rythu Bharosa to farmers.

The government allocated Rs 72,659 crore to agriculture and allied sectors in the State Budget and within two months, Rs 21,000 crore was deposited into farmers' bank



accounts under the loan waiver scheme.

A newly established Agriculture Commission was working on its task to make agriculture more profitable and enhance farmers' welfare.

## How a 50-year-old spun her track of life leaving a successful corporate career to become a DJ



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Vandana Irani or DJ VanD, at 50 has embarked on an extraordinary journey, leaving behind a successful corporate career to embrace her love of DJing. Vandana, an MBA graduate from IIM Calcutta and a financial services professional with decades of experience, now spins tracks instead of presentations, proving it's never too late to pursue one's passion. Born and raised in Kolkata, Vandana's early life was defined by the usual toil—focused hard work, solid education and an impressive professional career. She built a stellar career, starting with Citibank in 1997, followed by stints in other well known multinationals in the US, Gurgaon, and Pune. Starting as a credit card business personnel and most recently heading operations for Bajaj Finserv Health Limited, her professional life was fulfilling but demanding. By early 2023, Vandana decided to take a step back to focus on her family and personal aspirations and to reconnect with herself.

"I've always loved playing music," she said. "Even during social gatherings, I would curate playlists that would make everyone dance. It was my way of bringing people together and taking the party to the next level." After quitting

her job in early 2023, she decided to get professional training to be a DJ. While she identified a professional DJ course at an academy, she didn't get around to starting the course. Her family recognised this passion and gifted her a DJ console for her 50th birthday. Inspired, Vandana enrolled in the DJ training program right away, immersing herself in the endeavour of mixing music. dj irani, pune, against all odds, "Being 50 doesn't limit me; it empowers me. I've found joy and freedom in pursuing what I love, and I hope others are inspired to do the same," Vandana said.

Her first public performance came during a Holi celebration at her housing complex. "I was nervous, but I thought, 'If this music makes me want to dance, it will make others feel the same,'" she said. The overwhelming response from her audience gave her the confidence to keep going. But Vandana's journey wasn't without challenges. In May, during a family trip, she suffered a wrist fracture, requiring surgery and months of recovery. "It set me back by a couple of months," she admitted. "But it also gave me time to reflect and focus on what needed to be done to professionally scale my passion." By July, Vandana was back in action, performing at a private event — a milestone birthday party held at a premium resort near Lonavala. Her blend of Bollywood, retro, and international music struck a chord with diverse audiences. She has since had a lot of success as DJing for private parties, celebrations, and events, crafting playlists that make people of all ages hit the dance floor. "I love how music connects people," Vandana shared. "It's not about fame or money for me. It's about creating moments of joy and togetherness." For Vandana, her new path is about rediscovering herself and embracing a new chapter of life with courage and creativity. "Being 50 doesn't limit me; it empowers me. I've found joy and freedom in pursuing what I love, and I hope others are inspired to do the same," she said.

## IMD issues orange alert for fog and cold wave in 22 districts of Punjab and Haryana; visibility likely to be down to zero

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert for fog and cold wave in 22 districts of Punjab and Haryana for Monday due to an ongoing cyclone circulation in the region. Visibility could be severely affected, with some areas potentially experiencing fog so thick that visibility may drop to zero, as per the weather department. IMD Chandigarh reported that the impact of ongoing snowfall in the mountains will extend to Punjab and Chandigarh, leading to a significant drop in temperatures across the region. Some of the Punjab and Haryana districts where orange alert has been issued are as follows: Punjab Meanwhile, due to fog, a yellow alert has been issued for the rest of the 23 districts of the states and their joint capital, Chandigarh.

According to the weather department, these conditions are expected to persist until January 3, with temperatures in Punjab potentially dropping to 3 degrees Celsius over the next five days. However, Chandigarh is unlikely to see drastic temperature changes. In the last few days, rain was reported in several areas of Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh. Two western disturbances are expected to impact the region between January 1 and January 6. These disturbances will bring rain to the western Himalayan range and may also extend to Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and the plains. As a result, temperatures in Punjab and Chandigarh are likely to drop again. In Haryana, the aver-



age maximum temperature fell by 1.2 degrees on Sunday. However, this was still appreciably below normal by 4.5 degrees. The highest maximum temperature recorded in the state on Sunday was 22.5 degrees Celsius. On Sunday, the average maximum temperature in Punjab rose by 2 degrees, but it remained 2.3 degrees below normal. The highest maximum temperature recorded in the state was 21.3 degrees Celsius at Sri Anandpur Sahib. The meteorological department has urged the public to stay updated with weather warnings and advisories. It advised them to take necessary precautions, especially while travelling, due to the reduced visibility caused by dense fog.

## How Himachal is trying to capitalise on sprawling Vidhan Sabha complex in Tapovan

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Efforts are underway to make the sprawling Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, covering approximately 35,000 square feet in the foothills of the Dhauladhar range at picturesque Tapovan, more accessible and economically viable. Authorities are exploring various options, including the opening of a museum, a cafeteria, and a residential complex. The residential complex would be available for use by legislators during the annual winter session and by the general public for the rest of the year, a senior officer privy to the development said. As per the proposal, the cafeteria and residential complex are planned outside the Vidhan Sabha premises near Gate Number 2, while the museum, showcasing the rich heritage of the hill state, will be located inside the Vidhan Sabha grounds. The state assembly is situated adjacent to Swami Chinmayananda's Chinmaya Tapovan Ashram, a renowned destination for inner peace seekers from across the globe.

Constructed and inaugurated in February 2006, the assembly has hosted 18 winter sessions since then. The first assembly session in Dharamshala was held at Prayas Bhawan, Government College, in 2005. The most recent session was held from December 18 to December 21. "All new constructions, except for the museum near Gate Number 1, will be outside the Vidhan Sabha premises. A nominal fee will be charged for visitors to enter the museum. Currently, visitors, including school students, NCC cadets, private individuals, and tourists, are allowed to visit the Vidhan Sabha premises at Tapovan free of cost. The residential complex, designed like hotels, will address accommodation issues faced by legislators and government officials during the winter session. Unlike the Vidhan Sabha in



Shimla, there are no residential facilities for legislators here who stay in government guest houses or private hotels at the state's expense," a senior official privy to the development. The officer further stated, "A letter from the Vidhan Sabha Secretariat has been sent to the district administration in Kangra to transfer the required revenue land. A committee under the supervision of Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Harish Gajju has been formed to complete the groundwork." On December 22, Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania, along with Kangra Deputy Commissioner Hemraj Bairwa, ADM Harish Gajju, and other district officials, inspected the proposed sites for the new facilities. Yashpal Sharma, Secretary, Vidhan Sabha, said, "The assembly at Tapovan is a vast area, and we aim to use it constructively while maintaining its sanctity. The local district administration has also provided suggestions for its development. Plans for a cafeteria and residential complex for legislators are under consideration. However, we want to proceed cautiously and not rush into decisions."

## Government Railway Police recovers 870 stolen mobile phones, seizes Rs 3.4 cr in property in 2024

GNS News Agency, Feb 13 Hyderabad: The Government Railway Police (GRP) have traced a total of 870 mobile phones and handed them over to their owners in 2024. The gadgets which were either lost or stolen were traced using the Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) portal.

During this year, a total of 901 cases were reported, of which only 142 cases were solved by arresting 121 offenders and recovering Rs 37.1 lakh worth valuables. Speaking at the annual press meet, GRP Superintendent of Police, Chandana Deepthi on Monday said during this year, 56 drug related cases were registered, of which 38 were solved and

53 drug suspects were arrested. A total of 1194.3 kgs of marijuana worth Rs 2.9 crore was seized.

Officials said total worth of Rs 3.4 crore worth property was lost and Rs 37 lakh worth property was recovered, with a recovery percentage of 10.81 per cent. Apart from this, the GRP teams rescued as many as 84 children including 25 girls from the railway premises as part of Operation Smile and Muskaan in 2024. "The children were handed over to the Child Welfare authorities for their safe custody and reuniting them with their parents. In this regard, cases were booked at the GRP Hyderabad and Warangal," Chandana Deepthi said.



## South Korean president faces impeachment after martial law debacle



SEOUL, GNS News Agency, Feb 13 South Korean lawmakers submitted a bill on Wednesday to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol after he declared martial law and reversed the move hours later, triggering a political crisis in Asia's fourth-largest economy. The surprise declaration of martial law in the major U.S. ally late on Tuesday caused a standoff with parliament, which rejected Yoon's attempt to ban political activity and censor the media, as armed troops forced their way into the National Assembly building in Seoul.

The main opposition Democratic Party (DP) called for Yoon, who has been in office since 2022, to resign or face impeachment. Six South Korean opposition parties later submitted a bill in parliament to impeach Yoon, with voting set for Friday or Saturday. "We couldn't ignore the illegal martial law," DP lawmaker Kim Yong-min told reporters. "We can no longer let democracy collapse." There were deep divisions in Yoon's ruling People Power Party as well, as its leader called for Defence Minister Kim Jong-hyun to be fired and the entire cabinet to resign. Kim has offered to resign, the defence ministry said. Yoon told the nation in a television speech late on Tuesday that martial law was needed to defend the country from pro-North Korean anti-state forces, and protect the free constitutional order, although he cited no specific threats.

Chaotic scenes ensued as troops tried to seize control of the parliament building, although they stood back when parliamentary aides sprayed them with fire extinguishers while protesters scuffled with police outside. The military said activities by parliament and political parties would be banned, and that media and publishers would be under the control of the martial law command. But lawmakers defied the security cordon and within hours of the declaration, South Korea's parliament, with 190 of its 300 members present, unanimously passed a motion for martial law be lifted, with 18 members of Yoon's party present. The president then rescinded the declaration of martial law, just about six hours after its proclamation.

Protesters outside the National Assembly shouted and clapped. "We won!" they chanted, and one demonstrator banged on a drum. "There are opinions that it was too much to go to emergency martial law, and that we did not follow the procedures for emergency martial law, but it was done strictly within the constitutional framework," a South Korean presidential official told Reuters by telephone. There has been no reaction yet from North Korea to the drama in the South. Despite the overnight drama, Seoul appeared normal on Wednesday, with the usual morning rush hour traffic in trains and on the streets. However, more protests were expected with South Korea's largest union coalition, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, planning to hold a rally in Seoul and vowing to strike until Yoon resigns. The U.S. embassy urged citizens in South Korea to avoid areas where protests were taking place, while some major employers, including Naver Corp

falling about 1.3% and the won stable but close to a two-year low. Dealers reported suspected intervention by South Korean authorities to stem the won's slide. Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok and Bank of Korea Governor Rhee Chang-yong held emergency meetings overnight and the finance ministry promised to prop up markets if needed.

Item 1 of 13 Protesters hold up signs as people and lawmakers attend a rally to condemn South Korean President's surprise declarations of the martial law last night and to call for his resignation, at the national assembly in Seoul, South Korea, "We will inject unlimited liquidity into stocks, bonds, short-term money market as well as forex market for the time being until they are fully normalised," the government said in a statement. Sales of canned goods, instant noodles and bottled water had soared overnight, said a major South Korean convenience store chain, which sought anonymity. "I'm deeply disturbed by this kind of situation, and I'm very concerned about the future of the country," 39-year-old Seoul resident Kim Byeong-In told The National Assembly can impeach the president if more than two-thirds of lawmakers vote in favour. A trial by the constitutional court follows, which can confirm the motion with a vote by six of the nine justices. If Yoon resigned or was removed from office, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo would fill in as leader until a new election was held within 60 days.

"South Korea as a nation dodged a bullet, but President Yoon may have shot himself in the foot," Danny Russel, vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute think tank in the United States, said of the first martial law declaration in South Korea since 1980. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he welcomed Yoon's decision to rescind the martial law declaration.

"We continue to expect political disagreements to be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law," Blinken said in a statement. South Korea hosts about 28,500 American troops as a legacy of the 1950-1953 Korean War. Planned defence talks and a joint military exercise between the two allies were postponed amid the broader diplomatic fallout from the overnight turmoil. South Korea's political situation is an "internal matter" for the country, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters. Sweden's prime minister postponed a visit to South Korea, a spokesperson said, and Japan's lawmaker group on Korean affairs cancelled a trip to Seoul set for mid-December. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said the alliance was monitoring the current situation in South Korea, but added that its relationship with Seoul "was ironclad". Russia said it was following the "tragic" events in South Korea with concern. Yoon, a career prosecutor, squeezed out a victory in the tightest presidential election in South Korean history in 2022, riding a wave of discontent over economic policy, scandals and gender wars. But he has been unpopular, with his support ratings hovering at around 20% for months. His People Power Party suffered a landslide defeat at a parliamentary election in April this year, failing to wrest control from opposition parties that captured nearly two-thirds of the seats. There have been more than a dozen instances of martial law being declared since South Korea was established as a republic in 1948. In 1980, a group of military officers forced then-President Choi Kyu-hah to proclaim martial law to crush calls for the restoration of democratic government. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here. Reporting by Jack Kim, Ju-min Park, Hyonhee Shin, Hyunsu Yim, Heekyong Yang, Joyce Lee and Josh Smith; Additional reporting by Michelle Nichols at the United Nations, David Brunnstrom in Washington and Trevor Hunicutt in Luanda; Writing by Stephen Coates and Raju Gopalakrishnan; Editing by Lincoln Feast and Clarence Fernandez

## Trump's plan for Ukraine comes into focus: Territorial concessions but NATO off the table

WASHINGTON, GNS News Agency, Feb 13 Advisers to Donald Trump publicly and privately are floating proposals to end the Ukraine war that would cede large parts of the country to Russia for the foreseeable future, according to a Reuters analysis of their statements and interviews with several people close to the U.S. president-elect. The proposals by three key advisers, including Trump's incoming Russia-Ukraine envoy, retired Army Lieutenant-General Keith Kellogg, share some elements, including taking NATO membership for Ukraine off the table. Trump's advisers would try forcing Moscow and Kyiv into negotiations with carrots and sticks, including halting military aid to Kyiv unless it agrees to talk but boosting assistance if Russian President Vladimir Putin refuses. Trump repeatedly pledged during his election campaign to end the nearly three-year-old conflict within 24 hours of his Jan. 20 inauguration, if not before then, but has yet to say how. Analysts and former national security officials voice grave doubts Trump can fulfill such a pledge because of the conflict's complexity. Taken together, however, his advisers' statements suggest the potential contours of a Trump peace plan. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, facing manpower shortages and growing territorial losses, has indicated that he may be open to negotiations. While still intent on NATO membership, he said this week that Ukraine must find diplomatic solutions to regaining some of its occupied territories. But Trump may find Putin unwilling to engage, analysts and former U.S. officials said, as he has the Ukrainians on the back foot and may have more to gain by pursuing further land grabs. "Putin is in no hurry," said Eugene Rumer, a former top U.S. intelligence analyst on Russia now with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think tank. The Russian leader, he said, shows no readiness to drop his conditions for a truce and talks, including Ukraine abandoning its NATO quest and surrendering the four provinces Putin claims as part of Russia but does not fully control, a demand rejected by Kyiv. Putin, Rumer said, likely will bide his time, take more ground and wait to see what, if any, concessions Trump may offer to lure him to the negotiating table. Reuters reported in May that Putin was ready to halt the war with a negotiated ceasefire that recognized current front lines but was ready to fight on if Kyiv and the West did not respond. Russia already controls all of Crimea, having unilaterally seized it from Ukraine in 2014 and has since taken about 80% of the Donbas - which is comprised of Donetsk and Luhansk - as well as more than 70% of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, and small parts of the Mykolaiv and Kharkiv regions. As of last week, Trump had yet to convene a central working group to flesh out a peace plan, according to four advisers who requested anonymity to describe private deliberations. Rather, several advisers have pitched ideas among themselves in public forums and - in some cases - to Trump, they said. Ultimately, a peace agreement will likely depend on direct personal engagement between Trump, Putin and Zelenskiy, the advisers said. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was "not possible to comment on individual statements without having an idea of the plan as a



whole." Trump spokesperson Karoline Leavitt noted that Trump has said he "will do what is necessary to restore peace and rebuild American strength and deterrence on the world stage." A Trump representative did not immediately respond to a follow-up question about whether the president-elect still plans to resolve the conflict within a day of taking office. The Ukrainian government did not immediately respond to a request for comment. One former Trump national security official involved in the transition said there are three main proposals: the outline by Kellogg, one from Vice President-elect JD Vance and another advanced by Richard Grenell, Trump's former acting intelligence chief. Kellogg's plan, co-authored with former National Security Council official Fred Fleitz and presented to Trump earlier this year, calls for freezing the current battle lines. Trump would supply more U.S. weapons to Kyiv only if it agreed to peace talks. At the same time, he would warn Moscow that he would increase U.S. aid to Ukraine if Russia rejected negotiations. NATO membership for Ukraine would be put on hold. Ukraine also would be offered U.S. security guarantees, which could include boosting weapons supplies after an accord is struck, according to that proposal. In a June interview with Times Radio, a British digital station, Sebastian Gorka, one of Trump's incoming deputy national security advisers, said Trump had told him he would force Putin into talks by threatening unprecedented weapons shipments to Ukraine if Putin refused. Gorka, reached by phone, called Reuters "fake news garbage" and declined to elaborate. Vance, who as a U.S. senator has opposed aid to Ukraine, floated a separate idea in September. He told U.S. podcaster Shawn Ryan that a deal likely would include a demilitarized zone at the existing front lines that would be "heavily fortified" to prevent further Russian incursions. His proposal would deny NATO membership to Kyiv. Representatives for Vance did not make him available for comment, and he has yet to offer additional details. Grenell, Trump's former ambassador to Germany, advocated the creation of "autonomous zones" in eastern Ukraine during a Bloomberg roundtable in July but did not elaborate. He also suggested NATO membership for Ukraine was not in America's interest.

## World Food Program's troubles in Sudan hurt hunger relief, alienated donors - internal report



NAIROBI, GNS News Agency, Feb 13 Serious problems in the United Nations World Food Program's response to the Sudan crisis are hampering the organization's ability to alleviate hunger in the war-torn country and damaging its reputation with donors, according to a recent internal report seen. The U.N.'s main food-aid distributor, the WFP is struggling to feed millions of people in the African country, which is suffering one of the world's worst hunger crises. The report identifies a range of problems in the WFP's Sudan response, including an inability to scale up its operations, missed funding opportunities and what it describes as "anti-fraud challenges."

The report is the result of an assessment in July and August by the WFP's Regional Emergency Coordination (REC) team, which was tasked with helping to expand the U.N. body's operations in Sudan and neighboring countries. The team's findings are detailed in a five-page "REC Diagnostic Report," marked confidential and dated August 30. The report calls Sudan the WFP's largest emergency. News of the report comes as the WFP is struggling to secure billions of dollars for hunger hot spots around the world and is battling a crisis of confidence among the United States and other top donors. In Sudan, roughly half the population of 50 million is estimated to be suffering from severe hunger amid the civil war that has ravaged the country since April 2023. Hundreds are believed to be dying from starvation and hunger-related disease each day. "WFP's reputation for rapid emergency response has been damaged," the report says of its Sudan operation. "Key stakeholders, including key donors, are now demanding concrete progress before committing additional funding." Asked about the report, WFP Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau didn't address its specifics but told Reuters that the WFP and other humanitarian agencies weren't prepared for the sudden crisis in Sudan. "It took us too long to actually get back on our feet and deliver in an effective and efficient and principled way," Skau said in an interview in Cairo on Monday. "I'm confident the WFP is there now and that we are doing everything possible."

## Ukraine gives absconding soldiers second chance as forces dwindle

KYIV, GNS News Agency, Feb 13 As Ukraine's military struggles to find enough troops, particularly infantry, to hold off Russia's much larger army, some units are giving a second chance to those who have absconded from service. Data from the prosecutor's office shows nearly 95,000 criminal cases have been opened since 2022 against soldiers going "absent without leave" (AWOL) and for the more serious crime of battlefield desertion. The number of cases has risen steeply with each year of the war: almost two-thirds of the total are from 2024. With many tens of thousands of troops killed or wounded, it is a depletion that Ukraine can ill afford. A bar graph showing a more than six-fold increase in unauthorised absences and desertions by Ukrainian soldiers since 2022

Now, some units are replenishing their ranks by accepting soldiers previously declared AWOL. One of them is Ukraine's elite 47th Brigade, which published a social media post last month inviting soldiers who had absconded to join. "Our aim is to give every soldier the opportunity to come back into the fold and realise his potential," the post announced. In the first two days, the brigade said, over a hundred applications came in. "There was a tsunami of applications; so many that we still aren't able to process them all before new ones come in," Viacheslav Smirnov, the 47th's head of recruitment, said two weeks after the announcement. Two military units Reuters spoke to said they were only recruiting soldiers who had gone AWOL from their bases, rather than those who had deserted from combat. The former is seen within the Ukrainian military as a lesser offence. A bill recently signed into law has in effect decriminalised a soldier's first disappearance, allowing them to return to service.

THOUSANDS OF UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS REJOIN AFTER ABSCONDING Colonel Oleksandr Hrynychuk, deputy head of Ukraine's military police, told reporters on Tuesday that 6,000 AWOL soldiers had returned to service in the last month, including 3,000 in the 72 hours since the law was signed. Mykhailo Perets, an officer from the K-2 battalion of Ukraine's 54th Brigade, said his battalion had already hired over 30 men who had gone AWOL from other units. "The reasons [for absconding] are very different: for

Skau said that over the past few months, the WFP has put in place the strongest leadership available for its Sudan response, bolstered teams in area offices and reviewed its strategy to reach people in need. The WFP has some 700 trucks on the roads in Sudan, he added. The WFP also said it had reached over 2 million people in the country with cash-based assistance this year. "We always want our colleagues to provide honest assessments," Skau said. "And the spirit is always that we then address that." A WFP spokesperson didn't respond to detailed questions about the report's findings. The WFP's internal report also criticizes overly optimistic targets for distributing aid. The Sudan office's initial target of reaching 8.4 million people in need was "deemed unrealistic and posed a reputational risk to the organization," the report says. "Current projections suggest that WFP may only be able to fulfill around 50 percent of its current implementation plan by October 2024," the report concludes. The report says that an analysis of agreements between the WFP and its food-distribution partners found "excessively high operational costs irrespective of the quantities distributed." High costs and "unrealistic planning" resulted in payments to non-government organizations that "achieved less than 5 per cent" of their distribution targets, the report says. In August, Reuters revealed that the WFP is investigating two of its top officials in Sudan over allegations including fraud and concealing information from donors about its ability to deliver aid. The emergency coordination team's report on Sudan has been shared with the WFP's inspector general's office, which is conducting the probe, because it covers problems related to the fraud investigation, according to people familiar with the matter. The team's report has not been shared with donors, the people said. The WFP had no comment on the Sudan fraud investigation's status. It previously told Reuters that it's investigating "allegations of individual misconduct related to irregularities in pockets of our operation in Sudan" but declined to describe the suspected wrongdoing. Among the issues identified by the emergency coordination team in its report were delays in reporting and addressing what it termed "Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption" incidents. In August, there were nearly 200 cases either overdue or still pending, "posing reputational and operational risks," according to the report. It doesn't elaborate on the cases. The team's report is accompanied by a two-page "Action Plan," dated September 23. The measures outlined include revising aid targets, rebuilding relations with donors and the World Bank, and establishing a task force to clear the backlog of fraud and corruption probes. The WFP describes itself as the world's largest humanitarian organization. It won the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize for its role in combating hunger and promoting peace. In recent years, however, large quantities of its food aid have been diverted or stolen in some countries, including Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen. In October, Reuters detailed how the WFP was aware food aid was being stolen in Ethiopia for several years and repeatedly failed to act. The WFP later pinned much of the blame on needy aid recipients.



some people it was too tough a transition straight from civilian life, others served for a year or two as qualified [drone] pilots but were then sent to the front line because there wasn't enough infantry." Perets said those who had applied also included men who had become exhausted and run away after being at war for seven or eight years, having fought Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine before 2022. Gil Bardollar, a non-resident fellow at the U.S.-based Defense Priorities think tank, said the increase in unauthorised absences was most likely driven by exhaustion. Ukrainian service personnel have previously said how the lack of replacements for lost soldiers puts an unbearable strain on those remaining, exhausting them physically and mentally. Bardollar also highlighted their average age as an additional strain. "An army of men, often in poor health, in their 40s, all else being equal, is going to get exhausted sooner and is going to have morale problems faster than a reasonably fit army of 20- or 25-year-olds." Zelenskiy has responded to questions about the manpower problem by arguing that Ukraine lacks weapons rather than people, and pushed back against U.S. pressure to lower the minimum draft age to 18 from 25. He said in an interview with Sky News last week that Kyiv's allies had been able to provide the necessary equipment for only a quarter of the 10 new brigades Ukraine had formed over the past year.

## Daily life in Seoul ticks on, but in shock, after six hour martial law drama

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

SEOUL, South Koreans went to offices, businesses and schools as usual on Wednesday with scarcely any visible signs in the capital Seoul that six hours of surprise martial law and high political drama overnight had spilled into everyday life. The city of 9 million started the day normally with the usual morning rush hour in trains and on the streets after President Yoon Suk Yeol lifted his abortive attempt at banning political activities and censoring news media just before dawn. But many were in shock at such a sudden turn of events, which pushed stocks down and South Korea's currency to multi-year lows during a time of already faltering economic growth. There have been more than a dozen instances of martial law being declared in South Korea since it became a republic in 1948, but the last time was more than four decades ago when Gen. Chun Doo-hwan staged a coup and ruled from 1980 to 1988. Seoul resident Gang He-Soo, 50, said she woke from sleep by chance and saw the news.

"At first, I was scared and very confused. I kept thinking, 'What is going on?' Is this something that could actually

happen in this era? I couldn't sleep until the martial law was lifted because I was so frightened," Gang said, walking in Seoul's main commercial and tourist district Gwanghwamun. Yoon declared martial law in a live TV address at around 10:30 pm (1330 GMT) on Tuesday, only to reverse course after parliament defied police and special forces cordons around the National Assembly to vote, forcing him to lift the declaration.

The president's office said the declaration of martial law was done at night to "minimize damage to the national economy and people's lives". South Korean soldiers, equipped with rifles, body armour and night-vision equipment, were seen entering the parliament building in Seoul through smashed windows.

It was an experience that I've only seen in movies, and I realised how much more serious it is than I had imagined," said 39-year-old Seoul resident Kim Byeong-In, who said he was concerned about the impact on the economy. "I'm deeply disturbed by this kind of situation, and I'm very concerned about the future of the country."



## Rate cut would help revive economy without worsening inflation, says MPC member Nagesh Kumar



GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Nagesh Kumar, one of the three new external members of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), said that the slowdown in GDP growth during Q2FY2025 was transient and the economy is likely to pick-up in the second half of the current fiscal. Kumar, who voted for a 25 basis points (bps) cut in the repo rate in the last two consecutive monetary policies, told Hitesh Vyas and George Mathew that a rate cut would revive economic growth without worsening the inflationary situation. If the RBI does not follow the process of normalisation when most other central banks have moved forward, it runs the risk of currency appreciation, said Kumar, who is Director and Chief Executive of the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID). Excerpts:

Given that the growth has been sluggish, do you believe a 50 bps reduction in the repo rate at this point in time would be a more effective step to stimulate the economy? Do you think RBI is behind the curve in cutting rates and boosting growth? To some extent the sharp growth slowdown in Q2 was transient. We should expect an improvement in growth in the coming two quarters. The government capex, which saw a squeeze in the first quarter, has begun to revive in the second quarter and should gain momentum in the third and fourth quarters. The government capex should, therefore, help to lift the growth rate in the second half of the year. Yet, there is a slowdown from the earlier projections of growth around 7 per cent or higher to around 6.5 per cent. I believe that it needed a policy response because it largely reflected the slow-down of the manufacturing sector. The agriculture growth rate actually improved from 2 per cent in Q1 to 3.5 per cent in Q2 and the services sector was still posting a robust growth rate of 7 per cent (even though slight moderation from 7.7 per cent). The deceleration of manufacturing growth from 7 per cent to just 2.2 per cent was rather sharp. A reduction of the cost of capital through a reduced repo rate could help to revive the growth of private investment besides consumer demand. Keeping in mind the deceleration of the manufacturing sector, I made a case for a 25-basis point cut in the repo rate to start the cycle of normalizing the monetary policy. In addition I made a case for a 50-basis point cut in CRR, to help enhance liquidity. Expanding the manufacturing sector could also help in containing inflationary pressures by enhancing the supply capacity. You said monetary policy has limitations in addressing inflation largely driven by a supply-side

shock. What measures can address supply-side shocks?

The inflation hitting a high rate of 6.2 per cent is also a challenge. However, the bulk of the inflation is accounted for by the food, especially those of vegetables, namely tomatoes, onions, and potatoes (TOP). Excluding food, the CPI headline comes down to just 3.1 per cent in October 2024. Keeping in mind the easing of vegetables and edible oil in November, food inflation should be easing further in the coming months. I have argued in my statement that while looking at the policy options for reviving growth and containing inflation, one should factor in their determinants. This is because monetary policy instruments such as interest rate changes have more to do with demand management and have limitations in addressing the rising vegetable prices, which are primarily due to a supply-side shock, namely seasonal demand-supply mismanagement, which was beginning to correct itself in November. However, the inflation-targeting framework of MPC is currently focused on addressing the headline inflation based on CPI, which includes food as well as non-food items. Therefore, I believe that a rate cut would help in reviving economic growth without worsening the inflationary situation, which may soften with seasonal correction in prices.

Rupee has breached 85 level. How big a concern is a depreciating currency?

The Indian rupee is depreciating vis-à-vis the US Dollar, which is strengthening against different currencies in nominal terms. In real terms, the rupee is actually appreciating, as a recent RBI paper has shown.

If the US Fed slows down rate cuts, will it impact emerging economies like India?

We are living through highly uncertain times with upcoming changes in the economic and trade policy in the US with the change of administration in January, the ongoing geopolitical conflicts, which have a bearing on the oil prices, exchange rates, etc. The MPC will factor in the trends of the past months and projections for the future when it meets next to arrive at its decisions. We look at the trends in monetary policy over the past two months. The impact of the transition in the US government is a guess as of now. One has to wait and see how the new government will act. The MPC meeting in February will take stock of how the inflation-growth balance was shaping up between now and then against the backdrop of global trends. Most central banks around the world, barring a few, have embarked on a cycle of normalizing the monetary policy in recent months. The US Fed has cut the policy rate by 100 basis points in three rounds. While we do not have to follow what other central banks do. But if we do not follow the process of normalisation when most others have moved forward, we run the risk of currency appreciation. India needs to guard against the risks of currency appreciation in real terms as it would hurt the competitiveness of Indian products.

There is a debate on the exclusion of food from the inflation-targeting framework? Can you please share your views on this?

There is indeed a debate on whether food should be excluded. It was raised in the Economic Survey 2024, besides several economists expressing their opinions.

## Food spending rises in rural areas, gap with urban centres shrinks

REVERSING A DECLINING trend from over a decade, the share of food in monthly expenditure of households in rural as well as urban areas went up in 2023-24, according to the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 fact sheet released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Friday. This probably reflects the impact of higher food prices; given that the figures are in nominal terms, the share of food in the consumption basket of rural households went up to 47.04 per cent in 2023-24 from 46.38 per cent in 2022-23, while that for urban households inched higher to 39.68 per cent in 2023-24 from 39.17 per cent in the previous year.

The HCES data also showed that the difference in average monthly consumption expenditure between rural and urban households narrowed further to 69.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 71.2 per cent in 2022-23, and 83.9 per cent 11 years ago in 2011-12, which implies that rural consumption spending continued to rise more than urban consumption spending over the last one year. "The urban-rural gap in MPCE has declined to 71 per cent in 2022-23 from 84 per cent in 2011-12. It has further come down to 70 per cent in 2023-24 that confirms sustained momentum of consumption growth in rural areas," the Ministry said in a statement. Rural average monthly consumption spending per person increased to Rs 4,122 in 2023-24, an increase of 9.3 per cent from Rs 3,773 in 2022-23. It had stood at Rs 1,430 in 2011-12. This increase in rural spending over the one-year period was higher than the urban average monthly consumption expenditure per person at Rs 6,996 which increased from Rs 6,459 in 2022-23. The urban average monthly consumption expenditure per person had stood at Rs 2,630 per person in 2011-12. This seems to suggest that the pace of spending is more in rural India compared with the urban population, which seems to be cutting down on its consumption. A closer look at the fractile data reveals that the top 5 per cent of the rural and urban population saw a decrease in consumption spending in 2023-24, even as all other segments of the population, including the bottom 5 per cent, registered an increase in spending.

Experts pointed out that this is in contrast to evidence from other datasets that show a rise in spending by top segment, especially on premium goods. "Every fractile class has shown an increase in consumption except the top fractiles which is opposite to the trend being seen in other datasets," an economist, who did not wish to be named, said. Former Chief Statistician of India Pronab Sen said the deviant trend in the top fractiles may be a result of the change in methodology. "The household consumption surveys were earlier done once every five years but after the change in methodology, the back-to-back surveys were conducted to see if the revised methodology is stable. The change in methodology needs to be validated, otherwise it may show results which are not explainable," he said.

"It's also possible that while conducting the survey, the respondent is not the same during subsequent visits and it is no longer the same category of the people from whom you were getting responses," he told The Indian Express. The monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of the top 5 per cent of the rural and urban population stood at Rs 10,137 and Rs 20,310, respectively, in 2023-24 lower than Rs 10,501 and Rs 20,824 in 2022-23. The MPCE of bottom 5 per cent for rural and urban population increased to Rs 1,677 and Rs 2,376, respectively, in 2023-24 from Rs 1,373 and Rs 2,001 in 2022-23. In fact, the increase in average monthly per person spending in percentage terms was the highest in 2023-24 for bottom 20 per cent in rural and urban areas at Rs 6,276 (19.2 per cent increase from 2022-23)



and Rs 9,156 (18 per cent increase), respectively. Top 20 per cent saw an increase in monthly spending of just 1.5 per cent to Rs 22,829 for rural areas and 1.1 per cent rise to Rs 43,266 for urban areas. Including the imputed values of items received free of cost through various social welfare programmes, the average monthly consumption expenditure per person was Rs 4,247 and Rs 7,078, respectively, for rural and urban areas as against Rs 3,860 and Rs 6,521 in 2022-23. The fact sheet did not give fractile data for imputed consumption as was released in the earlier round. Officials said details will be given in the full report that is slated to be released early next year. A closer look at the data reveals that the top 5 per cent of the rural and urban population saw a decrease in consumption spending in 2023-24, even as all other segments of the population, including the bottom 5 per cent, registered an increase in spending. The Survey report, however, pointed out that consumption inequality, both in rural and urban areas, has declined compared with 2022-23.

The Gini coefficient declined to 0.237 in 2023-24 from 0.266 in 2022-23 for rural areas and to 0.284 in 2023-24 from 0.314 in 2022-23 for urban areas. Among food items, the share of cereals went up to 4.99 per cent in 2023-24 from 4.91 per cent in 2022-23 for rural households, while that for urban households went up to 3.76 per cent from 3.64 per cent. The share of egg fish and meat in total MPCE inched higher to 4.92 per cent and 3.56 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively, in 2023-24 from 4.91 per cent and 3.57 per cent. Beverages, refreshments and processed food continued to have the highest share of expenditure in 2023-24 at 9.84 per cent and 11.09 per cent in the consumption basket of rural and urban households, respectively, compared with 9.62 per cent and 10.64 per cent in 2022-23.

The share of expenditure on non-food items stood at 52.96 per cent and 60.32 per cent in rural and urban households, respectively, in 2023-24 as against 53.62 per cent and 60.83 per cent in 2022-23. Consumption expenditure on non-food items in rural India was driven by conveyance, medical expenses, clothing, bedding and footwear. In urban India, the spending on non-food items was mainly on account of conveyance, miscellaneous goods and entertainment, durable goods and rent.

State-wise data also showed a divergent trend between consumption patterns of high spending by western and northern states and lower spending by eastern and central states of India. For instance, the average spending per person was lower than the national average in rural and urban areas of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh in 2023-24. States of Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana, Gujarat, Andhra

## Boney Kapoor admits to feeling 'attracted to females' but says his 'passion and love' for Sridevi will remain eternal; understanding the difference



Boney Kapoor recently opened up about his enduring love for his late wife, Sridevi, stating that while he may feel attraction to others, his love and passion for her will never fade. In an interview with ABP Live, he said, "We were inseparable. I was in love with her, I am in love with her, and I will be in love with her till my dying day... When the most sought-after beauty, when the most sought-after personality becomes convinced to spend the rest of her life with you, what greater joy could there be? I never cheated on her, I never had to look here or there. She was my everything."

Kapoor continued, "Even today, I may have (female) friends, I may get attracted to females around me, but as far as she's concerned, the passion and love will never go away." The producer discussed how relationships naturally evolve with time, noting that couples tend to let down the barriers they may have initially maintained as the years pass in their marriage. He said, "Opposites attract. But temperamentally opposite people get closer day by day." His words reflect a sentiment shared by many who have experienced the loss of a partner: the distinction between fleeting attractions and lasting love. Kapoor's reflections raise important questions about how relationships evolve after the death of a spouse, particularly when feelings of attraction or desire for others emerge over time. Differentiating between new feelings of attraction and lingering emotional attachment after the loss of a spouse

Sonal Khangarot, licensed rehabilitation counsellor and

psychotherapist, The Answer Room, says, "Losing a partner can feel like navigating an emotional minefield. As life gradually normalises, new feelings of attraction may emerge, even as the emotional attachment to the deceased partner remains a powerful undercurrent. Attraction is a natural human response — similar to appreciating a beautiful painting or feeling warmth from a kind gesture. Emotional attachment, however, is rooted in years of shared experiences, trust, and deep intimacy. The key difference? Attraction is about curiosity, while attachment is about connection. And it's perfectly okay to feel both. The brain doesn't have a switch to turn off love just because grief has arrived." Psychologist Sonal Khangarot explains, "Is it possible to love a late partner while forming new emotional bonds? Absolutely." Psychologist Sonal Khangarot explains, "Is it possible to love a late partner while forming new emotional bonds? Absolutely." (Source: Freepik)

Psychological factors that influence how these emotions evolve over time. Feeling attraction to others while cherishing the memory of a late spouse can often feel like a betrayal — like cheating on someone who is no longer here, notes Khangarot. But the truth is, it's not. Grief doesn't take away our humanity or our capacity to form connections. "Psychologically, this duality is shaped by a mix of guilt, longing, and the natural progression of healing. Attraction can provide a sense of normalcy, while the enduring love for a late partner remains a steadfast and unshakable anchor," states the psychologist. Maintaining a deep connection to their late partner while still allowing room for new relationships or attractions, Khangarot explains, "Is it possible to love a late partner while forming new emotional bonds? Absolutely. Loving someone who has passed is about honouring their memory and cherishing the role they played in your life. Moving forward doesn't mean moving on; it means creating space for both remembrance and new connections." Healthy individuals find ways to integrate the memory of their late partner into their lives while leaving room for fresh relationships. It's about redefining love, not replacing it. The heart, as it turns out, is remarkably capable of multitasking.

## Why mental health education should be prioritised in schools, colleges



The competitive and fast-paced landscape of modern academia has taken a toll on students. As a result, their mental health concerns have emerged that require immediate and sustained attention. A 2023 report by the World Health Organization suggests that more than one in three students experience symptoms of anxiety and depression. This reflects the widespread impact of stress in academia. In the Indian context, student suicides have increased over the past decade. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data indicates that there has been a 50 per cent increase in male student suicides and a 61 per cent increase in female student suicides, as per a 2024 report. These trends underline the need for providing mental health as part of the educational experience. Mental well-being and training could not only prove beneficial to academic success but also improve emotional resilience, boost creativity, and impact life-long satisfaction.

Experts describe experiences in a mental health edu-

cation program as a student that could help them learn crucial skills for development. Dr. Arvind Otta, Senior Psychologist & Mental Health Activist explains, that mental health education "is key since all students face emotions and challenges during their time in school which they must learn to manage and understand. It builds resilience, counters stigma, and promotes prevention through early intervention which can help reverse potential challenges as far as mental health is concerned." These experiences allow a student to thrive educationally, socially, and emotionally. In an education system that encourages students to outperform their peers, it becomes crucial to develop pressure management aptitudes. "Mental health education can avail such skills such as attention to detail, self-control, and other skills which can promote assertive communication to avoid peer conflicts. This approach can also help seeking professionals' help at the right moment," describes Dr. Otta. The digital era and access to technology have democratized access to mental health education. This technology could prove to be the means used to bridge the gap in access to mental health services. It can be harnessed to de-stigmatize and normalize conversations around mental health concerns. Dr. Otta explains that "Mental health education can refute very simplistic views of mental health such as 'mental health issues are signs of weakness' or 'therapy is only for severe problems.'" It supports the argument that mental health care is essential and that help should be sought when needed. "It is imperative that schools and colleges prioritize students' mental health. By fostering open communication, trained educators, and accessible resources, educational institutes must create supportive environments for their students.

## Do all pets need a rabies vaccine? We ask the experts

Rabies is a fatal viral disease that affects the central nervous system of mammals, including humans and is spread primarily through bites or scratches from infected animals. Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent its transmission and is a critical public health measure. However, is it important for all pets to get a rabies shot? Indianexpress.com spoke to experts and found out. J.S Rama Krishna, Business Head at Carniwell, points out that irrespective of whether it is a community animal or a pet, it is our responsibility to vaccinate dogs and cats against rabies. This ensures that there are no health impacts due to rabies, and aggressive behavioural changes that could lead to biting are curtailed. Dogs, cats, and ferrets are the primary pets that require rabies vaccination. "These animals are considered high-risk because they frequently interact with other animals, and then humans. This makes not only the animal susceptible to contracting rabies but also the humans they interact with. In many parts of the world, dogs are the main transmitters of rabies to humans, making vaccination a legal requirement in most regions," he explained. Dr. Ishan, Petcare Pro Clinic,



However, it's essential to note that while these animals do not require rabies vaccination, they may still require other vaccinations and health checks.

Pune said that all dogs, cats, and ferrets, regardless of their lifestyle or environment, should receive the rabies vaccine. "Rabies is a fatal viral disease that affects the nervous system of mammals, including humans. It is primarily spread through the bite of an infected animal and vaccination is the most effective way to prevent rabies in pets and protect human health." However, it's essential to note that while these

animals do not require rabies vaccination, they may still require other vaccinations and health checks. Dr. Ishan said that the frequency of rabies vaccination depends on several factors, including:— Age: Puppies and kittens typically receive their first rabies vaccination at 12-16 weeks of age.— Location: Pets living in areas with high rabies incidence may require more frequent vaccination.— Lifestyle: Indoor pets may require less frequent vaccination than outdoor pets. Typical rabies vaccination schedules include:— Initial vaccination: 1-2 doses, 3-4 weeks apart, at 12-16 weeks of age.— Booster shots: Every 1-3 years, depending on the vaccine type and local regulations. Consult with your veterinarian to determine the best rabies vaccination schedule for your pet.



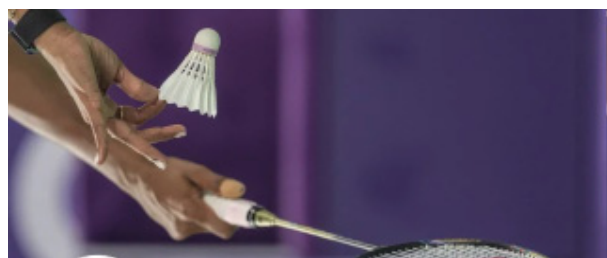
## Badminton's needless itch to tinker with scoring system

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Badminton's latest bee in the bonnet, is a scoring system that needs no tinkering. But it is almost expected that those who govern the sport will get the score-changing itch every few months, and the experimentation will get carried out in a bewildered tournament, with no perceivable change to either footfall or TV broadcast enthusiasm. There's a litany of problems confronting the sport, not racquet's most popular – that's tennis by a mile. But the 21 points over 3 sets, was one of the least bothersome things in that headache-inducing mix of troubles.

Higher prize money, better scheduling with rest days, expansion beyond Asia and Denmark, protecting players from internet trolls, better broadcast packaging all need actionable responses. The 21x3 was coasting along just fine. At best, older shuttlers might reckon they can prolong their careers if matches snap shut quicker. But at worst, the game becomes a lottery – a drawn out penalty shootout, with no real build-up, or core, or a smooth flow and anticipation of a crescendo that the 21x3 offered. It's perhaps a difference between 50 minutes and 80 minutes – not significant enough to drastically aid recovery, nor ensure better quality due to concentration of intensity.

All that 15x3 does is shorten the game for the sake of shortening. And with all due respect, if a TV watcher has someplace else to be for the additional 20-30 minutes, then give viewing it a Skip for the day, and be some place else happily. Why tinker and trample upon the drama of a sport, where a lilt of the early points can culminate into a zenith in just a few minutes. It is unclear if top active players desired this format because the cumulative exhaustion of the Tour calendar would have them pleading off any extra time that could be sheared. Or if the governing brains got this brainwave to make every point, start to finish, very very important. Trained shuttlers will adjust to anything assigned to them. But the 15x3 can kill the drama of a big lead conceded nearing the endgame, and a cool cat plotting a comeback and relishing the opponent's nerves when they are finishing. Could it happen between Point 10 & 15? Sure. But the BWF seriously undermines the skill and temperament of shuttlers, by turning it into an anyone-can-win-randomly format. Tennis' decision in doubles for a third-set tiebreak,



was abject, and based solely on the disdain the sport had for doubles practitioners, with the monopolising attention devoted to The Big Four and their beautiful, but attention-hogging men's singles battles. So, just like that, one day, the doubles was reduced to very unserious. Not too long after, with the star-Slam universe becoming the be-all, Davis Cup was unthinkingly truncated.

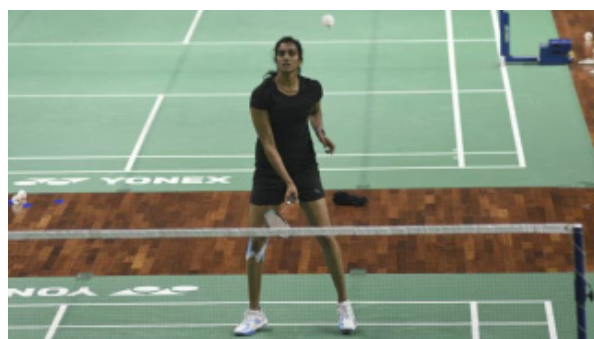
TT, cricket, hockey have all suffered this mad urge to make it shorter, because people allegedly have no time. There's the mobile phone and OTT and politics blow-horning and a million other things, including negotiating traffic and working long hours to cram into the 24 hours. But can and should sport scrunch its essence for the sake of those in a perennial rush? India might be the only country at the intersection of cricket and badminton popularity. The country's billions have no qualms about watching 5-day Test matches, and deriving serious distractions and delights from watching that sport. Even amongst badminton followers, Sindhu's Glasgow World Championship silver playing Nozomi Okuhara in a match of unbelievable excitement for 110 minutes, might rank as most memorable. Sport is unscripted drama. And largely honest and among the only things left that's not playing out like Reality TV or realistic blood and gore portrayals. The tribalism is toxic, but mostly till the last minute, both sets of fans stay invested in hope, and the possibility of their favourite winning. Those that are busy, don't watch, and needn't be catered to. But ruining a consistent scoring system and fiddling too much with the ebb and flow of the game, only loses any sport supporters. Football has mercifully eschewed all attempts to scrunch 90 minutes, tennis stays 5 sets and Isner-Mahut grab themselves a nice slice of history.

## PV Sindhu pulls out of Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships due to hamstring issue

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

PV Sindhu announced on Sunday that she had to withdraw from India's squad for the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China, from February 11-16. Sindhu said she picked up a hamstring niggle during a team training camp at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati from, that will take longer to heal than she hoped for. "It is with a heavy heart that I share I won't be traveling with the team for BAMTC 2025," Sindhu said in a social media post on Sunday morning. "While training on the 4th in Guwahati, I felt a twinge in my hamstring. Despite my efforts to push through with heavy taping for our country, an MRI has revealed that my recovery will take slightly longer than I initially expected. Wishing the team all the very best. I will be cheering from the sidelines." India had won a bronze medal at the last edition of BAMTC, where Sindhu was also part of a strong squad. She was once again expected to lead the charge in women's singles this time around. But earlier this year before India Open, Sindhu had said that one of her primary goals this year is to stay injury free. "After the Olympics, people ask what's next or if I'm playing in the next Olympics. It's important to stay injury-free, that's my primary goal. We'll be picking and choosing tournaments carefully," Sindhu had said in Delhi.

It is with a heavy heart that I share I won't be traveling with the team for BAMTC 2025. While training on the 4th in Guwahati, I felt a twinge in my hamstring. Despite my efforts to push through with heavy taping for our country, an MRI has revealed that my... Sindhu – a two-time Olymp-



pic medallist, a world championship gold medallist and so much more – had also said she still had the fire to aim for the big medals. "I feel there's a lot more to achieve. I have that fire in me. It's just a matter of time and rhythm. Another medal at the World Championships is something I definitely want, along with the All England Championships. We have big tournaments like the World Tour Finals."

In Sindhu's absence, the women's singles responsibility is likely to be shouldered by Malvika Bansod, India's No 2 currently in world rankings. It is not clear yet if there will be a replacement named for Sindhu. India have been drawn into Group D of BAMTC alongside 2023 runners-up South Korea, with Macau as the third team. The team will kick off their campaign against Macau on February 12, followed by a crucial clash against South Korea on February 13 at the Conson Gymnasium in Qingdao, China.

## Why Jadeja and Axar are better ODI options than Varun Chakaravarty

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel possess cricket skills that get labelled similarly. But that's like confusing tomato sauce for ketchup. Or a crow for a raven. It needs an expert eye and nose for nuance to appreciate the difference between the all-format multi-skilled cricketers. They have the same font but Jadeja is italicized. To bracket them as a fastish spinner is to dovetail Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Shami as identical 140 plus quicks. The taller Axar banks on bounce and drift. Jadeja, easily the better-skilled tweaker, also has the drift but possesses a bigger break, deadlier skidder and a more surprising armer.

Of the two, the older and far more experienced Jadeja is the more classical red-ball run-getter. As for Axar, captains these days play him as a white-ball pinch-hitter, a role that fits his style perfectly. This doesn't mean Jadeja, the present day trusted rear-guard, isn't equipped to jump up the order for any urgent kamikaze operation. They seem like peas from the same pod but they aren't. Both are incredible catchers, swift and measured movers around the field but the power and accuracy of his throws gives Jadeja the fielder, the edge. However, they have a few common under-publicised, less-appreciated traits that do justify that 'spin-twins' label. They are Indian cricket's indefatigable survivors, their careers a study in the sort of perseverance that cannot be taught. Over the years whenever there has been a question mark over their place in the Indian side, they have bounced back to underline their relevance.

Case in point is the ongoing England series. Days before the first ODI at Nagpur, the selectors drafted in Varun Chakaravarty, the 'variety shop of spin-bowling'. The new-age 'six-variations per over' wicket-taker had enjoyed great success against English batsmen in the T20 series and so the selectors and the team management wanted him around for the ODIs. After India's Champions Trophy squad was announced there was some chatter about India lacking middle-overs wicket-takers – the 50 overs game-changers. Those in the know also say that at the selection committee meeting, there were voices that had backed Chakaravarty and didn't whole-heartedly support the inclusion of two left-armers in the squad. Very early in the Nagpur game, Jadeja would remind the world of his indispensability in any format of the game. It is one thing to get wickets in a T20 game when batsmen are always ready to throw caution to the wind, or even a mild breeze, and another to get Joe Root in a 50 overs game after he has been at the crease



for 40 minutes. That too when the master batsman was setting the mid-overs base for an all-out assault later.

Jadeja would showcase his practised art of getting wickets when the batsman isn't attacking. It was an armer that drove into the right-hander Root like a trunk. It hit the pads in front of the stumps. This wasn't the case of a basher mistiming a slog but one of the game's top batsmen being beaten while on the back foot. To pull that off, one needs someone with Jadeja's body of work. Axar would get Jos Butler in the 36th over – another crucial middle-over strike. There aren't many in Indian cricket like Axar. Who except Jadeja can do an Axar – first come up with a spell of 7-0-38-1 and later turn up at No.5 to score a 52 from 47 balls after a mini-collapse. Axar Patel India's Axar Patel makes an unsuccessful appeal during the first One Day International (ODI) cricket match between India and England at Vidarbha Cricket Association (VCA) Stadium, in Nagpur, Maharashtra. It's their Test match expertise that makes Axar and Jadeja the ideal middle-order batsmen in 50-overs cricket too. In the recent tour of Australia, Jadeja stood out with his batsmanship in a line-up that repeatedly succumbed to pace. Go back to the tapes, see how Jadeja, with his piercing eyes, would get into the line and at the last minute move his bat like a well-oiled sliding door giving the ball a clear passage to the 'keeper. It was the tour when even the best in business spent over a month in search of their off-stump. With a highest of 77 his average was better than most frontline batsmen. Before that when Australia had toured India, it was Axar who played a few series-changing knocks. It was the same in the T20 World Cup that India won last year. Axar getting wickets, scoring runs and holding on to blinders. Despite their numbers and deep understanding of every aspect of the game, Axar and Jadeja don't shout about their achievements from rooftops nor are they angry about being unsung.

## After India, New Zealand one of strongest teams in Champions Trophy: Ravichandran Ashwin

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Ravichandran Ashwin has picked India and New Zealand as the two strongest teams in the upcoming Champions Trophy, adding that even though Australia may be missing some of their key personnel, the 2023 ODI World Cup winners are a team which shouldn't be taken lightly. "After India, New Zealand is one of the strongest teams in the Champions Trophy. Since the likes of Southee and Boult are not playing, there is a question mark about their bowling attack. Who will accompany Matt Henry? Will it be Will O'Rourke, who has the potential to be a runaway champion of next generation. Will it be Ben Sears? "They have an experienced spin attack with Michael Bracewell and Glenn Phillips. Mitchell Santner is the captain, how is he planning to marshal his resources. New Zealand is definitely a strong team. They are one of the challengers to India," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

Talking about Australia, the spinner said, "Steven Smith as captain is a marriage made in heaven. Smith is going to captain the team in the Champions Trophy. Will Smith, Head, Maxwell and Labuschagne pull through the team to the semis. I always believe that Australia is a champion team that always brings its A-game in marquee tournaments. Considering Australia have a few issues in their bowling department, a lot will depend on Smith's form and captaincy." He also said that India's matches in Dubai will



feel like home games for the Men in Blue due to their familiarity with the conditions and support. "India has the home advantage in Dubai, and it almost like every other team is playing an away match against India. This is a problem for the other teams, for sure. Is this preparation with England enough for the Indian team ahead of CT in Dubai? Should we have played a tri-series too? Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa are playing in Pakistan conditions, which would help them in the CT," Ashwin said. "India only played against England in India, and moreover, we don't have a lot of pleasant memories of playing T20s in Dubai. The toss becomes really crucial in Dubai. I think winning the toss becomes crucial," he added.

## Deepti Sharma named UP Warriorz captain after Alyssa Healy pulls out due to injury

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Deepti Sharma was confirmed as the captain of Women's Premier League side UP Warriorz ahead of the 2025 season. With Australian superstar Alyssa Healy ruled out of the third season of WPL, the Indian allrounder, who hails from Agra in UP, will get the chance to lead out the WPL side at their home venue in Lucknow. Deepti's promotion means three out of the five WPL franchises will have Indian skippers, as she joins Harmanpreet Kaur (MI) and Smriti Mandhana (RCB). Earlier, the Warriorz named West Indies allrounder Cinelle Henry as the replacement for Healy. The West Indies seamer who can bat high in the order has so far played 62 T20Is and has 473 runs and 22 wickets against her name in T20Is.

Warriorz will finally get to play in their home venue in Lucknow in the WPL with the Ekana Cricket Stadium named as one of the four venues. UPW will play the Gujarat Giants (March 3), Mumbai Indians (March 6) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (March 8) in their backyard. After a tough opening season, Deepti had a fine season in 2024 from a personal perspective. Apart from being the first Indian bowler to take a hat-trick in the WPL, against the Delhi Capitals. She went on to be named the most valuable player of the tournament for her return of 295 runs at a strike rate of 136.57 and 10 wickets. Overall, she has played 17 games for the UP Warriorz, scoring 385 runs in 16 innings, with three half-centuries to her name, along with a highest score



of 88 not out. For India, Deepti has been a bowling mainstay. The 27-year-old has played 124 T20Is, scoring 1086 runs from 79 innings, and has picked up 138 wickets, and is the highest wicket-taker in T20Is for the Indian women's team. Deepti, who plays for Bengal in the domestic circuit but is from UP, said in a statement, "I am delighted and honoured to be named captain of the UP Warriorz, which is a team from my home state."

The UP Warriorz has a fantastic squad, and we are confident that we will entertain our fans with the Warriorz brand of cricket, at the WPL this season as well. We can't wait to play in Lucknow in front of our home fans, and hope to inspire the next generation of women athletes."

## Tom Banton joins England squad as cover for injured Jacob Bethell

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

England have called up batter Tom Banton as a cover for injured Jacob Bethell for third ODI against India at Ahmedabad, said the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in a press release. The 23-year-old Bethell, who scored a half-century and took a wicket in England's four-wicket defeat in the first ODI at Nagpur, had sustained a left hamstring injury. "The injury will be assessed further when the team arrives in Ahmedabad on Monday (for the third ODI on Wednesday)," said an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) release on Sunday. The 26-year-old Banton, a wicketkeeper-batter has played six ODIs, scoring 134 runs with a highest of 58. "Banton, who last played for England in an ODI in August 2020, has been in outstanding form in T20 franchise cricket. He is currently the leading run-scorer in the UAE ILT20 competition, where he has amassed 493 runs from 11 innings at an average of 54.77, including two centuries," said the release. Banton will arrive in India on Monday. India are 1-0 up in the three-match ODI series. They made three changes to the side for the second



ODI in Cuttack, bringing in Mark Wood, Gus Atkinson and Jamie Overton in the playing XI in place of the injured Bethell, Brydon Carse and Jofra Archer. The pitch here is a black soil wicket, and could exhibit variable bounce as the game progresses. Spin will likely come into play on the abrasive surface as the sun beats down. Short square boundaries could aid the batters for a high scoring game.

## Corbin Bosch replaces injured Anrich Nortje in South Africa's Champions Trophy squad

GNS News Agency, Feb 13

Fast bowler Corbin Bosch has been named in South Africa's 15-member squad for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 to be played in Pakistan and in the UAE later this month. The 30-year-old, who made his One-Day International (ODI) debut against Pakistan in December, replaced the injured Anrich Nortje. Meanwhile, left-arm quick Kwenza Maphaka has also been added to the squad as a travelling reserve. Bosch and Maphaka, along with opener Tony de Zorzi, depart for Karachi on Sunday to join the squad for the remainder of the tri-nation ODI series. Former Pakistan all-rounder Yasir Arafat has joined the support staff as a consultant for both the tri-nation series and the Champions Trophy.

Who is Corbin Bosch?

Corbin Bosch made a sensational Test debut in the first Test against Pakistan with a great all-round showing. He took a wicket with his first ball, on his way to fine figures of four for 63. He



then counter-attacked smartly with the bat, coming in at 191 for seven and refusing to be pinned down despite being under massive pressure in difficult conditions for batting. His 81 not out at number nine was a terrific inning and hugely significant in the thrilling outcome of the match as it made up the bulk of the Proteas' 90-run first-innings lead.

But while the 30-year-old was continuing his outstanding recent form with the bat, taking his first-class average this season to 96, he

was primarily chosen for his fast bowling. And Bosch came into the game with a first-class record of 72 wickets in 34 matches at a humdrum average of 36.75. He had only taken one five-wicket haul in his career.

in 68 first-class matches at an average of 27.56. His pace and aggression were enough to earn him a place in South Africa's 1992 World Cup squad and their first Test since isolation, in the West Indies that April. South Africa's Champions Trophy 2025 squad Temba Bavuma (capt), Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen



## Why anti-caste films bother you, Gautham Vasudev Menon? Because no takers for your movies glorifying extrajudicial killings, stalking and toxicity anymore?



Over the decades, Tamil cinema has given birth to numerous exceptional filmmakers like CV Sridhar, A Bhimsingh, BR Panthulu, Krishnan-Panju, J Mahendran, Bharathiraja, K Balachander, Singeetam Srinivasa Rao, Balu Mahendra and Kamal Haasan. However, not all of them have succeeded in inspiring the masses on a transformative level. Not that their films lacked impact; but, inspiring the masses on a large scale — to make them dream of cinema and pursue that dream steadfastly — is a feat that not all have achieved. From Mani Ratnam and S Shankar to Vetrimaaran and Pa Ranjith, that list is small.

Even so, it's doubtful if any of them — perhaps with the exception of Mani Ratnam — managed to influence an entire generation in the way Gautham Vasudev Menon did. Beyond captivating audiences with his movies and aesthetics, Gautham redefined trends too, making things like engineering, guitar, Tenglish, filmmaking, train journey and youthful romance fashionable; so much so that for scores of youths, filmmaking became the default dream after engineering.

However, once a trendsetter, Menon has struggled to regain his footing in the industry over the past few years. Even setting aside the troubled journey of his delayed Dhruva Natchathiram, it's no secret that his career has been on a downward trajectory, with his recent film Dominic and The Ladies' Purse too failing to resonate. Moreover, even his once-celebrated films have come under scrutiny in recent years for their problematic themes and representations. Amidst all this, the filmmaker also stirred controversy with some comments in a recent interview. In a conversation with Behindwoods TV, Gautham Menon, without naming anyone, stated that films addressing casteism are no longer relevant. Implying that the discriminatory practice no longer exists, he 'explained' that this is why such films are often set in the '80s or '90s. "These are not the stories we are looking for. I don't think those stories need to be told anymore," he stated, before claiming in the same interview that his surname Menon was his family name and not his caste location, an absurd argument.

His words not only expose the typical hypocrisy of caste-blind elites — who deny the existence of casteism while proudly using their savarna identities as surnames — and his intentional oblivion to societal issues but also highlight why he has become a declining figure as Menon seems unable to grasp that people have evolved and that their societal sensibilities and political awareness advanced. Therefore, one cannot blame those who feel that Menon's frustration — with films addressing casteism — stems from a sense of desperation, as there is no longer a large fan base for his stories that glorify stalking, staring, impersonation, extrajudicial killings, homophobia, transphobia and toxicity.

Since Menon said, "These are not the stories we are looking for," it's worth examining the kind of stories he has told. Long before Raanjhanaa (2013) romanticised highly toxic male behaviour — such as stalking and manipulation — peddling it as love, the filmmaker's Minnale (2001) sympathised with young men who engaged in such practices. Not only does the film's protagonist, Rajesh (R Madhavan), stalk Reena Joseph (Reema Sen) after falling for her at first sight, but he also gathers personal details about her without her knowledge and impersonates her fiancé, Rajiv (Abbas). However, when his deception is exposed, he plays the victim, expecting sympathy under the pretext of 'true love'. Despite cheating her outright and committing identity theft, he also wonders why Reena doesn't understand his 'love' for her.

Under the guise of the age-old adage "all's fair in love and war", which men have long used to justify immoral actions without scrutiny, GVM, too, reinforced the notion that resorting to illegal behaviour was acceptable if one had 'true love'. And with Harris Jayaraj's ethereal music in the background, everything would look too cute.

Despite Menon's claim that casteism is a thing of the past, it is emphasised in Minnale that Rajesh is a vegetarian Brahmin. In one scene, he also remarks, "There were many girls in our college. Have I ever talked about any of them? There were two gorgeous Iyer girls from Chidambaram and even a stunning Kerala girl. But I never pursued them." Out of countless ways, Menon's choice to invoke caste while discussing beauty reveals much about him. Notably, the caste-highlighting surname absent in Minnale suddenly appeared when Menon remade the film in Hindi as Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein, where the hero was named Madhav Shastri, fully embracing his Brahmin identity. The story that Gautham Vasudev Menon deemed compelling enough to share with the world next romanticised extrajudicial killings. At a time when Tamil cop dramas were becoming increasingly formulaic, he revolutionised the "righteous officer with a no-holds-barred attitude" archetype with Kaakha Kaakha (2003), introducing ACP Anbuselvan IPS (Suriya), an advanced encounter specialist who deliberately avoids romantic relationships to maintain a lone-wolf persona, keeping rivals from gaining leverage. The film's appeal was also heightened by the protagonist's constant voiceover, presenting the narrative as his life flashing before his eyes. Centred around a specialised police unit led by Anbuselvan, where rules hold little significance in their fight against organised crime in Chennai, Kaakha Kaakha glamorised police officers, portraying them as infallible, with no moral ambiguity, and this portrayal contributed to the heightened admiration for encounter specialists as it conveniently ignored the atrocities committed by police, including custodial murders, wherein the victims are mostly Bahujans. Let's also not forget that the name of Menon's cameo role in the movie, which he himself penned, was Vasudevan Nair.

In his next original directorial Vettaiyadu Vilaiyaadu, Gautham Vasudev Menon once again centred the story on a righteous cop, DCP Raghavan IPS (Kamal Haasan), who, though not an encounter specialist per se, is also shown engaging in extrajudicial killings of those responsible for his wife's murder and a serial killer duo. Towards the end, Raghavan also, for absolutely no reason, delivers an extremely homophobic line, as if the characters' sexual orientation was (illogically) related to their criminal actions. Meanwhile, the film's graphic depiction of rape further fuelled a disturbing trend that continues in cinema even today.

Despite facing criticism for glorifying police brutality and extrajudicial killings — especially in the wake of incidents like the Thoothukudi case where two men were "allegedly" sexually assaulted, tortured and killed — GVM expressed no regret about creating these films. When The Hindu questioned him about it, he gave a bizarre response, saying, "I have had policemen walk up to me and say, 'Naanga police aanadhe unagalala dhan' (We joined the police force inspired by your films)."

Vettaiyadu Vilaiyaadu also highlighted just how deeply flawed Gautham Vasudev Menon's idea of romance is, with Raghavan proposing to a woman (who later becomes his wife) just two hours after meeting her at a wedding. And no, he doesn't even ask her out first, but jumps straight to marriage simply because "I knew from her eyes that she loved me." For a senior cop, his ignorance to running even a basic background check on this complete stranger, before asking her to spend the rest of her life with him, speaks volumes about his judgement, raising doubts about whether such an impulsive officer and his "Raghavan instincts" should be trusted blindly. In fact, though this detail added little to the narrative beyond providing some insight into his background, even Raghavan is portrayed as having a preference for vegetarianism, as evident in one of his dialogues.

Interestingly, Pachaikili Muthucharam (2007) is his only film where characters face rightful consequences for their actions, but its technical shortcomings and box office failure left it largely forgotten. In his semi-autobiographical Vaaranam Aayiram (2008), Gautham took creepiness to another level. Suriya and Sameera Reddy in Vaaranam Aayiram. (Credit: IMDb) In his semi-autobiographical Vaaranam Aayiram (2008), Gautham Vasudev Menon took creepiness to another level by introducing a father-son duo whose go-to means of expressing love is through obsessive stalking. In the first instance, Krishnan (Suriya) wins over the 'love of his life' Malini (Simran) after stalking her for a week — never revealing himself at first but ensuring people around her inform her of his love. Years later, their son Suriya (also played by Suriya), inspired by his father's tactics, takes things further, making them as creepy as possible and it begins with him staring unnervingly at a stranger woman, Meghna (Sameera Reddy), on a train. Worse still, the film portrays her finding it immediately endearing.

Encouraged by her reaction, Suriya goes out of his way to track down her address, follows her home, and later, in an even more unsettling turn, flies from Chennai to California — where she later enrolls in a course — to locate her, all without her knowledge, and confess his 'love'. Given how frequently women experience stalking and harassment in real life, Gautham Menon's romanticisation of such behaviours reflects his deeply problematic understanding of women and love. The fact that many crimes begin with a man stalking a woman under the guise of love only reinforces how dangerous this portrayal is. Gautham's glorification of toxic relationships peaked with Vinnaitaandi Varuvaayaa. Silambarasan TR and Trisha Krishnan in Vinnaitaandi Varuvaayaa. (Credit: IMDb) GVM's glorification of toxic relationships peaked with Vinnaitaandi Varuvaayaa (2010). Despite Karthik (Silambarasan) and Jessie (Trisha) being walking red flags and their relationship extremely unhealthy, the film was met with widespread acclaim and is still revered as a modern masterpiece. From stalking and non-consensual physical advances (as seen in the song "Omana Penne") to emotional manipulation, the film normalised and romanticised deeply problematic behaviours. Though the script lacked depth and the characters only superficially developed, Gautham elevated the movie through stunning visuals, strong dialogues and the contributions of a skilled technical team — all of which helped cement its iconic status. While the film claims that Karthik and Jessie are truly in love, by the end, one can't help but wonder: did they actually love each other, or were they simply drawn to the toxicity of one another and the strange gratification they found in mistreating and being mistreated by one another? Caste makes its way into this film as well. While Jessie (Trisha) is depicted as belonging to the upper-caste Syrian Christian community, the movie states clearly that Karthik is a Veerakodi Vellalar. Although Menon could have framed the conflict in their relationship from a religious angle, his un/conscious decision to emphasise caste instead suggests that it remains a significant factor even today. Notably, when the film was remade in Hindi as Ekk Deewana Tha (2012), Karthik's character was reimagined as a Marathi Brahmin, and here too, caste is explicitly mentioned. Meanwhile, his psychological thriller Nadunisi Naaygal was nothing more than a dampened experiment, where neither the psychological depth nor the thriller aspects held together and the film ultimately ended up as a middling effort, simply featuring elements not usually found in mainstream Tamil cinema. Although Neethaane En Ponvasantham/Yetto Vellipoyindhi Manasu (2012) is arguably Gautham Vasudev Menon's most realistic romance film, tracing the evolution of an on-again, off-again relationship from childhood to adulthood, its flawed execution significantly weakened its impact. Despite Ilaiyaraaja's remarkable soundtrack and Samantha's compelling performance, the film struggled to leave a mark, with Gautham failing to even add his signature touch to the toxic moments in the narrative. He returned to the police genre with Yennai Arindhaal (2015). While this film showcased greater maturity in storytelling and was a notable improvement over his previous two cop movies, his long-standing obsession with glorifying uniformed officers remained unchanged.

The film, like its predecessors, overlooked the crimes committed by law enforcement officers and also the systemic issues cops faced and focused merely on an idealised, morally upright police officer, placed as the ultimate force against societal evils. Though his later films Achcham Yenbadhu Madamaiyada (2016) and Enai Noki Paayum Thota (2019) were less problematic — at least on the surface — Gautham Menon's fascination with uniformed forces was evident in them as well. Moreover, both films were overwhelmingly male-centric, with the women having little to no influence on the course of events, despite being just as affected by their consequences. The back-to-back setbacks of these films, despite featuring Gautham's signature elements and more, highlighted the diminishing impact of his once-effective formula.

## Tom Cruise says he 'passed out' while hanging from upside down plane for Mission: Impossible 8: 'Couldn't get back into the cockpit'

Actor Tom Cruise continues his streak of performing death-defying stunts in the Mission: Impossible series, and the much-anticipated upcoming installment, Mission: Impossible – Final Reckoning, is no exception. Recently, the Hollywood superstar, known for executing his own stunts, shared a behind-the-scenes video from the film's shoot, where he is seen hanging from an upside down plane. In a recent interview, Cruise revealed that he passed out due to a lack of oxygen while filming the dangerous sequence.

Sharing the thrilling video on social media, the actor wrote, "Hang on..." The clip features director Christopher McQuarrie filming the stunt from another plane while Cruise struggles to hold on to the aircraft mid-air. In an interview with Empire, Tom Cruise explained how the lack of oxygen made it difficult to breathe during the stunt. He said, "When you stick your face out [of an airplane], going over 120 to 130 miles an hour, you're not getting oxygen. So I had to train myself how to breathe. There were times I would pass out physically; I was unable to get back into the cockpit." Christopher McQuarrie shared how Mission: Impossible – Final Reckoning continues the tradition of pushing boundaries in the Mission: Impossible franchise. "There



are stunts in this movie that will melt your brain. There would be a day in Africa — any day in Africa — where Tom would go out and do something that topped anything he had ever done before," he said. The filmmaker also revealed that the stress of shooting these stunts made him want to puke. Mission Impossible: Final Reckoning will release in 2025 and also stars Hayley Atwell, Ving Rhames, Simon Pegg, Vanessa Kirby, Esai Morales, Pom Klementieff, Henry Czerny, Angela Bassett, and Rolf Saxon in pivotal roles.

## Allu Arjun calls himself the 'biggest fan' of Pushpa director Sukumar: 'I could perform so well because...'

Following a massively successful theatrical run, during which it emerged as the third highest-grossing Indian film of all time, director Sukumar's Allu Arjun-starrer Pushpa 2: The Rule recently debuted on OTT, drawing more audiences. At the Thank You meet on Saturday, Arjun heaped praise on Sukumar, crediting him for the recognition every team member received for their work on the film.

"The reason I could perform so well is that Sukumar loves performances. Any actor becomes a bad actor without good guidance, no matter how great a performer they are. Thank you for guiding all of us and making us do a 'reasonably good' job," he said, urging everyone to give the filmmaker a standing ovation. "We are all characters in his dream and images in his projection. It's the director who communicates directly with the audience," the actor added.

Allu Arjun didn't stop there and went on to praise Sukumar further, saying, "Thank you so much for making us win. On behalf of the entire Telugu film industry, thank you for making us feel so proud — we all owe you this. Sukumar, for me, is not just a person but an emotion. I'm your biggest fan. The joy people feel while watching a movie is the same joy I experience when you narrate a scene to me. You are a maverick. I keep telling people who are close to me that I'm glad I am close to such a maverick of a director." A sequel to Pushpa: The Rise (2021), for which



Allu Arjun won his first National Film Award for Best Actor, Pushpa 2: The Rule was released on December 5, 2024, and became a global success.

Also starring Rashmika Mandanna, Fahadh Faasil, Jagapathi Babu, Sunil and Rao Ramesh, the film's cinematography, editing and music were crafted by Miroslaw Kubla Brozek, Naveen Nooli and Devi Sri Prasad, respectively. While the movie grossed Rs 1,742.1 crore worldwide, as per industry tracker Sacnilk, its India nett collection stood at Rs 1,234.1 crore.

## Vicky Kaushal calls Chhaava 'toughest role'; reveals Laxman Utekar refused to shoot until he perfected his look: 'I refuse to cheat'

Vicky Kaushal is currently busy with the promotions of his upcoming film Chhaava. The actor plays the fearless Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the eldest son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, who took over the throne after his father's passing. During a recent interaction, Vicky revealed that director Laxman Utekar was so particular about his look in the film that he refused to begin shooting until Vicky achieved the appearance of a real warrior.

Speaking on Radio Nasha, Vicky shared, "Chhaava has been the toughest role of my life physically and it is because it wasn't easy to gain 25 kg of muscles. It was very difficult for me. It took me 7 months to gain that. Laxman sir was very clear that till the time you don't get that look, learn horse riding, complete sword training and acting fighting, I won't start the film. He told me, 'I refuse to cheat. I won't use VFX.'"

He added, "I had to grow my hair, beard and build the body and that took time before we even began the shooting of the film. If you see 2000 people on set, there were actually 2000 people on set. We had 2000 junior artists, 500 of the best stuntmen of the country. It has been shot in a very raw and gritty way." In Chhaava, Akshaye Khanna plays the role of Aurangzeb. Speaking about Akshaye's menac-



photos of his look and I was totally surprised and I couldn't believe. When I actually saw him in the look on the set, with his demeanour and all, it was incredible. I was surprised. He has almost made the character alive. His evilness will translate so perfectly that people will be surprised." Rashmika Mandanna plays Maharani Yesubai, Sambhaji Maharaj's wife, in Chhaava, set to release in theatres on February 14.

## Racist accent joke on Keralites triggers criticism against Samay Raina's 'India's Got Latent' show



Hyderabad: A video excerpt from comedian Samay Raina's 'India's Got Latent' has triggered criticism on social media over what is being alleged as racism.

The excerpt shows one of the judges on the show making fun of a contestant's opinion on politics and voting, after she said she had not voted and was not interested in politics. The judge's comment, supposedly intended to be a joke went like "Kerala, Saar.. 100 percent literacy Saar..." "However, many are pointing out that the joke was completely off the mark and that it was not proper to make fun of the contestant's personal choice. Several netizens also pointed out that the "Saar" accent was not actually from Kerala and that it was being wrongly attributed to Malayalis just to make fun of them.

Many also pointed out that it was racist for Indians to make fun of each other's accent, especially when every State in India had different accents depending on the language spoken there. They also pointed out that Indian accent was made fun of in other countries and those who complained about that were making fun of their own people back in India. There was also criticism that the show was targeting non-BJP ruled States like Bengal and Kerala based on "rotten racist stereotypes propagated by the BJP IT Cell".