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TGSRTC offers 8 to 10 percent discount on buses between Hyderabad -Vijayawada

Hyderabad: To reduce financial burden on passengers who frequently travel between Hyderabad and Vijayawada, the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) has decided to provide a discount between 8 percent and 10 per cent on its buses that are operating on this route.

RTC officials said that since Hyderabad -Vijayawada route is witnessing heavy passenger traffic, particularly during weekends; it was decided to provide discounts on additional services to reduce financial burden on travelers. The concession will be applicable from Hyderabad to Vijayawada and vice-versa.

Telangana inter exams get high-tech overhaul: QR codes, unique numbers to secure question papers

Hyderabad: Ahead of the Intermediate Public Examinations, question papers underwent a high-tech overhaul, securing them from leakages besides aiding in tracing them quickly. In a move to prevent leakage and safeguard exams integrity, the intermediate question papers will now feature unique numbers and Quick Response (QR) codes. This year, Telangana Board of Intermediate Education (TG BIE) has decided to print a unique number and QR code, which comprises encrypted data, on each cover page of the question paper, as well as across subsequent pages as a watermark. "Each question paper will have a unique number and QR code."

BJP may decide the name of Rekha Gupta for the post of Chief Minister in Delhi

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

New Delhi: The results of the Delhi Assembly election were announced on February 8. Almost 11 days have gone since then, yet the BJP has failed to announce the CM candidate. Although about 10 names came up in the race for the CM, in the end only Pravesh Verma and Rekha Gupta remained. However, the RSS has proposed to the BJP to appoint a woman MLA to the seat of the Chief Minister of Delhi and it is being said that the BJP has approved this name. In such a situation, it is expected that now the name of Rekha Gupta has been decided for the post of Chief Minister.

The name of Rekha Gupta, MLA from Delhi's Shalimar Bagh seat, has been finalized for the post of Chief Minister. According to media reports, RSS has proposed the name of Rekha Gupta, which has been accepted by the BJP. In such a situation, it is expected that after the meeting at 7 pm, the name of Rekha Gupta can be announced for the post of Chief Minister. By doing this, BJP can do this to woo the women voters of the country and promote women empowerment because till now there



is no woman CM in any BJP-ruled state of the country. In such a situation, it is expected that BJP can hand over the chair of Chief Minister of Delhi to Rekha Gupta. It is worth noting that Rekha Gupta, who comes from the Vaishya community, is considered to be the core vote bank of the BJP, which makes her claim stronger.

Always exciting to hear PM Modi's vision for India, says Rishi Sunak

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

New Delhi: Calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "friend", former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday said that it is "always exciting" to hear PM Modi's vision for India. Sunak and his family met the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday evening, having detailed conversation on many subjects. PM Modi said that Sunak is a great friend of India and is passionate about even stronger India-UK ties.

Taking to X, Prime Minister Modi wrote, "It was a delight to meet former UK PM, Mr. Rishi Sunak and his family! We had a wonderful conversation on many subjects. Mr. Sunak is a great friend of India and is passionate about even stronger India-UK ties." The former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom replied to the PM's post on Wednesday, highlighting his strong friendship with the Indian leader and PM Modi's constant support for strengthening India-UK relations. "Wonderful to catch up with my friend Narendra Modi. Thank you for so warmly welcoming my family, too! Always exciting to hear your vision for India, and so important the UK-India relationship goes from strength to strength," Sunak posted on X.

Born to Indian parents in Southampton with roots in Punjab, Sunak is the first Indian-origin person to have served as the UK Prime Minister from 2022 to 2024. Always proud of his Indian roots, Sunak batted for having close ties with India in economic, security and scientific spheres as both nations collaborated in areas like finance, technology, healthcare, and education besides establishing the FinTech Bridge connecting London and Mumbai. As the Conserva-



ervative Party leader conceded defeat in the UK general election in July 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded Rishi Sunak's contribution to consolidate ties between the two nations during his tenure as the UK Prime Minister. "Thank you Rishi Sunak for your admirable leadership of the UK, and your active contribution to deepen the ties between India and the UK during your term in office. Best wishes to you and your family for the future," PM Modi posted on X on July 5, 2024. Sunak had also congratulated PM Modi on the BJP-led NDA's third straight election victory last year, insisting that the UK and India share the closest of friendships which would continue to thrive. In May 2024, as the UK Prime Minister, he hailed India's rise as an 'economic superpower', asserting that new and fast-growing economic superpowers like India, Indonesia, and Nigeria are significantly reshaping the global economy.

KCR chairs BRS executive meeting, charts path for party's future

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Hyderabad: The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) is holding its crucial executive body meeting on Wednesday afternoon, chaired by party president and former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao. The high-profile gathering at Telangana Bhavan has the participation of party working president KT Rama Rao, members of the State executive, district party presidents, sitting and former MPs, MLCs, MLAs, former chairpersons of various corporation and zilla parishads, DCCB and DCMS presidents, and constituency in-charges, among others. Chandrashekhara Rao, who arrived at Telangana Bhavan to a warm welcome from the party office in-charge and party general secretary Ravula Chandrasekhara Reddy and other senior leaders, is leading discussions on strengthening the party at all levels. A key focus will be the upcoming silver jubilee celebrations, marking 25 years since the party's inception. He is scheduled to outline strategies for membership registration and party restructuring, emphasising grassroots mobilisation from village-level units.

The meeting, attended by around 400 senior leaders from across the State, will also address major political and social issues. The party supremo is likely to discuss about organised struggles on matters like crop loan waivers, Rythu Bharosa, land rights, attacks on Dalits, farmers' suicides, HYDRAA demolitions, Lagacherla arrests of farmers and increasing suicides among Gurukul students. He will also deliberate on challenges faced by



auto workers and the alleged political targeting of the BRS cadre and social media activists. With the Congress government facing growing criticism, Chandrashekhara Rao called for a renewed fight on behalf of the people, directing leaders to gear up for an active role in State politics. Earlier in the day, Chandrashekhara Rao visited the Regional Passport Office in Secunderabad to renew his passport. He was accompanied by his wife Shobha. He reportedly submitted his diplomatic passport and renewed his personal passport. Ahead of the party executive body meeting at Telangana Bhavan, Chandrashekhara Rao went to the RPO from his Erravelli residence to complete the formalities. Sources indicate that he is likely to visit the United States next month, where he is expected to spend time with his grandson, Himanshu.

Centre Strengthens Disaster Relief Efforts, Sanctions Rs. 1,554.99 Crore for Five States

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

To support States grappling with natural calamities, the High-Level Committee (HLC), chaired by Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah, has approved Rs. 1,554.99 crore in additional Central assistance under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF). This aid is designated for Andhra Pradesh, Nagaland, Odisha, Telangana, and Tripura, which faced severe floods, flash floods, landslides, and cyclonic storms in 2024. This funding focuses on the Central Government's commitment, under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, to strengthening disaster response and ensuring swift recovery for affected regions. The approved financial assistance will help these States rebuild infrastructure, restore livelihoods, and enhance disaster preparedness. This additional aid supplements the funds already released under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). In the financial year 2024-25 alone, the Central Government has allocated: To ensure a timely and effective response, the Centre had also dispatched Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCTs) to assess the dam-



age immediately after the disasters, expediting relief measures without waiting for formal requests. The Central Government continues to prioritize disaster resilience and recovery, ensuring that States have the necessary resources to rebuild and safeguard communities against future calamities.

BJP's Annamalai Ready For Ideological Battle With Actor Vijay In 2026 Tamil Nadu Polls



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai has positioned his party for an ideological showdown with actor-turned-politician Vijay in the upcoming 2026 state assembly elections. While acknowledging Vijay's widespread popularity as an actor, Annamalai emphasized that both parties would bring their distinct ideological perspectives to the political arena. The statement comes in response to Vijay's declaration at his party's (Tamilaga

Vettri Kazhagam) first conference in October 2024, where he identified BJP as his party's ideological opponent and DMK as its political adversary.

Annamalai expects the 2026 elections to present a unique political landscape, influenced by social media, youth voters, aspirational politics, and welfare schemes. He emphasized that BJP has developed a stronger presence in Tamil Nadu and is prepared for a multi-faceted contest involving both ideological differences and anti-incumbency factors.

The BJP leader acknowledged the strong political ecosystem in Tamil Nadu, noting the formidable presence of established parties like DMK, which has operated since 1949, and AIADMK's significant historical role. He highlighted BJP's growing experience in Tamil Nadu politics, particularly since their independent campaign in 2021, which helped them refine their campaign strategy and messaging. While maintaining their opposition to the ruling DMK's policies, Annamalai stressed that BJP's approach would be based on substantive issues rather than arbitrary opposition to other parties. He expressed confidence in BJP's enhanced organizational capabilities and campaign machinery for the upcoming electoral battle.

Trump on reciprocal tariff with India: Nobody can argue with me



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

U.S. President Donald Trump has said that he made it clear to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs, emphasising that "nobody can argue with me" on tariff structure. On February 13, hours before Prime Minister Modi's bilateral meeting with Mr. Trump in the White House, the U.S. President announced reciprocal tariffs. Under the plan, the Trump administration "will work strenuously to counter non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by determining the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner." During the interview with Mr. Hannity, Mr. Trump reiterated his stance on existing tariff structures between the U.S. and its partners, including India. "I told Prime Minister Modi yesterday—he was here—I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging.'" President Trump said. "He (Modi) goes, 'No, no, I don't like that.' 'No, no, whatever you charge, I'm going to charge.' I'm doing that with every country," Mr. Trump said. India has very strong tariffs on certain imports from the U.S., like in the automobile sector and India charges 100%. Mr. Musk said, "It's 100% — auto imports are 100%."

"Yeah, that's peanuts. So, much higher. And—and others too. I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging.'" Mr. Trump said. Under the reciprocal tariff system, the U.S. would impose the same level of tariffs on Indian imports as India does on American goods. "Nobody can argue with me," President Trump insisted. "If I said 25%, they'd say, 'Oh,

that's terrible.' I don't say that anymore... because I say, 'Whatever they charge, we'll charge.' And you know what? They stop," Mr. Trump said. During PM Modi's visit to the U.S., while responding to a question on reciprocal tariffs on India, Mr. Trump said, "India has been, to us, just about the highest tariffed nation anywhere in the world. They've been very strong on tariffs, and I don't blame them, necessarily, but it's a different way of doing business. It's very hard to sell to India because they have trade barriers and very strong tariffs."

"We are right now a reciprocal nation. We are going to—if it's India or if it's somebody else with low tariffs, we're going to have the same. We're going to have whatever India charges; we're charging them. Whatever another country charges, we're charging them. So, it's called reciprocal, which I think is a very fair way. We didn't have that," he said. During his first term as the U.S. president, Mr. Trump described India as a "tariff king" and, in May 2019, terminated India's preferential market access—Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)—to the U.S., alleging India has not given the United States "equitable and reasonable access to its markets."

Rahul Gandhi to take up Save Samvidhan Yatra soon

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

New Delhi: Keeping in view the Bihar Assembly polls in October or November Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi is likely to take up 'Save Samvidhan Yatra.'

A crucial meeting to discuss the road map, agenda and dates is currently under progress at AICC office. The meeting is being attended by AICC president Mallikarjuna Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi are participating in the meeting. It may be recalled that before 2024 general elections Rahul had taken up Bharat Jodo Yatra.

During the proposed yatra Rahul is likely to try and explain how the NDA government led by BJP was 'insulting the Constitution and how it was violating the Constitution including appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner of India even when the issue was in Supreme Court.

Supreme Court postpones hearing of pleas challenging Election Commissioners' appointment law to March 19

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The Supreme Court on Wednesday (February 19, 2025) postponed the hearing of the pleas challenging the CEC appointment law, to March 19, owing to non-availability of dates in between. | Photo Credit: Sushil Kumar Verma The hearing in the Supreme Court of petitions challenging a law that gives the government a dominant role in the appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) did not materialise. A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant was caught up in other cases while Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, sought an adjournment on the ground that he was appearing in another courtroom before a Constitution Bench.

Repeated oral mentionings by petitioners failed to make much difference as the Bench indicated it may push the case to March 19, a month from now. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner-NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, urged the court for an early hearing, saying the case was of seminal importance and would not take up much time. He said the petitioners would use up only an hour of the court's time. The Bench appeared non-committal to the request for a date earlier than March 19. Advocate Kaleeswaram Raj, intervening in the case, said the discussion would be centred on a five-judge Bench judgment delivered in March 2023 in Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India, which had included the Chief Justice of India as a member of the high-powered selection committee involved in the appointments of CEC and ECs.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Failure of planning

The horrific New Delhi station stampede, which claimed 18 lives, was not an accident—it was a failure of planning, foresight and accountability. As thousands of pilgrims flocked to board trains for the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, the authorities failed to anticipate and manage the massive rush, leading to tragic consequences. Former Railway Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal was blunt in his assessment: the ultimate responsibility lies with the Railway Minister. The government's inability to put proper crowd control measures in place despite knowing the surge in travellers is a glaring oversight. The Maha Kumbh is not a surprise event; its scale and impact on railway traffic are well-documented. Why, then, was a tragedy of this magnitude allowed to unfold?

In the wake of the disaster, the government swiftly announced Rs 10 lakh compensation for each victim's family and Rs 2.5 lakh for the seriously injured, as per Indian Railways' guidelines. However, reports of wads of cash being handed over at the station raise ethical concerns. The sheer optics of authorities distributing notes in violation of 2023 compensation guidelines that allow cash distribution of up to Rs 50,000 only add insult to injury. Instead of fixing systemic issues, is the government attempting damage control with cash payouts? Not surprisingly, the demand for Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's resignation has gained traction, with his history of deflecting blame for railway mishaps underlined. The government's initial dismissal of the stampede as a 'rumour' further exposes its reluctance to acknowledge failures. Historically, ministers like Lal Bahadur Shastri and Nitish Kumar stepped down, taking moral responsibility for railway disasters. Will Vaishnaw do the same? Beyond resignations, systemic reforms are necessary. The Railways must overhaul its crowd management protocols, particularly during religious and festival rushes.

Imparting financial literacy, branding skills, this Maharashtra foundation helps rural women entrepreneurs shine



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Sunita Lonkar grew up as an introvert in the small village of Moshi in Pune, and had to discontinue her education after Class 12 due to her family's financial constraints. Her parents married her off at a young age after which she moved to Pimpri-Chinchwad with her husband and started a small business selling cloth bags. However, her earnings weren't steady. In 2019, she started a home-based papad business that earned her just Rs 2,000 a month. Aiming to expand her business, two years ago she joined the Rural Chamber of Commerce for Women (RCCW) programme run by the charitable trust Mann Deshi Foundation. This year, she participated in the Mann Deshi Mumbai Mahotsav from February 5-9, where she carried out sales worth nearly Rs 1,05,000. From a reserved Moshi girl to a confident entrepreneur interacting with customers in Mumbai, Lonkar has come a long way.

She was among 180 women entrepreneurs and beneficiaries who participated in the Mahotsav which showcased handmade goods, farm products, food as well as traditional arts and crafts. While 21 of the participants were from Pune, the rest were from other branches of Mann Deshi in Satara, Solapur, Sangola, Nashik, Latur, Lonand, Dahiwadi, Vaduj, Mhaswad, Kolhapur, Pimpri-Chinchwad, and Kamotho. The Mann Deshi Foundation was founded by Chetna Sinha in 1996 for the economic empowerment of rural women in India. Since 2006, it has reached 1 million women through various initiatives that impart financial and digital literacy. The Mumbai Mahotsav marked the celebration of this remarkable achievement. Payal Kokate sold manuka and amla candy worth Rs 3.84 lakh at the Mumbai Mahotsav. "The response was so good that by the fifth day of the Mahotsav, my entire stock had finished," says Kokate, who launched her own brand Lennyadri Foods after receiving guidance from Mann Deshi. The entrepreneurs also include women farmers who are no longer just cultivators "They are brand owners, transforming their produce into recognised labels. At the Mann Deshi Mahotsav, they are gaining access to larger markets and stronger linkages, ensuring better prices and wider reach for their goods," says the founder Sinha. "They are also our climate champions, providing soil testing services to farmers so that they reduce the usage of fertilizers and pesticides and not only reduce carbon emission but also help farmers to increase profitability," she adds. Kalpana Jadhav from Satara's Dahiwadi, who now resides in Pune, sold traditional spices worth Rs 1.53 lakh at the Mahotsav. Jadhav, who started her home-based spice business in 2019, had her spices lab-tested in 2023 after joining the foundation's Deshi MBA programme. "The Deshi MBA programme trained me in self-development, communication, finance management, social media marketing, and quality control. A visit to Ganesh Masale in Satara provided valuable insights into spice manufacturing and packaging," says Jadhav, who now earns about Rs 20,000 monthly. RCCW connected Lonkar with other rural and urban entrepreneurs through business support services like B2B meetings and networking forums. Around 8-10 women resold her papads in their localities, opening up new markets for her. She learned to use WhatsApp Business for marketing, which now accounts for 30-40 per cent of her papad orders. Additionally, she uses the MeraBill app to systematically record her income and expenses. The Foundation also helps her with product branding and labelling. Currently, Lonkar earns Rs 10,000 a month. Meanwhile, 50 participants at the Mahotsav have been picked to list their products on the Open Network Digital Commerce platform. Vanita Shinde, the Chief Operating Officer of Mann Deshi Foundation, states that to empower rural women in India.

Yamuna water-poisoning remark: Former Delhi CM Kejriwal did not appear in Sonapat court, next date of hearing on March 20



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Arvind Kejriwal skips Sonapat court appearance in Yamuna poisoning case. Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal did not appear in the Sonapat court in Haryana on Monday. The Sonapat court had issued a notice asking Kejriwal to appear before it in connection with a criminal complaint filed against him for his 'Yamuna river poisoning' remark.

In his place, Kejriwal's lawyer Bhuvish Malik appeared in the court. Advocate Malik apprised the court that the prosecution did not supply them with the proof and evidence based on which the criminal complaint was filed against

Kejriwal. On his submission, the 'proofs' of Kejriwal's remarks and other related evidence were handed over to advocate Malik in a pen drive. Haryana Irrigation Department's executive engineer Ashish Kaushik had filed the criminal complaint against Kejriwal in Sonapat court on the basis of social media clips in which the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener can be seen accusing Haryana of "poisoning Yamuna river waters". Kejriwal's remarks sparked off a political furor ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

On February 4, a day before the Delhi polls, the Haryana Police had also registered an FIR against Kejriwal under various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Act. The FIR was registered in Kurukshetra based on a complaint by Shahbad resident Jagmohan Manchanda. Kejriwal and others were booked under Sections 192, 196(1), 197(1), 248(a), and 299 of the BNS Act for alleging that the Haryana government had "poisoned" the Yamuna's waters. The FIR states: "The complainant is a public-spirited person and an advocate by profession... Therefore, he is competent and entitled to file this complaint in the Hon'ble Court against Shri Arvind Kejriwal and other members of the Aam Aadmi Party for committing offences under Sections 61 read with 109, 192, 196, 197, 248 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and Section 62 read with 109, 192, 196, and 197 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023."

AAP leader Anokh Mittal hired contract killers to murder wife; 6 including his lover held: Ludhiana police



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

A day after the AAP's Ludhiana leader Anokh Mittal claimed his wife died in a brutal attack by "robbers", the police said Monday they cracked the case with the arrest of Mittal and his paramour who hired "contract killers" for the murder. The Ludhiana police said they have also arrested four contract killers while one is absconding. Kuldeep Singh Chahal, Commissioner, Ludhiana police, said they found during their investigation that Anokh Mittal, 35, a businessman, hired contract killers to murder his wife Lipsi also known as Manvi in connivance with his paramour Pratiksha.

Chahal said a group of five assailants hired by Mittal intercepted their car on Dehlon Road and attacked Manvi with swords and other sharp-edged weapons when they were returning home after having dinner at a restaurant. They fled leaving her grievously injured, and also took away

Mittal's Ritz car and jewellery that the couple was wearing to make the attack look like a robbery. Chahal said they also found Mittal had hired the contract killers for Rs 2.50 lakh of which Rs 50,000 were paid in advance and the rest of the amount was to be paid after the murder. The police said they have arrested Anokh Mittal, Pratiksha, and four contract killers identified as Sahnawal's residents Amritpral Singh alias Balli, 26, Gurdeep Singh, 25, Sonu, 24, and Sagardeep alias Teji, 30, from Dhandhari Kalan. Another hitman, identified as Gurpreet Singh alias Gopi, is yet to be arrested. They also said they have recovered a Ritz, Swift, and I-20 used in the crime, and a sword from the accused. A First Information Report (FIR) for murder under relevant sections has been registered against all accused at the Dehlon Police Station. The police said Mittal was having an extra-marital affair with Pratiksha of Jamalpur, and Manvi had got to know about it. They said Mittal and Manvi's relationship was strained for many months and they had frequent fights. In his statement to the police Sunday, Mittal said he was returning home after having dinner at a restaurant with his wife at around midnight on February 15. He said he stopped his car to relieve himself near Rurka Road in the Dehlon area. He said five to six "robbers" following them in a vehicle attacked him with an iron rod and made him inhale some substance to render him unconscious. Mittal, who joined the AAP around three months ago, claimed when he regained consciousness after 20 minutes, he saw his wife lying on the road with grievous injuries and she died when taken to the hospital. He said the "robbers" also took away his car and Manvi's jewellery.

Himachal Pradesh education department limits days of annual sports meets, asks govt schools to effectively utilise teaching days



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Emphasising the effective utilisation of the prescribed 220 teaching days in government schools, the Himachal Pradesh government Saturday issued its annual academic calendar for 2025-26, limiting the duration of the annual sports meet at different levels. Additionally, the annual academic calendar focuses on curbing the practice of sending school students to participate in various functions organised by government departments and NGOs.

The calendar, issued through the office of the secretary of education, states, "The practice of sending school children to attend various functions, events, programs, rallies, yatras, etc., organized by different government departments and NGOs shall be discontinued. No group of students from any school shall be sent for such events as participants or audience members. In case it is necessary to send a batch or group of students for any such event, prior permission from the concerned Director of Education must be obtained." The calendar further states, "However, students shall be allowed to participate in various competitions as a team or individual participants. Only one teacher shall accompany such a team as a coordinator or manager. Meanwhile, schools may organize as many school-level activities (curricular and co-curricular) as needed, provided they do not reduce the teaching days." A source said that schools have been instructed to complete activities for events such as Environment Day, World Science Day, and Tree Plantation Day within one hour in the morning, instead of organising different events throughout the day. There are approximately 15,000 government schools in the state, with around 7.5 lakh students. "According to the National Education Policy (NEP), we have 220 teaching days for every academic year. However, it was observed that teaching days were not being utilised effectively. Various reasons were identified for this, including the prolonged scheduling of sports events throughout the year, the appointment of teachers to sports events despite their non-sports background, and the participation of students in activities organised by other departments and NGOs. Moving forward, sports tournaments for Under-14 students (elementary classes) at the block, district, and state levels will be held from April 27 to April 29, May 18 to May 20, and October 11 to October 12, respectively. Similarly, for Under-19

students (secondary classes), sports tournaments at the block, district, and state levels will be conducted from May 10 to May 12, May 29 to May 31, and October 11 to October 12, respectively," said B R Sharma, Additional Director of Elementary Education, who was one of the key officials involved in designing the annual academic calendar. A source said, "Previously, sports events at the block, district, and state levels were prolonged. Only 10 to 20 students from a government school would participate in sports, but the entire school would become engaged in preparations and practice, leading to a significant reduction in effective teaching days." Meanwhile, separate schedules have been issued for summer- and winter-closing schools, with no changes to school holidays. Winter-closing schools will have a winter break from February 1 to February 11 and a monsoon break from July 21 to July 26. Summer-closing schools will have a six-day Lohri holiday from January 11 to January 16. The results for non-board classes will be declared on March 31, and admissions will begin on April 1. These schools will observe a monsoon break from June 22 to July 29. The teaching-learning process shall commence from the very first day of the academic session. The government schools in plain areas, including districts Una, Kangra, Solan, and certain parts of Sirmour (such as Nahan and Paonta Sahib), as well as Sundernagar in Mandi district, fall under the summer-closing category. The remaining schools follow the winter-closing schedule. Notably, Himachal Pradesh has emerged as a leader in student reading proficiency, according to the 2024 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), released on January 28 this year. The report highlights significant progress in learning outcomes, infrastructure, and digital literacy in the state's schools, though challenges remain in stagnant school enrolment and rising dropout rates among older students. The ASER 2024 report, which evaluated 268 schools in Himachal Pradesh, found that 46.6 per cent of Class 3 students in government schools can easily read a Class 2 Hindi textbook – almost double the national average of 23.4 per cent. This marks a 10-percentage-point improvement since 2022. Himachal also ranked third in reading proficiency among Class 8 students, following Mizoram and Kerala. Lalit Chauhan, President, Himachal Pradesh Physical Teachers Association, has raised concerns about the dates set by the Himachal Pradesh education secretary for sports events. "Scheduling boys' and girls' block tournaments on the same date at two different venues is very challenging due to staff shortages," Chauhan said. He further pointed out that many schools have only one physical education teacher in senior secondary schools, who is responsible for both Under-14 and Under-19 tournaments. Additionally, the orders state that apart from Physical Education Teachers (PETs) and District Physical Education Officers (DPEs), no other staff members will be involved in tournaments. "This raises concerns about who will accompany and manage students during tournaments," he added.

Newly appointed Maharashtra Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal take charge tomorrow



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Maharashtra Congress president According to Congress functionaries, the charge-taking ceremony of Sapkal will take place at the Birla Matoshri Auditorium in Mumbai's Marine Lines. Newly appointed Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Harshvardhan Sapkal will Tuesday officially take over from Nana Patole, who was MPCC president since 2021. Sapkal was appointed as the Maharashtra Congress president after Nana Patole resigned from the position following the Maharashtra Assembly elections. According to Congress functionaries, the charge-taking ceremony of Sapkal will take place at the Birla Matoshri Auditorium in Mumbai's Marine Lines.

"Preparations for the ceremony have been completed, and the MPCC has urged Congress workers to attend in large numbers. Nana Patole successfully led the Maharashtra Congress for almost four years, guiding the party through elections, by-elections, and the Lok Sabha polls, where Congress performed well in the state," a Congress functionary said. The ceremony will be attended by Congress Maharashtra in-charge Ramesh Chennithala, All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary Mukul Wasnik, senior leader and Congress Working Committee member Balasaheb Thorat, Legislature Party Leader Vijay Wadetiwar, former chief ministers Prithviraj Chavan and Sushilkumar Shinde among other state working presidents, senior party leaders, office bearers, and party workers.

'India's Got Latent' row: Maharashtra police reject Samay Raina's request for virtual appearance

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The Maharashtra cyber police has denied permission for comedian Samay Raina to record via videoconferencing his statement in connection with the FIR registered against him, podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, influencer Apoorva Mukhija and others over Allahbadia's controversial remarks during the India's Got Latent YouTube show that went viral online. A senior officer from the Maharashtra cyber police confirmed the development on Monday. The cyber police have already served a summons to Raina, asking him to appear for questioning on Tuesday. His legal team had said he was travelling abroad and scheduled to return on Monday. Earlier, Raina had sought more time for appearing before the cyber police, but that request was also denied.

A controversy has erupted over an episode of India's Got Latent where Allahbadia asked a contestant an "insensitive" question. The show and its artists, especially Allahbadia and Raina, received sharp criticism from netizens, film stars, other celebrities, politicians and the general public. The Assam police were the first to register an FIR over the show, followed by the Maharashtra cyber police. The cyber police has already summoned more than 50 people, including Raina, Allahbadia, Mukhija, other artists, comedians, influencers, content creators, YouTubers, actors, participants and organisers of Raina's show after booking them all in the case. Only MTV Roadies creator Raghu Ram has appeared before the cyber police in the case so far. Raina has already removed all India's Got Latent videos from his YouTube channel and said that he will cooperate with all agencies to ensure their inquiries are concluded fairly. For his part, Allahbadia posted a video apologising for his "insensitive jokes". The Mumbai police are also inquiring into the matter and have recorded statements from Mukhija, Ashish Chanchlani and over a dozen other people linked to the show.

TISS files FIR after drugs found in a room of girls' hostel

TISS The complainant, as mentioned in the FIR had stated that her room remains untidy and has a foul smell because of the mess by her roommate who smokes inside the room. The Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) has filed an FIR with Trombay Police Station after drugs were found in one of the rooms of the girls' hostels on campus. While the FIR has been filed against an unknown person, the institute administration has expelled one of the two occupants of the where the drugs were found.

TISS's campus is home to six hostels, accommodating 976 students pursuing various higher education courses at the renowned social science institution. Drugs were found in a room of one of the three girls' hostels, shared by two occupants. According to the FIR, hostel warden along with others carried out a search of the said hostel-room in the evening of February 3, 2025, following a complaint by one of the two occupants of the room. This search led to the discovery of drugs in a bag belonging to the other occupant of the room.

The complainant, as mentioned in the FIR had stated that her room remains untidy and has a foul smell because of the mess by her roommate who smokes inside the room. Following the complaint, the hostel authority paid a visit to the said hostel-room. During the process, various items were found such as cigarette packets, cigarette butts. Whereas in an open bag on the bed, a transparent plastic bag was found which contained material that resembled cannabis and rolling paper. The FIR mentions that after the search, items were kept as it is and the room was locked from the outside by the authorities conducting the search, and the whole exercise was shot on video by the search team. After the incident, the institute constituted a disciplinary committee and a notice was sent to the other occupant of the room to appear before the committee the next day. "When the committee questioned about the materials found in her bag, the student refuted the allegations and stated that someone had purposefully kept the items in her bag to frame her," states the FIR.

The institute administration then approached the po-

Punjab Govt removes Varinder Kumar as Vigilance Bureau's chief director



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The Punjab Government Monday removed Varinder Kumar as the chief director of the state Vigilance Bureau, and attached him to the office of the director general of police.

lice. G Nageswara Rao, Additional Director General of Police (Provisioning), has been posted as the new Chief Director of the Vigilance Bureau. Varinder Kumar has been relieved from the charge of the chief director with immediate effect, and asked to report to the DGP's office. The sudden move has raised eyebrows in bureaucratic circles, and there is widespread speculation that Kumar's removal may be linked to the recent directive of the state government regarding zero tolerance for corruption and asking all officials to be vigilant. An Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the 1993 batch, Varinder Kumar is due to retire on July 31, 2025. He had been appointed as the chief director of Vigilance in May 2022 shortly after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) came to power in the state. In another move, the Punjab Government suspended Rajesh Tripathi, Deputy Commissioner, Muktsar, over corruption charges. Abhijeet Kaplish, a 2015-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, was appointed the new deputy commissioner in his place.

Shiv Sena sets up deputy CM's medical aid cell, says it'll complement CM's Relief Fund

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has set up a Deputy Chief Minister's Medical Relief Aid Cell at the Maharashtra secretariat, along the lines of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, which provides medical aid to patients in need. "On the occasion of the birthday of Eknath Shinde, on 9th February, we set up a DyCM Medical Aid Cell. The cell will work in coordination with the state's public health department and will take efforts for the better implementation of health schemes such as Mahatma Phule Jan Arogya Yojana, along with other medical health relief schemes implemented by the government," said Mangesh Chivate, head of the Shiv Sena's Balasaheb Thackeray Medical Relief Cell.

While the move has led to buzz in political circles that a separate cell has been set up in a bid to show political one-upmanship, Chivate clarified that the cell is not to counter the CMRF but will complement it. He said the cell will not provide any financial relief and will work in coordination with CMRF, Ayushman Bharat Yojana and other schemes to help patients. The move comes days after The Indian Express reported that deputy CM Eknath Shinde was in the process of setting up a coordination centre to monitor the implementation of ongoing infrastructure, housing and planning projects, even as Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis already runs a war room from Mantralaya that monitors all the ongoing infrastructure projects across departments. The NCP, led by the other deputy chief minister, Ajit Pawar, also



has medical cells to help poor patients. Sources said the party will soon start its cell from Mantralaya.

Earlier, when Fadnavis was the deputy chief minister in the Shinde-led Mahayuti government, he started a medical aid cell under the law department on the fifth floor of Mantralaya. After taking over as chief minister in December last year, the BJP leader merged the cell with the CMRF and replaced Sena's Mangesh Chivate with Rameshwar Naik as its head. For a few weeks now, Shinde has been staying away from government meetings. While he did not attend a war room meeting two weeks ago, on Tuesday, he did not attend the review meetings of several metropolitan region development authorities chaired by Fadnavis. These authorities fall under Shinde's urban development department.

Shiromani Akali Dal membership drive faces fresh challenges as SGPC chief Harjinder Singh Dhama quits

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The Shiromani Akali Dal's membership drive faces renewed challenges following the resignation of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) president Harjinder Singh Dhama on Monday afternoon. He quit after a controversial social media post by Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Raghbir Singh, who supported Giani Harpreet Singh—whom the SGPC removed as jathedar of the Takht Damdama Sahib.

The membership drive, launched on January 20 with a target of 50 lakh members by February 20, was initiated to pave the way for the election of a new SAD president scheduled for March 1. According to SAD sources, over 40 lakh members had already been registered by the first week of February. However, allegations of fake memberships have surfaced, with Giani Harpreet Singh claiming that the process is being manipulated.

The current crisis traces its roots back to directives issued by the Akal Takht on December 2, when a tankhah (religious punishment) was imposed on former SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal by the Akal Takht jathedar. Although Badal resigned on November 16, his resignation was initially rejected by the SAD working committee, only to be eventually accepted on January 10 after the jathedar's directives given on December 2. In an effort to reorganise the party in line with the Akal Takht's directives, a seven-member committee was announced to oversee the fresh membership drive. However, controversy arose when the SAD working committee established its own 13-member panel on January 10—incorporating five members from the original seven and later adding Gurbart Singh Wadala as the sixth member. Dhama's decision on Monday to request his removal from the committee has only deepened the party's internal dilemma.

The seven members are Harjinder Singh Dhama, Gurbart Singh Wadala, Manpreet Singh Ayali, Iqbal Singh Jhundan, Santa Singh Umaidpur, Bibi Satwant Kaur and Kirpal Singh Badungar. Wadala was convener of the Akali



Dal Sudhar Lehar—the rebel faction that was wound up on December 8 on the directions of the Akal Takht jathedar. Ayali, an SAD MLA, has not attended any SAD meetings since April 2022. Though he never joined any rebel faction, he has expressed his differences with SAD leadership publicly on several occasions. Iqbal Singh Jhundan was head of the committee in 2022 that suggested a change in leadership of the SAD after the party's poor performance in the 2022 Assembly polls, with Ayali as a member. Umaidpur also joined the rebel faction Sudhar Lehar last year.

The seven-member committee has so far held two meetings in February, during which it maintained that the membership drive was not being conducted in accordance with the directives issued by the Akal Takht jathedar. With mounting questions over the integrity of the membership drive and its potential impact on the upcoming party presidential election, the future direction of the SAD remains uncertain. Meanwhile, Balwinder Singh Bhunder continues to serve as the working president amid the unfolding crisis. The next meeting of the seven-member committee is on Tuesday, where they are expected to make a final decision regarding the membership drive. However, ahead of that, Dhama has submitted his resignation as SGPC president and asked the jathedar to relieve him from the chairmanship of the seven-member committee as well.

Four BJP MLAs, including LoP Suvendu Adhikari, suspended from West Bengal Assembly

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Four BJP MLAs — Leader of Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari, Agnimitra Paul, Vishwanath Karak, and Bankim Ghosh — were suspended from the House. Sources said the suspension for 30 days followed a motion raised by the BJP which alleged that Saraswati Puja was "not allowed" in the state. Adhikari expressed strong dissatisfaction with the move, stating, "Useless Speaker... The Chief Minister doesn't come. She keeps an eye on us whenever we're not in the house, then she appears. Four times, they have suspended BJP MLAs. (It happened) for five months in 2022, then for one month, then for two months. For a total of eight months, we have been kept out of the House. We are the only opposition. The House belongs to the Opposition. We have won on the Hindus' vote. We will raise our voices for them. This government is a minority's government, it is anti-Hindu." Women MLAs, led by Agnimitra Paul, had brought an adjournment motion to discuss the "obstruction" of Saraswati Puja. However, when Speaker Biman Banerjee did not allow the matter to be debated, a major uproar ensued, resulting in BJP MLAs



walking out of the Assembly. Banerjee said, "A motion was moved by TMC MLA Nirmal Ghosh, and the way the Opposition leader threw documents on my chair is very condemnable. Ghosh moved a motion that they should be suspended. A vote took place and based on that, it was decided to suspend them for 30 days." Suvendu Adhikari further said, "They have intentionally targeted those who participate well in debates and Question and Answer sessions. Agnimitra Paul was protesting from her seat—why has she been suspended?... Since the (Chief Minister) will respond to the Governor's speech tomorrow.

Twist in Delhi businessman murder: Sub-inspector arrested for sheltering killers



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

A senior officer of the Special Cell said they arrested Sukhbir Singh, 45, posted with the North East District of Delhi, after the counter-intelligence unit found evidence against him. (File Photo) A senior officer of the Special Cell said they arrested Sukhbir Singh, 45, posted with the North East District, after the counter-intelligence unit found evidence against him. Two months after a 52-year-old businessman was gunned down in Shahdara's Farsh Bazar by two bike-borne men over "mistaken identity", the Delhi Police said they have arrested a sub-inspector for allegedly harbouring and providing financial assistance to the assailants.

A senior officer of the Special Cell said they arrested Sukhbir Singh, 45, posted with the North East District, after the counter-intelligence unit probing the murder investigation of Sunil Jain found evidence against him. "The case was initially registered by the Farsh Bazar police station,

and was transferred to the CI. This is the first arrest made by the Delhi Police in connection with Jain's murder. He was arrested on Sunday afternoon and currently, he is in four-days police custody," the officer said. Singh was posted with the special staff, and was sent to district lines after it came to the fore that he along with other police personnel provided assistance to gangster Hashim Baba when he came to their office in police custody. He got an out-of-turn promotion three years ago. Jain, who owned a utensils business, was gunned down by Naveen Kasana and Sachin Golu in Farsh Bazar on December 8, 2024, when he was returning home from a morning walk at the Yamuna Sports Complex. The police probe showed Jain was killed as his physique was similar to that of the real target, and they shared similar routines.

"The real target was the father of a juvenile, who allegedly plotted the murder of a property dealer and his 16-year-old nephew on Diwali. The plot resulted in Anil alias Sonu Matka gunning down Akash Sharma alias Chotu (40) and his nephew Rishabh Sharma in Farsh Bazar. Sonu Matka is a member of the Hashim Baba gang," an officer said. "Jain's shooter Golu was upset and wanted to take revenge, as he considered Akash Sharma his brother. Chotu was known to give financial support to not just Golu but others as well," the officer added. With the help of technical surveillance, the police found that SI Singh was in constant touch with Golu and even provided monetary help to him after he killed Jain. "Sufficient technical evidence has been found that shows direct involvement of Singh with the shooters. After his arrest, police are now probing his role in criminal conspiracy in Jain's murder also," the officer said.

'We didn't wait... started pulling people out': Porters at New Delhi railway station recall stampede

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The screams came first. Then, a blur of people stumbling out of the New Delhi railway station's main entrance, their voices rising in panic. "Bachao! (Help us!)," they cried, breathless, clutching at strangers, their clothes torn in the frenzy. Some collapsed onto the pavement, others sprinted toward the noise, dodging rickshaws and street vendors who froze in confusion. This is how Vicky Singh Dagur, a 26-year-old porter, recalled the stampede that occurred on Saturday night at platform no 14.

Standing near the entrance of the station in his red shirt and golden badge, he saw the first wave of passengers emerge, their faces terrified. "Something was very wrong," he said. Then the cries rang out. Before he could think, Dagur and a handful of other porters were rushing toward the noise. The moment they stepped onto platform 14, the horror unfolded before them. People — men, women, children — lay on the floor, trampled, gasping for breath. Their luggage and shoes lay scattered across the platform. For the porters, who lift, haul and navigate the station's daily mayhem, it was instinct to act. "We started pulling people out," said Rajesh Yogi, 30, Dagur's older brother. Like his father and grandfather before him, Yogi has spent years ferrying passengers' luggage across platforms. "There is always a crowd here at the New Delhi railway station. But last night was like never before," he said. As the railway authorities scrambled to respond, the porters became the first responders. Describing the scene on platform 14, Jitesh Meena, another porter, said, "We heard



people crying for help and reached them as soon as we could. We did not wait for instructions from any official. We did what we could," he said. "We carried the injured passengers on our back, helped women who were bleeding, and wrapped children in shawls to keep them warm." "All I can remember is fear. Children were trembling, women clutching on to whatever they could find," he said. Mahesh, another porter who has worked at the station for years, said the footbridge was jammed beyond capacity. "There was no space to move.

The only option was to crawl under a train that was parked at platform 16. So we helped people slip underneath and get out." "We cooperated with the railway administration and they cooperated with us. We worked together last night to save as many people as possible," Mahesh said.

Lawyers in Delhi's district courts abstain from work today over proposed Advocates (Amendment) Bill

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The coordination committee of all District Court Bar Associations across Delhi's lower courts decided to abstain from work on Monday against the recent draft of the Advocates (Amendment) Bill proposed by the Union Law Ministry which would, in effect, prohibit advocates from boycotting and abstaining from courts' work. The circular drafted by the committee on Sunday said it unanimously took the decision against the "proposed unjust, unfair and biased" Bill proposed by the government of India. "The Bill is totally against the unity, integrity and dignity of Advocates but also draconian in nature. It will directly affect the autonomy of all Bar Associations and Bar Council of all states," it read. Section 4 of the proposed amendment to the Advocates Act, 1961 also allows the Centre to nominate up to three members to the Bar Council of India in addition to the existing membership of the Attorney General of India, and the Solicitor General.

One of the most contentious provisions in the draft amendment, as per Delhi's lawyers, is section 35 A which reads that "No association of advocates or any member of the association or any advocate, either individually or collectively, shall give a call for boycott or abstinence from courts' work or boycott or abstain from courts' work or cause obstruction in any form in courts' functioning or in court premises." "There is however, an exception: "...advocates may participate in a strike only when it does not impede the administration of justice such as strikes intended to bring attention to legitimate concerns about professional conduct, working conditions, or administrative matters and may include symbolic or one-day token strikes, as long as they are conducted in a way that does not disrupt court



proceedings or violate clients' rights." Any violation of this provision would invite disciplinary action.

A new clause in the draft amendment also says that the State Bar Council may not enrol any person who has been convicted of an offence punishable with imprisonment of three years or more. The definition of a law graduate has also been expanded from someone who obtains a Bachelor's law degree from any university established by law in India to someone who has obtained a Bachelor's degree in law of three or five years from any centre of legal education or university established by law or a college affiliated to any university and recognised by the Bar Council of India. Published by the Law Ministry on Thursday, the draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025 is open to comments till February 28. The coordination committee consists of advocate Jagdeep Vats (chairman), advocate Atul Kumar Sharma (secretary general), advocate Rahul Singh (vice-chairman), advocate N C Sharma (spokesperson), and advocate Nitin Ahlawat (coordinator) among others.

Jittery over BRS protests, Govt resumes work on Sangameshwara, Basaveshwara projects

Sangareddy: As the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) gears up to launch protests to expose the inordinate delay in taking up the twin lift irrigation projects, Sangameshwara Lift Irrigation Project (SLIP) and Basaveshwara Lift Irrigation Project (BLIP), the Congress government has resumed the works fearing opposition from the people. Former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao, who laid the foundation for these two lift irrigation projects on February 20, 2022, near Narayankhed, had asked former minister T Harish Rao to launch various protest programmes across Sangareddy district to expose the Congress government's neglect towards these two projects. Chandrashekhara Rao gave directions to this effect while talking to a team of BRS leaders from Zaheerabad constituency who visited him at Erravalli on January 31. Following the directions of the former Chief Minister, Harish Rao also held a review meeting on February 14 with key BRS leaders of Sangareddy to chalk out a plan to carry out protests across the district. However, sens-

ing that the BRS protests would expose the government's failure, officials have grounded earth works to build a pump house for BLIP at Borancha in Manoor mandal. The pump house will be built on 12 acres of land in the backwaters of Singur reservoir. Godavari water will be pumped in from Kondapochamma Sagar to Singur as part of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS). Later, the water will be lifted through SLIP and BLIP to meet the irrigation and drinking needs of Sangareddy, Andole, Narayankhed and Zaheerabad assembly segments. Combinedly, the twin lift projects will provide irrigation water to 4 lakh acres across these four assembly segments. According to estimates made in 2022 by the Irrigation department, the government will have to spend Rs.2,653 crore on SLIP and Rs.1,774 crore on BLIP. SLIP will provide irrigation water to 2.19 lakh acres in 231 villages of Sangareddy, Andole and Zaheerabad assembly segments while BLIP will provide irrigation water to 1.81 lakh acres in Andole.

When a minor murdered an 85-year-old woman to fund his live-in partner's bail



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

a large piece of the cement roofing sheet of her house next to the bathroom had broken off. The police then concluded that there was forced entry into the house and started probing robbery as the motive behind the suspected murder. As the team from the Detection Branch of the Pimpri police station started probing the murder, they gathered intelligence on known criminals in the area with records of violent attacks and property offences. Their probe zeroed in on a minor who had changed his location multiple times around the time of the murder and was missing from the known address.

Working on ground-level intelligence and some other leads, the police detained the minor from the Pimpri vegetable market around within a week after the murder. The police said his questioning revealed that he had murdered Salve for gold ornaments. An officer, who was part of the probe, said, "The investigation revealed that the accused had pushed her down and had sat on her chest causing fractures in her ribs. He then banged her head against the floor causing her death." The police found that the accused, who was to turn 18 four days after his arrest, was a criminal with over 10 cases, including those of attempted murders, armed robberies, and thefts, against him. They also found he had been in a live-in relationship with a married woman who was in her early 20s. The woman was in prison in a case of attempted murder in which the suspect was a co-accused. As he was a minor he was released soon after the attempted murder but the live-in partner was still in prison. "He needed the money for her bail and thus he executed the well-planned crime. He had entered Salve's house by breaking the cement roof sheet and had brutally murdered her before fleeing with the valuables. The police later recovered the gold ornaments from him after his arrest," an officer who was part of the probe at the time said. "Because he was still under 18 at the time of Salve's murder — though just by a few days — he was soon released from the observation home. However, a few weeks later, when he had turned 18, he was arrested again in a case of armed robbery." Sushant Kulkarni is a Special Correspondent with The Indian Express in Pune with 12+ years of experience covering issues related to Crime, Defence, Internal Security and Courts. He has been associated with the Indian Express since July 2010. Sushant has extensively reported on law and order issues of Pune and surrounding area, Cyber crime, narcotics trade and terrorism. His coverage in the Defence beat includes operational aspects of the three services, the defence research and development and issues related to key defence establishments. He has covered several sensitive cases in the courts at Pune. Sushant is an avid photographer, plays harmonica and loves cooking.

On July 31, 2023, within hours of the brutal murder of 85-year-old retired civic conservancy staff Shalubai Salve in Pimpri, her family members noted two crucial things at her home. Her old gold ornaments and cell phone were missing and a large piece of the cement roofing sheet had broken off. Salve lived alone in her small house in the densely populated Sanitary Chawl area near the Pimpri Railway Station. She retired from the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation in 1999. After losing her husband Rupaji in 2004 and only daughter Kamal in 2010, she lived alone in her one-room house. Her two granddaughters who stayed nearby, used to visit her regularly to check on her. On July 31, the two granddaughters received calls from Salve's neighbour that she had not opened her door for several hours. When the family members reached the house, they suspected something was wrong and called the police. When the police broke open the door in the presence of relatives, they found Salve lying unresponsive. She was rushed to the state-run Yashwantrao Chavan Memorial Hospital where she was pronounced dead. Before the probe began, the police initially looked at the possibility of the crime as a case of accidental death due to her fall. However, the autopsy report and further probe led the police in a different direction. The autopsy revealed Salve had died due to severe head trauma and the resultant brain haemorrhage. She also had some fractures in her ribs. When her granddaughters went to her house they noted two crucial things, and told the police about them.

Salve's gold jewellery that included gold earrings, a gold ring, a gold mangalsutra and some silver ornaments — some of which she used to wear and some remained in her cupboard — were all missing along with the cell phone and possibly some cash. Apart from the missing jewellery,

BJP targets Congress after U.S. cancels programme for 'voter turnout' in India

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The BJP on Sunday (February 16, 2025) claimed that a U.S.-funded programme, now cancelled, linked to voter turnout in India is a pointer to the previous Congress-led UPA government allegedly enabling infiltration of Indian institutions by forces opposed to the country's interests. BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said on X, "It is becoming increasingly evident that the Congress-led UPA systematically enabled the infiltration of India's institutions by forces opposed to the nation's interests - those who seek to weaken India at every opportunity." "Once again, he alleged, it is the billionaire U.S.-based investor George Soros, a "known associate" of the Congress party and the Gandhis, whose shadow looms over our electoral process. Mr. Malviya said the Election Commission in 2012 had signed an MoU with The International Foundation for Electoral Systems' an organisation linked to Mr. Soros' Open Society Foundation, which is primarily funded by USAID.

In a swipe at the Congress, he said those questioning the "transparent and inclusive" process of appointing India's Election Commissioner had no hesitation in handing over the entire Election Commission of India to "foreign



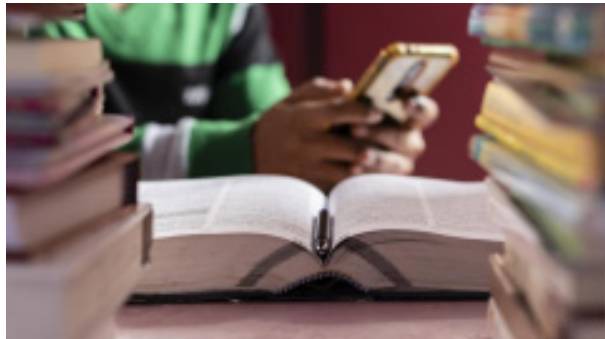
operators". Elon Musk-headed Department of Government Efficiency, which has been constituted by U.S. President Donald Trump, has announced that it has cancelled many programmes costing hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars. The programmes cited by it included \$486 million to the "Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening", including \$21 million for "voter turnout" in India. Mr. Malviya said, "\$21M for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!"

UGC-CARE list scrapped: A move towards autonomy or a risky gamble?

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The much-debated and highly anticipated announcement arrived on Feb. 11 — the UGC-CARE list has been withdrawn based on the recommendations of an expert committee. In its place, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has decided to discontinue the listing of journals and instead develop suggestive parameters to guide faculty members and students in selecting peer-reviewed journals. These parameters, formulated by a panel of experts and academicians, have been released for public feedback. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to adopt these suggestive criteria to identify peer-reviewed journals that best suit their disciplinary needs. The parameters cover key aspects such as: Journal Preliminary Criteria, Editorial Board Criteria, Editorial Policy, Journal Quality (Content) & Journal Standards, Research Ethics, Journal Visibility and Journal Impact criteria. Additionally, the UGC recommends that HEIs establish internal committees to periodically refine these parameters, ensuring they remain aligned with institutional academic and research objectives while upholding quality standards.

As the news broke, many research scholars and faculty members welcomed the decision, feeling liberated from the constraints of mandatory publications under the UGC-CARE framework. For years, they faced significant challenges, particularly due to the limited availability of journals in their specific fields. For instance, in Tamil language research, only two or three journals were listed, despite thousands of PhD students pursuing research in this domain. Moreover, regional languages often lack representation in global databases like Scopus and Web of Science, further restricting visibility. Another major concern was the dynamic nature of the UGC-CARE list, where journals were frequently added and removed, raising questions about its reliability. Many researchers published their work in UGC-CARE Group I journals, only to later find that their journal had been delisted, rendering their publications invalid for academic evaluation. This exposed the infiltration of substandard or predatory journals within the UGC-CARE system. A more serious issue was the inclusion of print-only journals, which were often targeted by cybercriminals and middlemen, leading to the proliferation of cloned journals. The primary reason for this vulnerability was that UGC-CARE only listed journals but did not maintain a repository of published articles. As a result, academicians and administrators



struggled to verify the legitimacy of publications, creating challenges in research assessment. This new flexibility allows researchers to move away from the pressure of mandatory publishing, but institutions will remain accountable for their research performance. Rankings continue to demand an increase in publications and citations for institutions to climb the academic ladder. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) places significant weight on Research and Professional Practice, expecting institutions to publish in reputed journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Notably, while NAAC recognizes UGC-CARE Group I publications, NIRF does not count them. With the withdrawal of the UGC-CARE list, this decision may set back India's progress in global research rankings. Now, the responsibility of evaluating journal quality lies entirely with higher education institutions (HEIs). However, this raises concerns, given past experiences. In 2015, when the UGC created an Approved Journals List, many HEIs recommended substandard and predatory journals, leading to a credibility crisis. If proper training on journal selection and evaluation is not provided to committees responsible for maintaining journal lists, India risks returning to the pre-2015 era, where predatory journals proliferated unchecked. While the UGC's initiative aims to grant HEIs greater autonomy in regulating publication quality, it introduces several complex challenges: Lack of Standardization — One institution's list of approved journals may not align with another's, leading to inconsistencies in faculty recruitment and promotion criteria. Autonomous vs. Affiliated Colleges — Will autonomous colleges have the freedom to create their own evaluation mechanisms, or will they still be bound by the guidelines of their affiliated universities? Proliferation of Multiple Journal Lists .

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



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Students invest immense efforts in securing admission to premier educational institutions. While many are able to turn their dreams into reality, others get left behind. There are times when both students who are unable to get admission and those who join these institutes take extreme steps. A victim's mother once said, "I gave him an IIT dream." Despite various preventive measures, students ending their lives is a tragic loss. In 2024, around a dozen suicides were reported from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT); there have already been over 100 cases in the decade, 2014 to 2024. In 2025, there have been incidents reported from IIT Indore, IIT Kharagpur, and the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, and six cases of admission-seekers in Kota in Rajasthan, which is famous for its coaching institutes. According to the 2022 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, there were 13,044 student suicides in India, or 7.6% of all suicide cases. Among these, 2,095 were linked to examination failure.

These tragedies have sparked much concern. In 2023, the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, called for a humanitarian approach, urging "all stakeholders to help students beat negative thinking and take study pressure in a positive way". The Supreme Court of India has directed academicians to explore innovative out-of-the-box solutions. The Council of Indian Institutes of Technology has proposed a slew of measures while the University Grants Commission (UGC) has included a representative of the vulnerable group in the Grievance Redressal Committee to effectively safeguard their interests. In January 2025, the Supreme Court, addressing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by the families of victims, directed the UGC to collate data on the establishment of Equal Opportunity Cells (EOCs), complaints received, and action taken reports from all universities, as per its 2012 regulations. Despite these interventions, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable.

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

The effectiveness of existing measures So, are the measures-in-place counter-productive? Current prevention measures such as counselling, complaint handling, remedial classes, and reduced academic load have their limitations. This stems mainly from the unintended consequence of these measures which end up isolating these individuals in their time of need. Counselling plays a crucial role in promoting wellness skills and improving mental health during normal times. However, challenges may arise during criti-

Reforming State universities: Why NITI Aayog's autonomy push can't replace govt support

A report unveiled by the NITI Aayog, highlighting the critical reform of the India's State University system, has emphasized the need for increased autonomy for State Public Universities (SPUs). But at the same time, the suggestion, though presented as innovative, only echo longstanding debates on India's higher education discourse. The NITI Aayog report, Expanding Quality Higher Education through State Public Universities (SPUs), states that over 85% of higher education enrolments in India are concentrated in these SPUs. These institutions play a critical role in shaping the nation's youth and thereby contributing to improving India's intellectual capital.

The report's recommendations, focusing on greater autonomy, resource mobilization, and capacity building, present a roadmap for transformation. However, a critical analysis of the report show these suggestions, while well-intentioned, risk intensifying some of the existing inequalities. That is, unless they are balanced by active state support including funding and capacity building, along with critical systemic reforms. The call for greater financial and administrative autonomy in the NITI Aayog report echoes longstanding debates within Indian higher education. Historically, policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) have emphasized similar ideas. The rationale is straightforward: autonomy allows universities to respond dynamically to local needs, innovate, and improve quality.

However, autonomy alone is insufficient. Past experiences in states like Bihar and Odisha demonstrate the risks of financial independence without adequate governance processes and structures. Several SPUs which went the pathway of granting autonomy to introduce self-financed courses seem to have prioritized revenue generation over academic excellence. Without vigorous overseeing and capacity building, autonomy can steer towards mismanagement and a decline in academic quality. The report advocates resource generation by expanding self-financed courses, increasing tuition fees, and forging corporate partnerships. While these measures can alleviate short-term financial constraints, they carry risks:

Fee hikes and accessibility: Fee increases disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged students. For instance, recent attempts to raise tuition fees in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra led to widespread protests, underscoring

cal moments such as when depression escalates. An IIT Jodhpur study, using data from the 75th Round National Sample Survey (2017-18), revealed that self-reporting of mental illness in India is less than 1%, primarily due to societal stigma, leading to isolation during such critical phases. Combating caste-based discrimination through a complaint-driven approach has significant flaws. It often results in no action in time, delayed or punitive actions, and instils fear of repercussions. The case of a student from IIT Kharagpur, in June 2024, exemplifies this, where the victim allegedly made a complaint and was later found dead. Later, a medical report showed murder, and not suicide. In another instance, at IIT Delhi, in 2023, in the case of two students, the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe cell saw no complaints, despite administrative efforts. It shows that a complaint-based system can discourage victims, only to worsen their suffering, and isolate complainants. A similar issue exists with remedial classes and tutorials for academically weaker students, who are identified based on semester-end results. While these classes may help some students improve their academic performance, there is an inherent flaw. Participants are labelled as being academically weak, causing isolation from their peers. Although most manage to pass, some may struggle due to the stigma and other factors, which when combined with underlying mental health triggers, could lead to tragedy. Thus, the prevention measures have inherent built-in-flaws. They unintentionally label vulnerable individuals, leading to isolation and exclusion. The need for a change in approach

Exclusionary approaches worsen the struggles of victims and hinder integration. A paradigm shift is needed to ensure immediate and inclusive support in critical moments. The key to prevention lies in keeping students integrated, and free from stigma or fear. There is also the point of early detection and flexible assessment. Instead of labelling weaker students at semester-end, early detection through performance in initial assignments or behavioural signs such as missed classes and reduced interaction can help before there is a crisis. A flexible assessment system that is tailored to the varying strengths and interests of students is an effective solution. It should be noted that the same size does not fit all. Offering assignments of different difficulty levels is an approach that supports vulnerable students, boosts their confidence, and ensures that no one is left behind. The writer's successful implementation of this method over three decades highlights its potential to transform student outcomes. This approach does not require reducing academic rigor for all, as doing so has its pros and cons. While it may ease stress for some, it could also affect the global competitiveness level and reputation of elite institutions. Second, transform discrimination into inclusion. Proactive caste-based inclusion strategies are needed instead of complaint mechanisms that risk alienation and retaliation. Complaint resolution should be handled instantly online by an independent third party, ensuring transparent and empathetic intervention beyond mere rule enforcement. Additionally, caste labels are no longer required after admission, so caste-related data should be removed from all public records.

Third, improve mental health collectively. Embracing community-oriented living over individualism fosters mutual support, shared responsibility, and emotional well-being. Encouraging students to socialise reduces isolation, strengthens social networks, and promotes empathy. By prioritising relationships over competition, community living nurtures mindfulness, belonging, and resilience, which are essential for mental health. Creating a supportive environment wherein students thrive without fear of failure is key to suicide prevention. No single solution fits all, but fostering inclusion and social connection can help. Preventing alienation ensures that no student feels left out, reducing stigma and fear. What truly matters is genuine care, integration, and collective action to build a compassionate educational system. Rajeev Kumar is a former computer science professor at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, Birla Institute of Technology And Science (BITS) Pilani, and the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and a former scientist at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Department of Science and Technology (DST), with over 40 years of experience in academia and research and development

the potential social backlash when quality improvements fail to accompany higher costs.

Over-reliance on self-financed courses: Punjab University, for example, has introduced diploma courses in high-demand areas like artificial intelligence and data analytics to attract private funding. While commendable, such revenue-centric approaches risk sidelining traditional disciplines like humanities, which are perceived as less profitable but remain essential for a well-rounded education. Corporate partnerships and academic independence: Partnerships with industry, as seen at institutions like Delhi University, can bring valuable resources. However, they may also skew research priorities towards commercially viable projects, undermining academic freedom and fundamental research. Without addressing these challenges, financial autonomy could undermine the very goals it seeks to achieve.

The state funding imperative Despite the push for financial self-reliance, the report does not adequately address the critical need for increased state funding. State universities are already underfunded, with many relying on outdated infrastructure and curricula. For example, universities in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh struggle with basic infrastructure, forcing students to migrate to better-equipped institutions in other states.

Even in a relatively better equipped States like Tamil Nadu, SPUs do not have the financial strength or a big war chest to compete with the well funded Centrally funded institutions, or private / deemed universities. So their ability to attract high qualified researchers is getting limited. The uneven starting points of SPUs highlight the limitations of a uni-dimensional approach. While universities in some States may have the capacity to attract alternate funding, those in economically weaker states lack the foundational resources to do so. Reducing dependency on State grants without addressing these disparities could deepen inequalities across the higher education landscape.

Capacity building is essential to implementing the report's recommendations, particularly in areas like employability-focused curricula, research ecosystems, and international collaborations. Achieving these objectives requires significant investment in faculty development, infrastructure, and institutional governance:

Thrust on growth, FDIs in Anura Kumara Dissanayake's maiden Budget



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Sri Lanka expects a 5% growth in 2025 — by improving productivity, boosting exports and attracting foreign investments — President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said on Monday (February 17, 2025), presenting his maiden Budget that signalled his government's firm adherence to an ongoing International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. Growth will be facilitated by a strong export sector said Mr. Dissanayake, who is also the Finance Minister. "We expect exports of goods and services to reach an all-time high of close to \$19 billion in 2025."

Outlining key economic indicators reflecting relative fiscal stability over the last two years, after Sri Lanka's unprecedented default in 2022, Mr. Dissanayake said Foreign currency reserves stood at \$6.1 billion in December 2024, "surpassing predictions". Additionally, despite concerns over currency depreciation, the Sri Lankan Rupee has strengthened to nearly LKR 300 (? 88.17) per US dollar, he pointed out. However, for most Sri Lankans the crisis is far from over. Families are struggling to cope, even as they squeeze their household budgets to meet the most essential expenses, including food, education, health, transport, and utility bills. Acknowledging the enduring impact of the financial meltdown, President Dissanayake highlighted high cost of living and a fall in real wages, especially after inflation soared to 70% in 2022. "Although inflation has since declined, price levels of many goods and services remain elevated, and income growth has not kept pace accordingly, thereby reducing living standards of the people," he said, unveiling the Budget that outlined increase in minimum

wages in private sector and public sector salaries. Growth for the sake of growth has little value to society unless it is a means to uplifting the lives of all members of society, Mr. Dissanayake said, citing income disparity and geographic disparity in incomes.

Terming the Budget "historic for laying the foundation for "economic transformation", Mr. Dissanayake said: "One of the challenges we faced at the outset was dispelling the wrong picture of us created by the myths and malicious political propaganda against our economic policy and vision." Commenting on the Budget, noted economist and former Central Bank Governor Indrajit Coomaraswamy called it "safe and sound". The President "deserves a great deal of credit" for maintaining fiscal discipline despite the ideological orientation of his [leftist] party, he noted. "The President has demonstrated that he is a safe pair of hands as far as the economy is concerned," he told The Hindu, adding that the 5% growth will be crucial for the reversal for sharp increase in poverty in the last few years. Sri Lanka's poverty rate rose to 25.9% in 2023, the World Bank estimated. Observing that the Budget was "pragmatic and prudent", Mr. Coomaraswamy said President Dissanayake had allocated a "fair amount" for social welfare, especially education, health, without undermining the IMF-prescribed macro-fiscal framework. "The welfare payments are well designed, well targeted." While several economists hailed the "fiscal discipline" envisaged in the Budget, activists working with poor families said it failed to offer relief from the crushing austerity measures that came with the IMF programme. The Budget reflected the constraints placed by the IMF and did not deviate from previous austerity budgets seen since the economic crisis, the Feminist Collective for Economic Justice contended. "Half of the expenditure allocated is for debt servicing and the amount allocated for public investment is negligible," it noted, however welcoming the government's commitment to education and health. "While the budget speech indicated an increase in Aswesuma [welfare benefit], it is still within the minimum 0.6% of GDP parameter set by the IMF, which has been repeatedly highlighted as inadequate," the Collective said. "The Government should immediately take steps to renegotiate the IMF agreement if it is serious about bringing Sri Lankans out of the pain caused by the economic crisis," it said.

US Taiwan independence reference: China urges U.S. to 'correct its mistakes' after State Department website update

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

urged the United States to "correct its mistakes" after the U.S. State Department removed previous wording on its website about not supporting Taiwan independence, which it said was part of a routine update. The fact sheet on Taiwan, updated last week, retains Washington's opposition to unilateral change from either Taiwan or from China, which claims the democratically governed island as its own. But as well as dropping the phrase "we do not support Taiwan independence", the page added a reference to Taiwan's cooperation with a Pentagon technology and semiconductor development project and says the U.S. will support Taiwan's membership in international organisations "where applicable".

Beijing regularly denounces any international recognition of Taiwan or contact between Taiwanese and foreign officials, viewing it as encouraging Taiwan's separate status from China. The update to the website came roughly three weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump was sworn in to his second term in the White House. Speaking in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mr. Guo Jiakun said the revisions for Taiwan on the U.S. State Department's website were a big step backwards and "sends a seriously wrong message to Taiwan independence separatist forces". "This is yet another example of the United States' stubborn adherence to the erroneous policy of 'using Taiwan to suppress China'. We urge the United States side to immediately rectify its mistakes," Mr. Guo said. The United States, like most countries, has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan but is its strongest international backer, bound by law to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

"As is routine, the fact sheet was updated to inform the general public about our unofficial relationship with Taiwan," a State Department spokesperson said in an email



sent late Sunday Taiwan time responding to questions on the updated website wording. "The United States remains committed to its one China policy," the spokesperson said, referring to Washington officially taking no position on Taiwan's sovereignty and only acknowledging China's position on the subject. "The United States is committed to preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," the spokesperson said. "We oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side. We support cross-strait dialogue, and we expect cross-strait differences to be resolved by peaceful means, free from coercion, in a manner acceptable to people on both sides of the Strait." On Sunday, Taiwan Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung expressed his appreciation for what he called the "support and positive stance on U.S.-Taiwan relations".

Taiwan's government rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying that only the island's people can decide their future. Taiwan says it is already an independent country called the Republic of China, its official name. The Republic government fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communists, who set up the People's Republic of China.

Asian elephants change scientists' minds about why elephants trumpet

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Humans have developed thousands of languages, spoken and signed, to share information, ideas, and emotions — yet they're not alone among the earth's life forms in communicating in complicated ways and out loud. Elephants live long lives, up to around 70 years, and in this time their herds often split and merge. To navigate these changes, these giants have developed a complex system of sounds, from low-frequency rumbles and roars to high-frequency squeaks and chirps, to stay in touch with each other.

Most of what we know about elephants' use of sounds to communicate comes from studies of African elephants (genus *Loxodonta*). We don't know much about Asian elephants (genus *Elephas*), the species native to India and other tropical and subtropical forests of Asia. Understanding the differences in vocal communication between elephant species is nontrivial because African and Asian elephants aren't just distant cousins roaming different lands. They are entirely different species with unique habits, habitats, and adaptations. In a study published in the journal *Mammalian Biology* on December 23, 2024, researchers compared the calls of Asian elephants based on their age, sex, and behaviour. They found the duration of trumpets remained fairly consistent across all age classes for both male and female Asian elephants but roars and roar-rumbles got longer with age. "Every behaviour of [Asian] elephants is fascinating to witness, and their acoustic communication makes it even more remarkable because of elephants' capabilities to switch between very high-frequency to very low-frequency sounds," Nachiketha Sharma, the study's first author and a PhD student at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said.

Through thick forests and rough terrain, the researchers set out in pursuit of the secrets of the vocal communications of Asian elephants. These animals roam freely in the outdoors and talk to each other using four main types of

calls: trumpets, roars, rumbles, and chirps. They combine them in different ways, called combination calls, to convey different messages. The researchers divided the vocalisations into high and low frequencies based on whether human ears could hear them. Each call carries a specific meaning and function. The most common high-frequency vocalisations, which both the Asian and the African savannah elephants can produce, are trumpets — the iconic sound uniquely associated with elephants. According to some mathematical models, these elephants may be producing the trumpets by blowing air in sudden bursts through the trunk, a form of "second voice" that doesn't require the vocal cords to be involved. Researchers had previously believed Asian elephants trumpeted chiefly to communicate disturbances caused by humans and other troublesome species. The new study isn't so sure. "Our study reveals that trumpets are generated in a variety of contexts, including social interactions, play, and in agonistic interactions both within and between groups," Sharma said. He also added that the study documented the first instance of combination calls in a southern Indian population of Asian elephants. The researchers found the roar-rumble in particular to possibly serve multiple functions, including maintaining contact and signalling disturbances. The team also tackled a fundamental question: whether Asian elephants' high-frequency vocalisations differed by age and sex. "For a holistic understanding of any communication system, it is vital to address fundamental questions such as age and sex differences," Sharma said. "Once we know these basic differences, we can dig deeper or ask more questions related to the possible reasons behind such variations as well as the functions associated with a particular call type." The team set up recording equipment in the protected areas of Bandipur National Park and Mudumalai National Park, which are 75 km apart. Both parks are home to large populations of Asian elephants, with an estimated 1,025 in the former and 300 in the latter.

India-Bangladesh ties should not be 'regime-specific', says Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser; pitches for Modi-Yunus meet



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

India-Bangladesh ties should not be "regime-specific", Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain said. After holding talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at the 8th Indian Ocean Conference organised in Muscat, Mr. Hossain said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus may finally meet on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in April. In an interview to The Hindu, the Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser and former Foreign Secretary (2006-2009), spoke about a number of thorny issues testing bilateral ties between the two countries, including attacks on minorities, Sheikh Hasina's statements from India, border killings and the mistreatment of fishermen, as well as the issues over the Adani power project. Tell us about your meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar amidst the tensions in ties.

To be frank, ties were very tense [when the interim government took over]. It started very tense, as I see it, because India had been used to a pattern of relations for more than 15 years, and suddenly there was a very quick break. Maybe adjusting to the new realities took some time, so there was a lot of adverse attention on ties, and uneasiness was definitely there. But I think six months on, that should actually be over, and we need an environment where we can do business with each other. Compared to six months ago, definitely, we can interact with each other much better. PM Modi was just in Washington. He met with U.S. President Trump, and, according to the Foreign Secretary, discussed some of India's concerns about the situation in Bangladesh. Did you ask Mr. Jaishankar about these concerns? Not really. I didn't ask because it is India's affair [what it discusses with another country].

I don't think there should be much concern. Our bilateral relations should be normalised, which is already happening in some areas. For example, in trade. Trade had a short period of a hiccup, but it has picked up again. So these are indications that the two countries, at least the private sector, people want to interact with each other, and that manifests that we have interests. Both countries have interests in each other and we need to take care of that. One of the concerns India has repeatedly made public is over the violence against minorities, particularly the Hindu community in Bangladesh. Do you think that your government has been able to control this? And does India agree? Because this seems to have become a bilateral issue between India and Bangladesh.

Well, let me make it very clear, the Hindu or other minority communities that live in Bangladesh are exactly equal citizens with the Muslim or the majority community. They are equal citizens with equal rights, and equal rights to protection. And it is Bangladesh government's job, that it is doing, to protect them, like protecting any other citizen of the country. Unfortunately, just after 5th of August [in 2024, when Sheikh Hasina resigned], there has been a really, almost unexplainable frenzy in the Indian media about this issue, mostly based on falsehood. I would invite you to go through the findings of the UN, which has been published two days ago, and says that [the interim government was not involved in the violence]. They came at our request as we wanted an absolutely neutral survey of the situation. I have read the committee report, the UN report which talks about some of the excesses of the previous Hasina government as well, but it does talk about the impact on minorities in Bangladesh. Are there any kind of measures that your government can take on the basis of this report?

Of course, even before the UN report, we have taken actions. It is Bangladesh government's responsibility and it is taking action. I do not think it is proper for the Indian authorities to speak on this issue. This is an absolutely internal issue, and Bangladesh government is taking adequate action. We must remember that we have at least four members in the Council of Advisers who are human rights workers, who have been working on these issues for many, many years. They have themselves taken up minority rights issues.

On the subject of former PM Sheikh Hasina, what exactly are you hoping India will do?

There are cases against [Ms. Hasina], and we have asked for India to send [Ms. Hasina] back to us to face trial. As long as the Indian government doesn't do that, we would expect they can at least put some restrictions on her so that she does not make incendiary and false statements which instigate reactions among the people, because the issues are still very, very raw. For 15 years, she was in power, and people feel very, very strongly angry about her actions, so they would like to see that she doesn't try to destabilise the situation inside Bangladesh.

Even so, how do you justify that a mob was allowed to ransack Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's house, allegedly over Ms. Hasina's speech?

A mob may do something, but that doesn't have the support of the government.

Your government has thus far sent only a note verbale, a diplomatic note asking for Ms. Hasina's return. Will there be a formal extradition request?

We have an extradition treaty, and we have given back many of the accused to India to face trial, and I think India can give her back to face trial in Bangladesh.

But for that extradition treaty, you would have to go through the trial process. You would have to have sufficient warrants for the MLAT (mutual legal assistance). When does Bangladesh hope to begin that process?

Well, the process is already on, because the cases are now in court. We cannot compel them to do it [in a hurry]. And we are also aware that she might also have recourse to the Indian judicial system. It might take time, but what we want is that she does not make incendiary statements while she's in India.

On border security, there have been a number of rounds of talks between the Bangladesh Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). On the arrest of fishermen, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she spoke to some of the fishermen who had been released from Bangladeshi jails, who

had been beaten up, who were limping, had been injured badly. Do you think that this is an outcome of bad bilateral relations?

I don't think so. The first issue is the border. In 2024, half of which was under the previous government, 24 people have been shot at the border. This is not done anywhere in the world. I think you would agree with me on this because from the Indian side, it's often said that since there is crime, so this is happening. There is crime in every border in the world. Nowhere are people shot dead like this. If crime has been committed, you arrest him or her and take them to court, jail or anything the court decides, but you can't just execute them. But that's what has been happening in the border for years, through different types of governments. This is not done. This is one thing which I think India, if you wish, it can stop, and it should stop. The other issue was on the maritime issue. Bangladesh and India signed a maritime agreement years ago. The idea that you're still arresting each other's fishermen...I haven't been on the ground, but as far as having spoken to different people, is that the, you know, fishermen follow the fish. Now, so often, on the land, you have the definitive border, you know it that this is the limit. But on the sea, it's not that easy. Often, from both sides, they often just cross into the maritime areas of the other country. You have some in your custody. We have some in ours, and we both periodically release them. About the mistreatment...we have already asked for an inquiry, and if we find that there was actually some of our security people involved, or if they have broken the law, of course we'll take it into consideration. But this is not normally done. I was a diplomat in Kolkata for more than four years... and have conducted these exchanges, and they are not mistreated. If there has been an exception, we will of course look into this.

On the Adani power agreement, recent reports suggest the Bangladesh government is negotiating for a restoration of power supply from the group. Could you confirm that the Bangladesh government intends to continue with the agreement with the Adani Group for power supply?

I think that we negotiate in two stages, one before the agreement is signed, [and second] we negotiate after the agreement is signed. We have to go by the agreement, but if we feel that it has not been done properly, we can always mutually agree to look at it again. And in my opinion, we will look at it with the Adani Group and try to make it more rational. I am not a technician, technical person, so I cannot go into exact details, but then there has been comparative comparison with other deals, and it was seen that the power tariffs have been unusually high, the agreed power tariff has been unusually high. So we believe that should be renegotiated again, particularly on the question of purchase of coal. Any rational person would say that the coal should be purchased for this project at the best possible price available in the world market. That has not been done. So these are areas where we can perhaps negotiate with Adani in good faith, and we would like to do that. For the moment, we have asked for the power to be restored because we need power, and our planning has been done on the basis of them supplying that power. So we want them to supply this power, and then we are going to pay for that.

You have met our External Affairs Minister twice now, but Prime Minister Modi and Chief Adviser Professor Yunus have not yet met. Do you expect a meeting between them at the BIMSTEC Summit in April in Thailand?

So far, the two leaders have not been at any venue on the same day, so there was no opportunity for them to meet. But I personally believe that there is willingness from both sides to meet and discuss things freely and frankly. That helps. In our culture in the region, when the 'top bosses' sit together, they can resolve an issue just in one word, rather than leaving it to people like us to negotiate for years. I think a meeting between the two would be a good thing to happen in that sense. They have spoken on the telephone once at the beginning of this government. They will be in the same venue for the BIMSTEC, as I understand that all the Heads of government will be there. If they are there, the normal, natural thing would be that they talk to each other, because it's a small group. At SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summits for example, every Head of state or government used to speak with the other seven counterparts. So I think something like that is likely to happen.

Did you discuss it with Mr. Jaishankar?

I just mentioned this. There's no agreement on a meeting...it's too early. We fix these things only a few days earlier, once the programme is finalised and complete. Let's see what happens. As a veteran of foreign policy, and the India-Bangladesh relationship, particularly the good ties between them since 2009, do you think India and Bangladesh can return to that state in the relationship?

Well, why only look at the past 15 years? Even during the BNP's (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) time (1996-2001), the trade within the two countries increased exponentially. I don't think the relationship has to be regime-specific. In 1996-1997, we had the Ganga water agreement. So I think whatever government, whichever party, is in power in our two capitals, that should not affect our relations, because elections are based on mutual interests and mutual respect. And I believe that both our sides realise what is in their interest, and we can have very good relations with India.

'Captain America: Brave New World' movie review: Harrison Ford thunders to the rescue

We are in the midst of a Harrison Ford tsunami, with the 82-year-old superstar winning plaudits and a fresh batch of fans for his portrayal of the gruff psychotherapist with Parkinson's in the series, *Shrinking*, and his final outing as archaeologist-adventurer in *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*. Taking over from William Hurt as Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross in *Captain America: Brave New World*, Ford weighs in with his star power and grinning gravitas to rescue the film from the timid morass it finds itself in. Storyline: Sam Wilson is in the midst of all manner of trouble with a war to be stopped and an omnipotent, omniscient villain to outwit. The fourth movie in the *Captain America* franchise and the 35th in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, *Captain America: Brave New World* sees Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie) take on *Captain America's* (Chris Evans) mantle and shield following the events of *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). There is an arms race brewing for the new super metal adamantium (even more powerful than the Wakandans' vibranium) following the emergence of Celestial Island in the Indian Ocean.

Individual taxpayers claimed higher tax benefits on political donations than corporate entities



1,650.86 crore in FY22.

The combined revenue impact of tax deductions available by corporates, firms and individuals on account of donations to political parties stood at Rs 2,905.96 crore in FY23, which is projected to reach Rs 3,265.14 crore in FY24. However, it is lower than the Rs 3,516.47 crore impact seen in FY22. The total revenue impact of tax concessions availed by these three categories of taxpayers—individual, corporates and firms—on political donations in 10 years since FY15 is an estimated Rs 14,473.75 crore. Under the Income Tax Act, 1961, taxpayers, including Indian companies, firms, Association of Persons (AOPs), Body of Individuals (BOIs), individuals or Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), are allowed to claim deductions in respect to donations made by them to political parties. These include donations made through cheques, account transfers or electoral bonds. As per Section 80GGC of the I-T Act, 1961 corporate taxpayers can claim deductions on account of donations made to political parties. Section 80GGC of the I-T Act states that "In computing the total income of an assessee, being an Indian company, there shall be deducted any sum contributed by it, in the previous year to any political party or an electoral trust." However, it does not allow deductions "in respect of any sum contributed by way of cash." Similar benefit is available to individual taxpayers under Section 80GGC. "In computing the total income of an assessee, being any person, except local authority and every artificial juridical person wholly or partly funded by the Government, there shall be deducted any amount of contribution made by him, in the previous year, to a political party or an electoral trust..." Section 80GGC of the Income Tax Act states.

Like individuals, non-corporate taxpayers (firms/AOPs/BOIs) are also allowed to claim deduction under Section 80GGC in respect of any sum contributed by them to political parties by way of cash. For the purpose of the Section 80GGC and 80GGC, the Act defines the term "political party" as "a political party registered under section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951".

Indian's largest refiner and fuel retailer Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) is optimistic about the prospects of higher energy imports from the US, particularly natural gas imports amid rising gas consumption in the country. And while IOC is also keen to step up purchases of American crude, volume growth shall be contingent upon how competitively it is priced, since high freight charges remain a concern, according to the company's Chairman ARVINDER SINGH SAHNEY.



quantities of Russian crude, particularly in the short term?

Russian oil and gas themselves are not under sanction. Yes, some of the entities, a couple of their insurance companies, and 180-odd ships have come under sanctions recently. Indian Oil and India are ready to import Russian oil, provided that all the three components of the trade—supplier, insurer, and shipping fleet—are not sanctioned. If Russian oil is delivered to our ports through a clean mechanism and the (price) cap is honoured, we are ready and willing to take it.

Since Russia is India's largest supplier of oil, how big an impact of the recent US sanctions do you foresee on oil supplies to India?

All of it (Russia's oil trade) is still not under sanctions. So, the non-sanctioned portion will continue to flow into the market. For Russia, only 1-2 million barrels per day (bpd) (of oil exports) may be impacted. Of the over 10 million bpd they produce, some is consumed inside Russia, while the rest is exported. The impact will be even less significant for India, as China is also a major buyer of Russian oil. And we have enough sources outside of Russia to compensate for any volume loss. Also, OPEC has some capped (oil production) capacities, which they can easily uncapped within 50 to 60 days. OPEC-plus can also produce more, Venezuela might also come into the picture, and the US is also ready to increase production. Guyana, Argentina, and Brazil are also coming into the picture... we are very well protected on the supply front.

Regular revisions in petrol and diesel prices have completely stopped over the past few years. Are you and other oil marketing companies (OMCs) looking to revert to routine price revisions?

If I talk as a customer myself, I am very happy in this situation. In the last three years, crude prices have been volatile. At one point, they were at \$115 (per barrel), but they went down to \$65 as well. At \$115, had we continued with the routine price revisions, we would have sold the fuels at something like Rs 250 per litre. You can imagine the kind of volatility that would be brought into the economy. Prices of essential commodities would have gone haywire. And then when oil falls to \$65, it goes haywire on the other side. So, the OMCs have taken a decision that we will try to insulate the customer from these vagaries to the extent that it doesn't start affecting our balance sheets.

speaking at the inauguration of the PG Certificate Course on International Commercial & Investment Treaty Arbitration in Delhi.

Commenting on the time period for local remedies, Sitharaman said that it becomes a contentious issue while negotiating the BIT as some nations wouldn't even want to give more than six months. "That is an issue on which BIT becomes contentious where they wouldn't even want us to give more than six months, sometimes one year, if they are kind, for local remedies. Within one year, for an Indian investor, or for an Indian claimant, to seek the court here within India and then say I have exhausted all the available legal options, and I have to now go for an international arbitration, is next to impossible. And even this becomes an arguing, contesting, and negotiating point when you are sitting at the BIT table," she said. She further said that nations are becoming weary of international arbitrations and are moving away from the established models of arbitration. "Many nations like Australia are moving away from the traditional model of arbitration of Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).

In the month of love, tech companies, regulators flag 'romance scams': What are they?

In what is widely viewed to be the month of love in popular culture, warnings about 'romance scams' are being issued by experts, social media companies and authorities about the tangled web of vulnerability, emotional connection, deceit, extortion and financial frauds. India has featured among the top three countries in the number of new 'romance scams' profiles opened in 2024, according to a Moody's report, with over three-fourths of Indians encountering fake profiles and AI-generated photos on dating websites, apps and social media. India accounted for 12 per cent of the new romance scam profiles in 2024, behind only the United States and Nigeria, as per the Moody's report. Overall, Moody's recorded 1,193 new entities and people with potential ties to romance scams in 2024, a 14 per cent increase versus 2023.

"The US accounted for over a third (38 per cent) of new romance scam profiles among top 10 countries, followed by Nigeria (14 per cent), India (12 per cent), the UK (11 per cent), Malaysia (5 per cent), China (5 per cent), the Philippines (4 per cent), Brazil (4 per cent), Canada (4 per cent) and Australia (3 per cent)," it said. In a recent survey, McAfee — an online protection and services solution provider — looked at the new dimension of artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools that may have added to romance scams, surveying 7,000 people in seven countries worldwide, including India. It found that 77 per cent of Indians said they'd come across fake profiles and/or photos that look AI-generated on dating websites or apps, or on social media. 39 per cent of Indians said their conversations with a potential love interest online turned out to be with a scammer, while 26 per cent said they'd talked with a potential love interest, to discover it was actually an AI-generated bot and not a real person.

What are romance scams?

Romance frauds often take place through dating apps, but fraudsters may also contact potential victims through social media, according to a 2021 advisory of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), which comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Fraudsters typically create fake online profiles designed to lure victims in. Romance scams grew during the Covid-19 pandemic, as people were confined to their homes, many of them devoid of human intimacy and contact. Scammers thrived during the time, capitalising on people's isolation, which led to a greater need for emotional connection — leaving them vulnerable to scammers. "Fraudsters may use a technique called 'love bombing', where they contact victims frequently professing their feelings for them. The victims start to develop feelings in return, making them more likely to be defrauded," the I4C had said.

The agency had detailed the modus operandi saying that such scamsters ask the victims for money, gifts, bank details or intimate pictures / videos once they gain victims' trust. "Such fraudsters can also pose a risk to victims' personal safety as they are often part of criminal networks," it had said, asking people to avoid sending money, giving account details or important documents to unknown people and carefully controlling the amount of personal information shared on social media. As per the USA's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), in romance scams, a criminal uses a fake online identity to gain a victim's affection and trust. The scammer then uses the illusion of a romantic or close relationship to manipulate and/or steal from the victim. According to social media conglomerate Meta, romance scams are a common scheme in which scammers target people in a variety of ways — malicious texts or emails, dating apps, social media posts, discussion forums and more — under romantic pretenses. "In these cases, scammers would typically pose as attractive, single and successful individuals, often with a military or business background. They would send cold messages to many targets at once — in a typical spray and pray scheme — to initiate contact. If a target were

'Seengh nikal gaye the': Madhu Chopra once shared how daughter Priyanka's success had gone to their heads after winning Miss World



Dr Madhu Chopra shares life lessons on staying grounded in success and resilient during failure, with insights on navigating life's highs and lows with humility and self-awareness. Dr Madhu Chopra shares life lessons on staying grounded in success and resilient during failure, with insights on navigating life's highs and lows with humility and self-awareness. (file) In a candid interview with Bollywood Hungama in 2023, Dr Madhu Chopra, the mother of global icon Priyanka Chopra, reflected on the importance of humility amid success and resilience during challenging times. Sharing her experiences, she revealed how Priyanka's success initially impacted the family. "Jab vo Miss World bani thi to humare bhi chote chote nikal gaye the (When Priyanka became Miss World, even we grew little horns)," she admitted with a laugh. "Bacchon ko ye sab chhutpan se seekhna padta hai. Sabki life mein aache din, bure din aate hai. Bure din aate hai toh ghabrane ki baat nahi hai aur aache din aate hai toh seengh nahi nikaalne. Unhe ye pata rahega toh vo grounded rahenge. (I've always believed that grounded values are best taught from a young age. This isn't something you can instill when they're adults. It's essential for kids to grow up understanding that life has both good days and bad days. During tough times, there's no need to panic, and in moments of glory, you shouldn't let arrogance take over.)" Dr Madhu Chopra's parenting philosophy highlights the balance between celebrating achievements and maintaining humility—qualities that have undoubtedly shaped Priyanka's global success.

Counselling psychologist Srishri Vatsa elaborates on the delicate balance between success and humility: "Success is something to be proud of, but when it turns into arrogance, it can harm relationships and personal growth. It's important to remember that no one achieves success entirely alone. Acknowledging the contributions of others and showing kindness fosters a healthy attitude toward achievements." She adds that staying grounded doesn't mean downplaying success. Instead, it's about being open to feedback, embracing self-awareness, and recognising

to respond, the scammer would try to build trust over a period of time, ultimately asking for money or suggesting a fraudulent investment opportunity," as per Meta. Moody's said that scammers often seek to launder the money generated from romance scams like sextortion via the traditional financial system. As a result, banks can face significant reputational risks and fines. Sextortion is a type of romance scam targeting teenagers, particularly boys. Perpetrators use fake profiles to solicit explicit images or videos from victims, then extort money by threatening to expose the images to friends, family or on social media.

How are tech companies responding to the issue?

Meta, whose social networking platforms Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook are used by at least 2 billion people globally, is a ripe place for romance scammers to hunt for their victims. Earlier this week, the company said it removes accounts that its automated systems find to be malicious, including those that impersonate others. On Facebook Messenger, the company said it rolled out 'Safety Notices' to caution users when they are chatting with someone whose account shows signals of suspicious activity, and who may be based in a different country. "We are testing similar nudges to teens on Instagram and will begin expanding them to more users in the coming months," Meta said. On WhatsApp, people can silence calls from unknown callers to prevent unwanted contact, including from potential scammers, it added. The Match Group, which runs popular dating apps like Tinder, Hinge, and OkCupid, in a 2023 blog post had said that it has taken steps to help prevent and warn users of potential scams or fraud using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to detect words and phrases and proactively intervene. "We have also implemented various ways to warn users of potential scams or fraud, from in-app features to in-app education, and popup messages. To help further educate users on how to protect themselves on our apps as well as any online platform, we partnered with law enforcement and cyber crime investigators around the world to create a consumer education campaign on the different types of scams and how to identify common behaviors," the company had earlier said.

What are the other frauds in focus?

Scammers are getting better at taking advantage of major events, leveraging AI to both conduct new types of scams and enhance well-established fraud techniques, Google India said in its blog dated February 11. Enlisting the recent scam trends in India, Google said there are fake donation schemes and fraudulent travel bookings during the peak periods of charitable giving and travel around the time of major festivals like Diwali and religious celebrations. There are also AI-generated celebrity investment scams, wherein deepfakes with fabricated news articles and social media posts are used to promote fraudulent investment opportunities — commonly in cryptocurrency and trading platforms, it said. Other scams include remote access tech support fraud where scammers pose as technical support staff from well-known companies, banks, and government agencies, creating a sense of urgency by claiming there's a problem with your device, account, or online security, Google said. Additionally, there are job scams under which job seekers are lured with promises of high-paying remote work and international opportunities, and scams involving predatory loan apps aimed at people who are seeking quick access to money, promising fast, easy loans with minimal paperwork. As on January 31, 2025, Google said it has blocked over 13.9 million installation attempts of potentially harmful apps, protecting 3.2 million devices that translates to over 309,000 unique apps prevented from being installed on these devices. Google has also partnered with the I4C under DigiKavach, and onboarded Google Pay, on to the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal that allows it to receive and share critical information to investigate fraudulent financial activities.

the value of self-growth.

Success and failure are both integral to personal development. While success can boost confidence, staying humble and remembering the journey to get there is vital. Similarly, failures should be seen as opportunities for growth, not moments to spiral into negativity. Vatsa stresses the importance of emotional regulation: "Failure often triggers negative self-talk, which can damage self-esteem. Having a strong support system and resilience can help navigate these tough moments. Both success and failure teach essential lessons and contribute to building a well-rounded character."

Microsoft's new free tool OmniParser V2 gives more power to large language models (LLMs)

Hyderabad: A new AI model, OmniParser V2, was unveiled by Microsoft. The open-source model allows large language models (LLMs) — which are deep-learning models pre-trained on vast amounts of data — to act as agents capable of using a computer. According to Microsoft, Graphic User interface (GUI) automation requires agents with the ability to understand and interact with user screens. However, using general purpose LLM models to serve as GUI agents faces several challenges: 1) reliably identifying interactable icons within the user interface, and 2) understanding the semantics of various elements in a screenshot and accurately associating the intended action with the corresponding region on the screen. OmniParser closes this gap by 'tokenising' UI screenshots from pixel spaces into structured elements in the screenshot that are interpretable by LLMs. This enables the LLMs to do retrieval based next action prediction given a set of parsed interactable elements. OmniParser V2 takes this capability to the next level. Compared to its predecessor, it achieves higher accuracy in detecting smaller interactable elements and faster inference, making it a useful tool for GUI automation. In particular, OmniParser V2 is trained with a larger set of interactive element detection data and icon functional caption data. By decreasing the image size of the icon caption model, OmniParser V2 reduces the latency by 60% compared to the previous version. Notably, Omniparser+GPT-4o achieves state-of-the-art average accuracy of 39.6 on a recently released grounding benchmark ScreenSpot Pro, which features high resolution screen and tiny target icons.

Sohum Shah gives it all to save his daughter in this intriguing race-against-time thriller



(Sohum Shah) who has to shell out Rs 5 crores to retrieve his kidnapped daughter. Over the course of the trailer, we are made to understand that he might be a renowned surgeon, but he is quite the terrible father, who doesn't give the light of day to his daughter. We see characters played by Nimisha Sajayan and Shilpa Shukla interact with him over phone calls, and various other incidents happening, including high-speed chases, and desperate measures to find ways to get his daughter back. Also, there's Tinnu Anand on the other end of the phone blackmailing Sohum.

Interestingly, we don't really see any other character in person, leading to speculations that it could be a one-man show or at least a limited character drama, and this idea is unique enough to carry the stamp of Sohum Shah Films. Produced by Sohum Shah, Mukesh Shah, Amita Shah, and Adesh Prasad, the music of Crazy is scored by Vishal Bhardwaj. This film comes close on the heels of the super success of the re-released version of Tumbbad. In fact, even in the comments section of the Crazy trailer, we can see many netizens comment that they wouldn't wait for the re-release or OTT release to celebrate Crazy, and instead flock to the theatres to watch the intriguing film. Will they keep up the promise? We'd know on February 28.

Tina Ahuja says dad Govinda asked her to lose weight as 'mote unhealthy ache nahi lagte', remembers going on crash diets: 'Won't advise it to anyone'

Actor Tina Ahuja has always been open about her relationship with father, actor Govinda, and how he would comment on her appearance and guide her regarding weight management. In an interview earlier, she had revealed that her father was very particular about her weight during her teens, because her 'stomach was growing'. Now, in a candid conversation with Kamiya Jani on *Curly Tales*, Tina elaborated on her weight loss diets, and how an invite from actor Shilpa Shetty for a screening was an eye opener.

When asked if she follows any diet routine, Tina shared, "I have done every type of dieting. I always had a nutritionist since my teens. I remember going from this aalo ka parantha diet to only having 600-700 calories in a day, which I don't recommend to anyone. I only used to have black coffee, wear dhoti pants, it was a boho phase of my life with those red lips. But now, I have come to a point where I want to eat very good food - I eat berries, have smoothies, workout, green juices, nuts, and I sleep very well now."

When asked if dad Govinda still asks her to focus on weight loss, Tina replied, "Not now, but this has been going on since my teens. He was always like, 'Tum fit raha karo, ache lagne chahiye, mote unhealthy ache nahi lagta'. I never had any problem or anything. After my accident in Jaipur, I gained weight. I couldn't workout for a year after that. I used to think I was fit," she replied. The actor also revealed that Shilpa Shetty invited her to a film screening, when she realised about her drastic weight gain. "The biggest eye opener was thanks to Shilpa Shetty ji, she invited me for a screening. I had just come from London after a holiday and



I walked in thinking I am a fairy. Then, I saw a tag on Instagram and I felt, 'Oh, I have become so fat,' she said. Tina further added, "I went from UK4 to UK12 and I didn't even realise it. I was not even working out and eating a lot. I can now write a book on how to lose weight, taking one day at a time. I know all the healthy tricks and tips now." When asked if her mother Sunita Ahuja restricts her from eating anything or encourages her to diet, she said, "My mom actually makes me eat, she tells me I look good fat." After which Sunita continued, "Mere according, mann nahi maarna, don't overeat, but eat everything. It's better you workout and walk daily. I go for a brisk walk in the morning for one hour everyday."

Thaman livens up NTR Trust's Euphoria Musical Night; Nandamuri Balakrishna sings and plays the drums

Thaman livens up NTR event Thaman's musical event for NTR Trust graced by CM Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan and Nandamuri Balakrishna. Music director Thaman S and actor-politician Nandamuri Balakrishna set the stage on fire in the recently conducted musical event, Euphoria Musical Night, organised by the NTR Trust. The event, which was conducted to support Thalassemia patients, also marked the completion of 28 years since the NTR Trust was started. The event was graced by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan and Minister Nara Lokesh. The crowds were in raptures listening to their speeches, and it was an electrifying atmosphere courtesy the musical concert by Thaman. Incidentally, the Andhra CM revealed that Thaman performed in this event for free.

Sharing a curated video from the event, Thaman wrote, "An Event To Cherish For this Lifetime. Thanks to Nara Bhuvaneshwari Mam. It was so delightful To Perform before Nara Chandrababu Naidu garu, Nara Lokesh brother, Pawan Kalyan gaaru, and Nandamuri Balakrishna Gaaru. Thanks everyone for making Our NTR Trust Event a blockbuster one." Taking to social media after the event, the Andhra CM expressed his heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved in making the event a success, and mentioned Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan's donation of Rs 50 lakh to the trust. NTR Garu stood for selfless service, and his legacy continues through the @ntrtrust, which has been relentlessly working in healthcare, education, disaster relief, and skill



development. Another viral video features Nandamuri Balakrishna on the stage. The sportive thespian not only took the stage on the insistence of the musicians, but also joined them in singing. He crooned the "Suguna Sundari" number from his own superhit film, *Veera Simha Reddy*. He sang it along with singers like Sahithi Chaganti, and Srikrishna. If that wasn't cool and sportive enough, he also joined the legendary drummer Sivamani, who was playing in the concert, and drummed out a few beats along with the award-winning musician.

Vishnu Manchu reveals Akshay Kumar turned down the role of Lord Shiva in Kannappa twice: 'I then had to go through another director to convince him'

Vishnu Manchu recently revealed that Akshay Kumar was initially reluctant to accept the role of Lord Shiva in Kannappa, turning down the offer twice before finally accepting it. Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar portrays Lord Shiva in the Telugu mythological drama *Kannappa*, wherein Vishnu Manchu plays the titular role. One of the most anticipated Telugu movies of the year, director Mukesh Kumar Singh's mythological drama *Kannappa* has been generating buzz ever since its makers revealed the star-studded cast. Featuring cameo appearances by Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar, "Rebel Star" Prabhas, Malayalam superstar Mohanlal and Kajal Aggarwal in the roles of Lord Shiva, Rudra, Kirata and Goddess Parvati, respectively, the movie stars Vishnu Manchu in the titular role.

While Kumar's transformation as Lord Shiva broke the internet when the makers of *Kannappa* unveiled his first-look poster last month, Manchu recently revealed that the Bollywood actor was initially reluctant to accept the role, turning down the offer twice before finally accepting it. Penned by Manchu himself, the movie is bankrolled by his father, actor-producer Mohan Babu. "Akshay sir rejected my offer the first two times we went to him. I then had to go through another director to convince him. I told him that he

should be the face of Lord Shiva for this generation. For earlier generations, there were other people... but today there is only one face and that is Akshay Kumar. That's how I convinced him," he told *The Hollywood Reporter India*. Kumar had previously portrayed Lord Shiva in director Amit Rai's blockbuster comedy-drama *OMG 2* (2023), starring Pankaj Tripathi in the lead role.

Manchu further revealed that, unlike Kumar, Prabhas and Mohanlal readily agreed to join the project due to their long-standing relationship with his father. He also stated that the two actors did not take any remuneration for their roles. "Both Prabhas and Mohanlal sir did not need any convincing. They were happy to shoot whenever and they did it out of love for my dad. In fact, they both did not charge a single penny. They are both so big that they didn't need to do this character. When I asked Mohanlal sir if I could talk to his manager to discuss financials, he laughed and said, 'So you think you've become such a big boy now?' People like him and Prabhas make me believe in the value of friendships," he added. Mounted on an estimated budget of Rs 140 crore, *Kannappa* also features producer Mohan Babu, R Sarathkumar, Madhoo, Mukesh Rishi, Brahmaji, Karunas and Brahmanandam in key roles.

When Raj Kapoor accepted relationship with Nargis, explained why he never left wife Krishna to marry her: 'My wife is not my...'



Raj Kapoor justified his actions by claiming that the women in his life knew they were not mere substitutes for one another and nor did they perceive themselves as secondary to anyone else. Raj Kapoor's son Rishi Kapoor confirmed in his autobiography that his father had been involved with multiple female co-stars, including Nargis, despite being married to his mother, Krishna Malhotra.

Much like his cinematic journey, Raj Kapoor's personal life too was marked by soaring highs, devastating lows and an undercurrent of perpetual drama. Yet, whether on screen or in real life, he remained the undisputed "greatest showman", captivating all with his magnetic charisma. While several aspects of his life made extensive headlines, it was his relationships with his female co-stars - particularly his extramarital affair with the legendary Nargis - that attracted the most attention. Although neither Kapoor nor Nargis ever publicly acknowledged their romantic involvement, years later, his son Rishi Kapoor confirmed in his autobiography that his father had been involved with multiple female co-stars despite being married to his mother, Krishna Malhotra.

In fact, Raj Kapoor himself once spoke about the affair, albeit without naming Nargis directly and referring to her only as "the actress". He justified his actions by claiming that the women in his life knew they were not mere substitutes for one another and nor did they perceive themselves as secondary to anyone else. His first encounter with Nargis occurred when she was just 16, while he was already a married man with children. However, the meeting left such an indelible mark on him that he later recreated and sort of immortalised it in his 1973 blockbuster *Bobby*, featuring Rishi and Dimple Kapadia in the lead roles.

"She was very young. Angelic, absolutely... What a great actress she was. Films, for me, meant a complete, absolute, dedicated devotion and belonging. So, anybody

and anything that revolved around it, very much became a part of my being. And I must say that (Nargis) contributed a lot to what RK (Studio) is," Kapoor said in a documentary produced by Prasar Bharti, chronicling his life and legacy.

"Right from the very beginning, from the word go, I drew a line. And it's a very, very straight fact that my wife is not my actress and my actress is not my wife. By my wife, I mean the mother of my children. So, my home life, somewhere or the other, was there. Krishna was the mother of my children. While here was my actress. She would share, and have that satisfaction of having contributed to my creativity. That is her satisfaction," he stated, implying that he never intended to marry Nargis and wished to simply maintain an affair with her while safeguarding his family as his ultimate priority.

ICYMI | South Korean actor Kim Sae-ron, 24, found dead at home; friend says she was planning a comeback after DUI scandal. He further elaborated, "Neither did I try to put across my wife to be my actress, or my actress to be my wife. And that is one big saving grace which balanced... We kept on working over the years, with all the intensity. Because, to each his own, whatever belonged to one, one had it. One did not feel in any manner playing second fiddle, no! You are absolutely supreme where you belong. And then, another thing, the understanding part of it. Each one understood, and nobody cheated anybody. The mother of my children wasn't meant to be my actress, so she didn't feel cheated. I didn't feel that way. And similarly, the actress came into me being my actress, not the mother of my children."

Despite her deep love for Kapoor, Nargis eventually came to terms with the fact that he would never leave Krishna. Heartbroken, she moved on and married Sunil Dutt in 1958. Kapoor, however, saw this as a betrayal. According to Madhu Jain's book "The Kapoors: The First Family of Indian Cinema", Kapoor once told journalist Suresh Kohli, "The world tells me I let Nargis down. It was she who betrayed me." Despite her deep love for Raj Kapoor, Nargis eventually came to terms with the fact that he would never leave Krishna. Actor-director Raj Kapoor with his wife Krishna Malhotra and legendary movie star Nargis. (Express archive photo) The book also revealed that Kapoor was shattered by her marriage. "He broke down and cried in front of his friends and colleagues when he found out that she had married Sunil Dutt. Raj Kapoor took it very badly: he would reportedly burn himself with cigarette butts to check if he was not dreaming, wondering how she could have done this to him."

Rishi Kapoor, in his autobiography *Khullam Khulla*, recalled how his mother temporarily moved out of their home and stayed at the Natraj Hotel on Marine Drive upon discovering Kapoor's affair with actress Vyjayanthimala. "I was very young when my father had an affair with Nargis Ji, and so was not affected by it. I don't remember feeling anything was amiss at home either. But I do remember moving into the Natraj Hotel on Marine Drive with my mom during the time Papa was involved with Vyjayanthimala," he wrote.

Hrithik Roshan has a reunion with Team War, gets a hug from Koi... Mil Gaya's 'Maa', Rekha.

Hrithik Roshan and the makers of the Netflix documentary series, *The Roshans*, hosted a success bash on Sunday night in Mumbai. While several B-town celebs were a part of the celebrations, a few photos and videos are winning hearts on the internet. Hrithik Roshan reunited with his War co-actors and director Siddharth Anand. He also posed with his *Koi... Mil Gaya*'s maa, actor Rekha, on the event's red carpet.

Hrithik Roshan was seen posing for a click with the team of his 2019 hit film *War*. The star was joined by filmmaker Siddharth Anand and co-stars Tiger Shroff and Vaani Kapoor. Siddharth Anand shared photos from the same and captioned it, "Reunion for the ages! #TeamWar." The comment section of the post is flooded with fans asking about an update on *War 2*. The film starring Hrithik and NTR Jr and directed by Ayan Mukerji will release this year. *War* was a major box-office success and got love for the action sequences and performances and also a face-off between Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff, both known for their impressive dance and action skills.

Meanwhile Hrithik Roshan also posed with veteran actor Rekha at the success bash of *The Roshans*. In the video, Hrithik Roshan, Rekha, and Rakesh Roshan were seen posing together for the paparazzi. Hrithik and Rekha played mother and son in the film *Koi... Mil Gaya*. The caption read, "When Rohit met his Maa ?? The iconic #KoiMilGaya duo #HrithikRoshan and #Rekha ji, reunite at The Roshans success bash??" While the night was a celebration for *The Roshans*, Hrithik Roshan's ladylove Saba Azad too was spotted as she arrived for the success bash. She was seen with Hrithik's son Hridaan Roshan, and niece Suranika. In a clip Saba Azad was seen interacting with the



two as they made their way to the bash. Saba was dressed in a brown bodycon dress for the night. Apart from these, celebrities like Neetu Kapoor, Ameesha Patel, Anu Malik, Shaban Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Bhushan Kumar, Sam Kaushal, Mallika Sherawat, Pashmina Roshan, Jeetendra, Alka Yagnik, Jackie and Tiger Shroff, Anupam Kher, Udit Narayan, David Dhawan and many others too attended the event.

Pushpa actor Dhananjaya gets married in Mysore; Shivarajkumar attends event

Kannada actor Dhananjaya, who is also known for his performances in other language films, including the hugely popular *Pushpa* franchise, got married to Dr Dhanyatha Gauraklar in Mysore. The ceremony, which happened on Sunday, was attended by the who's who of Kannada cinema.

The ceremony took place at the Exhibition Grounds in Mysore, where a splendid replica of the Chamundeshwari temple was constructed. Some of the celebrities who were part of the lavish event were actors Shivarajkumar, Ramya, Upendra, Priyanka, Rakshita, Prem, Sruthi Hariharan, Meghana Raj, Sapthami Gowda, Dhruva



Sarja and Shradhaa Srinath, among others. The wedding

was also graced by popular political leaders, including

Governor Thawar Chand Gehlo.

Ajinkya Rahane: 'I got an offer to become an expert. It was easy and good money but within me, a person is saying I still can (play)'



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Ajinkya Rahane Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane addresses a press conference on the eve of the Ranji Trophy semi-final cricket match between Mumbai and Vidarbha, in Nagpur.

Not just Ajinkya Rahane himself, but according to the veteran, people he meets during his travels and assignments also believe he should be in the Indian Test team. This, he says, motivates him to give another shot at an international comeback and not take the option of becoming a television pundit. "Be it airport, hotel, security check, ground, county cricket, everywhere I have gone, they all said: Aaju bhai, aapko team mein hona chahiye. It

feels nice. It motivates me to give it a try, at least I would have given my best in the last few years of my career," Rahane told The Indian Express.

Ajinkya Rahane Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane during a practice session on the eve of the Ranji Trophy semi-final cricket match between Mumbai and Vidarbha, in Nagpur. (PTI) But irrespective of whether or not he returns to international cricket, Rahane will forever be remembered for leading an Indian team missing several of its first-choice stars to a comeback series win for the ages in Australia in 2020-21. That too, after being knocked over for 36 in the first Test. His tempo-setting hundred in the second Test in Melbourne gave the team belief.

"When I came back after BGT, I knew that I was captain for that period only and will be back to being vice-captain," he said. With memories of that incredible achievement in his mind, it was all the more difficult for Rahane to watch the Border-Gavaskar Trophy this time round from home. But he didn't take the easy option of a television contract as a cricket expert. "Yes (it was tough). I got an offer to become an expert. It was easy and good money but within me, a person is saying I still can (play). Getting picked or not is not in my hands. Down the line, I don't want a situation where I feel that yeh expert assignment mein baad mein bhi le sakta tha. I could have given one last push," he explained his thought process.

Ajinkya Rahane still hopeful of India comeback, says 'fire and passion' still there

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

The national selectors seem to have moved on from him, but Ajinkya Rahane has not given up hope of putting on an India jersey again. The 36-year-old last played for the country in the West Indies almost two years ago, but still believes he has it in him to contribute to the national side. Having guided Mumbai to the Ranji Trophy semifinals, quality innings at the business end of the tournament can put Rahane's name in contention, with a tour of England coming up in the summer. "There is still fire and passion in me. I'm playing Ranji Trophy at the moment, trying to give my all to the Mumbai team. The goal is clear to make another comeback," Rahane told The Indian Express a day before he leads defending champions Mumbai against Vidarbha in Nagpur.

Ajinkya Rahane Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane plays a shot on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy fixture against Meghalaya (Express Photo by Amit Chakravarty) He banks on his experience and fitness and believes age is just a number. "I'm more experienced, but still feel young. I'm fit enough to compete at the highest level. I never get satisfied with my game and don't take things for granted. I feel there's more cricket left in me. As a batsman, one can play till 40. There are players who have played till the age of 39-40. What matters is fitness. We need more



experienced players, plus a few youngsters, in the team. So that they can learn," the veteran argued. The last few years of his international career were not too productive, with his last hundred coming in the famous victory in Melbourne in December 2020. But he thinks he was making useful contributions to the team. "Post Covid, there has been a drastic drop in batting averages of everyone because of the kind of pitches we played on. Only the top order has the advantage on such tracks. I am not giving excuses. I don't have any regrets because I know whenever the team wanted me to deliver, I did. Contributions are not necessarily in the form of big hundreds, it could be a 70, 80 or 50," Rahane reasoned.

Before Bumrah's arrival, it was Shami who carried India's attack all through, says Laxmipathy Balaji



GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Mohammed Shami India's Mohammed Shami celebrates the wicket of Australia's David Warner during the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 final match between India and Australia, at the Narendra Modi Stadium, in Ahmedabad. Former India pacer Laxmipathy Balaji said Mohammed Shami is the right guy to lead India's pace attack in the Champions Trophy in absence of injured Jasprit Bumrah. "Actually, he had out-bowled Bumrah in the 2019 (50-over World Cup) and in the last World Cup (2023). Bumrah is the champion bowler across formats," Balaji told "But Shami has experience and, before Bumrah's arrival, it was Shami who carried India's attack all through.

"I think it's very important. If India has to do well, then Shami has to come good with the new ball. The kind of impact he can make in his first six overs with the new ball, it will play a crucial role for India. ind vs eng, ind vs eng 1st odi, ind vs eng live score, ind vs eng 1st odi live score Mohammed Shami reacts after bowling a delivery to England's Phil Salt during the first ODI at Vidarbha Stadium in Nagpur. (AP Photo) "Old ball is anyway... it is a defensive game now. If he can make early inroads regularly that will give a huge booster to India," he added. Balaji feels Shami's effectiveness has not gone down and since the 34-year-old is making a comeback after ankle injury, he is taking a bit time to hit the rhythm.

"Since that (ankle) injury has happened, there was a little bit of slowness, maybe. It's natural. But there is nothing you can do about it. It's part of any sportsperson's career."

He has the experience to get over it and he will do it as he bowls more. It's just about accepting the (physical) condition and continuing his best practices," he said. Balaji felt the body of work that Shami has built over the last 12 years makes him an ideal candidate for it. "Shami is the leader of the pack right now. I mean, he has been the leader of the pack for a long time now. If you see what Shami has done in 12 years of cricket and, especially, in Test cricket, it has been humongous.

Sarfraz Ahmed opens up about MS Dhoni's iconic photo with his son before 2017 Champions Trophy final

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Former Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed shared the story behind his then three-month-old son's iconic photo with MS Dhoni before the 2017 Champions Trophy final between India and Pakistan. "The moment happened when his family friends were visiting, and Dhoni happened to come downstairs. He thought it would be a perfect opportunity to capture the moment with his three-month-old son," Sarfraz told Cricket Pakistan. Pakistan-led by Sarfraz defeated India in the 2017 Champions Trophy final. The former Pakistan captain also explained his conversation with the Indian great after the final, which helped him grow as a cricketer.

"I had a long conversation with Dhoni about wicketkeeping and cricket in general. I asked him how he managed to balance his roles as a wicketkeeper, batsman, and captain. The tips Dhoni shared with me were immensely helpful. He was very humble and generous in offering his advice," he said. The former Pakistan captain said despite the high-octane contest, the players from both the sides have shared mutual respect for each other. "While the lack of bilateral series has affected interactions to some extent, the matches that do take place, especially back-to-back encounters, have led to improved relations," he said. "Whenever Indian and Pakistani players meet, there



"The moment happened when his family friends were visiting, and Dhoni happened to come downstairs. He thought it would be a perfect opportunity to capture the moment with his three-month-old son," Sarfraz told Cricket Pakistan.

is always mutual respect and friendship, after matches it's not uncommon to see players like Shoaib Malik, Yuvraj Singh, Virat Kohli, MS Dhoni, and others sitting together, chatting and enjoying each other's company. "Pakistan will open their campaign against New Zealand on Wednesday at the National Stadium in Karachi. A day later, India will lock horns against Bangladesh in Dubai.

Hopefully Pakistan cricket team will play exactly the way PCB has worked to renovate all stadiums, says Muhammad Yousuf



GNS News Agency, Feb 19. Legendary Pakistan batter Muhammad Yousuf is hopeful that the Mohammad Rizwan-led team will play in a way that reflects the work the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has done to renovate all the stadiums in record time before the Champions Trophy. Defending champions Pakistan will start their campaign against New Zealand on Wednesday at the National Stadium in Karachi. "I am very excited like any Pakistani. After 29 years, Pakistan is hosting an ICC event," Muhammad Yousuf told Samaa TV. "If Pakistan reaches the final, then they will play at home. I wish Pakistan cricket

would play exactly the way the PCB has worked to renovate the stadiums.

"Kudos to the PCB for the way they renovated all the stadiums in six months." For Yousuf, New Zealand and India are the most balanced sides, but he feels Pakistan will have an edge as they are playing at home. "It's tough to pick. It's a big tournament. Momentum might swing with anyone. For me, New Zealand looks like the most balanced side," he said. "They have a good side as per the subcontinent conditions. They have three quality fast bowlers and good spinners. They have a solid top six in batting. The wicketkeeper is an all-rounder; they have two spin-bowling all-rounders. "Pakistan has the edge because they are playing in home conditions. But they have to play calculated cricket in the tournament." Yousuf also has one piece of advice for the Pakistan cricket team ahead of the marquee event. "We have played on turning wickets recently. We need to play in the gaps against the spinners. Rotate the strike and play fewer dots. "We got exposed in the tri-series final against New Zealand. We failed to dominate their spinners in the middle overs. On the predicted scores during the tournament, Yousuf said: "If it is a double-paced track, then 300 will be a good total. But if it's a flat track, then teams should be looking to score between 350 and 400."

Brand CR7 leaps higher than footballer Cristiano Ronaldo

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Cristiano Ronaldo was asked once why crowds jeered him. He shot back with his quintessential smirk and sarcasm: "Because I'm rich, handsome and a great player." He was only 26 when he popped out the one-liner that defines him even when he has turned 40. Only that, he could append the line. "Because I am the richest footballer in the world; the most expensive player in the world, the highest goal-scorer in the world; the most followed person on Instagram, a brand value of \$850 million" Because, it could be added, he is a successful businessman. He might not yet boast the dazzling investor-entrepreneur-venture capitalist portfolio of LeBron James, David Beckham, Stephen Curry, Magic Johnson and Serena Williams. But Ronaldo, as he does when making every step in his life, has aggressively embraced the fickle, and complicated world of business. It has plunged his hands and the unfathomable riches into varied streams, from the staple refuge of tourism, leisure, hospitality and clothing brands to unusual streams like tableware, home decor, and a hair-transplant chain in Spain among 21 enterprises.

The first venture was the CR7 lifestyle brand in 2006. He opened the first branch in Funchal, his hometown, with his mother, who worked as a gardener. "It's a deeply emotional moment for me, to start something like this in the town I was born and I was made," he said in a teary interview with journalists. In subsequent years, it spread to other parts of Portugal and Europe, before it slowly retreated to the background amidst more ambitious enterprises. The brand added a fragrance sticker, the extremely popular (and parodied) CR7 underwear line (with the most ad-caption fans that want to dress like Ronaldo), shoes, eyewear and track-pants. The pandemic body-blow hit the sales hard and the shutters of the clothing stores, including the one in Funchal, were rolled down. But the CR7 underpants brand has grown as exponentially as the cult of Ronaldo. The most serious endeavour set off in 2015, during his peak Real Madrid years. He entered into hospitality industry with the Pestana Group, owned by millionaire Dionisio Pestana. On the basis of a 50-50 agreement, they opened a chain of hotels in Portugal and later Europe. He chose the first, in another ode to his home-town, in Funchal. Another emotional press conference followed. Additions sprung in Lisbon, Times Square in New York, Madrid and Marrakesh, while an ambitious project is unfolding in Paris, on the left bank of the River Seine near the Austerlitz train station. All hotels are commonly-themed: Ronaldo. In 2022, the group claimed that its revenue touched \$500 million. Real estate was another obvious investment pool—even though he did cop losses, like when he sold the apartment he had bought in Trump Tower, on New York's Fifth Avenue, for a massive cut—and his empire includes a seven-storey apartment block in Funchal, where his mother and brother live, a villa in Turin, a \$6m mansion on a gated fortress estate called La Finca near Madrid, a sprawling holiday home in Marbella, and the most expensive flat in Lisbon



(£6.5m). The odds for being successful as a celebrity-athlete-cum-business are higher, because Ronaldo, as is Beckham or Williams, is one of the most famous athletes on earth, the perfect blend of sporting excellence and glamour, harnessed by a group of expert advisors. He has other selling points than his looks and greatness on the field. His is an inspiring underdog story, of self-made success, a riveting pursuit of perfection, the human form of ambition, of longevity and physical conditioning. In a sense he was made as much for business as he was for football. The corporate attire, demeanour and speak suit him more than his eternal rival Lionel Messi (you could imagine him in only the Barcelona stripes), or others like Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Neymar. Cristiano Ronaldo has been backed to play the 2026 World Cup by Portugal teammate Bruno Fernandes. (Reuters) Cristiano Ronaldo has been backed to play the 2026 World Cup by Portugal teammate Bruno Fernandes. (Reuters) Besides, like other successful entrepreneurs, athletes rarely launch businesses or invest alone. They do it with seasoned partners, like Ronaldo did with Pestana. His trusted advisors include his older brother Hugo Aveiro and former Sporting teammate Miguel Paixao. The most shocking was his acquisition of his stakes (estimated 20 percent share in the media firm Cofina, which owns Correio da Manhã, the most circulated newspaper in the country, a sports daily, a business paper and a television channel. Before buying the stakes, he has sued the newspaper eleven times. "I have no respect for that newspaper because it is constantly inventing news, inventing controversies, inventing a bad relationship, a bad atmosphere in the national team," he had said. In another incident, he threw a reporter's microphone into a lake during Euro 2016. Then, he would have gone by the business text logic that if you can't stop them fighting, then buy them. So vast and diverse are his investments that Ronaldo the footballer no longer exists. Only CR7 the brand does. The greatest footballer, goalscorer, the richest footballer on the planet, Insta-emperor, social-media influencer (charges around £1.2m to endorse a product), god of ads, the avatars are many. He lives the Andy Warhol quote that, "Making money is art. And working is art. And good business is the best art." The only brag he cannot brag about is that he is not a World Cup winner. That would make him feel like a bankrupt billionaire though.

'My mother used to babysit to earn extra money. Those memories are in my mind': Ajinkya Rahane explains his philosophy

GNS News Agency, Feb 19

Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane plays a shot on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy fixture against Meghalaya Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane plays a shot on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy fixture against Meghalaya

Playing 85 Tests for India and scoring more than 5,000 runs is a remarkable achievement, but success has never gone to Ajinkya Rahane's head due to the values he lives by. Coming from a humble background and having to work hard to succeed in cricket has ensured he remained level-headed. Also, watching his parents work hard to maintain the family has had a profound impact on him. "I used to come from Dombivali, the train journey was the most challenging for me and I used to travel alone from the age of 8 because my father had to go to office," Rahane recalls in a conversation with The Indian Express. "I come from a lower-middle-class family. My mother used to babysit to earn extra money because my father's salary wasn't enough to make ends meet. Those memories are in my mind and that is why I try to be grounded. This fame and money has come only due to this game." Rahane Ajinkya Rahane's 98 powered Mumbai to their second Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final That's the reason he tries to guide younger players, who suddenly get a lot of money and fame quickly and are at a risk of losing their way. Rahane stresses that one



should never forget one's roots. "I don't like to go into their personal space but as a leader, if I feel I need to tell them anything, I will. I have seen players with talent but wrong choices and wrong friends took them astray. It's important not to forget where we all come from. Many times when a player is having a great run, you see people with them. Suddenly, if things go wrong, the same people vanish. So it is very important to know who your true friends are," he says. Rahane is also very particular about how he spends his money, and took his time before buying a new car. "This is where my family values came in.