

# INDIAN CHRONICLE

21 February, 2025 | Friday | Volume No:13 | Issue No:6 | Pages: 8+8

www.indianchronicle.com

Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State)

₹ 3

## Uber goes cash-only model for auto-drivers

Hyderabad: Ride hailing app, Uber has announced a major shift in its payment model for auto drivers, shifting to direct cash-only model. This means that the customers will need to pay to the auto driver directly in cash, as any other digital payments like Uber credits will no longer be accepted. While Uber credits can still be used for other rides, it will not be implemented for payment to auto-drivers. A notification to this effect has been sent by the Uber to its customers, indicating that the new changes will be implemented from February 18.

"If you are our member, Uber One related changes have already been communicated separately.

We understand this is a change, but rest assured, the ride experience remains as seamless as always. We're excited to share this new step towards simplicity with you," the notification from Uber said.

## Picnic turns tragic; Hyderabad doctor who jumped into Tungabhadra river found dead

Hyderabad: The body of a woman doctor from Hyderabad, Dr Ananya Mohan Rao, who went missing on Wednesday after jumping into the Tungabhadra river near Sanapur in Gangavathi taluk while on a picnic, was retrieved on Thursday.

The doctor, who lived at Nampally and worked with a city hospital, reportedly drowned after she jumped into the river on Wednesday. On Tuesday, she had gone on a picnic with her friends Ashita and Satwik and on Wednesday evening, the trio went for a swim in the Tungabhadra situated behind the guesthouse they were staying in. Ananya jumped into the river from an adjacent rock and a strong current carried her away, the police suspect.

## Delhi CM Designate Rekha Gupta takes oath, says will not stay in Sheesh Mahal



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

In a bold declaration ahead of her swearing-in, Delhi Chief Minister designate Rekha Gupta has announced that

she will not take up residence in the Sheesh Mahal, the official residence of the Chief Minister. This statement comes as a notable critique of the current Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. Gupta, who is preparing to assume office, emphasized her commitment to being accessible to the people of Delhi, stating, "I will live with the Janta, not in Sheesh Mahal." This assertive stance signals a departure from the traditional expectations tied to the high-profile role and underscores her intention to prioritize transparency and direct engagement with the citizens. As Delhi prepares for a new chapter in governance, Gupta's approach is generating considerable attention, raising expectations around her leadership and the priorities she will champion as Chief Minister.

## CM Revanth Reddy Invited to Yadagirigutta Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple's Golden Vimana Gopuram...

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has been invited to participate in the grand consecration ceremony (Maha Kumbhabhishekam Samprokshana Mahotsavam) of the Golden Vimana Gopuram at Yadagirigutta Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple. A delegation, including Endowments Minister Konda Surekha, Government Whip Beerla Ayyanna Goud, Endowments Department Secretary Shailaja Ramaiyer, temple EO, and priests, met the Chief Minister at his Jubilee Hills residence. They formally invited him to attend the prestigious event scheduled for October 23. The Golden Vimana Gopuram is a significant spiritual and architectural addition to the revered temple, and the event is expected to attract a large number of devotees and dignitaries.



## AIMIM preparing to contest Bihar Assembly Elections



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Hyderabad: The All India Majlis e Ittehadul Muslimin is preparing itself to play a bigger role in the Bihar assembly elections to be conducted later this year.

The AIMIM party has seen Bihar as a favourable ground after Telangana and Maharashtra. In fact, in 2020 assembly elections the party won five seats Amour, Kochadhamam, Jokihat, Baisi and Bahadurgunj) of the 20 seats it had contested in the State. However, four out of the five legislators quit the party and joined the Rashtriya Janata

Dal (RJD). The party in 2024 Lok Sabha elections contested from eight seats in the State. Unfortunately it could not win a single seat. Party sources said preparations are going on and suitable candidates will be identified to contest the election on party ticket. The party is careful while identifying and selecting candidates having tasted bitterness after four of the party MLA's defected to the RJD in 2020 after winning on AIMIM ticket.

The party sees the Seemanchal region as a favourable ground in Bihar. In the 2020 assembly elections it fielded 20 candidates of which 14 were in the Muslim-dominated Seemanchal region. Seemanchal area comprises the districts of Purnia, Katihar, Araria and Kishanganj. It has a large Muslim population that has traditionally voted for the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress. In last one decade the AIMIM had gained considerable ground in Bihar. It first contested in the 2015 Assembly election in six seats in Seemanchal without significant success. Again during the 2019 Lok Sabha poll it contested from some seats and its candidates were the runner-ups, or close behind, in some seats. Nampally MLA, Mohammed Majid Hussain in-charge of party affairs in Bihar and the Akhtar ul Iman, AIMIM Bihar president and local MLA Amour from constituency are working together to help the party prosper in Bihar, source said.

## BRS refutes Congress allegations in Rajalingamurthy murder case



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Hyderabad: Former BRS MLA Gandra Venkataramana Reddy has refuted allegations linking him and his party to the murder of Rajalingamurthy in Jayashankar Bhupalpally district on Wednesday, calling them politically motivated attempts to malign BRS. He condemned the Congress's mudslinging against the BRS and attempts to pin the blame on him and senior BRS leaders, including party president K Chandrashekar Rao and senior leader T Harish Rao. Rajalingamurthy, who had filed a case alleging the BRS government's role in the Medigadda barrage collapse, was murdered on Wednesday, triggering a political storm. With the deceased's family and Congress leaders pointing fingers at BRS, Venkataramana Reddy dismissed the accusations, stating that his party never indulged in murder politics. "The Congress is making baseless claims without knowing the facts. The FIR clearly states that this murder stemmed from a local land dispute, and police should conduct an impartial investigation to punish the real

culprits," he demanded. He also noted that those accused in the case, were reportedly in police custody. The former BRS MLA pointed out the past criminal record of Rajalingamurthy, who was involved in multiple land disputes and had a history as a rowdy sheeter. He said the deceased's wife, a former BRS councilor, was being pressured to make false allegations against him. Venkataramana Reddy also demanded the State government to conduct a CB-CID investigation or even seek a CBI probe into the case. "Rajalingamurthy filed a case on the Medigadda barrage issue and it will be handled legally," he affirmed. He also criticised Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy for his remarks, charging him with using the incident for political mileage.

## Engineering tuition fee set to skyrocket as private colleges in Telangana propose steep hikes

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Hyderabad: Several top private engineering colleges in the State have proposed steep fee hikes, which could cost aspiring engineers their arm and a leg. The management submitted proposals to the Telangana Admission and Fee Regulatory Committee (TAFRC) seeking fee hikes ranging between 50 per cent and 100 per cent for the next three-year block period commencing academic year 2025-26.

## NDA Chief Ministers meet after Delhi CM's swearing-in; PM Modi attends



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

New Delhi: A meeting of Chief Ministers of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-ruled states got underway in the national Capital on Thursday, hours after the grand swearing-in of new Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and her Cabinet ministers at the city's iconic Ramliia Ground. The meeting was attended by the CMs of BJP-ruled states and those ruled by key constituents of the NDA alliance -- TDP and JD(U). TDP President and Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu attended the meeting, however Bihar CM Nitish Kumar was conspicuous by his absence.

The meeting was expected to focus on governance strategies, policy coordination, and preparations for upcoming elections in NDA-ruled states. Union Home Minister Amit Shah was among the first to arrive at the Imperial Hotel, the

venue for the meeting of CMs of NDA-ruled states. The BJP's allies attending the NDA meet extended congratulations to the new Delhi CM on the resounding victory of the party and attributed the success to the party's commitment to public issues and PM Modi's mass appeal.

PM Modi said that the team beautifully mixes vigour and experience and will surely ensure good governance for Delhi. Taking to social media after the oath ceremony, PM Modi wrote on X, "Congratulations to Smt. Rekha Gupta Ji on taking oath as Delhi's Chief Minister. She has risen from the grassroots, being active in campus politics, state organisation, municipal administration and now MLA as well as Chief Minister." He said he was confident that she would work for Delhi's development and wrote, "I am confident she will work for Delhi's development with full vigour. My best wishes to her for a fruitful tenure."

## Bandi Sanjay Blames Congress and BRS for Krishna Water Dispute

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Hyderabad: BJP National General Secretary Bandi Sanjay Kumar has criticized the Congress and BRS for the ongoing Krishna water dispute, holding them responsible for the water crisis in North Telangana. Speaking on the issue, Bandi Sanjay alleged that former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) colluded with the previous Andhra Pradesh government, compromising the state's water share. He claimed that KCR had agreed to receive only 299 TMC of Krishna water instead of the rightful 575 TMC, which severely affected irrigation and drinking water availability in the region.

Bandi Sanjay further stated that both the BRS and Congress governments had failed to safeguard Telangana's water rights, leading to the current shortage. He accused them of negligence and political motives that harmed the farmers and people of North Telangana. The Krishna water dispute has been a long-standing issue between Telangana



and Andhra Pradesh, with concerns over water allocation impacting irrigation and drinking water supply. BJP leaders have been demanding a fair distribution of Krishna river water, blaming past governments for compromising Telangana's interests.

## ED attaches properties of Tamil film director Shankar



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Chennai Zonal Office has provisionally attached three immovable properties worth about ₹10.11 crore registered in the name of film director and producer S. Shankar under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. The ED initiated investigation on the basis of a complaint filed by one Aarur Tamilanadan against Mr. Shankar before the 13th Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai, on May 19, 2011. The complaint alleged that the storyline of the movie Enthiran (Robot) starring Rajinikanth and directed by Mr. Shankar, was copied from a story titled Jiguba authored by him thereby rendering Mr. Shankar liable for violations under the Copyright Act, 1957, and the (then) Indian Penal Code.

The ED said its investigation revealed that Mr. Shankar received a substantial remuneration of ₹11.5 crore for his multifaceted contributions to Enthiran, including story development, screenplay, dialogues, and direction. Furthermore, an independent report by the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) identified striking similarities between the story Jiguba and the movie Enthiran. This report, which examined the narrative structure, character development,

and thematic elements, lends significant support to the plagiarism allegations against Mr. Shankar. Enthiran grossed ₹290 crore worldwide, making it an all-time blockbuster at the time. In a statement, the ED said, "Based on the substantial evidence and records in hand, it has been determined that S. Shankar has violated Section 63 of the Copyright Act, 1957 — a violation now classified as a scheduled offence under the PMLA, 2002."

## Indian deportees from U.S. arrive in Panama

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Panama has informed India about the safe arrival of a group of Indians deported from the U.S. and the Indian mission in the country is working closely with the host government to ensure their wellbeing after obtaining consular access to them. The Embassy of India in Panama, Costa Rica & Nicaragua took to 'X' on Thursday (February 20, 2025) to share the information but did not provide data on the number of Indians arriving in Panama. The group of Indians is part of a larger group of 299 migrants sent to Panama by the U.S. government. Panamanian authorities have informed us that a group of Indians have reached Panama from US

These people arrived in the country on three flights last week after President Jose Raul Mulino agreed that Panama would become a "bridge" country for deportees. The Trump administration has pledged to deport millions of people who crossed illegally into the U.S. "Panamanian authorities have informed us that a group of Indians have reached Panama from the U.S.," the Embassy of India in Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica posted on X. "They are safe and secure at a Hotel with all essential facilities. The embassy team has obtained consular access We are working closely with the host Government to ensure their wellbeing," it said.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Akali crisis

The current ferment in Akali politics reflects a fierce struggle for the control of premier Sikh institutions. Tensions have been simmering since December last year, when the Akal Takht awarded religious punishment to Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Sukhbir Singh Badal and others for the 'mistakes' committed by the party when it was in power in Punjab from 2007 to 2017. The intrigue and onepersonship have intensified of late, and it seems that things are coming to a head. Last week, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) dismissed Giani Harpreet Singh as the jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib after accepting the report of a panel that had probed allegations against him in an old domestic dispute. The controversial decision triggered a sharp response from Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghubir Singh, who said the highly condemnable step would undermine the autonomy of the Takhts. Following the scathing criticism, SGPC chief Harjinder Singh Dhani resigned on 'moral grounds' and reaffirmed his allegiance to the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs. The rift widened when former SGPC president Kirpal Singh Badungar resigned from a committee set up by the Akal Takht to oversee the SAD's membership drive and the election of office-bearers. The Badals have controlled the SGPC for decades, but the party's plummeting political fortunes — closely linked to the lingering anger within the Sikh community over the sacrilege cases of 2015 — has weakened their hold in recent years. Sukhbir and his party colleagues are hoping that their atonement would help them start afresh and regain the trust of the aggrieved Panth. However, their task has become even more difficult with the launch of a political outfit, Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De), by supporters of jailed radical MP Amritpal Singh. The multiplicity of rivals might prompt the SAD to revive its alliance with the BJP, which is itself bent on making major inroads into Punjab.

## Remains of Indian fishermen, who died in Pakistan jail, to reach his village in Gujarat: Activist



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

The mortal remains of an Indian fisherman, Babu Kana Chudasama, 41, who died in a Pakistani prison, are expected to reach his village in Gir Somnath by Tuesday evening, Mumbai-based activist and journalist Jatin Desai told. However, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has yet to respond to questions about the

repatriation. Chudasama had died in a Pakistani jail on January 23 while facing imprisonment for allegedly crossing Pakistan waters. Desai said in a release, "His mortal remains were repatriated Monday via the Wagah-Attari border. He was arrested by Pakistan's Maritime Security Agency on February 18, 2022, for inadvertently crossing the water border in a fishing boat. His sentence was over in 2022 and his nationality was also confirmed." Chudasama was lodged in a Karachi jail and was the eighth fisherman to have died in custody in the last two years, as per government sources. Desai has demanded that Pakistan immediately release and repatriate around 180 arrested Indian fishermen who have completed their sentences and whose nationalities have been verified. According to the MEA, the last list of prisoners exchanged between the two countries on January 1 had 49 civilian prisoners and 217 fishermen who are Indian or believed to be Indian in Pakistan's custody. India had 381 civilian prisoners and 81 fishermen who are Pakistani or believed to be Pakistani on its list.

## Delhi HC imposes cost on govt for delay in implementing Armed Forces Tribunal order on disability pension for woman captain



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

The Delhi High Court has imposed a cost of Rs 15,000 on the government for appealing against an Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) judgment after a year, causing agony and pain to a woman Army officer fighting for her disability pension. In a judgment delivered on February 14, a bench of Justice Navin Chawla and Justice Shalinder Kaur dismissed the government's appeal against an AFT order that granted disability pension to the woman Army captain. The bench upheld the AFT judgment, which recognised the disability caused to the woman officer during her service and dismissed the government's contention that she suffered the ailment before joining the Army.

"We find that the impugned order was passed by the learned Tribunal on 17.08.2023. Instead of complying with the same, the petitioners have chosen to challenge it after the lapse of more than one year, thereby causing further agony and pain to the respondent. The petitioners shall, therefore, pay costs of Rs 15,000 to the respondent," the court said. Capt Anamika Dutta joined the Army as a short service commission officer in 1996. She was prematurely released from service on September 24, 2002, due to lower backache after being placed in a low medical category. The woman officer contended before the AFT that, due to her shooting skills, she was attached to the Army Marksman Unit. During her training, she strained herself and suffered back pain. However, it was only upon her posting to Leh in the 3 Infantry Division Ordinance (DOU), a high-altitude area, from April 2001 that she experienced severe backache. Extreme inhospitable service conditions seriously affected her health, impacting her back. She was

hospitalised in Leh and in Chandigarh military hospitals before being released from service at her own request due to her medical condition. The government contended before the high court that the AFT had delivered an erroneous verdict favouring the woman captain, asserting that the "low backache" and "fibro fasciitis" she suffered from at the time of her release were not attributable to or aggravated by service conditions.

The government argued that the Release Medical Board (RMB) proceedings specifically recorded that the woman officer suffered from lower backache even before joining the service. However, the counsel for the woman officer contended that this assertion was not supported by any documentation and was merely a self-included insertion in the RMB proceedings. The counsel submitted that the woman officer entered service in 1996 and was discharged in 2002 and that in the previous medical board proceedings, there was no mention of her suffering from "low backache" and "fibro fasciitis". The high court noted that the basis for the finding by the RMB had neither been provided by the medical board nor produced by the government. "At the time of induction of an officer into service, the officer is required to undergo a rigorous medical assessment, and it is only if the officer is found to be fully fit that the officer is then inducted into service. In terms of the judgment of the Supreme Court in Dharanvir Singh (supra), in case there is no mention of a prior medical condition of the officer at the time of induction, a presumption has to be drawn that the disability suffered was post the induction. The only question thereafter that remains is whether the disability suffered can be said to be attributable to or aggravated by service conditions," the court said in its order. "A detailed analysis of the applicant's documents shows that the applicant was an active shooter and was posted to 3 DOU, Leh, from April 2001 till May 2002. In 2002, the applicant was hospitalised owing to Low Back Ache and Fibro Fasciitis, which further led to her discharge in the same year. The RMB records of the applicant showcase the disability percentage between 11-14 per cent and mark the onset in the year 2001 at Leh. Since the disability was not detected at the time of her entry into service and since the onset was recorded to be at Leh, this would attract the provision of the above-mentioned rule, thereby making the applicant's disability attributable to and aggravated by service and entitling her to the disability element of pension," the court said.

## 'Deport by USA': social media abuzz with stories of illegal immigrants and 'donkey route'

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Days have passed since US deportees returned to India on three flights, but social media is still abuzz with their stories. Among the latest posts shared by deportees is a video that Gurvinder Singh, from Nangal village in Punjab's Gurdaspur district, made while crossing Panama's jungle on foot in the dead of the night. Gurvinder and a few other Punjabi men are seen travelling in a small boat, before wading through ankle-deep water in the jungle in biting cold, holding torches. He had shared the video with his brother after reaching near Mexico, where reception was good, he told reporters. Gurvinder began his journey on December 22, 2024, starting from his home, reaching Delhi from his village, and later flying from Mumbai to Guyana, Brazil and Colombia. From Colombia, they crossed the Panama jungles on foot. He, along with 22 others, crossed a wall in Mexico and entered the US on February 1, where they were arrested and deported after a fortnight. He arrived at Amritsar airport on a military plane along with other deportees on February 16. Gurvinder, whose 'donkey route' video has gone viral, told reporters, "I had spent Rs 50 lakh after selling off land and taking a loan, but now I am in debt." A short video featuring a 7-8 seater autorickshaw is also gaining traction online for a message written on the vehicle's back and on a side—"Deport by USA"—alongside an American flag. The yellow vehicle bears the number PB06, indicating it is from Gurdaspur. The background song in the video thus goes: "Sada area painda border ni/na chalde kise de order ni/ ghar balyan di bhanve chhatt hove/ Par jigre sadde gardar ni" (Our area lies near the border, yet we follow no one's orders/Even if our homes have wooden beam roofs which are considered weak, our spirits are strong as iron rods which never surrender). These lines, written by Karan Randhawa, are from the recently released Punjabi movie Majhail. On the front mirror is a sticker with the Canadian flag, reflecting the vehicle owner's aspiration to settle abroad. Jagraj Singh, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Gurdaspur, told The Indian Express, "The auto number is from Gurdaspur, and the reel was posted on Instagram on February 8. However, the auto driver has not been found on the road since. Perhaps he did it to gain popularity on social media." Another video with a similar message on a truck from Phagwara is also going viral. Raja, a dealer of pre-owned cars based in Ludhiana, said, "We heard that a few people who are not even recent deportees are getting such stickers pasted on their vehicles to gain sympathy and support for more business—which is strange. In Phagwara, someone got it done. Vehicles are not visible on the roads, but reels are going viral."

Over 120 deportees from Punjab have returned so far this year. Earlier, a few videos of the "donkey route" went



viral on various social media. They were shared by Haryana-based Akash, a deportee who returned on February 5. In the comments section of the autorickshaw video, a user suggested the message should have been "deported by the USA" instead of "Deport by USA". "Perhaps due to this English only, they would have deported," reads one comment. Another user wrote, "Hats off to the spirit of Punjabis... but tomorrow, if someone comes from jail after committing a crime, will anyone write 'return from central jail'?" Yet another user pointed out the difference between "returned from USA" and "returned by USA." "With the deportees facing backlash and embarrassment as well, an AI-generated song in the voice of the late singer Sidhu Moosewala that appears to sympathise with them is also going viral. The song titled 295 2.0 features lyrics sung to the tune of Moosewala's popular song 295. A few lines from the song state: "40-40 lakh lakh ke bahar aaye si... siran te karje de bhoj paye si mehne dinda sara hi Punjab kaston (we had come to a foreign land by spending Rs 40 lakh or more after taking loans... the whole Punjab is targeting us for what purpose?). There are social media pages featuring "donkey route" videos. Titled "America donkey," "USA donkey route," etc, these pages show the purported journeys of illegal immigrants through the jungle of Panama, as well as through the sea and canals, even though their veracity has not been established. They promote the "donkey routes" and contain regular updates about deportation flights. Videos by Gurvinder and Akash reveal that people often document their journeys and send the footage to family members for informational purposes. "After jumping the wall, the men enter the US and strike their thighs, show victory signs and even do push-ups, as shown in a few old videos. Nevertheless, the US had been watching all this, and the outcome is before us all," said Vinay Kumar Hari, an overseas-education consultant based in Chandigarh. Many songs promoting "donkey routes" have been released over the years, such as Trump, America Wala.

## To crack down on 'donkey route' immigration, Haryana to reintroduce anti-human trafficking bill



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

In another attempt to curb illegal immigration to the West via the 'donkey route', the Haryana government is once again going to bring in a stringent law. The new law will attract up to 10 years in jail, a fine up to Rs 5 lakh, and confiscation of property of travel agents who entice gullible youth, government sources said. The development comes amid the deportation of illegal Indian immigrants from the United States. Of the hundreds of Indians who have been deported since February 5, when the first US Army plane landed at Amritsar, 110 are from Haryana. Last week, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini had said that the state government would bring a Bill in the upcoming budget session in March to deal with illegal migration out of Haryana. A similar Bill, the Haryana Registration and Regulation of Travel Agents Bill, 2024, was introduced in the Assembly in 2024 during the tenure of then chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar. The Vidhan Sabha passed the Bill, but after the Centre's objections, it could not be enacted as a law.

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Dr Sumita Misra confirmed to The Indian Express that the government was reintroducing the Bill in the upcoming budget session. "So far, we have registered 13 FIRs against these agents who sent the youth to the USA through illegal means. In the upcoming budget session, we shall be introducing the bill to curb these illegal migrations. The new Bill will be on similar lines of last year's Bill but it will also include the observations that the Government of India had raised," Misra told. "There are several agents who are suspected to be engaged in fraudulent activities related to immigration. Such unscrupulous elements charge lakhs of rupees from these youth and then take them to foreign countries using the 'donkey routes'. Stern legal provisions are required to deal with such illegal migrations," a source said.

The government will propose that unique-ID numbers be issued to all registered travel agents operating in the state, the source said. "It will bear the district code, city code and a unique numeric registration number assigned to each travel agent. To obtain such registration, the agent will have to fill up required forms, pay requisite fee, following which an inspection shall be conducted by the authorities concerned including district administration and the police and then only registration certificate shall be issued initially for a period of three years, and renewable as per the terms to be prescribed by the government later," the previous Bill had stated. Other provisions that the government included in the previous Bill and was likely to retain in the fresh Bill too include a mandatory condition for travel agents seeking registration certificate to submit a bank guarantee of Rs 25 lakh. A Haryana Police Special Investigation Team looking into immigration fraud and human trafficking cases in 2023 had mooted that the government should introduce this as a condition for travel agents so that in case of cheating by them, the amount could be recovered from the bank guarantee.

In the previous Bill, the government had also included another stringent provision. "If a travel agent is found guilty of violating the provisions, the government will initiate confiscation of his property (both movable as well as immovable) through the court. In the trial of offences under this Act, the court shall decide that any illegally acquired property, whether moveable or immovable, is liable to be confiscated or not and if it decides that the property is so liable, it may order confiscation," it had said. The government is likely to expand the definition of "travel agents" by including all those "who forge educational certificate, certificate for English language test for study/ migration/ work, travel paper, visa, ticket or passport in physical or electronic form, intended to be used or which may be used as evidence in support of qualification for the purpose of tourism/ emigration". As per the Haryana government's website, there are 36 "authorised agents for sending people abroad in Haryana" (as on January 22, 2025). These include 13 in Yamunanagar, two in Rohtak, one each in Hisar and Karnal, four in Panipat and 15 in Kaithal district.

## Maharashtra reschedules 3-year LLB CET dates to avoid clash with Mumbai University exams

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Maharashtra's Common Entrance Test (CET) Cell has rescheduled the 3-year LLB CET from March 20 and 21 to May 3 and 4, after multiple candidates raised concerns about a clash with the dates of some Mumbai University exams. The 3-year LLB is one of the most popular professional courses in the state. During the 2024-25 admission cycle, over 80,000 candidates registered for the CET, with nearly 70,000 appearing for the exam. An official from the CET Cell explained, "With such high participation, it was essential to accommodate students' needs and ensure that the exam dates did not interfere with other academic commitments." The rescheduling ensures that students can take both their Mumbai University exams and the CET. "As the timetable was announced, we quickly received requests from candidates asking for a change in the 3-year LLB CET dates due to the overlap with Mumbai University exams. Understanding their concerns, we decided to reschedule the exam to ensure a smoother admission process for students," said the official. For the upcoming academic cycle, the Cell has already released CET timetables for various professional courses. Most of these exams have been scheduled earlier this year to facilitate timely admissions, ensuring that the new academic year can begin on schedule. The CET Cell has extended to March 20 the deadline for online registration and application form submission for undergraduate CETs, including for Bachelor of Computer Application (BCA), Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS) as well as integrated courses like Bachelor of Business Management (BBM)/MBA and BCA/MCA.



## Saudi Arabia hosts Russia-Ukraine war talks: Top Russian, U.S. officials meet for talks on war without Kyiv



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs advisor, Yuri Ushakov, who attended the talks in Riyadh alongside Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, told Russia's Channel one that no date has been set yet for a meeting between Mr. Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump. He said the meeting was "unlikely" to take place next week. "The delegations of the two countries need to work closely together. We are ready for this, but it is still difficult to talk about a specific date for the meeting of the two leaders," Mr. Ushakov said.

The top diplomats from Russia and the U.S. met Tuesday in Saudi Arabia to discuss improving ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine — talks that represented a rapid and major change in American foreign policy under President Donald Trump. No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which comes as the beleaguered country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country won't accept any outcome from this week's talks if Kyiv doesn't take part. European allies have also expressed concerns they are being sidelined.

Beyond Ukraine, the meeting — attended by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other senior officials — is expected to focus on thawing relations between the two countries, whose ties have fallen to their lowest level in decades. It is meant to pave the way for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Concerns from allies they are being sidelined Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday that the talks will be primarily focused on "restoring the entire range of US-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement and organizing a meeting of the two presidents". U.S. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the meeting is aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about wanting peace and whether detailed negotiations can be started.

The recent U.S. diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Ukraine and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favourable to them. Kyiv's absence at Tuesday's talks has rankled many Ukrainians, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the UK on Monday to discuss the war. Bruce has said that even though Ukraine will not be at the table Tuesday, any actual peace negotiations will include the country. Kyiv's participation in such talks was a bedrock of US policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, whose administration also led international efforts to isolate Russia over the war. White House officials

have also pushed back against the notion that Europe has been left out of the conversation, noting that administration officials have spoken to several leaders.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following the meeting he called in Paris. "We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine," Mr. Macron wrote on social media platform X. "To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians," he said and vowed to "work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians". Mr. Peskov on Tuesday said that Mr. Putin has repeatedly expressed readiness for peace talks, and noted that a "a comprehensive settlement, a long-term settlement, a viable settlement" of the conflict in Ukraine is impossible without "a comprehensive consideration of security issues" in Europe. Saudi Arabia's role The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlights de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to be a major diplomatic player, burnishing a reputation severely tarnished by the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince's direction. Like the neighboring United Arab Emirates, the prince has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC-oil cartel and diplomatically as well. Saudi Arabia has also helped in prisoner negotiations and hosted Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit in 2023. Zelenskyy said he would travel to the kingdom later this week. Mr. Rubio was accompanied by U.S. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff, while Lavrov sat next to the Kremlin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and national security adviser Musaed al Alban joined Rubio, Lavrov and others for the start of the meeting but were expected to leave early in the talks. Ahead of the talks, Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund who the Kremlin said might join, underscored the importance of the meeting. "Good US-Russia relations are very important for the whole world. Only jointly can Russia and the US address lots of world problems, resolve for global conflicts and offer solutions," Dmitriev, who said he and his team would focus on economic issues at the talks, told The Associated Press. The Saudi-owned satellite channel Al Arabiya, citing the Russian delegation, described Moscow's priority as "real normalisation with Washington".

The meeting marks the most extensive contact between the two countries since Moscow's February 24, 2022, invasion. Mr. Lavrov and then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago, and in the fall of 2022, US and Russian spymasters met in Turkey amid Washington's concerns that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons amid battlefield setbacks. War continues Meanwhile, Russia continued to pummel Ukraine with drones, according to Kyiv's military. The Ukrainian air force said Russian troops launched a barrage of 176 drones at Ukraine overnight, most of which were destroyed or disabled by jamming. One Russian drone struck a residential building in Dolynska in the Kirovohrad region, wounding a mother and her two children and prompting an evacuation of 38 apartments, the regional administration reported. Four more residential buildings were damaged by drone debris in the Cherkasy region of Ukraine, according to local officials.

## EAM Jaishankar, Sa'ar discuss Trump's vision of connecting Israel with India, Europe, U.S.

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa'ar in Germany and discussed several important matters, including the situation in West Asia and President Donald Trump's vision of connecting Asia, Europe, and the U.S. through Israel. The two leaders met on Saturday on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, a key global forum to discuss security-diplomatic affairs. "Great to meet FM @gidonsaar on the sidelines of #MSC2025. Exchanged views on the current situation in West Asia/Middle East. Underlined the strength and significance of our bilateral partnership," Mr. Jaishankar posted on X. Exchanged views on the current situation in West Asia/Middle East. Underlined the strength and significance of our bilateral partnership.

A statement from the Israeli Foreign Minister's office said Mr. Sa'ar highlighted the strategic importance Israel places on its relations with India. They discussed Mr. Trump's vision of connecting Asia, Europe, and the U.S. through Israel, the statement said.

Mr. Trump in a joint conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday in Washington said that the U.S. and India have agreed to work together to help build "one of the greatest trade routes in all of history." "It will run from India to Israel to Italy and onward to the United States, connecting our partners by ports, railways, and undersea cables — many, many undersea cables. It's a big development," he said. He added, "It's a lot of money going to be



spent, and we've already spent some, but we're going to be spending a lot more in order to stay advanced and stay the leader." "There is an existing project to link infrastructure from India to Europe, through the Middle East. The project was announced at the 2023 G20 Summit in New Delhi. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu then described it as "the largest cooperation project in our history" and as something that will "change the face of the Middle East, Israel, and will affect the entire world." Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Sa'ar also spoke about the challenges posed by attacks on trade routes by the Houthis and Iran, the Israeli statement said. Houthis have repeatedly launched attacks on ships in the strategic Bab-el-Mandeb area during the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas claiming that they have been targeting ships with Israeli connection.

proposal, it added. The app was removed from local app stores on Saturday at 6:00 pm (0900 GMT) and remains unavailable.

The AI chatbot is still in use for those who have already downloaded the app. Seoul's data protection agency said it "strongly advised" people to "use the service with caution until the final results are announced". That included "refraining from entering personal information into the DeepSeek input field", it said. Analyst Youm Heung-young told AFP that the firm was yet to lay out a privacy policy "specifically tailored" for users in South Korea. "It has on the other hand disclosed a privacy policy for the EU and certain other countries, stating that it complies with the domestic laws of those nations," Youm, a data security professor at Soonchunhyang University, said. "Deepseek needs to establish a privacy policy specific to Korea," he said. Asked about the app's removal, Beijing said on Monday that it asked Chinese firms to operate on "overseas operations on the basis of strict abidance by local laws and regulations".

## Student protesters set to launch new party in Bangladesh



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Mohammad Ali, a 27-year-old schoolteacher from Bangladesh's Lakshampur district, has possessed his National Identity Card (NID) ever since he turned 18. But he has never cast a vote. In the 2018 national election, Awami League (AL) leaders forced out voters who were not aligned with the ruling party, barring him from the ballot box, says Mr. Ali.

In January 2024, when major political parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted the national election, he stayed home, unwilling to take part in a process that he saw as predetermined. Mr. Ali does not align with any existing political party, nor does he trust them anymore. But after the July-August student-led uprising that ousted Sheikh Hasina from power, he believes it is time for something new.

"I saw the existing parties fail us again and again," Mr. Ali said. "For 16 years, they could not remove Hasina. We lost so much in that time. But in the end, it was the students who reignited our hope. If they form a political party, I will vote for them." His uptake echoes thousands across the country. The uprising, spearheaded by students but supported by opposition groups, has left many believing that a youth-led political party could reshape Bangladesh's political landscape. Forhad Hossain, a graduate of Jagannath University and a frontline figure in the protests, agrees. "Bangladesh needs a students and youth-led political party. Gen Z understands the country's aspirations better than the old political elites. With the public's backing, we could become a formidable counter-force."

The movement is rapidly gaining traction as student leaders and former protest organisers-turned-advisers prepare to officially launch a new political party this month. Initially, they formed the Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JNC), a platform designed as a pressure group that brought together people from diverse backgrounds and political ideologies. Now, as they take the next step toward formalising their party, they already wield significant grassroots influence under the banners of the JNC and the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement (ADSM). As part of organisational expansion, the JNC has already formed 90 more local committees across the country between January 11 and February 1. With this expansion, the JNC now has representative committees in 257 localities across the country. On the other hand, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement (ADSM) has so far established committees in more than 30 districts and several university and colleges.

According to student leaders, the party's name is likely to be announced on February 24. Public opinion surveys are being conducted to finalise both the party's name and its electoral symbol. Already, nearly 1,50,000 people have shared their suggestions online. Discussions are also ongoing regarding the party's political structure. The party will initially be formed through a convening committee. Interim government adviser and a key students' leader Nahid Islam has been tentatively finalised as the party's convener.

A central committee member of the JNC, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "The policy-making forum

has chosen Nahid Islam as convener. If he steps down from his advisory role in the interim government, he will lead the new party — that is our plan." "While a few members pushed for an alternative choice, most backed Akhter Hossain, the current member secretary of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, to retain the same role in the new party. As for the two other young advisers, their future roles remain undecided," he added. Mr. Islam has decided to resign from the interim government to take on the political leadership role. The two other young advisers, Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan and Mahfuz Alam, are unlikely to step down immediately.

Student leaders are conducting research on political parties that emerged from uprisings. Their study includes India's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Türkiye's Justice and Development Party (AKP), and Pakistan's Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Although they are yet to finalise the ideology of the new party, the JNC's member secretary said, within February, a centrist political party will be launched in collaboration with the ADSM. Meanwhile, coordinators of ADSM announced at a press conference on Monday that they are going to form a new student organisation with the slogan "Student first, Bangladesh first". Notably the announcement lacked any presence of figures associated with the JNC. Nazmul Islam, a political analyst and Head of Türkiye, Asia, and Indo-Pacific Studies at Ankara Yildirim Beyazıt University, believes transforming a movement into a political party is no easy feat. "Leading protests is one thing, but building a sustainable political organisation is a much bigger challenge," he noted. After Muhammad Yunus took charge of the interim government, the student group found themselves in a strained relationship with the BNP, disagreeing over multiple issues. However, no such tensions were observed with the Jamaat-e-Islami. In fact, on several occasions, both groups appeared to support each other, fueling speculation that the student-led party could align with Jamaat to challenge the BNP in the coming national election. "The biggest challenge for this student-led party will be navigating its relationship with established political forces like the BNP and Jamaat. While it is likely to gain traction among the urban middle class, expanding its reach to the working class and the elite will require a well-crafted strategy," Mr. Nazmul Islam said.

He points out that while such short-term alliances may help, they are unlikely to cement the party's long-term dominance. "If this party aspires to be a major political force, it must remain active and consistent for at least 10 to 15 years," he added. Dr. Mubashar Hasan, a political analyst and Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oslo, believes the student-led party will introduce fresh perspectives into national politics. However, he doesn't think they would seek an alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami. "This student-led movement has the potential to bring meaningful change to Bangladesh's political landscape," Mr. Hasan said. "One of their biggest contributions will be shaping public discourse around politics in a way we haven't seen before." The BNP welcome's the protest leaders' bid to form a new party, but with riders. "As a democratic party, the BNP welcomes this new party led by students. However, such a party must act as a real and honest democratic entity, not as a king's party," said A.B.M. Ashraf Uddin Nizan, Industrial and Commercial Affairs Assistant Secretary of the BNP. "Their claim of being a counterforce to the BNP may resonate with some disillusioned voters, but they must prove their ability to unite a fragmented electorate and present a compelling alternative."

The political environment remains highly polarised, and without strong leadership, infrastructure, and strategic alliances, the new party may struggle to function as a national force," he told The Hindu. "Still, their movement could influence future elections and possibly force the traditional parties to adapt to new demands."

## Nepali student death | Two embassy officials sent to Odisha's KIIT university, says PM Oli

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Monday (February 17, 2025) said Nepal's embassy in New Delhi has sent two officials to counsel Nepalese students at a private university in Odisha where a Nepali woman reportedly died by suicide. Prakriti Lamsal, a third-year B Tech student of Bhubaneswar-based Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), died allegedly by suicide at her hostel on Sunday, police said. The incident triggered tension on the campus as the Nepalese students began protesting. "Our embassy in New Delhi has dispatched two officers to counsel Nepali students affected in Odisha. Additionally, arrangements have been made to ensure they have the option to either remain in their hostel or return home, based on their preference," Oli posted on X. Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba said diplomatic initiatives were being taken regarding the incident. Earlier, some students said they were asked to leave the hostel.

"We were told to vacate hostel rooms and dropped at the railway station. We have to appear for an examination on February 28," a student told reporters at the Cuttack railway station. "Keeping in view the situation, the Nepal students have been sent to their respective homes. The situation presently remained calm," the KIIT said. Later, in a separate statement, the Nepalese Embassy in Delhi said the KIIT assured it would arrange for the accommodation of the Nepalese students in the university hostel and cover their academic losses. The embassy said it was in contact with the Indian government and the Odisha chief minister's office and coordinating with authorities on the incident. A group of Nepalese students staged a demonstration in front of the Indian embassy in Kathmandu with placards demanding a probe into the incident.

The Indian embassy in a statement said it was deeply saddened by the tragic death of the Nepali student and extended its heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased during this difficult time. "The embassy has been in touch with the authorities of KIIT as well as the Odisha state government. The embassy has been informed that the local authorities have initiated an investigation into the unfortunate incident," it said. "Nepali students studying in India form an important facet of the enduring people-to-people links between the two countries. The Indian government will continue to take all necessary steps to ensure the well-being of the Nepali students in India," the statement added. Meanwhile, the All Nepal National Independent Students Union-Revolutionary, the student wing of the opposition CPN-Maoist Centre, has strongly condemned the KIIT incident and expressed deep concerns. It demanded immediate government action to initiate legal proceedings against those responsible. "We are concerned about reports that Nepalese students at KIIT are facing severe violence and intimidation. Instead of addressing the issue and ensuring justice, the KIIT administration has ordered the Nepalese



students to vacate the hostel, displaying a lack of empathy and responsibility," the student organisation said in a statement. The union urged the government to engage in high-level diplomatic efforts with Indian authorities to ensure a fair investigation and strengthen the Nepalese embassy's role in protecting students abroad. Those in distress or having suicidal tendencies can seek help and counselling by calling: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, telephone: 011-40769002 (Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.) or by calling any of the numbers available in this link.

## Paddy farmers wait for bonus in Karimnagar

Karimnagar: Paddy farmers, who sowed the fine variety of the crop during the Vanakalam season, are still waiting for the bonus promised by the State government. About 20,000 farmers are waiting in the erstwhile Karimnagar district, where the bonus to be paid amounts to Rs.41 crore.

The Congress party, which promised to provide Rs 500 bonus to all paddy varieties during the time of elections, had changed its voice after coming to power and announced bonus only for fine variety. Though there is huge demand for fine variety rice in the market, farmers used to stay away from the cultivation of fine variety paddy because of various reasons. High investment, less yield and the crop getting easily infected by insects were the main reasons. Moreover, it requires high maintenance when compared to the normal variety. However, with the State government's announcement of a Rs 500 bonus, a considerable number of farmers shifted to fine variety paddy. In the Vanakalam season, paddy is usually cultivated in about 9.50 lakh acres in the erstwhile Karimnagar. However, it crossed 9.65 lakh acres in the last season.



## Fifteen years on, city's 'Ferris Wheel' project stuck on paper



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Story so far: In its biggest-ever budget, Mumbai's civic body – the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), unveiled its plan to construct a 'Mumbai Eye' similar to the London Eye. An ode to the 443-foot Ferris Wheel called the 'Millennium Wheel' located on the River Thames in London, the Mumbai Eye has been in the works since 2008 but is yet to become reality. In the budget document, the BMC states that it intends to erect 'Mumbai Eye' in line with 'London Eye' at a suitable location under public private partnership (PPP) Model. The proposed Ferris wheel will feature air-conditioned passenger units capable of holding 25 people at a time. As per previous estimates, the structure is likely to attract 70 lakh visitors per year. In comparison, the London Eye, which offers a 30-minute Ferris wheel ride and a panoramic view of the city, attracts 35 lakh visitors per year.

Previously, two locations progressed till the feasibility study were Bandra Bandstand and Bandra Reclamation – both of which are sea-facing and offers a bird's eye view of the city's coastline. "We don't oppose the project. But it should not be in our Bandra Reclamation area," says Maharashtra Information Technology minister Ashish Shelar to The Hindu. The Bandra West MLA had protested against the project in 2023 when it had zeroed in on Bandra Reclamation as a suitable site. The project was scrapped as recently as September last, due to the unavailability of a suitable location. The project, which was first proposed by the BMC in 2008, travelled a full circle passing to state authorities – MSRDC and MMRDA – before coming back to the BMC. Long journey of Mumbai Eye in 2008, undivided Shiv Sena's corporator Ravindra Waikar, who headed the BMC's Standing Committee, had proposed the idea of the Mumbai Eye. Envisioned as a 650-foot tall Ferris Wheel, the BMC initially zeroed in on the 14,000 square-metre land near

Bandra Bandstand as a suitable site. Aimed at attracting tourists and additional revenue for the BMC, the project got delayed as it needed clearance for the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) from the Centre.

Three years later, it was the Congress-NCP state government which revived the project. In a weekly cabinet meeting, deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar proposed building the 'Mumbai Eye' close to the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, off the toll plaza. Tasking the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Limited (MSRDC) with the task, Mr. Pawar assured that the necessary CRZ clearances will be sorted before going ahead with the project. However, the project never took off the ground. Almost a decade later, in 2020, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government revived the project with an aim to promote tourism in Mumbai. Tapping the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), the government kicked off the feasibility studies, identification of site and preparation of detailed project report, tenders and consultancy bids in October that year. However, as COVID-19 spread worsened in the state, the project once again lay dormant. Two years later, power changed hands from the MVA to the BJP-NCP-Shiv Sena 'Mahayuti' coalition. BMC corporators' term also expired, leading to an administrator taking control of the BMC. In 2023, the project was revived with Congress MLA Zeeshan Siddique raising the same in the Budget session of the Maharashtra Assembly that year. "Mumbai is a place which attracts a lot of tourists but lacks enough tourist spots. I believe that Mumbai eye should be constructed in my constituency's Bandra-Kurla complex area," said Mr. Siddiqui in March 2023. Soon enough, MMRDA zeroed in on the Bandra Reclamation area as a suitable spot for the Mumbai Eye. On May 10, the authority began carrying out technical feasibility study at the Bandra Reclamation for the project. However, they hit a hurdle soon as Bandra residents, along with Mr. Shelar had opposed the project. Citing traffic congestion fears, the residents sought to shift the project to alternate non-residential areas. Mumbai Port Trust, Bandra-Kurla Complex, space behind National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) and Ballard Estate were suggested as alternate locations for the Mumbai Eye. Finally, on September 28, 2024, the MMRDA scrapped the project in entirety. Despite the tourism and revenue opportunities, Mumbai Eye's Road to reality seems nowhere near the end. Though the BMC has listed it in the budget document, it is unclear which department will head this project. Details of its allocation, type of PPP model to be used, the tender process, potential locations are unclear.

## Pope Francis being hospitalised for medical tests, to treat bronchitis, Vatican says

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Pope Francis has complained of breathing trouble and was diagnosed with bronchitis on February 6, but has continued to hold daily audiences in his Vatican hotel suite. He presided at an outdoor Mass on Sunday (February 16, 2025) and attended his general audience on Wednesday, February 12, 2025. But he has been handing off his speeches for an aide to read aloud, saying he was having trouble breathing. On Friday (February 14, 2025), he appeared bloated and pale during the handful of audiences he held before going to the hospital. The bloating appeared to indicate that the medication he was taking to help treat the lung infection was making him retain water. Pope Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has long battled health problems, especially long bouts of acute bronchitis in winter. He uses a wheelchair, walker or cane when moving around his apartment and recently fell twice, hurting his arm and chin.

Ever since his diagnosis, Pope Francis has appeared bloated, an indication the medication he was taking to treat the lung infection was making him retain water. He was being hospitalised at Rome's Gemelli hospital, where he was last hospitalised in June 2023 to have surgery to remove intestinal scar tissue and repair a hernia in the abdominal wall. A few months before that, he spent three days in the hospital to receive intravenous antibiotics for a respiratory infection. A Vatican statement said the Pope would be admitted at the end of his Friday audiences. In addition to regular Vatican officials, the pope met Friday morning with the Slovak prime minister, Robert Fico and the head of CNN, Mark Thompson. "This morning, at the end of the audience, Pope Francis will be admitted to the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic for some necessary diagnostic tests and to continue in a hospital setting treatment for bronchitis that is still ongoing," the statement said.

Christopher Lamb, CNN's Vatican correspondent, saw Francis at the beginning of an audience Friday (February 14, 2025) with CNN head Mark Thompson, and said the pope was mentally alert but struggling to speak for extended periods due to breathing difficulties. Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has long battled health problems, especially bouts of acute bronchitis in winter. He uses a wheelchair, walker or cane when moving around his apartment and recently fell twice, hurting his arm and chin.

Francis is being treated at Rome's Gemelli hospital, where he was last admitted in June 2023 to have surgery to remove intestinal scar tissue and repair a hernia in the abdominal wall. A few months before that, he spent three days in Gemelli to receive intravenous antibiotics for a respiratory infection. He later revealed that he had been rushed to the hospital March 29, 2023 after spiking a high fever and feeling a sharp pain in his chest. He said he was diagnosed with what he said was "an acute and strong pneumonia, in the lower part of the lungs." The Vatican said Francis was admitted to Gemelli after his Friday (February 14, 2025) audiences. In addition to regular Vatican officials and Thompson, the pope met Friday (February 14, 2025) morning with the Slovak prime minister, Robert Fico. "This morning, at the end of the audiences, Pope Francis will be admitted to the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic for some necessary diagnostic tests and to continue in a hospital setting treatment for bronchitis that is still ongoing," a Vatican statement said.

No details were given about the duration of Francis' hospitalisation, but the Vatican later announced the pope was cancelling his participation in Holy Year events through Monday (February 17, 2025). The pope had a busy weekend agenda planned, including an audience with artists in town for the Jubilee on Saturday, a Mass for them on Sunday (February 16, 2025) and a trip to Rome's famed Cinecittà studios on Monday (February 17, 2025). While a Vatican cardinal will preside over the Mass in Francis' place, the Vatican said the other events were cancelled "due to the impossibility of the pope to participate."

At Gemelli, where popes enjoy a private suite on the hospital's 10th floor, passers-by were concerned but hopeful. Yellow candles, including some featuring Francis' photo,



surrounded the statue of St. John Paul II that greets visitors at the hospital entrance. "I wish with all my heart that he will get better because these awful illnesses, you don't wish them on anyone," said Nino Davi, who himself was receiving treatment at Gemelli and had arrived earlier Friday (February 14, 2025) from Palermo, Sicily. "So I wish with all my heart that he gets better." The Vatican announcement, delivered ahead of Francis' hospitalisation, came in sharp contrast to the way it announced his 2023 hospitalisation that caused confusion. Initially, the Vatican had said he had gone in for scheduled tests, but the pontiff later revealed the situation was far more urgent and that he had been rushed to the hospital where pneumonia was diagnosed. He was put on intravenous antibiotics and was released April 1, quipping as he left that he was "still alive." "Thank God I can tell the story, because the organism, the body, responded well to the treatment," he later told reporters.

Francis spent 10 days at the same hospital in July 2021 following intestinal surgery for a bowel narrowing. He credited his personal nurse then with saving his life for having insisted he get the problem checked out. It wasn't the first time he credited a nurse with saving his life. Francis recounted his near-death experience with his youthful lung infection in his recent autobiographies "Hope" and "Life," in which he credited his survival to a nurse, an Italian nun named Sister Cornelia Caraglio.

"She was an experienced, cultured woman who had worked as a teacher in Greece, and she quickly realised the seriousness of my situation: She called the specialist, who drained one and a half litres of fluid from my lungs. It began a slow and unsteady climb back from the brink between life and death," he recalled in "Hope." It was she who, after the doctor prescribed a certain dose of penicillin and streptomycin, ordered that it be doubled, he recalled. "She had intuition and practical experience, and certainly no lack of courage," he recalled. "My companions came from the seminary to visit me; some also gave me their blood for transfusions. Gradually the fevers decided to leave me, and the light began to return." Francis survived, but during the course of his treatment he had to have the upper lobe of his right lung removed after it developed three cysts. "The surgical procedure used the techniques of the day: You can imagine the incisions they made, and how I suffered," he said in "Life".

## Over 200 killed in three-day Sudan paramilitary assault: lawyer group

Sudanese paramilitaries have killed more than 200 people including women and children in a three-day assault on villages in the country's south, a lawyer group monitoring the war said. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), locked in a nearly two-year war with the regular army, "attacked unarmed civilians in areas with no military presence" in Al-Kadaris and Al-Khelwat villages in White Nile state, according to Emergency Lawyers, which documents rights abuses. It added that the RSF carried out "executions, kidnappings, enforced disappearances and property looting" during the assault since Saturday (February 15, 2025), which has also left hundreds injured or missing.

## 'Research must ask the right questions, sensitise technologists, communicate effectively to stakeholders'

What would be some of these issues?

In all the areas that we work in, we are always framing questions and passing it on to the government. For example, a favourite topic of governments is to create the next Silicon Valley in Bengaluru. It makes little sense. People who say that don't understand Silicon Valley at all. Every city or every region has its own history. You can't go back and replicate it. But what can we learn from different parts of the world? That's what we look at. We are telling you what questions to ask rather than clone something. At a slightly abstract level, we come up with certain broad answers and recommendations and then it is up to people in decision-making positions to take a call.

Many of the problems in Bengaluru - like traffic congestion or flooding or pollution - are seen in other Indian cities too. So, what are the right questions we should ask?

Start asking what the sources of these problems might be. For example, flooding. In a place like Bangalore, you have lakes which have been built upon. You take a city like Kolkata, it is low-lying. So the source of the problem is different. Then you look at who is being affected.

Take the example of pollution. Delhi has a very specific problem of stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. In Bhopal, the source was Union Carbide. What does it tell you about future planning processes for each of these cities?

So, what you do is to look at history and then come up with recommendations for the future based on these kinds of contexts. And then you try and look at a broad range of possibilities and create broad categories. For example, Bengaluru represents a category of cities where real estate development has run amok and, therefore, areas that were natural catchment areas or drainage areas have suffered. Then you start formulating the problem differently. Formulating the problem in broad terms allows you to take it to another city and pose these questions - what are the sources, who are being affected, why are they being affected at all, and so on.

The other thing that's extremely critical to ask is who holds power. There are certain things that might be amenable to what you might broadly call technical solutions. But then there are issues where you need to understand the politics of it. The problems need to be understood in terms of the political structures that govern them. That's why putting more signal lights on the road or building more flyovers become short-term solutions. It's only like putting band-aid when you are bleeding without understanding what's causing it. So, the job is to ask these questions and make sure that you go beyond band-aid thinking. In Electronic City, why was it that they built the flyover first and not the metro? Answering this question requires an understanding of who has access to power. You can't also pretend to know all the answers either. I can give you a broad framework and say, if it's not working, come back and tell me what's the problem. Then we can tweak it. I think one of the important things is to be able to be open to international influence. You can't think only in terms of Bengaluru, Karnataka or even India. Maybe some lessons come from Brazil and that could tell you something.

Do you feel that sometimes AI obsession tends to go a little overboard?

Yes. But that's also because you don't have other ways of solving the problems of the world. Once people learn to understand what it is and figure it out, then they'll be able to step back and see the specific ways it can help us. It is going to change our lives. But nobody knows how much and to what extent. Until then everybody is going to say all kinds of bizarre things. The multiplicity of ways in which you can engage and use these technologies is something that we can't often predict.

Also, technology itself is not a fixed thing. With AI there are two issues. One is that it's a very broad term. It doesn't refer to one technology. It's a basket of technologies and the shape of the basket and its content is changing every day. There is a lot of hype. Maybe in five years, they'll be talking about something else.

But if the right questions are posed and if there is a political will to implement it, can AI be a powerful tool to solve?

No two ways about that. But just don't make wild claims about it without asking or studying why certain outcomes and possibilities exist. We have AI signals, AI cameras... you have to be aware of why you're doing what you're doing. There must be the willingness to backtrack and make changes, there must be feedback mechanisms. If you're very blindly wedded to it, then you're asking for trouble.



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

As a city grows, so do its problems. In the years 2022 and 2024 Bengaluru witnessed some of the worst floods in its history, whereas 2023 was a year of drought. The latest TomTom traffic index has rated the city's traffic as the third slowest in the world. Plumes of dust from construction debris, potholes and vehicular emission have ensured soaring levels of air pollution in the city. However, many of these problems are not unique to Bengaluru. Inundated roads and railway tracks during monsoon have become a yearly phenomenon in Mumbai, while Kolkata has the second slowest traffic as per the TomTom index. Pollution levels in Delhi skyrocket every winter. While the problems may look common, what is different is the source of these problems in each city and how they affect the different inhabitants in each city, says Balaji Parthasarathy, faculty at IIIT-Bangalore and Principal Investigator at Fairworks India project. Part of IIIT-B's Centre for Information Technology and Public Policy (CITAPP), an interdisciplinary research and advocacy centre that focuses on the policy challenges and the organisational demands made by technological innovation, Parthasarathy speaks to The Hindu about the works of CITAPP, the role of research in sensitising technologists, policymakers and other stakeholders about the social implications of technology, and why it is crucial to ask the larger questions.

Can you give an overview of CITAPP and what it does?

We set up CITAPP in 2012. It stands for Centre for IT and Public Policy. We realised that technology was becoming a very important part of various discussions and dialogues, and finding applications in various aspects of life, having social implications. By 2010 India had become the world's largest software services exporter. But there were also questions about why is it that India exports only services and doesn't have product companies like Microsoft or Adobe. This was on the supply side. The question on the demand side was how we can ensure that this technology finds beneficial outcomes for the underprivileged. So, we wanted to think about issues on the demand and the supply side and how we could conduct research to bring these kinds of issues to the attention of the public as well as other stakeholders. The other reason for doing this was while all this excitement of IT was going on, there was very little in terms of research, especially in terms of policy. While there are many centres of public policy in the country, CITAPP is the only one devoted to exclusively thinking about public policy through the lens of information technology.

The research spans a range of topics from spectrum allocation, to disability in technology, to Aadhaar and its implications, e-governance, data justice, labour technology, human-computer interaction, healthcare, the software industry, implications of automation for work, and so on. One of the earliest studies on e-governance was undertaken here. The first-ever study on the policy implications of e-waste was also done here through the master's thesis of a student. We've also done some of the initial research in this country on things like information accessibility. Our goal as academics is to show, through our research, what questions to ask, how to frame things and then allow others to act on those issues. Being at a technology institution, our role is also to sensitise technologists and then communicate it effectively to the public.

What are some of the works you have been doing in relation to Bengaluru or Karnataka?

Some colleagues have worked on transportation issues and so on, building sophisticated algorithms for transport routing. But our work is not just about solving a local problem. That's what consulting companies do. We may collect data from here, but as academics, we operate at a slightly broader level. You can take our findings and recommendations and see how they can potentially fit a Bengaluru or a Mysuru or a Dharwad. We help the government think about how we need to frame these issues.

## Ranveer Allahbadia continuously out of contact, says Police

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

He is yet to respond to investigation agencies after being named in FIRs filed by Maharashtra Cyber Department, Guwahati Police, and Jaipur Police in the India's Got Latent case, the police said. "Apart from Maharashtra Cyber and Guwahati Police, the Jaipur Police have also filed a case against Ranveer Allahbadia, but he has not yet been in contact with them too. Maharashtra Cyber Department has ordered Ranveer to appear before it on February 24," Mumbai and Guwahati Police said in a joint statement. Maharashtra Cyber Cell has summoned YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia to appear before it on February 24. The Cyber Cell is investigating the case registered against Ranveer Allahbadia and others after he triggered an uproar with his offensive remarks on the show 'India's Got Latent.' Comedian Samay Raina has also been asked to appear before the cyber cell on February 18. All about India's obscenity laws A huge controversy has erupted over the popular YouTube show India's Got Latent, after the Maharashtra cyber police booked podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, comedian Samay Raina, and others for allegedly broadcasting obscene content. This is the second FIR against the duo, following a case registered by the Assam police on February 10. But what do India's obscenity laws entail? How have courts interpreted them over the years? And where does one draw the line between obscenity and the right to freedom of speech and expression? We break it all down for you in this video. | Video Credit: The Hindu

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has also investigated the matter and has issued summons to Allahbadia, Raina, and others. However, many of those summoned failed to appear before the commission, citing concerns about their personal safety, prior foreign travel commitments, and other logistical challenges. The Commission said that Ranveer Allahbadia had informed it that he was



Apart from Maharashtra Cyber and Guwahati Police, the Jaipur Police have also filed a case against Ranveer Allahbadia

receiving death threats and requested a new hearing date after three weeks. The Commission has accepted his request and rescheduled the hearing for March 6.

The show's host, Samay Raina, has apologized for the remark, stating that his only intention was to entertain people. In a statement on his Instagram Story, Raina said, "Everything that has been happening has been too much for me to handle. I have removed all India's Got Latent videos from my channel. My only objective was to make people laugh and have a good time. I will fully cooperate with all agencies to ensure their inquiries are concluded fairly. Thank you."



## Renewed India-US nuclear cooperation: A diplomatic upside with 3 clear gains



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

The announcement on renewed nuclear cooperation with the US marks a significant diplomatic upside for India, in what was otherwise a rather concessionary first interaction for Indian government officials with the tariff-obsessed new administration in Washington, DC. The commitment stated by both sides to "fully realise" the US-India 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement is a realistic admission of the lack of progress so far, and of the need to leverage the gains of the Indo-US nuclear deal, two decades after it was signed.

Large scale localisation & possible tech transfer At a time when the US has been extremely transactional on the issue of balancing trade balances and supporting American manufacturing, the commitment to jointly build American-designed nuclear reactors in India through large scale localisation and possible technology transfer, is being seen as a gain for India. The focus of this new pact specifically indicates the intent to transfer technology from the US and manufacture equipment locally in India for projects being set up here, which is against the grain of what Washington has generally been pushing for — bringing manufacturing back to the US.

Chance to upgrade reactor specialisation The other upside is from the fact that this new deal offers a chance for India's nuclear sector to upgrade its reactor specialisation to those in use across most parts of the world, and an ability to scale up capacity addition against the current glacial pace of project development. The plan to leverage private sector capabilities to get into the niche, but growing, small modular reactor (SMR) space is also significant. Though India's civil nuclear programme has expertise in manufacturing smaller reactor types — 220MWe PHWRs (pressurised heavy water reactors) and above — the problem for India is its reactor technology. Based on heavy water and natural Uranium, the PHWRs are increasingly out of sync with the pressurised water reactors or PWRs (a light-water nuclear reactor type that constitute the large majority of the world's nuclear power plants) are now the most dominant reactor type globally.

On the SMR side, India's Department of Atomic Energy is already learnt to be in exploratory talks for collaborations with Camden, New Jersey-based Holtec International — a privately-held company that is now billed as one of the world's largest exporters of capital nuclear components. Then there is also the strategic incentive for India and the US to join forces to compete with China at a time when Beijing is working on an ambitious plan to seize the opportunity of global leadership in the SMR space, unlike large reactors where China has been a latecomer. Like India, Beijing is seeing SMRs as a tool of its diplomatic out-

reach in the Global South and that the country could shake up the SMR industry, just as it has done in the electric vehicle sector. Both India and the US are ill placed to compete with China on their own, given India's technological constraints and the US being seen as being impeded by a relatively high cost of labour and the growing protectionist mood in that country. "In reality, by opening up the nuclear generation to US technology, India will finally emerge from the technology isolation that has lingered nearly two decades after the country came out of "nuclear penalty box"... Without acquiring the PWR knowhow, India cannot join the mainstream of the commercial nuclear world that Korea and China joined three decades ago and are now nuclear plant exporters.

Opening of the nuclear sector will in fact create a deluge of work for the Indian companies," Kris P Singh, the Indian-American promoter of Holtec International, told Holtec has a non-nuclear manufacturing facility in Dahej, Gujarat, and has conveyed that it can double the workforce at that plant in less than a year if the proposed manufacturing plans are cleared. "As for us, Holtec is planning to build a large nuclear technology campus in Pune where we currently have a modest business presence. We will also build a specialty manufacturing plant at a suitable place in India. We believe the proposed change in the law will spur investments to pour into India's nuclear sector from the Middle East and Western capital markets. Nuclear will rise and nuclear's rise will have a knock-on effect on the whole (Indian) economy," Singh said. The 123 agreement signed by India and the US way back in July 2007 did, in fact, explicitly aim to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation between the two sides by providing for "full civil nuclear energy cooperation covering nuclear reactors and aspects of the associated nuclear fuel cycle including enrichment and reprocessing" Since then, though, there has been no progress on the ground and a single investment is yet to come through, primarily due to legislative impediments in India. The Indian government has signalled its intent to amend two key domestic legislations to address these concerns.

Holtec's pitch is for fostering a public-private initiative centred on the American company's flagship small modular reactor, the SMR-300, to potentially help break this stasis in the nuclear engagement between the two countries, with the possibility of using existing coal plant sites in India to deploy its proposed SMR-based projects and joint manufacturing at some point in the future. These developments come at a time when India is working to get into the manufacturing value chain of small reactors, both as a way of fulfilling its commitment to clean energy transition, and bundling SMRs as a technology-led foreign policy pitch. SMRs — small reactors with a capacity of 30MWe to 300 MWe per unit — are increasingly seen as important for nuclear energy to remain a commercially competitive option in the future, especially in the wake of surging power demand from technology companies, given the massive incremental electricity requirement coming in from AI machine learning applications and data centres. Holtec's SMR-300 is one of seven advanced reactor designs supported by the US Department of Energy's Advanced Reactor Demonstration Programme. In 2020, the company's SMR project received a \$116 million award to help accelerate design, engineering, and licensing activities and is currently in the early design review stages in the United Kingdom and Canada to deploy its small reactor.

## Language policy row: Dharmendra Pradhan has insulted people of Tamil Nadu, says Manickam Tagore



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Union Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan has insulted the people of Tamil Nadu with his "arrogant" statement that the Centre would not release [Samagra Shiksha]

funds to the State until the government accepted the three-language policy under the National Education Policy (NEP), said Congress MP B. Manickam Tagore in Virudhunagar. The Union Minister's observation has exposed the "RSS mindset" of giving diktats to all the States from New Delhi, he told mediapersons. The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had given a guarantee that until the States accepted the three-language policy, they could continue with their two-language policy.

When this was the case with respect to Tamil Nadu, the Union Minister has insulted the State and its people by making such statements, he said. He further said even as the entire State had condemned his statement, the Tamil Nadu unit of Bhartiya Janata Party was trying to justify it to show its loyalty to the party. "The State BJP leaders have shown again that they are against the interest of Tamils," the Virudhunagar MP said. Mr. Tagore condemned the Minister for saying that Tamil Nadu was going against the Constitution just because it was not joining a Central government scheme. The issue would be raised in Parliament, he said. When asked about Tamil Nadu government being accused of denying students the right to learn Hindi in government schools, Mr. Tagore said the Centre was refusing funds to the State even for the existing education system. "It was not right to compare the syllabus of the Central Board of School Education (CBSE) and the State Board. Only compelling students to learn Hindi amounted to Hindi imposition ... which was fought tooth and nail in the past," he said.

## People in Haryana lost Rs 72.84 crore to cyber frauds in January: Police

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

cyberfraud, haryana, cyber fraud, The Haryana Police attributed the success to their awareness campaigns and said they had put 433 more cybercriminals behind bars in January this year, compared to January 2024. People in Haryana lost Rs 72.84 crore to cyber frauds in January this year, the police said, adding that the amount was Rs 14 crore less compared to January 2024, when cybercriminals defrauded people of Rs 86.18 crore. The police attributed the success to their awareness campaigns and said they had put 433 more cybercriminals behind bars in January this year, compared to January 2024.

"As a result of the prompt action of the Haryana Police, a significant increase has also been recorded in the amount saved from cybercriminals in January 2025 compared to January 2024. Taking strict action against cybercriminals, the Haryana Police has arrested four times more criminals in January 2025. While 138 cyber accused were arrested in January 2024, this year, a total of 571 accused (130 from Haryana, 441 from other states) have been arrested," DGP Shatruej Kapur said in a statement. Issuing an appeal to the public, DGP Kapur said, "In this era of technology, most people are active on online platforms. If anyone calls and introduces themselves as an officer of the CBI, ED, or police and talks about digital arrest, be immediately alert because no investigating agency does this kind of thing. People should not fall into the trap of fake share trading being broadcast on social media platforms. Before investing, be sure to officially confirm the company and website.

"Additionally, people should not answer WhatsApp video and audio calls coming from abroad, especially from Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, etc. They should be cau-



tious of fake advertisements appearing on Telegram and Google. The Haryana Police is continuously running awareness campaigns on print and social media to educate the public about the methods adopted by cyber criminals. The only way to avoid cyber crime is through caution and vigilance, so people should be vigilant and contact helpline number 1930 immediately if there is any apprehension of cyber crime. "The Haryana Police, which was at the 23rd position in the country in September 2023 in terms of the rate of blocked amounts in cyber fraud, has now reached the first position. The rate of blocked amounts in cyber fraud and the recovery being done by the cyber police stations, which was seven per cent of the defrauded amount in September 2023, increased to 36 per cent in December 2024, the highest in the country. If a complainant files a complaint within six hours of cyber fraud, up to 70 per cent of the defrauded amount is being blocked. It is the highest success rate in the entire country," DGP Kapur further said in the statement. The police was honoured by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on September 10, 2024, for the efficient implementation of the cyber helpline 1930.

## Vatican cancels more Holy Year events as Pope remains hospitalised with respiratory infection

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

The Vatican on Tuesday (February 18, 2025) cancelled papal audiences through the weekend and delegated others to cover for Pope Francis as the 88-year-old Pope remained hospitalised with a multi-pronged respiratory infection. The cancellations put a damper on upcoming events of the Vatican's big Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century celebration of Catholicism that is aimed at encouraging pilgrims to come to Rome to participate in special Jubilee activities. Expected to draw some 30 million people to Rome, the Holy Year is packed with special papal audiences and Masses throughout 2025, some of which have now been put into question given Francis' illness. Pope Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital in a "fair" condition on Friday after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened. On Monday, medical personnel determined that he was suffering from a polymicrobial respiratory tract infection, meaning a mix of viruses, bacteria and possibly other organisms had colonized in his respiratory tract.

The Vatican has given no indication of how long he might remain hospitalised, only saying that the treatment of such a "complex clinical picture" would require an "adequate" stay. This Holy Year weekend was dedicated to deacons, the Ministry that is a necessary step for men who are preparing to become priests. Francis was supposed to have presided over a special audience with them on Saturday and ordained them during a Mass on Sunday. The Vatican on Tuesday announced the audience was cancelled and that the archbishop who is organising the Jubilee would celebrate the Mass. It's a similar arrangement that the



Vatican announced last weekend, when artists in town had to settle for a cardinal presiding over their special Mass. The next Jubilee events on the calendar that would typically involve the pope are the March 8-9 weekend dedicated to volunteers.

Pope Francis had part of one lung removed after a pulmonary infection as a young man and is prone to bouts of bronchitis in winter. He has admitted in the past that he is a non-compliant patient, and even his close Vatican aides have said he pushed himself too far even once his bronchitis was diagnosed. He refused to let up on his busy schedule and ignored medical advice to stay indoors during Rome's chilly winter, insisting on sitting through an outdoor Jubilee Mass for the armed forces on Feb. 9 even though he was having trouble breathing. Pope Francis' hospital admission has this year already sidelined him for longer than a 2023 hospitalisation for pneumonia.

## Renovated Ravindra Natya Mandir in Mumbai to be reopened on February 28: Ashish Shelar

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

The renovated Ravindra Natya Mandir will have advanced sound systems and refined interiors to cater to theatre and Marathi cinema, two revamped small theatres, five exhibition halls and 15 rehearsal rooms for artists, a grand open-air stage for large-scale performances, newly added virtual filming, sound recording, dubbing and sound mixing studios to support the evolving creative industry, Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar told reporters on Tuesday. The grand reopening will take place in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar along with Minister of Skill Development, Employment and Innovation Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Public Works Minister Shivendra Rajee Bhosale, MP Anil Desai, MLA Mahesh Sawant and other dignitaries. An emblem, representing the academy's dedication to folk arts, classical arts, visual arts, and audio-visual arts, reaffirming its role as the premier institution for cultural excellence will be unveiled on the occasion.

Shelar said the reopening of Ravindra Natya Mandir marks a new dawn for Maharashtra's thriving theatre and arts community. Since its inception, the academy has nurtured generations of artists and art enthusiasts, and it will



continue to nurture talents and enrich our cultural heritage for generations to come, Shelar said. The academy will launch 20 certificate and diploma courses in various art forms to empower, educate, and employ the next generation of artists. These programmes will provide structured learning and career opportunities for budding artists. "This grand revival will retain Maharashtra's rich artistic legacy. Ravindra Natya Mandir is more than just a theatre. It is a sanctuary for creativity, a platform for artists, and a celebration of culture," Shelar said.

## Mamata Banerjee slams UP govt over Maha Kumbh stampede deaths, alleges attempts to hide death toll

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Slamming the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said that the Maha Kumbh has turned into a "Mrityu Kumbh", and claimed that the Uttar Pradesh government had "hidden hundreds of bodies to bring down the death toll." "I respect Maha Kumbh, I respect the holy Ganga Maa. But there is no planning... How many people have been recovered?... For the rich, the VIP, there are systems available to get camps (tents) for as high as Rs 1 Lakhs. For the poor, there are no arrangements at Kumbh. Stampede situation is common in a 'mela' but it is important to make arrangements," Banerjee said during an address at the state Assembly. At least 30 people died and 60 were injured in a stampede last month at Prayagraj. Additionally, 18 people lost their lives on Saturday at the New Delhi railway station. During the speech, Banerjee also highlighted the plight of Bengal residents who died in the stampede, alleging that their bodies were sent back without proper documentation, making it difficult for families to receive compensations. "We conducted post-mortems to ensure that their families get the death certificates," PTI quoted the Chief Minister as saying. The Bengal CM also criticised the Uttar Pradesh government for creating a hype around the Maha



Kumbh "without making proper arrangements". She termed the stampede at the Maha Kumbh "deeply heartbreaking", and stressed the need for better planning and management at large religious gatherings to ensure public safety. The chief minister also slammed the "VIP culture" at the Maha Kumbh. "While I avoided the holy dip to prevent inconvenience to common people, the event saw special treatment for VIPs," Banerjee said. She also pointed out that despite the stampede incident, no investigation committee has been set up by the Uttar Pradesh government, unlike in West Bengal, where probe panels are constituted after such tragedies.

## Pope is stable, followed Mass on television as he recovers from respiratory infection, Vatican says

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Pope Francis had breakfast, read the newspapers and followed Mass on television Sunday (February 16, 2025) after a second night sleeping well at the hospital where the 88-year-old pontiff is being treated for a respiratory tract infection, the Vatican said. The Pope's condition was stable, as he continues his unspecified drug therapy, alternating in the afternoon between reading and resting, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said. The Argentine pope, a known workaholic who keeps up a gruelling pace despite his many ailments, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Friday after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened. It was his fourth hospitalisation since his 2013 election and raised questions about his increasingly precarious health.

Doctors confirmed that the pope had a respiratory tract infection and prescribed "absolute rest" alongside unspecified drug therapies. Francis skipped his traditional Sunday noon blessing, declining to even come to his hospital window to wave to a small crowd below that had gathered in hopes of cheering him on.

The @Pontifex social media account, which isn't written by the pope himself, thanked people for their prayers on Sunday. "Thank you for the affection, prayer and closeness



with which you are accompanying me in these days," the post read. The Pope had part of one lung removed after a lung infection when he was a young man and is prone to respiratory infections. In 2023, he spent three days at Gemelli to be treated for what he later revealed was an acute case of pneumonia. Despite his February 6 bronchitis diagnosis, Francis had kept up a frenetic pace of late, packing his days with private and public audiences, while taking on the added obligations of steering the Catholic Church through its Holy Year. The Vatican has canceled his events through Monday at least.



## Delhi hopes for some tariff easing as it works on US trade agreement



As India and the US prepare to work on the contours of a bilateral trade agreement (BTA), New Delhi hopes to secure concessions on the sweeping tariffs announced by US President Donald Trump, such as the 25 per cent tariff on all steel and aluminium, as well as reciprocal tariffs that could impact India's exports to the US. "All tariff announcements coming from the US will be addressed in the trade forum, where both countries have agreed to sign a trade deal and increase trade to \$500 billion (by 2030). Negotiators from both countries will discuss a roadmap on how to move forward, including (on tariffs) being announced in the US," a government official said in response to India's strategy to tackle the 25 per cent tariffs on aluminium and steel.

On reciprocal tariffs, where the US has announced plans to match high tariffs in the partner country, including India, the official said that New Delhi is awaiting clarity on its impact as the US Commerce Secretary is expected to get back with details by April 1. Moreover, the Senate confirmation of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), America's top trade body, is also pending, the official added. However, a White House notification imposing tariffs on steel and aluminium stated that by granting exemptions to certain countries during the initial tariff implementation, the US inadvertently "created loopholes" that were exploited by China and others with excess steel and aluminium capacity, undermining the purpose of these exemptions. On February 11, the White House said that Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, the European Union, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom had received exemptions, which prevented the tariffs from being effective. Hopes for a concession during the current round of trade deal negotiations marks a shift from the past, when India had chosen to retaliate against the US on steel and aluminium tariffs imposed during Trump's first term. This time, the White House has said that exemptions to certain countries were exploited by China and so concessions have broadly been ruled out now. However, Reuters reported last week that Trump said he had agreed to consider a tariff exemption on Australian steel and aluminium imports after a telephone call on Tuesday with Australia's prime minister. Trump noted that the US trade surplus with Australia

was one of the reasons he was considering an exemption from the tariffs.

Moody's Ratings flagged that Indian steel producers will face increased challenges in exporting their products following the US decision to impose an additional 25 per cent tariff on all steel and aluminium imports. Over the past 12 months, high steel imports have already dampened prices and earnings for steel producers in India, said Hui Ting Sim, Assistant Vice President at Moody's Ratings. While the US is aiming to reduce its trade deficit, a senior government official said that Washington, DC is looking to rebalance trade with several countries, and India is much lower in the trade deficit hierarchy. "They (US) maintain a very huge deficit with China, Mexico, and Canada," the official said, adding that both countries are negotiating to boost trade as well. Even as India lowered its basic Customs duty on a range of items in the Union Budget, a White House statement on reciprocal tariffs last week pointed out that Indian tariffs on agricultural goods and motorcycles remain significantly higher than those imposed by the US on Indian products. "The US average applied Most Favoured Nation (MFN) tariff on agricultural goods is 5 per cent, while India's average applied MFN tariff is 39 per cent. India also imposes a 100 per cent tariff on US motorcycles, whereas the US only charges a 2.4 per cent tariff on Indian motorcycles," the White House said.

Another government official said that while a roadmap is being prepared to sign a deal with the US, not all tariffs imposed may be detrimental to India. "The Commerce ministry is set to meet with the industry to evaluate the opportunities that could arise from the US tariffs on Canada and Mexico. The trade diversion opportunity could be beneficial to India," the official said. Notably, Trump's tariffs during his first term helped boost India's electronics exports. A report from Oxford Economics last year examined the impact of the US-China trade war during Trump's first term, highlighting that US trade rerouting was particularly pronounced in the large electronics market, where China's share had dropped by 19 percentage points since 2017.

"India's share in US electronics imports has risen nearly tenfold since then, reaching 2.1 per cent. Electronics now also account for a greater share of India's overall exports, indicating that the government's ongoing efforts to become a high-tech powerhouse have partly paid off," the report stated. India's goods trade surplus with the US has been rising, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, doubling from \$17.30 billion in 2019-20 to \$35.33 billion in 2023-24, alongside a notable shift in the export basket. While exports of electronic and engineering goods surged, traditional exports such as gems & jewellery and garments remained largely unchanged. The most significant transformation has occurred in electronics exports, driven in part by tariffs imposed by the US during Trump's first term.

## Profit-booking leading FIIs to sell; investments yielding good returns: FM

foreign institutional investors Finance secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said foreign investors keep moving their investments depending upon where they want to park their funds. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the current outflows from foreign institutional investors (FIIs) is a result of profit booking by them as their domestic investments have delivered good returns. "FIIs also go out when they are in a position to book profits. The Indian economy today has an environment in which investments are also yielding good returns and profit booking (by overseas investors) is also happening," Sitharaman said during the post Budget interaction with the media. Foreign investors have been relentlessly selling domestic equities since the beginning of 2025. So far (till February 17), they have offloaded Rs 1.04 lakh crore of local shares.

Finance secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said foreign investors keep moving their investments depending upon where they want to park their funds. He said it was not true that these investors are moving from one emerging market to another. The secretary said whenever there is global uncertainty, foreign investors return to their origin country, which is largely the US. "In terms of resilience, Indian markets have held. The strength of the Indian economy will continue to grow despite global headwinds," Pandey said. He said the country has faced global headwinds in the past and continues to face it but it is in a strong position to handle challenges.

When asked about the tariff wars and the risk of reciprocal tariffs from the US, Sitharaman said India has been taking several measures from the last two years. "This Budget shows that there is a lot of rationalisation happening in terms of basic customs duty and their application, safeguard duties or any anti-dumping duties that we levy are also periodically reviewed. And this Budget shows that there is a major step forward in reforming India's customs duty



and that regime which governs it" "We are building to be an investor friendly country and as a result, the duty cuts and the rationalisation that has been announced is a continuing process and we shall keep doing that," she said. To a query on how the government was attempting to manage spill overs of rising inflation due to geopolitical pressures and tariffs wars around the globe, the finance minister said the inflation is being monitored regularly, both from the supply side and from the monetary side by the RBI. She said inflation has been well within a certain band, and the last print showed that it has come down, very close to 4 per cent. Consumer price index (CPI) eased to a five-month low of 4.31 per cent in January from 5.22 per cent in December. "That is one of the reasons why the RBI has chosen to cut the interest rate after nearly 5 years. So inflation related management of supplies and also the monetary policy are working in sink and that is going on in order to favour the growth cycle," she said. Earlier this month, the RBI reduced the repo rate - the key policy rate - by 25 basis points (bps) to 6.25 per cent, after keeping it at 6.5 per cent for almost five years. One basis point (bps) is one-hundredth of a percentage point.

## Raising insurance cover for depositors above Rs 5 lakh under active consideration: Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju

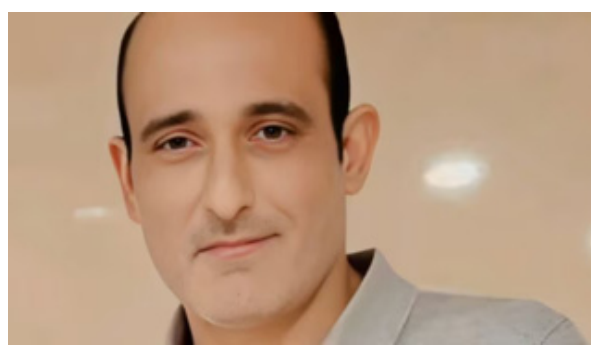
The government is considering increasing the insurance cover limit on bank deposits from the current Rs 5 lakh per depositor, Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju said on Monday. The announcement comes in the wake of the recent clampdown on Mumbai-based New India Cooperative Bank by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The regulator imposed several restrictions on the bank in the wake of certain supervisory concerns, and also superseded its Board of Directors for 12 months, citing "poor governance standards".

"...On the point about increasing (deposit) insurance, that is under active consideration. As and when the government approves, we will notify it," Nagaraju said when questioned about the government's action plan in the New India Cooperative Bank case and if there was a possibility of revising the Rs 5 lakh per depositor insurance cover. Noting that the RBI was seized of the New India Cooperative Bank matter, the secretary refused to comment on it. The cooperative bank has a network of 30 branches and a deposit base of Rs 2,436 crore as of March 2024. The bank had posted losses of Rs 22.78 crore in 2023-24 and Rs 30.74 crore in 2022-23. Post the RBI's action, the bank's depositors have been queuing up before its branches to withdraw their money. Currently, each bank depositor is insured up to a maximum of Rs 5 lakh for both principal and interest amount held by him as on the date of liquidation or

cancellation of the bank's licence or the date on which the scheme of amalgamation or merger or reconstruction comes into force. The insurance cover to depositors is provided by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), a subsidiary of the RBI.

According to the RBI, the eligible depositors of the New India Cooperative Bank would be entitled to receive deposit insurance claim amount of their deposits up to a monetary ceiling of Rs 5 lakh from the DICGC. It will be based on submission of willingness by the depositors concerned and after due verification, the RBI said. The RBI is also in favour of a hike in deposit insurance coverage limit. On August 19, 2024, RBI Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao had said that a periodical upward revision of the deposit insurance coverage limit, currently at Rs 5 lakh, may be warranted considering multiple factors like growth in the value of deposits, inflation and increase in income level. DICGC insures all commercial banks including branches of foreign banks functioning in India, local area banks, regional rural banks and urban cooperative banks. The insurance cover for bank depositors in insured banks was last raised from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh from February 4, 2020. The hike in this limit followed the RBI's action on Mumbai-headquartered Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank Ltd (PMC Bank), with deposits of over Rs 11,000 crore.

## 'The body can still be covered a bit': When Chhaava actor Akshaye Khanna opened up about premature balding at 19-20



Chhaava actor Akshaye Khanna once spoke about how premature balding at a young age affected his self-confidence. "It started happening to me at such a young age. For me, it was like a pianist losing his fingers. It almost felt like that in those days. Till you come to terms with it. It then starts bothering you less. It's heartbreaking," said Khanna. "You might lose a year or two years of your career. Because the way you look as an actor is very important. Especially the face. The body can still be covered a bit. At 19-20, it is devastating. It is heartbreaking. It can mentally kill you," Khanna told Mid Day in 2020, adding that it did "affect my self-confidence a lot as a young actor." "It did affect more than I would like to admit," he expressed. Taking a cue from his admission, let's understand all about premature balding and how it affects one.

Premature balding at 19-20 years of age can be caused

## All about 'kakeibo', the Japanese technique to manage your money better

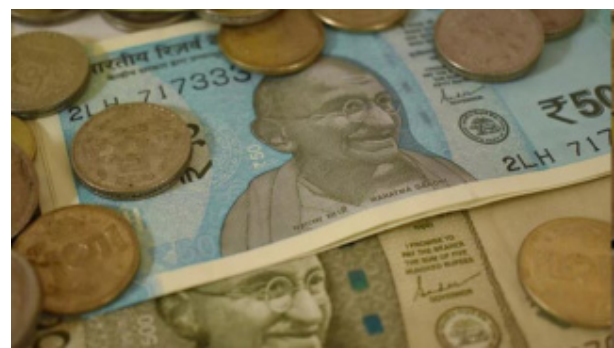
Discover Kakeibo, the Japanese money-saving technique that promotes mindful spending and financial awareness. Learn how this simple budgeting method can help you save more and spend smarter. Discover Kakeibo, the Japanese money-saving technique that promotes mindful spending and financial awareness. Learn how this simple budgeting method can help you save more and spend smarter. Financial mindfulness has become more important than ever in an age of impulsive spending and digital transactions. Enter Kakeibo (pronounced kah-keh-bo), a J that has been around for over a century. Rooted in mindfulness and simplicity, Kakeibo isn't just about tracking expenses—it's about developing a thoughtful, intentional approach to money.

What Is Kakeibo?

Kakeibo (meaning "household finance ledger") was introduced in 1904 by Hani Motoko, Japan's first female journalist. The system encourages individuals to write down their income and expenses manually, promoting a deep awareness of spending habits. Unlike modern budgeting apps, Kakeibo is traditionally practiced with pen and paper, fostering a personal connection to money management. At its core, Kakeibo involves asking yourself four key questions every month: By analysing spending patterns and setting realistic goals, Kakeibo helps you make intentional financial decisions rather than falling into mindless consumption. After each choice or coin flip, participants had to assign money to another person (the same person each time). By integrating Kakeibo into your financial routine, you can cultivate better money habits, reduce unnecessary expenses, and achieve long-term financial stability. Mindful

by genetics, family history, hormonal changes, and lifestyle factors like stress, alopecia areata, nutritional deficiency, weight loss, certain medications, supplements, excessive hairstyling, and treatments, or thyroid problems, said Dr Shareefa Chause, dermatologist at Dr Shareefa Skin Care Clinic, Mumbai. The most common cause is male pattern baldness, which is driven by sensitivity to dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a hormone that shrinks hair follicles over time. "The symptoms of excessive hair loss are excessive hair shedding, hair coming out in clumps, a receding hairline, or thinning at the crown," explained Dr Chause. As pointed out by Khanna, early balding can take a toll on one's mental and emotional well-being. "One can feel ashamed, embarrassed, frustrated, and avoid socialising too.

This can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and frustration," expressed Dr Chause. She stressed that optimism and acceptance of the changes, understanding that self-worth is beyond the way your hair looks, can be helpful. "Remember, confidence comes from how you feel from the inside out, not just how you look," said Dr Chause. While there's "no overnight cure," treatments like biotin supplements and lifestyle changes such as a nutritious diet and de-stressing through yoga and meditation can help slow or even partially reverse hair loss. "A diet rich in proteins, vitamins like biotin, and proper scalp care can also support hair health. Consulting an expert is key to identifying the cause and getting the right treatment plan before hair loss progresses further," said Dr Chause.



Spending Unlike automated budget trackers, Kakeibo requires you to physically write down expenses. This act of recording creates an emotional connection to your spending, making you more mindful about where your money is going. Kakeibo encourages financial introspection. Instead of buying something impulsively, it asks you to consider whether the purchase aligns with your financial goals. Over time, this awareness leads to better spending habits. A unique aspect of Kakeibo is its emphasis on saving before spending. Instead of saving what's left after expenses, you allocate savings first, making financial security a priority. Unlike restrictive budgeting methods, Kakeibo is flexible and sustainable. It doesn't rely on apps or complex spreadsheets—just a notebook and a commitment to mindful spending. By integrating Kakeibo into your financial routine, you can cultivate better money habits, reduce unnecessary expenses, and achieve long-term financial stability.

## Gen Z has added a new dating term to their dictionary: Chameleoning

Gen Z-ers, known for their evolving perspectives on relationships, has coined a new term in their ever-growing dating dictionary: 'chameleoning.' The concept captures a familiar yet often overlooked behaviour in modern dating—changing one's personality, interests, or behaviour to blend in with a partner's preferences. This might be a survival strategy for some, while others see it as a red flag that signals a lack of authenticity or self-identity. But what drives this phenomenon? Is it a harmless way to connect with someone or a deeper sign of insecurity and a need for acceptance?

Dr Sneha Sharma, psychiatrist and co-founder, Anvaya Healthcare mentions, "Some individuals mould their personalities according to their partner's expectations and preferences, and this is often referred to as 'chameleoning' or changing colours to blend into the relationship. While compromising and adapting to your partner's preferences and needs can be helpful in building relationships, it can become problematic if it's at the expense of one person's authentic self." Psychological factors behind chameleoning There are several factors behind this behaviour, according to Dr Sharma. These are: -Strong need for external validation and approval can drive individuals to mould themselves to fit in their partners' ideal version. Fear of rejection also leads individuals to hide their true feelings and preferences. They feel that they will only be liked and accepted if they fall within their partners ideas of them. -Low self esteem and poor sense of self can lead to negative views of self. A partner might not feel worthy of love and affection and hence hide their true self.

-Some individuals prefer avoiding conflict in a relationship. They either feel incompetent to put across their values and priorities or feel that their voices and concerns will not be heard and addressed correctly. Some individuals also see a relationship without conflict as an ideal relationship and strive to fit in that. Open communication will lead to both partners communicating their point of views and arriving at consensus or agreeing to disagree. Open communication will lead to both partners communicating their point of views and arriving at consensus or agreeing to disagree. (Source: Freepik)

Impact of chameleoning on relationships

Dr Sharma says, "While chameleon might initially help in creating a bond and reducing conflict it can have detrimental consequences in the long run, both individually and for the relationship." The person who is constantly trying to fit in will develop a growing sense of resentment and frustration which will lead to dissatisfaction in the relationship. Lack of authenticity will lead to lack of connection between partners leading to fractures in the relationship. Additionally, increasing distance as both partners cannot connect and don't feel understood or seen. Difference between adapting to a partner's preferences and losing one's sense of self in the process "Adapting is healthy behaviour which in-



volves mutual understanding and respect and hence leading to behaviour change which resonates with both partners. This strengthens the values and identity of both individuals and the relationship," explains Dr Sharma. Losing a sense of self means a person suppresses their own authentic identity, feelings, values and preferences and hence can no longer recognise or relate to themselves. Advice for someone who feels they are 'chameleoning' in their relationship Here's what Dr Sharma says you should do: 1. Regular introspection about your own feelings and values can allow you to be aware when you feel inauthentic. 2. Open communication will lead to both partners communicating their point of views and arriving at consensus or agreeing to disagree.

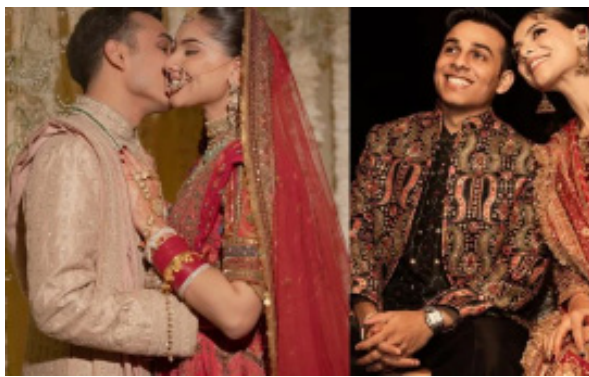
3. ?Boundaries need to be established to protect your own interests and feelings while still being supportive and considerate of your partners needs. 4. Consider talking to a counsellor or psychotherapist if you struggle with expressing yourself in a healthy manner. Work on self esteem issues and together in a relationship, if necessary.

## Elon Musk launches 'the smartest AI on earth'

Hyderabad: Elon Musk-owned xAI has launched its AI chatbot Grok-3. The Tesla chief calls it 'the smartest AI on Earth.' At the launch event, Musk explained why he chose the name 'Grok'. "The term comes from Robert Heinlein's novel Stranger in a Strange Land. It's used by a character raised on Mars and means to fully and profoundly understand something." He also stressed that deep understanding and empathy were some of the key aspects of Grok's capabilities. The company claimed that Grok-3 has over 10 times the computing capability of its predecessor. Musk said the AI model completed pre-training in January and is already improving by the day.



## Anuv Jain marries longtime girlfriend in dreamy wedding, shares first pics: 'Kaise aayi do dilon ki yeh baraat hai'



pictures from their wedding functions. Along with the post, he wrote, "Aur haan dekho yahan kaise aayi do dilon ki yeh baraat hai." He himself commented on his post adding, "Got married over the weekend". According to Reddit, the couple got married on February 14, 2025, in Delhi.

An Instagram comment tagged the newlyweds and wished them a happy married life saying, "Congratulations @anuvjain @hridinarang," which helped in revealing the name of the bride. Several fans flooded the comment section because they were surprised by the development and did not see this coming, while others congratulated him and expressed happiness. Some social media users also joked about how there would be 'no breakup songs', considering the singer is married now. Meanwhile, in an interview with the Hindustan Times in September 2022, Anuv Jain hinted about being in a relationship, but said it was too soon to share any details about it. "Let's see how it goes. I'm not sure," he said, while promoting his love song Mazaak. Elaborating on the same, the singer added, "Mazaak talks about love - when you least expect to fall in love, it just hits you like a truck. It's based on personal experience, maybe it's too soon to share right now."

A GenZ favourite, Indie singer Anuv Jain has tied the knot with his longtime girlfriend Hridi Narang in a dreamy traditional ceremony. The Tum Mere Ho singer shared the first pictures from his wedding on social media. The duo glowed at their wedding, and fans can't stop gushing over their photos. The newlywed has not tagged his partner on Instagram yet, leaving the fans curious to know who she is. Anuv took to his Instagram handle and shared a bunch of

## Vineeth Kumar Singh: 'After Chhaava, I am positive that the audience will no longer ask me aapka naam kya hai'



Vineeth Kumar Singh then politely shared a message for his audience: "To my audience, your messages on Instagram & social media platforms always fill me with immense gratitude & emotion. After Chhaava I am positive that the audience who watched my earlier work and loved it too will not surprise me in person with this sweet question 'Sir, if you don't mind' Your love has been my greatest strength. Even when I lost my way, there were people who understood that I am just an actor determined to do good films, nothing more," said Vineeth. At the end of the post, the actor also thanked his Chhaava co-stars Vicky Kaushal, Rashmika Mandanna, and Akshaye Khanna, among others.

Vineeth Kumar Singh, known for movies like Mukkabaaz, Gangs of Wasseypur, Bombay Talkies and Gold, was recently seen portraying a powerful character in Vicky Kaushal-starrer Chhaava. Vineeth played the role of Kavi Kalash, who was a close friend of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. After the film's release, the actor garnered praise for his acting skills. On Tuesday, Vineeth took to X to pen a long note for all the appreciation he has been getting after being out of work for a very long time. His post read: "As an actor, the most important thing for me is to be part of stories that truly touch hearts. I have always aimed to choose stories that inspire or move you in ways you've never felt before. After Mukkabaaz, there was a phase when I had almost no work, but today, I am finally part of films that I am truly proud of. Chhaava is one of them, close to my heart and soul."

In his note, the actor thanked his director Laxman Utekar, producer Dinesh Vijan and the casting director for "trusting" him with a powerful character. Vineeth added, "Life teaches lessons in its own way, sometimes tough but always meaningful. A special thank you to all the actors, directors & journalists who encouraged me, praised my work, & gave me a reason to work harder & never give up despite my mistakes & struggles."

He also thanked the people who stood by him during his lowest moments. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

## Varun Dhawan shares BTS moment with Sunny Deol from Border 2 set: 'Hameraa saab ji'



is more than a film's legacy, an emotion, and a dream come true," Ahan wrote. Reflecting on his deep connection with the film, he added, "Ironic how life works my journey with Border started 29 years ago, when mom visited dad on set while pregnant with me. I grew up hearing OP Dutta's legendary stories, holding JP uncle's hand, and sitting by @nidhiduttaofficial side. I never realized how much those moments would shape my love for cinema and the Indian Armed Forces." He went on to express his gratitude to the filmmakers, saying, "Now, being part of Border 2 is an absolute honour. JP uncle, thank you for continuing to hold my hand, I hope to make you very very proud." The passing of the baton from father to son has been beautifully captured in a montage video shared by the makers, which showcases iconic images from the original 'Border', alongside Ahan's emotional voiceover.

Actor Varun Dhawan shared an adorable behind-the-scene photo with actor Sunny Deol from the set of Border 2 on Tuesday. The shooting for the much-anticipated sequel of the 1997 epic is currently taking place in the rugged cantonment of Jhansi. In the photo shared by 'Badla' actor, the duo were seen sitting on a military tanker while posing for the photograph. Varun donned a white vest along with a blue shirt. He complimented his outfit with brown pants, black sports shoes, and sunglasses. Sunny Deol wore a blue shirt and green cargo for the photo. "Sunny days. Hameraa saab ji. #border2 #indianarmy Jan 2026" T-Series, the official producer of Border 2, shared a picture of the whole team from the continent of Jhansi. It featured producers Bhushan Kumar, Nidhi Dutta, actor Sunny Deol and Varun Dhawan along with others.

"Action, legacy, and patriotism! #SunnyDeol on the sets of #Border2 in the rugged cantonment of Jhansi, alongside #VarunDhawan, Producer #BhushanKumar, #NidhiDutta, co-producer #ShivChanana, #BinoyGandhi, & director #AnuragSingh. January 23, 2026 gear up for a saga of valor and sacrifice!" Directed by Anurag Singh, "Border 2" is set to be a grand cinematic spectacle with a star-studded ensemble cast that includes Sunny Deol reprising his legendary role, Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh, and Ahan Shetty. The original film, helmed by JP Dutta, was a landmark in Indian cinema, depicting the 1971 India-Pakistan war, and introduced audiences to unforgettable characters like Suniel Shetty's portrayal of BSF officer Bhairav Singh.

A special moment in the sequel's development is the casting of Ahan Shetty, who steps into his father, Suniel Shetty's shoes. In a heartfelt Instagram post, Ahan shared his emotional connection to the Border franchise. "Border

## Juhi Chawla takes holy dip in Triveni Sangam: 'Most beautiful morning in my life'

Actress Juhi Chawla took a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam at the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Tuesday and called it the "most beautiful" experience of her life. Juhi Chawla, known for films like 'Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak', 'Hum Hain Rah Pyar Ke', 'Yes Boss', 'Darr' and 'Ishq' has joined the list of Bollywood celebrities who visited the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

The actress also paid gratitude to the police and others for the grand arrangements at one of the largest spiritual gatherings in the world. While recalling her experience from the visit, Juhi Chawla said, "This morning has been the most beautiful morning in my life... I took a holy dip in the Sangam. I didn't want to leave that place. It was an amazing and beautiful experience. I thank the police and everyone who has made such good arrangements."

Last week, actor Vivek Oberoi, along with his family, visited the Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj to take a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam, where the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers meet. Oberoi thanked the Uttar Pradesh government for the Mahakumbh arrangements and shared

how proud he feels that the world's biggest festival is being celebrated in the country with so much love. "We have come here to thank God... We want to thank the government of India, especially the government of Uttar Pradesh, their administration, and every officer present here for making such good preparations. It feels very proud that today, the world's biggest festival is being celebrated in such a beautiful way in our country," Oberoi told ANI.

Actor Vicky Kaushal also visited Mahakumbh 2025 ahead of his film Chhaava's release. Sharing his experience at the event, Vicky Kaushal expressed his joy, saying, "I am feeling good. I was waiting to visit Mahakumbh. I am fortunate as I got the opportunity to come here." The ongoing Maha Kumbh 2025, the world's largest human gathering, has witnessed an overwhelming turnout, with over 540 million devotees taking a holy dip in the first 36 days, officials said on Monday. According to official data, from February 17, 2025, till 8 PM, more than 13.5 million devotees participated in the grand religious event, marking yet another significant milestone in the 45-day-long spiritual congregation.

## R Madhavan's GD Naidu biopic titled GDN; Krishnakumar Ramakumar to helm the project



Actor-filmmaker R Madhavan is the man with the Midas touch when it comes to starring in biopics. In his directorial debut, Rocketry: The Nambi Effect, the actor played the titular role of ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan. The biopic won the National Award for Best Feature Film among other awards. Now, Madhavan is set to step into

the shoes of the famous inventor and engineer, GD Naidu. On Tuesday, the makers announced the title of the film as GDN.

Directed by Krishnakumar Ramakumar, the movie will be backed by Vijay Moolan's Varghese Moolan Pictures and Madhavan-Sarita Madhavan's Tricolour Films. Sharing the first look poster of the film, the makers wrote, "Unveiling the title of our tribute to the Edison of India, GD Naidu. G.D.N - A story of innovation, resilience, and inspiration."

Gopalswamy Doraiswamy Naidu was born in Coimbatore, and is credited with developing the first indigenous electric motor. He was known for his relentless quest for creating new things, and has made credible innovations in the field of agriculture, textile, photography, and automobiles. He was also a noted philanthropist, and acclaimed academician. Incidentally, a Ranjit Kumar-directed documentary on him, titled GD Naidu - The Edison of India, won the Best Science & Technology Film Award at the 66th National Film Awards. GDN also boasts an interesting ensemble including actors like Jayaram, Priyamani and Yogi Babu. Actor-turned-filmmaker Krishnakumar Ramakumar has helmed a segment in Modern Love: Chennai, and this will be his debut feature film. With cinematography by Aravind Kamalanathan, the music of GDN will be composed by Govind Vasantha.

## A few middle-class women cook up a trippy tale

Remember the beautiful story about how a simple lunchbox resulted in the blossoming of a matured romance in the bustling city of Mumbai? Now, the same bustling city, the same world of lunchboxes, but with a twist is coming to Netflix on February 28. Titled Dabba Cartel, the series is set to explore how the life of a few women gets irrevocably changed when they decide to cook something way more sinister. Directed by Hitesh Bhatia, and written by Vishnu Menon and Bhavna Kher, Dabba Cartel revolves around five middle-class women whose dabba business takes an unprecedented turn into a drug cartel. And it is all about how these five women, and their families find a way to live their lives at peace in this world of guns, drugs, and pharmaceuticals.

With a stellar star cast that is truly pan-Indian, Dabba Cartel is backed by Excel Entertainment, and created by Shibani Akhtar, Vishnu Menon, Gaurav Kapur, and Akanksha Seda.

Shabana Azmi headlines the cast, which includes marquee names like Jyotika, Nimisha Sajayan, Shalini Pandey, Anjali Anand, Sai Tamhankar, Jishu Sengupta, Lillete Dubey, Bhupendra Singh Jadawat, and Gajraj Rao. The series is set in Thane, and the trailer shows us glimpses of the world of these five women whose lives get entangled in a drug mafia. Sharing the trailer, Netflix wrote, "They're cooking. And it's criminally good." In a statement, creator Shibani Akhtar said, "With Dabba Cartel, we wanted to



explore the extraordinary journey of ordinary household women, and how resilience, ambition, and survival instincts can push them into unimaginable circumstances. This is a story of friendship, betrayal, and power, set against the backdrop of a world they never imagined being a part of." Director Hitesh, who recently helmed the heartwarming Sharmaaji Namkeen, which marked the final onscreen appearance of late actor Rishi Kapoor, is directing Dabba Cartel, and he called the 'gripping crime drama' an extremely special experience that has "dynamic characters navigating a high-stakes world with courage and wit."

## Parmish Verma-starrer 'Kanneda' to premiere on JioHotstar from March 21

New Delhi: Web series "Kanneda", fronted by Punjabi star-singer Parmish Verma, is set to start streaming on JioHotstar from March 21. Directed by Chandan Arora, the show also stars Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, Ranvir Shorey, Arunoday Singh, Aadar Malik and Jasmin Bajwa in pivotal roles. The "high-stakes thriller" is produced by Jar Pictures.

Verma, known for songs such as "Look Classy", "Caran Caran", and "Dekhi Dekhi", will play the role of Nimma in "Kanneda". "After escaping the horrors of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Nimma arrives in Canada. But the streets are ruthless, the system is broken, and the world isn't waiting to welcome him. Explore Nimma's journey as he travels the distance between Canada and Kanneda," read the official synopsis of the series. Verma said "Kanneda" is very close to his heart.

"Nimma's story is about identity, ambition, and the thirst for power. Playing Nimma was a unique experience and as an artist, it was an incredibly fulfilling one. I have put my heart and soul into Kanneda. I am super excited for its release on JioHotstar and am looking forward to the audiences' reaction," the singer-actor said in a statement.



"Power is intoxicating, but in this world, it's also a ticking time bomb. 'Kanneda' is the story of Nimma and Parmish has done absolute justice to the character. The soundtrack and music also adds immense value to the project. The stakes and the sheer force of this narrative makes it a must-watch. We're elated to collaborate with JioHotstar and cannot wait for it to be seen by everyone," added producer Ajay G Rai.

## Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan are battle ready atop a tank in BTS picture from Jhansi on sets of 'Border 2'



Mumbai: The work on the upcoming movie 'Border 2' is in full-swing. On Monday, the makers of the film took to Instagram, and shared a BTS picture from the sets of the film in Jhansi. The picture features Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan, producers Bhushan Kumar, Nidhi Dutta, co-producer Shiv Chanana, Binoy Gandhi, and director Anurag Singh. While Sunny and Varun can be seen sitting atop a tank, the producers stood in front of it.

The makers wrote in the caption, "Action, legacy, and patriotism! #SunnyDeol on the sets of #Border2 in the rugged cantonment of Jhansi, alongside #VarunDhawan, Producer #BhushanKumar, #NidhiDutta, co-producer #ShivChanana, #BinoyGandhi, & director #AnuragSingh January 23, 2026, gear up for a saga of valor and sacrifice".

The film also stars Ahan Shetty and Diljit Dosanjh.

While 'Border' was based on the events of Battle of Longewala, 'Border 2' is presumably based on the Kargil War which occurred in 1999. The conflict between the two countries was mostly limited. During early 1999, Pakistani troops infiltrated across the Line of Control (LoC) and occupied Indian territory mostly in the Kargil district. India responded by launching a major military and diplomatic offensive to drive out the Pakistani infiltrators. As per official data, an estimated 75%-80% of the intruded area and nearly all high ground was back under Indian control.

'Border', which released in 1997 featured an ensemble starcast including Suniel Shetty, Jackie Shroff, Akshaye Khanna, Sudesh Berry and Puneet Issar alongside a supporting cast including Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Tabu, Raakhee, Pooja Bhatt and Sharbani Mukherjee. 'Border 2' is presented by Gulshan Kumar & T-Series & JP Dutta's J.P. Films. The film is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, JP Dutta, and Nidhi Dutta, and is set to land in theatres on January 23, 2026.

## G D Naidu's biopic featuring Madhavan in the lead titled 'G.D.N'

Chennai: Director Krishnakumar Ramakumar's film on the great scientist G D Naidu, featuring actor Madhavan in the lead, has been titled 'G.D.N', its makers announced on Tuesday. The biopic, the India schedule of which officially began today, will also feature actors Priyamani, Jayaram and Yogi Babu among others. Music for the film is by Govind Vasantha.



## Kerala inch ahead with Sachin Baby's go-slow approach in Ranji Trophy semis



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

On the eve of his team's second Ranji Trophy semifinal appearance, skipper Sachin Baby stepped in for an extended batting session alone in the nets as coach Amay Khurasiya kept a close tab from behind the facility. The focus was on perfecting the cuts and drives while choosing the right deliveries to employ the shots. "Precision is exactness. Power is about going through it (the shot) and precision is about going through it with your control like here, here and here," Khurasiya said as he pointed out three imaginary marks on the left-handed Baby's off-side. For most of the opening day of the semifinal contest on Monday at the empty Motera cauldron, Kerala and Baby's movements were about exactness and precision, not necessarily on their stroke-making but also the restrained movements in the crease against the Gujarat bowlers.

Over 80 per cent of the Kerala batting scorecard was jotted with dot balls. 429 off the 534 deliveries had no run linked to them and Baby was at the forefront of the stonewalling, blocking out 152 deliveries. The coach's pressing may be from the basic manual, but Baby needed assurance and guidance from a like-minded southpaw in Khurasiya to get back to the grind after an improbable injury — the first of his 15-year career for Kerala — put him off the boil for a bit. "I did not know how to react to such a situation. For the first time in my career, I had to miss a game for Kerala due to an injury. My regular fitness routines went down and it was playing on my mind, especially after I could not contribute much in the first half of the Ranji season as well," Baby says as Kerala played out 89 overs for 206 runs and four wickets after opting to bat on a tacky Ahmedabad pitch. It was integral for Baby to find his groove again for Kerala to continue their newfound 'blockathon' philosophy. Having led the batting charts for the state with two blockbuster seasons where he crossed 800 runs twice between 2022-24, Baby's unbeaten 69 off 193 deliveries was his first half-century since November 2024. Sachin Baby bats for Kerala in the Ranji Trophy semi-final against Gujarat in Ahmedabad. (Express Photo by Lalith Kalidas) Sachin Baby bats for Kerala in the Ranji Trophy semi-final against Gujarat in Ahmedabad. (Express Photo by Lalith Kalidas) As the Kerala captain waded through a late seam bowling probe from his counterpart, Chintan Gaja, the synchronised claps from the dugout were doubled up with some Gen-Z Malayalam lingo that praised Baby's bravado.

"Kattakku nilku Baby. Katta manassu (Stay solid Baby,

You have a solid mind)," shouted his teammates who have also bought into the art of attrition drawn out by the captain and coach. Kerala team manager Nasir Machan says he has never seen Mohammed Azharuddeen exhibit such levels of restraint before. Surviving a lbw decision off the final delivery of the day with a successful review, Azharuddeen (30 not out off 66 balls) and Baby denied Gujarat the satisfaction of any last-minute ascendency to claim the day. "All of these boys have transformed this season under the coach and Baby. Azhar is one of our more attacking batters but even he has begun to temper his knocks in a way that is expected of him in the new rule," remarks Machan.

A spate of injuries and lack of reliable batters emerging from the age-group system prompted Kerala to play around with their batting order to serve the impression of a long order. "Azhar and Salman Nizar went from top-order roles to lower down the order and we had Jalaj Saxena and Aditya Sarvate coming above them as floaters. We have been looking for an opener and a No. 3 for the last year or so, but haven't found a consistent bat from U19 or U23. That is when Akshay Chandran put his hand up for the game at the top," Baby says.

Embedded in this plan, Kerala even listed two debut batters in young Ahammed Imran and Varun Nayanar for the high-stakes semifinal. Relying on a four-man bowling attack helmed by spinners Sarvate and Saxena, the decision was a stark contrast to the home team's four-pronged seam attack that was rendered ineffective throughout the morning. Despite a disintegrating dry pitch developing genuine cracks quite early, Kerala's added confidence in the unusually defensive mindset even threw Gaja and Gujarat off their game after tea. When Baby blocked out left-arm spinner Siddharth Desai's delivery with a prodding front-pad outside the off-stump in the 84th over, Gaja and his teammates remained unsuspecting of a potential lbw. The giant-screen replays would tell the Gujarat captain he had lost a substantial opportunity to delay the second new ball to the next day. Dismayed by the let-off, Gaja smiled wryly before opting for a late, desperate push with the new ball from the next over but Baby and Azharuddeen would not cede an inch. While the packed-in fields were never consistently threatened by the Kerala batters with regular boundaries, Baby says his team is on course with their plans and could have added another 50-60 runs, save for a little stretch in the morning session.

As the clock ticked at 11:11 am, Gujarat observed fortune for about fifteen minutes on the field after the fidgety Rohan Kunnummal was involved in frequent mix-ups with his opening partner Chandran in the first hour. A full-throated charge to a non-existent single to extra cover blew a well-settled Chandran out before Kunnummal burnt a review on a Ravi Bishnoi googly after finding himself trapped in front. That was shortly before Baby took charge and began the controlled recovery with three patient stands. "The plan was always to bat as much time as possible after seeing a dry pitch. We will bank on our spinners to seal the fate of this game," Baby said as he sipped on hot tea after his ice bath recovery. Attrition will be the codeword for Tuesday too, with Baby and his 'katta manassu' fuelling Kerala's hopes of a historic Ranji final berth.

## Why Gukesh's winless run at Weissenhaus in Freestyle Chess is nothing to worry about

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

At a private luxury resort in Germany, Gukesh Dommaraju, the reigning world champion, has spent an entire week being deeply uncomfortable. Nothing seems to have gone his way at Weissenhaus, where he ended the first event of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour 2025 without a single win. To put that into context, that's zero wins, 11 draws and six defeats across classical and rapid time controls. He just about snuck into the quarter-finals after finishing eighth in the 10-player round robin stage, which was played in the rapid time control. Then, he lost or drew all his games in the knock out rounds in the classical time control to end up eighth. Should this event be a cause for concern? After all, last year it was Ding Liren who had suffered a similar fate at the freestyle event in Weissenhaus while he was still world champion. And Ding had been in wretched form for the rest of the year till he was relieved of the world champion's crown by Gukesh.

Do the results from freestyle chess prove that Gukesh has lost form — or worse, motivation — like his predecessor?

Not really. Just days before the Freestyle event started, Gukesh had come within a whisker of winning the Tata Steel Chess Tournament in Wijk aan Zee, eventually losing to compatriot R Praggnanandhaa in tiebreaks after both players had ended on top of the standings after 13 games. Gukesh had in fact landed in the Dutch village just hours before his first match, having barely trained for weeks because felicitations and public appearances had consumed all of his time since becoming world champion. Gukesh's winless Freestyle chess grand slam Gukesh's Weissenhaus event ended with a defeat in 30 moves to Alireza Firouzja on Friday. (FIDE/Lennart Ootes) So what had changed for the teenager in the days that separated Tata Steel chess event — where he had gone unbeaten in 12 games before losing the final game — from the Freestyle event where he could not manage a single win? Simply put, the sport itself had changed. Freestyle chess might be referred to as a variant of the sport, but those who have had a close brush with it — like chess legend Judit Polgar who was a commentator at the Freestyle Tour event for a week — believe that it's a "completely different sport which requires a completely different mindset".

In essence, freestyle chess is not like T20 is to Test cricket or ODIs. For chess, that equivalence to T20s and ODIs would be rapid and blitz formats. Freestyle chess is a whole new game. "It's a completely different sport. You need a completely different mindset and completely different priorities than the ones we are used to. There are so many small details that you're not used to. There are very few things that you can rely on from your classical way of thinking in chess," Polgar told ChessBase.

As envisioned by the legendary Bobby Fischer, who popularised Fischer Random (also known as freestyle chess and chess 960), freestyle chess essentially plunges players into the middle game from the first move itself. That's why it wasn't particularly surprising that in the final of the Freestyle Chess event in Weissenhaus, eventual winner Vincent Keymer actually spent 21 minutes to decide what his first move with black pieces would be against Fabiano Caruana. DEEP DIVE: Against Fabiano Caruana in the quarters, Gukesh was down to ONE SECOND on his clock at



## Freestyle chess demands that Gukesh fights the habit of calculation and preparation, something he has aced while becoming Classical World Champion

one point while in a completely losing position in the end game. Despite that, his heart rate was at 78 beats per minute. How does Gukesh do it? It's all in the mind, experts tell Fabiano Caruana recently spoke of how impressed he was with the amount of prep Gukesh had put in in recent years. The teenager had spent almost six months working excruciatingly with his team of seconds for the World Chess Championship. But in freestyle, most of that preparation is superfluous. What's the point of all of those novelties and carefully set up booby traps when you find out your opening position a few minutes before your game? Freestyle neutralises not just preparation, but also all the centuries of work that has gone into perfecting the opening phase of chess. It's a new world where a chess player does not know which square on the board is a landmine. While Gukesh went through the entire Weissenhaus event without doing any media interactions, his full-time second Grzegorz Gajewski explained why the freestyle variant had posed so many problems for the 18-year-old world champion in particular.

"We faced some positions that are mindblowing. Some of them were a bit weird for our taste. It hasn't been easy for Gukesh to play here. Feels kind of like we're late to the party. It's not easy to basically learn a new game," said Gajewski on ChessBase India live stream. He added that doing well in freestyle chess depended on the style of the player. For some, like Javokhir Sindarov, it's easier to adjust to freestyle. Gajewski was asked if Gukesh, who is known for his calculation ability on the board, needed to develop more intuition to thrive in freestyle chess. "I think it's not a matter of developing intuition, but rather about fighting the habit of calculation. When you calculate so well, it becomes a habit. He does it automatically. In 960 (freestyle chess), calculation can be very misleading because you have to be careful about which moves you are calculating. Many moves that intuitively seem fine in classical chess are pure mistakes in freestyle."

## Important for us to play to our optimum level: PAK captain Mohammad Rizwan before opening match vs NZ in Champions Trophy



GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan said that the side needed to be on top of their game if they want to do well in the Champions Trophy, starting on Wednesday. He also said that they need to rectify the side's tendency to collapse under pressure. "It is hard to say how we will perform on a particular day because it is important for us to play to our optimum level to win matches," Rizwan said a day before Pakistan take on New Zealand in the tournament opener. "I think we lack that one or two per cent needed

to win matches under pressure because unfortunately, we tend to crack under pressure and lose close matches as we have seen in recent games," he added.

The Pakistan captain also urged his side to show the same resilience in the Champions Trophy which they had shown during the 10-year period when no international side toured the country. "I think, most importantly, we should all enjoy the Champions Trophy as it is after a long time (that) we are having such a big event in Pakistan, after 10 years (that) we spent playing our home matches elsewhere," Rizwan said. "If you see, even in those 10 years (that) we suffered, Pakistan cricket did well and won big matches including being the Test No 1 team and (winning the) Champions Trophy. I hope we can repeat that same thing in this tournament," he added. No top team in international cricket had toured Pakistan following the terrorist attacks on the Sri Lankan team in March 2009 until the start of this decade when top teams such as Australia, England and New Zealand resumed visiting their Asian opponent. In between, Pakistan hosted Zimbabwe in 2015 and a World XI side under Faf du Plessis had toured for a three-match T20I series to quell concerns regarding security.

## 'Slowly, we fell in love': Neeraj Chopra opens up about his marriage with Himani Mor

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Star Indian athlete Neeraj Chopra took the world by surprise in January after he posted a photo of his wedding with former tennis player Himani Mor. In a recent conversation with India Today, Neeraj opened up on his marriage and why it was kept lowkey. "I knew her. She also comes from a family with a sports background, and so do we. Her father and mother were kabaddi players. Her brothers were boxers and wrestlers. She herself was a tennis player, but after picking up injuries, she focused more on her studies," Neeraj said.

Talking about how being athletes helped them form an easy connection, Neeraj said, "Because our families had a sports background, we had the opportunity to meet. Our conversations began like that — just two athletes talking. It was casual at first, but slowly, we fell in love," he said. In a short post on his social media pages in January, Neeraj had shared pictures from the ceremony held in Himachal Pradesh on January 16. "Grateful for every blessing that brought us to this moment together. Bound by love, happily ever after," Neeraj had written.

Neeraj's paternal uncle Bhim Chopra had told The Indian Express that the marriage was arranged by both fami-



lies. "The wedding took place on January 16 in Himachal Pradesh. Both the families were present during the wedding, which was arranged by the two families," Bhim said. Although only family members were invited for the nuptials, Chopra said most of his close circle of friends was aware that he was tying the knot and he would soon be planning a celebration with those who couldn't be a part of the function. "... Families and friends knew. I wanted to return to training because the season was about to start. I thought it would only be possible after the season. Inviting everyone would have taken time," he explained.

## I have not resigned: Mary Kom responds to reports of her leaving role of IOA's athletes commission chairperson

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Mary Kom Resignation Mary Kom told PTI that her outburst in a private WhatsApp group was misconstrued and leaked to the media as resignation. "I have not resigned, I will complete my tenure (which ends in 2026)," she asserted. Boxing legend Mary Kom on Tuesday said that she hasn't resigned from the role of Indian Olympic Association's athletes commission chairperson, adding that she will complete her tenure. The 42-year-old Manipuri, who is also a 2012 Olympics bronze-winner, had travelled to Haldwani for the National Games closing ceremony last week where she expressed her displeasure over being lodged at an "inferior hotel".

Mary Kom told PTI that her outburst in a private WhatsApp group was misconstrued and leaked to the media as resignation. "I have not resigned, I will complete my tenure (which ends in 2026)," she asserted. "I was merely telling my fellow (athletes commission) members that if this kind of treatment happens again, I will consider resigning. I never said that I am resigning. IOA is my family and if I am unhappy over something, I have every right to express it. This does not mean that I am resigning," she said. Mary Kom, who was elected to the panel in 2022 with table tennis stalwart A Sharath Kamal as vice-chairperson, said the person who leaked her conversation in the WhatsApp group of Athletes Commission. "Whoever has leaked the private conversation in the WhatsApp group of Athletes Commission has not done the right thing. I don't know who has done it. I am hurt but I want to close this matter because IOA is my



family," she later said at the IOA Bhawan.

"I have no ill feelings towards anybody who has leaked the conversation but I want the IOA and the sports ministry to find out who has leaked it. I want to serve the country's sport and don't want a controversy which I had not created," she added. The commission also features two-time Olympic medal-winning shuttler PV Sindhu, former shot putter Om Prakash Karhana, Winter Olympian Shiva Keshavan, London Olympics bronze-winning shooter Gagan Narang, rower Bajrang Lal, fencer Bhavani Devi, former women's hockey captain Rani Rampal, and Tokyo Olympics silver-winning weightlifter Mirabai Chanu. "I don't know why it is that every time I raise my voice for something, it is misunderstood like this? Lot of my fellow athletes speak their mind on so many issues but nobody gets misunderstood," Mary Kom said.

## Inzamam Ul Haq on terror attack on Sri Lanka in 2009: 'We were punished for 10 years... Our cricket went backwards'

GNS News Agency, Feb 20

Workers install billboards on a structure of an entry point to Gaddafi Stadium, in Pakistan's Lahore, in preparation for upcoming ICC Champions Trophy 2025 on Saturday. (AP Photo) Workers install billboards on a structure of an entry point to Gaddafi Stadium, in Pakistan's Lahore, in preparation for upcoming ICC Champions Trophy 2025 on Saturday.

The ICC Champions Trophy will mark the return of big-ticket cricket to Pakistan after nearly three decades. The last mega, multi-team event hosted by Pakistan was the 1996 World Cup, which Pakistan co-hosted with Sri Lanka and India. Many cricketing nations avoided touring Pakistan after the 2009 terror attack where the Sri Lankan cricket team had come under attack from terrorists. "The events of 2009 feel like a bad dream," former Pakistan captain Inzamam Ul Haq said recently while talking about the terror attack on Sri Lanka. "We were punished for 10 years. Our cricket went backwards." The Pakistan national team hosted its 'home' games in the United Arab Emirates before teams started to reluctantly travel to Pakistan from 2018. The attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team happened



on March 3, 2009 while the team was playing a Test match in Lahore. The incident happened while the Sri Lankan team bus was making its way to the venue for the third day of the Test. The team bus was ambushed around 9am (local time) just outside the Gaddafi Stadium by 12 gunmen. The terrorists were heavily armed, wielding assault rifles, grenades and rocket launchers. The terror attack had caused the deaths of six policemen and a driver escorting match officials. Several others were injured, including seven Sri Lanka players and coaching staff members of the team. The tool could have been much higher.