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HPRC World Arena Polo Championship 2025 from February 24 in Hyd

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad Polo and Riding Club (HPRC) will be hosting what is being claimed as India's largest ever international arena polo tournament in the city from Monday. The tournament will continue upto March 2. The HPRC World Arena Polo Championship 2025 will see participation of two Indian teams along with France, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Luxembourg, UK and USA vying for honours. Speaking to reporters here on Friday, the club president Chaitania R. Kumar and secretary (admin) Reaz Ahmed and Indian polo player Arsalan Khan, said that they have earmarked 80 top-tier polo horses for the tournament, the matches of which will be held under floodlights all through.

PM Modi to Release 19th PM-KISAN Instalment on Feb 24 in Bihar

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to release the 19th instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme on February 24. The funds will be transferred directly to eligible farmers' bank accounts during his visit to Bhagalpur, Bihar, as per information on the PM-KISAN official portal. PM-KISAN provides financial assistance of Rs 6,000 annually to eligible farmer families. The amount is distributed in three instalments of Rs 2,000 each, credited every four months. The scheme defines a farmer family as comprising a husband, wife, and minor children. Payments are made through direct bank transfers to beneficiaries. The 18th instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme was released on October 5, 2024, from Washim, Maharashtra. The initiative continues to provide financial support to landholding farmers, reducing financial distress and aiding agricultural development. To receive instalments under the scheme, farmers must complete the eKYC (electronic Know Your Customer) process. The following options are available for eKYC verification:



2. Biometric eKYC: Can be completed at Common Service Centres (CSCs) and State Seva Kendras (SSKs).
3. Face Authentication eKYC: Accessible through the PM-KISAN mobile application.

The PM-KISAN website highlights that eKYC is mandatory for all registered farmers, and those yet to complete the process must do so to continue receiving payments.

1. OTP-based eKYC: Available on the PM-KISAN portal and mobile app.

India says reports of \$21-million USAID fund 'deeply disturbing'

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

India on Friday (February 21, 2025) said that the reports about USAID's alleged \$21 million funding 'for voter turnout' in India is "deeply troubling" and has led to concerns regarding foreign interference in India's internal affairs. Addressing a press briefing, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said "These reports are deeply troubling, and indicate possible foreign interference into India's internal affairs." He added that relevant departments and agencies are investigating the allegations.

"We have seen information that has been put out by the U.S. administration regarding certain US activities and funding. These are obviously very deeply troubling," Mr. Jaiswal said. Addressing an event in Miami on Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump questioned the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) funding of \$21 million for voter turnout in India and wondered whether it was trying to get someone else elected. "This has led to



concerns about foreign interference in India's internal affairs. Relevant departments and agencies are looking into this matter.

It would be premature to make a public comment at this stage, so relevant authorities are looking into it and hopefully, we can come up with an update on that subsequently," he said.

RS Praveen Kumar hits out at Congress for targeting Harish Rao

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Hyderabad: BRS leader RS Praveen Kumar criticised the Congress government for misusing power to target former Minister T Harish Rao with illegal cases. He said intoxicated by electoral success, the Congress leaders were engaging in political vendetta instead of governance.

Speaking at Telangana Bhavan on Friday, Praveen Kumar stated that a criminal named Chakradhar, a close associate of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, had filed a fabricated case against Harish Rao at the Panjagutta police station, alleging that his phone was tapped during the BRS regime. He stated that Harish Rao was targeted with corruption and phone tapping charges, only because he was cornering the government on people's issues. "Harish Rao, a seven-time MLA from Siddipet, has served Telangana with dedication, especially during Covid-19 as the then Health Minister. Unlike Revanth Reddy, who was involved in the Cash-for-Vote scam, Harish Rao has never been linked to corruption. But multiple cases are being filed against him, on one pretext or another. Revanth Reddy is keen to implicate Harish Rao to silence him, which is not possible," he asserted.

The former IPS officer said the police officials were acting as pawns of the ruling party. He charged DCP SM Vijay Kumar for pressuring individuals to implicate Harish Rao, citing the alleged torture of Vamsi Krishna, a former associate of Harish Rao, in the phone-tapping case. He observed that senior police officers were bending to political pressure and suggested that such officers should re-



sign if they could not act independently. Pointing out Chakradhar's criminal background, he stated that there were numerous cases against him, including sexual assault, fraud involving 1,900 job aspirants, and kidnapping among others. Despite a previous High Court writ being withdrawn, an FIR was swiftly filed against Harish Rao within hours of Chakradhar's fresh complaint. Praveen Kumar also condemned the selective policing, stating that complaints against Congress leaders were ignored, while BRS leaders like Kaushik Reddy and Erolla Srinivas were being falsely implicated. He urged the DGP to provide additional security to Harish Rao and others who were named in the phone-tapping case, citing life threats from Congress leaders. "The police should realise that Revanth Reddy will not remain in power forever. BRS is ready to face any politically motivated cases," he warned.

AP and Tamil Nadu sign MoU on handloom sales

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

In a significant development for handloom artisans, the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have reached a key agreement regarding the sale of handloom products. An Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed to facilitate the sale of handloom goods from both states through Tamil Nadu's Co-optex outlets. This year, the partnership aims to achieve sales exceeding 9 crores.

The agreement was formalised in the presence of Ministers Savita and Gandhi, with officials from both states participating. State Handloom and Textiles Minister Savita emphasised that the MoU is part of a broader strategy to enhance marketing opportunities for handloom products produced in Andhra Pradesh. Minister Savita stated that the



coalition government is committed to ensuring that handloom workers have employment opportunities throughout the year, allowing them to lead economically and socially dignified lives.

Cyber fraudsters dupe woman of Rs 7.4 lakh on pretext of updating KYC

Hyderabad: Cyber fraudsters cheated a woman from the city to the tune of Rs 7.4 lakh on the pretext of updating the 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) details in the bank. The 35-year-old complainant who works in the health sector received a call from the fraudsters claiming to be bank executives regarding a KYC update. The fraudster sent a link to the victim via WhatsApp and guided her to update bank details. Police said while on the call, the victim entered the card details as instructed. Shortly after, she started receiving debit messages from her bank and was shocked. "Immediately, the victim questioned the fraudster, who disconnected the call. Without any delay, she contacted the bank authorities and got her accounts frozen," said a cybercrime official.

CM Revanth Inaugurates First-of-Its-Kind Mahila Samaikya Petrol Bunk in Narayanpet

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Mahabubnagar: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy laid the foundation stone for development projects worth ₹1,000 crore in Narayanpet on Friday. Speaking at a public meeting in Appakpally, he challenged opposition parties to debate the development and welfare programs implemented by the Congress government within just 12 months of coming to power.

Revanth Reddy said that in just one year, his government has provided 55,000 jobs and sanctioned 5 lakh houses. He promised that Telangana would soon become one of the leading states in the country under Congress rule. He also announced a new initiative where women's self-help groups will run petrol bunks, providing economic empowerment to women.

Criticizing the previous BRS government, he accused them of neglecting weaker sections for 10 years. He reminded people that the earlier Congress government had sanctioned 25 lakh Indiramma houses, but the BRS government ignored the needs of the poor. Now, the Congress government has sanctioned 5 lakh Indiramma houses, with construction beginning in Narayanpet. He also assured that if needed, the number of houses allotted per constituency would be increased to 5,000. Revanth Reddy spoke about his commitment to developing the Palamuru region, which had been neglected for decades. He pointed out that despite 811 TMC of water flowing through the region every year, the previous government failed to complete irrigation projects. He criticized former CM KCR for diverting water to Rayalaseema while ignoring Palamuru. He promised that his government would speed up work on the Palamuru-Rangareddy, Uddandapur, Bhima, Nettekpadu, Kalwakurthy, and Koil Sagar projects to ensure proper drinking and irrigation water for farmers.

During his visit, the Chief Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation for several key projects, including a ₹56 crore medical college building, a ₹130 crore new hostel at the medical college, and a ₹200 crore Young India Integrated Residential School Complex. He also announced ₹26 crore for a government nursing college, ₹40 crore for a new 100-



bed hospital unit, ₹295 crore for major road development projects, ₹193 crore for new road construction, and ₹12.7 crore for CRR roads. Additionally, ₹7 crore was allocated for a new Mandal Parishad Office in Marikal, ₹5.58 crore for new rural police stations in Dhanwada and Narayanpet, and ₹1.23 crore for a petrol bunk run by women's self-help groups.

Revanth Reddy threw an open challenge to the BRS and BJP, asking them to debate the achievements of the Congress government in just one year compared to BRS' 10-year rule and the BJP-led Centre's 12-year tenure. He criticized the previous government for leaving the state with ₹8 lakh crore in debt and ₹40,000 crore in unpaid bills. Minister Damodar Rajanarasimha spoke at the event and highlighted the Congress government's commitment to social justice. He mentioned that within 120 days, the government had successfully completed a caste census and implemented a 9.7% reservation for the Madiga community. Minister Jupally Krishna Rao said that in just 14 months, the Congress government had worked hard to fulfill its promises, unlike the previous administration that only created financial burdens. The event was attended by several key leaders, including Ministers Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Anasuya Seethakka, Chief Secretary Shanti Kumari, DGP Jitender, and local MLAs.

Congress allegations on Formula-E Race undermined as SC backs PPP model setting aside Madras HC directions

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Hyderabad: As the Congress government in Telangana is digging holes and raking up controversies over the conduct of Formula-e race, other State governments are holding such events under Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode and building an image for themselves. Furthermore, Supreme Court has also now backed the conduct of such events under PPP mode. The Tamil Nadu Government conducted Formula 4 race event in September last. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT) and Racing Promotion Private Limited (RPPL) in August 2023 for a period of three years. As per the terms and conditions, RPPL was to spend Rs. 202 crore and SDAT would spend Rs 42 crore towards license and operations fee and other expenditure. However, due to a few issues a case was filed in Madras High Court, which issued four directions.

Setting aside these four directions, the Supreme Court in a judgement on Thursday, observed that PPP modes were being adopted by governments across the world. Such deals were being done considering different factors, including limited resources of the State, besides inefficiency and expertise. Interestingly, the then Telangana government had organized the Formula-e race in February 2023 on the similar lines. The state capital became India's first city to host such an event and with an objective of promoting EVs and making the city a hub for sustainable development.



The event drew international attention and as per Nielsen report Rs.700 crore revenue was generated directly and indirectly for the Telangana government. On the contrary, the Congress government accused former Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao of corruption in organizing the event. The Government alleged that Rs 55 crore had been paid by the HMDA to the organiser. It had also alleged that there was a poll code violation and procedural lapses resulting financial burden on the State. The Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) had filed a case against the former Minister, besides the then Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar and other officials. However, KT Rama Rao has been arguing that the corruption charges were politically motivated as countering the Congress government's charges.

Harish Rao condemns police action on media, calls it 'Murder of Democracy'



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Hyderabad: Former Minister and senior BRS leader T Harish Rao strongly condemned the police action against TS24 News, calling it a blatant attack on press freedom under the Congress regime. He denounced the alleged assault on a female journalist and the seizure of CCTV footage from the media office, terming it a "murder of democracy."

"The Congress government is running a dictatorial regime, using police as henchmen to silence dissent," he said. He accused Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy of orchestrating a crackdown on media houses that dare to

question the government. In a statement, Harish Rao lashed out at the Congress for fostering a culture of intimidation. "In just 14 months, this government has made it clear - if you question, you face cases; if you confront, you receive threats; if you post on social media, you risk physical attacks. Is this the so-called people's governance that the Congress promised during the elections?" he asked. Comparing the situation to the Emergency era under Indira Gandhi, he said the Congress is once again resorting to oppressive tactics to stifle voices.

Adani Group to Invest 30,000 Crore in Kerala Over Next Five Years

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Thiruvananthapuram: The Invest Kerala Global Summit 2025 witnessed a major boost in investment commitments as the Adani Group announced a massive ₹30,000 crore investment in Kerala over the next five years. Addressing the summit, Chief Minister of Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan, and Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal highlighted Kerala's growing reputation as a leader in Ease of Doing Business and a global startup hub.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Beyond slogans

Haryana's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) programme was launched in 2015 with much fanfare to address gender discrimination and improve the state's skewed sex ratio. A decade later, however, recent tragedies expose the grim reality. Unable to bear the weight of expectations for a male heir, mothers of only daughters are succumbing to societal pressure. The suicide of Kiran, a mother of five daughters, in Hisar's Raipur village on February 14 is a heartbreaking testament to this. While her family denies direct pressure, her distress over not having a son was evident. Similarly, Neelam, a mother of four daughters, ended her life along with two of her girls in January. These are not isolated incidents but symptoms of deep-rooted gender bias that no government scheme has been able to eradicate.

Despite the BBBP initiative, Haryana's sex ratio at birth (SRB) remains a concern, declining to 910 girls per 1,000 boys by the end of 2024 — the lowest since 2017. The persistence of such figures signals that while awareness campaigns are loud, the societal mindset remains resistant to change. The tragedy extends beyond mothers. Newborn girls continue to be abandoned, their worth determined by outdated patriarchal norms.

Gender discrimination is not merely an economic or policy issue; it is a societal failure. Financial aid schemes like the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana or Kanyadan Policy cannot single-handedly erase centuries of entrenched bias. The need of the hour is grassroots-level transformation. Gender sensitisation in schools, active male participation in equality movements and strict monitoring of government schemes to ensure that they reach the most vulnerable families can make a difference. A decade after its launch, the BBBP must move beyond slogans. It's time for Haryana to prove that its daughters are not just being 'saved', but also truly valued.

Scientists aren't entirely sure why whales breach



Mass stranding of these species tend to be in shallow areas with gently sloping, often sandy, seabed. In those situations, it is no surprise that these animals, which are used to swimming in deep waters, can get into difficulties and even if re-floated will often re-strand

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Hyderabad: Over 150 false killer whales were reported to be stranded on a remote beach on Australia's island State of Tasmania on February 19. Of them 136 appeared to be still alive and rescue operations were launched to refloat them. The largest mass-stranding in Australian history occurred in the Macquarie harbour in 2020 when 470 long-finned pilot whales became stuck on sandbars. Most of the beached whales died.

Why do these creatures, who are masters of oceans, enter an inhospitable environment where they could die?

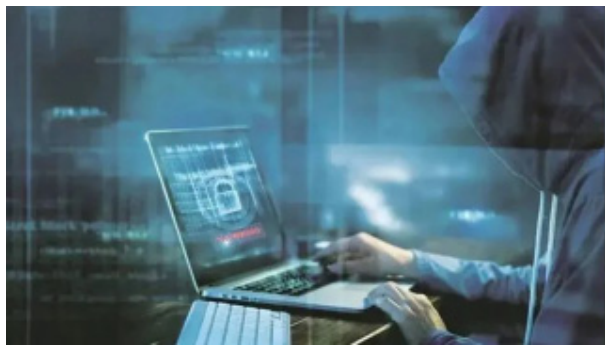
Mass stranding involves whales. Long-finned and short-finned pilot whales tend to be the frequent casualties. Other species typically are false killer whales, melon-headed whales, Cuvier's beaked whales and sperm whales. All of these live in waters over 1,000 metres deep and are social, forming cohesive groups that in some cases may number hundreds of animals. Although we blame whale stranding on human activity, in many cases there is an involvement of natural causes as well.

Mass stranding of these species tend to be in shallow areas with gently sloping, often sandy, seabed. In those situations, it is no surprise that these animals, which are used to swimming in deep waters, can get into difficulties and even if re-floated will often re-strand. The echolocation, which they use for navigation does not work well in such environments. So it is quite possible that the majority of such stranding was due to navigational error, for example when whales have followed a prey into unfamiliar and dangerous territory. However, mass stranding aren't only caused by whales getting lost or misjudging the depth of the water. One or more individuals may be diseased and, as they become weaker, they seek shallower waters so they can more easily come to the surface to breathe. Once their bodies come to rest on a hard surface for any extended period, there is a greatly increased chance that their chest walls will be compressed and their internal organs damaged. Occasionally, live stranding may derive from human activities, particularly military activity that involves the use of sonar. This connection was first suggested in 1996 after a NATO military exercise off the coast of Greece coincided with the stranding of 12 Cuvier's beaked whales.

During another beaked whale mass stranding in Bahamas, alongside naval activity, haemorrhaging, particularly around the inner ear of whales, was discovered, indicating acoustic trauma. It was also found that sometimes, the animals die at sea first, not after stranding. Many researchers believe that naval sonar might be producing behaviour in whales that interferes with their ability to dive and rise to the surface safely. Loud noise in the ocean has become a major conservation concern as humans introduce sounds of varying intensities and frequencies into the marine environment from different technologies and even explosions. Seaquakes are another source of intense underwater sound and those might also lead to physical damage or behaviour resulting in stranding.

The kind of stranding seen in New Zealand, where very large numbers of whales become beached but a significant proportion can be rescued, also raises the question of whether some healthy animals simply follow others into dangerously shallow waters. When we see large numbers of whales or dolphins doing mass suicide, the chances are that they are vocally responding to one another, reflecting their strong social bond.

Retired airline executive in Pune loses Rs 1 crore in 'digital arrest' scam; was told she had bank accounts in 5 states



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

A 75-year-old retired airline executive in Pune became the latest victim of a 'digital arrest' scam after she lost a staggering Rs 1 crore to fraudsters posing as 'Delhi Cyber Branch' officers. The woman was threatened with arrest for money laundering and told that bank accounts in her name had been opened in five states in India, she told the Pune police. A First Information Report in the case was recently registered at the Cyber Crime police station in Pune.

According to the woman's complaint, she received a call in the third week of January. The caller claimed to be an executive of an international courier and said that a parcel sent in her name had been intercepted. The caller claimed that the authorities had recovered 4 kg of clothes, five passports, three ATM cards, eight bank statements, and 200 gm of MDMA. The complainant said she denied having sent any such parcel. The caller said she would be connected to 'Delhi Cyber Cell officers' for 'further investigation', the woman said in her complaint. A man posing as 'DCP Delhi Cyber' allegedly told the complainant that she has bank accounts in five states of India which have been opened using her Aadhaar card and that she would face serious money-laundering charges.

The fraudster threatened her with arrest and also offered to help her prove her innocence, she said in her complaint. For that, the man said, she would have to share all her financial information. He also warned her not to discuss it with anyone else, the woman said. The fraudster then made a video call to the complainant, saying that she would have to record her statement on video and that the call would be monitored by the CBI, she told the police. Placed under 'digital arrest', the woman said, she was manipulated into sharing her personal details and the details of her bank accounts, savings etc. The caller allegedly told her that her savings would have to be transferred to government accounts for financial surveillance and that the money would be returned once the probe ended. Over two days, she was manipulated into transferring a total of Rs 1 crore in three transactions to mule accounts registered at Imphal in Manipur and Dhanbad in Jharkhand, she said in her complaint. When she tried to call the numbers to get her money back, the woman did not get any response and realised she had been cheated. She then contacted the cybercrime helpline and a case was registered. The Indian Express has reported that 'digital arrest' cyber scams are multilayered and geographically distributed multinational syndicates, siphoning money from unsuspecting victims to mule accounts in India and funneling it to international cyber masterminds through the cryptocurrency route. An advisory about such online blackmail cases was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in May. These frauds were also highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year in his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme. In November last year, a 59-year-old senior IT executive from Pune lost Rs 6.29 crore in a 'digital arrest' fraud to online criminals who posed as CBI officers. Recently, a 78-year-old woman was swindled for Rs 4.37 crore after she endured a month-long ordeal in which she was manipulated by online criminals posing as CBI officers who threatened her with arrest for alleged drug trafficking charges.

Bengaluru cops arrest 6 for honey-trapping TN man, robbing gold worth Rs 2.3 lakh, phones from him

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Five men and a woman were arrested for honey-trapping youths and robbing money from them, the Bengaluru City police said Tuesday, adding that 30 grams of gold worth Rs 2.30 lakh, an autorickshaw and three bikes were seized from the accused. The police identified the accused as Suhail Khan, 42, Wahid Ahmed, 27, Syed Shamaluddin, 29, Rekha, 29, Mohammed Irfan, 29, and Salman Khan, 26. While Irfan and Shamaluddin hail from Mysuru, the rest are Bengaluru residents. According to officers, the accused targeted Tamil Nadu native Shivan when he visited Bengaluru on January 25 to meet Rekha whom he had befriended on social media. Along with Rekha, Shivan boarded an autorickshaw driven by Suhail and travelled around the city before the two were dropped off near Bannerghatta Main Road.

Shortly after, the police said, three of the other accused confronted Shivan as he planned to go to a lodge with Rekha, and robbed him of a 15-gram gold chain, a 19-gram gold bracelet, and two mobile phones. The accused also took away Rekha's mobile phone as she pretended to panic and fled the spot. Soon, a case was registered at SG Palya police station and the suspects were arrested from various locations in Bengaluru and Mysuru and remanded in judicial custody. An officer said Rekha, who had briefly worked as a beautician in Tamil Nadu, shifted to Bengaluru two years ago. She later got into a relationship with Shamaluddin and they moved to a house in Banaswadi. The police said she befriended Shivan on social media and invited him to Bengaluru while Shamaluddin plotted the crime.



lice station and the suspects were arrested from various locations in Bengaluru and Mysuru and remanded in judicial custody. An officer said Rekha, who had briefly worked as a beautician in Tamil Nadu, shifted to Bengaluru two years ago. She later got into a relationship with Shamaluddin and they moved to a house in Banaswadi. The police said she befriended Shivan on social media and invited him to Bengaluru while Shamaluddin plotted the crime.

US deportee files case against Punjab farm union leader Sukhwinder Singh for duping him of Rs 45 lakh



Jaswinder, a Class 10 pass from Pandori Arian village in Moga district, was among the second batch of deportees who landed at Amritsar airport on February 15. In his complaint, Jaswinder said that he had sold his family's land, mortgaged his house and sold his buffaloes to arrange Rs 45 lakh, which he allegedly paid to Gill after he was promised safe entry to the US.

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

BKU (Totewal) state president Sukh Gill, booked for sending US deportee via Dunki route. He also runs immigration firm "Fateh Immigration". He allegedly took Rs 45 lakh from the complainant. BKU (Totewal) state president Sukh Gill, booked for sending US deportee via Dunki route. He also runs immigration firm "Fateh Immigration". He allegedly took Rs 45 lakh from the complainant. The Punjab Police on Tuesday booked farm union leader Sukhwinder Singh alias Sukh Gill, the state president of Bhartiya Kisan Union (Totewal), and three others for allegedly duping US deportee Jaswinder Singh of Rs 45 lakh and sending him abroad via the illegal 'dunki' route. Gill runs an immigration firm.

Jaswinder, a Class 10 pass from Pandori Arian village in Moga district, was among the second batch of deportees who landed at Amritsar airport on February 15. In his complaint, Jaswinder said that he had sold his family's land, mortgaged his house and sold his buffaloes to arrange Rs 45 lakh, which he allegedly paid to Gill after he was promised safe entry to the US. The FIR against Gill, his mother Pritam Kaur, relative Talwinder Singh and one Gurpreet Singh was registered at Moga's Dharamkot police station under sections 143, 318(4), 61(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Section 24 of The Emigration Act. Gill's phone was switched off, and he could not be contacted for comment.

According to the FIR, Gill and his family run a travel agency named Fateh Immigration in Dharamkot. Jaswinder alleged that when he consulted Gill about his plans to move abroad, Gill said that he would send him to America legally via flight and would also arrange his work permit for three years. Gill demanded Rs 45 lakh for the job, as per the FIR. Jaswinder further stated that to arrange the amount, his father Sukhdev Singh sold their ancestral land measur-

ing 1 kila 5 kanal for Rs 40 lakh. He alleged that he handed over Rs 30 lakh in cash to Gill in the presence of his mother Pritam Kaur and Talwinder Singh. As per the FIR, in November 2024, Gill took Jaswinder to an office in Chandigarh's Elante Mall, which he claimed was the "US embassy's office", where he was allegedly asked to submit some documents and pay Rs 14,000 as 'fees'. After some days, Gill allegedly informed him that his US visa had arrived and he had to board a flight from Delhi on December 12, 2024, the FIR quotes Jaswinder as saying. He added that it was only after he reached Prague (Czech Republic) that he got to know that he was given a Schengen visa, not a US one.

Jaswinder alleged that till December 30, 2024, he was kept captive at a hotel in Prague by Gill's aides, who demanded more money and made him speak to Gill on WhatsApp calls. Jaswinder said that he was told to transfer the pending amount to the account of M/S Ekam Travels, owned by one Gurpreet Singh. In his complaint, Jaswinder said that his family transferred Rs 4 lakh to Gurpreet's account. This was followed by two more transactions of Rs 2 lakh each, which Jaswinder's father allegedly transferred into the account. After the money was transferred, Jaswinder was made to board a flight from Prague to Spain, as per the FIR. After reaching Spain, Jaswinder's family was allegedly asked to pay Rs 3.50 lakh more, and after receiving another tranche, the agents made him board a flight to El Salvador. Jaswinder alleged that he was taken to a hotel by 'donkers' (an informal term for aides of agents who take illegal immigrants through several countries) who knew Gill and already had his (Jaswinder's) photograph. He further alleged that the 'donkers' thrashed him in the hotel and also snatched \$2,725 from him.

The FIR says Jaswinder took the usual 'dunki' route via Panama and travelled via boats, taxis and buses to reach the US-Mexico border on January 27, where he was arrested after crossing the border illegally and deported on February 13. "BKU leader Sukh Gill and his family members run this immigration firm, as per the complainant. The FIR has been registered, and a probe has been started to ascertain facts as per the complainant's statement," Inspector Jatinder Singh, Station House Officer, Dharamkot police station, said. Divya Goyal is a Principal Correspondent with The Indian Express, based in Punjab. Her interest lies in exploring both news and feature stories, with an effort to reflect human interest at the heart of each piece. She writes on gender issues, education, politics, Sikh diaspora, heritage, the Partition among other subjects. She has also extensively covered issues of minority communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. She also explores the legacy of India's partition and distinct stories from both West and East Punjab. She is a gold medalist from the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), Delhi, the most revered government institute for media studies in India, from where she pursued English Journalism (Print). Her research work on "Role of micro-blogging platform Twitter in content generation in newspapers" had won accolades at IIMC.

Haryana govt likely to hike power tariff



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Haryana government, power tariff, indian express The committee members will also review the efficiency and functioning of the thermal power plants in the state and discuss ways to reduce transmission losses. The Haryana Government is likely to take a decision Wednesday on hiking domestic and industrial electricity tariff in the state which last saw an increase in 2019. The Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission (HERC) has called a meeting of the State Advisory Committee (SAC) as power distribution companies have been raising the issue of revenue deficit over the past few years.

The Uttar Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (UHBVN) and the Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (DHBVN) have sought to raise a revenue of Rs 4,520 crore for the financial year 2025-26. Currently, multiple electricity tariff slabs are applicable in Haryana. For domestic users, the tariff is Rs 2.50 per unit (0-150 units), Rs 5.25 per unit (for 150-200 units), Rs 6.30 per unit (for 251-500 units), and Rs 7.10 per unit (for 501-800 units and above).

Wednesday's HERC meeting will be helmed by its chairman Nand Lal Sharma and will see the participation of representatives from industries, agricultural sector, educational institutes, and the directors of power distribution companies. The committee members will also review the efficiency and functioning of the thermal power plants in the state and discuss ways to reduce transmission losses. There are 84 lakh electricity consumers in Haryana. Last year, the government decided to impose a Fuel Surcharge Adjustment (FSA) worth 47 paise per unit for which a consumer shells out an additional Rs 94 if he/she consumes 201 units or more per month. The FSA will not be applicable if the consumption is 200 units or less per billing cycle.

Man breaks traffic rules 269 times; is fined Rs 53,800, told to do community service



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

For violating traffic rules 269 times, a fine of Rs 53,800 has been imposed on a man in Chandigarh. The violator has also been awarded with 15 days' community service at any traffic signal in the city. To address the rise of habitual traffic offenders, the traffic police took up the matter with the district court and the Registration and Licensing Authority, Chandigarh. On Monday 17, 2025, the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM), Chandigarh, took strict action against the offender, who was found guilty of 253 dangerous driving/red light jumping, 14 road markings, and two not wearing a helmet violations.

Taking serious note of the violation committed by the violator, the CJM Court impounded the vehicle till the violator appears before the court and moves an application for the release of the vehicle. A fine of Rs 53,800 was also slapped for a total number of 269 violations. Furthermore, the violator has also been awarded 15 days community service at any traffic signal to ensure traffic rules are followed by the public. Earlier in this month, the CJM Court of Chandigarh revoked the driving licence of a habitual traffic rules offender and fined him Rs 43,400 after he was found guilty of 222 violations: 168 instances of speeding and 44 red light jumping. Furthermore, the court mandated that he complete 15 days of community service at a traffic signal, where he must ensure that the public adheres to traffic rules. The

Mob attacks police team in Maharashtra's Bhiwandi; four persons held

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

A police team trying to arrest a man accused of a sexual crime was attacked on Tuesday by a violent mob at Bhiwandi in Maharashtra's Thane district, following which a case was registered against around 50 persons, an official said. Police arrested four persons in connection with the attack, in which the accused hurled stones causing injury to an official and damage to the police vehicle, he said.

A police team had gone to a hospital to record the statement of the sexual attack victim's mother. At that time, a large crowd gathered outside the hospital, prompting the police personnel to call for backup. However, by the time additional police force was brought, the crowd already dispersed.

Continuing their operation, the police team went in search of the accused and found a group of 20-25 young men standing in the Varhaldevi temple area. When the officers questioned them, the mob started shouting and pushing them. Soon, more people gathered at the scene, escalating the situation. During the altercation, one of the attackers hurled a stone at a policeman, in which he was injured. The mob also targeted the official police vehicle and broke its windows.

After 60 years of occupation by Haryana body, HC orders compensation for landowners



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

punjab and haryana hc, land compensation case. Justice Pankaj Jain stated that depriving individuals of their property without adequate compensation is a violation of Article 300-A of the Constitution. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has upheld compensation for landowners whose property has been occupied by Dakshin Haryana Vidhyut Parsaran Nigam Ltd. (DHVPNL) for over six decades, ruling that the plaintiffs are entitled to compensation at the market rate prevalent in 2005, when they filed the suit. Justice Pankaj Jain stated that depriving individuals of their property without adequate compensation is a violation of Article 300-A of the Constitution.

The case involved 8 kanals and 8 marlas of land in Hisar, which DHVPNL had taken over in 1961 to build a power house without formal acquisition. The landowners, Arjun Lal and others, filed a suit seeking possession and an injunction against further construction. The defendants, in turn, claimed ownership through adverse possession, arguing that they had openly and continuously occupied the land since 1961. The trial court dismissed the landowners' claim, ruling that their prolonged inaction amounted to acquiescence. However, the appellate court rejected DHVPNL's claim of adverse possession, holding that it "can

only be raised as a defence and cannot be pleaded as a plea of attack." The appellate court affirmed the plaintiffs' ownership but denied them possession, citing precedent from Food Corporation of India v. Dayal Singh (1991), and instead granted compensation at the rate applicable in 1961, when a portion of the land had been acquired.

On further appeal, the high court found this approach unjust. "Granting compensation to the appellants-plaintiffs at the market rate prevalent in the year 1961 would be travesty of justice," Justice Jain observed, adding that for decades, the plaintiffs had been deprived of both their land and fair monetary compensation. "Had they been granted compensation in 1961, they may have purchased some other land. The same also would have grown exponentially with the other lands in the country." Rejecting DHVPNL's defence, the court noted that the state, being an instrumentality of the government, should not have resorted to adverse possession. "State cannot claim adverse possession over private property," the ruling stated, adding that the defendants' own actions—first claiming adverse possession and then offering compensation—amounted to an admission of the plaintiffs' ownership. Justice Jain ruled that the plaintiffs were entitled to compensation at the market rate in 2005, when the suit was filed. "For the purpose of grant of compensation, Section 4 notification shall be deemed to have been notified on the date of filing of the suit i.e. 16.02.2005." Additionally, the court awarded user charges at ₹1,000 per annum, with a 10% enhancement every 10 years from 1961 to 2005, along with 6% annual interest until actual realisation. The court directed the Hisar Commissioner to determine and pronounce the compensation within three months. "The decree is modified to the extent that plaintiffs are held entitled for compensation and other statutory benefits deeming the date of notification under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 to be the date of institution of the suit."

Arrested after deportation from US, Punjab man was sent back from Nairobi, Belarus too; spent three days in Russian jail: FIR

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

A Ludhiana man, arrested in a snatching case soon after he was deported from the United States, had taken the dunki route on a fake passport with residential address of Uttar Pradesh and even spent three days in a Russian jail after being arrested in Belarus while trying to cross the border illegally, says the FIR registered by Ludhiana police, Tuesday. Gurwinder Singh also paid Rs 69.40 lakh to the travel agents, including one from Dubai, and had made two failed attempts to reach the US via Kenya and Russia before finally reaching US-Mexico border on January 25 this year in the third attempt only to be deported, his wife Hardeep Kaur told the police. Based on her statement, police registered a fresh FIR against five travel agents.

Gurwinder, who had left home in December 2023, was deported twice on the way to the US — first from Nairobi (in Kenya) and then Belarus. A resident of Sarsali Colony of Ludhiana, he landed in Amritsar on February 15, in the second batch of deportees from the US. He was later arrested after it was found that non-bailable warrants were pending against him in the 2021 Ludhiana snatching case. Police said two other cases — one of snatching another of robbery — were also registered against him in Ludhiana and Faridkot. He was booked for allegedly snatching 1500 and Rs 500 in Ludhiana.

The Ludhiana police has now registered an FIR against travel agents Charanjit Singh of Ludhiana, Nishant Kumar (an advocate from Uttar Pradesh), Sandeep Kumar of Bathinda, Ravinder Deol of Dubai and Satnam Singh under the sections 406 (breach of trust), 420 (cheating), 370 (trafficking of people), 120-B IPC and 24 of Immigration Act at Meharban police station for allegedly duping the couple of Rs 69.40 lakh and sending Gurwinder abroad on basis of "fake passport and documents." Hardeep Kaur in her complaint to the police said that Gurwinder had cleared IELTS and wanted to work abroad. They came in contact with Charanjit Singh, the former sarpanch of their village who also works as a travel agent. She said that he promised to send Gurwinder to the US for Rs 35 lakh. However, Gurwinder informed Charanjit that he had three criminal cases registered against him following which the latter said that he will get a new passport made for him on a fake address of some other state, said Hardeep in her complaint.

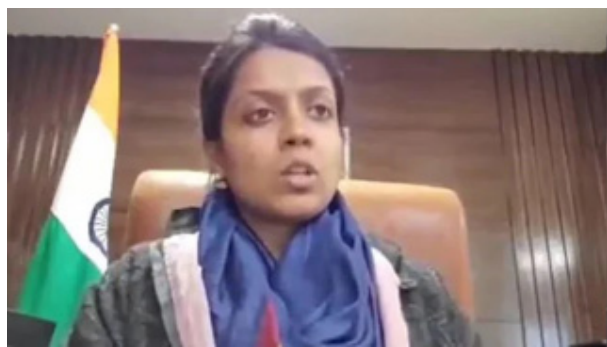
According to Hardeep Kaur, in December 2023, Gurwinder was first sent to Nairobi via Mumbai to a tourist



visa for which Charanjit took Rs 12.50 lakh in cash. Hardeep said that Charanjit had claimed that Gurwinder would be sent to the US via Suriname, Nicaragua to Mexico but after reaching Nairobi, he was sent back to Mumbai. Hardeep said that in March 2024, Charanjit introduced them to travel agents Sandeep Kumar and Ravinder Deol. Again a deal was fixed for Rs 32 lakh to send Gurwinder to the US and after they paid Rs 8.50 lakh, he was sent to Thailand. Hardeep said that on being told by the agents, her husband also carried US \$ 9,000. But instead of being sent to the US via Dubai, he was sent to Moscow (Russia). Back home, Charanjit took another Rs 6.50 lakh from Hardeep on the pretext of arranging a flight ticket to Mexico. Hardeep said that instead Gurwinder was made to cross the Belarus border illegally where he was arrested by the Army and sent to a Russian jail where he spent three days. After being released from jail, he went to Abu Dhabi on a tourist visa.

She said that Charanjit took another Rs 2 lakh on the pretext of arranging Gurwinder's ticket for Brazil but instead sent him back to Delhi. Then they met another agent Satnam Singh who demanded Rs 32 lakh to send him to the US. He was then sent to Guyana following which they paid another Rs 10 lakh, and another Rs 8 lakh were paid after he reached Brazil. Gurwinder then took the usual dunki route to reach the US-Mexico border via the Panama jungles to reach Guatemala and then Mexico. Back home, Charanjit took another tranche of Rs 13 lakh from his wife. Gurwinder crossed the border on January 25, was held by US authorities and deported. Ludhiana police commissioner Kuldeep Singh Chahal said that according to the complainant they were duped of Rs 61.75 lakh in cash and another US \$ 9,000 (Rs 7.82 lakh). "We will further probe how the passport and other documents were made. Arrests will be made in due course," said CP Chahal.

Mohali DC to residents in illegal colonies: Get your plots registered before February 28



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Mohali Deputy Commissioner (DC) Aashika Jain has appealed to the residents to get the registration of their plots in illegal colonies done before the last date, February 28, which has been fixed by the Punjab government. The DC said that as the deadline fixed for the registration according to the policy of the Punjab government to give relief to the plot holders (with land up to 500 squares yards) in an unauthorised colony, is fast approaching, they should take maximum benefits from the policy.

Jain said that according to the directions of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, to ensure the benefit of amendment in Punjab Apartment and Property Regulation Act effected from December 1, 2024, in which Sub-Section 5 had been introduced to give relief to the plot holders for registration of plots situated in an unauthorised colony, the sub-registrars and joint sub-registrars of all tehsils and sub tehsils of the district have been directed to extend the benefit of the policy to the people. She also reminded that

the exemption of no-objection certificates (NOCs) from housing and urban development, and local bodies departments is valid only till February 28. The DC said that as per the notification, any person, who up to July 31, 2024, for an area up to 500 square yards situated in an unauthorised colony has entered into a power of attorney or agreement to sell on stamp paper shall be entitled to get registration of such plot executed. Further, the plot holder will furnish an undertaking to the sub-registrar or joint sub-registrar along with an application for registration of sale deed of such plots, that the area does not fall in unauthorised development raised on land falling in restricted areas along scheduled roads and national highways or any other restricted areas declared under any other central or state law, and the registration and use of this plot do not contravene the provisions of the respective regional plan/master plan and other mandatory restrictions as applicable.

Unusual hot spell grips Telangana in February

Hyderabad: Hyderabad and districts in Telangana State are experiencing an unusually hot spell this time of the year, resembling the peak days of summer in April and May. For the past 48-hours, day time temperatures have been consistently hovering between 36 degrees Celsius and 37 degrees Celsius in Hyderabad while in districts, a few places have already started recording 39 degrees Celsius. The abnormal spell of heat, however, is expected to abate and temperatures might drop by a degree or two between and Friday.

'Ab kya keh sakte hain': US deportee on grievance against system, says nervous about loan repayment



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

"My father, Balwinder Singh, died from cancer three years ago. Mother Asha Rani is a mid-day meal worker who cooks for children. We mortgaged our only house in Milwan village near Kangra district's Indora, to go to the US. But all our hopes were crushed after my deportation. I'm depressed; don't know what to do," 23-year-old Rohit, one of the two Himachal Pradesh residents deported from the US — among the third batch of deportees who landed at Punjab's Amritsar International Airport from the US on Sunday night — was handed over to a team of Himachal Pradesh officials, who later reunited him with his family.

He had entered the US from Mexico on February 3, and was detained the same day. According to Rohit, his cellphone and money also got stolen while he was walking on foot with others in Mexico, towards the US border. Sharing his ordeal, Rohit said he and other detainees were "never allowed to sleep properly" at the detention centre in Sandia near California. "Every two hours, we were forcibly woken up so that the staff could clean our barracks at the detention centre. I won't say the Americans didn't feed us, but the food was unsatisfactory — just an apple, rest of the meal was non-vegetarian. We were given food six times a day. There were also detainees from abroad including China, Pakistan, and Arab countries. Women and children were kept separately," he added. The Class 12 passout and a member of the OBC community, instead of being overjoyed at meeting his family, is now worried how to repay a massive Rs 45-lakh (approximately) loan — Rs 15 lakh borrowed from a government bank, and the remaining amount from his sister Simmi (married) as well as several friends and relatives.

Rohit further said: "Indeed, I had big dreams about going to the US. I had tried to go there legally too, but did not succeed. Later, I somehow came across travel agent Satnam Singh from Amritsar. He promised to get me settled in the US for Rs 45 lakh. I had been working in Armenia for 1.5 years, where my elder brother, Naresh Kumar, is settled... In July 2024, Satnam arranged a visa for Dubai, while promising that I would have to stay there only for 15 days. I, however, ended up spending almost six months there. After that, Satnam arranged a visa for me in Greece;

from there, they sent me and others to Mexico. I entered the US on February 3, but was detained by the authorities the same day. "Sharing about the money transfer process, Rohit said: "Until I reached Dubai, I hadn't paid a penny to Satnam. The payments started once I landed in Dubai. I forwarded to my family different account details provided by Satnam, where they transferred money. Since my deportation, the money lenders have been anxious — about the loan repayment; they might not charge interests. But I am very nervous. My father used to run a tea stall. We don't even have much agricultural land."

On who is responsible for such an experience and if he has any grievance against the government, a hesitant Rohit said: "Ab iss situation mein kya keh sakte hain? (What can we say in such a situation)?" Also, Rohit said, one of the deportees — Daler Singh — has filed a complaint against their agent. "One of Satnam's relatives has been calling my brother in Armenia, urging him not to file a police complaint. They are asking us to reach a compromise. But mentioning everything that happened to me, I have given a statement to the Himachal Pradesh government team that brought me back from Amritsar airport," Rohit said. Naib Tehsildar Jai Chand and Assistant Sub-Inspector Chaman Singh, who brought Rohit back from Amritsar and reunited him with his family, have recorded his statement. "We have sent a detailed report to senior police officers. Further action will be taken as per directions," he said. Ninteen-year-old Ritesh, a resident of Gumti village near Nahan in Simraur district, was the second US deportee from the state. According to sources, Ritesh's travel agent from Ambala district's Naraingarh deceived him by promising a job at a foreign pharmaceutical company in Mumbai before sending him to the US. His family had also paid the agent Rs 45 lakh cash. "From many Naraingarh villages, several youths have managed to enter the US through the 'dunki' route. One such village is Panjajsa — nearly a dozen youths from the shepherd community have entered the US illegally," they said. Three US military planes (C-17 Globemaster) landed in Amritsar this month so far, deporting Indians as part of the Trump administration's promised crackdown on illegal migration, with the latest one on Sunday night.

The deportees have alleged that despite paying huge amounts to travel agents, they were made to travel to the US illegally, without their knowledge. They now seek strict action against the agents. On February 5, a US military aircraft carrying the first batch of 104 illegal Indian immigrants — including 33 each from Haryana and Gujarat, 30 (Punjab), three each from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, and two from Chandigarh — landed in Amritsar. In the second batch of 116 deportees, 65 were from Punjab, 33 (Haryana), eight (Gujarat), two each from Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. The third batch had 112 deportees, including 44 from Haryana, 33 (Gujarat), 31 (Punjab), two (Uttar Pradesh), and one each from Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Bombay HC upholds jail term to ex-Army officer for sexually assaulting minor: 'Her instinct... must be believed'

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday refused to interfere with the decision of the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) bench in Mumbai that upheld a 2021 order of the General Court Martial (GCM) convicting a former lieutenant colonel-rank officer for the aggravated sexual assault of a minor daughter of a junior official. He was sentenced to five years in jail. The incident had taken place in 2020 under the limits where the officer had been officially deployed.

A bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and Neela K Gokhale noted in its judgment that as per her deposition, "the girl immediately sensed a bad touch and reported as such to her father instantly," therefore the court was unable to interfere or "dissent with findings of either the GCM or the AFT in this regard". In January 2024, the AFT bench comprising Justice Shailendra Shukla and Vice-Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve had also directed the dismissed officer, who was on bail, to surrender and undergo the remaining jail term. The AFT had refused his prayer to commute his sentence due to his health. In his complaint, the minor's father had stated that on February 1, 2020, after he wished the appellant as per protocol, the latter inquired about the former's well-being and his family members.

The father told the petitioner about his two minor children, an 11-year-old daughter and a younger son. The petitioner sought to meet them, after which their father went back to his own residence and brought his children to where the petitioner was. The petitioner had asked the minor girl a few general questions, and her father said that he knew palmistry and could read horoscopes. Thereafter, as per the complainant's father, the petitioner took the girl's hand and started to study it and later asked her father to bring a pen. When the father went out to bring the pen along with his son, the petitioner had touched the minor girl's thigh, making her uncomfortable. He allegedly asked the girl as to whether he could kiss her as a friend, and then she pushed him back.

After the father came back and saw her crying, he



inquired about the incident and lodged a complaint for offences punishable under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act, 2012, and a provision of the Army Act. The GCM convicted him in March 2021. The AFT upheld the GCM's conviction last year, prompting the officer to approach the high court. Advocates Saakshi Jha and Ujjwal Gandhi for the petitioner submitted that their client interacted with the minor girl as a "father figure" without any ill will or bad intention, and the entire story was "cooked up". However, the high court noted that the minor's demonstration in court about the specific manner in which the accused behaved with her once her father left the room "was depicted with immense clarity". "Thus, her statement inspires confidence that she has narrated the incident correctly. Furthermore, her instinct of identifying a bad touch of the petitioner must be believed," Justice Gokhale for the bench stated.

"The girl met the petitioner for the very first time, and there was no reason for the Petitioner to hold her hand and read her palm even under the pretext of reading her horoscope, touch her thigh and request to kiss her. The girl immediately sensed a bad touch and reported as such to her father instantly," the high court observed. Rejecting the plea, it noted that there was "no infirmity" in the findings of the GCM and the AFT. "We do not find any violation of fundamental rights of the petitioner," the court noted.

'Ensure report on corrupt cops facilitating rise of gangs in Punjab is tabled in House': Partap Singh Bajwa to Speaker

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Partap Singh Bajwa, punjab news, indian express Partap Singh Bajwa said that he is writing this letter on behalf of the opposition to address a matter of utmost importance and urgency regarding the integrity of the police force and the safety of Punjab citizens. Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa has written to Speaker Kulraj Singh Sandhwan, asking him to ensure that the action taken report regarding the involvement of corrupt police officers facilitating the rise in gangster activities is tabled in the assembly.

The Speaker has called a two-day session of the Assembly on February 24 and 25. The previous session in September was adjourned sine die and this session will be considered a continuation of the five-month-old session. Bajwa said that he is writing this letter on behalf of the opposition to address a matter of utmost importance and urgency regarding the integrity of the police force and the safety of Punjab citizens.

"You would kindly recall that during Zero Hour on September 2, 2024, you had expressed profound concern over the apparent laxity in addressing corrupt practices within



the police force. Specifically, you highlighted the case of ASI Bohar Singh, posted in your constituency, Kotkapura, who was accused under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption Act for allegedly receiving bribes from a known gangster, with the transactions traced to his bank account," Bajwa said. He reminded the Speaker that it was unanimously decided that the DGP should provide a detailed report on the matter. This decision underscores the House's commitment to upholding integrity of our law enforcement agencies and ensuring justice for citizens, he said.

India to submit updated green house gas inventory to U.N. soon



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

India is in the final stages of preparing its first ever Biannual Transparency Report (BTR), part of its commitment as a signatory to the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, Environment Ministry officials told The Hindu. This report will be India's official position on its greenhouse gas emissions inventory, key sectors and sources, and steps taken to improve energy efficiency use, as well as the transition to renewable energy sources and the availability of required resources.

While India has been periodically submitting such information in the form of 'national communications' and 'Bi-annual Update Reports' (BUR) — it submitted a BUR on December 30, 2024 — the BTR is a document that will be subject to technical review by independent, non-Indian, UNFCCC-accredited experts. The UNFCCC, or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is the core agreement on which rest commitments by countries to take climate action. Historically, only developed countries have been required to submit BTRs, which are reviewed by accredited experts, including some Indians. The BTRs

are part of the commitment made by all signatories at the UNFCCC's 21st Conference of Parties (COP), held in Paris in 2015, to provide information on the climate action that they have taken, using a collectively agreed-upon format, in a bid to increase transparency. However, it was only at the 2024 COP in Baku that countries actually began submitting BTRs that adhered to the prescribed format. While all countries were to have submitted their BTRs by December 2024, several failed to meet that deadline, including India.

"The main feature of the upcoming BTR submission is that it will have data upto 2022. In the BUR, the data submitted reflected the emissions inventory of 2020. The other aspect is that this will be reviewed by an external set of experts," a Ministry official, who declined to be identified, told in its latest BUR, India reported that in 2020, its total GHG emissions fell 7.93% from 2019. "One of the factors was a reduction in energy consumption due to COVID-19 induced lockdowns. The forthcoming BTR is likely to show an increase in total emissions, just as is the trend in other countries. India's share of emissions, however, continues to be 4% to 5% of the globe and, in per-capita terms, less than a third of global per-capita emissions," the official added.

The preparation of such inventories is an elaborate process, involving multiple government and private research agencies. As of 2020, India's emissions, excluding land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), stood at 2,959 million tonnes of CO₂e. Including LULUCF, net emissions were at 2,437 million tonnes of CO₂e. The energy sector contributed the most to overall emissions (75.66%), followed by agriculture (13.72%), industrial processes and product use (8.06%), and waste (2.56%). In 2020, India's forest and tree cover, along with other land use, sequestered approximately 522 million tonnes of CO₂, equivalent to reducing 22% of the country's total carbon dioxide emissions in 2020.

Where is ISRO heading?

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Only three decades ago, the Indian space programme was a diminutive affair, dominated by the newfound successes of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and a then-fledgling clump of communications satellites. Today, the programme is a large tree with a flourishing canopy. There is a slew of ongoing projects accompanied by projects being ideated, developed, tested as well as retired. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) — employer of several thousand engineers, scientists, and administrators — is now accompanied by IN-SPACe, a new nodal agency to oversee and enable private space enterprises' activities, and NewSpace India, Ltd., to manage commercial launch commissions and commercialise Indian space technologies. ISRO's spaceport in Andhra Pradesh has expanded to two launch pads while a second port is under construction in Tamil Nadu. Its PSLV rocket is likewise joined by five others — three operational and two in the works — with bespoke features to meet specific civil and national needs while serving commercial markets when opportunities arise.

ISRO operates more than 50 satellites in earth orbit and has launched more than 400 in commercial missions paid for by foreign governments and companies. It has also hoisted four missions to the moon, one to Mars, two space telescopes, and a solar physics probe. Missions in the near future include a synthetic aperture radar satellite co-built with NASA, more interplanetary missions, an orbital space station, and of course human spaceflight. Its experts are designing next-generation engines (especially the SCE-200), green(er) fuels, and high-performance materials. The organisation is currently transferring SSLV and PSLV manufacturing to industry while government reforms from 2019 invited private enterprises to build and operate virtually any technology. Against the backdrop of India's history, a national space programme of this magnitude is by all means very successful. 'Success' here refers to the programme's ability to plan and execute longer-term projects with crore-rupee budgets, coordinate activities across multiple centres, manage procurement, logistics, and accounts with industry contractors, and balance political ambitions and public expectations. Unfortunately, neither ISRO nor the programme has the luxury of having their efforts vis-à-vis spaceflight, space exploration, and commercialisation judged only by the yardstick of how far India alone has come.

The fact is the Indian space programme can take great strides and still remain uncompetitive with the other countries belonging to the same elite club to which it has repeatedly claimed to belong. While the U.S. and Russia (including the erstwhile USSR) had a head start of many decades, China, Japan, and Europe for a long time enjoyed more funding, technological sophistication or both.

But it's also possible to flip this tension the other way. The dramatic rise of commercial opportunities in space technologies and spaceflight — led by the successes of and radical innovation by companies like SpaceX and aided by the struggles of regulatory agencies to catch up — has placed the carts of profit and/or primacy before the horse of national needs. For example, India is committed to an increasingly complex series of scientific missions to the moon, to be complemented in due course by the Bharatiya Antariksh Station and crewed moon missions. The cumulative cost will be in the tens of thousands of crore rupees and lakhs of work-hours — yet neither ISRO nor the Department of Space have explicitly articulated what the ultimate purpose is here. Simply put, what's in it for Indians?

In 2019-2020, the Department of Space reorganised the space programme to allow ISRO to focus on research. It hived off the responsibility of organising and executing commercial launches to NewSpace India, Ltd. (a public-sector undertaking), in 2019 and that of overseeing the activities of the country's young and ambitious space startups to IN-SPACe (an autonomous body) in 2020. This division of labour was intended to improve each arm's ability to better define its goals and work towards them in an era in which space technologies are both diversifying and becoming more sophisticated.

At the same time, the division is still open-ended to the extent that there isn't a policy or law that specifies what long-term goals they are collectively working towards and why. This is in and of itself not a bad thing if the space programme is also finding its footing, but it can't afford to take its time. Some important inefficiencies linger in the reorganisation that could lead to the uneconomical use of valuable resources. For example, IN-SPACe is both promoter and regulator of private space enterprises; there is no independent tribunal to settle disputes between private companies and IN-SPACe; and there is no space law attuned to the needs of this new, wider ecosystem of participants. Nonetheless, the more vehement supporters of India's plans have advanced three typical arguments: (i) partaking of the comity of nations, (ii) not losing out on future opportunities, and (iii) the value of spin-off technologies. Speculative though the value of all three are, they can't be dismissed out of hand. Argument (i) in particular is quite

valuable: countries working together on space missions can reduce the per-country costs as well as open new channels for soft diplomacy. The value of (ii) and (iii) is more obvious: to keep opportunity costs in future from surging while amortising them in the interim by taking advantage of the new technologies that become available in the course of achieving those overarching goals. But a direct counterargument here is that the cost of attaining these new technologies can be much lower if we pursued them in a more direct manner rather than anticipating them as spin-offs. More broadly, if there is one correct answer to how ISRO and India should orient themselves — joining the pursuit of greater goals versus being led by Indians' needs — it has yet to present itself. The leaders of the Indian space programme also haven't explicitly articulated what their long-term priorities are nor how they are to be determined. The launch vehicles as things stand today, at least a significant part of the answer lies with India's launch vehicles. The reason is simple: both national and commercial missions are affected by their capabilities and availability.

ISRO can currently access four launch vehicles: the PSLV, the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark 2 (GSLV Mk-2), the Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM-3), and the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV). It has also just started work on the Next-Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) and is conducting what appear to be mid-stage tests of the Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV). It is also making good progress on a human-rated version of the LVM-3, called HLVM-3, for its Gaganyaan human spaceflight missions. In addition, the Department of Space pays launch service providers abroad to buy payload capacity on their rockets when India's own don't fit the bill.

For many years, ISRO followed a supply-driven model of launch services: it would build and launch satellites onboard rockets, then promote the availability of these services in order to induce demand. But as it acquired newer, better rockets as well as access to more launch options, and together with reforms in the space sector, ISRO switched to a demand-driven model: until a customer — within India or international — requested a particular service, ISRO wouldn't build the corresponding satellite and/or launch vehicle. The problem now is that people and/or industries have to wait a service before it can exist, and they may not think to want it unless the want is acute or, more likely, they may not even be aware of the possibility that a satellite-based service could fulfill their requirements. Because the provision of these launch services is an important revenue source for ISRO as well as the industry member that will operate the satellite, the question is who will be responsible for seeding demand: ISRO or industry. The answer isn't yet self-evident. This said, India's budding space startups could help bridge this gap to a meaningful degree.

Soon after the Government of India opened the door to private sector participation, it has also been trying to give the first people through the door a push, or at least is giving an impression to that effect. The government has sweetened startups' involvement by opening up and/or expanding foreign direct investment (FDI) in rockets and launch facilities and in satellite manufacturing, operations, and data products; floating an interest-free loan pool of Rs 1 lakh crore for all tech startups; an investment pool of Rs 1,000 crore for space tech startups; a 24% hike in the allocation for IN-SPACe; and proposed removing the angel tax — all in 2024 alone. When she announced the 2024-2025 (post-poll) budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also said the government hopes the national space economy will expand fivefold in the next 10 years. While the size of the venture capital fund read together with this comment elicited mixed reactions from startup operators, the government's aim is clear: for private enterprises to take advantage of opportunities in the global space economy — and make use of the available launch options. Many startups are doing good work. Some notable ones include Bellatrix Aerospace (small-satellite manufacturing and in-space mobility), Digantara (space surveillance and satellite traffic management), GalaxEye Space (multi-sensor earth observation), PierSight (persistent maritime monitoring with synthetic aperture radar satellites), Pixxel (hyperspectral imaging), SatSure (infrastructure and agriculture intelligence based on satellite data), and Skyroot Aerospace (launch vehicle design and construction). I haven't included many others here strictly due to space constraints.

Trump begins firings of FAA staff just weeks after fatal DC plane crash



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

The Trump administration has begun firing several hundred Federal Aviation Administration employees, pending staff on a busy air travel weekend and just weeks after a January fatal midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Probationary workers were targeted in late-night emails Friday (February 14) notifying them they had been fired, David Spero, president of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union, said in a statement. The impacted workers include personnel hired for FAA radar, landing and navigational aid maintenance, one air traffic controller told The Associated Press. The air traffic controller was not authorized to talk to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity. A Transportation Department official told the AP late Monday that no air traffic controllers were affected by the cuts, and that the agency has "retained employees who perform critical safety functions." In a follow-up query the agency said they would have to look into whether the radar, landing and navigational aid workers affected were considered to handle critical safety functions.

The National Air Traffic Controllers Association said in a brief statement Monday it was "analyzing the effect of the reported federal employee terminations on aviation safety, the national airspace system and our members." Other FAA employees who were fired were working on an urgent and classified early warning radar system the Air Force had announced in 2023 for Hawaii to detect incoming cruise missiles, through a program that was in part funded by the Defense Department. It's one of several programs that the FAA's National Defense Program manages that involve radars providing longer-range detection around the country's borders. Due to the nature of their work, staff in that office typically provide an extensive knowledge transfer before retiring to make sure no institutional knowledge is lost, said Charles Spitzer-Stadtlander, one of the employees in that branch who was terminated. The Hawaii radar and the FAA National Defense Program office working on it are "about protecting national security," Spitzer-Stadtlander said. "I don't think they even knew what NDP does, they just thought, oh no big deal, he just works for the FAA." "This is about protecting national security, and I'm

scared to death," Spitzer-Stadtlander said. "And the American public should be scared too." Spero said messages began arriving after 7 p.m. Friday and continued late into the night. More might be notified over the long weekend or barred from entering FAA buildings Tuesday, he said. The employees were fired "without cause nor based on performance or conduct," Spero said, and the emails were "from an 'exec order' Microsoft email address" — not a government email address. A copy of the termination email that was provided to the AP shows the sending address "ASK_AHR_EXEC_Orders@usfaa.mail.outlook.com." The firings hit the FAA as it is facing a shortfall in controllers. Federal officials have been raising concerns about an over-taxed and understaffed air traffic control system for years, especially after a series of close calls between planes at U.S. airports. Among the reasons they have cited for staffing shortages are uncompetitive pay, long shifts, intensive training and mandatory retirements.

In the January 29 fatal crash between a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter and an American Airlines passenger jet, which is still under investigation, one controller was handing both commercial airline and helicopter traffic at the busy airport. Just days before the collision, President Donald Trump had already fired all the members of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, a panel mandated by Congress after the 1988 PanAm 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland. The committee is charged with examining safety issues at airlines and airports. Spitzer-Stadtlander suggested he was targeted for firing for his views on Tesla and X, formerly Twitter, not as part of a general probationary-level sweep. Both companies are owned by Elon Musk, whose Department of Government Efficiency is leading Trump's effort to cut the federal government. Spitzer-Stadtlander is Jewish and was angered by Musk's straight-arm gesture at Trump's inauguration. On his personal Facebook page he urged friends to get rid of their Teslas and X accounts in response. Spitzer-Stadtlander said that post drew the attention of a Facebook account labeled "Department of Government Efficiency," which reacted with a laughing emoji. Soon after, he saw the same account reacting to much older posts through his personal Facebook feed. There are at least a half-dozen Facebook accounts labeled "Department of Government Efficiency," and it's unclear who operates any of them. White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt wrote Monday on X, "DOGE doesn't even have a Facebook page."

Spitzer-Stadtlander said he was supposed to be exempted from the probationary firings because the FAA office he worked in focused on national security threats such as attacks on the national airspace by drones. "Less than a week later, I was fired, despite my position allegedly being exempted due to national security," Spitzer-Stadtlander wrote in a post over the weekend on LinkedIn. He added, "When DOGE fired me, they turned off my computer and wiped all of my files without warning."

Uttarakhand UCC: how is mandatory registration of "brazen" live-in relationships an invasion of privacy, asks HC

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Hearing a plea against the mandatory registration of live-in relationships under Uttarakhand's new Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the Uttarakhand High Court has asked how this requirement can be considered an invasion of privacy when couples are "brazenly" living together without marriage. These oral observations were made by the division bench of Chief Justice G. Narender and Justice Alok Mehra on February 17, in response to submissions made by the petitioner's advocate Abhijay Negi. He told the court that his client is distressed with the provision under the UCC mandating government registration of couples in such relationships. The petitioners, an interfaith couple, had claimed that it was difficult for them to live in the society and get their relationship registered. When Mr. Negi pressed for a stay on the mandatory registration provision, arguing that that the State inquiry will institutionalise gossip, the Chief Justice asked whether the State had anywhere asked people not to live together. "What gossip? Are you living secretly, in some secluded cave? You are living amongst the civil society. You are brazenly living together without there being a marriage. And then what is the secret? What is the privacy that is invaded?" the Chief Justice asked. Mr.



Negi then told the court about the opposition faced by several interfaith and intercaste couples in India, including the case of Jagdish from Almora who was assassinated just because he married an upper-caste woman.

The court has posted the matter for further hearing on April 1. While hearing a similar petition earlier this month, this same bench had asked applicants what was wrong with the State regulating live-in relationships.

Is appointing ad-hoc judges a viable means to reduce backlog?

The Supreme Court on January 30, 2025, permitted High Courts to appoint retired judges on an ad-hoc basis to address the mounting backlog of cases. However, these judges were authorised to hear only criminal appeals as part of a bench led by a sitting judge. Is appointing ad-hoc judges a viable means to reduce backlog? Justice Rajeev Shukdhher and Shadan Farasat discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Aaratrika Bhaumik. Edited excerpts:

Is appointing ad-hoc judges a viable remedy for reducing pendency?

Rajeev Shukdhher: The move is commendable. The Supreme Court first endorsed the appointment of ad-hoc judges in its 2021 ruling in Lok Prahari v. Union of India, though such a measure should have been introduced even earlier. As of January 25, 2025, High Courts were burdened with a staggering backlog of 62 lakh cases. However, with only three recorded instances of such appointments in the past, the practice has failed to gain traction. Now that the Supreme Court has revisited the issue, there is renewed hope for the implementation of concrete and lasting reforms. Shadan Farasat: The Constitution allows for appointing ad-hoc judges in both the Supreme Court and High Courts for a reason. However, my concern is that these appointments require presidential approval, making government cooperation crucial. While the judiciary may propose candidates, their appointment ultimately depends on the executive's willingness to act. Since ad-hoc judges are not typically assigned politically sensitive cases, I am hopeful that the government will approve these appointments without delay.

Is it more prudent to first address challenges in the regular judicial appointment process?

Shadan Farasat: In our 75-year constitutional history, no policy measure has been introduced to address the docket crisis systematically. We will have to wait and see how this initiative unfolds. However, the government's handling of regular judicial appointments remains a concern, with several deserving judges either overlooked for elevation to the Supreme Court or appointed as High Court Chief Justices far too late. This issue requires urgent

redress. Rajeev Shukdhher: The appointment of ad-hoc judges is unlikely to interfere with the regular judicial appointment process, as both operate independently. Ultimately, it is the common litigants who bear the brunt of judicial delays. From personal experience, no matter how much effort one exerts, there is rarely enough time to adjudicate each case satisfactorily. Expediting criminal appeals would also benefit the government by reducing the financial strain of maintaining overcrowded jails filled with undertrials. However, for this measure to be truly effective, Chief Justices must take a proactive role. The real challenge lies in identifying a cohort of candidates with impeccable integrity and strong technical expertise. Only once this hurdle is overcome does the government's role come into play.

The Supreme Court has previously found the ad-hoc appointment process cumbersome. Are any reforms needed?

Rajeev Shukdhher: To ensure these appointments achieve their intended purpose, the process must be simplified. The Chief Justice of the relevant High Court should directly recommend a candidate to the Supreme Court collegium after securing their consent, after which the collegium can forward its recommendation to the government. The Lok Prahari verdict also sets a three-month timeline for completing the process. It may be prudent for the Chief Justice to secure some form of pre-approval from the Centre before making a recommendation. However, subjecting ad-hoc appointees to an Intelligence Bureau clearance would be unnecessary and counterproductive. As retired judges, they may be discouraged by such scrutiny, and the added procedural hurdle would only lead to further delays. Shadan Farasat: Ad-hoc appointments should follow a summary process. As retired judges, they have already undergone rigorous vetting — not just by the government but also by the legal fraternity. Therefore, their appointments should be largely uncontroversial.

Could these appointments hinder the career progression of senior judges or those in the district judiciary?

Shadan Farasat: No, they will not. Ad-hoc judges serve for a limited term of two to three years and do not compete with sitting judges.

Trump orders firing of all 'Biden-era' US attorneys



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

President Donald Trump said that he has ordered the firing of all remaining U.S. attorneys nominated by his predecessor Joe Biden. "Over the past four years, the Department of Justice has been politicised like never before," Mr. Trump posted on his Truth Social platform. "Therefore, I have instructed the termination of ALL remaining 'Biden Era' U.S.

Attorneys," he said. It is standard practice for an incoming president to replace the federal prosecutors, known as US attorneys, nominated by their predecessor.

There are 93 US attorneys, one for each of the 94 federal court districts in the country. Two districts share a US attorney. US attorneys are the top federal law enforcement officer in each district. A number of US attorneys nominated by Democrat Biden resigned following Mr. Trump's November election victory in anticipation of being replaced. The Justice Department, which Mr. Trump has accused of unjustly prosecuting him, has been the target of a sweeping shakeup since the Republican took office and a number of high-ranking officials have been fired, demoted or reassigned. Among those sacked were members of the office of special counsel Jack Smith, who brought two now-abandoned criminal cases against Mr. Trump. The acting US attorney for the powerful Southern District of New York, a Trump appointee, resigned last week after being asked by the Justice Department to drop corruption charges against New York Mayor Eric Adams.

New Zealand must 'reset' Cook Islands ties after China pact, Foreign Minister says

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters said on Wednesday (February 19, 2025) his country must "reset" its relationship with the Cook Islands government after its Pacific neighbour signed agreements with China without consultation. In a speech to the Pacific Island Political Science Association in Wellington, Peters said Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown's opaque dealings with Beijing was the latest attempt to test constitutional ties with New Zealand. "While the connection between the people of the Cook Islands and New Zealand remains resolutely strong, we currently face challenges in the government-to-government relationship," he said.

"We are going to need to reset the government-to-government relationship." The Cook Islands is a self-governing nation and maintains free association with Wellington, sharing a head of state and citizenship rights. It is permitted an independent foreign policy, but the two countries are required to consult on security, defence and foreign policy issues. Mr. Brown's visit to Beijing this month resulted in a strategic partnership with China spanning education, the economy, infrastructure, fisheries, disaster management and seabed mining. It set off alarm bells in New Zealand due to concerns with China's growing presence in the region and the potential threats to the country's national security.

While the Cook Islands government has released details of the strategic partnership, Mr. Peters said New Zealand had not seen a number of memoranda of under-



standing also signed with China. "New Zealand and the Cook Islands people remain, as of this evening, in the dark over all but one of the agreements signed by China and the Cooks last week," Mr. Peters said. Mr. Brown's deal with China follows an attempt by the Cooks to create its own passports and citizenship, a proposal New Zealand said would require the islands to become fully independent to do so. Separately, Mr. Peters also addressed tensions with Kiribati after its government cancelled a planned visit by New Zealand officials at short notice. Kiribati has also signed a series of bilateral deals with China in recent years. Mr. Peters said Wellington had committed more than NZ\$100 million (\$57 million) in aid to the Pacific island nation over the past three years and needed to reassess how funds were being used.

Trump signs order to study how to expand IVF and calls for 'radical transparency' from government

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

President Donald Trump signed an executive order meant to expand access to and reduce costs of in vitro fertilization and issued a Presidential memorandum calling for "radical transparency requirements" from the government, which he suggested could reduce wasteful spending. On the campaign trail, Mr. Trump called for universal coverage of IVF treatment after his Supreme Court nominees helped to overturn Roe v. Wade, leading to a wave of restrictions in the Republican-led States, including some that have threatened access to IVF by trying to define life as beginning at conception. Mr. Trump, who was at his Florida residence and club Mar-a-Lago, also signed another executive order as well as a presidential memorandum. The second executive order outlined the oversight functions of the Office of Management and Budget, while the memo requires the government to detail the "waste, fraud and abuse" that's found as the Department of Government Efficiency, overseen by Elon Musk, looks to cut government spending.

DOGE has often fallen short of the administration's promises of transparency. Mr. Musk has taken questions from journalists only once since becoming Trump's most powerful adviser, and he's claimed it's illegal to name people who are working for him. Sometimes DOGE staff members have demanded access to sensitive government databases with little explanation. Mr. Trump took more than 30 minutes of questions Tuesday (February 18, 2025) on a range of topics and bashed the Biden administration throughout, highlighting issues such as its handling of the U.S.-Mexico border, Venezuela policy and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mr. Trump said he thought he had a "good chance" to end Russia's war in Ukraine but bristled at suggestions that the U.S. and Russia had begun negotiations to end fighting without Ukraine playing a role. He even seemed to suggest that Ukraine was to blame for a war that began only after Russia invaded that country.

"Today I heard, 'Well, we weren't invited.' Well, you've been there for three years," Mr. Trump said of Ukraine's leaders. "You should have never started it." In anticipation of questions about his administration's efforts to slash federal spending, the president said he wrote down examples of government programs around the world which he then listed off at length. They included funding to promote voter turnout in India and social cohesion initiatives in Mali — all of which Trump suggested collectively amounted to fraud. Asked about the White House's arguing in a court filing that Musk wasn't the head of Mr. Trump's government efficiency efforts, Mr. Trump said, "You could call him an employee, you could call him a consultant, you could call him whatever you want. But he's a patriot."

Mr. Trump said he thinks "women and families, husbands, are very appreciative" of his executive order on IVF, which offers a possible solution when a woman has trouble getting pregnant. The procedure involves retrieving her eggs and combining them in a lab dish with a man's sperm to create a fertilized embryo, which is then transferred into the woman's uterus in an attempt to create a pregnancy. IVF is done in cycles, and more than one may be required. Barbara Collura, president and CEO of RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association, said that what the White House put out "looks extremely promising." "The biggest barriers for people to building their families are the out-of-pocket costs, the lack of insurance coverage for this care," she said. Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth, a Democrat, said, "Donald Trump's executive order does nothing to expand access to IVF. In fact, he's the reason IVF is at risk in the first place."



President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to study how to expand access to in vitro fertilization and make it more affordable

Mr. Duckworth said if Mr. Trump is going to follow through on his campaign promise to provide free IVF, he can start by supporting her legislation that would require insurance plans to cover IVF. Mr. Trump, who spent the morning at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida, spoke to reporters hours before his first joint TV interview with Mr. Musk airs in prime time on Fox News. Mr. Musk has drawn criticism from Democrats in Congress and others for the methods he and his team at DOGE are using to cut spending, including foreign aid, and eliminate jobs across the bureaucracy.

The Fox News interview also follows Musk's appearance with Trump in the Oval Office last week, when both defended Musk's approach to federal cost-cutting. Mar-a-Lago was the setting Tuesday night for an awards program by America's Future, a conservative group led by Mike Flynn, who briefly served as national security adviser in the Republican president's first term. The program aims to preserve individual rights and promote American values and traditions, according to its website. The event, celebrating American exceptionalism, honored one member each from the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Air Force and the Space Force.

The event included a poolside reception, musical performances and dinner in Mar-a-Lago's Grand Ballroom. The lineup included such names as Russell Brand, Ted Nugent and Mike Tyson. Mr. Trump made an appearance at the event, according to video posted on social media Tuesday night, addressing the crowd on the patio as he stood near Tyson, Flynn and Nugent and declaring, "This is very, very friendly territory." Mr. Trump praised the men, including Flynn, who was one of the leading proponents of Mr. Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. The president called him "the real deal" and indicated he wanted to bring Flynn into his administration, saying he offered him "about 10 jobs." "Anytime you want to come in, you know that, Mike, OK?" Trump said. Mr. Flynn resigned from the first Trump administration less than a month after Mr. Trump's inauguration. He was charged in 2017 with lying to the FBI about conversations he had with the Russians on Trump's behalf. He twice pleaded guilty, but Trump pardoned him in the final weeks of his presidency.

Offering to co-develop and co-design jet engine, allowing India to own the IP: Rolls Royce



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Abhishek Singh, Senior Vice President of Business Development and Future Programmes for India and Southeast Asia, Rolls-Royce (Defence), Alex Zino, Executive Vice President - Business Development and Future Programmes (Defence), Rolls-Royce and GS Selwyn, Managing Director of MTU India, Rolls-Royce's Power Systems business at Aero India 2025 Engine maker Rolls Royce, which is in talks with India for co-development of a fighter jet engine, says what they are offering is quite "unlike" others, and are "offering to co-develop and co-design, allowing India to own the Intellectual Property (IP) in India, for India for use in current as well as future programmes," according to a senior company official.

"Another focus is building a deeper and broader aerospace ecosystem. You will have seen that we're talking here about at least doubling our procurement and supply from India—not just for domestic needs but for global markets as well. And finally, we're working on powering India's growth with both stationary and mobile power solutions," Alex Zino, Executive Vice President for Business Development and Future Programmes for Rolls-Royce (Defence) said speaking at Aero India. "We see India emerging as a key sourcing hub for us, supporting all our divisions—across gas turbines, reciprocating engines from our MTU product line, and our defence aerospace segment." Rolls-Royce recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Triveni Engineering and Industries Limited to collaborate on programmes for 4MW marine gas turbine generators (GTG) for customers in India, including design, development and manufacturing of the marine GTGs. This is in addition to a new partnership with GRSE for the production and localisation of its Series 4000 governmental marine engines in India, the company said.

We already have a very broad footprint, and we're looking to expand that significantly, Mr. Zino said noting that they already manufacture a lot of parts here through a range

of suppliers, as well as our own joint ventures. Today, we produce very complex parts - take the partnership with International Aerospace Manufacturing Private Limited (IAMPL), or the partnership with Force Motors, he said elaborating. If you look at IAMPL, we now have a new plant in Tamil Nadu that has grown significantly, he said adding, "We manufacture over 160 complex aerospace components there, and that facility now serves - not just Rolls-Royce and our fleet around the world - but the entire aerospace ecosystem on a global scale." While India is in advanced stage of talks with France for co-design and co-development of a 110 KN aero engine to power India's fifth generation fighter, Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), that is under development, it has also been holding talks with Rolls Royce for sometime. On the ongoing effort between Rolls Royce and Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE), U.K. Minister of State for Defence Vernon Coaker told The Hindu at Aero India that there was a successful phase 1, and discussions are on ongoing on what's happened and how to take that forward.

On this Mr. Zino said they still believe they have a "very compelling" proposal for co-developing and co-creating IP here in India—IP that will be owned by India. "This ensures freedom of modification and action, which is crucial for moving at pace in an operational environment and maintaining control within India's own ecosystem." In addition, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and General Electric are in contract negotiations for the license manufacture of the F414 jet engines to power the Light Combat Aircraft Mk2. The same engine will also power the AMCA through the development phase. India and UK signed a Statement of Intent at the end of last year for developing electric propulsion for Indian Navy's Land Platform Docks. "We're very clear on our commitment—you might have seen that just last week, we signed an agreement through our US side on the AG 9160s, a four-megawatt generator set, with Triveni. We're bringing that forward, and then there's the statement of intent on the MT30 through the UK," Mr. Zino said. "We're ready to power the first all-electric ship for the Navy using our product portfolio, he asserted. Further, he stated that they are in conversations with the Navy about their timelines, ensuring that they ready to respond to proposals, especially in terms of which procurement category they are placed in and what the specific requirements will be. "That's all part of the ongoing discussion. There's no specific timeline yet," he added. We are very bullish about India in terms of the demand, as well as the capability that exists here in terms of engineering, supply chain, ecosystem, and manufacturing—and that is already in motion, stated Abhishek Singh, Senior VP of Business Development and Future Programmes for India and Southeast Asia, Rolls-Royce.

Border arrests plummet 39% in January in early gauge of Trump's immigration policies

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico plummeted 39 per cent in January from a month earlier, authorities said on Tuesday, an early gauge of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. The Border Patrol made 21,593 arrests during the month, down from 47,316 in December and the lowest mark since May 2020 near the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic, according to US Customs and Border Protection. "Call it the Trump effect," the White House said in a statement.

Border arrests fell sharply well before Trump took office from an all-time high of 2,50,000 in December 2023. Mexican authorities increased enforcement within their own borders and then-president Joe Biden introduced severe asylum restrictions in June. Arrests sank even further after Trump was sworn in on January 20 and issued a slew of orders on immigration, including one to suspend asylum on grounds that the US is under "invasion" at the southern border.

Border czar Tom Homan said on Monday that there were 229 border arrests in a 24-hour period, the lowest he remembered since becoming a Border Patrol agent in 1984. Homeland Security Department officials say they want to



drive that to zero. Border Patrol Chief Michael Banks said on Friday in Edinburg, Texas, that he will "not be satisfied that our border is secure until we have operational control of our border, which means anyone that crosses illegally is apprehended or no one crosses". Homeland Security said on Tuesday that it launched a multimillion-dollar video ad campaign in the US and internationally that features Secretary Kristi Noem warning people to leave or not to come. "If you are here illegally, we will find you and deport you. You will never return," she said in the video. (AP) SZM

European leaders differ on peacekeeping in post-war Ukraine

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

European leaders failed to reach a joint position on whether they would send peacekeeping troops to Ukraine, after they discussed the issue of security guarantees for Ukraine and negotiations for an end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict at an emergency summit in Paris on Monday (February 17, 2025). The meeting, convened by French President Emmanuel Macron, was in response to U.S.-Russia talks in Riyadh which left Ukraine and the rest of Europe out of the negotiating room. "We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine. To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians," said Mr. Macron, who held talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Donald Trump following the European meeting. Mr. Macron said Ukrainians, Europeans and Americans would need to work on the issue together.

He also called on Europeans to invest in their security and defence. The U.K, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the European



Union were represented at Monday's meeting. After the meeting in Paris, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said it was the wrong time to discuss security guarantees and that it was "highly inappropriate" to discuss peacekeeping troop deployments for Ukraine which was in the midst of a war. He said he had been "a little irritated" by the debate. Mr. Scholz, who faces an election on February 23, said on social media site X that acting together and sharing risks underpinned NATO. "There must be no division of security and responsibility between Europe and the USA," he said. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said his country would not send troops to Ukraine. Mr. Tusk also said that the transatlantic relation-

ship (i.e., ties between the U.S. and Europe) had entered a new stage. The current American position under Mr. Trump — that Europe spend more on its defence — was justified, Mr. Tusk said, emphasizing that Poland was leading in this regard. Poland spent more than 4% of its GDP on defence last year, with a planned figure of 4.7% this year, far higher than the 2% NATO guideline and higher than the U.S. There must be a U.S. backstop," Starmer

alongside others, if there was a lasting peace agreement. "But there must be a U.S. backstop," Mr. Starmer said, adding that a U.S. security guarantee was the only way to deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again. He also called on Europeans to do more in terms of burden-sharing (in defence) with the United States. On Monday, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said once the Russia-Ukraine was over, sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine was "absolutely a possibility." Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof said Europeans need to decide on what they can contribute (to bringing peace in Ukraine) and they would eventually get a seat at the table.

Lifestyle purchases, online gaming, and dining out top discretionary spending: Study



GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Indian consumers allocated 29 per cent of their expenditure to discretionary spending in 2023, with online gaming commanding a slightly higher share than dining out and ordering in, a new study has found. Discretionary spending trailed obligatory expenses (39 per cent) on loan EMIs and necessity spending (32 per cent) on utilities and everyday essentials like groceries, according to the study by Perfios and PwC India, released Wednesday, on consumer spending behaviour. The study analyzed bank statements of over 30 lakh "tech-savvy borrowers" who sought loans via fintechs and NBFCs. The analysis excludes credit card and cash transactions. A majority of consumers (73 per cent) had a monthly income of up to Rs 40,000. Lifestyle purchases, including fashion and electronics, dominated discretionary spending, accounting for an average share of 63 per cent.

This was followed by online gaming (13.7 per cent), dining out and ordering in (13.1 per cent), and entertainment (3.1 per cent). Share of spending on liquor and spirits (2.7 per cent) and travel (1.2 per cent) was notably lower. The study found that 22 per cent of entry-level earners (up to Rs 20,000 per month) and 18 per cent of emerging professionals (earning between Rs 20,001 and Rs 40,000) incurred online gaming-related expenses in 2023. For high-income earners (above Rs 1 lakh), the figure was lower at 12 per cent.

Among these, those in tier-1 cities, including metros like Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, and Bangalore, spent an average of Rs 5,081 per month on online gaming. In tier-2 cities, like Agra, Ranchi, and Rajkot, the spend was 6 per cent lower at Rs 4,763. "In metros and tier-1 cities, we typically see people engaging in online gaming for recreational purposes. In tier-3, tier-4, and tier-5 towns, people may have more time to play physical sports outside their homes. But in metro areas, online gaming has strong penetration, especially among lower-income groups," said Sabyasachi Goswami, CEO of Perfios. "Many of these spenders, often single and in their first jobs, are drawn to gaming due to exposure to ads, the need to pass time while living alone, or as a way to unwind amid their busy work life," Goswami added. In comparison, the share of discretionary expenditure on dining out and ordering in is slightly lower. The average monthly spend on dining out and ordering in, among those who incurred such expenses, increased with income levels, from Rs 492 for entry-level earners to Rs 2,170 for high-income earners. Urban elite households in metro cities spent nearly 50 per cent of their monthly food budget on packaged goods, dining out, and food delivery in 2022-23, up from 41.2 per cent a decade ago, the study said, citing data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). "The increase in the number of food orders can be attributed to arrangements like working from home and a boom in food delivery apps and the discounts provided by them. On the other hand, dining out has become a popular form of social activity," it noted.

While the share of travel-related expenses in total discretionary spending was only 1.2 per cent, the spend was high among those who incurred such expenses. "The biggest discretionary spend is travel. Post-pandemic, people are spending a lot on travel and hospitality. They want new experiences, irrespective of whether they are entry-level or mid-career professionals," Goswami said. An entry-level earner spent Rs 776 per month on travel, whereas a high-income earner spent Rs 3,066. The total share is low given that the analysis does not consider credit card transactions, which is preferred by many to book flight tickets.

Post-Covid demand plateaus, health premium growth halves in last 10 months

The health insurance sector's growth rate, which witnessed a significant surge in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, appears to be losing momentum. This, according to analysts, indicates that the pandemic-driven boost may be fizzling out. With the economy losing steam, growth in gross direct premium income underwritten in the health insurance segment plummeted to 10.44 per cent during the 10 months ended January 2025. This marks a significant decline from the 20.79 per cent growth recorded in January 2024, 23.57 per cent growth in January 2023 and 25.89 per cent growth in January 2022, according to data from the General Insurance Council.

Despite the slowdown, the sector managed to cross the Rs 1 lakh crore mark in gross premium income, up from Rs 90,785 crore in the previous 10-month period. GI Council data shows. However, the growth rate of 25 general insurers declined sharply to 7.68 per cent from 18.58 per cent a year ago. In contrast, seven standalone health insurers saw their growth rate decline to 17.61 per cent from 26.94 per cent. The growth in the health insurance sector has slowed down with rising inflation and stagnant incomes forcing consumers to prioritise essential expenses. As a result, many individuals and businesses are cutting back on discretionary spending, including health insurance premiums. Industry experts warn that high premiums and perceived low immediate need are driving a significant portion of the population to delay or avoid purchasing health insurance altogether. This trend is expected to slow growth in the sector, as insurers struggle to attract new policyholders.

The market share of general insurers also slipped to 70.45 per cent from 72.26 per cent a year ago, while standalone health insurers increased their market share to 29.55 per cent from 27.74 per cent, GIC data shows. "The growth rate is moderating due to the demand plateauing now after four years post Covid... also (there's) some change from October 2024 due to change in recognition of upfront multiyear premium to only on annual basis," said Rakesh Jain, MD & CEO, Reliance General Insurance. A major reason for the growth slowing down is the sharp rise in the health insurance premium, triggered by medical inflation and high claim status. IRDAI recently directed insurers that they should not revise the premium on health cover products for senior citizens by more than 10 per cent in a year. The regulator's move follows sharp hike in health premium by over 50-60 per cent by insurers in the case of senior citizens with some insurers even resorting to 100 per cent hike in premium. "The health segment is witnessing high costs. Insurers are becoming choosy... they are targeting young people who are paying lower premium. But it's a profitable portfolio," said an insurance sector official. Admitting that health premium for senior citizens has gone through the roof, IRDAI said, "it is observed that there has been



steep increase in premium rates under some of the health insurance products offered to senior citizens (aged 60 years and above)."

Medical inflation is on the rise and current inflation is around 14 per cent which further fuels the hike in the premium. "I would like the premiums to be capped but the same cannot be done unless the hospitals are regulated," said an insurance sector official. The alarming jump in hospitalisation expenses indicates the surge in healthcare costs and medical inflation in the country. The largest claim related to heart disease — specifically for a cardiac procedure — filed in the past year exceeded Rs 1.1 crore, while the biggest kidney disease-related claim topped Rs 24 lakh, according to a report from general insurer Acko. The costs of common medical procedures have escalated, with angioplasty (PTCA) costs soaring from Rs 1-1.5 lakh in 2018 to Rs 2-3 lakh in 2024, and projections suggest that the cost could reach Rs 6-7 lakh by 2030, the report said. The report's findings are based on 60,000 health insurance claims filed with ACKO during 2023-24. The report showed that kidney transplant costs have doubled, from Rs 5-8 lakh in 2018 to Rs 10-15 lakh in 2024, with expectations of it surpassing Rs 20 lakh by 2030. The anticipated reduction in GST has also not happened. Currently, an 18 per cent GST is levied on these premiums, contributing to the government's revenue. In the fiscal year 2023-24, the government collected approximately Rs 16,398 crore from GST on health and life insurance policies. Significantly, public sector insurers fared well in claims settlement ratio with a figure of 103.38 per cent while the ratio of private players was 88.71 per cent. However, standalone health insurers fared poorly with a claim ratio of 64.71 per cent, as per the data available from IRDAI Annual Report. According to IRDAI, during 2023-24, general and health insurers settled 2.69 crore health insurance claims. The average amount paid per claim was Rs 31,086. In terms of number of claims settled, 72 per cent of the claims were settled through third party administrators (TPAs) and the balance 28 per cent of the claims were settled through in-house mechanism.

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. 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 27.28 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 in-

sured 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.

Guava vs pear leaves: Find out which one to chew for good health



In many cultures, chewing leaves is a traditional practice that offers various health benefits. So, we asked experts whether to chew guava leaves or pick pear leaves. Which one is more beneficial? Let's find out. Guava leaves have been used for centuries in traditional medicine, said Dr Divya Gandhi, founder of Diet and Cure. "They are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals that can help reduce inflammation and pain, improve digestion and prevent diarrhoea, lower blood sugar levels, and boost the immune system," said Gandhi. Chewing guava leaves can also help to freshen breath and reduce gum inflammation.

Guava and its leaves are a great source of vitamin C and iron and are effective in relieving colds and coughs, said Tanvi S. Chiplunkar, senior dietician at Bhatia Hospital Mumbai. "A study states that guava leaf extract is useful in reducing cramps during menstruation," said Chiplunkar. Dr Birali Swetha, chief dietician, Gleneagles Aware Hospital,

LB Nagar, Hyderabad mentioned that guava leaves are a powerhouse of various antioxidants and vitamins, packed with goodness of several nutrients like quercetin and anti-inflammatory properties, which aid in fighting against free radicals damage in the body and help in pain relief, respectively. Gandhi said pear leaves are also used in traditional medicine, particularly in Asian cultures. "They are said to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that can help to soothe digestive issues, reduce fever, and improve respiratory health. "However, pear leaves are not as widely studied as guava leaves, and their health benefits are not as well-documented," said Gandhi.

According to Gandhi, based on the available research, guava leaves appear to be the better choice. "They have a wider range of health benefits and are more widely studied. Additionally, guava leaves are easier to find and more commonly used in traditional medicine. That said, pear leaves can still be a good alternative if you can't find guava leaves. Just be sure to identify the leaves correctly and chew them in moderation," said Gandhi. According to Dr Birali, if guava leaves are chewed thrice a week it may offer a myriad of health benefits. "The power-boosting antioxidants such as quercetin and flavonoids play a critical role in eliminating harmful waste substances from the body, thereby promoting liver health," said Dr Birali. However, before incorporating guava leaves into your daily routine, one must take a few important considerations and consult their healthcare professional.

The Ranveer Allahbadia controversy: Why we enjoy jokes at others' expense and the psychology of roast humour

When YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia, better known for his channel 'BeerBiceps', found himself in legal trouble over an alleged obscene remark on comedian Samay Raina's 'India's Got Latent' YouTube show, it reignited a familiar debate about the boundaries of comedy. A case was filed against both YouTubers, prompting their summons by the Mumbai police. The incident drew condemnation from social media users, public figures as well as political leaders, with some even raising the issue in Parliament. For Allahbadia, who was honoured with the Disruptor of the Year award by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the National Creators Award last year, the controversy has proven particularly damaging.

As the content creator faces ongoing backlash for his controversial "sex with parents" remark while attempting to roast a contestant as a judge, his apology — stating that "comedy is not my forte" — has done little to quell the criticism. Earlier last year, content creator and actor Kusha Kapila also came forward after appearing on a show called 'Pretty Good Roast Show' where Raina took a dig at her marriage, divorce, and sex life. The episode went viral and raised several eyebrows due to the comments made on her.

Taking to social media, Kapila shared a note: "Jokes weren't shared beforehand (as it's done in all roast formats in the west) so I had no idea what was in store for me. Maybe I should have asked for a script and known better but since friends were involved I didn't. Rookie mistake. While I endured some of the really raspy jokes in front of a live audience and technicians, I absolutely was not okay for it to play for millions of people since some jokes straight up dehumanised me. It was shockingly unkind." These incidents spark important discussions about the boundaries of 'roasts' and their broader impact. Roasts thrive on the delicate balance between wit and wickedness. But what makes us laugh at others' expense? And where do we draw the line? To understand this, indianexpress.com spoke to stand-up comedians as well as psychologists. "Humour, by its very nature, always comes at the expense of something — if not others, then ourselves," explains Gurleen Baruah, an existential psychotherapist at management consulting firm That Culture Thing. She points to the "delicate interplay between wit, discomfort, and shared laughter" that makes roasts particularly engaging. This dynamic creates what she calls a "dance with discomfort", where skilled comedians must navigate precisely between entertainment and offence.

Psychologist Anjali Gursahoney offers multiple frameworks to understand this phenomenon. Through the 'Superiority Theory', she explains how people often laugh at others' expense because it "reinforces a sense of superiority" and provides a "temporary ego boost". The 'Benign Violation Theory' suggests that humour emerges when something challenges social norms while remaining within a "safe" or "playful" context, she says. Additionally, she notes that shared laughter, even at someone's expense, can serve as a form of "catharsis and social bonding". For working comedians, these theoretical frameworks translate into practical challenges. Stand-up comedian Rishabh Goyal emphasises the importance of empathy in comedy: "Before I make a joke, I ask myself, 'Will this person laugh with me?' and not 'Will people laugh at them?'" He acknowledges that "comedy is very personal" and that "even in a show where people come because they like me, not everyone laughs at the same joke. Some laugh hard, some just smile, and some stay quiet".

Stand-up comedian Navin Kumar takes a more direct approach to the question of boundaries. He tells indianexpress.com, "Not sure what 'too far' here means. But most of the time, the imaginary line is in the comedian's conscience." This perspective is echoed by comedian Garv Malik, who observes that "every listener of the joke decides for themselves which joke is too far for whom. The comedian can decide for themselves as a listener, which is why most people only do jokes they are comfortable saying". The rise of social media has fundamentally altered the dynamics of roast comedy. The rise of social media has fundamentally altered the dynamics of roast comedy. (Source: Freepik)

A crucial element that emerges from both comedians and psychologists is the importance of context and consent. Anish Goregaonkar, a Marathi stand-up comedian, emphasises that "if the person who you are cracking the joke on laughs at it, you have nailed it". He draws an illuminating parallel to sports entertainment, saying, "if people are going to watch a roast show and do the same thing on other people, I don't think it's the comic's fault. It's as simple as you watching a WWE wrestler and trying to chokeslam your friend. You are at fault, not the wrestler." Garv Malik adds nuance to this perspective, noting that effective roasting should "make the subject of the joke appear more human, and bring them off the high horse that society might put them in". He illustrates this with a specific example: "The joke on Arjun Kapoor being 10th Pass in AIB Roast made us all realise that despite being a superstar, he also struggled in school studies like many of us, and is only human." Digital amplification of roast comedy

The rise of social media has fundamentally altered the



dynamics of roast comedy. Stand-up comedian Rishabh Goyal points out a crucial change, adding that "a joke told to 100 people in a room can now be seen by thousands online" who "don't know you, your style, or the context". This observation aligns with Baruah's analysis that "a joke or roast made in a specific context — where consent and participation are clear — can easily be stripped of that context when recorded and shared online". Gursahoney warns of specific dangers in the digital age, saying, "Unlike live roasts, social media roasts have a permanent digital footprint. This can lead to prolonged embarrassment, cyberbullying, or reputation damage." She notes that "celebrities and influencers often experience relentless roasting, which can contribute to anxiety, depression, or withdrawal from public life."

The psychological impact The effects of roasting on mental well-being vary significantly among individuals. Gursahoney explains that while those with "high self-esteem are more likely to laugh at themselves and view roasts as harmless fun," individuals with "low self-esteem may perceive roasting as a personal attack, reinforcing negative self-perceptions". Goyal shares a personal lesson that illustrates this impact. "When I was starting out, I once made a joke about someone's looks... later I found out it made them feel bad. They told me it reminded them of something they were already worried about," he says. This experience, he says, taught him that "our words can stay with people long after the show is over". Stereotypes and social responsibility Comedian Garv Malik addresses the concern about reinforcing harmful stereotypes. "I think harmful stereotypes or jokes on them can only work if everyone believes it is true. I cannot force/create a belief unless people have noticed it themselves in their real life or in movies," he says. However, he emphasises that "it only makes sense to roast someone equal to you or bigger than you otherwise it becomes punch down comedy, going off the spirit of comedy itself". Baruah provides a crucial framework for evaluating roast comedy. She says that the question is not whether humour should come at someone's expense, but "whether the joke humanises or dehumanises". This distinction offers perhaps the clearest guideline for both comedians and audiences in determining when a roast crosses the line from entertainment to harm. The Ranveer Allahbadia controversy exemplifies the challenges facing modern comedy. As roasts move from intimate venues to global platforms, the need for careful consideration of impact becomes increasingly crucial. While roast comedy can serve as a powerful tool for social bonding and emotional release, its potential for harm requires thoughtful execution from performers and critical consumption from audiences. As Goyal concludes, "Good comedy doesn't need to hurt anyone; it can be clever and kind at the same time." In an era where a single joke can spark a national controversy, this balance between wit and wisdom becomes not just an artistic choice, but a social responsibility.

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. The chatbot was trained using a massive cluster of 2,00,000 graphics processing units (GPUs) housed in a data centre in Memphis, US. A smaller version of Grok 3 called Grok 3-mini, which is capable of responding to user's questions more quickly, was also launched on the occasion. Musk explained that Grok-3 got another major update, ie DeepSearch. According to him, DeepSearch doesn't just answer user's questions but also explains its thought process. Grok-3 also has other two search engines, namely Think and Big Brain, that work best for analysing physics and mathematical questions.

Himesh Reshammiya told Kirti Kulhari not to 'mess' with Badass Ravikumar dialogues, made it clear it was his way or the highway



The Himesh Reshammiya-starrer *Badass Ravikumar*, which was released in theatres on February 7, made headlines for out-performing the far more mainstream romantic comedy *Loveyapa*. The film also stars actor Kirti Kulhari, and in a recent interview, the actor shared what made her want to be a part of the project. Kirti also recalled her experience working with Himesh, who is best known as a music composer, and said that she appreciated his clear vision.

In a recent interview recalled wanting to alter a few dialogues, and said that Himesh made it clear that there could be no changes. "Himesh and I exist in parallel worlds. How can they ever meet? I remember there were a few dialogues and I wanted to improve them, add something to them, remove something or say them differently, and he told me no. It was almost like take it or leave it but this is what it is. He made it clear that if I say yes to the film, I'll have to do things his way or not do the film at all. That was the moment that I knew I'll do the film," Kirti said in an interview with News18. She added, "He was like, 'Don't mess with what we have. This is what it is.' I wasn't offended. I was happy that here's somebody who knows what he's doing." The film *Badass Ravikumar* is produced by Himesh's banner, Himesh Reshammiya Melodies. A spin-off of Himesh's 2014 film *The Xposé*, the film is a pastiche of 80s-style Bollywood potboilers. The film also features Prabhudev as the antagonist gangster, alongside Simona J, Saurabh Sachdeva, Sanjay Mishra, and Johnny Lever. Directed by Keith Gomes, *Badass Ravikumar* was described as 'a tribute to 1980s masala entertainers' after it landed. It has earned around Rs 10 crore so far, roughly the same as *Loveyapa*, with which it clashed at the box office.

B Praak changes stance on 'BeerBiceps' Ranveer Allahbadia, asks public to forgive him: 'Galat tha, lekin...'

Singer B Praak was among the first celebrities to speak out against YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia after the controversy over his perceived inappropriate remark on India's *Got Talent* erupted on social media. The singer had called Ranveer's comment on the show "ghatiya" and also declared that he had dropped out of an appearance on Ranveer's show. Following Praak's statement, speculations arose that he was never invited to Ranveer's podcast in the first place. However, in a recent interview, the singer has now set the record straight.

During a conversation with *Hindustan Times*, when asked if he was invited to Ranveer's show, Praak clarified, "I liked watching his podcasts and I really wanted to go on his show. Our teams had been discussing the dates for six-seven months. Sometimes, he would be busy and travelling, and sometimes I would be."

While Praak had initially lashed out at Ranveer for his comment, he has now taken a more forgiving stance. He maintained that, as someone the youth looks up to, Ranveer should be more mindful of his words. He said, "Galat tha, lekin mujhe lagta hai agar koi dil se pachhtaakar maanfi maang raha ho then society ought to forgive him (it was wrong but if somebody is asking for forgiveness, he should be forgiven). Kuchh baatein galat hoti hain, par hum bol jaate hain. But nobody should get hurt because of it. If you forgive someone, you become the bigger person." Earlier, Praak had shared a video message after Ranveer's comment on *Samay Raina's* show went viral. He had strongly



criticized Ranveer, saying, "I was supposed to appear on a podcast, on *BeerBiceps*, and we cancelled that." He added, "Aur yeh Ranveer Allahbadia, aap Sanatan Dharma ko promote karte ho, spirituality ki baat karte ho. Aapke podcast pe itne bade-bade log aate hain, itne bade sant aate hain, aur fir bhi aapki host itni ghatiya hai? (You promote Sanatan Dharma and host so many influential people, still your thinking is so shoddy)."

Priyanka Chopra helps needy man on Mumbai streets, ends her India trip with daughter Malti Marie.



Priyanka Chopra had a packed schedule during her latest trip to India, and Tuesday was another hectic day for the star. She landed in Mumbai after wrapping up some

work commitments in Hyderabad, and later that evening, she took off for her home in Los Angeles with daughter Malti Marie. A few videos of the actor were shared on paparazzi accounts. In one clip, Priyanka was seen helping a differently abled person on the streets of Mumbai. In another, Priyanka was seen carrying Malti Marie in her arms, and making sure that she doesn't get photographed.

Priyanka had landed in Hyderabad around a month back, reportedly to shoot a portion of director SS Rajamouli and Mahesh Babu's upcoming film. Priyanka also attended her brother Siddharth Chopra's marriage to Neelam Upadhyay some days later. Soon after the wedding celebrations, the actor resumed work in Hyderabad. But on February 18, she returned to Mumbai. Priyanka shared a photo of herself on Instagram story. She was wearing a grey top, sweatpants and a cap. She captioned it, "Channeling my inner Urmila Matondkar." Priyanka Chopra also took to her Instagram story to post a small clip from the flight and said, "Bye Bye, See you soon Hyderabad." Soon afterwards, the actor was spotted at Mumbai airport. Before getting into the car, she posed for the photographers and waved at some of the fans who were there at the Kalina airport. As she got into the car and left for her mom's house, Priyanka was seen giving money to a man on the street, when her car stopped at a traffic signal. Priyanka returned to the airport in the early hours of Wednesday, and this time, she was joined by Malti Marie. The actor was seen dressed in comfortable joggers for her flight.

Sooraj Barjatya acknowledges the facade of Hum Saath Saath Hain's 'perfect' family where fear replaces love

Sooraj Barjatya was just 30 years old when he made the now-classic film *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*. Such was the response to the aesthetic of the film, that just five years later, he made an over-the-top version of the same thing with *Hum Saath Saath Hain*. Bear in mind, this was a man, still in his 30s, doling out advice to an entire generation, and telling them that parents, or any elders, in the family were god-like people who must not be questioned. Karan Johar ran with the idea and made *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* where the same message was underlined once again. But, the generation has changed and these men are now in their 50s, and it feels like they have just realised that the idea of the 'perfect family' they confidently promoted wasn't all that it was shown to be. Karan, in his trademark verbose way, expressed his realisation with *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani*, and for Sooraj, it feels like a sliver of that is coming through *Rajshri's* latest show *Bada Naam Kareng*, where he is credited as the showrunner. The central plot of the *SonyLIV* show is that of a young love story, and much like all desi stories, the conflict here is the disagreeable elders. After very many unnecessary twists of 'will they-won't they', we finally get to the crux of the show which looks oddly familiar as a viewer, but feels almost out of place in

the world of *Rajshri*. Unlike *Rajshri* films where youngsters unquestionably follow their elders despite their impossible demands, the 20-something protagonist here calls out his tauji, played by Kanwaljit Singh, for assuming he knows best when he really doesn't, and demanding love and respect when he doesn't really deserve it. The central Rathi family on the show lives in a garish mahal in *Ratlam*, which can pass off as a heritage wedding resort. Thanks to years of watching *Rajshri* films, we already know the tropey characters inhabiting it, where even the bad guys function within a sanskari framework. However, since this is a show tries to question the declarations made by its predecessors, we quickly start seeing the cracks. The women of the Rathi family have no say, and no rights. Even something as small as a Zumba class has to be treated like a state-level secret, and while there are characters in the show who can sense the absurdity here, the show also realises that treating women as an afterthought might not work today. *bada naam kareng* sony liv From its appearance, *Bada Naam Kareng* looks like another *Rajshri* product set within a large joint family. *Bada Naam Kareng* takes baby steps towards suggesting that the idea of a 'happy joint family' isn't all that it's hyped up to be. In a crucial scene, the patriarch of the family, played by Kanwaljit Singh,

Soha Ali Khan recalls Sharmila Tagore telling Saif Ali Khan it would be his fault if she joined films: 'Quit banking job after *Paheli* was offered'



Soha Ali Khan recalled how she quit her job as a banker and made her way in Bollywood. Soha Ali Khan recalled how she quit her job as a banker and made her way in Bollywood. Soha Ali Khan had no plans to be an actor when she was growing up even though she saw her mother Sharmila Tagore working in films, and even her older brother Saif Ali Khan had been an active part of the movies since the 1990s. Soha had always been "very dismissive of films," but in a recent interview, she shared how she made a bold decision to leave her banking career after Amol Palekar offered her the lead role in his film *Paheli*. However, things didn't go as planned, leaving Soha without both a job and a film.

In a chat with Siddhartha Basu on his YouTube channel *Quizzitok*, Soha shared that she didn't watch many Hindi films growing up and whatever she consumed in the 1990s, didn't really appeal to her. "A lot of changing outfits and bizarre breaking into song and very regressive in certain

ways" and Soha told herself that this was not something she wanted to do, and her parents, Sharmila and Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi were quite relieved as they wanted her to do something else. "My parents were very happy. They had invested very heavily in my education and they wanted me to do something else, and I did. I was a banker," she said but immediately added that she continued that job for just 13 months and quit when Amol offered her a role in *Paheli*.

"He wanted to launch me, he wanted to launch another actor," she said and recalled that the film did not work out but in the meanwhile, she had already quit her well-paying job. "I realised you should not quit your well paid corporate job if someone just offers you a film. There has to be a contract, there has to be a signing amount," she recalled. *Paheli* was eventually made with Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukerji. Soha did not inform her parents about her decision as she knew that they wouldn't approve and when they found out three months later, they were in for a rude shock. "They found out three months later. I was jobless and I was paying Rs 17,000 rent for a flat in *Lokhandwala* and I had no income and they were not amused at all," she recalled. Soha said that her mom had warned brother Saif that if Soha ended up joining films, it would be his fault. "My mother said to my brother, 'If she joins films, it will be your fault because you would have filled her head with all kinds of things so don't do that.'" Soha said that she did not want to be in the profession as it would be seen as an easy way out by others and she was also skeptical if she would be as good as the rest of her family members. She said that "it may not be the correct career choice and that's why I think I shied away from it." Soha Ali Khan made her Hindi film debut with *Dil Maange More* in 2004. She has not appeared in any Hindi films since 2018's *Saheb, Biwi Aur Gangster 3*.

Bada Naam Kareng: Sooraj Barjatya acknowledges the facade of Hum Saath Saath Hain's 'perfect' family where fear replaces love

Sooraj Barjatya was just 30 years old when he made the now-classic film *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*. Such was the response to the aesthetic of the film, that just five years later, he made an over-the-top version of the same thing with *Hum Saath Saath Hain*. Bear in mind, this was a man, still in his 30s, doling out advice to an entire generation, and telling them that parents, or any elders, in the family were god-like people who must not be questioned. Karan Johar ran with the idea and made *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* where the same message was underlined once again. But, the generation has changed and these men are now in their 50s, and it feels like they have just realised that the idea of the 'perfect family' they confidently promoted wasn't all that it was shown to be. Karan, in his trademark verbose way, expressed his realisation with *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani*, and for Sooraj, it feels like a sliver of that is coming through *Rajshri's* latest show *Bada Naam Kareng*, where he is credited as the showrunner.

The central plot of the *SonyLIV* show is that of a young love story, and much like all desi stories, the conflict here is the disagreeable elders. After very many unnecessary twists of 'will they-won't they', we finally get to the crux of the show which looks oddly familiar as a viewer, but feels almost out of place in the world of *Rajshri*. Unlike *Rajshri* films where youngsters unquestionably follow their elders despite their impossible demands, the 20-something protagonist here calls out his tauji, played by Kanwaljit Singh, for assuming he knows best when he really doesn't, and demanding love and respect when he doesn't really deserve it. The central Rathi family on the show lives in a garish mahal in *Ratlam*, which can pass off as a heritage wedding resort. Thanks to years of watching *Rajshri* films, we already know the tropey characters inhabiting it, where even the bad guys function within a sanskari framework. However, since this is a show tries to question the declarations made by its predecessors, we quickly start seeing the cracks. The women of the Rathi family have no say, and no rights. Even something as small as a Zumba class has to be treated like a state-level secret, and while there are characters in the show who can sense the absurdity here, the show also realises that treating women as an afterthought might not work today. *bada naam kareng* sony liv From its appearance, *Bada Naam Kareng* looks like another *Rajshri* product set within a large joint family.

Bada Naam Kareng takes baby steps towards suggesting that the idea of a 'happy joint family' isn't all that it's hyped up to be. In a crucial scene, the patriarch of the family, played by Kanwaljit Singh, is told in very clear words that what he assumes to be love and respect from his family members, is actually fear. His family members don't want to disappoint him — not because they love him, but because he can choose to exclude them if he gets upset. They have to lie because it's impossible to reason with him and this confession comes as a shock to him. Think of it as *Ranveer Singh* calling out *Jaya Bachchan's* character in



Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani, except here, Kanwaljit's character is not painted as an evil person. But, it is evident that his authoritarian ways have damaged an entire generation, and he never saw it because he was the one inflicting the pain. His wife, played by Alka Amin, has also been a victim of patriarchy and her wounds have become a part of her personality. So even when she is called out for the same, she refuses to see the problem.

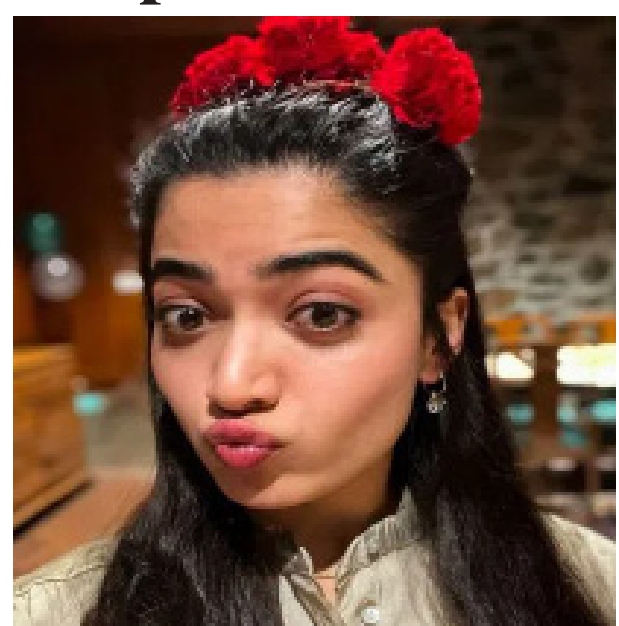
A significant chunk of the show focuses on the story of the bua of the house, played by Anjana Sukhani, who was punished because she dared to fall in love. It is at this point, that the show starts to highlight that the traditional idea where older men of the family decide what's best for you is a flawed concept. The existing patriarchy has given them the power to boss over everyone, and because they don't expect to be called out, they go on spreading the same toxicity for decades, not realising the generational trauma they are passing down. The declaration that 'we are wise because we are older' rings hollow and *Bada Naam Kareng* spends quite a lot of time in underlining that. But, the show gets around to all these subjects largely in the last two episodes. Anjana Sukhani's character trigger the actual conflict on the show. Anjana Sukhani's character triggers the actual conflict on the show. In the case of both Karan Johar and Sooraj Barjatya, one can't help but think of these shows and films as somewhat autobiographical, much like their other works. Its like their 30-year-old versions had a phase where they were unsure of their own decisions and the path shown by elders, felt like safe choices. When it gave them success, they started to believe that these older people were awarded some special wisdom with age but now, when they are older, they can clearly see that age has nothing to do with wisdom. So the idea that elders must be respected because they are older has gotten dismantled intrinsically. Its almost as if they are telling their younger selves that they should have done what they wanted, as opposed to what they were told to do, and perhaps, the result would have been the same. Sooraj Barjatya's idea of a 'happy joint family' found its way in the masses decades ago and while he might have realised that the idea is inherently flawed, it will take many more 'Bada Naam Karenges' to scrub that off people's conscience.

Rashmika Mandanna impresses with this special crown

Mumbai: Rashmika Mandanna loves to treat her InstaFam with her adorable social media posts. The 'Animal' actress recently took to her Instagram and posted a cute picture of herself. Rashmika Mandanna can be seen wearing a special crown on her head made from beautiful red flowers as she pouts for the camera.

She also asked a very crucial question to her fans in the caption, "Hey there. How does this crown look?"

Rashmika Mandanna played Maharani Yesubai in her last release, "Chhaava". The project which reached the theatre on February 14 has been receiving a lot of love from the audience. The diva took to her IG and penned a heartfelt note on her journey of transforming into Maharani Yesubai. She wrote on the photo-sharing app, "A girl from the south playing Maharani Yesubai. That was something I never had on my radar.... never thought it was possible, and that is why I love working with people who give us the hope to dream beyond boundaries. And then the maharani came in all her glory. She is fierce — she is powerful — she is graceful — she is a true queen. Her love is the love I truly relate to — it's so pure so divine and so respectful and so true that Maharaj and Maharani are always connected beyond just words."



Ex-Mumbai captain Milind Rege dies at 76, players wear black armbands in Ranji Trophy match

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Ahead of the Wednesday's play in Nagpur, Mumbai and Vidarbha players observed silence as a mark of respect to Milind Rege. The Mumbai players wore black armbands as well for their Ranji Trophy semifinal. (Express Photo) Ahead of the Wednesday's play in Nagpur, Mumbai and Vidarbha players observed silence as a mark of respect to Milind Rege. The Mumbai players wore black armbands as well for their Ranji Trophy semifinal. Former Mumbai captain Milind Rege passed away on Friday morning at 76 after suffering cardiac arrest. Rege played multiple roles in Mumbai cricket since he retired from the sport, remaining available for Mumbai Cricket Association throughout his cricketing career. He served as a managing committee member, was a selector, commentator and later was appointed as advisor to MCA.

Ahead of the day's play in Nagpur in the Ranji Trophy semifinal, Mumbai and Vidarbha players observed silence as a mark of respect. The Mumbai players wore black armbands as well. Rege, an offspinner, played 52 first-class matches for Mumbai in the 70s and took 126 wickets. He was also part of the organising committee during ICC-Champions Trophy held in Mumbai in 2006. Former India cricketer Sandeep Patil said Rege was the support system of his life. "At my book release, he said see you in Kolkata. I was waiting for him to visit me. He played a very very important role in my life on and off the field, he and his wife Raj stood behind me in my trying times. Mumbai has lost its biggest supporter, his contribution in helping and building the careers of young talents will remain unmatched. He remained loyal to Dadar Union, CCI, and MCA. Even in his late days he always wanted to be part of Mumbai Cricket as a long-serving selector and Administrator. I will keep missing him," the former India chief selector said.

Really sad to hear about the demise of a dear friend Milind Rege. A true Champion in his contribution to Mumbai and Tata's cricket all-round. A Mentor Par Excellence. Diana



Edulji, former Indian captain and advisor to MCA along with Rege, said he would never miss any meeting until the last one, where he had an appointment scheduled with his doctor. "He was a good cricketer in his days. He was not feeling well lately and the only meeting he missed was the last one. He always came up with good ideas and he believed in discipline during the meeting. He was never afraid of speaking his mind. He will come well prepared with all his notes written. He knew the performance of each player and coach," Edulji said. MCA president Ajinkya Naik recalled how he wished Mumbai does well in the Ranji Trophy before getting admitted to the hospital for a routine check-up. "He called and said I am going for a routine check-up and won't be available for the MCA selection meeting for Ranji Trophy semis. He never missed any meetings and he was so passionate about Mumbai that his last line was 'I hope Mumbai clinches the Ranji Trophy title this time too'. He just wanted Mumbai to do well in every section of the game," Naik recalled. For MCA and BCCI administrator Ratnakar Shetty praised Rege's versatility to wear many hats. "I have known him since his playing days. He came back to active cricket after a heart surgery. He always made it to watch Mumbai Ranji games. I last spoke to him when we won the quarter-finals against Haryana. I salute him."

Haris Rauf returns for Pakistan; New Zealand fret over Rachin Ravindra

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Pakistan vs New Zealand, PAK vs NZ Champions Trophy 2025 Match Predicted Playing 11 Today Match: Pakistan will take on New Zealand in the opening match of the Champions Trophy just 5 days after losing the Tri-Series final to the Kiwis last Friday. The venue of the opening encounter is the National Stadium in Karachi, the same one where the Tri-Series final was held and the Black Caps will be filled with confidence. New Zealand suffered a late blow to the Champions Trophy preparations when they learned that seamer Lockie Ferguson was ruled out from the tournament through injury. Meanwhile, they are also sweating on the fitness of Rachin Ravindra and will also be missing another pacer in Ben Sears. Pakistan, meanwhile, have Haris Rauf back in the squad and will just miss opener Saim Ayub, who was ruled out of the whole tournament a few weeks back.

Pakistan will breathe a sigh of relief with the inclusion of Haris Rauf in their Playing XI after the player had missed the remainder of the Tri-Series due to an injury suffered during the first match between Pakistan and New Zealand. With Pakistan's pace department coming under criticism, Rauf's return will no doubt bolster the Men in Green's chances. There are concerns in the New Zealand camp about the fitness of batter Rachin Ravindra who had suffered a face injury while fielding against Pakistan in the 1st



ODI of the Tri-series. Since that injury, Rachin hasn't been spotted in the Kiwi kit with New Zealand winning the series without him. Little is known about his status before the Champions Trophy opening match but New Zealand will hope that the talented batter recovers in time. Pakistan: Fakhar Zaman, Babar Azam, Saud Shakeel, Mohammad Rizwan (c&wk), Salman Ali Agha, Tayyab Tahir, Khushdil Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf. New Zealand: Will Young, Devon Conway, Kane Williamson, Rachin Ravindra, Daryl Mitchell, Tom Latham (wk), Glenn Phillips, Mitchell Santner, Nathan Smith, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson.

Clinical Mumbai Indians trounce Gujarat Giants by five wickets

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Mumbai Indians Gujarat Giants WPL. Sajana of Mumbai Indians and Natalie Sciver of Mumbai Indians during match 5 of the Women's Premier League 2025 (WPL) between The Gujarat Giants and The Mumbai Indians held at the BCA Stadium, Vadodara, India All-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt starred in both departments as Mumbai Indians produced a clinical performance to return to winning ways with a five-wicket victory over a self-destructive Gujarat Giants in their Women's Premier League (WPL) match here

Sciver-Brunt smashed a 39-ball 57, her second consecutive half-century, after taking two wickets for 26, as MI first bowled out GG for a modest 120 and then chased down the target, scoring 122 for 5 with 3.5 overs to spare. Invited to bat, Gujarat paid the price for their over-aggression, with MI's bowlers, led by off-spinner Hayley Matthews, delivering a tight performance. Shabnim Ismail (1/17), Amelia Kerr (2/22), and Amanjot Kaur (1/17) also played key roles in restricting Gujarat's batting. In response, Sciver-Brunt dazzled with a flurry of boundaries, playing cut, pull, sweep, and scoop shots with ease. She hit 11 fours during her innings and was dismissed in the 16th over with just seven runs required to win. Chasing 121, MI lost Matthews (17), Yastika Bhatia (8) and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (4) early as MI slipped to 55-3 in the 8th over.

However, Sciver-Brunt continued to dominate, bringing up her fifty with a four off Ashleigh Gardner in the 14th over. Amelia Kerr (19) also contributed with a six and a four before being dismissed by Gautam. Earlier, Gujarat's batting imploded as they tried to muscle the ball rather than



build partnerships. Only two batters in the top six reached double digits, with Harleen Deol top-scoring with a 31-ball 32. Kashvee Gautam (20) and Tanuja Kanwar (13) also got starts but failed to capitalize. Gujarat were in early trouble, crashing to 16 for 3 in the 4th over, with Beth Mooney (1), Laura Wolvaardt (4), and Dayalan Hemalatha (9) back in the pavilion. Hemalatha has been in poor form for some time. Gujarat's in-form skipper, Ashleigh Gardner (10), tried to inject some momentum, pulling Sciver-Brunt for a six, but was dismissed on the very next delivery. Deandra Dottin went for a slog and was stumped by Yastika Bhatia off Kerr, leaving Gujarat at 43 for 5 in 8.2 overs. Deol and Gautam added 24 runs off 19 balls, with the latter hitting a big six off Ismail. However, Matthews induced a faint edge to dismiss Gautam. Deol hit two boundaries off Kerr in the 13th over but was dismissed by Amanjot Kaur in the 17th over. Sayali Satghare (13) hit a couple of boundaries late in the innings to offer some respectability to the total.

Matteo Berrettini stuns Novak Djokovic in straight sets to pull off Qatar Open upset

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Doha: Matteo Berrettini of Italy caused a huge upset in the Qatar Open 2025, beating former World No. 1 Novak Djokovic in straight sets in a first-round match at the ATP 500 series event being played on the hard courts here on Tuesday. This is Berrettini's first top-10 win since 2023.

Berrettini, who is currently ranked 35th in the ATP Rankings and had a career-high rank of 6 in January 2022, survived a few anxious moments, including a couple of break points in the sixth game of the first set, before winning the match 7-6(4), 6-2 in one hour and 33 minutes. While Berrettini is unseeded here, Djokovic is the third seed and was expected to go all the way after retiring from his Aus-

tralian Open semi-final against Alexander Zverev with a hamstring injury last month. However, the Italian had other ideas as he served a potent display of power tennis to upset the 24-time Grand Slam winner.

In the second set, 28-year-old Berrettini broke Djokovic's serve in the second game and then again in the marathon eighth game in which he saved a game point after deuce and defeated the 37-year-old Serb on the second advantage. Berrettini won 85 per cent (40/47) of points behind his first delivery, according to Infosys ATP Stats, en route to a dazzling 95-minute victory, which was his first in their ATP head-to-head series (1-4).

Blindspots in Jannik Sinner doping case: How did he and his team miss the Clostebol drug problem in Italian sport?

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

A spray purchased for a cut followed by a positive test for Clostebol. The sequence of events is applicable to World No. 1 tennis player Jannik Sinner, in the news after being banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency for three months because he tested for Clostebol, a banned anabolic steroid. Sinner's trainer bought a spray. His physiotherapist used it on a cut on his hand and then gave Sinner a back massage. But the chronology also fits into Italian basketball player Riccardo Moraschini's story. Three years ago Moraschini's fiancée used a spray that contained Clostebol after cutting her finger when cooking. Moraschini and his fiancée came in contact and he subsequently tested positive and was banned for a year. A similar ring to the positive test justification that is becoming as old as the hills in Italy.

Sinner and Moraschini are not isolated cases because Italian sport has a Clostebol problem, from football to tennis to basketball. A scientific research paper titled "Detection of Clostebol in sports: Accidental doping?" on the WADA website says more Italian athletes are testing positive for Clostebol. "In the last years, the improvement of the detection capabilities of the antidoping laboratories has led to a moderate increase of Clostebol detection worldwide, and especially in Italy where the use of a cream containing Clostebol acetate and neomycin is quite extended," the research paper said. A key finding of the research paper, published in 2020, four years before Sinner tested positive, is that contact with a person who used Clostebol can also produce an adverse analytical finding.

How did Sinner's team miss the warning?

Sinner's team seems to have missed the red flags. Found in an over-the-counter medicine used to treat cuts, Clostebol has been banned by WADA because of its muscle-building properties. First developed in East Germany, Clostebol is now only available in medications in only a few countries — Italy, Brazil, Peru and Pakistan, according to the research paper. However, it's way more popular in Italy, going by the number of positive cases. At the centre of the Clostebol-Italy link is Trofodermin, a cream and spray. Sinner's trainer Umberto Ferrara bought this very spray, it was then used by his physiotherapist Giacomo Naldi on a cut. But how did Ferrara and Naldi miss the warning signs, literally on the packaging of the medicine. Over two decades ago, Italy's ministry of health mandated that a 'potentially doping drug' must have a 'circular pictogram' showing a red prohibition symbol with the word 'doping' inside it. The leaflet too includes a 'special warnings' paragraph, the decree states. Online searches for Trofodermin show images of a red circular pictogram with a prohibition sign running across the word 'doping'. Naldi's absence of caution as a professional physiotherapist is also worrying because he worked in basketball when the Moraschini case made headlines. Naldi was with rival club Virtus Bologna. Moraschini too had pointed fingers at Trofodermin. Speaking to L'Equipe in August last year, days after the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) announced that Sinner had been cleared of any wrongdoing, Moraschini said: "It was also a contamination, my fiancée had cut her finger while



cooking and had bought Trofodermin, a healing spray that can be obtained without a prescription in Italian pharmacies. It's the same story as Giacomo Naldi, Sinner's physiotherapist."

Sinner's case has dominated the headlines, but Clostebol spray caused a furore when Benevento captain Fabio Lucioni tested positive in 2017 and subsequently banned for a year. In Lucioni's case, the team doctor said he had used a spray for his personal box to treat Lucioni's cut. Lucioni had attained legendary status, captaining Benevento's journey from Serie C to Serie A. Two years ago doubles specialist Marco Bortolotti tested positive for Clostebol but after providing evidence of involuntary contamination was let go. In its statement, ITIA had said, "As part of the investigation, the ITIA sought scientific advice from the WADA-accredited laboratory in Montreal, Canada, where the sample was analysed, for expert views on the plausibility of the player's explanation. The laboratory performed calculations based on Bortolotti's exposure to the Clostebol and the concentration detected in their sample and confirmed, based on scientific literature, that the player's explanation was credible. "Clostebol is similar to meldonium in the way its availability reflects in the nationality of athletes testing positive. Meldonium gained prominence when former World No. 1 and six-time Grand Slam winner Maria Sharapova tested positive and was banned for two years. Meldonium prescribed by doctors for angina is known to improve blood flow but WADA found that athletes were using it to their advantage. Produced mainly in Latvia, Meldonium is easily available only in Russia and Baltic countries. Like meldonium in Russia, Clostebol has also earned a bad name in Italy. Talking to the Associated Press, Giovanni Fontana, an Italian lawyer who represents athletes said, "When an athlete tests positive for Clostebol, the first thing I ask them is if they used Trofodermin," Fontana said. "And if they haven't, I tell them to go check if a family member or partner has, because it's transmitted so easily." When WADA banned Sinner for three months, it cleared him of any wrongdoing. "WADA accepts that Mr. Sinner did not intend to cheat, and that his exposure to Clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit," the WADA statement said. Sinner also made the right noises saying, "I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realize WADA's strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love. "But the unanswered question is why Sinner and his team turned a blind eye to the Clostebol problem in their backyard. Coming from an Italian, a spray, a cut and a positive test sounds like a done to death storyline .

Md Azharuddeen prolongs Gujarat's agony with a leisurely 149* as Kerala aim for 500

GNS News Agency, Feb 21

Even as the hapless Gujarat fielders dished out colourful conversations to try and break Kerala's resolve during another day of marathon batting, the two most happening addas of the day took place inside the restaurant hall of the Narendra Modi Stadium post-play in the evening. Kerala coach Amay Khurasiya enquired about the formulating powdery patch outside the left-hander's off-stump at one end with his trusted spin lieutenant Aditya Sarwate who had helped centurion Mohammed Azharuddeen to see off the day as Kerala added 212 runs to their overnight score with negligible shift in scoring intent. The idea of 'time and turn' dominated the discussion as Kerala extended the slow-cooking process to 177 overs, entering stumps at 418 for seven.

The coach's words to Sarwate revolved around the shaky patch, which would in due course, become vital to Kerala's bowling plans led by the left-armed and off-spinner Jalaj Saxena against a Gujarat line-up crammed by four southpaws in the top order. While Khurasiya and Sarwate exchanged plans in one corner, Kerala skipper Sachin Baby approached the Kathi roll counter with a clever question wrapped up deftly in his pocket. After setting up the innings with his overnight 69 in 193 balls, Baby only lasted two deliveries in the morning before poking hard at Arzan Nagwaswalla's late away-shaping delivery to first-slip. Baby surely had to have another moment to cap off a long day and ensure everything was under control. Catching up with Gujarat spinner Siddharth Desai who ran another pale day on the field, Baby quizzed the 24-year-old on his thoughts on the pitch. "What is the behaviour of the wicket like? Wasn't it turning at all?" questioned Baby. "It's a slow turner," came the response from Gujarat's highest wicket-taker, eyes firmly on the pincer rolls and not the seasoned Kerala pro. Azharuddeen would not quite agree with Desai after he remained the least effective spinner on the pitch — Gujarat captain Chintan Gaja only summoned him five minutes before lunch on Tuesday. With Desai's backup left-armed Vishal Jayswal extracting sharp turn and lift from odd balls in the evening, Kerala's tempestuous wicket-keeper said that "every run tomorrow is going to tire their minds and body." Carrying on from his overnight start alongside Baby, Azharuddeen (149 not out) dictated the mind games on the pitch, even conquering his own aggressive impulses while at it. "There are times when the hand naturally goes for a swing but the coach's sound instructions have held it all back. Playing to his advice and guidance is all that I have been trying to do here and throughout the season that has helped this time on the whole," said Azhar after breaking a duck of seven years since his first Ranji Trophy century to etch another in a pivotal semifinal setting. The lull in between saw him out of the red-ball side for two years post Covid-19. Poor outings in the season-opening white-ball tournaments meant the management's patience ran out before the Ranji campaigns then, he candidly admitted.

A natural top-order bat, Azharuddeen's slide to a No. 6 keeper-bat role this year has shot up his red-ball fortunes. Sharing the space behind Fortress Baby with his old-time



Coach Amay Khurasiya keeps sending his batsmen paper-written notes to fortify Kerala's attritional abilities in batting.

buddy Salman Nizar (52), the pair have set up another lower-order bastion that is defining Kerala's unique Ranji campaign. Even as Nagwaswalla and the Gujarat dug-out roared in delight after snapping Baby second ball, the pressure was adroitly quelled by the North Kerala bonhomie that lasted 368 deliveries for 149 runs. Gaja's men trimmed from roars to hoots and chirps through the afternoon as the sixth-wicket pair ransacked 87 runs in the first session before slowing down to 60 in the next two hours, hoarding 30 more overs. "There was a lot of colourful sledging going on. The time to react to all that is long gone. I only find them all to be so hilarious these days. But there is a special feeling and fun you get seeing the frustration of the opposition when they go wicketless for so long," the 30-year-old Azharuddeen reflects with a chuckle. Seizing the opportunity of a dropped catch at first slip and Gujarat's sloppy lapses in missing out on two lbw counts without opting for the DRS, Azharuddeen maintained the metronomic rhythm of his longest First-Class innings with a sturdy defence and an uncluttered mind. Unlike his famous Hyderabad namesake's leg-side dexterity, "Azhar Jr." maintained a regular love for the off-side, carving the extra cover to point region with supple front and back-footed drives. Azharuddeen credits the much "involved" Khurasiya's timely interventions behind Kerala's cohesive defence. "He sends in inputs through notes at the right time from the dugout on the field where he remains throughout the day," says Azhar, stressing that the frequent "paper-written notes leave longer images and impressions" in the mind. With the pitch beginning to offer continual turn, Azharuddeen said the attritional targets to burn out more overs will continue with him and Sarwate poised to return on day three. "The target was to exhaust as many overs as possible and not bat quickly to get to 400 or something in a five-day game. Getting to 500 is the plan and that will begin to play a lot on their mind and body. We have far more experienced spinners in Jalaj and Sarwate to handle the job from there," he said with apt clarity.