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## Chalivagu check dam damaged in Bhupalpally's Chityala mandal

Bhupalpally: Unidentified persons have damaged a check dam built across Chalivagu at Nawabpet in Chityala mandal in the district by causing a breach in it.

As a result of the breach, water stored in the dam drained out much to the agony of farmers who took up rabi cultivation in the lands upper side of the check dam. It was alleged that the villagers in Tekumatta mandal might have caused the breach to irrigate crops in the lower part of the check dam in the mandal. With the water flowing down from the dam, the farmers around Nawabpet in Chityala mandal were worried that their crops might be damaged due to lack of water.

## All eyes on Revanth Reddy as MLC elections under MLA quota gets near



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Hyderabad: With the notification for biennial elections to the MLCs under MLAs quota being issued, speculations are doing rounds in Gandhi Bhavan over nomination of leaders for the elections, which will be held on March 20. Among a few prominent leaders, a couple of leaders have already commenced lobbying for the nominations. There is speculation that State government Advisors, including Vem Narender Reddy, Harakara Venugopal and Mohd Ali Shabbir are among contenders. These apart, many leaders from different communities are also eyeing the opportunity. Among the OC cat-

egory, former Minister K Jana Reddy, T Jeevan Reddy, T Jagga Reddy and others are among the probables. Likewise, from the BC community, Madhu Yaskhi Goud, Egge Mallesham, Sunitha Mudiraj, Neelam Madhu and others are keen to be nominated. Addanki Dayakar, Sampath Kumar, Pidamarthy Ravi, Singapuram Indira and others are hoping for a call from the SC category. From the Minorities, former Indian cricket captain Mohammed Azharuddin, Feroz Khan and Fayeem Qureshi are in the list. Amidst all these contenders, the big question is whether Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy will recommend Advisor to Government Vem Narender Reddy's name. It may be recalled that in the 2015 sensational cash-for-vote case, Revanth Reddy was caught red-handed while allegedly bribing nominated MLA Elvis Stephenson to cast his vote in favour of Narender Reddy, who was the TDP candidate then in the MLC elections. Both the leaders were members of the TDP then. Another dimension in the speculations doing rounds in Gandhi Bhavan is that even if the Chief Minister recommends Narender Reddy's name, will the high command consider the same? If Narender Reddy is recommended, then former Minister and senior leader K Jana Reddy's name cannot be recommended as he too hails from the same community. At a time when caste politics are at its peak in the Telangana Congress, recommending two leaders from the same community is ruled out.

## CM Revanth Reddy Inaugurates HCL Tech KRC Campus in Madhapur

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy participated in the inauguration of the HCL Tech KRC Campus at KRC Commerzone, Madhapur. The event marked a significant step in the state's efforts to strengthen its position as a leading hub for the IT sector. Speaking at the event, the Chief Minister highlighted Telangana's commitment to fostering technological advancements and attracting major investments. He lauded HCL Technologies for expanding its presence in Hyderabad and contributing to employment opportunities in the region. The newly inaugurated campus is expected to boost innovation and digital transformation while providing a world-class work environment for IT professionals. With Hyderabad continuing to emerge as a preferred destination for global tech firms, the



state government reaffirmed its support for initiatives that drive economic growth and technological excellence.

## BRS MLC Kavitha calls out Revanth Reddy for acting as RSS CM



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Hyderabad: BRS MLC K Kavitha launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for acting under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directions and working as an RSS Chief Minister. She said the Congress government in Telangana was surviving on BJP's support and both the parties were working with the sole agenda of targeting the Kalvakuntla family and weaken the BRS. Addressing the mediapersons at Telangana Bhavan on Thursday, Kavitha raised suspicions, pointing out that immediately after his meeting with Modi, Revanth Reddy started talking about filing cases against former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao and former Minister KT Rama Rao. "This is nothing but a well-planned conspiracy. The Chief Minister's only agenda is to harass the Kalvakuntla family and dismantle the BRS, which has been the protective shield for Telangana," she said.

The BRS MLC also slammed the Chief Minister for spreading falsehoods, pointing to his remarks twisting the deaths of individuals to suit political narratives. "Look at the absurdity – a lawyer who died of a heart attack in the court,

another death was declared as murder due to property dispute by the district SP, and a natural death in Dubai was turned into a political ploy. Revanth Reddy is peddling blatant lies to mislead people," she charged. Kavitha questioned the unofficial role of Revanth Reddy's brother, Tirupati Reddy, in government affairs. "We have no issue with him handling party matters, but why is he attending official meetings? Why is the district collector welcoming him in an official capacity? This is nothing but the Chief Minister encouraging unconstitutional forces," she said, asserting that unlike Revanth Reddy's family, the Kalvakuntla family always adhered to the law and served Telangana people as elected representatives. The BRS MLC tore into the Chief Minister's claims on State finances, charging him with deliberately misleading the public on the interest payments against debts. She stated that while Revanth Reddy claims that the State pays Rs 6,500 crore in interest every month, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report states that interest payments in no month has exceeded Rs 2,600 crore.

"Where is he getting his numbers from? Congress, which came to power through lies, continues to deceive the people," she opined. She also challenged the Chief Minister on his false claims that the State Own Tax Revenue (SOTR) is Rs 18,000 crore per month, but CAG data shows it is only Rs 12,000 crore. "So why is Revanth Reddy making false projections? Who is he trying to fool?" she asked.

Kavitha linked the State's financial crisis to a targeted attack on Hyderabad's growth, alleging that city's brand image is being deliberately damaged. "The State government estimated Rs 18,000 crore in revenue from stamps and registrations, but due to the HYDRRAA demolitions, it fell to Rs 5,800 crore. The Congress government is deliberately weakening Hyderabad's economic foundation," she added.

## India poised to become world's leading investment destination: Piyush Goyal

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Mumbai: With a robust and resilient economy, a large and dynamic consumer market, and a government committed to fostering business-friendly policies, India is poised to become one of the world's leading investment destinations, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday. Inaugurated the 'Bharat Calling Conference 2025' organised by IMC Chamber of Commerce and Industry here, the minister said that India stands at the forefront of global economic growth, offering unparalleled opportunities for investment across diverse sectors. Dwelling on the theme 'Path to Viksit Bharat 2047: Pioneering Prosperity for All', he said there are huge opportunities unfurling

in a country of 1.4 billion people, many of whom are aspirational and young. There is a deep commitment towards manufacturing, skill development, and innovation, as advocated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, which truly makes India the world's emerging investment destination.

Goyal highlighted that various strategic initiatives of the government, including Make in India, Digital India, Startup India, Swachh Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat, have collectively prepared the mindset of the nation to be resilient, self-sufficient and become a bigger player in global trade, even as the country's economy is transformed in the Amrit Kaal of the coming two decades leading up to 2047.

## Man sentenced to 10 years in jail in POCSO case

Hyderabad: A local court in the city convicted and sentenced a man to 10 year imprisonment in a POCSO case reported at Pahadishareef in 2019. The court also imposed a fine of Rs. 15,000 on the man while the victim was awarded a compensation of Rs. 3 lakh. Mohd Idris, a resident of Jalpally in 2019 had lured a minor boy to secluded place and sexually assaulted him. The boy later informed about the assault to his family elders who approached the police and made a complaint. The Pahadishareef police registered a case under Section 377 of IPC and POCSO Act against Idris and arrested him.

## PM Modi cherished Nanaji's dream of 'Antyodaya': Amit Shah



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Bhopal: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought to fruition the noble dreams of 'Antyodaya,' a vision cherished by Nanaji Deshmukh - the great visionary of India in real sense, said Union Home and Cooperative Minister Amit Shah on Thursday in Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh. He said, in a mere decade, as many as six hundred million Indian citizens have now been provided homes, sanitation, sustenance, electricity, and gas connections. This remarkable achievement was extolled by the Union Home and Cooperative Minister, Amit Shah, during his visit to Chitrakoot, while addressing a function organised to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Nanaji Deshmukh. Home Minister, lauded Nanaji's visionary adoption of 'Ekam Manavwad,' a principle espoused by his compatriot, Deendayal Upadhyay. "As India strides forward with the ethos of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam' (a Sanskrit phrase meaning, 'the world is one family), the world now gazes upon this great nation with admiration," he said. Nanaji Deshmukh's transformative concept of 'Gramodaya' has rendered Chitrakoot an exemplar of rural development, inspiring

villages to metamorphose into idyllic Gokul Grams. In a pointed critique of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's policies, Amit Shah lamented the lack of indigeneous essence in the policies of that era, which, according to him, appeared as mere translations of Western doctrines. Reflecting on the dark days of the 'Emergency,' Amit Shah recounted the resilience of the opposition and the eventual downfall of Indira Gandhi's regime in 1977. He said Nanaji Deshmukh was one of the select few leaders, alongside JP (Jay Prakash Narayan), who formed the Jana Sangh and established a non-Congress government at the Center to restore democracy. Nanaji's exemplary conduct, such as his magnanimous gesture towards his political rival Maharani of Balrampur, further cemented his legacy, Amit Shah further said. "The late APJ Abdul Kalam had fittingly honored Nanaji with the title of 'Rashtra Rishi,'" he said.

The Home Minister's visit to Madhya Pradesh, following his recent address at the Global Investors Summit-2025 in Bhopal, holds added significance. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav was also present on the occasion. Chandikadas Amritrao Deshmukh, affectionately known as Nanaji Deshmukh, was born on the 11th of October, 1916, during the pre-independence era. A venerable social reformer and politician, he devoted his life to education, health, and rural self-reliance. In 1999, he was bestowed with the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award, and posthumously honoured with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, in 2019. A stalwart of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and a member of the Rajya Sabha, Deshmukh, after retiring from active politics, dedicated himself to the Deendayal Research Institute, which he founded in 1969. His endeavours spanned anti-poverty and minimum needs programs, agriculture, cottage industry, rural health, and education. Nanaji Deshmukh passed away on the 27th of February, 2010, within the precincts of Chitrakoot Gramoday Vishwavidyalaya, an institution he had established.

## Kishan Reddy challenges Revanth Reddy to prove his allegation on stalling Telangana's projects

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Hyderabad: Union Minister for Coal and Mines G. Kishan Reddy challenged Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Thursday to prove the allegation that he is stalling Union government's approval for Telangana projects. The Union Minister was responding to Revanth Reddy's allegation that he (Reddy) is stopping the Union government's approval for the Hyderabad Metro Rail Phase-2.

During an informal chat with media persons in Delhi on Wednesday, the Chief Minister had claimed that Kishan Reddy was stalling the project. Kishan Reddy, who is also the president of Telangana's BJP unit, rebuked Revanth Reddy for saying a person holding the Chief Minister's post was speaking out of ignorance. The BJP leader remarked that Revanth Reddy becoming the chief minister was the misfortune of the Telangana people. "The Central government works as per a clear policy and procedure. Revanth Reddy is resorting to blackmail politics and acting as a bully," Kishan Reddy told media persons in Delhi. After meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the national capital on Wednesday, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy alleged that Kishan Reddy was stalling the Centre's approval of projects related to the state. "Kishan Reddy did not allow the Hyderabad Metro Rail second phase project to go to the Cabinet. He did this as he felt that Revanth Reddy would



get the credit. For me, credit is not more important than the state's interests. If Kishan Reddy wants, he can get approvals for projects and funds to the state and get the credit," Revanth Reddy had said.

The Chief Minister also stated that he requested the Prime Minister to cooperate in completing five projects which are critical for the state's development. Revanth Reddy also remarked that as central ministers, Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay should get approvals and funds for these projects or should shift to Gujarat or some other state.

## Teachers' MLC polls held peacefully, 92.48% polling recorded in Telangana's Khammam



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Khammam: Polling for the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Teachers' MLC constituency election passed off peacefully in erstwhile Khammam district on Thursday, barring minor incidents. At the end of the polling, 93.03 per cent voting was recorded — of the 4,089 voters, as many as 3,804 cast their vote in Khammam district. In Kothagudem district, of the 2,022 voters, 1,859 cast their vote and the polling percentage was 91.94. Police had to intervene as a clash ensued among the supporters of TPUS, TSUTF and PRTU candidates over the display of flex banners at Ricob Bazar polling station under the two-town police station limits in Khammam city.

It was said that the TSUTF candidate's supporters campaigned at the polling station by displaying a flex banner with a photo of candidate Narsi Reddy. The TPUS supporters displayed a banner with an image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at their tent. A verbal duel broke out between TSUTF and TPUS supporters, who demanded each

other to remove the flex banners. Meanwhile, the PRTU candidate's supporters took the matter to the police's notice, who intervened and removed the flex banners while directing the clashing groups to leave the place. BJP district president Galla Satyanarayana complained that TSUTF supporters spoke offensively about Modi, while the police tried to arrest party leader Allika Anjaiah while sparing the UTF supporters. The police dispersed both the groups, restoring normalcy. Commissioner of Police Sunil Dutt inspected several polling stations and monitored polling. Seven ACPs, 16 CIs, 25 SIs and 470 constables were deployed to maintain law and order at the polling stations, he said.

## YS Jagan condemns arrest of actor Posani Krishna Murali

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Former Chief Minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has strongly condemned the recent arrest of film actor Posani Krishna Murali. Jagan expressed his discontent with what he characterized as the authoritarian approach of the coalition government in Andhra Pradesh. In a conversation with Posani's wife, Kusumala, Jagan assured her of the party's unwavering support for the actor following his arrest. He emphasized the importance of remaining strong during challenging times, stating, "People and God are watching the ongoing affairs in the state." Jagan announced that the YSRCP would provide legal assistance to Posani, promising to enlist senior lawyers associated with the party to support him in the legal proceedings.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Monumental Kumbh

Forty-five days, over 65 crore devotees, around Rs 8 lakh crore revenue — the Maha Kumbh was an overwhelming spectacle in more ways than one. The curtains came down on the mega festival on Wednesday as millions of pilgrims took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam on Mahashivratri. The whole world watched in awe, week after week, as India proudly showcased its spiritual magnificence as well as soft power. The 2025 edition was special as it witnessed an innovative confluence of tradition and technology. Digital lost-and-found centres helped reunite thousands of missing people with their family members. AI-driven systems played a vital role in estimating crowd density and tracking people. 'Digital snan' became the new buzzword as a start-up offered a service for those who were unable to attend the Maha Kumbh: prints of photos sent by devotees through WhatsApp were collected and immersed in the sacred waters on their behalf — it was as simple and convenient as that.

Crowd control was a major challenge throughout the festival, and the authorities did fairly well on this front despite huge odds. However, things went horribly wrong on Mauni Amavasya last month when crores of pilgrims jostled to take a dip. The resultant stampede led to the death of at least 30 people, according to the police, even as the Opposition has accused the Yogi government of concealing the actual death toll. This tragic incident must not be reduced to a mere footnote. For its own good, the government should come out with the truth, no matter how unpalatable. Another dampener was the Central Pollution Control Board's report that flagged alarming levels of faecal bacteria in the river water near Sangam. The report highlighted that water quality at multiple sites failed to meet prescribed bathing standards. The biggest lesson from the Maha Kumbh is that there should be no compromise on river water quality, sanitation and devotees' safety.

## Inside job? Receptionist arrested in theft of historic antiques from Himachal museum

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

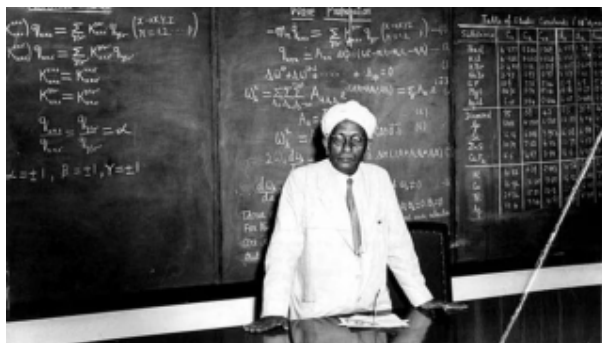
Himachal Pradesh police have arrested a 36-year-old receptionist for his alleged involvement in a case of theft at the historic Maharaja Sansar Chand Museum near Kangra Fort in the state. Rajesh Kumar, who had been working at the museum for over five years, was taken into custody for tampering with evidence and disabling security cameras to facilitate the burglary. Over three dozen antique items, including a silver khadau (slippers), an antique revolver, and 36 silver children's toys, were stolen from the museum on February 16. The museum, owned by the Katoch dynasty of Kangra's royal family, houses priceless relics from the region's history. DSP (Kangra) Ankit Sharma revealed that Rajesh Kumar had initially joined as a security guard before being promoted to receptionist. Maharaja Sansar Chand Museum (1) More than three dozen antique items, including a silver khadau (slippers), an antique revolver, and 36 silver children's toys, were stolen from the museum. "There are five CCTV cameras installed in the museum. Three of these cameras were rendered dysfunctional, but two were still functioning, capturing suspicious activities involving Rajesh Kumar. We have identified three more suspects who executed the theft, and they will be arrested shortly. We have questioned many staff members of the museum and finally arrested Rajesh Kumar," Sharma Investigations further revealed that Kumar had attempted to mislead authorities by removing an exhaust fan to create the illusion that thieves had entered through that opening. He has been remanded to three-day police custody. Ghan Shyam Chand, the museum's manager, confirmed Kumar's long tenure at the institution and added, "Three other employees, including a woman sweeper and her son, were also summoned by the police." Police added that the museum is a private institution managed by Ashwariya Singh Katoch, a descendant of the Kangra royal family and son of MP Chandresh Kumari Katoch.

## Bengal woman dies after car overturns in attempt to escape 'drunk' eve-teasers

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

A woman died on Sunday night after her car met with an accident as the driver speeded in an "attempt" to save her from inebriated youths who were allegedly verbally abusing her and chasing the car. The deceased has been identified as Sutandra Chattopadhyay, a resident of Chandannagar in West Bengal's Hooghly district. Four other passengers of the vehicle received minor injuries. Police said Chattopadhyay was a head of an event management organisation. They were going to Gaya on an assignment. The driver of the car, Rajdeo Sharma, claimed, "We stopped at a petrol pump when those miscreants came. They started showering abuse at her. But we ignored them and started towards our destination... When we reached Panagarh, the same car came in front of us from the left and stopped. Suddenly, they tried to block our way by overtaking our vehicle, and in that process, there was a collision between the two vehicles." "In a desperate attempt to escape, I changed my vehicle's direction and entered a service road of the highway. Then the miscreants' vehicle collided with our vehicle from the back and we lost control and the car was overturned. We somehow got out of the car and got an ambulance to move (Chattopadhyay) to a hospital but the doctors said she was brought dead," he said. Chattopadhyay's colleague Mintu Mondal claimed, "After the accident, we chased the youths and took the key of their car. But they ran away. They were showering unprintable abuses at her. We had ignored them to avoid further chaos, but we never thought they would chase and collide with us." Her colleagues filed an FIR against unknown persons at the Kanksa police station and police started an investigation. Police seized the highway's CCTV footage and are trying to identify the accused. Atri Mitra is a Special Correspondent of The Indian Express with more than 20 years of experience in reporting from West Bengal, Bihar and the North-East. He has been covering administration and political news for more than ten years and has a keen interest in political development in West Bengal. Atri holds a Master degree in Economics from Rabindrabharati University and Bachelor's degree from Calcutta University.

## Institutes across India to host Open Day events



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

National Science Day: Scientific institutions across the country are preparing to celebrate National Science Day later this week. Since 1986, National Science Day has been observed annually on February 28 to commemorate the Nobel Prize-winning discovery of the Raman Effect by physicist CV Raman in 1928. In his latest radio address, Mann Ki Baat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi encouraged young students to experience 'One Day as a Scientist' by spending time in research laboratories, visiting planetaria, and exploring space and science centres. The theme for National Science Day 2025 is 'Empowering Indian Youth for Global Leadership in Science and Innovation for Viksit

Bharat'. In the national capital, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) will organise a day-long celebration on February 28. The event will feature the inauguration of Inclusive Technology Business Incubators, the launch of a new initiative to support electric vehicle startups, and the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Ayush to develop biomedical devices. The event will be attended by Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister (I/C), DST, Professor Ajay Sood, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, along with secretaries from the Departments of Science and Technology, Biotechnology, and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, among other leading scientists. Additionally, a national-level science quiz competition, Vigyanotsav, will take place. What: IUCAA will host its annual Open Day to celebrate National Science Day, featuring poster and model exhibitions showcasing major science projects. Visitors can enjoy live telescope sessions, aero-modelling demonstrations, and interactive sessions with science scholars and scientists. What: Visitors can tour the observatory, attend the finals of essay and quiz competitions, and enjoy a popular science talk. What: A special Kids' Zone for younger students will be set up. All departments will be open to general visitors and science enthusiasts, offering popular lectures, experiments, demonstrations, poster and quiz contests, as well as insights into ongoing research and technological initiatives.

## 'Democracy cannot function without an Opposition' – In Andhra, YSRCP pitches itself as principal Opposition, disrupts Guv's address



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Stormy scenes were witnessed during Governor S Abdul Nazeer's address to a joint session of the Andhra Pradesh's Legislative Council and Assembly Monday, with YSR Congress Party staging a walkout over not being granted the status of the principal Opposition party. The YSRCP led by former chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy faced a rout in the May 2024 Assembly elections, securing only 11 of 175 seats, down from the 151 that it won in the previous election. According to leaders of the ruling Telugu Desam Party, a political party requires at least 18 members to get the chief Opposition status in the Assembly. A TDP leader also added: "Jagan has not attended even a

single assembly session since his party's defeat". After the YSRCP staged a noisy walkout, leaders of the TDP-led National Democratic Alliance, including Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy CM K Pawan Kalyan, condemned the move.

Reiterating the party's demand, YSRCP leader Botsa Satyanarayana said the party was "the natural choice" of principal Opposition in the Assembly, and accused the coalition government of trying to silence them. Speaking outside the Assembly, Satyanarayana, who is the YSRCP Council leader, said: "We expressed our concern during the Governor's address but there was no response. A democracy cannot function without an Opposition which is the voice of the people". He accused the state government of "targeting" the party, and questioned the government on the drop in the prices of red chillies in the state.

"The (ruling) coalition has been saying that it's speaking with the Centre on the issue of fair prices for red chillies in the state, but what's been the outcome? A positive outcome would be there only by persistent questioning from the Opposition. While our leader (Jagan) visited the Mirchi Yard to interact with the farmers, cases were foisted citing election code." Such issues, he claimed, can only be highlighted by the Opposition. "If the (ruling) coalition is not following the basic democratic norms, people's voice cannot be heard in the full intensity and measure," he claimed.

## Punjab govt directs deputy commissioners to crack down on bribery: 'inspect at least one sub-registrar office daily'

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

In yet another anti-corruption order issued following the AAP's election debacle in Delhi, the Punjab government, led by the party, directed deputy commissioners of all districts on Monday to ensure that sub-registrars do not engage in bribery, by inspecting at least one sub-registrar office every day for a week. The government aims to facilitate the registration of sale deeds in a smooth and corruption-free manner and to gather feedback from the public regarding any instances of bribery. Anurag Verma, Special Chief Secretary, Revenue and Rehabilitation, instructed the deputy commissioners to collect feedback on the functioning of sub-registrars. "Make it clear to them in no uncertain terms that they will have to face severe consequences if any instance of corruption on their part comes to notice," he stated in the order.

Verma's order said the government has a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption. It added that, via notification dated November 25, 2024, from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, certain categories of plots have been allowed to be registered by February 28 without obtaining a no-objection certificate. "However, some complaints have been received regarding some Sub-Registrars/ Joint Sub-Registrars," he wrote. Verma asked the deputy commissioners to hold a special meeting with all sub-registrars and joint sub-registrars in their districts. "Please talk to public representatives in your district and gather feed-



back regarding the functioning of all Sub-Registrars and Joint Sub-Registrars. For the next week, inspect at least one Sub-Registrar or Joint Sub-Registrar office in your district daily and take feedback from the public on whether anyone has asked for a bribe," he wrote. "Similarly, SDMs should be directed to inspect at least one Sub-Registrar or Joint Sub-Registrar office within their jurisdiction daily and take feedback from the public regarding any requests for bribes," the order further stated.

Verma also wrote that any instance of corruption should be immediately reported to the government for stern action, adding that he would review the actions taken in this regard on a daily basis.

## Old Kasara Ghat on Mumbai-Nashik highway closed for repair works; check alternative routes here



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The Old Kasara Ghat section of National Highway No. 3 (Mumbai-Nashik direction) has been closed for repair works between 8 am and 6 pm from February 24 to 27, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)'s project implementation unit in Nashik announced. This section will once again be closed for repair works from March 3 to 6. During these periods, both light and heavy vehicles will be prohibited from crossing this part of the highway. Also, the movement of over-dimensional cargo (ODC) vehicles will be restricted around the clock on the Mumbai-Nashik and Nashik-Mumbai routes. An official from NHAI Nashik said they aim to complete the work this week, eliminating the need for

another traffic block. The repair work involves resurfacing the road with a bitumen layer. To minimise traffic congestion, the state highway police have established alternative routes for public use. Dr Suresh Kumar Mekla, Additional Director General of Police (Traffic), Maharashtra, said all vehicles travelling towards Nashik on National Highway No. 3 will be diverted to the New Kasara Ghat near Chintamanwadi police station between 8 am and 6 pm. ODC vehicles from Nashik to Mumbai will be redirected to National Highway No. 60, which runs from Nashik to Pune, and the Yashwantrao Chavan Mumbai-Pune Expressway. Likewise, ODC vehicles from Mumbai to Nashik will have to use the Yashwantrao Chavan Mumbai-Pune Expressway and National Highway No. 60 from Pune to Nashik. These restrictions will remain in effect until the road repair work is completed. Officials said two cranes with a minimum capacity of 20 tonnes are stationed at key locations to ensure safety during the diversion period. One crane is positioned at the Hotel Kasara Gate, where the diversion begins, and the other is located at Shivneri Point, where the New Kasara Ghat diversion starts. This setup allows for the immediate deployment of a crane to remove any vehicles that break down on either lane and transport them to a safe location, said officials. In the event of an accident, an ambulance equipped with essential staff and first-aid supplies is stationed at Hotel Kasara Gate to transport the injured to the nearest hospital for treatment quickly.

## Man sets cars, bike on fire after woman breaks up with him in Bengaluru

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The police said Rahul believed the parents and brothers of the woman, a final-year undergraduate student, were behind the strain in the relationship. The police said Rahul believed the parents and brothers of the woman, a final-year undergraduate student, were behind the strain in the relationship. A man in Bengaluru Sunday allegedly set fire to three cars and a motorbike that belonged to the family members of a woman he was reportedly in a relationship with after she distanced herself from him.

According to the Bengaluru police, they are yet to arrest the accused, identified as Rahul, a resident of Hanumanthnagar. The police said Rahul, who worked as a cab driver, faces 18 criminal cases, including those of attempted murder, drug peddling, and robbery. A police officer said two of the cars belonged to the woman's parents and the motorbike was owned by her brother. They said Rahul and three of his associates went to the woman's father's house at around 12.30 am on Sunday, and set a car and motorbike on fire. Later, he went to an apartment in Subramanyapura where the woman lives with her mother. The accused allegedly set her mother's car on fire in the basement of the apartment, and another vehicle parked next to that car was also gutted. The police said Rahul believed the parents and brothers of the woman, a final-year undergraduate student, were behind the strain in the relationship. The C K Achchukattu and Subramanyapura police have registered three separate cases. The police have launched a manhunt to nab the accused.

## Decide Engineer Rashid's bail plea expeditiously: Delhi HC to NIA court



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the court hearing cases of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to expeditiously decide the bail plea of jailed J&K MP Abdul Rashid Sheikh alias Engineer Rashid in a terror funding case. Justice Vikas Mahajan said, "The ASJ-03, Patiala House Court is requested to dispose of the bail application of the petitioner expeditiously." The court was dealing with Rashid's plea alleging there was no remedy available after the NIA court, dealing with his bail application, left him in limbo post him becoming member of Parliament (MP). Justice Mahajan observed a direction was passed by the high court on the administrative side clarifying that the NIA court would continue to hear the case. In view of the development, Rashid's counsel sought to withdraw the plea from the high court. The Baramulla MP is facing trial in a terror funding case with the allegations that he funded separatists and terror groups in Jammu and Kashmir. He was elected from the Baramulla constituency in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and has been lodged in Tihar Jail since 2019 after the NIA arrested him under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the 2017 terror-funding case. As an interim relief, Rashid was earlier allowed a two-day custody parole to attend the ongoing Parliament session on February 11 and 13.

## No heatwave alert yet but Mumbai to remain 'hot, humid' in coming days: IMD



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

and Sunday, the IMD's Santacruz observatory recorded a maximum temperature of 37.2 degree Celsius — which was 5.2 degrees above normal. On Saturday and Sunday, the IMD's Santacruz observatory recorded a maximum temperature of 37.2 degree Celsius — which was 5.2 degrees above normal. Even as the temperature in Mumbai crossed 37 degree Celsius for at least three days in a row, officials from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) assuaged concerns regarding a possible heatwave and said the city will continue to experience hot weather in the coming days. On Saturday and Sunday, the IMD's Santacruz observatory recorded a maximum temperature of 37.2 degree Celsius — which was 5.2 degrees above normal. On Friday, the city's maximum temperature stood at 37.3 degree Celsius. Over the past three days, Mumbai's day temperature was higher than February's average maximum temperature of 31.3 degrees. "Mumbai's weather will continue to be hot and humid and we are not issuing any heatwave alert as of now. The temperature has been higher due to the strong easterly presence which is delaying the setting of a sea breeze. This is going to last for at least three more days," Sushma Nair, scientist at IMD, Mumbai, told The Indian Express on Monday. Meanwhile, independent weatherman Rushikesh Agre took to X and posted on his handle Mumbai Rains: "Mumbai & MMR will experience a heatwave for next 48 hours (24-26 Feb), temps soaring to 40-42°C in Kalyan & interiors. Santacruz & Western line at 37°C. South Mumbai 34-36°C. Thane 40°C. Navi Mumbai 40°C." Nair, however, maintained that a heatwave alert is usually issued when two weather stations in a coastal city record a maximum temperature above 37 degree Celsius for two consecutive days. O



## Demand strict punishment for those behind R G Kar incident: Bengal CM Mamata



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

"I extend my condolences to the family of the sister who was killed in RG Kar hospital. We demand proper punishment in this case," Banerjee said. (File photo)"I extend my condolences to the family of the sister who was killed in RG Kar hospital. We demand proper punishment in this case," Banerjee said. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday referred to the murdered woman doctor of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital as her "sister" and extended deepest condolences to the victim's parents. She also demanded strict punishment for those

responsible for the crime. Speaking at a special gathering of senior and junior doctors and medical students at Dhono Dhanyo auditorium in Kolkata, Banerjee highlighted her government's efforts to ensure justice and emphasised the introduction of the Aparajita Bill, which seeks capital punishment for rape convicts. "I extend my condolences to the family of the sister who was killed in RG Kar hospital. We demand proper punishment in this case," Banerjee said. She added, "I had also taken to the streets in protest against the incident. Our government had passed the Aparajita Bill, but it is still pending (with the President)." A 31-year-old junior doctor was raped and killed at the state-run hospital in Kolkata on August 9 last year, triggering national outrage. The Aparajita Woman and Child Bill (West Bengal Criminal Laws and Amendment) Bill, 2024 was unanimously passed by the West Bengal Assembly in September last. The Bill proposes capital punishment for rape convicts if their crime results in the victim's death or leaves her in a vegetative state. "I entrust my brothers with the responsibility of protecting our sisters and preventing such incidents in the future. Today, there is no gender disparity, which is a very positive development. The government will certainly do its part, but I believe you (brothers) can take a proactive role in this matter," she added. Earlier this month, several Trinamool Congress MPs met President Droupadi Murmu to discuss the pending Bill, which was sent to the President's office by Governor CV Ananda Bose.

## Gujarat University to launch 20 UG programmes to offer double degrees to students

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The Ahmedabad-headquartered Gujarat University (GU), the largest and oldest public university in Gujarat, in a major move, announced that it will offer dual degrees to undergraduates. The university has claimed that under this initiative, 20 undergraduate programmes will be launched. GU has 67 departments and offers 152 undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, diploma and certificate programmes. At present, the university has around 15,000 students. With a total of 325 GU-affiliated colleges across Gujarat, the university boasts of faculty members in Arts, Commerce, Science, Education, Medical and Management streams, among others.

The 16-member Executive Council of the GU, in its meeting on Thursday, decided to offer dual degrees in 20 programmes on its campus. Regular students of BA, BCom, BSc, BBA, and BCA can opt for a second undergraduate degree under one of the 20 programmes, as per the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines, and get a dual degree. The programmes will be formally launched from the new academic session 2025-2026. An official announcement by the university is expected in the coming days. The Executive Council will comprise three heads of departments, nominated by the Vice Chancellor (V-C); four principals of affiliated colleges, nominated by the VC; four teachers from affiliated colleges, nominated by the VC; four seniors nominated by the state government; and one representative from the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The council will have the V-C as the chairperson, and the member secretary as its registrar.

What is the aim of the initiative?

Vice Chancellor Neeraj Arun Gupta told The Indian Express that the GU thought of offering double degrees to students to "save time" and reduce "administrative hassles". Authorities revealed that the move also aims at "financial and academic autonomy" and dealing with the cutting-edge competition with foreign universities. "The fee revenues of the university will increase. Also, amid increasing competition from foreign universities, which offer some of these programmes, the move will help retain students at Gujarat University," a university official stated. Two Australian universities have set up their campuses and are offering fintech and cyber security-related programmes at GIFT City in 2024. A British university is scheduled to set up its campus this year. The benefits for students include better preparedness for competition as it offers choice and flexibility for them to choose between offline and online, and vocational and academic courses.

Who can avail it?

In current scenario, students usually opt for a second



degree programme once they graduate from one course as universities cannot offer migration in the middle of a programme. Majorly integrated programmes also result in loss of time for students. After the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, University Grants Commission (UGC) allowed students to pursue two full-time degrees simultaneously, in April 2022. GU has introduced a four-year undergraduate programme in 2024-25 for BBA students at 12 colleges, lateral entry, and multiple exit and entry, among other NEP provisions. On a pilot basis, the provision has been restricted to 10 seats in each of the 20 programmes. For instance, an undergraduate in Sociology can pursue a Yogic Science course and Naturopathy or a student of History can take Heritage as their second degree. Students can study two full-time degrees in offline mode if their class timings don't overlap. They can also opt for offline classes for one full-time degree and online classes for another. Students can pursue up to two online or Open and Distance Learning programmes at the same time.

UGC's ruling to allow students to study two degrees simultaneously is part of an effort, through the NEP 2020, to provide flexible educational options for students. "The second or dual degree programmes will run from the university campus. There is no MoU as all programmes are run by the GU. We have opened departments for undergraduate college students to run bachelor programmes. For instance, Life Sciences and Nutrition programme will be run by Life Science department, Yogic Science and Naturopathy by the Education department, Regulatory and Documentation by medical colleges. We want them (students) to come here (GU campus) to feel the (university) environment," GU V-C Neeraj Arun Gupta said. The V-C said that while the regular courses are majorly run in colleges in morning shifts, these 20 programmes will be run in afternoon shifts. In any case, the NEP has limited study hours for a higher education student to three hours, the V-C pointed out, adding that the NEP also allows universities to offer up to 40% of courses online.

## 'Why opposing bail plea of Christian Michel James now?': Delhi HC asks ED about 'middleman' in AgustaWestland case



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The Delhi High Court Monday asked the Enforcement Directorate why it was opposing the bail plea of Christian Michel James, an alleged middleman in the Rs 3,600-crore AgustaWestland chopper deal, in a case registered by the central agency. The query from Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma came after James told the court that the Supreme Court passed an order granting him bail in the predicate offence lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Last week, the apex court granted him bail in the CBI case on grounds of delay in trial. As the ED requested that the matter be taken up later in the day for its panel counsel to appear before the court, Justice Sharma remarked orally, "Why are you opposing this now?" The court then posted the matter for consideration on Tuesday. James, one of the alleged middlemen in the deal for the purchase of 12 VVIP choppers, was extradited from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2018 to stand trial in the case. He moved the Supreme Court in the CBI case after the Delhi High Court denied him bail on September 25, 2024. The CBI said James was a consultant for AgustaWestland and acted as a middleman negotiating on behalf of the firm. According to the

agency, undue favour was given to AgustaWestland for awarding the contract for procurement of VVIP helicopters in its favour by accepting illegal gratification from it through middlemen. The CBI claimed that James "had been paid a huge bribe amount by M/s AgustaWestland, which was paid to the officers of the Indian Air Force, MOD (Ministry of Defence), bureaucrats, politicians and family in India for showing favour in the VVIP helicopter deal". The ED also booked him on money laundering charges with a complaint lodged against him on July 3, 2014. James was booked under Sections 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13(2) read with Section 13(1)(d) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). He has already been in jail for over six years since December 2018, and the maximum punishment possible in the ED complaint in case of a conviction, is seven years. The ED filed its chargesheet in June 2016, alleging that James received 30 million euros (approximately Rs 225 crore) from AgustaWestland. In September last year, the Delhi High Court had orally remarked that there were "insufficient" reasons to refuse him bail.

## Man summoned for questioning dies after 'torture' at police outpost in UP's Budaun, inquiry ordered

An official in Budaun said that the head constable who is said to have taken the deceased to the outpost has been sent to the police lines. An official said that the head constable who is said to have taken the deceased to the outpost has been sent to the police lines.

## How footwear marks led police to killer of senior citizen at plush apartment



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

In 2015, the Pune police faced a murder case with very little evidence during the early stages of the investigation. However, in a stroke of luck, footwear marks discovered at the crime scene became a vital clue, ultimately guiding the police to the accused and his accomplice. Satishchandra Gopalrao Dravid, 86, was alone in his apartment on the third floor of Lunkad Valencia in Viman Nagar on September 17, 2015, while his family members visited a relative's house for the Ganesh festival celebration.

After some time, the family members tried to contact Dravid multiple times on his cell phone, but there was no response. They returned home around 8 pm, rang the doorbell and knocked on the door repeatedly, but again received no answer. Concerned, they used spare keys to open the door to their apartment. To their shock, they found Dravid lying in a pool of blood. They also discovered that gold ornaments worth Rs 1.3 lakh had been stolen from the house. The family immediately informed the police, who rushed to the spot. The police filed a murder and robbery case at the Vimalant police station, and a team, including sleuths from the crime branch, launched a probe. The police said there were no initial clues at the crime scene except for footwear marks. Investigators questioned around 150 people, including newspaper vendors, plumbers, delivery personnel, and

others whose names were recorded by the security guard at the entrance of the Lunkad Valencia building. However, none of them were found to be connected to the murder.

The police reviewed the CCTV footage recorded at the building. In the video, they saw a laundry man entering the premises. He was identified as Rahul Juggul Vishwakarma, who was 20 years old at the time. However, the police noticed that his name was not recorded in the security guard's register. On September 19, 2015, the police went to his laundry shop. He behaved suspiciously and attempted to flee, but the officers chased and arrested him. During the investigation, the police discovered blood-stained clothing and slippers belonging to him. They said the markings on the slippers matched those found at the crime scene. The police arrested Juggul on charges of murder and robbery. Originally from Uttar Pradesh, he had been living in Pune for the past few years and operated a laundry shop in the Viman Nagar area, according to the police. Investigators discovered that he visited Dravid's house around 4 pm on September 17. According to the police, he murdered the elderly man by assaulting him with an iron chair and a sharp knife and subsequently stole gold ornaments from the house.

The police investigated why his name was not recorded in the security guard's register. The investigation revealed that security guard Girishchandra Mishra, then 26, who had been working at the building for the past three years, was also allegedly involved in the crime. The police arrested Mishra, suspecting that he had provided the assailant with information about Dravid being alone at the house. The police said Mishra was employed by a private security agency operating without the necessary permissions and licences. A separate case was filed against the proprietor of the security agency under sections 406 (criminal breach of trust) and 420 (cheating and dishonesty) of the Indian Penal Code, as well as provisions of the Private Security Agencies (Regulation) Act. A senior police officer part of the investigation team said, "Marks of the footwear of the accused found that murder spot turned out to be an important clue and evidence for solving the case. The matter is currently pending before a court in Pune."

## Police clamp prohibitory orders, deny permission to BJP protest

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Mysuru police denied permission to the BJP to hold a protest against the incident of stone pelting at the Udayagiri police station earlier this month. Mysuru police denied permission to the BJP to hold a protest against the incident of stone pelting at the Udayagiri police station earlier this month, and clamped prohibitory orders in the city ahead of planned demonstrations by various organisations. Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party has approached a court after being denied permission to hold the protest against the incident at the police station. BJP Karnataka president B Y Vijayendra, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka, and other senior leaders are expected to participate in the rally, according to a party office bearer.

Seema Latkar, Commissioner, Mysuru police, announced the restrictions on meetings, rallies, and protests linked to the February 10 violence at the Udayagiri police station. In her order, Latkar said any such events related to the police station incident could disrupt public peace, communal harmony, and law and order. The police said they have imposed the restrictions to prevent potential clashes and maintain stability in the city. The decision follows the Rashtra Suraksha Janandolana Samiti Mysuru's call for a 'Mysuru Chalo' rally from JSS Vidyapeeth Gunhouse to



Kote Anjaneyaswamy Temple, condemning the incident. The Dalit Mahasabha and Mysuru District Youth Congress Committee have planned a counter-event, alleging that the BJP is trying to depict the Muslim community negatively over the Udayagiri violence. On February 11, a mob attacked the Udayagiri police station, demanding that a social media user picked up over a provocative post on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s loss in the recently held Delhi Assembly election be handed over to it. The police said they were forced to resort to a lathi charge after some people pelted stones at the Udayagiri police station. They also arrested several people involved in the stone-pelting.

## Stopped from flashing weapon, 'drunk' NRI 'opens fire' at pre-wedding function in Ludhiana; one injured

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

An NRI allegedly opened fire at a pre-wedding function at Malsian Bajan village of Ludhiana district injuring a guest. The incident happened after the accused was allegedly stopped from flashing his weapon. The condition of the victim, who was in his back near the spinal cord, was stated to be serious. The Ludhiana rural police registered an FIR in the matter at Sidhwan Bet police station. The accused was identified as Jasman Cheena of Kakar Tihara village. The family of the victim alleged that the police delayed the registration of the FIR and consequently the accused managed to return to Canada.

The FIR has been registered on the statement of Manjinder Singh, 26, of Aligarh village of Jagraon. Manjinder stated that he had gone to attend a pre-wedding function of Jaspreet Singh, one of the friends of his brother Harwinder Singh on February 15. He added that he along with his cousin Daljit Singh were sitting on a table and having food. The accused Jasman Cheena, who is known to him, came and sat on the same table. He was allegedly drunk.

The complainant stated that Cheena pulled out a revolver for celebratory firing. "When the accused was flaunting his weapon, I deterred him from doing so and asked him to keep the revolver back in its cover. However, the accused started abusing and threatening me. Sensing the



situation, I decided to leave the function," said the victim. "When I was walking away the accused opened fire targeting me. The bullet hit me on my back near the spinal cord and I fell on the ground. My brother and other guests rushed me to Civil Hospital Jagraon. Sensing my critical condition, the doctors referred me to Dayanand Medical College and Hospital Ludhiana," he added. ASI Sukhmandar Singh, who is investigating the case, said that there was no delay in lodging the FIR. He said that the victim was not medically fit to record his statement for at least six days. On Saturday he recorded his statement after which an FIR was registered against the accused.

## Yellow Ribbon Run on March 2 to raise awareness on Endometriosis

Hyderabad: City-based Endometriosis Foundation of India is conducting the second edition of Yellow Ribbon Run at Jalavihar Necklace Road on Sunday, March 2. The Foundation members on Monday said that the run is aimed at educating women about Endometriosis.

Endometriosis is as common as diabetes and asthma which affects women. It's the most misunderstood, misdiagnosed, unknown, under-funded and under researched health condition which severely affects women's lives mentally, personally and professionally, founder, Endometriosis Foundation of India, Dr. Vimee Bindra, on Monday said. The special run for women on Sunday will see a participation of over 2000 people from all walks of life. The Endometriosis run will have running categories including 10K, 5K and 3K. "The current state of endometriosis care in India is insufficient to address the magnitude of the issue.



The objective of the Yellow Ribbon Run is to create public awareness and urge policy makers to invest in research and development, and ensure partnerships with stakeholders to address Endometriosis," Dr Vimee Bindra said.



## 'Our heritage under threat': As Chandigarh's Rock Garden wall demolished, residents join hands to protest



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Citizens of Chandigarh woke up on Sunday to shocking and distressing visuals of the demolition of a part of the world-famous Rock Garden, with a section of the wall in Phase 3 already damaged and a bulldozer working its way to clear more than 200 old and beautiful trees that were completely cut along the Rock Garden on Saturday night to pave way for road widening for the expansion of the parking at the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

As the photographs circulated widely on social media, concerned citizens, activists, members of the Chandigarh Heritage Committee called for a demonstration in the afternoon at the Rock Garden near high court parking to register a protest and voice the concern: 'Our heritage is under threat. We must act now.' According to Amrita Singh, a designer and resident of Sector 28, who encouraged citizens to come together for the cause, the intent to stand here together was to resist and protect what makes our city unique. "Suddenly this area is unrecognisable without the magnificent trees that lined the wall. This is a huge cost to pay for so-called development. The city is known for its greenery, natural surroundings and the Rock Garden and we are systematically destroying it all. This is home, a place where we have grown up, and we cannot let this happen," shared Singh, who runs regularly in this area.

Senior advocate Mac Sarin, who has been raising constant concerns about the city's heritage being destroyed, wrote on X early morning, expressing how it is a sad day in the history of Chandigarh, apologising to the creator of the Rock Garden Nek Chand for the demolition of a part of his precious creation, and how the people of the city and the Chandigarh Administration have let him down, that too in his birth centenary year. "The world is converting concrete city centres into green areas to have a clean environment but here, we are doing the exact opposite. I am not here as a lawyer but as a citizen. This place is special in so

many ways, all my three children got married here," said Sarin, who also participated at the demonstration. For many regular walkers, who joined the demonstration, the loss of trees is a huge setback for the beauty of the space. A senior lawyer shared that this is notified forest land, and also there is a prohibition of demolition, with no environmental clearance for the cutting of the trees. "They want to cover the entire area up to the start of the Rose Garden into a parking lot. Who has given them the consent? The high court has not ordered it. When there was a plan to build a shed outside courts 2 to 9, the administration objected to it, citing how this was a heritage area, and now it has gone ahead with this. Get shuttle buses for lawyers, and people coming to the high court, improve the public transport, think of ways to decongest," the lawyer said.

Yojana Rawat, general secretary, M N Sharma Architectural Society, shared how Nek Chand and M N Sharma, the first chief architect of Chandigarh, worked closely for this city. "The need of the hour is to form a save Chandigarh society, that can take up issues of conservation and preservation of heritage of this city. Why can't they make multi-level parking instead of destroying our precious symbols of the city," added Rawat, an academican. Robin Nakai, a resident of Chandigarh and a friend of Nek Chand, also condemned the demolition. "My wife and I used to come to Rock Garden during our college days. This is where our love story started, and we got married. This is like watching our love story being demolished," he said.

Samita Kaur added how noise and vehicular pollution are rising due to the thoughtless cutting of trees, which act as natural barriers to pollution. Justice S Sodhi added that he is shocked at the fact that the beautiful creation of Nek Chand is being bulldozed. "Chandigarh and Rock Garden are synonymous to each other," he added. Paveela Bali, an environmentalist added that the Administration is in the hands of people who are not aware of the history of Chandigarh. Deepika Gandhi, architect and former director of the Le Corbusier Centre, added that this is a reflection of the growing insensitivity of decision-makers towards the very ethos of the city. "Chandigarh is at a major crossroads with the powers that be challenging its heritage status just for short-sighted goals. The citizens have to come together to save the city before irreparable damage is done. The fact is that Rock Garden does not come under any heritage regulations in terms of its growth and development. It comes under the General Zone 1 of heritage areas but there is no specific legislative protection of Rock Garden. Dr B N Goswamy kept pushing for this till the last meeting," Gandhi said.

## Myanmar, Manipur, and strained borders



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Northeast India has experienced prolonged spells of insurgency. However, over the past few decades, large parts of the region have remained free of insurgencies. This relative peace has allowed for the operationalisation of massive infrastructure projects. But, as the violence in Manipur attests, the gains made are experiencing increasing stress because of the political developments in Myanmar. The military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 has encountered widespread disapproval from the people of that country. The civil disobedience movement against military rule subsequently evolved into armed resistance by the People's Defence Forces (PDFs). The coordinated attacks by the PDFs and the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) pushed the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) to cede control over large parts of the country. In a futile attempt to regain territory, the Tatmadaw resorted to indiscriminate use of force. There were instances when civilian areas were subjected to aerial and artillery bombardment by the Tatmadaw. The Sagaing Region, Chin and Kachin States — bordering Northeast India — often witnessed heavy fighting between resistance forces and the Tatmadaw.

Movement of refugees In Northeast India, there are many ethnic groups, such as the Mizo-Chin-Kuki, that inhabit both sides of the India-Myanmar border and share strong community and familial ties. Recognising these ethnic interactions, the governments of both countries instituted a Free Movement Regime (FMR) after Independence, for people living within 40 kilometre on either side of the India-Burma border, which was subsequently reduced to 16 km. The FMR allowed people in the designated areas to move across the border without being subjected to cumbersome paperwork such as visas. Additionally, a wide range of economic activities, such as Border haats were established to encourage local cross-border trade and promote livelihoods.

However, these attempts to convert border zones into launch pads of economic engagement received a setback after the recent violent conflict in Myanmar, which resulted in a large-scale refugee movement into India. The movement of refugees has negatively impacted India's border management strategies. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates, as of December 31, 2024, approximately 95,600 refugees from Myanmar had moved into India. Of these, about 73,400 refugees reportedly reached India after the recent military coup. However, given the porous border, it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of Myanmar refugees in India. The influx of Myanmar refugees has generated diverse responses in India's Northeastern States. In Mizoram, vari-

ous civil society organisations and the State government have shown considerable empathy for the refugees due to their shared ethnic identity.

On the other hand, in Manipur, there are concerns that the influx of refugees is disturbing the fragile ethnic balance and has become an important variable in the Meitei-Kuki conflict. Responding to such concerns, last year, the Union Home Minister announced that the FMR would be abolished to maintain internal security and "to maintain the demographic structure of India's Northeastern States bordering Myanmar." However, it is not certain if India's Ministry of External Affairs has formally communicated to its Myanmar counterpart about the withdrawal from the Agreement on the Land Border Crossing. Meanwhile, in December 2024, a new framework was operationalised, which would allow people living within 10 km of the border, including in Manipur, to cross the India-Myanmar border with a permit at designated entry/exit points. Rather than expanding the FMR to facilitate greater economic engagement between India's Northeast and Myanmar, it is being increasingly constricted. Moreh in Manipur, once a bustling border trade town, has borne the brunt of recent violent developments. The decline in the border trade meant that Moreh's emergence as India's gateway to Southeast Asia may not materialise anytime soon. Plans to improve the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway have also taken a back seat. Along with India, China is also experiencing negative spillovers due to political instability in Myanmar. To prevent the unauthorised movement of people, China has fenced a few critical sections of its border with Myanmar. Beijing has strong relations with some EAOs in Myanmar and deployed them to tackle the criminal/drug syndicates operating from there. China deploys considerable economic resources and is a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which gives it greater space to engage with diverse actors in Myanmar with relative ease. Unlike China, India is not a member of the UNSC and must operate within the liberal democratic framework. Yet, India must craft a more calibrated and comprehensive response to developments in Myanmar lest Manipur will continue to fester. To ensure peace in the region, the consolidation of unhealthy relationships between Indian insurgent groups and armed groups across the border needs to be arrested. Therefore, it becomes imperative to engage various ethnic organisations in Myanmar. There is also an urgent need to provide increased humanitarian relief and, in the long run, develop health care and educational infrastructure in Myanmar near the border with Manipur and Mizoram in India. These measures would ensure that the population seeking basic needs does not have to make strenuous efforts to enter India. Further, India, in collaboration with select neighbours of Myanmar, must nudge all the stakeholders in that country to move towards a more federal democratic polity. With political uncertainty in Bangladesh and the civil war in Myanmar, the prospect of Northeast India's enhanced external economic engagement is dim at the moment. Therefore, the Indian government will have to spend more resources to maintain economic growth in the region. Despite the current security situation along the borders, including in Manipur, the long-term objective of border management practices in Northeast India should be to increase economic interactions with Southeast Asian countries. The policy framework should be geared to achieve such an objective at the first available opportunity.

## Progressive farmer, only one from Punjab, to get Innovative Farmer Award today

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Feted by the then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi for low-tunnel vegetable and mushroom cultivation in 2013-14, progressive farmer Karnail Singh from Ghatia Wali Bodla village in Fazilka district will Monday receive the prestigious "Innovative Farmer Award" by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), commonly known as Pusa Institute. Singh is the only farmer from Punjab to be honoured with this prestigious award, following a recommendation by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Fazilka-Abohar. "I have studied up to class 12 but I guide youngsters to pursue BSc (agriculture). They can use that education in the fields or they can get good jobs in the field of agriculture. One of my nephews is now professor at Punjab Agricultural University after doing PhD and another is in second year of BSc. Unless and until we do not upgrade our knowledge, we can't make agriculture profitable. Doing farming is also a science. Therefore, farmers need to use that knowledge while doing farming," he said. Innovation and contributions in agriculture



or goushalas as cattle feed."

In addition to traditional farming, he has made contributions to fish farming as he has a fish pond as well, said Dr Arvind Ahlawat, head of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Fazilka. Actively involved in farmer awareness programs, Singh has educated over 700 farmers on modern agricultural techniques. Singh said, "I am so busy in farming that I have no time to go to dharnas. I eat whatever I grow — fruits, vegetables, spices, wheat and rice. So, I believe in self-sustaining farming and later marketing it outside. I am doing everything myself and I feel that education helps a lot in upgrading knowledge to increase income in agriculture." Singh played a key role in establishing the "KVK CIPHET Farmers' Club at Fazilka, where he educates farmers about new agricultural technologies, organic farming, water conservation, and the use of high-yield seeds. Under his guidance, numerous farmers have adopted advanced techniques, leading to increased agricultural productivity and income, said Dr Ahlawat. He congratulated Singh on being selected for the Innovative Farmer Award. A total of 34 farmers from the country will be honoured at this event, with Singh being the sole recipient from Punjab, Ahlawat added.

## Engineering medicine: The future of CAR-T and CRISPR technologies

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The fourth industrial revolution marked by the fusion of technologies is blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological worlds. And it is at this intersection that the future of medicine is being written, with innovations like CRISPR and CAR-T therapy unlocking the potential to not only treat diseases but cure them. From editing the human genome to reprogramming immune cells to fight cancer, these approaches promise to transform healthcare as we know it. But as we stand on the brink of this new era, the question is no longer if these technologies will change lives — but how they will reshape the framework of human biology, ethics, and society itself. In 2012, Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier published their groundbreaking work, revealing that CRISPR/Cas9 could be re-engineered as a gene-editing tool. They won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for this, in 2020. On December 8, 2023, the United States' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved of a gene therapy treatment for transfusion dependent beta-thalassemia and sickle cell anaemia (SCA) patients — a decision that will revolutionise medicine and change countless lives. Yet, I find myself grappling with mixed emotions. While technology and medicine have always been intertwined, never have we imagined breathing life into extinct creatures or mending/tailoring our genes, ideas nothing short of science fiction. Casgevy and Lyfgenia, the two cell-based gene therapies approved by the FDA, utilise the CRISPR/Cas9 genome editing technology. Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) / CRISPR-associated protein 9 (Cas 9) evolved naturally as a defence mechanism in bacteria and archaea. It was first reported in E. Coli in 1987 by Ishino et al. In a nutshell, the system serves as a genetic memory for past infections by incorporating a part of the viral genetic material into its own, so that the next time it is invaded, the bacteria is capable of recognising the virus and destroying it. The bacteria, in short, has developed an immunisation mechanism to ward off unwanted viral invaders. The CRISPR system is easy to manipulate. Researchers have adapted it as a tool to cut, delete, or add DNA sequences at precise locations opening doors to treating genetic disorders, in diagnostics, creating disease/drought resistant plants, or in de-extinction projects involving the woolly mammoth and the dodo. The progress in CRISPR has been rapid. In only a decade since its discovery, we now have a technology with the potential to rewrite genetic code. As exciting as the prospect is, conversations around ethical, societal and safety issues must progress parallelly. Ethical considerations A siren rang across the scientific world in 2018, when Chinese scientist He Jiankui announced he had altered a gene in three human embryos to render resistance to HIV. He was imprisoned for three years in 2019 by a court in China. The scientific community also condemned his actions, and this self-regulation was crucial as it was a clear violation of guidelines that banned germline editing. But nonetheless "designer babies" became a reality. The sole purpose of Jiankui and his team experimenting with the embryos was to monitor the evolution of two babies, as the genetic intervention was different for each embryo. The idea of such tools in the hands of scientists like Jiankui is terrifying. In an article, Françoise Baylis, a bioethicist at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, rightly pointed out "There is a difference be-



tween making people better and making better people." There is also concern amongst the public that the wealthy will exploit this technology for genetic enhancement. While CRISPR, right now, is being used to treat monogenic disorders, it is capable of altering multiple genes. Admittedly however, factors like intelligence are complex traits influenced by many genes and the environment, making it difficult to tailor. In addition, CRISPR has also got its own safety problems, such as off-targeting, that aren't fully understood yet. While there is a consensus within the scientific community to use CRISPR for therapeutic purposes, incidents like the Chinese case are always possibilities. And so, when benefits outweigh the risks where will scientists draw the line? Is it ethical to perform germline editing, even for the purpose of treating diseases? When it comes to human embryos, we face numerous unresolved moral questions and have much to learn about what is right and wrong in this rapidly evolving field. For many in the disabled community, their genetic anomalies are part of their identities. This raises important questions about the intersection of ableism and CRISPR, particularly regarding the potential implications of societal attitudes towards disability as genetic technologies become common. While most would choose gene therapies, there is a concern that such emerging technologies could reinforce the notion that disability is an abnormality rather than a natural aspect of human diversity. This makes it necessary to include disabled voices in discussions from the beginning, prior to clinical applications, and at the policy-making level. Another factor is the exorbitant price of such technologies. Casgevy costs around \$2.2 million. Sickle Cell Anaemia (SCA) is mostly seen in certain ethnic groups including people of African, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern descent. In India, SCA is relatively higher in tribal communities. Many people from these groups are economically disadvantaged and find it difficult to afford even primary healthcare. Indian researchers are working towards building a cost-effective treatment with CRISPR. But we are talking about a huge leap from basic-hydroxyurea - first line treatment in India to CRISPR, an advanced tool requiring skilled experts. With CRISPR in the market, it is of paramount importance to first initiate dialogues on health equity. According to fundamental cause theory, health disparities persist because advancements in medicine tend to benefit the more advantaged segments of society, leaving disadvantaged groups with less access to new interventions. As seen during events like the COVID-19 pandemic, those with higher social status — who have more resources — can access healthcare more readily than minority populations, who often face barriers in obtaining similar benefits.

## Number of Internet shutdowns highest in 2024 globally, India tops in govt-ordered curbs

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

India did not impose the highest number of Internet shutdowns last year, with Myanmar seeing one additional disruption in 2024, according to a report by advocacy body Access Now. However, the number of shutdowns imposed by the government in charge — the Union and State Governments here, and the military junta in Myanmar — is still higher in India. Fewer shutdowns happened in India in 2024 than the previous year. "People in 16 States and [Union] Territories experienced a shutdown, with State Government officials in Manipur (21), Haryana (12), and Jammu & Kashmir (12) topping the list of offenders in India," the report said. "Of the 84, 41 shutdowns were related to protests, and 23 were related to communal violence." More shutdowns happened globally in 2024 than in any past year.



296 Internet shutdowns happened globally in 2024, the report found, and India's cumulative 84 curbs accounted for 28% of these. 85 were imposed in Myanmar, and 11 of these were a result of other countries and groups: "China imposed two [shutdowns on areas in Myanmar] and Thailand four, while the exiled National Unity Government (NUG), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) imposed one shutdown each in areas they controlled. The remaining two shutdowns were imposed by unknown parties," the report said. A particular focus of anti-shutdown advocates' ire has been examination-related shutdowns. India imposed five such shutdowns ahead of key exams in 2024. One was during the General Graduate Level Com-

petitive Examinations in Jharkhand, which took place for a five-and-a-half hour period from September 22 morning through the afternoon. That same month, Assam also imposed similar shutdowns in most districts for government job exams. Rajasthan issued a shutdown for the Rajasthan Public Service Commission exam in January. Exam related Internet shutdowns are a disproportionate response to the possibility of cheating in exams, Access Now said.



## Foreign leaders visit Ukraine to show their support on war's third anniversary



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

A dozen leaders from Europe and Canada visited Ukraine's capital on Monday (February 24, 2025) to mark the third anniversary of Russia's invasion in a show of support for Kyiv by some of the nation at war's most important backers. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau were among the visitors greeted at the train station by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and the president's chief of staff Andrii Yermak. In a post on X, Ms. von der Leyen wrote that Europe was in Kyiv "because Ukraine is in Europe". "In this fight for survival, it is not only the destiny of Ukraine that is at stake. It's Europe's destiny," she wrote.

The guests, also including European Council President Antonio Costa as well as the Prime Ministers of Northern European countries and Spain, were set to attend events dedicated to the anniversary and discuss supporting Ukraine with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy amid a recent US policy shift under President Donald Trump. In the latest sign of Europe's efforts to rework its strategy on Ukraine to respond to Trump's actions, Costa on Sunday announced that he would convene an emergency summit of the 27 EU leaders in Brussels on March 6, with Ukraine at the top of the agenda. "We are living a defining moment for Ukraine and European security," Costa said in a post on social media.

The three-year mark of the war in Ukraine came at a sensitive moment for Kyiv as Mr. Zelenskyy navigates a rapidly changing international environment upended by Mr. Trump's changes to the U.S. approach to the war. The U.S. leader has sought to follow through on his campaign promises to end the war quickly, though his methods for doing so have alarmed many in Ukraine and Europe who believe that his approach is too conciliatory toward Russia and its President, Vladimir Putin. Russia's foreign ministry said on Saturday (February 22, 2025) that preparations for a face-to-face meeting between Trump and Putin were underway, and US officials have said that they had agreed with Moscow to reestablish diplomatic ties and restart economic cooperation. And on Sunday (February 23, 2025), Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the state TASS news agency that Moscow and Washington would continue bilateral talks at the end of next week, adding that "quite a lot" of contact was ongoing between the Russian and Ameri-

can sides. Leaders across the EU, fearing both that Trump's approach to Ukraine would lead to an unfavorable settlement for Kyiv and that they — among Ukraine's most important supporters — would be sidelined in negotiation for peace, have rushed to assert their own response to the rapidly shifting environment. The EU's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, insisted on Monday that the US cannot seal any peace deal to end the war without Ukraine or Europe being involved. She highlighted what she claimed were pro-Russian positions being taken up by the Trump administration. "You can discuss whatever you want with Putin. But if it comes to Europe or Ukraine, then Ukraine and Europe also have to agree to this deal," Kallas told reporters in Brussels, where she is chairing a meeting of EU foreign ministers. Kallas travels to Washington on Tuesday for talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Asked whether the US administration is acting in the interests of Russia or Ukraine's Western backers, she said: "If you look at the messages that come from the United States, then it's clear that the Russian narrative is there very strongly represented." Kallas rejected Trump's earlier inflammatory assertion that Zelenskyy was a dictator for not having held elections after his regular term expired last year, saying, "Russia hasn't had elections in 25 years." Ukrainian law prohibits elections being held while martial law is in place, and Zelenskyy said as recently as Sunday that after martial law is lifted "there will be elections and people will make their choice". Coming off a victory in Sunday's German elections, conservative leader Friedrich Merz — also a staunch backer of Ukraine — posted on X Monday: "More than ever, we must put Ukraine in a position of strength." "For a fair peace, the country that is under attack must be part of peace negotiations," Merz wrote.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in a video message, parts of which were being aired on Ukrainian television, that "peace and freedom in Europe demand of us that we support Ukraine resolutely," and said Germany would not ease up on its humanitarian and military support for Kyiv for "as long as this illegal war lasts". The UK was expected to announce new sanctions against Russia on Monday, having earlier described them as the biggest package since the early days of the war. Foreign Secretary David Lammy on Sunday said the measures would be aimed at eroding Russia's "military machine and reducing revenues fuelling the fires of destruction in Ukraine". British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron were to both visit Washington this week as Europe attempts to persuade Trump not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal. Meanwhile, Ukrainian air defenses downed 113 drones launched by Russia at 12 regions overnight with another 71 "lost" according to the daily air force report. The report said that as a result of the attack, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Kyiv, and Khmelnytskyi regions "suffered", but did not provide further details. On Sunday, the eve of the war's three-year anniversary, Zelenskyy said Russia had launched 267 drones into Ukraine overnight, more than in any other single attack of the war. (AP) PY PY

## Trump shakes trans-atlantic alliance with Russia pivot; Europe in shock

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Donald Trump's sudden shift on Ukraine has shaken the transatlantic alliance to its core. Now European leaders are crossing that same ocean in a desperate bid to shore it up. French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will meet Mr. Trump separately at the White House this week to try to convince him to stick by Kyiv. But fears are growing in European capitals that the bond forged from the ruins of Second World War is on the verge of collapse as Mr. Trump pursues talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In Mr. Trump, many see a President who has abandoned the traditional U.S. view of a rules-based world order in favour of a nationalist, great power game with Moscow and Beijing. That has caused panic on a continent that has relied on U.S. security assurance for 80 years. "The Europeans are running around with their hair on fire," Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia programme at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said.

For his part, Mr. Trump insists that he is just seeking peace in Ukraine. "I think that President Putin and President Zelenskyy are going to have to get together. Because you know what? We want to stop killing millions of people," Mr. Trump told presspersons in the Oval Office on Friday, February 21, 2025. But Mr. Trump's embrace of Kremlin talking points on Ukraine — calling President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "dictator without elections" and blaming Ukraine for Russia's 2022 invasion — has caused alarm in Europe.

It has also reinforced suspicions that Mr. Trump is effectively pulling the plug on decades of U.S. support for Europe. In Mr. Trump's view, European officials fear, the United States, Russia and China will instead look after their own spheres of influence closer to home. "You know, it doesn't affect the United States very much. It's on the other side of the ocean," Mr. Trump added on Friday (February 21, 2025) about the Ukraine war. Even in his first term he threatened to pull out of the NATO military alliance and questioned why the United States spends huge amounts on keeping troops in Europe. Mr. Trump's meetings with Mr. Macron on Monday (February 24, 2025) and Mr. Starmer on Thursday (February 27, 2025) could therefore be testy. Mr. Macron said he would tell Mr. Trump not to be "weak" on Ukraine. Britain and France have both offered to send peacekeepers in the event of a deal to end the war, but Mr. Starmer has pushed for a U.S. "backstop". Mr. Trump for his part accused both leaders of doing "nothing" to end the Ukraine war over the past three years. "Dangerous moment"

Many Europeans are also realising that the writing could be on the wall. "We experience now quite a difficult and very dangerous moment when both parts of the transatlantic community, so to say, are getting more and more away from each other," Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) near Washington. For Nigel Gould-Davies, Senior Fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, it was an "unprecedented transatlantic crisis." "By negotiating with Russia over European heads and intervening in European politics, the United States is not only decoupling from, but deciding for and disrupting Europe," he said in a commentary.

The question now is whether Europe — after years of talking about how they need to take more responsibility for their security umbrella in case of a rainy day — will do so now that day has come. Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said on Wednesday (February 19, 2025) that Europe "has to do much more in order to defend ourselves, but also in order to support Ukraine. Because we are in a

very, very critical period in world history." The European Union's top diplomat Kaja Kallas on Tuesday (February 18, 2025) separately urged the United States not to walk into "traps" set by Russia as it attempts to divide the West. But for analyst Mr. Bergmann, it could also be a wake-up call for Europe. "I think what is being asked of Europe now is not just to simply do a bit more — but is for Europe to effectively take actions that would make it emerge, frankly, as a superpower," he said.

## Pope Francis health update: Resting on 10th day of hospitalisation after early stages of kidney insufficiency detected says Vatican

Pope Francis was resting on Monday (February 24, 2025) morning after a quiet night, on the 10th day of his hospitalisation for a complex lung infection that has provoked the early stages of kidney insufficiency, the Vatican said. The one-line statement didn't say if Francis, 88, had woken up. "The night passed well, the pope slept and is resting," it said.

Late Sunday, doctors reported that blood tests showed "early, slight kidney insufficiency" that was nevertheless under control. They said the Pope remained in critical condition but that he hadn't experienced any further respiratory crises since Saturday. He was receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen and, on Sunday, was alert, responsive and attended Mass. They said his prognosis was guarded. Doctors have said the Pope's condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. They have warned that the main threat facing the Pope is sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of pneumonia. To date there has been no reference to any onset of sepsis in the medical updates provided by the Vatican, including on Sunday. Monday marks the Pope's 10th day in the hospital, making this equal to the longest hospitalisation of his papacy. He spent 10 days at Rome's Gemelli hospital in 2021 after he had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed. In New York on Sunday, Cardinal Timothy Dolan acknowledged what church leaders in Rome weren't saying publicly: that the Catholic faithful were united "at the bedside of a dying father." "As our Holy Father Pope Francis is in very, very fragile health, and probably close to death," Cardinal Dolan said in his homily from the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral, though he later told reporters he hoped and prayed that the Pope would "bounce back."

## Infosys denies using intimidation tactics on Mysuru campus



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

IT services company Infosys on Wednesday said it did not use force or intimidation tactics when it laid off trainees at Mysuru campus over performance-related issues, and that it was explaining the circumstances to the labour department authorities. In an interview to PTI, Shaji Mathew, Chief Human Resources Officer at Infosys, however, conceded that assessment failure percentages this time around have been "slightly higher" than in the past but dismissed charges that the tests had been designed for failure. On whether the lay-offs would dent Infosys' brand as the company goes out to campuses for FY26 hiring, he said plans to hire 20,000 freshers for next fiscal are on track and that they should have nothing to worry about as they will get one of the best corporate training. Responding to allegations that testing parameters, assessment criteria and syllabus were altered and intimidation tactics were resorted leading

to the 300 plus terminations at Mysuru campus recently, Mr. Mathew said given the company invests money and effort to select and put trainees through the training programme "it is in the interest of Infosys to see that all these people are successful, and that is when we are able to put them into our projects".

On the Labour Ministry's direction to Karnataka State Labour Department to take action, and reports that department officials had followed up with visits to Infosys campuses in Bengaluru and Mysuru, Mr. Mathew said the Labour Department is in touch with the company and Infosys is cooperating with the authorities. Asked if reinstating trainees would be considered he said, "There has been no further ask in terms of taking them back". Mr. Mathew countered allegations claiming that at no point were 'bouncers' brought in, nor were intimidation tactics used. The Indian IT sector, long synonymous with large-scale hiring, is recalibrating with multiple headwinds reshaping its trajectory, industry experts said. V. Balakrishnan, former CFO Infosys and current chairman, Exfinity, a B2B-focused fund said economic headwinds include slowing global demand, shrinking profit margins and rapid AI adoption. "As the correlation between headcount and revenue weakens, the era of large-scale hiring and maintaining extensive talent benches is becoming obsolete. The new paradigm will be defined by just-in-time hiring, selective recruitment of high-end talent, and aggressive up-skilling of the workforce," he said. The lay-offs in the sector had caused a fear psychosis in the hiring market, said Kapil Joshi, CEO, Quess IT Staffing.

## AI remains underutilised as few possess a deep understanding: Ness Digital CEO

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

While artificial intelligence (AI) has been a buzzword across industries, companies worldwide have yet to harness the full potential, says Ranjit Tinaikar, CEO of Ness Digital Engineering. Speaking to The Hindu during his visit to Mumbai, the New York-based tech leader stressed that leaders must first grasp the concept of AI to effectively guide their organisations through the transformative journey it entails. "This journey is about re-skilling people," Mr. Tinaikar said. He predicted that the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector would face significant disruption due to AI, with jobs in the 'vanilla BPO world' likely to be impacted the fastest. However, he framed this disruption as an opportunity for adaptation.

"The disruption would be the highest there. But a disruption also creates the biggest opportunities. I won't frame it as the BPO world losing jobs; I would say it will need to adapt the first and the fastest," Mr. Tinaikar explained. He suggested that AI could help BPOs generate more revenue or reduce service costs by leveraging data-driven use cases, even with fewer employees. "Right now, companies make money based on how many calls their agents handle, but AI will change that. The knowledge contained in those calls is valuable. If AI can process and analyse this data, firms can generate more revenue for their clients or reduce service costs. So, while the number of employees may decline, revenue per employee will increase. The revenue per Full-time Equivalent (FTE) will change," he explained.

Mr. Tinaikar believes that over the past three years, companies have primarily focused on proof-of-concept projects and small-scale trials rather than leveraging AI to its full potential. "I don't think I have come across anybody who has taken AI programmatically to transform a part of the business, except the AI companies. A reasoning being financial risk and the risk of new things," he said. Mr. Tinaikar observed that most organisations prefer to follow rather than innovate. "Most people are better at fast following than innovation. Once one or two things kick in, then everybody will follow. Most people don't want to be on the bleeding edge of innovation," he said. He warned that incumbents in various industries would eventually face challenges as AI disrupts their business models. "CEOs talk about AI transforming the world, but they don't want it disrupting their own businesses. It's only the attackers who create innovation. Eventually, large companies will either acquire these challengers or restructure their businesses to adapt." According to Mr. Tinaikar, AI will significantly raise the bar for what is considered expertise. "Much of what we call expertise today is actually routine knowledge. AI is exceptionally good at making implicit knowledge explicit. Take cricket, for example. When Rohit Sharma hits a six in half a microsecond, that's implicit knowledge. But if AI can analyse the mathematics behind that shot, it can program a robot to hit the same shot perfectly every time, reducing the power of the expert," he said.

This ability to codify expertise will change the workplace, he said. "Experts have two choices—accept that their



knowledge is now less exclusive, or relearn or go deeper into the expertise area, or go to a new area of expertise or adjacencies. The latter is the optimistic view, and it's happening at an accelerated pace," he said. Regarding concerns that employees might share classified company data with AI tools like ChatGPT or DeepSeek, he said, "Each organisation has to decide what is the right way to employ AI and set a policy. For example, one of my clients said they will not use anything on DeepSeek because they don't trust Chinese. That's their policy. Depending on who you are and what the use cases are, you should have very explicit policies. It is just like, a gun can be used for attack or defence. How you use it is important, not the gun itself," he said.

Jobs won't disappear, but work will change. On the debate about AI replacing jobs, Mr. Tinaikar said that AI won't necessarily eliminate jobs but will change how work is done. "It's a myth that AI will take jobs away. Instead, it will create more projects and opportunities. Right now, every software platform operates on a simple principle—business rules are automated based on data in a database. AI adds a third layer where business rules themselves change dynamically based on new data. This means companies will have more projects, requiring more people, even if each project itself becomes more efficient." Addressing concerns about AI ethics, bias, and data privacy, he said the industry is still in uncharted territory. "It's like the Wild West right now. Some platforms promise 'ethical AI' by preventing hallucinations and ensuring AI systems don't provide misleading information. But the broader question is: How will AI impact organisations and society?"

For example, AI could allow senior professionals to spend less time coding and more time mentoring juniors. However, this could also mean fewer jobs for entry-level workers. These are ethical dilemmas we will need to navigate carefully. "He stressed that senior leaders must act as watchdogs to prevent AI misuse. "AI is a powerful tool, but how we use it will determine whether it helps or harms industries and workers. Leaders need to ensure that AI implementation is responsible, ethical, and beneficial to both businesses and employees."

## A cartoon that landed the Editor of Ananda Vikatan in jail 38 years ago

When the March 29, 1987 issue of the popular Tamil magazine Ananda Vikatan hit the stands two days earlier, it created a stir in Tamil Nadu. On its cover page was a cartoon showing the dais of a public meeting. In the forefront, two persons were shown seated prominently in front of the mike. Behind them were two others seated less prominently with a police constable standing in between. The caption read: "Of the two persons on the stage, who is the MLA and who is the Minister?" The response was: "The person who looks like a pick-pocket is the MLA and the person who looks like a masked dacoit is the Minister...!"

'MLAs ridiculed'

The Assembly was in session. On March 28, N.S.V. Chitthan, a legislator, flagged the cartoon in the House alleging that it ridiculed the members of the legislature by describing them as anti-social elements. Speaker P.H. Pandian condemned the cartoon and said it was derogatory and calculated to damage the reputation of the legislators in general and the Ministers in particular. Holding that the reputation of the MLAs had been injured by the cartoon, he ordered Ananda Vikatan to publish a front page apology, failing which summary sentence would be passed in the House. He also communicated this to S. Balasubramanian, the Editor of the magazine. Balasubramanian sent to the Speaker a copy of an article on the subject to be published in the next issue of the magazine dated April 5, 1987. The article said the caricature was an offenceless joke with no one in mind. Besides, the Minister or the MLA referred to need not be taken as belonging particularly to Tamil Nadu.

Be it Rajiv or Reagan, in cartoons or titbits, they would be shown to converse only in Tamil in a Tamil magazine, it said. Two alternatives

Balasubramanian also expressed surprise at the Speaker instantly delivering a judgment finding him guilty of an offence against the House and threatening him with the punishment without an opportunity to explain the charge proposed to be levelled against him. He said he was given only two alternatives: apologise by accepting the offence or be punished without an inquiry or adjudication. He pointed out that in cases of breach of privilege, the Assembly should decide by means of a resolution and the Speaker should not unilaterally impose punishments. Later, the Speaker ruled that since Balasubramanian failed to apologise, he had committed a breach of privilege of the House, and therefore he must be arrested and detained in the Central Prison for three months to undergo rigorous imprisonment. The House passed the resolution, with some members walking out. Balasubramanian was arrested at his farmhouse at Padappai and jailed on April 4. His wife moved the Supreme Court challenging his detention, and a Special Bench was constituted. Meanwhile, Pandian said that at the request of Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, in exercise of the residuary powers conferred on the Speaker by the House, he was ordering the release of Balasubramanian. He walked out of jail on April 6. Consequently, the Supreme Court closed the proceedings in the matter. However, upon his release, Balasubramanian filed two writ petitions before the Madras High Court.



## India to face US pressure to reduce tariffs on agri products in trade deal negotiations

While New Delhi is considering a range of items for tariff reductions on US products, Washington, DC is particularly keen on exporting more agricultural goods to India and is seeking a reduction in tariffs in this traditionally high-protection sector. Discussions on agricultural tariffs are set to arise during negotiations for the India-US bilateral trade agreement. Early indications suggest that agricultural exports are an "offensive interest" of the new Donald Trump administration, which is looking to boost US exports, a person aware of the development said.

The American farming community in mid-Western states has been a key voter base for Trump since 2016. In the recent election, he managed to increase his support among farming-dependent counties, with more than 100 of agri-focused counties backing him with at least 80 per cent of their vote, according to an Investigate Midwest report. Even as India lowered its basic customs duty on a range of items in the Union Budget, a White House statement on reciprocal tariffs earlier this month pointed out that Indian tariffs on agricultural goods remain significantly higher than those imposed by the US on Indian products.

"The US average applied Most Favoured Nation (MFN) tariff on agricultural goods is 5 per cent, while India's average applied MFN tariff is 39 per cent," the White House said. However, government officials hope that lowering tariffs on agricultural goods will increase overall trade in agricultural products and could help Indian agricultural exports gain better market access in the US. India primarily exports basmati rice, spices, cereals, dairy, and poultry products to the US. "Both sides are exploring ways in which trade in agricultural items can grow. India exports around \$4 million worth of agricultural products to the US every year, and there will be opportunities for growth in Indian agricultural exports as well," an official said. Agricultural goods receive high protection in India and have largely remained outside trade agreements, even with countries that traditionally insist on market access for agriculture, such as Australia. Trade experts noted that due to high tariffs on Indian agricultural goods, the sector is also vulnerable to reciprocal tariffs that the US plans to introduce in April.

Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), in a note on Friday, stated that the hardest-hit sector due to US reciprocal tariffs will be fish, meat, and processed seafood, with \$2.58 billion in exports facing a 27.83 per cent tariff differential. In trade parlance, tariff differential refers to the difference in tariff rates applied to Indian exports compared to other countries or product categories. "Shrimp, a major export, will become significantly less competitive. Processed food, sugar, and cocoa exports worth \$1.03 billion will also struggle with a 24.99 per cent tariff increase, making Indian snacks and confectionery pricier in the US," GTRI said. "Edible oils, with \$199.75 million in exports, face a 10.67



per cent tariff, increasing costs for coconut and mustard oil. Alcohol, wines, and spirits face the highest tariff hike at 122.10 per cent, though exports are only \$19.20 million," the note said.

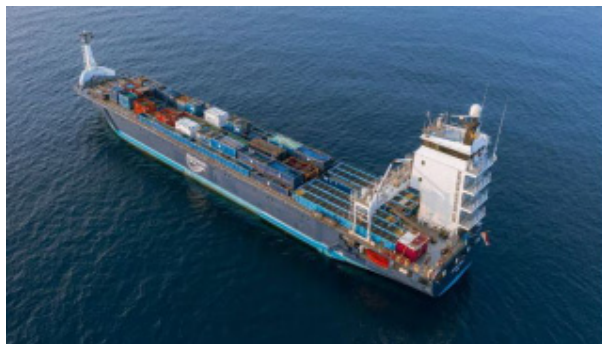
Live animals and animal products face a 27.75 per cent tariff differential on \$10.31 million in exports. Tobacco and cigarettes, valued at \$94.62 million, will remain unaffected, as the US already imposes 201.15 per cent tariffs, creating a negative tariff differential (-168.15 per cent), it added. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), signed during Donald Trump's first term, replaced the earlier North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to improve market access for US agricultural products. According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the new deal expanded opportunities for US dairy producers by granting increased access to the Canadian market. "Canada agreed to eliminate its Class 6 and 7 milk pricing programmes, which had previously allowed Canadian producers to undercut US dairy prices," the USDA said. The department further stated that USMCA addressed issues related to wheat trade by requiring Canada to terminate its discriminatory wheat grading system. This change enables US wheat growers, especially those near the border, to compete more effectively in the Canadian market, the USDA said. The US-China trade deal, signed during Trump's first term, included provisions aimed at boosting US agricultural exports to China. A US Trade Representative (USTR) statement on the deal indicated that, during the two-year period from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021, China was required to import certain US agricultural products worth: "at least \$12.5 billion above the corresponding 2017 baseline amount in calendar year 2020" and "no less than \$19.5 billion above the corresponding 2017 baseline amount in calendar year 2021". The deal also required China to remove certain non-tariff barriers that had previously blocked US exports, such as eliminating "cattle age" requirements for US beef imports, according to the USTR statement. A query emailed to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry remained unanswered at the time of publication.

## India, UK proposed FTA talks set to resume today after 8 months; Trump tariffs to impart urgency to deal

After a gap of eight months, India and the UK will resume negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) on Monday under the shadow of Trump tariffs that have plunged the world into uncertainty. Prior to the opening of the 15th round of negotiations, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds will hold a bilateral meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. Reynolds' visit to India comes amid the personal storm he faces at home over allegedly falsifying his legal career.

The FTA negotiations were paused in May 2024 because of the general elections in both India and the UK. "The Trump tariffs can impart some urgency to the negotiations though it will have to be seen," trade expert Abhijit Das said. The subject of tariffs that the US is talking of imposing on the countries with which it has a trade deficit could be a part of discussions in the bilateral meeting between Goyal and Reynolds, he added. Since the last round of talks, India has on its own brought down import duties on cars, motorcycles and even select bourbon whiskey, which is produced in the US. A proposal has also been moved in Parliament to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in insurance to 100 per cent. Lower duties on cars and insurance liberalisation address some of the key demands of the UK, but India may still not offer to write down the latest import duties or FDI limits in the FTA and commit to it unless it gets anything in return.

"The changes have been done autonomously and can be reversed but if they become part of FTAs then companies in the UK will continue to enjoy the concession," founder of Global Trade Research Initiative Ajay Srivastava said. Both Das and Srivastava were of the view that India should seek clarity on how the carbon tax that the UK will



collect from January 2027 will be neutralised after the FTA. "If CBAM comes even after the FTA then the agreement does not make sense," Das said. The UK's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is similar to that of the European Union (EU). However, it will be tax-based and not based on the price of excess carbon emission during the production of a product.

The UK will start by imposing a tax on imports of iron, steel, aluminium, cement and hydrogen. Later, it will go on to cover all products.

Srivastava said that because there has been a big gap between the two rounds of negotiations, India should not agree to reopening the chapters or policy areas where agreement has been reached. Sometimes countries do request reopening of discussions on areas already agreed upon. The negotiations on the India-UK FTA started in January 2022 and it deals with 26 chapters or policy areas. Majority of chapters have been closed or are in an advanced stage of negotiations, officials say.

## Kerala is a leader in services, with the best startup ecosystem. Committed to strengthening that position: Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan

As Kerala looks to shun its older image of being an unfriendly destination for big investments, the state is undertaking initiatives like land pooling, building industrial townships, and setting up grievance redressal mechanisms. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said in a written interview to Soumyarendra Barik. He also spoke about the competition with other southern states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and how the state was looking at attracting manufacturing activities.

What's the overarching vision for boosting trade and investments in Kerala, and what's the state government's role in it?

Kerala aims to position itself as a knowledge-based economy and a hub for high-tech manufacturing and service industries. The state government acts as an enabler and is committed to facilitating and supporting investors through proactive policies and infrastructure development. We have already made Kerala's Ease of Doing Business atmosphere the best in the country. Kerala has expanded its industrial infrastructure with the development of techno parks, food parks, EV parks, industrial estates, and the Palakkad corridor. Kerala is leveraging its strategic location to enhance its logistics connectivity with projects such as the Vizhinjam Port.

Our Export and Logistics Park Policy and Industrial Policy focus on strengthening trade infrastructure, boosting exports, and attracting investments. The entire physical infrastructure will supplement Kerala's integrated industrial ecosystem. The Government is implementing land

pooling initiatives and developing industrial townships to create a seamless trade and investment environment all across the State. Investor facilitation is the key to our success. K-SWIFT, Kerala's single window interface for fast and transparent clearances ensure efficient business approvals. Digital governance reforms and a structured grievance redressal system have been put into place to ensure investor-friendly processes.

At a time when Kerala's neighbours Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have established themselves as big manufacturing bases, how does Kerala fit into the picture?

Kerala does not compete with our neighboring states. In fact, we complement them. While Tamil Nadu has an advantage in land-intensive large-scale manufacturing due to its sheer size, Kerala focuses on technology-driven, high-value, low-volume industries. Kerala is focusing on industries that rely on innovation, technology, and skilled manpower rather than vast land tracts. One of our key strengths is our highly skilled workforce. A leading human development index and a talent-rich ecosystem make Kerala ideal for knowledge-intensive industries. Another strength is that we have a strategic industrial focus. Kerala prioritises sectors such as medical devices, aerospace and defence, food processing, IT, and GCC based industries. On top of all of this, Vizhinjam Port and the seamless multimodal connectivity available in the state strengthen Kerala's position as a global trade gateway and logistics hub. Is the tech services sector an area that the state is keen on attracting?

## How does space travel affect astronaut health?

The human body was not built for spaceflight, with its microgravity conditions, exposure to high-energy radiation and other issues. As a result, trekking beyond the earth's confines causes many physiological changes that affect an astronaut's health. Here is an explanation of some of the effects on human health caused by space travel.

Why is space travel tough on the human body?

The human body evolved over millions of years to function optimally in the earth's environment, which includes its gravity, atmospheric composition and relatively low levels of radiation. Space travel exposes people to quite a different environment, posing a range of physiological and psychological challenges, especially with prolonged exposure, according to Afshin Beheshti, director of the Center for Space Biomedicine at the University of Pittsburgh. As researchers seek new countermeasures to protect space travellers, more data is needed on astronauts with varying health backgrounds and undertaking different kinds of missions in order to map out personalised risk profiles and mitigation strategies, according to Chris Mason, a professor of physiology and biophysics at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York.

What are the hazards of space radiation?

Unlike on the earth, where the atmosphere and planetary magnetic field provide a shield from space radiation, astronauts are exposed to high-energy radiation permeating the cosmos. This can lead to DNA damage, increased cancer risk, neurodegenerative effects, cardiovascular issues and immune system dysregulation. The earth's magnetosphere - the region of space dominated by the planetary magnetic field - provides some protection for astronauts in missions in low-earth orbit. But astronauts traveling beyond that - such as on missions to the moon or Mars - would experience much higher radiation doses.

What does microgravity do?

Gravity plays a critical role in regulating bodily functions. Its absence triggers widespread physiological adaptations, according to Beheshti. Without gravity, bodily fluids shift upward, leading to facial swelling and increased intracranial pressure, which can affect vision. The lack of mechanical loading on bones and muscles associated with the downward pull of gravity leads to bone density loss and muscle atrophy. In addition, the cardiovascular system undergoes major changes, including difficulty regulating blood pressure upon return to the earth. Prolonged exposure to microgravity conditions also affects vestibular function - the inner ear's ability to sense movement and orientation. That can cause balance and coordination issues.

How about psychological stress?

Long-duration space missions require astronauts to live in confined and isolated environments with limited social interaction and exposure to natural stimuli. This, according to Beheshti, can lead to psychological stress, sleep disturbances, cognitive performance declines and mood disorders. The effects of prolonged isolation and close-quarters living among astronauts - during stints aboard space stations or longer future missions to destinations like Mars - could aggravate interpersonal conflicts, further impacting mental well-being and mission performance.

What happens after returning to the earth?

How astronauts recover after returning to the earth depends in large part on mission duration. For short-duration missions of a few days in low-earth orbit, about 95% of the biological damage sustained appears to be reversed upon return. For astronauts who spend months aboard the International Space Station, or ISS, recovery appears proportional to their time in space. Many physiological systems gradually return to normal. But some issues persist. One example is spaceflight-associated neuro-ocular syndrome (SANS), linked to vision impairment due to microgravity-induced fluid shifts and changes in intracra-



bral pressure affecting the eyes. Research suggests that dysfunction in subcellular structures called mitochondria plays a role in SANS. Some astronauts experience lasting impairment that may require corrective lenses. Questions remain about the effects of long-duration deep-space missions in which astronauts would experience much higher levels of space radiation and prolonged microgravity. Without effective countermeasures, recovery could be problematic. Researchers are actively developing mitochondrial-based countermeasures to mitigate space-induced damage.

Where are the gaps in what we know?

There are still gaps in the understanding of how spaceflight impacts human health. Relatively little is known about how it affects lung function. While it is known that space radiation elevates cancer risk, accelerates aging and induces cellular damage, the precise biological mechanisms remain elusive. Research has shown that mitochondria play a central role in spaceflight-induced health effects. The precise mechanisms of mitochondrial adaptation and dysfunction in space remain an area of active study. Scientists also lack a comprehensive understanding of how microgravity, radiation exposure and isolation impact cognitive function, mental health and neuroplasticity - the brain's ability to change and adapt - over long durations.

How about having babies in space?

One significant knowledge gap is how spaceflight affects human reproduction and fetal development, according to Beheshti. Limited studies have been conducted on reproductive health in space, mostly involving animals such as mice. The complete implications for human fertility, embryonic development and long-term space habitation spanning generations remain unknown. This is especially important as humankind considers future space colonization efforts.

What has recent research found?

Research published in 2024 detailed changes in the brain, heart, muscles, kidneys and skin, immune regulation and stress levels and a breakdown in the activity of mitochondria among crew members who participated in SpaceX's three-day Inspiration4 mission in 2021 - the first all-civilian team to orbit the earth. Another study published in 2024 showed that astronauts are more likely to experience headaches in space than previously known. It involved 24 astronauts who traveled aboard the ISS for up to 26 weeks. All but two reported headaches. A study published in 2023 found that astronauts who traveled on the ISS or NASA space shuttles on missions lasting at least six months experienced expansion of the cerebral ventricles - spaces in the middle of the brain containing cerebrospinal fluid. Research published in 2022 documented bone loss in 17 ISS astronauts in missions averaging about 5-1/2 months. A year after returning to the earth, the astronauts on average exhibited 2.1% reduced bone mineral density of the tibia - one of the bones of the lower leg - and 1.3% reduced bone strength. Nine did not recover bone mineral density after the spaceflight.

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



The recent news about Infosys laying off freshers caused outrage in higher education circles. The justification of the company was that these graduates were trained and given three attempts to clear the evaluation and, in spite of all that, they failed; and hence they were fired. Reports often say only a small fraction of Indian computer engineers have basic programming skills. This makes us ponder upon this question - are Indian graduates incompetent at programming?

Like Mathematics, programming excellence comes with practice. Unfortunately, not only are the engineering institutions' syllabi outdated, they don't have a culture of coding practice. Most engineering institutions offer less than 20 programming exercises per lab, and the same exercises come in the final lab exams as well. Students memorise them, instead of understanding. Some private universities have invested in cloud-based coding practice platforms for running their

lab courses. However, using such software alone wouldn't guarantee the intended outcomes. With GenAI tools readily available, students find creative ways to bypass learning, easily escaping detection in traditional assessments.

Beyond automation While machines handle repetitive tasks, humans pursue intellectual work. Today's tech industry thrives on this human-machine synergy. Programming education must reflect this reality. Higher Education Institutions must adopt a hybrid approach. While coding platforms provide the foundation, significant weightage must be given to viva-voce and one-on-one sessions. These evaluations should go beyond simple conceptual questions. Instead, students must explain their code flow and implementation choices. When students explain their own code, the questions naturally flow from their implementation choices. Why did they use a particular loop structure?

How did they handle edge cases? What made them choose specific variable names? A student who truly wrote and understood the code can easily explain these decisions. However, those who used AI tools or copied code typically struggle to justify their choices or explain the underlying logic. Unlike traditional viva-voce with standard questions, a code walkthrough creates a unique evaluation for each student based on their own work. This makes it an effective tool to verify authentic learning and programming competence. Code explanation is also a hiring technique used by many IT companies during their interviews. A robust assessment framework A robust assessment framework requires both automated and human evaluation components. Higher Education Institutions should implement a 70-30 split between these components. Automated assessment through cloud-based coding platforms should focus on timed programming tests with multiple

test cases. The human evaluation should comprise rolling viva-voce sessions where students do a code walkthrough from the automated tests. For effective implementation, institutions must maintain an optimal student-faculty ratio of 60:1 or lesser. Faculty members should ideally conduct 15-minute viva-voce sessions spread across the semester, ensuring thorough evaluation of each student. To maintain objectivity, external evaluators should also be in this assessment panel. The framework demands proper infrastructure - secure digital platforms integrated with existing Learning Management Systems for conducting and recording assessments. These recordings, preserved for an academic year, serve as quality control measures and provide transparency in evaluation. Fixing the root cause The future of programming education lies in the synergy between automated assessment platforms and human evaluation. While cloud-based coding practice platforms support in practice and preliminary assessment, it's the human verification through code explanation that ensures authentic learning. Educational institutions must act now to implement this hybrid framework, ensuring their graduates not just write code, but understand and explain it. When implemented effectively at the academic level, students will not just secure better placements but become the competent programmers that India's IT industry desperately needs.



## Arjun Kapoor-starrer barely holds on as Chhaava juggernaut continues to dominate Indian cinema



Mere Husband ki biwi box office collection day 3: Arjun Kapoor film earns around Rs 4.3 crore in opening weekend

Mere Husband Ki Biwi box office collection Day 3: Arjun Kapoor, who played the primary antagonist in 2024's big success, Singham Again, faced the litmus test as the only male lead of a film with Mudassar Aziz's Mere Husband Ki Biwi. The film, headlined by Bhumi Pednekar and Rakul Preet Singh, is essentially a film about them, and Arjun happily playing second fiddle to their onscreen shenanigans. Just like Aziz's recent films, this too was a comedy of errors that received mixed reviews. Nevertheless, according to trade website Sacnilk, the film has managed to earn Rs 1.1 crore on Day 3 of its run, taking the total collections to Rs 4.31 crore after the opening weekend. With the film just managing to have a 15.82% occupancy, and the matinee and evening shows having a commendable

18.01% and 22.88% occupancy, it shows signs that the family audiences are giving this film a chance to entertain them. Aziz is known for his simple, and straightforward comedies that solely focusses on entertainment, and seals in a message or two in the narrative. So, interestingly, facing the onslaught of the Chhaava juggernaut, Mere Husband Ki Biwi is still holding simply because of being a completely different alternative at the movies. Indian cinema can do with this positioning of films finding themselves in box-office clashes that can't be averted. But again, the comparison is too skewed because Mere Husband Ki Biwi has made Rs 4.31 crore after three days of run, and Chhaava has made around Rs 40 crore on Day 10, the second Sunday of its run.

Notably, this is also a slightly better showing for an Arjun Kapoor film as his previous theatrical release as the lead hero, Kuttey, only made Rs 3.42 crore in the opening weekend despite being star-studded, and directed by Vishal Bhardwaj's son, Aasmaan Bhardwaj. But he'd prefer getting back to his Ek Villain Returns days as the 2022 film made a whopping Rs 23.54 crores in the opening weekend with the Day 3 numbers being Rs 9.02 crores, more than double of what Mere Husband Ki Biwi made in the opening weekend. Nevertheless, Hindi cinema should have the space for multiple films to exist in the same ecosystem at the same time, and Mere Husband Ki Biwi finding its place under the sun next to Chhaava is, in a way, a positive sign because it is two direct Hindi films that are fighting for the Hindi cinema audience's attention. There are no dubbed versions of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada or Malayalam films that are vying for their attention. It is between Chhaava and Mere Husband Ki Biwi, and it all comes down to the better product, the better budget, and simply, the better hype.

## Jyotika says she and husband Suriya leave their stardom outside the door at home: 'Only our children and their dabbas get prominence there'

As actor Jyotika prepares to return with Prime Video's The Dabba Cartel, she speaks to SCREEN about her career spanning languages, returning to the screens recently and why she and husband, actor Suriya, shed their stardom once they reach home. My journey is nothing but growth. Whenever I have thought I need growth as an actor, I have switched languages. I have always chosen my films according to characters which have been different from me and especially in the last decade, which has been extremely different for me as a personality and which resonate with the people. So I feel growth is a factor which is persistent to my thought process.

What attracted you to Dabba Cartel?

I would say what is it that would not attract me to Dabba Cartel? Everything about it was extremely special. Firstly, the banner, Excel Entertainment, they are known for creating some of the best web series. The content is always top priority. Varuna is a character I think I haven't played before. It's very very close to me and I think a common woman will resonate with it. So I just fell in love with Varuna's character as I heard it. Then there was one more major incentive.

What was that?

Definitely the stalwart actress Shabana Azmi Ma'am. I don't think anyone would think twice before wanting to stand and share a frame with her. Not only is she such a brilliant actor but she is also such a magnanimous personality; you feel so empowered just standing next to her. Her entire thought process and the way she works and even today at her age, she makes every effort in providing her 100% to the character. I saw a language therapist with her at shoot and I was just seeing the small nuances and how dedicated she is even now. Even if you have a teleprompter, she doesn't refer to it. She still prefers mugging her lines and saying them with absolute emotion. So it was a treat to be sharing screen space with her.

You shared screen space with another very talented actress in Dabba Cartel?

Definitely, with the most talented Nimisha Sajayan. I have always loved her work and The Great Indian Kitchen is one of my favourite works of hers. So sharing screen space with her, with my South buddy actor in a Hindi web series was again extremely special. I made great friends with Anjali Anand and Shalini Pandey at shoot and I think all of us had a blast. I think even Anjali and Shalini are such talented actors and nothing like coming with the best actors onboard. I think just standing with all of them makes us a better actor. So I had a great experience. As I said, growth is always about working on good subjects, good characters and with good actors. So there was no reason not to be doing Dabba Cartel.

Which among your wonderful film is your favourite?

I have experimented with a lot of roles actually, but I feel Mozhi is one of my favourite films where I play a deaf and mute girl. I just love that film. It's a milestone film for me. And there are a couple of films in my second innings — 36 Vayadhinile which means at the age of 36. And there is another one called Raatchasi where I play the principal of a government school. There is another film where I played a lawyer, it is called Ponnagal Vandhal.

These all very impressive performances?

There are a lot of iconic films of mine which have portrayed me in very different shades. I do like myself in my two recent Hindi films, even though they were not protagonists. I do like my role of a mom in Shaitaan. I found her to be a very powerful mother. I do love my role in Srikanth where she is the wind beneath Srikanth's wings. I feel Hindi is also offering me some great work. So extremely happy with the growth.

How different is the OTT as compared with a feature film?

Definitely longer hours of work in the OTT format, but it's very interesting. We shoot about 5-8 scenes in a day. And it's quite similar to the South style of working. When I do women-centric films, which are made at a certain budget, we also work in the same format. So it seemed quite similar to working there. And the pace is great and it's always nice to finish a film or a series quickly.

You actually started your career in Hindi, then why did you quickly gravitate towards Tamil cinema?

I did start my career with the Hindi film Doli Saja Ke Rakhna that was directed by Priyadarshan, and had the great actor Akshaye Khanna. But yes the film didn't do too well, and I didn't get a lot of work in Hindi. In fact, I got no work at all. While I was shooting Doli Saja Ke Rakhna, I signed up for a South film. It was my first film in Tamil with



my husband Suriya. And yeah, it didn't fare too well either but people recognised my work and I started getting a lot of films in South. After 27 long years, there was suddenly a fusion of Hindi and South films. And so work is just being divided amongst all the actors equally.

What is it like having two superstars under one roof? Do you and Suriya leave together for shooting with your dabbas?

I guess we leave the superstardom outside the door when we enter home. There, we are just parents of our kids. And yeah, the dabbas... definitely the prominence is given to our children. It's more about what's going in their school dabbas in the morning. One dabba leaves early morning at 6 o'clock with him to school while the younger one's food goes at lunch time at 12. So the discussions are more about what they are eating and how we are packing their food and sending it. So absolutely we are parents at home, superstardom stays outside.

Any regrets about not pursuing your career in Hindi?

I was extremely happy in the South. I have done some of my best roles there and I could only be glad that I was part of South films. Because I'm not sure if I had probably got those roles if I had worked in Hindi. In fact I was married and stopped working at 28 and then got back to films when I was 35. And I did see a lot of prominent roles coming up my way in Tamil where I played the protagonist. And here I am in Hindi now where I am again receiving a very warm welcome. So no complaints. I am very happy with the way the career has shaped.

## Katrina Kaif visits Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj

Mumbai: Bollywood star Katrina Kaif was joined by her mother-in-law Veena Kaushal as they visited the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Several pictures of the actress; visit are doing the rounds. Katrina wore a powder pink hued Indian wear and was seen having a conversation with Swami Chidanand Saraswati and Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati.

A tweet on the official handle of Parmarth Niketan, a spiritual ashram under the leadership of Pujya Swami Chidanand, on X, read: "Katrina Kaif at Mahakumbh". Katrina Kaif visits Parmarth Niketan in Prayagraj, meeting @PujyaSwamiji & @SadhviBhagawati Ji. Her presence at #mahakumbhmelā blends spirituality with entertainment, inspiring youth to reconnect with their roots. #Mahakumbh #KatrinaKaif."

Katrina is one of several personalities of Indian cinema who have visited the Maha Kumbh. Several stars such as Akshay Kumar, Sonali Bendre, Vidhut Jammwal, Boney Kapoor, Vicky Kaushal, Tamannaah Bhatia, Nimrat Kaur and Chandan Roy Sanya took a dip in the holy waters of Maha Kumbh.

In other news, Katrina heaped praise on her husband Vicky's performance in 'Chhaava' and said that he is 'outstanding'. She had written: "What a cinematic experience and what a monuments task to bring to life the glory of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. @laxman.utekar tells this incredible story in the most brilliant way, I'm in awe, the last 40 min of the film will leave you speechless. I've spent all morning wanting to go and rewatch it again."

## Explaining block bookings, Bollywood's quick fix to create perception of success, hide box office failures



In showbiz, what defines a successful film? A gripping story told well, an impressive star cast, and outstanding performances? Not anymore. In 2025, success of a film is dictated by how much money producers, studios, and banners are willing to pump into creating the illusion of a blockbuster. Recent box office trends indicate a troubling scenario where inflated figures and bulk bookings mislead audiences, making certain films appear as hits when the reality is far from it. Taking the case of three major releases in January 2025—Ram Charan-Shankar's Game Changer, Akshay Kumar's Sky Force, and Shahid Kapoor's Deva—SCREEN spoke to film trade experts to decode the growing trend of block bookings and how the entire system operates.

January 2025: A disappointing start for Bollywood?

Speaking about Bollywood's lacklustre box office performance in January, film exhibitor Akshaye Rathi said, "Among the major releases, Sky Force performed reasonably well compared to his recent films. Apart from that, no film performed well. We had high expectations from Deva, but unfortunately, it didn't live up to them. Game Changer was an underperformer. Everyone expected a lot from Ram Charan, especially since it was his first solo release after RRR, and with a visionary director like Shankar at the helm, but the film fell short. That was disappointing." Film trade analyst Komal Nahta echoed this sentiment. "When a film fails, it's because the content isn't appreciated. The films released in January simply did not offer what the audience wanted," he said.

Some industry insiders claimed that Allu Arjun's highly anticipated Pushpa 2: The Rule affected other films' performances, but Nahta dismissed this notion: "That's just an excuse. We've seen multiple films release on the same day and still become blockbusters—like Lagaan and Gadar, or Gadar 2 and OMG 2. If a film has strong content, it will work regardless of competition." Rathi concurred, saying, "Pushpa 2 had no impact on these films. Every film has its own trajectory. If Game Changer or Deva underperformed, it was solely because they lacked the merit to bring the numbers we expected."

Is Bollywood heading towards a weak first quarter?

Bollywood has been facing a difficult phase at the box office, and while Chhaava seems to have broken the slump, one successful film alone cannot save the industry. Commenting on how the films performed in January, Nahta said, "The first quarter doesn't look promising. The films that have been released so far haven't performed well, and there aren't many major releases lined up in the coming weeks. If Pushpa 2 hadn't been released in December and made most of its business in January, the quarter would have been even worse. Chhaava is looking strong, though." Rathi said, "Every film industry has had a slow start this year. Last year, two major films—Pushpa 2 and Street 2—were outlier hits. While those films did well, the industry as a whole is not going through the best time."

Why do producers inflate box office figures? Naturally, the primary objective is creating a perception of "success".

## Sonu Nigam breaks down while singing Mere Dholna 3.0 at Bengaluru concert: 'Aisa main rota tha jab mummy ka dehaant hua tha'



Renowned for his exceptional vocal range, Sonu Nigam has gifted Indian cinema with numerous memorable tracks, including "Kal Ho Naa Ho", "Suraj Hua Maddham", "You are my Soniya", "Abhi Mujh Mein Kahin", "Shukran Allah" and "Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna", among others. Known for his ability to captivate audiences both through his recorded songs and live performances, Nigam recently experienced an emotional moment during a concert in Bengaluru. Overcome with feelings following a powerful rendition, the playback singer-composer was moved to tears, while the audience, equally emotional, responded with thunderous applause.

A video of the performance, which has since gone viral on social media, shows Nigam singing "Mere Dholna 3.0" from Bhooh Bhulaiyaa 3 (2024). Towards the end, he becomes visibly emotional and tears up. He later revealed that the song was not part of his planned setlist and that he performed it without prior rehearsal. In a selfie video shared on Instagram, Nigam admitted that the performance had left him "emotionally, physically and mentally drained." He reflected, "After performing, I realised that sometimes, even if a person doesn't sing well, an energy might build up and such an atmosphere is created that people connect to it, and they too end up crying."

Mentioning that this was the first time he performed "Mere Dholna" on stage, Nigam added, "I hadn't planned to sing it, I hadn't even rehearsed it. But when the atmosphere

Today, at a time when even the public seem to care about "how much films made," producers add a few crores to films' credit to falsely declare it hits, hoping to convince people that their movies are doing well and worth watching, creating a self-fulfilling cycle of deception. One of the key strategies used for this deception is "block booking" or "bulk booking"—where large numbers of tickets are bought in bulk to artificially boost films' earnings. According to Rathi, this practice doesn't provide any real benefit: "Inflating box office numbers beyond a point doesn't help anyone. It's common for brands associated with actors to buy tickets in bulk and distribute them among clients or employees. That's fine—it's an age-old practice. But outright fabricating figures serves no purpose because audiences, trade partners, and streaming platforms eventually learn the truth. Those who do this are only fooling themselves by declaring wrong numbers." Nahta was even more critical: "Inflating box office numbers is a disgusting trend. It's been going on long before Game Changer. In fact, Sky Force exaggerated its earnings even more—while it made Rs 40 crore in the first week, the makers claimed it had earned Rs 80-85 crore. Empty theatres were falsely declared "Housefull". On some platforms, if you book a ticket for Rs 300, you get Rs 250 as refund, which is another way to boost numbers. Everybody is thinking of their interest, inflating collections, and showing it's a hit, but nobody is thinking or bothered about the film industry as a whole. It's all selfish producers who do these things."

Block booking: The nexus behind the numbers According to Nahta, actors, producers, and studios are all responsible in equal parts for this practice. He explained why it is done: "One, to give the perception that their film is a hit, to fool the trade and the public. The public thinks it's a hit film, so they go to watch it, and makers get the benefit of footfalls. Many stars do it to create hype around them to charge several crores extra for future brand endorsements. The advertising companies and brands come thinking they are working with a big star, but if they get to know the truth, they will not pay what they are willing to pay. Producers and studios do it for the same reason; to show that a hit film has come from their banner. This industry is all about showmanship, but people forget that." Nahta elaborated on the system behind block bookings, revealing a well-organised network that orchestrates ticket purchases: "This level of block booking trend is new. Earlier, block bookings would amount to around Rs 7-10 crore, a trend started by a superstar a few years ago. But this year, Sky Force did block bookings worth Rs 40 crore—an unprecedented amount. Agents are hired to coordinate with corporate houses, who then receive formal invitations to book tickets for their employees and families. These agents specialise in distributing bulk bookings, arrange an audience for watching the film, and they charge a commission for their services." Don't miss: Game Changer Worldwide Box Office Collection Day 1: Ram Charan-starrer's Rs 186 crore debut disputed, analysts allege Rs 100 crore inflation A few months back, when director Anurag Kashyap said Bollywood is doomed, we wondered what he meant. Is the end really near?

Nahta doesn't think so. "I don't think Bollywood is doomed, but it needs to be cautious. Substandard content will no longer work. Earlier, rich content paired with a star-studded cast could carry a film, but today's audience has access to world cinema at the click of a button. Their expectations have risen, and writers and directors need to pull up their socks," he said. Rathi, on the other hand, is confident that Bollywood's future is not at all in the dark and that its people will have the industry's back when needed. He said, "Bollywood has faced crises before. When Amitabh Bachchan took a sabbatical, people wondered what would happen to the industry. Then came Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, and Aamir Khan, who carried the industry forward. When these superstars pass their prime, I am pretty sure Ranbir Kapoor, Varun Dhawan, Tiger Shroff, and Vicky Kaushal will take this baton forward. Every time we think Bollywood is doomed, someone steps up and saves the day. That will happen again."

became so emotional, I was in tears. After singing 'Bijuria', I wondered whether I should take the chance or not. But I did." "Itna roya hu main stage par main. Mera bas chalta toh main rok deta, lekin agar main gaana rokta toh log sochte ki humein chidaa ke gaana nahi gaaya (I cried so much on stage; I've never cried like that before. If I could have, I would have stopped, but if I had stopped, people would have thought that I was just teasing them by not singing)," he said. Nigam also admitted that simply hearing "Mere Dholna" and "Abhi Mujh Mein Kahin" brings him to tears: "Aisa main rota tha jab mummy ka dehaant hua tha 2013 mein, 28th February ko. Abhi 12 saal ho jayenge 4 din mein. Tab 3-4 saal jab main 'Kya Hua Tera Waada' stage par gaata tha aur main phoot-phoot ke rota tha. Ab thoda kam hua hai itne saalon ke baad. (I used to cry like this when my mom passed away in 2013, on February 28th. It'll be 12 years in 4 days. For 3-4 years, when I used to sing "Kya Hua Tera Waada" on stage, I would cry uncontrollably. Over the years, it has become a bit less)," he explained, before concluding the video by expressing gratitude for the love and support of his fans, while also asking for their understanding in case of any mistakes on his part

## Malaika Arora tries these five steps to tying up her hair

Mumbai: Bollywood diva Malaika Arora revealed that she tries the five steps to tying up her hair yet she never gets it right. Malaika took to her Instagram on Monday morning, where she shared a few pictures. In the images she is seen tying up her hair. In the images, the actress, who looks stunning in an all-white bodycon dress is seen trying to tie up her hair, opening them and then trying again. "5 steps to tying ur hair up... But jus never get it right," she wrote as the caption. The dancing diva often shares her best fashion foot forward on social media. On February 20, she re-lived 90s fashion and recreated retro magic in her new post on social media. In a clip, the actress is seen wearing wide-legged jeans paired with a striped shirt. She stepped into the changing room and comes out wearing a thigh-length dress with floral design. She completed her look with knee length boots and a half high pony.



## How Carlo Ancelotti, who uncorked the goal-scoring monster in Cristiano Ronaldo, revived Kylian Mbappe at Real Madrid



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

When Carlo Ancelotti became the Real Madrid manager in 2013, he had two emergency tasks. A) To convince Cristiano Ronaldo to stay at the club. Rumours of a reunion with Manchester United were stewing. B) To unlock the goal-scoring beast in him. Besides, his reluctance to drop back to defend offered swathes of unmanned land for opposite full backs to exploit. The first task was simple. He sweet-talked his way to make Ronaldo feel wanted at Madrid and put the move on ice. "It will be an honour for me to coach Ronaldo. It will be like it was coaching [Zinedine] Zidane, Ronaldo and Ronaldinho before," he spoke during his unveiling. The second was a more complex task as it involved moving Ronaldo from his preferred left wing to the central forward role, a move that could also unzip the nippy potential of wingers Angel di Maria and the newly-recruited Gareth Bale.

It required more than cajoling. So the Italian set up the team in such a way that Ronaldo was installed on the left wing but literally functioned as a centre forward with a minor tweak in formation. The deputised centre forward, Karim Benzema would shift to the right, while the right winger Gareth Bale dropped a bit deeper, like a wingback. On the left flank Angel Di Maria marauded into the spaces Ronaldo would normally occupy, organically moving Ronaldo to spaces in the centre. An assistant of his Paul Clement would recount: "They had to adjust everything else to ensure he didn't have to track his full-back so he played one system offensively and another defensively. It was a lopsided shape that would change to allow Ronaldo to play more advanced." Carlo Ancelotti Real Madrid Real Madrid's head coach Carlo Ancelotti gives instructions from the side line during the Spain Super Cup final soccer match between Real Madrid and Barcelona at King Abdullah Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Sunday, Jan. 12, 2025. (AP Photo/Altai Qadri)

The yield was glorious—in 101 games he netted 112 goals and tallied 47 assists. Ronaldo the fizzy winger with snazzy feints and step-overs transformed into a less showboater voracious centre forward. He later thanked Ancelotti for the metamorphosis that made him a goal colossus of the game. "He is a genius. He makes great players," Ronaldo could wax eloquent. The Italian with affable manners and monikered teddy bear, makes players great too. Twelve years after he steered Ronaldo towards the path of goal-scoring Everest, he encountered a similar challenge. To guide Kylian Mbappe to the path of greatness.

The Frenchman, like the Portuguese, descended on the hallowed Bernabéu turf as a future great, already famous and expensive. Ancelotti already had Vinicius Junior, of dizzying talent and unflappable energy, on the left wing where Mbappe devastates with his explosive pace, the blinding cutbacks, well-weighted passes, and whiplash right-foot swing cutting inside. Or precisely all the things that Vinicius Junior does. Mbappe, thus, disrupted the careful balance of Madrid. Jude Bellingham, who played centrally in a free role, now had to move deeper into the midfield, his liberty inhibited. This was Mbappe's impediment at PSG as well, with Neymar prowling Mbappe's preferred spaces.

This time, though, Ancelotti did tweak the entire system to suit Mbappe. He did not change Vinicius's flank, because he reasoned that he "doesn't want to change the player that makes the difference." Instead, he persisted with Mbappe as the focal point of the forward. When a journalist once queried him whether the No 9 role suits, Ancelotti replied in jest: "I can't teach him anything about being a striker. Maybe he can teach me." Goals came at a trickle, shuffling Bellingham to the midfield diminished his goal-scoring output. Rodrygo, the right-sided forward was repurposed into a winger. The ripple effect of Mbappe signing destabilised Madrid in the early days. Criticism mounted, pundits and former players questioned both Ancelotti's insistence and Mbappe's labours. But Ancelotti struck his fabled easy-go poise. He knew Mbappe was too good to languish, too un-hubristic to wage a cold war using his player-power, but impossibly ambitious to establish his greatness in the most famous white robes in football. As the season wore on, Mbappe prospered and hit high notes in the hat-trick against Manchester City, operating as a classical centre forward in a 4-4-2, beating City's off-side with ease (an aspect he had struggled against Barcelona in the first El Clasico), sprinting into spaces behind the defenders, working hard off the ball and wearing those exquisite goal-scoring boots with prominently high collars. He had only five shots on goals, three of them shook the nets. The hat-trick goal was his 17th in 18 games. He received the ball on the right wing, darted past a bevy of defenders and spat the ball goal-wards with a left-footed strike.

In the press conference, he stressed on his prowess to occupy any role in the forward line. "I said the first day I came here that I can play in every position: right, left, centre, in a two; I don't mind. Today I played in a different position to the last game and in the next game I might play in a different position again," he would say. Other subtle layers of his game too shone. Like his tracking back, which the manager was concerned about. His pressing was relentless and off-the-ball industry displayed his eagerness to fulfill the predestined greatness. His manager would compliment, saying he has "the quality to reach Cristiano's level." "He has to work, because Cristiano has set the limit very high. For the quality, for the illusion he has, he can reach Cristiano's level, but it's not going to be easy, he has to work," he elaborated. Gradually, every other post-Mbappe tactic too fell into place and Madrid rediscovered their sting and sprite. At the heart of the renaissance is Ancelotti, the man who uncorked the goal-scoring monster in Ronaldo, and the man that has revived Mbappe in Madrid.

## 'Was doing the math for his hundred': Axar Patel on Virat Kohli's ton vs PAK in Champions Trophy

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Virat Kohli Axar Patel IND vs PAK Champions Trophy India's Virat Kohli, left, and Axar Patel celebrate after winning against Pakistan during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates.

As Virat Kohli closed in on his century against arch-rival Pakistan in the Champions Trophy 2025 clash, all-rounder Axar Patel started doing mathematical calculations in his head to ensure that his senior teammate reached his 82nd century. Axar walked into bat with India needing 19 runs to win and Kohli unbeaten on 86. "At the end, actually main bhi thoda maths kar raha tha unke hundred ke liye (Even I was doing the math for his hundred towards the end). I was hoping that I don't edge the ball or something. So, it was quite fun," Axar said in a video posted by ICC. While Axar became a human calculator crunching numbers in his head, Pakistani pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi bowled three wides in the 42nd over making Kohli's path to the century a bit tricky. At one point, Axar was even booted for taking a single, as fans wanted Kohli to get maximum strike. "It was the first time I got to watch a high-pressure game from the dressing room where Virat bhaiya scored a



century. I had a lot of fun, and the way he was running between the wickets after fielding for 50 overs is a testament to his fitness."

Axar added. With just two runs needed in the 43rd over, Kohli was stranded on 96 and skipper Rohit Sharma cheekily gestured for him to finish the game with a six. Kohli finished the game with an elegant drive through the covers to finish the game and bring up his 51st hundred in style.

## 'Let's move on from them': Mohammad Hafeez wants PAK to look past Shaheen Afridi and co in pace department

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Mohammad Hafeez slams Shaheen Shah Afridi and Co Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi, left, celebrates with teammate the wicket of India's captain Rohit Sharma during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Former Pakistan player Mohammad Hafeez slammed the Men in Green's pace attack consisting of Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf after their 6-wicket loss against India in Dubai on Sunday which has put them on the brink of an early exit from the tournament. Hafeez said that it was time for Pakistan to look ahead from this pace trio and give others a chance. "Since the Asia Cup in 2023, we were expecting this trio of Shaheen, Naseem, and Haris to deliver trophies for us. But they've been unsuccessful. The 2023 World Cup, a disaster. The 2022 T20 tournament in Melbourne, a disaster. And now, this Champions Trophy, another failure," he said in PTV's coverage of the Champions Trophy.

"It is time to realise that these guys, according to many people they have skills but these skills are not enough for them to win Pakistan the big tournaments. They are not proving themselves capable of helping Pakistan win a big tournament. Let's move on from them. Let's bring other people. Let's go with Mohammad Ali, Khurram Shahzad,



Mohammad Wasim Jr, Akif Javed, Mir Hamza. These guys are waiting for their chances. Let's see what happens if we play them. They are also Pakistani; they also have a Pakistani passport," he added. The current Pakistan pace bowling trio has had a Champions Trophy to forget, conceding more than 200 runs against New Zealand in the tournament opener and then failing to defend 242 runs against India in a must-win game on Sunday. In order to stay alive in the tournament now, Pakistan have to pray that Bangladesh upset New Zealand on Thursday and then defeat Bangladesh in the last group game.

## Sanjay Bangar says Shubman Gill will lead India's batting in years to come



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Former India player Sanjay Bangar heaped praises on India ODI vice-captain Shubman Gill and said that the Punjab player will lead the Indian team's batting in the years to come. The 25-year-old continued his stellar performances in the ODI format when he made a classy 46 against Pakistan on Sunday. "Clearly, he's the guy who is going to shoulder the responsibility of the Indian team going forward in years to come," Bangar said on JioHotstar.

"(His) foundations are really, really strong and add to that the confidence of nearly two-and-a-half years of performing in one-day cricket. In one-day cricket, he's been phenomenal. Now look, the straight drive, the on-drive are

the shots wherein you cannot actually hit the ball really hard. But here, he was hitting the ball so hard that despite the mid-off and the mid-on fielder being on that 30-yard circle, the ball was going and hitting them. That's the kind of timing he possesses," he added. Before his steady innings against Pakistan, Gill had scored a century against Bangladesh in India's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh, helping his team to a win.

Last week, Gill had dethroned Pakistan's Babar Azam from the top spot in the ICC ODI rankings by India. In the latest ICC rankings list, Gill has 796 rating points while Babar has 773. India skipper Rohit Sharma is ranked third with 761 points. South Africa's Henrich Klaasen and New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell at fourth and fifth respectively. "Look, see, nothing grows under a banyan tree and the banyan tree of Indian cricket is basically Rohit Sharma and with him, Virat Kohli. But when you look at Shubman Gill, those two straight drives, even the blistering cover drive, this is like a blitzkrieg where the opposition is taken aback, you know, it's awe-inspiring," Navjot Singh Sidhu said on JioHotstar. "This man has emerged from the shadows of that banyan tree and has come of age. It's tough to say that. You rate ability in men by what they finish, not by what they attempt. When you actually take your side through after scoring a hundred and don't throw your wicket, that responsibility is making you better," he added.

## Champions Trophy: Who is Nahid Rana, Bangladesh's fastest-ever pacer, fast-tracked into team

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

At his pre-match press conference before the big game against India, Bangladesh cricket team captain Najmul Hossain Shanto heaped praise on his pace attack. Then he spoke about 22-year-old Nahid Rana, who has not played too many games for Bangladesh, but is already making waves.

"We have struggled in the past when it comes to fast bowling. But we have a good attack now and as a captain it makes me excited to see our bowlers bowl fast. They are in good form.... Hopefully they will be able to put Indians under pressure," Shanto said. "Rana played one Test against India and he has the experience. He is not someone who looks at the opponent, but is more focused on execution. He is looking forward to the game." While Nahid Rana did not play for the game against India, he has been handed a game against New Zealand. And he could hold the keys for the chances of teams like Bangladesh and Pakistan, if the Tigers are to defend a target of 237 against New Zealand in Rawalpindi.

Who is Nahid Rana?

Nahid Rana is a pacer who will be playing in his first ICC tournament at the Champions Trophy. He's shown that he is capable of reaching speeds north of 150km/h. He frequently throws thunderbolts over 145kph. He played against India in the Chennai Test in 2024 where he claimed two wickets, both of Yashasvi Jaiswal in two innings. In the first innings in particular, he gave a measure of what sorts of pace he can generate, after getting Jaiswal's wicket with a 148kmph delivery. "The opportunity to play against the best cricketers in the world is the highest form of inspiration,"



Rana was quoted as saying by ICC's website. "I am enjoying every moment of international cricket. Things have happened very fast but I'm grateful for everything. It is never easy to adapt to international cricket but I was lucky in the sense that I got to play a good number of first-class matches before my debut. Nahid Rana added: "I feel that is the best thing that could have happened as you get exposed to all sorts of different situations and conditions. But international cricket is a totally different level altogether." Rana started playing serious cricket in his late teens, having grown up in Rajshahi, on the international border with India. He didn't really play in the age group teams of Bangladesh. "The place is more famous for mangoes rather than cricket, or any sport for that matter," Nahid Rana said. "I was mainly playing taped tennis ball cricket (growing up) and could feel I was way quicker than those around me. I could extract more natural bounce because of my height."

## Virat Kohli on his outside off-stump peril: 'It's been my weakness but I've scored a lot of runs on that shot'

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Virat Kohli has admitted that the outside off-stump line has been his "weakness" over the years but it has been also his "strength." Virat Kohli on Sunday became the fastest batter and third man to reach 14,000 runs in one-day international cricket on Sunday, before going on to hit a record-extending 51st century in the ODI format.

"I think today was just about backing my shots and I think the first couple of boundaries I got were cover drives on the rise, so I really had to just let it go a little bit and take a bit of risk and follow through with my shots, because when I hit those kind of shots, then I feel in control when I bat out there, so it was a good innings for me personally and as you said, it was a great team win. "I was able to bat the way I wanted to bat and to contribute in a winning cause in an important game obviously feels big, so yeah, it was imperative that we get stuck in and get this win to be able to qualify."

India's Virat Kohli hits winning runs during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025. (AP Photo) India's Virat Kohli hits winning runs during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025. (AP Photo) Virat Kohli powered the chase to



finish on 100 not out — hitting the winning boundary as India beat Pakistan by six wickets with 45 balls remaining. "One thing that I've always thought of batting at three is to minimise risk and make sure that I put my team in a winning position and if you have a chance to finish off the game in a chase, obviously that's much better and I always preferred that kind of a situation, but yeah, my role over the years has remained the same, whatever the demand of the game, I put my head down and try to do that," he said. "The occasion is always a bit more lively when you play against Pakistan, especially in this region because you have equal number of fans from both countries and yeah, it was a great day for us as a team and for me personally as well."

## New Zealand eager to seal semifinal spot, Bangladesh fights for survival

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Rawalpindi: A confident New Zealand side will be eager to seal their semifinal spot when they take on Bangladesh, who will be fighting for survival, in their Champions Trophy Group A match here on Monday.

The Black Caps started their campaign in dominant fashion, defeating hosts Pakistan by 60 runs. This emphatic victory placed them at the top of Group A with a healthy net run rate of 1.200. A win on Monday will put them within touching distance of a semifinal berth. Bangladesh, on the other hand, suffered a six-wicket loss to India and currently sit third in the group with a net run rate of -0.408. They must secure a victory to stay in contention for the knockout stage. New Zealand looked clinical in their opening match, and their recent triumph in the tri-series has further helped them adapt to the conditions in Pakistan. However, they now face a selection dilemma with the potential return of Rachin Ravindra from a head injury. In his absence, Devon Conway and Will Young opened the innings. Initially, Young was expected to make way for Ravindra, but the right-hander's century against Pakistan has complicated the

decision — in a positive way. Moreover, Young has consistently proven his ability to handle spin bowling effectively. Dropping him would also disrupt the left-hand-right-hand combination at the top, which could be crucial for New Zealand's batting strategy. Meanwhile, Conway appears to be regaining his best form. Apart from this selection call, New Zealand look well-settled and are unlikely to make further changes to their playing XI. Bangladesh, however, face an uphill task and must regroup quickly after their disappointing defeat against neighbours India. The pressure will be on their top order to deliver, as their batting struggles were evident in the previous match. If not for the 154-run sixth-wicket partnership between Jaker Ali and Towhid Hridoy, Bangladesh would have struggled to even reach 100. Despite winning a crucial toss, the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side failed to capitalise on the advantage and got off to a poor start. Their bowlers performed well but lacked the runs to defend. Adding to their woes, sloppy fielding cost them valuable opportunities, and they will need a significant improvement in that area if they hope to challenge a quality side like New Zealand.