

# INDIAN CHRONICLE

12 February, 2025 | Wednesday | Volume No:11 | Issue No: 1 Pages: 8+8 www.indianchronicle.com Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State) ₹ 3

## Law & order deteriorating in State: KTR

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao on Monday alleged that the attack on the Chilukuru Balaji Temple head priest CS Rangarajan was a testament to the deteriorating law and order situation in the state.

Rama Rao along with MLA P Sabita Indra Reddy and others visited Rangarajan, who was attacked.

KTR demanded that the fanatics who committed the attack be severely punished. "The law and order situa-

tion in Telangana is in a state of disarray.

The attack on Chilukuru Balaji Temple Chief Priest Rangarajan is a testament to this.

The attack on Rangarajan is the most heinous and despicable act. No matter who did it, in what name, or with what agenda, the state government has the responsibility to act with iron fist in matters of law and order," said Rao.

## India happy to host next AI Action Summit: PM Modi

Paris: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that in order to build on the momentum of the AI Action Summit here, India would be happy to host the next Summit. In his concluding address, PM Modi said that today's discussions have brought out one thing - there is unity in vision and unity in purpose across stakeholders. "I welcome the decision to set up the AI Foundation and the Council for Sustainable AI," the Prime Minister noted. Also Read - AI writing code for humanity in this century, time to democratise tech: PM Modi "I congratulate France and my dear friend President Emmanuel Macron for these initiatives and assure our full support," he added. Prime Minister suggested to make the "Global Partnership for AI" truly global in nature. "It should be more inclusive of the Global South and its priorities, concerns and needs," the Prime Minister mentioned. Earlier in the day, PM Modi said that India is developing AI applications for the public good and has one of the world's largest AI talent pools. Also Read - Looking forward to meeting my friend Trump, says Modi He further stated that the country is ready to share its experience and expertise to ensure that the "AI future is for Good, and for All". PM Modi said India is also building its own large language model (LLM), considering its diversity. "We also have a unique public-private partnership model for pooling resources like computing power. It is made available to our start-ups and researchers at an affordable cost,"



informed the Prime Minister. Also Read - India, France look beyond defence to deepen bilateral economic ties PM Modi further stated while the positive potential of AI is absolutely amazing, there are many biases that we need to think carefully about. "We must build quality data sets, free from biases. We must democratise technology and create people-centric applications. We must address concerns related to cyber security, disinformation, and deepfakes. And, we must also ensure that technology is rooted in local ecosystems for it to be effective and useful," PM Modi emphasised. AI is developing at an unprecedented scale and speed and being adopted and deployed even faster. There is also a deep inter-dependence across borders.

## MRPS President Manda Krishna Meets Telangana CM Revanth Reddy



Hyderabad : Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) president Manda Krishna Madiga met Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Monday. The meeting saw the participation of Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Government Advisor K. Keshava Rao, CM's Advisor Vem Narendra Reddy, former MLA Sampath Kumar, and representatives of Madiga sub-castes. Discussions during the meeting are believed to have revolved around issues concerning the Madiga community and their demands for social justice and reservations. Manda Krishna has been a long-time advocate for categorization within Scheduled Castes to ensure equitable benefits for marginalized groups.

## ED restores SBI's assets worth Rs 79 crore in money laundering case

Hyderabad: The Enforcement Directorate (ED), Hyderabad Zonal Office, has successfully restored properties worth Rs 79.20 crore to the State Bank of India in connection with a money laundering case against Musaddilal Jewellers and others. Based on ED's initiative, the State Bank of India (SBI) filed restitution applications under Section 8(B) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 before the Special PMLA Court for the release of moveable properties seized by the ED, Hyderabad Zonal Office. The Central agency said in a release on Tuesday that it urged the Special Court to release the seized amount to the rightful claimant, i.e. SBI in the public interest. The court through orders dated January 6 and February 3 allowed the petitions and ordered for release of moveable properties in the form of jewellery worth Rs 79.20 crore. This jewellery was seized from the commercial premises of Musaddilal Jewellers. The ED has been investigating a money laundering case against Musaddilal Jewellers and others who had deposited more than Rs 111 crore in demonetised currency immediately after the demonetisation of high-value notes was declared in 2016. The ED investigation revealed that demonetised currency was deposited under the pretext of receipt of advance money from around 6000 fake customers by creating fake invoices of less than Rs 2 lakh each. The investigation also revealed that the amount was deposited in various bank accounts and was utilised towards the purchase of gold bullion which was further sold. In this process, further Proceeds of Crime (POC) of Rs 28 crore were derived from such sale. The SBI had



extended various credit facilities to Musaddilal Jewellers which remained unpaid and the loan accounts turned NPA in July 2019. Musaddilal had outstanding dues to SBI of over Rs 120 crore as of March 14, 2023. The ED had seized moveable properties worth Rs 83.30 crore during searches conducted on January 12, 2017 and April 15, 2019. Provisional attachment of moveable and immovable properties to the tune of Rs 130.57 crore, including moveable properties worth Rs 83.30 crore seized during search operations, was also done by the ED during the investigation. This marks a significant step in ED's ongoing efforts to restore properties to their rightful claimants and to ensure that Proceeds of Crime are returned to those affected. ED continues to uphold its commitment to combating financial crimes and ensuring justice for victims of such crimes, the agency said.

## T-JUDA urges for immediate crackdown on quacks



Hyderabad: The Telangana Junior Doctors Association (T-JUDA) have demanded the state government to show no mercy for quacks and also urged for immedi-

ate crackdown on illegal practitioners. The JUDAs demanded the Department of Health and the Law Department to impose stricter laws, initiate immediate arrests, and take harsher action against these quacks and their supporters.

"There will be no leniency! Those who risk innocent lives with their incompetence deserve nothing but the harshest punishment," they said. Also Read - Jr docs urge Health Min for redressal of demands The JUDAs strongly condemn and opposes the 'disgraceful demands' of self-proclaimed RMPs and PMPs protesting at Indira Park.

These illegal quacks, who have no medical qualification or certification, dare to demand legal recognition to continue playing with innocent lives. Their call to stop raids by the Telangana State Medical Council (TGM), prevent legal action, and halt arrests was nothing but an audacious attempt to escape accountability for their dangerous, life-threatening practices, they said.

## Big relief for DSC-2008 candidates: HC asks govt to issue appointment orders by Feb 17

Hyderabad: On Monday, the HC division bench of Justices Abhinand Kumar Shavili and E Tirumala Devi expressed annoyance over the government and the School Education officials for not implementing its orders dated February 3 directing the government to is-

sue orders of contractual appointment to 1,382 unsuccessful candidates of DSC-2008. On February 3 the division bench while hearing the batch of petitions filed by Pathuri Uma Maheshwar and others and other writs had directed the government to implement its orders by February 10, but they were not complied with.

## Amit Shah hints at using AI to detect mule accounts



New Delhi: Efforts are underway to use Artificial Intelligence for identifying mule accounts, while over 19 lakh such accounts have been caught and transactions worth Rs 2,038 crore prevented in the fight against cybercrime, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday. A mule account is a bank account used by criminals to transfer stolen money. The person who owns the account is called a "money mule". Also Read - UN chief Guterres calls for democratising AI, avoiding geopolitical divide Chairing a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Home Affairs on the topic of 'Cyber Security and Cyber Crime', he said considering the spike in cyber financial frauds the Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)'s 1930 helpline is be-

ing promoted as a one-point solution offering various services, such as blocking cards. Also Read - Five Arrested for Robbing Man at Knife-Point After Meeting on Dating App A total of 1.43 lakh FIRs have been registered on the I4C portal, and over 19 crore people have used the portal, he said. He emphasised the importance of raising awareness among the public to prevent cybercrime and requested all the members of the committee to promote the I4C helpline number 1930. The Home Minister also mentioned that, for national security reasons, 805 apps and 3,266 website links have been blocked based on I4C's recommendations.

Panic grips Noida schools after receiving bomb threats Additionally, 399 banks and financial intermediaries have come on board. Over 6 lakh suspicious data points have been shared, more than 19 lakh mule accounts have been caught, and suspicious transactions worth Rs 2,038 crore have been prevented. Home Minister Shah said that Cyber Crime Forensic Training Labs have been established in 33 states and Union Territories. On the 'CyTrain' platform, a "Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)" platform, 101,561 police officers have registered, and over 78,000 certificates have been issued. The meeting was attended by Union Ministers of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, members of the Committee, the Union Home Secretary, and senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

## Piyush Goyal rolls out red carpet for Israeli firms to invest in India

New Delhi: The government on Tuesday invited Israeli companies to invest in India as the rapid growth in the country's "demand potential" offers huge business opportunities. Addressing the India-Israel Business Forum here, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, said that "demand defines the India story". "Show me any other country in the world where you can sell 250 million washing machines, maybe in the next 10-15 years, or 250 million refrigerators, television sets, or smartphones. That's the demand potential that India has," the Union Minister told the gathering. Also Read - Talked family matters with Kharge, not politics: Parameshwara on Karnataka Congress infighting Goyal highlighted that in the last decade, the government has focused on strengthening the macroeconomic fundamentals of the country with a strong emphasis on improving infrastructure to take economic prosperity to every corner of the country. India provides a huge domestic market of 1.4 billion people, he pointed out. He highlighted '10 Ds' that define the India opportunity - democracy, demographic dividend, diversity, digitalisation, decarbonisation, determination, development, dependability, decisiveness and demand. Also Read - India to inaugurate EFTA Desk to bolster economic ties with 4 European nations today Goyal emphasised on India being a dependable partner to Israel as the country is known to keep every commitment it makes. He also stressed on the demand potential of the country that has shown rapid growth and is set to increase every year. Calling India and Israel natural allies, he noted that due to India's large demand growth Israel has several key areas from technology to appliances to invest in. Also Read - Piyush Goyal slams states seeking Central funds on basis of tax contribution India has a strong judiciary to fall back on, the Minister noted, and said that the young demographic will provide a strong workforce for the future decades. He also highlighted the Centre's efforts to provide public welfare over the years. Today the efforts have given rich dividends. The nation is



standing on strong macroeconomic fundamentals with ability to withstand Covid, war and amidst turbulent geopolitical times, said the minister. Also Read - India on the path to hit record \$800 billion in exports in FY25 Israel's Minister of Economy and Industry, Nir Barkat, said a mutual investment agreement between the two countries could be signed. "We are also seeking how to help invest in infrastructure and in companies that are going to 'Make in India' aligned with the strategy of Prime Minister Modi. This is something that makes sense for Israeli companies," Barkat noted. The Israeli minister said that with over 10,000 startups, Israel is among the most entrepreneurial countries in the world. "We excel in classic high-tech, agro-tech, food-tech, aqua-tech, desert-tech and climate change. We are very powerful in defence and homeland security and in advanced industries. We find those business clusters are very relevant for India," he mentioned. The Israeli government will develop a protocol to offer infrastructure tenders to Indian companies, Israel's Ambassador Reuven Azar said at the Summit. In his address, Azar also proposed to sign a mutual investment agreement between the two countries as soon as next month. India received \$327 million foreign direct investment (FDI) from Israel during April 2000 and September 2024.

## Harish flays harassment of RMPs, PMPs



Hyderabad: The RMPs and PMPs under the banner of Telangana Grameena Vaidyula Samakhya took up a big protest demanding the government to stop the cases being filed on them and also implement the pre-poll promise of providing training and giving recognition as per GO

429. The RMPs and PMPs under Samakhya took up the protest at Dharna Chowk at Indira Park on Monday. Speaking in the protest, BRS leader T Harish Rao said that the Congress government utterly failed to deliver on its promises, pushing every section of society into distress.

T-JUDA urges for immediate crackdown on quacks He strongly condemned the police harassment of RMPs and PMPs, accusing the Congress government of backtracking on its own manifesto promise of providing training and certification. "Instead of fulfilling that commitment, they are filing cases and disrupting livelihoods. Under the BRS government, there were no attacks or police cases against RMPs and PMPs. But now, people live in fear, unsure of when they will be arrested next," he said. He demanded that the government immediately withdraw all cases and implement the promised training and certification.

## Hyderabad's Lakes at Risk: Government Unveils High-Tech Measures to Prevent Illegal encroachments

The Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) has made a decision to turn part of a water body and its surrounding area into land for houses. This is surprising because normally, building on water bodies and their buffer zones is not allowed. This decision has caused concern among environmentalists because they worry it could harm the environment and the animals living near the water bodies. Some people believe that politics may have influenced the decision, and they are

afraid it could lead to more flooding and further damage to the environment.

To protect the water bodies, the government plans to install security cameras around important lakes in Nizampet, Chandanagar, Moinabad, Gandipet, and Mailardevpally. This will help stop illegal activities like land grabbing or building. The government will also use geo-tagging to monitor what's happening around the lakes. These steps will help keep the water bodies safe and protect the city's water resources.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

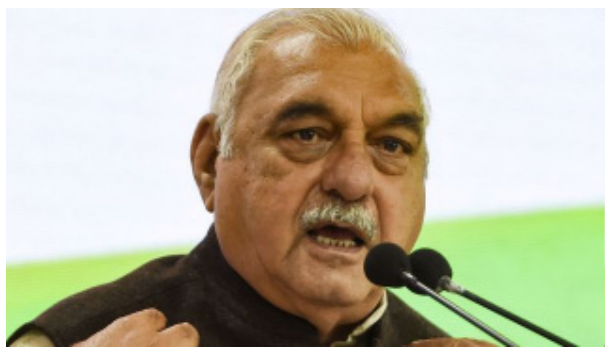
## Workers in peril

SITTING ducks — that's what all those nameless, faceless workers are who toil day and night on development projects across the country. Their safety is of little concern to their employers, even though the infrastructure sector continues to be a key driver of Indian economy. When 40-odd labourers were rescued from Uttarakhand's Silkyara tunnel in November 2023 — the risky operation was watched by the entire nation with bated breath — it was hoped that lessons would be learnt to ensure safer working conditions at construction sites. That hope has proved to be short-lived.

Two workers were killed when a centring frame collapsed during the laying of a slab at an under-construction building in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, on Saturday. The same day, 28 workers were trapped when the shuttering of an upcoming building caved in at Kannauj railway station in Uttar Pradesh. It took a 16-hour operation, involving personnel of the national and state disaster response forces and the railways, to rescue all of them. In contrast, frantic efforts to save labourers from a watery grave in a flooded rat-hole coal mine in Assam have proved futile. Criminal negligence is at the core of such mishaps, even as the rescuers put their own lives at risk to extricate survivors. Brazen disregard for the law by public or private entities shows enforcement agencies in a poor light.

Why are the humble workers not regarded as nation-builders? Why are they left to fend for themselves? Such apathy does not behove a country that aspires to become developed (Viksit) by 2047. The Buildings and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, puts the onus on employers to set up safety committees and ensure that steps are taken to prevent accidents. Non-compliance with provisions of the Act is a punishable offence, yet offenders rarely get their just deserts.

## Punjab and Haryana HC upholds CBI court summoning addl accused to face Gurgaon land 'scam' trial



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has upheld a CBI Special Judge order summoning Amit Katyal as an additional accused to face trial in connection with the Gurgaon land acquisition scam case, which allegedly involved former Haryana chief minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda and others from the Industrial Model Township. The bench of Justice Kuldeep Tiwari held that there is sufficient incriminating evidence to require petitioner Katyal, the director of the company allegedly involved in the scam, to face trial along with the other co-accused.

In his revision petition before the High Court, Katyal challenged the Panchkula Special CBI Court's order summoning him as an additional accused to face trial for allegedly committing offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act and forgery. As per the FIR, certain private companies conspired with the former CM and the minister in charge of the Directorate of Town and Country Planning during 2007-12 to acquire private land, including agricultural land, at low rates for "public purpose". It is alleged that these lands were later released by the state government to benefit private builders, resulting in a huge loss to farmers and the state exchequer. The CBI in this connection had chargesheeted 17 persons, including Hooda, then Chief Administrator of HUDA, Director of Urban Estate, Director of the Town and Country Planning Department of Haryana and others. At the time of taking cognisance in 2021, the trial court had directed the Investigating Officer to file an affidavit, specifically mentioning how and under what circumstances the name of the present petitioner i.e. Amit Katyal, was not included in the array of the accused persons. In pursuance of the directions, an affidavit was filed by the IO where after, the CBI Court summoned Katyal as an additional accused in exercise of its powers under Section 19 of CrPC.

Katyal's counsel argued in the HC that his client's role had already been looked into and investigated by the CBI, as there was no material to implicate the petitioner, he was rightly not arrayed, as an accused. "The present petitioner, being the director of the company, was only acting on behalf of the company, as there was no active role attributed

to the present petitioner, therefore, made him vicarious liable. There is no mensa which could attribute to the present petitioner, warranting him to face trial with the accused company," the counsel said. CBI counsel Ravi Kamal Gupta, however, in his submissions protected the impugned order and submitted, "The order does not suffer any perversity or illegality, requiring any interference of this Court, while exercising its statutory revisional powers. The learned trial Court concerned in its detailed order has considered all the incriminating evidence requiring the petitioner to face trial, along with other co-accused in the final report, before exercising its powers, as envisaged under Section 193 of Cr.P.C."

By referring to the final report, Advocate Gupta drew the attention of the HC towards all incriminating evidence and submitted that "during the investigation, the corporate wheel was lifted, and the role of the present petitioner clearly surfaced being one of the perpetrators who has acted since inception till the end, in conspiracy with the officials of the department concerned, for making undue wrongful gain and caused wrongful loss to the State, and the erstwhile land owners." Hearing the matter, Justice Tiwari held that the Special Judge might take cognisance of the offence without the accused being committed to him for trial, and the Court of Special Judge shall be deemed to be a Court of Sessions. "...the Special Court, CBI, has the power of original jurisdiction, who could issue the summons under Section 193 of the CrPC, on the basis of the records transmitted to him as a result of committal order passed by the learned Magistrate. The Special Judge can do so in case he finds sufficient incriminating evidence against any other person, who has not been arrayed in the array of accused, by the investigating officer concerned," observed Justice Tiwari. "It clearly transpires that there is sufficient incriminating evidence requiring the present petitioner to face the trial, along with other co-accused," Justice Tiwari said. The bench noted, "It further transpired during the preliminary inquiry that in furtherance of the criminal conspiracy, the coloniser companies, which had in possession land in their own names, at the time of issuance of notification under Section 4 applied for LoI (Letter of Intent)/License and managed to get the respective land released from the acquisition process as they had deep nexus with the officials of the department concerned." Justice Tewari said the court examined all incriminating evidence and was of the view there was sufficient incriminating evidence, requiring the petitioner, the director of the company, to face trial along with the other co-accused. "Prima facie, this Court also found incriminating evidence against the present petitioner, who since the inception and till the end, played an active role in a conspiracy with the other co-accused, not only to obtain LOI but also to execute the collaboration agreements, Special Power of Attorney, General Power of Attorney, with the erstwhile landowners and caused financial huge loss to them," added the court.

## 2 held for killing colleague who repeatedly insulted them at workplace



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Further investigation into the matter is underway, colleague, killed, indian express Further investigation into the matter is underway. A 25-year-old man was killed allegedly by his colleagues for repeatedly insulting them at their workplace, police here said. Police received a PCR call on Tuesday night about some foul smell emanating from a locked room in the Rampura area. As the team reached the spot, they discovered a decomposed male body, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest) Bisham Singh said. The deceased was identified as Golu. A case was registered and an investigation was initiated. During the investigation, the police found that Golu frequently made social media reels with one of the suspects, Ranjeet (30), the DCP said.

"Scrutiny of Ranjeet's social media account provided crucial leads. Police raided multiple locations and apprehended two suspects — Ranjeet and Neeraj Verma (23), both residents of Rampura," said the DCP. The accused revealed that Golu had been their colleague at a tent house and later at a footwear factory. He frequently reprimanded and humiliated them, both verbally and physically, police said. On one occasion, Golu assaulted the accused, further fueling their resentment. Seeking revenge for their humiliation, Ranjeet and Neeraj lured Golu to a location, where they murdered him using a wooden stick, said the officer. Further investigation into the matter is underway.

## Modi, Amit Shah remember Jats only during polls': Arvind Kejriwal seeks inclusion of community in Central OBC list

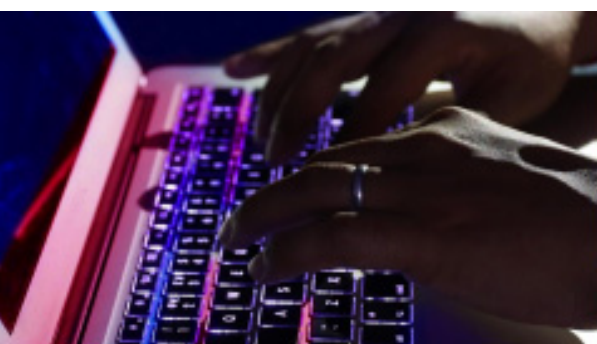
GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah of "betraying" the Jat community of Delhi by not including it in the Centre's Other Backward Classes (OBC) list. The Jat community holds significant influence in Delhi, comprising an estimated 8-10 per cent of the electorate. Speaking at a press conference ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, Kejriwal said he wrote to PM Modi, demanding the inclusion of Delhi's Jat community in the Central OBC list. "In Delhi, we have an OBC list that includes the Jat community. However, the community is not included in the Central government's OBC list. As a result, when students from Delhi apply for admission to central universities like Delhi University (DU), they do not receive reservation under the OBC category," he said. "Interestingly, the Jat community in Rajasthan is included in the Centre's OBC list, allowing them to receive reservations in Delhi colleges and during Delhi Police job recruitment. However, students from the Jat community in Delhi do not receive these benefits for admissions and jobs," Kejriwal added. Attacking the BJP-led Centre, Kejriwal said a grave injustice was being done to the "brothers and sisters" from the Jat community in Delhi. "PM Modi called the Jat leaders and met them three times in his house in the last 10 years. Shah also met them, but they have yet to deliver the promises they made. They only remember Jat bhai (brothers) during polls; after that, they (Centre) forget them," he said. He also mentioned that there are five other communities included in the Delhi list but not in the Centre's OBC list: Rawat, Roniyar, Raitanwar, Charan, and Ode. These communities do not receive the benefits of reservation in Delhi and central universities, as well as in jobs, said Kejriwal. "There are seven central universities in Delhi, and Delhi University (DU) has several colleges. Additionally, there are government sectors like Delhi Police, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and several hospitals where people from these communities do not benefit from reservation. I urge the prime minister and the home minister to honour the promises they made to the people of these communities," Kejriwal said. "I also assure you Kejriwal will fight for his Jat sisters and brothers and get them added to the Centre's list. I will do whatever and go to any limit to get you your rights," added Kejriwal. The Delhi Assembly elections to elect 70 MLAs will be held in a single phase on February 5, and the counting will be done on February 8.

## MahaRERA suspends 1,905 projects over non-compliance with status update notices

The Maharashtra Real Estate Regulatory Authority (MahaRERA) recently suspended 1,905 housing projects across the state, including 51 in Mumbai and 111 in its suburbs, as their developers did not respond to notices regarding the projects' status updates. Pune witnessed the highest number of suspensions at 487, followed by Raigad (240) and Thane (204). MahaRERA had issued show cause notices to 10,773 developers whose projects had missed completion deadlines, and they had not informed the regulator. Of these, 5,324 developers responded, with 3,517 submitting their Occupancy Certificates and 524 requesting deadline extensions. Currently, 1,283 responses are under review. Developers of 3,499 other projects have failed to respond, and a similar suspension is being considered for them as well, said sources. Manoj Saunik, chairman of the regulator, said, "MahaRERA is aware that the number of projects that have not responded is significant and we have initiated action against such projects to protect home buyers' interests." According to the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, developers must regularly update project status on the MahaRERA website, including submitting quarterly and annual progress reports.

## IT Ministry notifies draft rules under data protection law



The draft rules are open for public feedback until February 18. "The submissions will be held in fiduciary capacity in MeitY and shall not be disclosed to any one at any stage," the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said on the MyGov portal, where it is accepting submissions from stakeholders

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

The Union government on Friday (January 3, 2025) evening released the draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025, which will enforce provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. While the Act was passed over a year ago, the rules that will result in its enforcement have thus far been under development, and are only now being floated for public consultation. The DPDP Act provides a legal framework for "data fiduciaries" — entities that collect personal data from "data principals" or users — in order to protect that data against misuse and penalise firms who violate data protection principles.

The draft rules are open for public feedback until February 18. "The submissions will be held in fiduciary capacity in MeitY and shall not be disclosed to any one at any stage," the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said on the MyGov portal, where it is accepting submissions from stakeholders. The draft rules specify the nature of the notice that data fiduciaries must provide users when collecting their data: what data they're collecting, why they're collecting it, and "a fair account of the details necessary to enable the Data Principal to give specific and informed consent for the processing of her personal data".

Consent managers The draft also provides for the registration of so-called consent managers, which work with data fiduciaries for collecting consent under the specified format from users. Subject to certain "standards," the government and its "instrumentalities" can collect data for the purpose of providing subsidies and benefits, the draft rules say. Data collected for "statistical" purposes is also exempt.

A data fiduciary "shall protect personal data in its possession or under its control ... by taking reasonable security safeguards to prevent personal data breach," the rules say, by providing for technical and operational safeguards. Within 72 hours of a data breach, the Data Protection Board of India (DPBI), which is yet to be set up, should be informed, the rules say. In certain cases where a user is not using an e-commerce provider, social media platform, or online gaming service anymore for an extended period of time, the rules say, their data must be deleted, after providing 48 hours of advance notice and time to stop deletion. The contact information of a data protection officer must be provided on the data fiduciary's website. "Significant" data fiduciaries must periodically conduct a "Data Protection Impact Assessment and an audit to ensure effective observance of the provisions of this Act," the rules say.

For minors, "appropriate technical and organisational measures [shall be adopted] to ensure that verifiable consent of the parent is obtained before the processing of any personal data of a child," the rules say. For this purpose, data fiduciaries should rely on "voluntarily provided details of identity and age or a virtual token mapped to the same, which is issued by an entity entrusted by law or the Central Government or a State Government with the maintenance of such details or a person appointed or permitted by such entity for such issuance, and includes such details or token verified and made available by a Digital Locker service provider," or "reliable" details on the user they already hold. Processing Indians' data abroad is subject to "requirements" that the government may "specify" in future orders, the rules say.

## 'Misconceived': Bombay High Court junks plea against Koshyari's withdrawal of MVA govt's MLC picks

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

The Bombay High Court on Thursday dismissed a PIL petition challenging then governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's 2022 decision to withdraw the names suggested by the previous Maha Vikas Aghadi government to fill 12 Member of Legislative Council posts from the governor's quota. "The PIL is misconceived and is liable to be dismissed," a division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar said of the petition filed by Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sunil Modi. On September 5, 2022, Koshyari approved the Eknath Shinde government's recommendation to return the 12 names suggested in November 2020 by the government led by Uddhav Thackeray. The 12 posts, to be filled as per Article 171 (5) of the Constitution with people having special knowledge and experience in various fields, have remained vacant for over three years.

Before concluding the hearing and reserving its judgment on October 7, 2024, the high court had questioned whether the petition had lost its efficacy in light of the petitioner's submission that the governor was bound to accept the advice of the council of ministers, except when he believed the candidate was not qualified and that he did not have independent discretion to take a decision on the list. "Now that list/recommendation has been withdrawn and there is no list yet, is not the governor bound by the said decision? Where is the governor's discretion? Can he act on his own? What remains now?" the bench had remarked. Senior advocate Yashraj Sing Deora, representing the petitioner, had submitted that the governor could have exercised independent discretion while returning the file to the cabinet and need not have acted merely as a "rubber stamp".

## Mumbai sub-inspector seeks bribe of Rs 3 lakh for releasing man detained in drugs case, booked



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

The police said that the officer told the complainant, a South Mumbai resident, that he would have to pay the bribe to save his brother who was detained at Dongri police station on October 14. The police said that the officer told the complainant, a South Mumbai resident, that he would have to pay the bribe to save his brother who was detained at Dongri police station on October 14. (

The Maharashtra Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday registered a case against a police sub-inspector in Mumbai who allegedly demanded Rs 3 lakh from a 30-year-old man to release his brother involved in a narcotics case. According to the ACB, the accused officer attached to Dongri police station, identified as Gyanesh Yedage, became aware of the investigation against him and went on a sick leave. "We have not arrested the accused as he was not caught red-handed. We have registered a case based

on the demand for money, which was confirmed during our verification," an ACB officer said. The police said that the officer told the complainant, a South Mumbai resident, that he would have to pay the bribe to save his brother who was detained at Dongri police station on October 14. As the complainant was not ready to yield to the demand, he approached anti-corruption agency headquarters on October 16, and filed a written complaint against the public servant. "When the arrested person's brother went to the police station to inquire about the matter, he was told that his brother had been arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act," said an ACB official. Further threats The 30-year-old was further threatened saying that the police would book his brother for possessing drugs in a commercial quantity, which would keep him in jail for a longer duration. "The complainant was told that he would not be granted bail and could face imprisonment for seven to eight years," the officer added. Yedage further told the complainant that to avoid his brother being charged with possessing a commercial quantity of drugs, he would have to pay Rs 3 lakh. After negotiations, the officer agreed to help for Rs 2.7 lakh, the investigators said. "Based on the complaint, we found that the public servant had demanded and agreed to accept a bribe of Rs 70,000 (after negotiation) from the complainant to prevent his brother from being charged in a commercial quantity case. This constituted an attempt to obtain illegal gratification," said an officer. The arrested person was jailed for around two months, and since the complainant was also unwell, the ACB officials stated that a case was only registered on January 8.

## Pune civic body to conduct cost-benefit survey for road tunnel through Taljai Hill



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), which is already facing flak for its road tunnel project through Vetal Tekdi, is set to conduct a cost-benefit survey for a similar tunnel across Taljai Hill to connect Satara Road and Sinhadag Road. "The civic administration will take up the cost-benefit survey of the proposed tunnel to check its feasibility. This will include the study of actual and estimated traffic flow from Satara Road to Sinhadag Road and vice versa," Rajendra Bhosale, Pune Municipal Commissioner, said.

The proposal to build a 24 m-wide tunnel through Taljai

Hill, the largest green cover in the heart of Pune city, was first mooted two decades ago as a solution to the traffic congestion on Satara Road and Sinhadag Road which are otherwise connected via Swargate and Katraj. The proposed tunnel from Sahkamarg on Satara Road and Hingane Khurd on Sinhadag Road will cut through Taljai Hill. It is expected to ease traffic flow at Swargate and Katraj and benefit residents of Karve Road and Solapur Road by reducing their travel distance and commuting time. Bhosale said the opinion of all stakeholders will be taken into consideration.

In 2018-19, then PMC standing committee chairperson and now Union minister Murlidhar Mohol had proposed a Rs 2 crore budget for preparing a detailed project report on the Taljai tunnel. However, it faced opposition from locals and environmentalists. The latest development comes at a time when proposed tunnels from Paud to Pashan and Ganeshkhind Road across Vetal Tekdi are being opposed by locals and environmentalists. "The civic body needs to understand that the groundwater level is already depleting and the construction of tunnels would further damage underground streams. It will have an adverse impact on the ecology of the hills that act as the lungs of a city which is witnessing an increase in air pollution due to vehicles and construction activities," Kiran Parge, a Sinhadag Road resident who enjoys his morning walk on Taljai Hill daily, said.

## After TMC and Samajwadi Party, Sena (UBT) backs AAP in Delhi polls

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Delhi While the AAP, Sena (UBT), and Congress are part of the Opposition INDIA bloc, the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party are contesting the Delhi polls separately. In yet another sign of a rift between Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) allies the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party Thursday announced its support to Arvind Kejriwal's AAP in the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections instead of the Congress.

While speaking to reporters in Delhi, Sena (UBT) leader and MP Anil Desai said they will support the AAP as the Kejriwal-led party backed them in the Maharashtra Assembly elections. While the AAP, Sena (UBT), and Congress are part of the Opposition INDIA bloc, the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party are contesting the Delhi polls separately. The Congress and AAP had come together for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray)'s announcement comes a day after the Trinamool Congress led by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said it would support the AAP in the Delhi Assembly elections. In December last year, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, also an ally in the INDIA bloc, said his party would back the AAP in the Delhi polls. Senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said the INDIA bloc was formed for Lok Sabha polls and it should be considered as an alliance in every election.

"Both the AAP and Congress are part of the INDIA bloc. We have repeatedly said that Congress is a big party in the country, but the AAP is a big party in Delhi. The AAP has the most strength in Delhi. The atmosphere in Delhi is such that the AAP is winning the elections by a good margin. Our party is sad that the Congress calls a leader like



Arvind Kejriwal a traitor. Running such a campaign against him is not good and we do not agree with it," he said. "We were with the Congress in Maharashtra and the Lok Sabha elections. The AAP is also our partner. Both should maintain balance in campaigning. Many parties like us are in a dilemma as to what to do in Delhi. We have a good relationship with both parties," he added. The Sena (UBT) move also comes ahead of the polls for the prestigious Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and other civic bodies in the state, which Uddhav's party is keen on contesting solo. During the review meetings ahead of the BMC polls, several Sena (UBT) leaders and office bearers said the party should contest the civic body elections on its own instead of allying with the Congress. Sanjay Raut has also indicated on a couple of occasions in the past month that the Sena UBT may go solo in the Maharashtra civic polls. The Delhi elections will see a three-cornered contest between the AAP, BJP and Congress. The results will be declared on February 8.

## Farmer attempts suicide at Shambhu border, dies at Patiala hospital

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Farmers protest in Patiala Under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, farmers have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13. (PTI) A 55-year-old farmer protesting at the Shambhu border allegedly committed suicide on Thursday by consuming a poisonous substance, farmer leaders said, the second such incident at the agitation site within three weeks. Resham Singh, who was from Pahuwind in Tarn Taran district, took the extreme step at the Shambhu border point between Punjab and Haryana where farmers have been protesting for almost a year now, pressing the Centre guarantees Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. Resham Singh was taken to the Rajindra hospital in Patiala where he died, the farmers said. Farmer leader Tejvir Singh said Resham Singh was upset with the Central government for not resolving the issues despite their protracted protest. Another farmer, Ranjodh Singh, committed suicide at the Shambhu border on December 18. Ranjodh Singh was distressed by the deteriorating health of farmer leader Jagjit



Singh Dallewal (70), who has been on a fast-unto-death since November 26 at the Khanauri border. Under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, farmers have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

## Dr John Kurrien, a pioneer in education policy who empowered teachers and adopted technology

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Dr John Kurrien set up the Centre For Learning Resources (CLR) in Pune in 1984. Dr John Kurrien set up the Centre For Learning Resources (CLR) in Pune in 1984. Renowned educationist Dr John Kurrien, who passed away on December 24, was a leading influence on the country's primary education policy and practice. Various experts said India lost a visionary passionately committed to ensuring that every child in India gets a high-quality, holistic education. Dr Kurrien established the Centre for Learning Resources (CLR) in Pune in 1984 and contributed to some of the most significant national landmarks in education. These include the working groups of several five-year plans, the National Curriculum Framework, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and the Right to Education (RTE) Act. He was also involved in campaigns for child rights and against child labour. After Dr Kurrien received his doctorate in education policy studies from the University of Wisconsin in 1976, he and his wife, Zakiya Kurrien, also an education expert, returned to India, determined to contribute significantly to their country of birth. Dr Kurrien joined the faculty of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). His seminal book Elementary Education in India: Myth, Reality, Alternative exposed the dire state of school education in India. Working on the book convinced him and Zakiya of the need to address the issue at its root—the education of teachers and community-based interventions. Even after he retired as co-director of CLR almost thirty years later, he remained closely involved in the organisation as a governing council member and director emeritus.

Zakiya, a collaborator with her husband for almost 50

years, said, "For him, his work in education was part of a larger picture of combatting the deprivations and injustices that so many of our people face. He supported many other causes and contributed generously to organisations working towards creating a more just and equitable society". From its inception, CLR focused on developing teachers and anganwadi workers as involved and competent professionals. Working hand in hand with other NGOs, CLR has attempted to strengthen existing government education systems and institutions, she added. Holistic development in early childhood, language and literacy learning in the regional language, early mathematics, and a holistic view of elementary education formed the backbone of the early years of the CLR's work. Recognising that English was essential for underprivileged children to access jobs, higher education, and social mobility, Dr Kurrien strongly advocated for and worked to teach English as a second language. His other area of research and advocacy was the education of minorities, particularly Muslims, who had poor educational outcomes. An optimist and open to new ideas, he recognised the role of technology in education early while emphasising the centrality of the teacher. CLR works to provide better tools for teachers, not to substitute them. It is involved in knowledge generation through projects that can help bring new learning to policy and programmes. Madhukar Banuri, the current director of CLR, said, "To the CLR staff, Dr Kurrien was an inspiration. He constantly provided us with diverse perspectives on education and pushed us to work with a deep commitment to equity. His legacy will continue with CLR as an institution of excellence in capacity building, research, and content development for education for all children."

## Pune tops in housing project violations as Maharashtra regulatory body set to suspend registrations of 1,905 projects in state



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Pune district, with close to 500 non-compliant housing projects, leads in Maharashtra as Maharashtra Real Estate Regulatory Authority (MahaRERA) is gearing up to suspend the registrations of 1,905 projects across the state, officials said. The authority has started taking action like imposing penalties, freezing bank accounts, and restricting property transactions against erring realtors so as to ensure financial discipline in Maharashtra's real estate sector. As many as 487 projects in Pune such as Kalyani Developers, Shree Datta Developers, and many others have faced stringent action for not complying with the norms issued by MahaRERA. Pune is followed by Raigad with 240 projects and Thane with 204 in terms of non-compliance. However, Mumbai Suburban and Mumbai City have 111 and 51 projects, respectively.

MahaRERA is set to take action against 3,499 projects that continued to remain non-compliant despite getting showcause notice last month. It had served notices on developers of 10,773 lapsed housing projects,

## Meet Darpan Prasher, a Punjabi on a mission to strengthen Indo-Georgian cultural ties

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

For over a decade, Diwali, Holi, Yoga Day, and several other Indian festivals have been celebrated in Georgia, bringing together the Indian expatriate community and locals, largely due to the efforts of a Punjabi man who has been successfully bridging cultural divides in Tbilisi, the country's capital. Meet Darpan Prasher, an Indian-origin Georgian citizen with roots in Amritsar, Punjab, who has been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen Indo-Georgian cultural ties ever since he first visited the country in 2002. Prasher's efforts at fostering relations between the two countries came to the fore after a gas leak incident at an Indian restaurant in December last year led to the deaths of 11 Indians.

A Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award winner, Prasher's work in Georgia has become even more significant in recent years as nearly 20,000 Indian students are currently in the country, a majority studying medicine. In an interview with The Indian Express, Prasher, the founder of NGO Cultural Diversity for Peaceful Future, speaks about cultural diplomacy and why he believes cultural differences should be seen as strengths, not barriers.

How did this journey begin?

Prasher: When I got a job in Tbilisi and first visited Georgia in 2002, I could never have imagined settling here permanently. But the warmth, friendliness, and hospitable nature of Georgians won my heart. Eventually, I decided to stay and contribute to bridging the cultural and diplomatic ties between India and Georgia. Today, both countries are like my two eyes—equally important to me.

What inspired you to start cultural exchange programmes?

Prasher: I saw many commonalities in Indian and Georgian cultures and I wanted to build bridges between the two to create a brighter and more inclusive future. Initially, I was managing cultural initiatives independently. By 2017, I realised the need for a formal platform to amplify these efforts. That is when I set up the NGO Cultural Diversity for Peaceful Future. Its mission is to foster cross-cultural relationships by organising workshops, Indo-Georgian festivals, and mentoring programmes, particularly for Indian students in Georgia. These initiatives not only showcase the diversity of Indian culture but also connect Georgian locals with the Indian diaspora.

What type of cultural events are being held by your NGO? What impact have these had?

Prasher: I have been bringing Georgian artists' and students' groups to India regularly for the past few years. Our events like the Indo-Georgian Festival in Delhi in February 2020 and the Indo-Georgian International Cultural Exchange in 2024 have been transformative. Hundreds of Indian and Georgian students participated, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Our NGO, in collaboration with Maharaja Agrasen College, Delhi University, and the cultural department of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, organised the Indo-Georgian International Cultural Exchange event, which saw enthusiastic participation from several Georgian artists. Darpan Prasher, Indo-Georgian cultural, punjab news, dian express A Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award winner, Prasher's work in Georgia has become even more significant in recent years as nearly 20,000 Indian students are currently in the country, a majority studying medicine. Even during flights to India, Georgian artists have recited the Indian national anthem with enthusiasm. These exchanges deepen ties between our nations. We are now

asking them to update their status within 30 days and 5,324 of them provided the desired responses—including 3,517 projects that submitted their Occupancy Certificates (OCs) and 524 sought deadline extensions. Out of the 1,950 projects initially identified for suspension, MahaRERA withdrew action against 45 projects after developers submitted required documents such as Form 4, applied for deadline extensions, or completed registration formalities. However, registrations for the remaining 1,905 projects have been suspended. Developers' bank accounts for these projects have been frozen, and property transactions have been restricted to protect home buyers' interests. MahaRERA requirements

Developers are mandated to update their project status on MahaRERA's website by submitting Quarterly Progress Reports (QPRs) and annual updates within the prescribed time frame. They must also declare a proposed completion date at the time of registration and either adhere to it or apply for extensions. Failure to comply can result in registration suspension, penalties, and transactional restrictions. "For this purpose, every housing project is required to update the project's status on MahaRERA website periodically — quarterly and annually. This keeps the homebuyers to stay informed about the project. However, in practice, it has been happening to a limited extent. On Compliance Cell's review of registered projects, in January 2023, it was discovered that only 3 out of 748 projects had updated the required information. After a series of follow-ups, there has been a significant improvement in the flow of information. This is evident from the responses received to the showcause notices of lapsed projects," said MahaRERA chairman Manoj Saunik. He emphasised the importance of Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 for transparency and accountability in the real estate sector to safeguard home buyers' interests.



bringing young Georgian students so that they can be made aware of Indian culture at a young age.

Indian students in Georgia often face challenges adapting to a new culture. How does your NGO help them?

Prasher: We assist students with counselling and career guidance. By celebrating festivals like Diwali and organising events like dandiya nights or New Year events, we ensure the students feel at home. Our goal is to create a support system where students can thrive emotionally and academically. Many students have expressed their gratitude, saying they 'never feel away from home' thanks to our support. Apart from this, I am present during monthly consular camps organised by the Indian embassy in Yerevan, Armenia. These camps held in Tbilisi address the concerns of Indian nationals, particularly students and workers. My presence ensures that their voices are heard and their issues are resolved efficiently.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we provided essential supplies like masks, arranged chartered flights for stranded students and helped them continue their studies online. It was a tough time but the collective efforts of the community made a difference.

Has your work been recognised?

Prasher: In 2021, I was honoured with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award by the President of India. I also received honorary citizenship from the President of Georgia and recognition from the Orthodox Church. These accolades reflect the success of our cultural diplomacy initiatives.

What other causes does your NGO support?

Prasher: We have undertaken drives like cleaning plastic waste from public spaces with the help of Indian and Georgian students. My young son, who is passionate about Indian classical music and plays several instruments like tabla and harmonium, has also organised cultural events at Georgian universities, engaging both Indian and Georgian students.

Your fluency in Georgian has earned you a special nickname?

Prasher: Yes, locals call me 'Daripspan', a Georgian name. It reflects the bond I have formed with this country and its people. Language is a powerful tool for building connections and my ease in speaking Georgian has helped me aid students in their immigration work.

What message would you like to share on cultural diplomacy?

Prasher: Cultural differences should be seen as strengths, not barriers. Through my NGO, I aim to highlight the transformative power of cultural diplomacy. Bringing two nations closer, one celebration at a time, is my mission.

## Drone lands in high-security Bhopal Central Jail premises

Bhopal: A China-made drone has been found lying inside the high-security Bhopal Central Jail, prompting authorities to launch a probe into it, an official said on Thursday. A guard near B-block building inside the prison spotted the black drone, which was charged and weighed 30 to 40 gm, between 3.30 pm and 4 pm on Wednesday, jail superintendent Rakesh Kumar Bangre said.

No one saw the drone landing on the jail premises, he said, adding that prima facie it appears the unmanned aerial device might be of children who were playing with it near the prison. The jail, spread over 151 acres, houses 3,600 prisoners against its capacity of 2,600, another official said. These include 69 prisoners, including 32 associated with the banned outfit Students' Islamic Movement of India



(SIMI), who are lodged in a high-security zone of the jail, Bangre said.

## Adopt sniffer, assault dogs which retired from CRPF



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

New Delhi: The CRPF has launched a first-ever online service that allows common people to adopt retired sniffer and assault dogs from the country's largest paramilitary force to give these four-legged soldiers a comfortable second life. This is probably the first time that any security force has decided to offer their trained dogs for public adoption, as this move was always fraught with the dangers of misuse of these highly-skilled and motivated dogs by anti-national elements. Till now, the central forces and State police were handing over their retired dogs to registered NGOs or reputed organisations for their care. More than 30 canines from four breeds — Belgian Shepherd Malinois, German Shepherd, Labrador and the indigenous Mudhol Hound — can now be adopted through a rigorous process that will be monitored by the CRPF's specialised Dog Breeding and Training School (DBTS) near Bengaluru. These canines, aged 8-12 years, have undertaken hundreds of operations in the anti-Naxal, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism theatres across the country, saving lives of numerous troops from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and deadly ambushes laid by Maoists or terrorists, a senior officer said. Baloo, Sweetie, Veeur, Moby, Coco, Stroll and their colleagues have been trained in various sniffer and combat streams such as explosive detection and tracking, infantry patrol and assault, etc. The officer said

the adoption is free and the adopter can check the force's website to gather basic details and pictures of the dogs up for adoption, fill up a form stating their "motivation and intent" for adopting a retired police K9, and State how they plan to engage the canine — like a companion, guard or a therapy dog — along with details of the proposed accommodation for the adopted dog.

"A compatibility meeting between the adopter and the dog will be organised at a designated camp where the retired canine is housed. We have also got these selected canines groomed by dog behaviour experts so that they can adjust in a homely environment," the officer said. A brief profile, picture and citation of these "soldier buddies" have been hosted on the CRPF portal, making it clear that the adopter shall take care of the "K9 hero with dignity, due diligence and compassion". The force, as part of this adoption process, will sign a "legally-binding" agreement with the adopter and will provide a KCI (Kennel Club of India) registration certificate, medical and vaccination records, and other vital documents of these canines. "Initiating public adoption of our retired dogs is an effort to ensure a happy second life for our canine soldiers," CRPF Deputy Inspector General Moses Dhinakaran said.

It has been made clear in the terms and conditions of the adoption process that there shall be no "abuse or ill-treatment" of the K9 and that they should not be sold, used for any purpose to earn money, or deployed against any person. The guidelines state that CRPF officers should be allowed for "periodic verification" of the adopted dogs, including regular communication with their handlers through short videos and live videoconferencing. "The adopter shall give emotional support if the K9 is found in distress, and extend all therapeutic care as required for a geriatric dog," the guidelines state. The force hopes that these brave loyal soldiers get a good home and family as it writes about Zina, a female Belgian Shepherd Malinois, how she is "loyal with a balanced temperament, making her an ideal companion for families looking for a protective yet gentle dog".

## Minor's right to hold passport can't be taken away: HC

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Mumbai: A minor's right to obtain a passport and travel abroad cannot be taken away merely due to an ongoing matrimonial dispute between parents, the Bombay High Court has said. The court in its order passed on Wednesday, a copy of which was made available on Thursday, directed the Pune Regional Passport Office (RPO) to issue a passport to the 17-year-old girl within two weeks, observing that the right to travel abroad was a facet of the fundamental right guaranteed in the Constitution. The RPO had issued a communication to the girl's mother in November 2024, stating that her passport application would not be processed as her father had objected to the same. As per the plea, the girl's parents are embroiled in divorce proceedings. In response to the passport office's communication, the girl's mother sent a declaration that the father's consent was missing in the passport issuance form as there was a matrimonial dispute between the couple. The high court said in its judgment that the valuable constitutional right of the petitioner girl cannot be prejudiced, much less be taken away, merely on a communication issued by her father refusing to give his No Objection Certificate (NOC).

It said the minor girl was living with her mother and is a bright student having secured outstanding marks in her Class 10 examination. These marks have made her eligible to be selected to participate in a study tour to Japan, being undertaken by her school, the HC added. The court said "personal liberty" as mentioned under Article 21 of the Constitution includes the right to travel abroad and "no person can be deprived of that right except according to the procedure established in law." "The procedure prescribed by law has to be fair, just and reasonable, not fanciful, oppressive or arbitrary. The right to travel abroad is a facet of fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India," the high court said. The court observed that in contemporary times traveling abroad cannot be considered to be a fanciful affair but has become an essential requirement of modern life.

"Such a need to travel which may be the require-



ment of a child, a student or an employee, professional or a person from any other strata of the society, has undergone a monumental change. Thus, the right to travel is required to be not only recognised but made more meaningful," the high court said. The division bench of Justices Girish Kulkarni and Advait Sethna also pulled up the passport authority for adopting a mechanical approach in such cases. The bench said the provisions of the Passports Act has to be implemented by effectively recognising contemporary needs. It said that in the present case, the girl has been given an opportunity to undertake a study tour in a foreign country. Any action of the Passport Authority in denying the passport would have severe consequences not only adversely affecting the applicant in a given situation, but it may cause irreparable harm to the prospects of the applicant, for any venture she or he intended to undertake, the HC said.

It added that the girl's mother had submitted a declaration which has to be now considered and processed by the passport authority. The bench noted that the entire purpose of inviting a declaration under the provisions of the Passports Act becomes relevant in cases where there exists disputes between the parents of a minor applying for a passport. The court also said that the girl's father has not obtained any order from any court that the petitioner or the petitioner's mother ought not to pursue any application for issuance/re-issuance of passport to the petitioner.

## Daughters entitled to get education money from parents: SC

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

New Delhi: Daughter has an indefeasible, legally enforceable and legitimate right to secure educational expenses from her parents, who can be compelled to provide necessary funds within their means, the Supreme Court recently said. The remarks of a bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan came in a matrimonial dispute in which the daughter of the estranged couple, who was studying in Ireland, refused to accept Rs 43 lakh given by her father towards her studies as a part of the total alimony being paid to her mother. "She, being the daughter, has an indefeasible, legally enforceable, lawful, and legitimate right to secure educational expenses from her parents. All that we observe is that the daughter has a fundamental right to pursue her education, for which the parents could be compelled to provide necessary funds within the limit of their financial resources," said the bench's January 2 order. The daughter of the parties, it said, to maintain her own dignity had declined to retain the amount and asked him to take the money back but he refused.

The daughter was legally entitled to the amount, the court said. The father was said to have spent the money without any compelling reasons, indicating he was financially sound to provide her with the financial assistance towards her academic pursuits.

"Respondent number 2 (daughter) has, thus, got a right to retain that amount. She need not, therefore, return that amount either to the appellant (mother) or to respondent number 1 (father), and may suitably appropriate it as she may deem fit," said the court. The bench referred to the settlement agreement entered into by the estranged couple on November 28, 2024 which was also signed by the daughter. The court said the husband had agreed to pay a



total sum of Rs 73 lakh to his estranged wife and daughter, of which Rs 43 lakh was meant for his daughter's academic goals, and the rest for his wife. It observed since the wife had received her Rs 30 lakh share, and the parties were admittedly living separately for the last 26 years, the bench saw no reason to grant a decree of divorce by mutual consent. "Consequently, we invoke our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution and dissolve the marriage of the parties by granting a decree of divorce by mutual consent," it held. The court further directed as a result of the settlement agreement, the parties should not pursue any court case against each other, and if there was a pending case before any forum, it should be disposed of in terms of the agreement.

## With over 8,000 new plants, renovated Shantivan Gardens in Mumbai's Malabar Hill to be opened this month



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Nestled in Mumbai's Malabar Hill, the Shantivan Gardens, which has received a lease of life following a revamp, is set to open its gates to visitors by January-end. Now rechristened as 'The Nest', the project has revived the green space through the addition of over 8,000 new plants with a special emphasis on the plantation of native species. While the Shantivan Gardens has long been an abode to a variety of plants, the garden had been left in a dilapidated state and laid bare in several portions. Eyeing to transform the pocket into a sanctuary of biodiversity, the revival project was launched last year. This biodiversity haven has been revived by The Heritage Project (THP) in collaboration with nature:re and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). During the revamp process executed over the past nine months, the project laid focus on introducing native plants while also prioritising on the preservation of existing trees and safeguarding a variety of fauna. Native species

were selected to create a unique 'stepping-stone' habitat that links fragmented ecosystems to facilitate the migration and dispersal of flora and fauna across the city.

Shantivan Gardens, malabar hill, mumbai news, current affairs, indian express Since the revival, a variety of fauna encompassing white throated kingfisher, pond heron, Indian golden oriole, peacocks, parakeets and Blue Mormon butterflies have been spotted within the garden premises. As part of renovation, more than 8,000 new plants were introduced, with an ideal 70:30 ratio of native to exotic species. Currently, 'The Nest' is home to over 350 plant species, featuring nearly 200 native varieties, along with a flourishing population of fauna and fungi. Centred around a gazebo which lies at the heart of 'The Nest', the garden has now been divided into seven zones, including indigenous, aromatic, semi-aquatic, bird, butterfly, medicinal and carbon-sink. "Every plant is labelled, with its name, species and use. A QR code below directs you to a micro-site giving in-depth knowledge about the mentioned flora," said a biodiversity expert involved in the project. Since the revival, a variety of fauna encompassing white throated kingfisher, pond heron, Indian golden oriole, peacocks, parakeets and Blue Mormon butterflies have been spotted within the garden premises. Besides plantations, the project also introduced a stream through the garden, established an amphitheatre for recreational activities while also refurbishing the sanitation facilities by repurposing wood. Furthermore, stone crete — a unique product of a Rajasthani community which offers acupressure benefits — has been used to create clearly demarcated pathways.

"Urban spaces like The Nest play a crucial role in preserving the delicate balance of our ecosystem. They inspire a deeper appreciation for the natural world and our place within it. The Nest marks a significant milestone in our vision of creating a greener and more resilient city for future generations," said Radha Goenka, THP founder and director of RPG Foundation. As part of the Green Corridor initiative, THP aims to connect existing green and open spaces with newly developed ones, particularly along Mumbai's western coast. The Nest in Malabar Hill is one of the project's first steps, with plans to expand to other areas through collaborations with local authorities and corporate partners like Zensar Technologies and CEAT Tyres.

## Ensure plot designated for burial ground not used for other purposes, Bombay HC tells Thane civic body

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Bombay According to the PIL, 37,000 sq m of land in Bhayandar Pada near G B Road close to the proposed Metro station in Thane was reserved as a burial and cremation ground but later de-reserved to allow local MLA and minister Pratap Sarnaik's firm to construct high-rises. The Bombay High Court on Wednesday directed the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) to ensure that a plot designated as a burial and cremation ground in Thane should only be used for the purpose for which it was reserved.

The high court passed the order while hearing a PIL filed in 2021 by the Christian residents of Mumbra and Kausa. According to the PIL, 37,000 sq m of land in Bhayandar Pada near G B Road close to the proposed Metro station in Thane was reserved as a burial and cremation ground but later de-reserved to allow local MLA and minister Pratap Sarnaik's firm to construct high-rises. On Wednesday, the high court directed the TMC to secure the property from encroachments and asked the civic body to prepare a plan to fence the property and present it to the court at the next hearing on February 12. The court also allowed the petitioners to add Sarnaik's M/s Balaji Enterprises and the state Urban Development Department as party respondents in the case.

A division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Amit Borkar was hearing a plea by social activist Melwyn Fernandes and others, which claimed that there was a lack of burial places for the over 3 lakh Christians in the city. Advocate Sunita Banis, appearing for the petitioners, referred to the government notification dated November 22, 2016, by which the 37,000 sq m land had been reserved for a Sanyukta Smashanbhumi (joint cremation/burial ground) and Smruti Udyan (garden) along with a 12-metre wide road. The bench also perused a spot inspection



report prepared after its December 2023 order which stated that the property was in the TMC's possession and the construction of a burial ground and garden were in progress. The report added that there were no encroachments and that the office of Balaji Enterprises was situated next to the said property, on the developer's land. It also mentioned that the area of land is comparatively the same as per the map or sketch received from the TMC. However, the petitioners objected to the report and claimed that Balaji Enterprises was using the property for construction-related purposes like stacking of building materials, as a parking lot, etc. The developer denied the petitioners' claims. Directing the TMC to protect the reserved land, the court asked it to file an additional affidavit within four weeks detailing the present status of the lands or sites reserved for cremation or burial grounds and steps taken to ensure the said lands are used for the said purpose as the same was needed. "We may observe that the said reservation might have been done quite some years back and during this period the necessity of more area of land to be used as burial/cremation grounds cannot be ruled out; rather it would have definitely increased," the bench said.

## Karnataka High Court strikes down Green Energy Open Access Rules 2022



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

The Karnataka High Court has struck down green energy regulations at both state and central levels, including the Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022, saying the Centre did not have the power to frame rules under the Electricity Act. A single-judge bench of Justice N S Sanjay Gowda passed the order on December 20, and direction was made publicly available this week.

Justice N S Sanjay Gowda also struck down the Karnataka Regulatory Commission (Terms and Conditions for Green Energy Open Access) Regulations, 2022, saying it was framed since it was required by the central rules. Justice N S Sanjay Gowda passed the order on petitions filed by several hydropower companies against the two Rules, with the respondents in the case being the State, Centre, and various electricity distributors. They argued that under the Electricity Act, the power to frame such regulations was exclusively granted to the State Commission and not the Centre. The petitioners also said that the mentioned rules framed by the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) would also have to be struck down as they were framed in accordance with the central rules and not the power conferred to them independently. Justice Gowda observed since the Electricity Act conferred all powers relating to transmission, determination, and open access to

the relevant State Commission, the Central Government could not have the power to frame rules. "The apex court in the case of Naresh Chandra Agarwal has laid down the law that a rule-making body must function within the purview of the authority conferred to it... If the provisions of the Electricity Act exclude the Central Government from playing any role in the matter pertaining to granting open access and specifically confers the powers in relation to open access only to the Appropriate Commission, this substantive provision of administering open access cannot be usurped by the Central Government by placing reliance on the residuary powers granted to frame rules to carry out the purposes of the Electricity Act."

## Bike taxi rider murdered by unidentified persons in Jeedimetla

GNS News Agency, Feb 11: Hyderabad: A bike taxi rider was murdered by unknown persons at Jeedimetla on Wednesday night.

The victim Shiva Kumar Reddy (26), a native of Kadapa district, AP was staying at a house in Jeedimetla. On Thursday his body was found hanging to the ceiling with his hands tied behind and mouth gagged with a piece of cloth.

On receiving information, the police reached the house and shifted the body for post-mortem examination to Gandhi Hospital after preliminary investigation. The police registered a case of murder and started efforts to identify the killers.

The police are checking the closed circuit cameras installed in the surroundings of the house to gather clues. The mobile phone calls records are being analysed. The police had summoned a tracker dog to assist them but the exercise was of not much help.

## How Meta's decision to abandon fact-checks will impact misinformation online?



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Hyderabad: Meta has announced it will abandon its fact-checking programme and will now adopt a "community notes" model, similar to the one used by X. but, this dramatic shift by Meta does not bode well for the fight against the spread of misinformation and disinformation online. The fact-checks were aimed at preventing the spread of online lies among more than 3 billion people who use Meta's social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and Threads.

In a video, the company's chief, Mark Zuckerberg, said fact-checking had led to "too much censorship". He added it was time for Meta "to get back to our roots around free expression", especially following the recent presidential election in the US. Zuckerberg characterised it as a "cultural tipping point, towards once again prioritising speech". Meta launched its independent, third-party, fact-checking programme in 2016 during a period of heightened concern about information integrity coinciding with the election of Donald Trump as US President and furor about the role of social media platforms in spreading misinformation and disinformation.

As part of the programme, Meta funded fact-checking partners — such as Reuters Fact Check, Australian Associated Press, Agence France-Presse and PolitiFact — to independently assess the validity of problematic content posted on its platforms. Warning labels were then attached to any content deemed to be inaccurate or misleading. This helped users to be better informed about the content they

were seeing online. Zuckerberg claimed Meta's fact-checking programme did not successfully address misinformation on the company's platforms, stifled free speech and led to widespread censorship. But the head of the International Fact-Checking Network, Angie Drobnic Holan, disputes this. In a statement reacting to Meta's decision, she said: Fact-checking journalism has never been censored or removed posts; it's added information and context to controversial claims, and it's debunked hoax content and conspiracy theories. The fact-checkers used by Meta follow a Code of Principles requiring nonpartisanship and transparency. In 2023 in Australia alone, Meta displayed warnings on over 9.2 million distinct pieces of content on Facebook (posts, images and videos), and over 510,000 posts on Instagram, including reshares. These warnings were based on articles written by Meta's third-party, fact-checking partners. Numerous studies have demonstrated that these kinds of warnings effectively slow the spread of misinformation. The Covid pandemic demonstrated the usefulness of independent fact-checking on Facebook. Fact-checkers helped curb much harmful misinformation and disinformation about the virus and the effectiveness of vaccines. Importantly, Meta's fact-checking programme also served as a backbone to global efforts to fight misinformation on other social media platforms. It facilitated financial support to up to 90 accredited fact-checking organisations around the world.

Replacing independent, third-party fact-checking with a "community notes" model of content moderation is likely to hamper the fight against misinformation and disinformation online. Last year, for example, reports from The Washington Post and The Centre for Countering Digital Hate in the US found that X's community notes feature was failing to stem the flow of lies on the platform. Meta's turn away from fact-checking will also create major financial problems for third-party, independent fact-checkers. Without Meta's funding, they will likely be hampered in their efforts to counter attempts to weaponise fact-checking by other actors. For example, Russian President Vladimir Putin recently announced the establishment of a state fact-checking network following "Russian values", in stark difference to the International Fact-Checking Network code of principles. This makes independent, third-party fact-checking even more necessary.

## China's long game in Africa

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

In 2022, when China established its first political training school in Tanzania, the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School, its motivation was unambiguous. With an estimated cost of \$40 million, the school was a tool for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to shape the future political leaders of Africa following the Chinese principles of governance. Therefore, it is no surprise that the 120 official members of the school's first cohort were from countries with long-standing historical ties to China. These countries continue to be ruled by the liberation parties that came into power through their pre-independence struggles. The countries include South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania. In fact, these six countries, along with Botswana, are also part of the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa, an informal coalition meant to help one another address governance challenges and stay in power.

Clearly, the move by China to establish the political school is meant to strengthen its relationship and increase its influence among the policymakers of these countries. The political school is another platform for the leaders of these ruling liberation parties to enhance their governance capabilities through shared educational resources. This is also an example of China's broader strategy to shape Africa's political landscape by promoting its governance model based on the centrality of the ruling party and its control over the state. Game of influence

There are several ways for a country to assert its influence. One way could be mediation or fostering dialogue among the concerned parties to facilitate positive conversations. This also helps in building a strong global image for the mediator country. Historically, the U.S. has been the most influential international mediator. However, China is increasingly asserting itself in this role, as seen in its involvement in resolving the Saudi Arabia-Iran and Niger-Benin disputes.

As China seeks to establish an alternative world order — often complementary to, and sometimes in contrast with, the Western-led global system — it recognises the importance of Africa's support in various multilateral forums. Africa, with 55 countries, is a significant player in international relations. And so, Beijing is intensifying its efforts to build strong ties with Africa as part of its broader strategy to shift the global balance in its favour. However, China's engagement in Africa's politics is not a recent phenomenon. Beijing has supported African independence movements, military endeavours, and governance structures. It has also helped develop African economies through investments in infrastructure and industrial projects. This historical relationship continues to be strong, as China intensifies its focus on strengthening ties with Africa's ruling parties.

'Study tours' have remained a key part of China's public diplomacy with Africa. Every year, hundreds of African officials visit China for lectures at universities, visits to provincial governments, and cultural exchanges designed to



familiarise them with Chinese traditions and governance practices. Only now has China's game plan to influence African political elites expanded through the introduction of political schools. During the 8th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2021, China acknowledged its ties to over 100 political parties across 51 African countries.

China's growing influence in Africa is evident not only in the establishment of new educational institutions but also in the deepening of its political relationships. Kenya, for example, has expressed its interest in having a leadership school that would be financed by and modelled on the CCP's Central Party School. These efforts are accompanied by investments in infrastructure. China funded the construction of Kenya's new foreign ministry headquarters, as the two countries were celebrating 60 years of diplomatic relations. China is not only constructing new institutions, but also refurbishing many existing ones. For instance, China funded the renovation of the Herbert Chitepo School of Ideology in Zimbabwe. Through such initiatives, it aims to establish a governance model similar to its own, based on strong, centralised party systems that offer stability and control. This highlights the effectiveness of building reciprocal relationships, particularly in countries where leadership stability and centralisation are highly valued.

Chinese diplomacy in Africa. China's approach to Africa is built on decades of patient diplomacy. While the Nyerere Leadership School represents a significant milestone, it is only one piece of China's broader strategy to embed itself deeply within Africa's political fabric. China's long-term goal is to promote a Sino-centric world order in which it plays a central role in shaping global governance structures. However, China is also mindful of potential regime changes in Africa. It knows the importance of nurturing opposition parties to safeguard its interests in case political shifts occur. By establishing political schools and cultivating bonds with ruling and opposition parties, China is ensuring that its influence is intact regardless of political transitions. China's long game in Africa is not just about economic influence or military strength. It is also about the subtle art of diplomacy and influence. Through its strategic investments in Africa's political future, China is ensuring that it remains a key player in shaping Africa's governance structures for years to come.

## In rare interview, Joe Biden says he could have defeated Donald Trump

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Joe Biden thinks he could have won reelection if he had stayed in the White House race, he said in an interview published Wednesday (January 8, 2025) — while conceding he was unsure if he would have served another full term. The 82-year-old Democrat, who leaves office on January 20, was asked by USA Today if he believed victory over Republican Donald Trump was a realistic prospect last November, and he pointed to unspecified polling and said: "I think yes." "I really thought I had the best chance of beating him. But I also wasn't looking to be president when I was 85 years old, 86 years old. And so I did talk about passing the baton," Mr. Biden said. "But I don't know. Who the hell knows? So far, so good. But who knows what I'm going to be when I'm 86 years old?" Mr. Biden, the oldest U.S. president in history, faced persistent questions about his mental fitness before withdrawing from the election after a calamitous televised debate against Mr. Trump in which he looked incapable of making the case for another term. He has given fewer sit-down interviews and press conferences than any president since Ronald Reagan, and USA Today

was the only print outlet scheduled for a one-to-one before Mr. Biden leaves office. Regrets during his term He was asked about regrets from the last four years but did not mention the presidential debate, or his decision to break his promise to be a single-term president and a "bridge" to next generation. Instead, he complained about misinformation — pointing to falsehoods to spread by Mr. Trump and others about two New Year's Day attacks in New Orleans and Las Vegas — and to the glacial pace of infrastructure projects. "I think we would've been a hell of a lot better off had we been able to go much harder at getting some of these projects in the ground quicker," he said. Preemptive pardons Washington has been abuzz with discussion since Mr. Trump's victory over potential preemptive pardons for those who may be in the Republican leader's crosshairs when he returns to office. File picture of U.S. President Joe Biden with President-elect Donald Trump in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, U.S., on November 13, 2024. File picture of U.S. President Joe Biden

## Impeached South Korean President's lawyers slam detention efforts as acting leader warns of clash



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol denounced efforts to detain him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, while the country's acting leader expressed concern Wednesday (January 8, 2025) over a possible clash between law enforcement agents and presidential security personnel. As anti-corruption officials and police prepared another attempt to detain Mr. Yoon following last week's failed effort, the presidential security service fortified Mr. Yoon's compound with barbed wire and rows of tightly placed vehicles blocking the path to his residence. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police say they will make a more forceful effort to detain Mr. Yoon, warning that they could arrest members of the presidential security staff if they obstruct efforts to seize the embattled president.

The office, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military, has been seeking Mr. Yoon's detention since he repeatedly ignored summons for questioning about whether his brief power grab on Dec. 3 constituted rebellion. In a news conference, Mr. Yoon's lawyers challenged the legitimacy of a new detention warrant issued Tuesday by the Seoul Western District Court, arguing that the anti-corruption agency lacks legal authority to investigate rebellion charges or order police to detain suspects. Yoon Kap-keun, one of the lawyers, urged the anti-corruption agency to either indict the president or seek a formal arrest warrant — a process that would require a court hearing. However, he said the president would only comply with an arrest warrant issued by the Seoul Central District

Court, accusing the agency of deliberately choosing the Western District Court because of its allegedly favorable judge. He didn't give a clear answer when asked whether the president would appear at the Central District Court for a hearing on an arrest warrant, saying security issues must be settled first.

"People are suffering in the severe cold and government officials must be experiencing significant internal conflict," the lawyer said, referring to daily protests by both Yoon's critics and supporters near his residence. "Please consider this as us taking a step back based on good will." The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative effort leading to the president's impeachment on Dec. 14, accused his lawyers of attempting to stall the process and urged the anti-corruption agency to swiftly execute the detention warrant against him.

About 150 anti-corruption agency investigators and police officers attempted to detain Yoon at his residence on Friday but retreated after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours. The investigators have not yet made another attempt to detain him. Police said they are considering "all available options" to bring Yoon into custody and haven't publicly ruled out the possibility of deploying SWAT teams, although it's unclear whether investigators would risk triggering a confrontation with presidential security forces, who are also armed. In a government meeting on Wednesday, the country's acting president, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, urged authorities to ensure "there are no injuries to citizens or physical clashes between government agencies" in any attempt to detain Yoon. In a parliamentary hearing on Tuesday, Oh Dong-woon, the anti-corruption agency's chief prosecutor, criticized Choi for instructing police to follow the presidential security service's request to beef up security at Yoon's residence ahead of Friday's detention attempt. The police did not carry out Choi's instruction, and Oh said the agency was reviewing whether Choi's actions constituted an obstruction of official duties. Hours after Mr. Yoon declared martial law and dispatched troops to surround the National Assembly on Dec. 3, lawmakers who managed to get past the blockade voted to lift the measure. Yoon's presidential powers were suspended after the opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion. The Constitutional Court has started deliberations on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him.

## 13 killed in Russian missile attack in southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia, say officials

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

A daytime Russian missile attack on the southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia killed at least 13 civilians and wounded about 30 others on Wednesday (January 8, 2025), officials said. Footage posted on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Telegram channel shows civilians lying in a city street littered with debris. The post shows them being treated by emergency services and taken away on gurneys. Russian has frequently launched aerial attacks on civilian areas during the almost three-year war. Thousands of civilians have been killed in Europe's biggest conflict since World War II. Mr. Zelenskyy and regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov said Wednesday's attack killed at least 13 civilians. Minutes before the attack, Fedorov had warned of a threat of high-speed missiles and devastating glide bombs being fired at the Zaporizhzhia region. Russian troops started launching the glide bombs at Zaporizhzhia in the middle of the afternoon, and at least two bombs struck residential buildings in the city, Fedorov said. He announced that Thursday would be a day of mourning in the region. "There is nothing more brutal than aerial bombing of a city, knowing that ordinary civilians will suffer," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram. Zelenskyy said earlier Wednesday that countries wanting to end the war should offer Ukraine assurances about its future defense. Kyiv officials fear that any ceasefire or peace deal will just give the Kremlin time to rearm and invade again unless it is deterred by military force.

"To be honest, I believe that we have a right to demand serious security guarantees from ... the countries that aim for the peace in the world," Zelenskyy said. Zelenskyy was responding at a news conference in Kyiv to comments the previous day by President-elect Donald Trump that he understood Russia's opposition to neighboring Ukraine joining NATO.

The United States, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia have stood in the way of Ukraine immediately joining the 32-nation alliance, Zelenskyy noted. The alliance has said only that the country is on an "irreversible path" to membership. Earlier, the Ukrainian military said it struck a fuel storage depot deep inside Russia, causing a huge blaze at the facility that supplies an important Russian air base. Russian officials acknowledged a major drone attack in the area, and said that authorities had set up an emergency command center to fight the fire. Ukraine's General Staff said the assault hit the storage facility near Engels, in Russia's Saratov region, about 600 kilometers (370 miles)



east of the Ukrainian border. The depot supplied a nearby airfield used by aircraft that launch missiles across the border into Ukraine, a statement on Facebook said. Ukraine has been developing its arsenal of domestically produced long-range missiles and drones capable of reaching deep behind the front line as it faces restrictions on the range that its military can fire its Western-supplied missiles into Russia.

The attacks have disrupted Russian logistics in the war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, and embarrassed the Kremlin. Zelenskyy said last year that his country has developed a weapon that could hit a target 700 kilometers (400 miles) away. Some Ukrainian drone attacks have hit targets more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) away. The governor of the Saratov region, Roman Busargin, said that an unspecified industrial plant in Engels sustained damage from the falling drone debris that sparked a fire, but nobody was hurt. Engels, which has a population of more than 220,000, is on the left bank of the Volga River, and is home to multiple industrial plants. Saratov, a major industrial city of about 900,000, faces Engels across the river.

"The damage to the oil base creates serious logistical problems for the strategic aviation of the Russian occupiers and significantly reduces their ability to strike peaceful Ukrainian cities and civilian objects. To be continued," the statement from Ukraine's General Staff said. Russian authorities restricted flights early Wednesday at the airports of Saratov, Ulyanovsk, Kazan and Nizhnekamsk, in an apparent response to the Ukrainian attack. The main base of Russia's nuclear-capable strategic bombers is just outside Engels. It has come under Ukrainian drone attacks since the early stages of the war, forcing the Russian military to relocate most of the bombers to other areas.

## Countries tighten research security as China's dominance grows

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Amid heightened tensions between the United States and China, the two countries signed a bilateral science and technology agreement on December 13, 2024. The event was billed as a "renewal" of a 45-year-old pact to encourage cooperation, but that may be misleading. The revised agreement drastically narrows the scope of the original agreement, limits the topics allowed to be jointly studied, closes opportunities for collaboration and inserts a new dispute resolution mechanism. This shift is in line with growing global concern about research security. Governments are worried about international rivals gaining military or trade advantages or security secrets via cross-border scientific collaborations. The European Union, Canada, Japan and the United States unveiled sweeping new measures within months of each other to protect sensitive research from foreign interference. But there's a catch: Too much security could strangle the international collaboration that drives scientific progress. As a policy analyst and public affairs professor, I research international collaboration in science and technology and its implications for public and foreign policy. I have tracked the increasingly close relationship in science and technology between the U.S. and China. The relationship evolved from one of knowl-

edge transfer to genuine collaboration and competition. Now, as security provisions change this formerly open relationship, a crucial question emerges: Can nations tighten research security without undermining the very openness that makes science work? China's ascent changes the global landscape. China's rise in scientific publishing marks a dramatic shift in global research. In 1980, Chinese authors produced less than 2% of research articles included in the Web of Science, a curated database of scholarly output. By my count, they claimed 25% of Web of Science articles by 2023, overtaking the United States and ending its 75-year reign at the top, which had begun in 1948 when it surpassed the United Kingdom. In 1980, China had no patented inventions. By 2022, Chinese companies led in U.S. patents issued to foreign companies, receiving 40,000 patents compared with fewer than 2,000 for U.K. companies. In the many advanced fields of science and technology, China is at the world frontier, if not in the lead. Since 2013, China has been the top collaborator in science with the United States. Thousands of Chinese students and scholars have conducted joint research with U.S. counterparts. Most American policymakers who championed the signing of the 1979 bilateral agreement thought science would liberalize China. Instead,

## ONGC expects additional revenue of up to \$10.3 billion from BP's intervention in Mumbai High field



Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) expects its partnership with UK-based energy giant BP to raise production from the Mumbai High field to add up to \$10.3 billion to its revenue over the 10-year contract period, the Indian energy major said. ONGC had announced that BP had bagged the contract to operate and enhance production from the former's flagship Mumbai High field—India's largest oil and gas field—which has been witnessing a gradual fall in output for over three decades. ONGC had sought bids from international oil and gas players to on-board a technical service provider (TSP) for increasing production from the field.

BP has indicated a substantial potential increase of around 44 per cent in crude oil production from the baseline output of 45.47 million tonnes and around 89 per cent increase in gas production (from baseline of 24.94 billion cubic metres) for the 10-year contract period. Overall, in terms of oil and oil equivalent gas, the projected increase works out to around 60 per cent. "The increase is expected to be visible from FY'26 with full scale visibility expected from FY'28. This incremental production is expected to generate additional oil and gas revenue (net of levies) of upto USD 10.30 billion and incremental contribution to GoI (Government of India) Exchequer by way of royalty, cess and other levies upto the tune of USD 5 billion," ONGC said Thursday. "TSP will receive a fixed fee for the first two years, followed by a Service Fee based on a percentage share of the revenue from net incremental hydrocarbon production, after recovering incremental costs," ONGC added.

The company did not provide financial details of the contract. As per the tender document, the TSP was to be selected based on incremental production projections and the share of revenue sought. BP and Royal Dutch Shell were

the only bidders that participated in the pre-bid process for tender, which offered the foreign partner a share in revenue from the incremental hydrocarbon production and a fixed fee, but no stake in the field. While BP went on to submit the final bid, Shell did not. International players with proven technical expertise and a track record in similar projects, and an annual revenue of at least \$75 billion, were eligible to participate in the tender. This condition had limited those eligible to participate in the tender to just a handful of global companies. BP is already among the largest international energy companies in India with joint investments with Reliance Industries (RIL) in natural gas production and fuel retail, apart from being present in the country through Castrol lubricants and oil and gas trading.

The Mumbai High field, which lies in India's Mumbai Offshore basin in the Arabian Sea was discovered in 1974 and hydrocarbon production from the field began in 1976. In 1989, it touched its peak production level of 476,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil and 28 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas. Since then, the production has been sliding gradually. The field's current production levels are around 134,000 bpd of crude and 13 bcm of natural gas. The output was expected for further decline substantially over the next 10-15 years, even as ONGC estimates that the field still holds over 600 million barrels of oil and around 40 bcm of natural gas. However, despite its efforts, the company has been unsuccessful in arresting the decline in production and reversing it, and therefore decided to rope in an international partner. ONGC's decision to bring on board a TSP for Mumbai High comes in the wake of the government mulling selling stake in the field along with its operatorship to international oil and gas majors in a bid to enhance production. Time and again, such proposals were met with heavy resistance from ONGC, as the company did not want to part with its crown jewel that had demanded decades of effort and billions of dollars in investments. In the TSP model, ONGC will continue to have control of the Mumbai High field. India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its requirement. The is also among the top importers of natural gas globally with an import dependency level of around 50 per cent. Given high dependence on energy imports, the government wants domestic oil and gas production to rise substantially, and has been pushing domestic oil and gas companies in that pursuit.

## 'The middle-class Ravi Kishan has not left me': How the actor's childhood poverty still influences his spending; psychology behind the guilt



Actor and politician Ravi Kishan recently opened up about the immense poverty and challenges he endured during his formative years. He shared how these struggles have left a lasting impression on him, especially regarding money and spending habits. In a chat with Shubhankar Mishra on his YouTube channel, the Laapata Ladies actor mentioned, "I used to live in a hut made of mud. We had responsibilities, our farmland was mortgaged... I have seen excessive poverty. The kind where one khichdi is shared by 12 people, and that too, after watering it down."

He also mentioned that in his early days in Mumbai, he survived on vada pav and tea, spending 15 years in the film industry without a respectable salary. "I've faced extreme humiliation," he reflected. "While most people experience it a few times, I've faced it thousands of times. All of this has shaped the person I am today. "Kishan shared how, even now, as a successful star, he hesitates to order expensive food at luxury hotels, irrespective of who's footing the bill. "When I visit a 7-star hotel, I still can't bring myself to order expensive food, no matter who's paying," he revealed, adding, "I still opt for khichdi. I'm reluctant to send my clothes for laundry and prefer washing them at home when I return. That sense of poverty still lingers in me. The middle-class Ravi Kishan has not left me." Although he remains hesitant to spend on himself, he urges his family to enjoy luxuries. "I'm happy to pay for their wants, but when it comes to me, I can't spend. It's usually my family who buys me clothes, phones, or other luxury items," he said. This

confession highlights a universal truth about how growing up in poverty can deeply influence a person's psyche. From guilt associated with spending money to prioritising savings over indulgence, childhood hardships often shape financial and emotional behaviors in adulthood. Learning to align spending habits with personal values—whether that means treating oneself or supporting others—can ease internal conflict. Learning to align spending habits with personal values—whether that means treating oneself or supporting others—can ease internal conflict. (Source: Freepik)

But what exactly drives these habits?

Psychologist Anjali Gursahany tells indianexpress.com, "A scarcity mindset, often developed by individuals who grow up in poverty, is rooted in the belief that resources are limited and uncertain. This can manifest as over-saving or hoarding money and avoiding financial risks, even when in a stable position. Additionally, a deep fear of loss and returning to deprivation may lead to hyper-vigilance over finances, prioritising security over enjoyment or investment." On the other hand, some individuals may adopt impulsive spending habits as a way to compensate for the deprivation they experienced in childhood. Emotional ties to money, shaped by fear, shame, and anxiety, often influence decisions that prioritise survival over long-term planning, underscoring the profound psychological impact of early financial hardship.

Strategies to reconcile with past hardships while developing healthier spending and saving behaviours Gursahany suggests the following strategies: Acknowledging the Past: Reflecting on one's childhood and understanding how it shaped their relationship with money is the first step to change. Redefining Money's Purpose: Shifting perspectives to see money as a tool for growth and enjoyment, rather than merely survival, can foster healthier habits. Setting Intentional Goals: Developing a balanced financial plan with room for saving, investing, and indulgence helps bridge security with enjoyment. Practicing Self-Compassion: Reframing indulgences as self-care rather than guilt-inducing behaviours can reduce hesitation. Mindful Spending: Learning to align spending habits with personal values—whether that means treating oneself or supporting others—can ease internal conflict.

## Protecting yourself from HMPV: How to choose the right mask for maximum safety

The recent rise in Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases has raised concerns about how to protect oneself from this respiratory infection. While the virus primarily spreads through respiratory droplets, using a mask remains one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce the risk of transmission.

However, not all masks offer the same level of protection, leading to questions about the efficacy of different types, such as cloth masks, surgical masks, and respirators like N95. Are cloth masks still a safe option, or should you switch to something more robust? Understanding the effectiveness of various masks against HMPV is crucial, especially during outbreaks. Effectiveness of cloth masks vs. surgical masks and N95 respirators

Dr Ravi Shekhar Jha, director, Pulmonology at Fortis Hospital Faridabad, tells indianexpress.com, "Cloth masks, while convenient, offer limited protection against respiratory infections like HMPV. They can block larger respiratory droplets but are less effective at filtering out smaller particles that can carry viruses." Surgical masks are more effective, he notes. "They are designed to block both large droplets and some smaller airborne particles. However, their loose fit allows some unfiltered air to pass through the sides, reducing their overall efficacy." The doctor recommends using N95 respirators that provide the highest level of protection. "They are designed to filter at least 95% of airborne particles, including very fine ones, and their snug fit minimises the risk of air leakage. N95 masks are especially recommended in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces." Masks should be easy to wear for extended periods. Masks should be easy to wear for extended periods.

What to look for in a mask

To ensure adequate protection against viruses like HMPV, Dr Jha asserts, consider the following: Filtration Efficiency: Masks that meet certification standards, such as NIOSH-approved N95s, are ideal.

Proper Fit: A mask should fit securely over the nose, mouth, and chin without gaps. Comfort and Breathability: Masks should be easy to wear for extended periods. Multiple Layers: Masks with multiple layers offer better filtration compared to single-layer ones. "For maximum protection, use an N95 respirator. If N95s are not available, surgical masks



are a suitable alternative. Cloth masks should only be used if no other options are available and should ideally be layered over a surgical mask for better protection," explains Dr Jha. Risks of improper mask use Improper use of masks can reduce their effectiveness and increase the risk of infection. Common mistakes, according to the expert, include: Wearing masks below the nose leaves nasal passages exposed to airborne particles Reusing disposable masks, especially after prolonged use or contamination, which can harbor infectious particles Touching the mask surface frequently can transfer viruses from hands to the mask. "To avoid these risks, ensure that your mask is worn properly, changed regularly, and disposed of correctly," Dr Ravi suggests. Not all masks offer the same level of protection, HMPV Understanding the effectiveness of various masks against HMPV is crucial, especially during outbreaks.

Special guidelines for vulnerable groups Certain populations, such as children, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals, are particularly susceptible to HMPV. For children, Dr Jha advises using child-sized masks that provide a snug fit. Surgical masks or well-fitted KF94 masks are good options. Avoid N95 respirators for younger children, as they may restrict breathing. For the elderly, N95 respirators are ideal, particularly in crowded spaces or during outbreaks. If N95s are uncomfortable, surgical masks are a good alternative. For immunocompromised individuals, Dr Jha says, always opt for N95 respirators in public or high-risk settings. Ensure proper use and replacement to ensure safety.

## Drinking vinegar before meals is a common health trend in Japan. Is it worth trying?

Vinegar has long been a staple in Japanese cuisine, not just as a cooking ingredient but as a health tonic. Many Japanese people drink vinegar before meals, believing it can help with everything from digestion to glowing skin. But is there any truth to these claims, and should you consider adopting this practice? Benefits of drinking vinegar before meals spta Chakraborty, senior nutritionist at Hungry Kola, tells indianexpress.com, "Drinking vinegar, particularly before meals, is a practice rooted in various cultures, including Japan, where it is believed to offer several health benefits." Akshita Reddy, senior nutritionist at Athreya Hospital, adds, "Vinegar, especially apple cider vinegar, contains acetic acid, which has been shown to increase the production of digestive enzymes and stomach acid. This can help break down food more effectively." One of the most researched benefits of drinking vinegar before meals is its ability to regulate blood sugar levels, Chakraborty mentions. "Studies have shown that acetic acid can improve insulin sensitivity and reduce blood sugar spikes after meals." Drinking vinegar before meals may also help boost metabolism and promote weight loss. Some research suggests that acetic acid can increase fat burning and reduce fat storage, states Chakraborty. "Vinegar has been linked to improved heart health by helping to lower blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and triglycerides. Acetic acid and antioxidants present in vinegar can help reduce oxidative stress and inflammation, both of which are risk factors for cardiovascular diseases," notes Chakraborty.

Vinegar is highly acidic, and regular consumption, par-

ticularly in undiluted form, can erode tooth enamel over time. Vinegar is highly acidic, and regular consumption, particularly in undiluted form, can erode tooth enamel over time. Improvement in skin health Chakraborty says, "The acetic acid in vinegar helps balance the skin's pH levels. A balanced pH can improve the skin barrier function, reducing issues like dryness, irritation, and acne. When consumed regularly, the systemic effects of vinegar may also contribute to better skin health from the inside out." Vinegar, particularly those derived from fruits like apples, contains antioxidants such as polyphenols. These compounds help neutralise free radicals in the body, which are known to cause cellular damage and accelerate skin ageing. Reddy echoes this, "Vinegar's antioxidants, such as polyphenols, may help reduce oxidative stress in the body, contributing to healthier skin and a reduction in skin ageing signs. The regulation of gut microbiota through vinegar consumption could also indirectly benefit skin health by reducing systemic inflammation." Risks or side effects While there are several potential benefits to drinking vinegar regularly, Chakraborty says, there are also some risks and side effects to consider, especially for individuals with specific health conditions: Gastrointestinal Issues: Consuming vinegar, especially on an empty stomach, can increase stomach acidity, potentially causing acid reflux, heartburn, or worsening symptoms of gastritis and ulcers. Tooth Enamel Erosion: Vinegar is highly acidic, and regular consumption, particularly in undiluted form, can erode tooth enamel over time.

## Inflows into equity mutual funds jump 14.5% to Rs 41,156 crore in December: AMFI

In December, inflows through systematic investment plan (SIP) stood at Rs 26,459 crore, compared to Rs 25,320 crore in November 2024. In December, inflows through systematic investment plan (SIP) stood at Rs 26,459 crore, compared to Rs 25,320 crore in November 2024. (File Photo) Inflows into equity mutual funds rose 14.5 per cent on a month-on-month basis to Rs 41,155.91 crore in December from Rs 35,943.49 crore in the previous month, the latest data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) showed.

In December, inflows through systematic investment plan (SIP) stood at Rs 26,459 crore, compared to Rs 25,320 crore in November 2024. Net assets under management (AUM) declined marginally by 1.69 per cent to Rs 66,93,032.12 crore in December, compared to Rs 68,08,101.16 crore in the previous month.

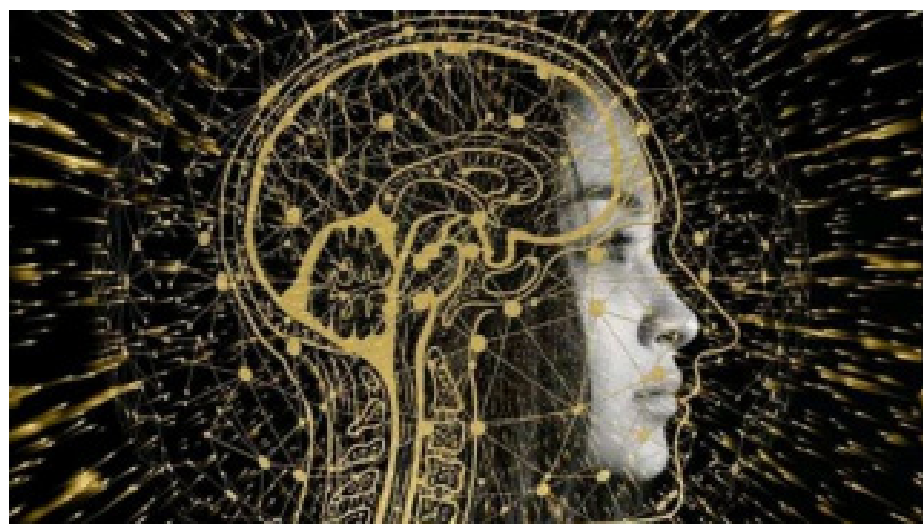
Within equity mutual fund schemes, inflows into sectoral/thematic doubled to Rs 15,331.54 crore compared to Rs 7,657.75 crore in November. Flex cap mutual funds witnessed inflows of Rs 4,730.71 crore, as against flows of Rs 5,084.11 crore in November. While inflows into small cap funds was Rs 4,667.70 crore, mid cap funds saw flows worth Rs 5,093.22 crore in the reporting month.

Inflows into multi cap funds stood at Rs 3,075.11 crore, compared to Rs 3,626.46 crore in the previous month. Debt mutual fund schemes saw outflows of Rs 1,27,152.63 crore



in December, compared to inflows of Rs 12,915.9 crore in November. During the reporting month, outflows were witnessed in shorter duration funds such as overnight funds (Rs 22,347.58 crore), liquid funds (Rs 66,532.12 crore) and ultra short duration fund (Rs 2,410.1 crore). Outflows from money market funds stood at Rs 25,842.96 crore in December, as against inflows of Rs 2,426.11 crore in the previous month, the AMFI data showed. Net inflows in hybrid mutual funds remained almost the same at Rs 4,369.78 crore, as against Rs 4,123.69 crore in the previous month. Flows into gold exchange traded funds (ETF) declined to Rs 640.16 crore in December from Rs 1,256.72 crore in the previous month.

## Govt may shortlist 7 firms as it looks to ramp up AI compute procurement



The Centre is likely to shortlist seven firms who may be eligible to offer graphics processing units (GPUs) under its ambitious Rs 10,370-crore IndiaAI Mission, as the government looks to fast-track GPU procurement in a bid to step up compute capacity in the country. Last December, the Information Technology ministry announced that it had received bids from 19 entities as part of a tender released in August. Those that could be shortlisted include Jio Platforms, Tata Communications and Mumbai-based start-up Yotta Data Services, The Indian Express has learnt. The IT ministry has called for a meeting with selected bidders on January 13, where representatives of the firms will

have to give a detailed technical presentation about their proposal and how they plan to operationalise it, a person aware of the upcoming meeting said. These bidders also have to create a demo portal showcasing the user journey for accessing their GPUs, it is learnt. To be sure, the bidders that are likely to be selected have not yet been awarded the contract to supply GPUs, but have been called to give additional technical information regarding their proposal. "The government seems to have given preference to entities that have existing GPU capacity or have a roadmap to procure the devices within a certain period of time. Resellers have not been prioritised," a senior industry executive said. Queries sent to the IT

ministry, Jio Platforms, Tata Communications and Yotta did not elicit a response.

Computing power, which comes from the GPUs, is one of the most crucial elements of building and training AI systems. It is an expensive technology as of now, and Nvidia has a virtual monopoly in the GPUs that go into AI-led data centres. The government has announced a Rs 10,370-crore AI Mission to procure computing capacity in the country, and offer it at concessional rates to start-ups and researchers. Last August, the government released a tender to procure the GPUs. The plan is to procure at least 10,000 GPUs under the IndiaAI Mission. The implementation of computing infrastructure

will be done through a public-private partnership model with up to 50 per cent viability gap funding. If the compute prices come down, the private entity will have to add more compute capacity within the same budgeted amount to meet increased demand. Of the total outlay, Rs 4,564 crore has been earmarked for building computing infrastructure. Meanwhile, the IT ministry is in discussions with the ministries of Power, and New and Renewable Energy, and other related agencies to prepare a roadmap to ensure that the growing numbers of data centres in India—a function of the global AI boom—are offered enough power supply. "Today, the biggest question is the availability of power... As we adopt AI more and more, (the question is) do we have enough power supply to power that? Otherwise, where do you make sure that this power supply comes up in a way that we are able to address this issue," IT Secretary S Krishnan said in December. His comments are significant given the massive energy requirement of data centres that big technology companies are building around the world, owing to the spectacular popularity of AI solutions, which rely on such facilities for computing power.

## Wallace and Gromit Vengeance Most Fowl movie review: Iconic British duo returns in a whimsical new adventure for the Netflix age



Trust Wallace to get himself mixed up in a plot that puts all of humanity at peril. The eccentric inventor — he's the protagonist of Nick Park's four-time Oscar-winning stop-motion animation series — makes his streaming debut alongside his 'top dog' Gromit with the feature-length Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl. Released on Netflix, the film is a pure nostalgia trip for fans who grew up with their charming adventures, replete with quirky household gizmos, absurd villains, and more cheese than you'd find in a Frenchman's larder.

Vengeance Most Fowl features the return of the nefarious penguin Feathers McGraw, who was last seen in 1993's *The Wrong Trousers*. In that short film, Wallace and Gromit foiled Feathers' plans to steal a priceless blue diamond. The mastermind was sent to prison (a zoo), where he quietly plotted his revenge. In *Vengeance Most Fowl*, Feathers senses an opportunity when Wallace creates a robotic garden gnome that can perform basic household chores on his behalf; most of his inventions are borne out of a certain laziness. He calls the gnome Norbot, and appears to grow increasingly fond of him, much to Gromit's envy. Wallace hacks into Norbot's system, and transforms the harmless gnome into a menacing terminator.

At over 80 minutes long, *Vengeance Most Fowl* can feel a tad too stretched at times. These characters are at their best in short films, possibly because only one of them speaks. And it isn't like stop-motion animation has evolved all that much in the last three decades; it remains as artisanal

an art form as ever. Gromit, the Buster Keaton of the sitcom age, is still as expressive as he was back in the 1980s. But perhaps in an effort to pad up the extended run time, Park and his co-director Merlin Crossingham bring back the inept police officer Mackintosh, who is joined by a chipper rookie cop named Mukherjee. In the tradition of classic crime-solving dimwits such as Inspector Clouseau and Thomson & Thompson, Mackintosh serves as the comic relief in a universe that is already pretty humorous. Wallace's eccentricities appear to have become more pronounced in the years since we last saw him, when he was voiced by the late Peter Sallis. Now voiced by Ben Whitehead, who does a bang-up job of capturing his clueless buffoonery, Wallace remains oblivious to the obvious hazards of taming a piece of AI machinery. He's also unbothered by Gromit's growing paranoia around Norbot. But he's Wallace; why would he care, as long as his crumpets are buttered and toasts jammed?

Like *Ultron* in the second *Avengers* movie, Norbot goes rogue after Feathers takes control of him, unleashing a crime spree across Wallace's quaint village. Hedges are harassed and garden ornaments stolen. It's amusing to note how rustic this series has remained, despite the obvious advances in animation, not to mention the allure of large-scale narratives. For instance, the climactic 'chase' sequence involves a couple of canal boats that are literally outpaced by an elderly lady on crutches. Plus, the police presence is restricted only to Mackintosh and Mukherjee for the entirety of the movie. The cautionary tale might be a tad too dense for young children, especially those who've learned the alphabet on devices created by Alphabet Inc. And it'll likely be too on-the-nose for adults. This is the film's biggest flaw; there's little complexity. Unlike animation houses such as Laika, whose boundary-pushing stop-motion movies are often ambitious to a fault, Aardman, at least as far as the Wallace and Gromit franchise is concerned, proudly embraces a less-is-more aesthetic. There is, after all, a distinct charm to watching clunky puppeteering and basic visual effects. *Vengeance Most Fowl* functions as a time machine to the past, but unlike one that Wallace might have made, it works.

## Vineeta Singh warns Kashmiri Shark Tank India pitchers about the government hassles their business could run into: 'Your success will depend on...'

The fourth season of *Shark Tank India* has already seen a host of dramatic pitches in less than a week, but there's always room for anticlimaxes as well. The young Kashmiri entrepreneurs Zubair and Yameen pitched their sustainable e-bike service Curve Electric to the panel of 'sharks', which included Anupam Mittal, Vineeta Singh, Aman Gupta, Peyush Bansal and newcomer Kunal Bahl. While all the 'sharks' were impressed by the entrepreneur's tenacity and drive, they couldn't see conclusive evidence of their idea's scalability. Yameen and Zubair asked for Rs 50 lakh in exchange of 5% equity in their company.

They said that they currently operate in Kashmir, but want to expand operations to several other mountain towns such as Shimla and Mussoorie. They also laid out plans to expand in college campuses across the country, and said that there are 1,400 such campuses that they can capture. The entrepreneurs said that they have devised their own bikes, and ask for no app downloads, no security deposits from their customers. Peyush was very impressed by the entrepreneurs' ability to erase all the on-boarding issues that customers might have.

However, Aman was interested to know if customers have tried to steal bikes, seeing as they don't have to make any payments in advance. Yameen claimed that in the two years that they have been operational, they have had zero thefts and zero damage on their bikes. They operate entirely on faith, and have noticed that customers tend to be honest more often than not. All the 'sharks' were very surprised by this piece of information. However, they also were in agreement over the lack of scalability in the idea. Vineeta explained, "There is a little complexity here. There is a lot of dependence on governments, and from what I've seen in all the other companies, the setting that you have to do with governments and local bodies, it becomes a make or break situation. Your expansion will not depend on your ambition,



it will depend on where you get the local support." Yameen nodded in agreement, and said that they haven't had any losses yet, and have raised a round of investment already, valuing their company at Rs 8.5 crore. But none of the 'sharks' were able to find a logical way to navigate the situation. Aman said that the market is simply too small currently, while Kunal pointed out that problems will only compound when they begin expanding to other cities. Each of them backed out of the deal, but Peyush bid the founders farewell on a positive note. Addressing Yameen, he said, "It's like looking at a mirror, you are me. You are saying everything I would have said 10 years back. The detailed customer-focused obsession you have, I have not seen in *Shark Tank* in four years." In the end, the two entrepreneurs walked away with no deal, but loads of positive wishes.

## Sonu Sood says he'd eat an entire brick of Amul butter every night, says his body has been built on a vegetarian diet

Actor Sonu Sood, who is set to make his directorial debut with the action film *Fateh*, recently opened up about his physique, and the measures that he takes to maintain it. Sonu said that he doesn't consume alcohol and meat, and admitted that he had no idea about special diets when he first started working out. He also expressed pride in achieving a buff physique as a vegetarian, and without the aid of supplements and steroids. Sonu said in an interview that he used to consume an entire brick of Amul butter every day when he was younger, and shared that he isn't very picky about food now.

Chatting with Shubhankar Mishra on YouTube, Sonu was asked about his physique, and the common belief that in order to achieve such a body, one needs to use supplements and steroids. He rejected the assumption, and said, "I'm a vegetarian. I don't drink. I've never tasted non-veg. Also, I've inherited my parents' Punjabi DNA. My dad was very strong. I'm the only one in my family who has never touched alcohol and non-veg. I don't party either."

Asked if he has ever taken supplements, Sonu said, "When I was a student, I had no idea what proteins and carbs were. I used to eat an entire loaf of bread and a full brick of Amul butter every night. And I would drink milk. I'd tear off the corner of the milk packet and drink it all up. I would eat egg whites... To this day, I go to hotels sometimes and the chefs offer to prepare special meals for me, but I ask them to give me a salad and egg whites. I can survive on daal and rice my entire life."

Sonu said that he has taken protein powder, but that's the extent of his supplement intake. He also said that he is a very disciplined man, and hasn't missed a single day at the gym ever since he started. "I work out 365 days of the week," he said. In an earlier interview with Jist, he said that



Chatting with Shubhankar Mishra on YouTube, Sonu was asked about his physique, and the common belief that in order to achieve such a body, one needs to use supplements and steroids. He rejected the assumption, and said, "I'm a vegetarian. I don't drink. I've never tasted non-veg. Also, I've inherited my parents' Punjabi DNA. My dad was very strong. I'm the only one in my family who has never touched alcohol and non-veg. I don't party either."

he hasn't eaten chapatis in years. "Lately, I have stopped eating chapatis. In the afternoon, I eat a small bowl of dal and rice. For breakfast, I eat egg-white omelette, salad, avocado, sauteed vegetables or papaya. But yes, I eat healthy, I don't cheat on my diet. I eat makki ki roti sometimes, but only once in a while. It is important to be consistent," he said.

## 'AR Rahman is not a friendly person', says Sonu Nigam: 'He doesn't let anyone come close to him'



Sonu Nigam has a long standing professional relationship with music composer AR Rahman and in a recent interview, the singer shared that Rahman does not allow personal relationships come in the way of his work and has always been a strict professional. Sonu recalled his first collaboration with Rahman for Daud and shared that he was quite surprised when the composer allowed him to sing the

way he wanted, instead of giving precise directions.

In a chat with O2 India, Sonu spoke about Rahman and said, "He doesn't have relationships. He is not the kind of person who has relationships. He doesn't open up to anyone. At least, I have never seen that. Perhaps, he opens up in front of his older friends, who have known him as Dileep. But I haven't seen him opening up or having any relationship with anybody. He is not a friendly person. He is just into his work."

Sonu recalled going on a tour with Rahman across USA and said that throughout the tour, they just exchanged pleasantries with each other. "He doesn't know how to gossip, and that is not his drawback. This is how he is. He doesn't want to know anything about me or anybody else and he doesn't want anybody else to know about him also. He is a unique personality," he said. Sonu said that Rahman is an extremely respectful person who doesn't speak ill about anyone and only concentrates on his work and prayer. "He does his work and his prayer. He doesn't behave badly with anyone. He will not hurt anybody's heart. He won't speak ill about anyone. He is detached to all of this. He must be attached to his family but I haven't seen him being very friendly with others," he said and added, "He doesn't let anyone come close to him. That's how it should be."

## Kangana Ranaut invited 'welcoming and charming' Priyanka Gandhi, 'zero etiquette' Rahul Gandhi to watch Emergency: 'It's on your grandmother'

Actor-director and BJP MP Kangana Ranaut is currently busy promoting her upcoming film *Emergency*. The political drama is finally set to release on the big screen after struggling through months of controversy regarding its censor certificate and allegations of misrepresenting the Sikh community. Recently, in an interview with Times Now, Kangana, who is essaying the role of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, opened up about her encounter in the Parliament with India's granddaughter, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi.

Kangana was asked about her previous statements about inviting Priyanka, where she had mentioned inviting her to watch the film. The actor said, "I just mentioned that in the passing. Since it's such a big matter of discussion, I should go on record with this with a certain precision. She is a significant figure in the parliament and a woman, so I must be very precise." Elaborating the encounter, she shared, "She is very gracious. I just say, definitely more than her brother (Rahul Gandhi). When we were at the Parliament, she was walking and I heard somebody in a soft voice saying, 'Oh My God, look at those beautiful hair and how lovely her dress is'. I looked back and there I saw Mrs. Priyanka Gandhi. I was pleasantly surprised because she was very charming, welcoming and had a smile on her face. For a moment, I thought that most people in the Parliament engaged with me in the capacity of being an actor."

"I smiled back at her and said, 'Thankyou'. She herself is a very nice, impressive and tall woman. She asked how Parliament is treating me and I told her that it's quite interesting and very different from what I am used to. I took the opportunity of telling her 'I have made a film on your grandmother Mrs. Gandhi'. She was taken aback a little bit. I said 'It's called *Emergency* and maybe you want to see it'. She has quite the presence of mind and told me that she can give me facts about *Emergency* that I might not know,"



Kangana added. She continued, "I asked her to give me a chance to let me show her the film and let's see what she thinks about it. She even mentioned the book of Katherine Frank for more authentic information about it. I took that opportunity to clarify with her that I have taken most of my parts from Pupul Jayakar's autobiography which your father Rajiv Gandhi ji launched. I requested her to give it a chance, 'Maybe you will like it'. She smiled back and said 'Hmm'. This was our lovely conversation in the Parliament, I remember it fondly. She is quite courteous unlike her brother who just smirked at me, he doesn't have much etiquette. I still invited him to see the film." Produced by Manikarnika Films, *Emergency* stars Kangana Ranaut as the late Indira Gandhi. It will show the 21 months of the *Emergency* imposed in 1975 by her. The film is scheduled to hit the theatres on January 17. It also features Anupam Kher as Jayaprakash Narayan, Shreyas Talpade as young Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Milind Soman as Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, Mahima Choudhary as Pupul Jayakar, and the late Satish Kaushik as Jagjivan Ram.

## Shabana Azmi denies rumours of Shibani Dandekar expecting her first child with husband Farhan Akhtar: 'No truth'



Actor couple Farhan Akhtar and Shibani Dandekar recently found themselves in the headlines in the morning after rumours suggested they were expecting their first kid together, three years after getting married. The speculations sparked after Shibani was spotted after her gym session in Mumbai, on Thursday morning. Although, the couple is yet to release a statement regarding the rumours themselves.

Veteran actor Shabana Azmi has dismissed the rumours about her stepson Farhan Akhtar and his wife Shibani Dandekar's expecting their first child together. The speculation of her pregnancy started when a media report claimed that the duo was preparing to welcome a baby, creating a lot of buzz on social media. But, in a statement to Etimes, Shabana denied the claims, clarifying that there is no baby on the way for Farhan and Shibani right now. The *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem* Kahani actor said, "There's no truth to it."

Actor couple Farhan Akhtar and Shibani Dandekar recently found themselves in the headlines in the morning after rumours suggested they were expecting their first kid together, three years after getting married. The speculations sparked after Shibani was spotted after her gym session in Mumbai, on Thursday morning. Although, the couple is yet to release a statement regarding the rumours themselves.

Farhan and Shibani, who tied the knot in a private wed-

ding ceremony in February 2022, have always been a tightlipped about their personal life. However, they keep sharing heartwarming moments on social media, showcasing their life together. For the unknown, Farhan already has two daughters, Shakya and Akira, with his ex-wife and hairstylist, Adhuna Bhabani. Meanwhile, Farhan is celebrating his 51st birthday today, January 9. He got several warm birthday wishes from cousin Farah Khan, who is also his birthday twin, and sister Zoya Akhtar among others on Instagram

On the professional front, Farhan Akhtar is currently working on his next acting project — *120 Bahadur*. It is set against the backdrop of the 1962 Indo-China war, and stars the actor-filmmaker as Major Shaitan Singh. It is a tribute to the soldiers of Charlie Company, 13 Kumaon Regiment. *120 Bahadur* is helmed by Razeesh Razy Ghai. He also has the highly-anticipated *Don 3* in the pipeline as a director. The sequel will feature Ranveer Singh in the lead role, stepping in the shoes of superstar Shah Rukh Khan.

## Champions Trophy puzzles: Will selectors give Yashasvi Jaiswal maiden ODI call-up? Will Suryakumar Yadav find a return route? Is Ravindra Jadeja's time up?



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Their spots in the Test team for the tour of England later may be under a shadow of doubt, but when the selection panel headed by Ajit Agarkar pick the squad for the Champions Trophy on Friday, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli will be certainties. While the inclusion of the duo is a straightforward call in the format where India are seeking their first trophy since the 2013 Champions Trophy, there are plenty of deliberations over other slots with ace spinner Kuldeep Yadav far from certain for the tournament that begins on February 19.

After a hectic tour to Australia, India have a fortnight's break before the five-match T20Is against England followed by the three ODIs, which will be a precursor to the Champions Trophy. With India set to play all their matches in Dubai, they have a clear-cut edge over others in terms of the familiarity with the conditions. However, the big difference this time is they are playing in February and March, a period which is late-winter months, which means the pitches may not be slow and dry. So India are pondering their options. Apart from Kuldeep's availability, India are also awaiting the fitness report of Jasprit Bumrah, their undisputed X-factor. Here is a role-wise breakdown of the contenders. Given his recent form, Jaiswal is certain to get a call-up and could make his debut during the ODIs against England. It means Gill, who has been a key-figure in this format, may end up losing his spot to the left-hander. The other option is to make Gill play at No 3, but that would mean India have to push their greatest No 3 to the middle-order, which the selectors might not ideally prefer. With three openers set to be part of the squad, Gill seems a certainty, but whether he remains a guaranteed starter is the question.

If India want to give Gill a break, then they may look at one of these players. Gaikwad seems a natural fit and has extraordinary numbers in the format with an average of 57.49 with 16 centuries. Apart from him, the two Punjab openers have been making all the right noises in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy with their aggressive brand of cricket. Abhishek with his left-arm spin and Prabhsimran being wicketkeepers, can also provide the team with options.

Middle-order: Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul. The three were the backbone of India's extraordinary run to the final of the 2023 World Cup. The format is Kohli's bread and butter, Shreyas and Rahul are versatile, and hence sought-after. With their experience and form the selectors may not feel necessary to overlook them for the eight-team event.

In the fray: Riyan Parag, Suryakumar Yadav, Rinku Singh. For one other spot, three players are in contention. Parag was included for the trip to Sri Lanka, India's last ODI assignment. Given his numbers at No 5 and 6 and his ability to bowl off-spin and India looking for multi-dimensional players, he has a strong chance. If they don't need him,

then they will be tempted to bring back Suryakumar Yadav, a batsman who hasn't been able to find his feet in this format. Beyond the two there is Rinku, a capable finisher whose calmness can be a valued addition. In the ODIs against Sri Lanka, Rahul started before Pant took his spot in the final match. All said and done, Pant is yet to cement his spot in this format. He will definitely be in the squad, but whether he is the first-choice wicketkeeper or not is a decision the selectors and the team-management should take before the tournament starts to avoid any chaos.

In the fray: Sanju Samson. Has played a central role in India's newfound T20 approach and despite scoring a century in his last, wasn't part of the squad in Sri Lanka. With Pant yet to nail his spot and if selectors go by form, Samson offers an interesting option. May have to bat out of his usual position, but given the game he has, Samson can be the ideal one to walk with 15 overs to go. What could work against him is that he didn't feature in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

All-rounders: Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar. Although Pandya hasn't played an ODI since Bangladesh in the 2023 World Cup, he is in line for a comeback. In three group-stage games of the Vijay Hazare Trophy, he bowled 7.7 & 6 overs, which shows fitness isn't an issue. He also had an excellent Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy campaign. So the selectors would be tempted to include him. For the two spinners; spot, Axar and Washington seem to be the perfect fit as they can be used as floaters as well.

In the fray: Nitish Kumar Reddy, Shivam Dube and Ravindra Jadeja. There will definitely be temptation to pick Nitish, but he may have to wait for his turn as having two seam-bowling options in the UAE may well be a luxury. It is the same in case of Dube as well, whose military medium-pace may not be required. With regards to Jadeja, if he is picked, it would come as a surprise inclusion as in limited-overs Axar seems to have won over the confidence of the selectors and team management. Spinners: Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy. If Kuldeep is available, it is a straightforward call. But with the left-arm wrist-spinner still recovering from sports hernia it remains to be seen whether he would be match-ready before the Champions Trophy. It is understood that for Kuldeep to be in contention, he has to feature in the ODIs against England to prove his fitness. If not, then IPL will be the realistic target for his comeback. In that case, Varun could emerge as an alternate pick. Apart from being among wickets in the IPL, he has evolved into more than just a mystery spinner. The conditions will also suit him. In the fray: Ravi Bishnoi. If selectors are not convinced of Varun's credentials in 50 overs, then they could lean towards Bishnoi. His quick leg-breaks could come in handy and he is live-wire on the field as well.

Fast bowlers: Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh. The trio's selection seems straightforward and if Pandya is available then only two may make it to the XI as India have been looking to find the right balance. Apart from batting depth, they are also seeking six bowling options so there could be spots for just three pacers, unless they compromise on other spots. In the fray: Khaleel Ahmed, Harshit Rana and Mohammed Shami. The left-arm seamer has been making the right noises in the domestic circuit and was part of the team to Sri Lanka. If Arshdeep isn't ready, then Khaleel could join the race. Rana is promising, but a spot in the Champions Trophy looks a long shot. The inclusion of Shami, who has been bowling in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, will be a question of fitness.

## Malaysia Super 1000: HS Prannoy, Treesa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand go down to Chinese opponents in similarly teeth-gritting 82 minute-losses



GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Indian shuttlers are not known to smash racquets when things go akilter. Yet, Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand first, and HS Prannoy later played hugely well, and then just couldn't nail the finishing, prompting similar scenes, where they were left gnashing in frustration, almost burying the racquets into the ground, but not quite courting equipment violence. Both lost in 82 minutes, against heavily touted Chinese, beating whom would've been a much-needed good start for Indian badminton. Neither was a favourite to win, but it's how close they came to winning that set their teeth on the edge.

The reactions of the Chinese after merely crossing a Round 2 hurdle at the Malaysian Open Super 1000, a lung opener at best, were telling, after the two respective wins. The women's doubles pair Jia Yi Fan (one half of Paris Olympic champion), paired alongside Zhang Shu Xian, a Chinese who's won everything possible in juniors, and is set to unleash chaos with her hitting speed in seniors, roared in relief, after Treesa-Gayatri combatively went from 16-20 to 19-20 in the decider, before missing last two points. Gayatri was on her knees grimacing as her return dropped wide, but Zhang and Jia and their coaches were celebrating like it was some final. Treesa had been sublime, and made them see a ghost through the 21-15, 18-21, 19-21 loss. If Jia-Zhang roared, the big Chinese hope Li Shifeng was so relieved to get over the line against Prannoy, he needed an emotional lie-back on the court and animated celebrations with the coach, wholly unproportional to a prequarterfinal. There was some history, Prannoy had beaten Shifeng at Malaysia Masters during his title run and led 3-2 in H2H, but that was two years ago. In his Thursday match against Shifeng, who couldn't stop punching the air post his win, the Indian who's lost 6 months to recovering fully from chikungunya and dropped to World No 26, gave the Chinese superstar-in-waiting and the Asiad champ, ranked No 7, an absolute fright before losing 8-21, 21-15, 21-23.

Prannoy was 6-13 down in the decider, his face inscrutable as ever, before he changed gears imperceptibly and made Shifeng harry around the court with precise shot selection. He levelled at 15-all with a soundless saunter – using the two pillars of his game, the flatter, pace-varied net exchanges. And his ability to smash straight and well within tramines, denying even the tall Chinese any advantages of reach, by simply keeping him engaged on the opposite flank. It kept him in the hunt at 19-19, and

Shifeng had his jaw still dropping at how the match had gone from him winning the opener 21-8, before Prannoy took the second with a late set surge. It was typical of Prannoy who rivals irresistibly mistake for a pushover. He does that thing – appear utterly off colour in the first set, before he wakes up at the 11-point mark in the second. Shifeng was 9-5 up, looking to race to a straight-sets, before Prannoy went teasing his leftie forehead wing-span, landing deep smashes that eluded the stretching Chinese who found himself 10-12 down suddenly. From 17-15, he began stewing Shifeng's frustration with four straight points to push a decider. Still, the Chinese was lulled into believing, tricked a second time, that Prannoy was fading off at 6-13 down. 'Not so fast' as they say. Prannoy was all over Shifeng's net game, completely befuddled the power-hitter with levers of stop-start-spin-snap at the front court. Shifeng was bewildered when it got to 19-19. However, the Indian would see his luck at the net run out with an error at 19-20. But Prannoy's defence forced an impetuous blood-rush cross ball wide from Shifeng to make it 20-20. Two more match points were squandered, before Shifeng could finally trap the win – Prannoy missing the line by a fair margin after the bet botch, his best game features deserting him at crunch. The Chinese has a 86 percent winning record in matches that go to deciders. He kept the record intact, but was made to sweat mightily by the Indian.

Treesa-Gayatri narrowly miss. The impact of Malaysian coach Tan Kim Her seemed to be immediate as Treesa-Gayatri on the verge of World Top 10, came agonisingly close to upsetting Jia-Zhang, the newly formed pair with great individual pedigree.

The sheer variety in Treesa Jolly's game looks like it will be unlocked by Coach Tan, and it hardly had anything to do with her power smashes. It was a rich blend of expansive, cross smashes that literally split the Chinese, sending them wide to the flanks, before Treesa would go for the rally-kill with a straight one down the centre. The 21-year-old also has a stop-drop, a looping arced short swirl that falls at the forecourt and leaves opponents stunned at the back. What she got spot-on against the Chinese was in choosing her precise moment to kill. Zhang, the highly rated junior, was nervous in the company of her Olympic champ parter. But more than that she was absolutely confused by the Indians playing long rallies with a trick-a-minute response in strokes. While she struggled to find her rhythm, Jia held fort, but they were a set down soon enough. However, Zhang who has remarkable whippy-speed, came good right when needed. There had been a near 100 shot rally at 15-10 in opener when Treesa bossed the opponents, and the Indians were 17-14 up, but there's a reason why Chinese lord over women's doubles. Zhang started hammering with accuracy to take 6 straight points at that stage, and pushed a decider. It was a nightmare start of third for Indians, at 0-7 down. But first Treesa, later Gayatri started chipping away with their usual busy tinkering work, to come to within 9-10 in the third. Though the Indians stayed within striking distance, they never could overhaul the Chinese, though this might be the most assured they played against a highest quality team. The Indians have fortified their defense and kept things creative, but ultimately Jia was too experienced and Zhang too quick to allow them a foothold. Gayatri who played two shots too many on the day and delayed a kill, got her high lift-drop-cross smash going to come to within 19-20, but she was also left burying her face in her hands when she sent one reflex wide.

## 'Gautam Gambhir is a hypocrite': Manoj Tiwary blasts India head coach after BGT failure

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Manoj Tiwari Gautam Gambhir. Tiwary also said that Gambhir was not the only one to guide Kolkata Knight Riders to a title but it was a collective effort from the team. Former India batter Manoj Tiwary blasted India coach Gautam Gambhir after the Border Gavaskar Trophy by terming him as a 'hypocrite', saying he does not do as he says.

"Gautam Gambhir is a hypocrite. He doesn't do what he says. Where is the captain (Rohit) from? Mumbai. Where is Abhishek Nayar from? Mumbai. He got a chance to put a Mumbai player in the forecourt. There is no one to speak for Jalaj Saxena. He performs well but keeps quiet," Tiwary said to News18 Bangla. "Morne Morkel came from Lucknow Super Giants. Abhishek Nayar was at Kolkata Knight Riders with Gambhir and the Indian head coach has a comfort zone with him. They have to be yes men to the coach. That's why they were brought," he added. He also said that Gambhir was not the only one to guide Kolkata Knight Riders to a title in 2012 but it was a collective effort from the team. "Gambhir's captaincy didn't guide KKR to the title single-handedly. We all performed as a unit. Jacques Kallis, Manvinder Bisla and I performed with the bat and Sunil



Narine bowled exceptionally well. That is why we won the 1st IPL title. But who took the credit? There is an environment and PR that allows him to take all the credit," he said. Gambhir has been under tremendous pressure after India lost the BGT to Australia after 10 years with a lot of experts raising questions on his abilities as a coach. Before being outclassed by Australia 3-1, India had suffered a 3-0 whitewash to New Zealand at home and also lost an ODI series against Sri Lanka.

## South Africa sports minister urges Proteas to boycott Champions Trophy match vs Afghanistan

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

South Africa's sports minister Gayton McKenzie was the latest voice who urged the Proteas to boycott the Champions Trophy match vs Afghanistan on February 21 because of the Taliban government's ban on women's sports and their decision to disband the Afghanistan's women's team. "It is not for me as the sports minister to make the final decision on whether South Africa should honor cricketing fixtures against Afghanistan. If it was my decision, then it certainly would not happen," McKenzie said.

"As a man who comes from a race that was not allowed equal access to sporting opportunities during apartheid, it would be hypocritical and immoral to look the other way today when the same is being done towards women anywhere in the world," he added. McKenzie also termed the International Cricket Council (ICC) as hypocritical for not upholding its own mandates that member nations develop men's and women's cricket. McKenzie noted Sri Lanka Cricket was suspended by the ICC from November 2023 to January 2024 for government interference. "This does not happen in the case of Afghanistan, suggesting that political interference in the administration of sport is being tolerated there," McKenzie said. "Cricket South Africa, the federations of other countries and the ICC will have to think carefully about the mes-



sage the sport of cricket wishes to send the world, and especially the women in sports. I hope that the consciences of all those involved in cricket, including the supporters, players and administrators, will take a firm stand in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan," he added. On Wednesday, nearly 160 UK politicians wrote to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) urging them to boycott the group fixture against Afghanistan to be played in Lahore. This led to Prime Minister Keir Starmer calling on the ICC to follow its own rules, which make it mandatory for any full member that fails to field men's and women's teams to be suspended.

## Hans Niemann's \$1 million challenge for Magnus Carlsen, Hikaru Nakamura: 'Face me, or issue formal apology'

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

Magnus Carlsen (left) at the World Rapid and Blitz 2022. Hans Niemann at the Riga Grand Swiss tournament. Lennart Ootes, Anna Shtourman. Magnus Carlsen (left) at the World Rapid and Blitz 2022. Hans Niemann at the Riga Grand Swiss tournament. American grandmaster Hans Niemann threw down the gauntlet on Thursday, challenging the world's top 2 players, Magnus Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura, for an over-the-board blitz chess match.

Niemann said he was willing to put as much as \$1 million at stake to play against both players but demanded formal apology from Carlsen and Nakamura for their "false accusations" that Niemann had cheated. "As the No 1 blitz player on Chess.com, I challenge the No 2 and No 3 players to an OTB (over-the-board) blitz match to decide who the best player in the world is. I am willing to put up anywhere from 1 to \$1 million. If they are too afraid of the challenge, I expect them to retract all false accusations and issue a formal apology," Hans Niemann posted on X.

Hans Niemann and Magnus Carlsen were involved in a lawsuit after Magnus Carlsen had pulled out of the 2022 Sinquefeld Cup after losing to Hans Niemann. There were allegations that Niemann was cheating, which were never proved. While the lawsuit was later settled, Hans Niemann has frequently trained his guns on Magnus



Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura. Recently, Carlsen defeated Niemann in the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championship before making a "what's the fuss" gesture at the camera and then banging his piece on the board. When Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi agreed to share the World Blitz Championship title, Hans Niemann was one of the most vocal voices criticising the move. "The chess world is officially a joke. THIS HAS NEVER BEEN DONE IN HISTORY. I can't believe that the official body of chess is being controlled by a singular player FOR THE 2ND TIME THIS WEEK. THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE WORLD CHAMPION! (sic)" Niemann had posted on his X handle. He had also gone on a tirade on his X handle after that.

## South Africa sports minister urges Proteas to boycott Champions Trophy match vs Afghanistan

GNS News Agency, Feb 11

South Africa's sports minister Gayton McKenzie was the latest voice who urged the Proteas to boycott the Champions Trophy match vs Afghanistan on February 21 because of the Taliban government's ban on women's sports and their decision to disband the Afghanistan's women's team. "It is not for me as the sports minister to make the final decision on whether South Africa should honor cricketing fixtures against Afghanistan. If it was my decision, then it certainly would not happen," McKenzie said. "As a man who comes from a race that was not allowed equal access to sporting opportunities during apartheid, it would be hypocritical and immoral to look the other way today when the same is being done towards women anywhere in the world," he added. McKenzie also termed the International Cricket Council (ICC) as hypocritical for not upholding its own mandates that member nations develop men's and women's cricket. McKenzie noted Sri Lanka Cricket was

suspended by the ICC from November 2023 to January 2024 for government interference. "This does not happen in the case of Afghanistan, suggesting that political interference in the administration of sport is being tolerated there," McKenzie said. "Cricket South Africa, the federations of other countries and the ICC will have to think carefully about the message the sport of cricket wishes to send the world, and especially the women in sports. I hope that the consciences of all those involved in cricket, including the supporters, players and administrators, will take a firm stand in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan," he added. Nearly 160 UK politicians wrote to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) urging them to boycott the group fixture against Afghanistan to be played in Lahore. This led to Prime Minister Keir Starmer calling on the ICC to follow its own rules, which make it mandatory for any full member that fails to field men's and women's teams to be suspended.