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## 57 labourers trapped under avalanche in Uttarakhand

Dehradun: Fifty-seven labourers from the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) were trapped under an avalanche near the border village of Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Friday, officials said. The avalanche buried a camp of the Border Roads Organisation between Mana and Badrinath, Chamoli District Magistrate Sandeep Tiwari said. Mana is the last village on the India-Tibet border at a height of 3,200 metres. Teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and SDRF have left for the spot amid continuing snowfall and rain. Meanwhile, Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami said 16 of 57 workers trapped under avalanche in Chamoli have been rescued.

## Revanth Reddy Rebukes Kishan Reddy Over Metro Expansion and Infrastructure Projects



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has hit back at Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy, calling his remarks "irresponsible" and reaffirming that the Congress-led state government is committed to transparency and upholding the federal spirit of the Constitution. Addressing the ongoing debate over infrastructure projects, the Chief Minister highlighted the Centre's approvals for metro expansion projects in Bengaluru and Chennai since 2021, while Hyderabad's long-pending Metro Phase II remains stalled. He recalled his December 12 meeting with Mr. Kishan Reddy, where he urged the latter to facilitate necessary clearances, as well as his January 24 meeting with Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on the same issue. Mr. Revanth Reddy criticised the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government for neglecting the Metro's second phase despite its potential to boost Hyderabad's development. The Congress government, he stated, is now prioritising metro expansion through five new

corridors to improve connectivity for both city residents and visitors from across the state and country.

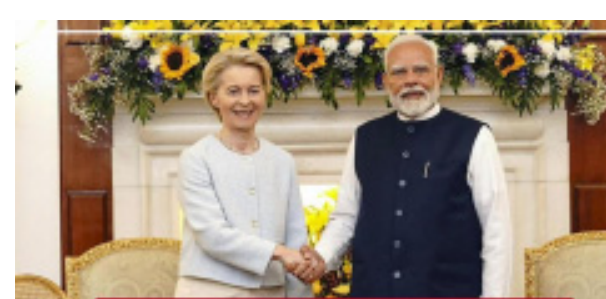
In addition to the metro, the Chief Minister underscored his government's focus on the Musi River rejuvenation project, which he linked to Hyderabad's cultural heritage and its role in irrigating Nalgonda district. Drawing attention to Union Minister Kishan Reddy's past support for the Sabarmati riverfront and Ganga rejuvenation projects, Mr. Revanth Reddy accused him of double standards for opposing a similar initiative in Telangana. The Chief Minister also raised concerns about delays in securing approvals for the Regional Ring Road (RRR), a dry port, and a greenfield highway linking Telangana to Andhra Pradesh's seaports. He held Mr. Kishan Reddy accountable for failing to expedite these critical projects.

Rejecting Mr. Kishan Reddy's assertion that the Telangana government lacks awareness of central approval processes, Mr. Revanth Reddy emphasised that the state has followed all necessary protocols and even offered to share project costs. He accused the Centre of discriminating against Telangana, citing approvals granted to similar projects in neighbouring states. The Chief Minister further compared Mr. Kishan Reddy's tenure to that of senior leaders like S. Jaipal Reddy and G. Venkat Swamy, who secured major benefits such as metro rail and pension schemes for Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) employees. "What is your contribution to Telangana as a Union Minister?" he asked pointedly. Asserting that the state's infrastructure projects are vital for Telangana's growth, Mr. Revanth Reddy urged Mr. Kishan Reddy to prioritise approvals and funding for proposals worth ₹1.63 lakh crore, rather than engaging in political criticism.

## Centre gives clearance for Mamnoon airport in Warangal

Hyderabad: The Central government has accorded approval for Mamnoon airport at Warangal. The Telangana government has been appealing to the Central government to accord permission for construction of an airport at Mamnoon since long. There was a condition that construction of a new airport from 150 kms distance from Shamshabad airport would not be permitted. In November 2024, the Telangana government had approached the Airports Authority of India (AAI) stating that Hyderabad International Airport Limited (HIAL) had issued 'No Objection Certificate'. Accordingly, instructions were issued to hand over 253 acres to AAI for development of Warangal Airport.

## PM Modi, European Commission Chief Von der Leyen hold talks; India, E.U. decide to conclude FTA by end of 2025



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

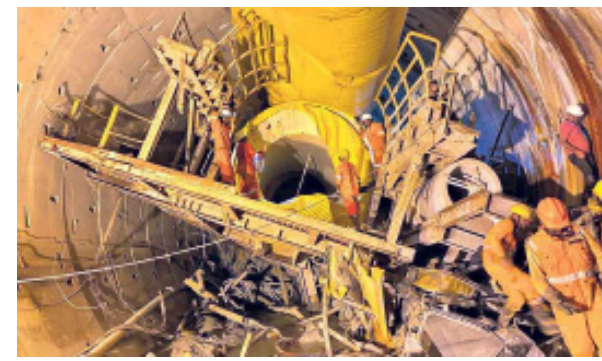
Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Friday (February 28, 2025) issued directions to conclude an ambitious free trade agreement by end of this year as the two leaders vowed to expand India-E.U., strategic partnership in areas of defence, security and critical technology. We have di-

rected our teams to conclude a mutually beneficial bilateral free trade pact by the end of this year, he said, in a hugely significant decision that came amid growing global concerns over the Trump administration's policy on trade and tariff. The Prime Minister said both sides are also looking at forward movement on negotiations for an investment protection pact as well as an agreement on Geographical Indications. On connectivity, Mr. Modi said concrete steps will be taken to take forward the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC). I am confident that the IMEEC corridor will prove to be an engine to drive global commerce, sustainable growth and prosperity, he said. The Prime Minister also called the visit of Ms. Von der Leyen and other the College of Commissioners to India as "unprecedented". Mr. Modi said India and the E.U. agreed on the importance of peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Many decisions have been taken to elevate and accelerate India-E.U. partnership, he said. In her remarks, the European Commission president said the E.U. wants to take its relationship with India to new heights.

## 60 members of SCCL rescue team sent to trace missing workers

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Mancheril: Nearly 60 members of a rescue team of Singareni Collieries Company Limited's (SCCL) Srirampur, Mandamari and Bellampalli areas were sent to participate in the rescue operation to trace eight missing personnel inside the Srisaillam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel in Nagarkurnool. The rescue team comprising 483 trained personnel has earned national-level recognition for rescuing those trapped in calamities. The personnel were trained at special training centres. They are members of International Mines Rescue Body (IMRB), indicating their efficiency. They bagged many awards for their outstanding work. Officials said that the personnel were headquartered in Godavarikhani. The team is headed by general manager K Srinivas Reddy, while superintendent is B Madhava Rao. Additional manager Bhaskar Reddy is the coach of the team.



The team was roped in during several calamities across the country.

## India slams Pakistan over Kashmir remarks at UN, calls it 'failed state surviving on international aid'

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

New York: India has hit out at Pakistan at the seventh meeting of the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, calling it a failed state thriving on international aid. Kshiti Tyagi, the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva, said it was unsurprising that Pakistan's leaders continued spreading falsehoods from their military-terrorist complex. Reaffirming India's stance, Tyagi emphasised that Jammu and Kashmir, along with Ladakh, will always remain an integral part of India, pointing to the progress in these regions.

"The Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India. The unprecedented political, social and economic progress in J&K in the past few years speaks for itself. These successes are a testament to the people's trust in the government's commitment to bring normalcy to a region scarred by decades of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism," he added. "It is regrettable to see Pakistan's leaders and delegates continuing to spread falsehoods handed down by its military terrorist complex. Pakistan is making a mockery of the OIC by abusing it as its mouthpiece. It is unfortunate that this Council's time continues to be wasted by a failed state which thrives on instability and survives on international handouts," said Tyagi.

He added that Pakistan must move past its unhealthy obsession with India and address the issues that continue to affect its citizens. "India remains focused on democracy,



progress and ensuring dignity for its people. Values that Pakistan would do well to learn from," he said. Tyagi's comments followed India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, who on February 19 reaffirmed that Jammu and Kashmir is and will always remain an integral part of India, while strongly condemning Pakistan's misinformation campaigns. During India's statement at the United Nations Security Council's Open Debate on Practising Multilateralism and Reforming Global Governance, Harish said, "The Deputy PM and Foreign Minister of Pakistan have referred to an integral and inalienable part of India, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in his remarks. I would like to reaffirm that the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been, is, and will always be, an integral and inalienable part of India."

## Students enjoy science and defence expo in Hyderabad



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Hyderabad: An exciting and rare opportunity unfolded for scores of school and engineering students as they were introduced to India's modern military technology at the 'Vigyan Vaibhav,' a science and defence expo, organised by the DRDO at Gachibowli stadium here on Friday. Visiting students and teachers were greeted by real missiles, towering artillery guns, majestic tanks, and radars. It was a sight most of them had only seen in movies, but the exhibition gave an opportunity to walk around and have a closer look. Some of the machines on display were recently tested hypersonic missile, Pralay missile, Pinaka missile system, short-range ballistic missile system, Agni 5 missile, India's main battle tank, Arjun, advanced towed artillery gun system, 155 mm guns, and Rudram, anti-radiation missile. Students had their phones out, taking photos of the missiles, guns, tanks and ammunition, while school teachers snapped their students in front of the machines and missiles. "I can't believe that I am actually seeing missiles. Contrary to my impression of models, these missiles turned out real ones used in a

war," said Sandeep, a Class X student of Brilliant Adonai High School. Hundreds of engineering students, particularly from the electronics and communications branch, got exposure to the missiles, including hypersonic, short-range ballistic missile, quick reaction surface to air missile and radars. Scientists gave a peek into the life in the defence sector besides explaining the opportunities awaiting them. "Here I learnt a lot of avionics, radars and missiles. It's really nice to get first hand information from the horse's mouth," said Phanindra, an engineering student of Institute of Aeronautical Engineering. The DRDO, Aeronautical Society of India and Kalam Institute of Youth Excellence jointly organised the event, which had 200 stalls including the BDL, BHEL, Indian Navy and MIDHAN.

## MLC Kavitha Criticises Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, Vows Action Against Attacks on Party Workers

EMS News Agency, Feb 28

Hyderabad: MLC Kavitha has launched a sharp attack on Telangana Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, alleging that he is visiting constituencies like a tourist. Speaking at a party gathering, she made it clear that they are meticulously maintaining a "pink book" to keep track of political developments. Kavitha also issued a stern warning, stating that leaders responsible for attacks on their party workers will not be spared. "We are noting down every detail. Those who have targeted our activists will face consequences," she asserted.

## Telangana High Court orders Government to pay retirement benefits to petitioners within 8 weeks



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Hyderabad: Telangana High Court on Thursday provided relief to Cholleti Raja Sukanya, a retired head master from Thorur in Mahabubabad district, directing the government to clear her retirement benefits within eight weeks. The petitioner was among a few dozens of retired government

employees who moved the court seeking directions to the government to clear retirement benefits that include commutation, gratuity, provided fund, earned leave and surrender leave encashment. The petitioner's counsel CR Sukumar told the court that the retired head master from Thorur has repeatedly approached the authorities for over seven months to get her retirement benefits but in vain. Following the submissions, Justice Namavarapu Rajeshwar Rao has directed the authorities to clear the retirement benefits of former government employees, who approached the court, within eight weeks from the date of receipt of his orders. Telangana is estimated to have witnessed around 10,000 government employees retiring since March last year with the school teachers accounting for nearly half of them, said the High Court advocate CR Sukumar, citing media reports. While hundreds of retired government employees have already moved the Telangana High Court seeking directions to release their retirement benefits that were due for months together, dozens of retired government employees have been approaching advocates daily, he said.

## 8 workers injured as under-construction portico collapses at University of Hyderabad; students protest



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Students protest at University of Hyderabad after workers injured in construction accident. Students protest at University of Hyderabad after workers injured in construction accident. Students at the University of Hyderabad have been protesting after at least eight workers were injured when a portion of an under-construction building on the campus collapsed Thursday night. The students' union demanded accountability from the administration and compensation to the injured workers even as a section boycotted classes on Friday. The students also demanded that the university bear the treatment expenses of the injured labourers. The incident occurred at around 8.30 pm when an under-construction portico collapsed on workers employed by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). The workers, who sustained minor injuries, were shifted to a private hospital. Construction work has been underway at the site for eight months. According to Gachibowli police, a case

is being registered against the contractor, and the site supervisor is being questioned. The CPWD said that all the injured workers were discharged from the hospital on Friday after treatment and the department was trying to ensure that the contractor paid them compensation.

## A.P. govt presents 3.2 lakh crore Budget for 2025-26

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The Andhra Pradesh state government, on Friday (February 28, 2025), presented the annual budget for the financial year 2025-26 with a total outlay of ₹3,22,359 crore. Of this, revenue expenditure is estimated at ₹2,51,162 crore, and capital expenditure at ₹40,635 crore. Talliki Vandanam, Annadata sukhibhava, the two promises made under Super Six, key electoral promises, found their way into the Budget. The government made a mention of Godavari-Banakacharla, an ambitious 'intra-linking of rivers' initiative. But, there was no specific mention of funds allocated to it. However, allocation of ₹6,705 crore for Polavaram irrigation project was made in the budget. The government for the first time announced ₹10 crore for Telugu language development and free power to schools. A viability gap funding (VGF) scheme for Capital expenditure was also announced in the budget. Presenting the budget in Andhra Pradesh Assembly on Friday, Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister Payavula Keshav said that the estimated revenue deficit is around ₹s. 33,185 crore and the fiscal deficit is around ₹79,926 crore.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Tainted politicians

THE Central Government has rightly told the Supreme Court that it's the prerogative of Parliament to consider whether convicted politicians should be banned from contesting elections for the remainder of their life. The Centre is not keen on a blanket ban and has opposed a plea challenging the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the Representation of the People Act. Under this law, a convicted neta is immediately disqualified and also barred from contesting polls for six years, starting from the date of completion of sentence. Subsequently, he/she becomes eligible for entering the poll fray. But is the six-year gap a potent deterrent? Should it be longer, if not lifelong? Various political parties are reluctant to discuss this contentious matter inside or outside Parliament for an obvious reason — they all have tainted leaders in their ranks. The bitter reality is that criminalisation of politics is par for the course. Of the 70 newly elected MLAs of Delhi, 31 have criminal cases against them — 16 are from the BJP and the rest from AAP. Both parties had no qualms about giving them the coveted ticket, apparently because their 'winnability' was the decisive factor, not their probity (or lack of it). It's true that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, but what stops a political party from preferring someone with a spotless record to one whose name figures in FIRs? And how can voters ascertain the truth about candidates' credentials? They simply can't — it's the job of prosecutors and courts to do the needful, and that too in a time-bound manner. The trial in cases against sitting/former MPs and MLAs often drags on for years or even decades. The protracted litigation allows them to contest one election after another. Fast-tracking of these cases can go a long way in weeding out the black sheep and preventing them from vitiating the electoral process. Political outfits can do their bit by initiating much-needed self-regulation.

## On revival mode ahead of Bengal polls, CPI(M) holds special session in state conference | Survey report, roadmap to 2026, and more discussed



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

With an aim to revive the party from its present position in West Bengal, the CPI(M) state leadership organised a special session for its members on Monday. State secretary Md Selim termed the special session as a first-of-its-kind in the state conference. "In this session, a PowerPoint presentation showed where our party stands now. Earlier, a survey was organised across the state by the party, and the result of that was also shown in the presentation: What voters are thinking about the political situation of the state," a delegate said.

Party sources said the CPI(M) has decided to constitute separate state-level and district-level committees for this revival mission. At the state level, a central research team will be constituted. This will monitor and research the campaign material, and campaign on social media. On the

other hand, two committees will be constituted at the district level — A district task force and a district war room, a party insider said, said party insiders. The district task force will be engaged in managing data which will be used for campaign and election preparation. On the other hand, the district war room will be engaged in mining data, campaign and election managements. It will also ensure micro-level Assembly constituency management and according to their report, the party will identify which assembly constituency they should give more importance.

A delegate of the state conference said, "We are lacking development at the booth level, which was strong 30-40 years ago. From now on, we will develop the cadre base through a special cadre development programme. The cadre will be taught how to choose which issue is to be given more importance. We shall also work on which local-level campaign should be done in a particular area, how a person should be targeted to be inducted into our organisation and more. All such things will be taught in the cadre development programme." A member of the CPI(M) state secretariat said, "We don't have a readymade report of the census as since 2011, the census has not been conducted. So, we made a survey on our own in every village of West Bengal. Accordingly, we now have a detailed data on the population, with the number of people from the SC/ST and OBC communities as well as other minorities in each village and panchayat areas. Accordingly, we will do our planning." Md Selim said that the party will carry out the work in six projects, each of which will be named after former CPI(M) leaders.

## Delhi Police arrest Rajasthan native for posing as YouTube employee, blackmailing people with explicit videos



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Delhi Police has issued a non-bailable warrant was issued against the accused in connection with the case registered in 2022. (File Photo) A non-bailable warrant was issued against the accused in connection with the case registered in 2022. (File Photo)

The Cyber Cell of the Delhi Police Crime Branch arrested a Rajasthan native for allegedly posing as a YouTube employee named Rahul Sharma and blackmailing people by threatening to release their sexually explicit videos on the platform, the police said Tuesday. The accused has been identified as Sahid, 27, who hails from Bharatpur. A non-bailable warrant was issued against him in connection with the case registered in 2022. According to the police, Sahid also posed as Inspector Surender from the Delhi Police Crime Branch to further intimidate some victims. He has allegedly blackmailed hundreds after recording their explicit videos through WhatsApp video calls.

As per a complaint received by the cyber cell, in November 2022, the complainant received a call from a person claiming to be a YouTube employee. He said that he possessed an objectionable video of the complainant and demanded money to prevent its release. The victim initially transferred Rs 3.61 lakh to various bank accounts. However, the extortion continued, and the complainant was coerced into paying an additional Rs 25 lakh over multiple transactions. Aditya Gautam, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Cyber Cell Crime, said, "Investigations revealed that 'Rahul Sharma' was acting as an agent of one Sandeep Aggarwal who was arrested earlier and had orchestrated an extortion scheme along with others."

Using a combination of technical and ground surveillance, the police followed Sahid movements across multiple locations, including Nuh in Haryana and Bharatpur in Rajasthan. On Sunday, following a raid in Haryana's Yamuna Nagar, he was arrested and subsequently remanded for five days, officers said. He was booked under sections 384 (extortion), 419 (cheating by impersonation), 420 (cheating), and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). "During interrogation, Sahid revealed that he had studied only up to Class 3 in Gokulpur, Nuh. Orphaned at a young age, he married in 2009 and struggled to support his wife and five children through farming. In 2022, he was introduced to a sextortion network led by one Mazid, through an acquaintance named Wasim," the DCP said. "Sahid joined the gang and began posing as different people to carry out cyber fraud and extortion schemes. His arrest is expected to lead to the dismantling of a larger network of cyber criminals," DCP Gautam added.

## 1984 anti-Sikh riots: Former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar gets life imprisonment in second case

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

A Delhi court Tuesday sentenced former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar to life imprisonment for his involvement in the murder of two Sikh men during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Kumar was convicted on February 12 in the case.

"From the evidence on record, it has been established that the victims in the present case not only witnessed the brutal killings of their family members at the hands of the rioting mob which the convict was a part of, but they were also witness to the burning and destruction.

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Date: 28.02.2025

## ED opposes AgustaWestland 'middleman' Christian Michel James's bail plea, says he's a flight risk

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

VVIP chopper scam, Agustawestland VVIP chopper scam, Christian Michel, VVIP chopper scam case, Indian express news, current affairs British national Christian Michel James, one of the accused in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam case. Opposing a bail plea filed by Christian Michel James, alleged middleman in the Rs 3,600-crore AgustaWestland chopper deal, the Enforcement Directorate submitted in the Delhi High Court on Tuesday that he was a flight risk, citing his British citizenship. James, however, said in the court of Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma that his passport had expired.

Zohab Hossain, special counsel for the ED, said James was granted bail by the Supreme Court only in the predicate case of the CBI and not in the money-laundering case, adding that being a British citizen, he could "run away" and that he was a flight risk. Advocate Alio Joseph, representing James, countered the argument saying James' passport had anyway expired and that he would have to apply for a renewal, which may take some time. "I don't have a passport, I will have to take permission to continue here (staying in India)... After completing the maximum sentence, if I run away or stay, what does it matter? It has been six years and two months (of incarceration) here and four months in Dubai... I'm entitled to remission. ED's argument does not hold any water," he said.

James has been in jail since December 2018, and the maximum punishment possible in the ED complaint is seven years. The ED filed its chargesheet in June 2016 alleging that James received 30 million Euros (approximately Rs 225 crore) from AgustaWestland. Justice Sharma remarked that the court would prefer to see the conditions imposed by the trial court for the bail granted by the Supreme Court first. "Let them (trial court) write the conditions... I want to see what conditions they are imposing," James, one of the alleged middlemen in the deal for the purchase of 12 VVIP choppers, was extradited from the UAE in 2018 to stand trial in the case. He moved the Supreme Court in the CBI case after the Delhi High Court denied him bail on September 25, 2024. The CBI then said James was a consultant for AgustaWestland and acted as a middleman on behalf of the firm. According to the CBI, undue favour was given to AgustaWestland in awarding the VVIP helicopter contract by accepting illegal gratification from it through middlemen. The CBI claimed that James "had been paid a huge bribe amount by M/s AgustaWestland, which was paid to the officers of the Indian Air Force, MOD (Ministry of Defence), bureaucrats, politicians and family in India for showing favour in the VVIP helicopter deal". The ED booked James on money-laundering charges with a complaint lodged against him on July 3, 2014. He was booked under sections 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13(2), read with section 13(1)(d) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

## Hyderabad cybercrime officials nab Uttar Pradesh man over job fraud

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad Cybercrime officials nabbed Dharmender Kumar alias Rohan (30) from Uttar Pradesh on charges of cheating job aspirants by promising jobs in Dubai.

Dharmender set up a call centre in New Delhi and cheated people with the help of his aides. During the investigation, it was found that he was involved in five cases across India including one case in Hyderabad. Recently, fraudsters duped a 49-year-old man from Amberpet to the tune of Rs 15.8 lakh. They asked the victim to pay the money to process the file internally. Believing this, he paid the amount and ended up being cheated.

According to the police, the fraudsters posted fake job postings on popular job portals, social media or company websites to attract job aspirants. Victims receive unsolicited calls, messages, or emails from scammers claiming to represent reputable companies. "These scammers use professional language and tone and even conduct fake interviews or assessments to build trust with victims. They create fake employee profiles on LinkedIn and other job portals to appear legitimate," said a police official.

## Delhi High Court questions UP Police's arrest of man, seeks response on protocol compliance

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The Delhi High Court has recently termed the Uttar Pradesh Police's action to enter the national capital and arrest a resident without informing their counterparts as "illegal" and directed the Greater Noida police commissioner to file a status report in the next hearing in May. A division bench of Justices Prathiba Singh and Dharmesh Sharma on February 20 stressed the "need to ensure that the prescribed protocol for inter-state arrests is followed by the UP Police".

The court has expressed concern at the interstate arrest of the Delhi resident, Satinder Singh Bhasin, by the Uttar Pradesh Police without notifying their Delhi counterparts through the prescribed protocol. A habeas corpus petition was moved on behalf of Bhasin after the Uttar Pradesh Police arrested him near Shivaji Stadium, Connaught Place, New Delhi, on February 18 and shifted him to an unknown location without intimating the Delhi Police. Bhasin was first detained by the Noida police on February 16 based on the complaint of 'DS Group' co-promoters about certain incidents at the Grand Venice Mall, Greater Noida, and released the same day. The bench has also sought a response from the Noida police commissioner on whether any protocol has been agreed upon with the Delhi Police.

Bhasin, through his advocate, had submitted that in the present case, the officers did not abide by the protocol for inter-state police arrest or detention. In their status report submitted on February 19, the Delhi Police said the Connaught Place police station had not received any prior notification regarding Bhasin's arrest from the staff of Beta-II, Gautam Buddha Nagar police station. They were given information about the arrest only late in the evening, it stated. The court observed, "Another cause for concern is



the fact that the UP Police have entered Delhi and picked up a resident of Delhi without any information being given to the Delhi Police and without following the prescribed protocol... The matter requires a deeper look as none of the other prescribed procedures appears to have been followed. No grounds of arrest also appear to have been communicated at the time of arrest. If the procedures prescribed are not followed, the arrest itself would be contrary to law... The prima facie view of the Court is that the steps required were not taken and hence the arrest itself is illegal." The court also referred to its previous judgment that has categorically held that interstate arrests cannot be effected without following a proper protocol. The Delhi High Court said that it would like to examine the CCTV footage to ascertain how the police from UP/Noida had picked up the petitioner. It also sought an explanation for the use of private vehicles for the arrest and why the UP police personnel were not in uniforms. "Let a status report be filed by the Commissioner of Police, Greater Noida, UP, after enquiring into the whole matter..." the court held.

## Mumbai police file rape FIR against Shyam S Bhartia, he calls allegations 'baseless, false, disparaging'



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

After the Bombay High Court took cognisance of a petition seeking registration of an FIR against an industrialist and three others for allegedly raping an aspiring actor, blackmailing her and subjecting her to casteist slurs, the Kapurbawadi police in Thane registered the FIR on February 22 against four persons, including Shyam S Bhartia, founder and chairman of Jubilant Bhartia Group. The Bench of Justices Revati Dere and Dr Neela Gokhale was hearing a petition filed by the woman, who alleged that the Thane police were not registering an FIR based on her complaint submitted on November 11 last year. In a statement issued to the Bombay Stock Exchange, Jubilant Foodworks said, "In reference to media reports about the registration of an FIR by the police, the company has received a statement from Mr Shyam S Bhartia, Chairman, Jubilant Bhartia Group, in his personal capacity, where he denies all the allegations as they are baseless, false and disparaging, and made with clear mala fide intent against him. The order of the hon'ble High Court of Bombay, downloaded from the court's website, specifically states that the police shall investigate the case on its own merits. The court has also made it clear in the said order that they have not dwelled on the merits of the complaint in any manner whatsoever. As a respectable citizen, Mr Bhartia would fully cooperate with the investigation agency as and when called upon to do so. As the investigation in this matter is ongoing, no additional comments can be made at this stage. He has further requested that the privacy of the family be respected. The company confirms that the said news reports have no material impact on the company or its operations." On February 18, the police informed the court it would comply with its orders, following which the FIR was registered on February 22.

After the police assured the court that the FIR would be registered, the petition was disposed of, and the court said, "Nothing survives for further consideration in the petition... Needless to state that the police shall investigate the case on its own merit in accordance with law. We make it

clear that we have not gone into the merits of the complaint made by the petitioner." According to the FIR, the woman, an aspiring actor in her 30s, had approached the other accused, Puja Kanwaljit Singh, who allegedly promised to introduce her to people who could get her a break in the industry. According to the FIR, the complainant alleged that on May 3, 2023, she was introduced to Bhartia at a five-star hotel in Santacruz. According to the FIR, the complainant alleged that "Bhartia told her to come to Singapore with him and passed on his card details to her to book tickets". According to the FIR, she alleged that she went with Singh to Singapore on May 19 that year, and Bhartia took them to a house where they consumed alcohol. As per the FIR, she alleged that she was forced to drink alcohol, after which Bhartia forced himself on her while Puja recorded the incident on her phone. As per the FIR, the woman claimed they threatened to make the video public if she told anyone. As per the FIR, the woman alleged she was again raped in Andheri and Thane on June 26, 2023, and October 14, 2023.

## Delhi Police lodge FIR after 'bomb threat' forces American Airlines flight to divert to Rome

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The Delhi Police Monday registered an FIR based on the complaint lodged by American Airlines after a potential security threat led to the diversion of its flight from New York to Rome Sunday. Authorities said the FIR was registered under sections 217 and 351(4) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Section 3 of the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against Safety of Civil Aviation Act. Italy's ANSA news agency said that the diversion was caused by an "alleged bomb threat".

News agency PTI reported citing sources that a Bomb Threat Assessment Committee (BTAC) was formed at the Delhi airport soon after the threat message was received for Flight AA292 Sunday. The committee wanted the aircraft to be inspected at the nearest airport and later the plane diverted to Rome for the necessary checks, PTI added. American Airlines said in a statement Flight AA292 was diverted to Rome due to a "possible security concern". It added that the possible issue was determined to be non-credible,



## Setback to MMRDA as Bombay HC sets aside 'unfair' notice terminating French firm Systra's Mumbai's Metro consultancy contract



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The High Court noted that it was unnecessary to examine the nature of the contract as it had already concluded that MMRDA's action was arbitrary. The High Court noted that it was unnecessary to examine the nature of the contract as it had already concluded that MMRDA's action was arbitrary. The Bombay High Court on Tuesday quashed a notice issued by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) last month, terminating the contract awarded to Systra MVA Consulting (India) Pvt Ltd. The company was providing design consultancy services for three Metro lines in the city. A bench of Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice Arif S Doctor, in its judgment, directed MMRDA to take a fresh decision on whether to discontinue the contract awarded to the French-origin consulting and engineering firm. The bench asked MMRDA to pass a reasoned order after hearing the company which has a 70 per cent stake in Systra-SMCIPL Consortium.

The MMRDA, in February 2020, invited bids for appointing a general consultant for design, assistance in procurement, construction, and management supervision for Mumbai Metro Lines - 5 (Thane-Bhiwandi-Kalyan), 7A [Andheri (East)-CSIA] and 9 (Mira Bhayander). The peti-

tioner, Systra Consortium, had submitted a bid of Rs. 90.76 crore in June 2020 and was appointed General Consultant for system works for part of the three Mumbai Metro Lines in May 2021. While the initial term of appointment of the petitioner was for 42 months till November 2024, it was, later, extended up to December 2026. However, on January 3, the MMRDA issued notice to the petitioner firm informing that it had decided to discontinue Systra's service. Senior advocate Venkatesh Dhond for Systra argued that the notice was not issued as per the terms of the agreement signed in 2021 and the MMRDA had not set out any reasons for discontinuation of petitioner's services and failed to act reasonably and fairly. Advocate General of Maharashtra Birendra Saraf, representing MMRDA, submitted that the plea was 'misconceived' and was based on the erroneous argument that the notice was beyond the purview of contractual terms. Saraf submitted that notice was issued as per general conditions of the contract that enable MMRDA to terminate the same without assigning reasons. However, the bench found that one of the general conditions of contract "cannot be read to mean that the MMRDA has a licence to act unfairly, arbitrarily or unreasonably in the contractual field without assigning reasons." "We find that the action of the MMRDA in discontinuation of the terms of the contract, which was extended up to December 31, 2026, without assigning any reasons, is arbitrary, unfair, and unreasonable," it observed. The High Court noted that it was unnecessary to examine the nature of the contract as it had already concluded that MMRDA's action was arbitrary. "The contention that since the MMRDA has acted in exercise of rights available to it under the contract and therefore the petitioner should be relegated to the remedy of arbitration, does not deserve acceptance, as we find that the action of the MMRDA in discontinuing the consultancy services provided to the petitioner is arbitrary and unfair," the court held and allowed Systra's plea.

## Submit sports category marks for Maharashtra SSC, HSC exams by April 15; results expected by May 15

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Maharashtra, sports category marks for Maharashtra SSC, HSC exams, Indian Express. The Board offers a policy that allows students to earn up to 15 extra marks in their overall score if they have demonstrated excellence in extracurricular activities under either the sports or arts category. In an important update for students appearing for the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams conducted by the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (MSBSHSE), students seeking additional marks under the sports category must ensure that their applications are submitted by April 15. This deadline is earlier than usual due to the Board's plan to declare both HSC and SSC results by May 15.

In a circular, the Board noted, "It is important to note that both HSC and SSC exams started 10-15 days earlier this year with the same objective of declaring early results. Thus, schools and junior colleges have to ensure that applications seeking extra marks under the sports category are sent by April 15." The Board offers a policy that allows students to earn up to 15 extra marks in their overall score if they have demonstrated excellence in extracurricular activities under either the sports or arts category. For the arts category, students can earn additional marks based on their performance in elementary and intermediate drawing exams.

Meanwhile, for the sports category, students can re-



ceive additional marks for participating in recognised sports and activities with the National Cadet Corps (NCC) and Scouts and Guides. The number of extra marks awarded ranges from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 15, depending on the level of excellence demonstrated. An official from the Board said, "For the arts category, students only need to submit their elementary and intermediate drawing exam results. However, for the sports category, students must upload their applications to the government portal, where the state's sports department must approve them before they are forwarded to the Board. Students must be mindful of the earlier deadline this year to ensure they don't miss out on these additional marks."

## R G Kar rape-murder victim's parents to visit Delhi 'in hopes of meeting CBI director, PM Modi'



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

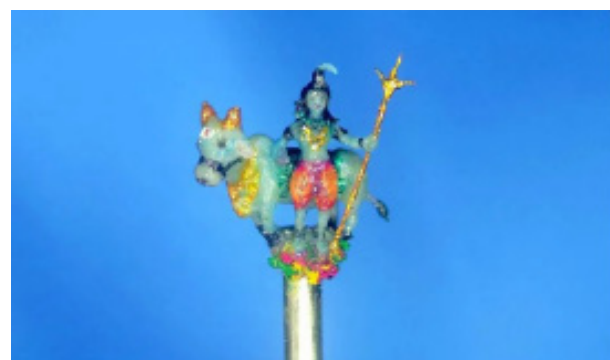
The parents of the victim of the R G Kar rape and murder case are headed for Delhi this week in hopes of meeting the director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), President Draupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Home Minister Amit Shah. Speaking to The Indian Express, the victim's mother said, "We will be going to Delhi on Thursday and return on the same day. We would like to visit the office of the CBI. We have not been informed of the progress of the case, they have done nothing with the CFSL report or the DNA reports." The victim's father added, "We have sent an email to the CBI office seeking an appointment, but till now, we have not gotten a reply. As we are going to Delhi for some legal work, we would like to meet with the CBI Director. We had also mailed the President, Prime Minister, and Home Minister some time back. If we are given the opportunity, then we will meet them and ask for justice for our daughter." During a hearing in the matter in a Sealdah court on Monday, the victim's parents had alleged that they were kept in the dark by the investigative agency regarding the progress in the case.

Her father said, "The CBI has been conducting the investigation for the past seven months and the last time they visited us was on November 10 to supply us with a summons copy. The Kolkata Police investigated the matter for the first five days and visited us just once. With regards to the CBI probe, we do not know where the investigation stands."

The victim's mother broke down during the hearing, saying, "My daughter was on duty. We want to know why this happened to her." The CBI on Monday submitted a status report in the Sealdah court on the progress of a probe into the alleged tampering of evidence in the rape and murder case, maintaining that the investigation was still on and a supplementary chargesheet would be filed soon. Dr Sandip Ghosh, the then principal of R G Kar Medical College, and former Tala police station officer in-charge Abhijit Mondal

are the accused in the matter. Both were granted bail by the court in the case in December 2024 after the CBI failed to submit a chargesheet within 90 days of filing the FIR. However, Ghosh remains in custody in the R G Kar financial irregularities case. The central agency on Monday informed the court that the SIM card of Abhijit Mondal could not yet be returned due to the ongoing probe. On January 20, a Kolkata court sentenced the rape-murder convict, Sanjay Roy, to life imprisonment. The victim's parents had visited RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat during his ten-day visit to West Bengal to express dissatisfaction with the investigation of the CBI and submit documents. They had also met West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose and Leader of Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari to seek "justice" for their daughter.

## Jagtial micro artist carves Lord Shiva, Nandi on needle



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Jagtial: Micro artist from Jagtial, Dr Gurram Dayakar, who had earlier prepared a replica of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir by using rice grains, has come up with another innovative art form.

On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, he carved the idols of Lord Shiva and Nandi (bull) on the top of a needle. Lord Shiva stands in front of Nandi holding his trishul (trident) in the work. It took 12 hours to carve out the art form, which was prepared using a needle, nylon and pencil colors. Dayakar said it may be recalled that Dayakar, who prepared a number of micro idols, prepared the replica of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir using rice grains during the time of the Ram Mandir inauguration.

## How a Mumbai gang used GST numbers of people with high credit scores to steal premium cars like BMW



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The Mumbai Police Crime Branch seized 16 high-end cars worth Rs 7.3 crore and arrested seven people over the last two weeks for allegedly using GST numbers of in-

dividuals with high credit scores to steal premium cars like BMW and Fortuner. Datta Nalawade, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), said the accused, who live in and around Mumbai, would search online for the GST numbers of people with high CIBIL scores. "Using this, they would obtain the PAN of these individuals and make duplicate PAN and Aadhaar cards in their names using photographs of the gang's members," he said. The accused had also taken a room on rent in case of bank verification, the DCP added. Since the CIBIL scores were good, the loans for high-end vehicles would be granted. The accused then allegedly changed the engine and chassis number of these cars, made duplicate RC books, and sold the vehicles in neighbouring states before fleeing. Over the past three years, the accused are suspected to have stolen over 35 cars in this manner. DCP Nalawade said four of the seven arrested men have a criminal record. An officer said the scam came to light when they were investigating the theft of a Mahindra Thar, worth Rs 16 lakh, from Vikhroli in 2023.

## What CAG report says about now-scrapped Delhi liquor policy

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The Delhi Government incurred a massive loss of Rs 2,002 crore because of issues in making and implementing the now-scrapped excise policy in 2021-22, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report tabled in the Assembly Tuesday. The Delhi liquor policy was withdrawn by the then Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government after allegations of corruption. AAP leaders, including then chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and deputy CM Manish Sisodia, were arrested in the case lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

The report says, "Excise Policy for the year 2021-22 was framed ostensibly to achieve the objectives including to not allow the formation of any monopoly or cartel in the liquor trade, to ensure equitable access of liquor supply to all the wards/area of Delhi, to allow the responsible players in the industry to carry out the trade transparently without resorting to any proxy model and to eradicate the sale of spurious liquor and check bootlegging." The CAG report on the Delhi liquor policy adds that infirmities were ignored.

"Moreover, cases of related business entities holding licenses across the supply chain and skewed distribution pattern highlighted the risk of exclusivity arrangements and Brand Pushing... Some retailers retained licenses till the expiry of the policy period, some surrendered the same before the policy period was over. As retail licensees were limited in numbers, it caused disruption in supply because the Policy did not contain any provision requiring the licensees to give advance notice before surrendering the license," it said. The CAG report pegs the revenue loss at Rs 890



crore because the surrendered licenses were not put up for tender bids again. About the losses owing to the decision to open liquor vents in non-confirming areas, the report says, "In spite of being aware that vents were required to be opened in non-confirming wards in order to achieve the objective of equitable distribution, the Department did not take timely action to work out modalities leading to non-achievement of the objective. It also resulted in loss of revenue of approximately Rs 941 crore due to exemptions which had to be given to the zonal licensees." Waiver of license fees of Rs 144 crore granted to the zonal licensees on the basis of COVID restrictions (December 28, 2021, to January 27, 2022), despite a mention in the conditions of the tender document that any commercial risk shall lie with the licensee. Incorrect collection of security deposit from zonal licensees, led to the loss of revenue of around Rs 27 crore. Liquor testing laboratories, batch testing for rigorous quality assurance, and monitoring and regulation through the creation of a dedicated post were not ensured.

## Ludhiana police start razing properties of drug peddlers in latest crackdown

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Launching its latest drive against the drug menace, the Ludhiana police in Punjab Tuesday demolished the illegal properties of two drug peddlers in the Ladhawal and Dugri areas. As part of the drive, a building belonging to an alleged drug peddler, identified only as Sonu, was razed by bulldozers in the early hours in Talwandi village in the Ladhawal area.

Kuldeep Singh Chahal, Commissioner of Police, Ludhiana, said, "Sonu and his family members have been booked in six cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. They have been selling drugs for years. Earlier we got their properties frozen. Today one was demolished."

Another property belonging to one Rahul Hans from Street No. 6 in Bhai Himmat Singh Nagar near Dugri was also razed on Tuesday. Hans was arrested by the Dugri police last year after they recovered more than 41,000 illegal tablets and Rs 2.15 lakh, the commissioner said, adding that both properties that were demolished were built using the proceeds from drug sales. According to the commis-



sioner, the police plan to go hard against drug peddlers in the coming days. Vehicles purchased by the drug peddlers will also be seized. "We have identified 78 such people in the jurisdiction of the Ludhiana Police Commissionerate. All their properties which are either illegal or have been constructed using drug money will be bulldozed in the coming days. We have written to the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation Commissioner seeking cooperation," Chahal added.

## Maharashtra minister Manikrao Kokate seeks stay on conviction: How is it different from suspension of sentence?

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate was sentenced to two years in jail in a 30-year-old cheating case on February 20. Under the Representation of People Act, 1951, he faces disqualification as a member of the Legislative Assembly. One legal recourse available to him is a stay on the conviction. A sessions court in Nashik district is set to decide Tuesday whether the stay can be granted. On Monday, the court suspended his sentence.

What does the suspension of the sentence mean?

Kokate, through his lawyers, has filed a criminal appeal challenging the magistrate court order from February 20, which found him guilty under sections including cheating and forgery of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for fabrication of documents to acquire two flats in Nashik under the then chief minister's discretionary quota for economically weaker sections. Kokate's brother Sunil was also found guilty. The sessions court will thoroughly review the criminal appeal to determine if the magistrate court's conviction was correct, needs to be set aside, or if the punishment should be modified. Till the appeal is heard and decided, Kokate sought a suspension of his sentence under Section 389 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPc). This relief means that Kokate cannot be arrested until the appeal is finally disposed of. Since Kokate has been sentenced to two years in jail, the suspension of the sentence means that the punishment cannot be executed till the appeal is heard. Section 389 requires the reasons to be recorded in writing by the court on why it is suspending the sentence, pending the appeal. It takes into account that the appeal

may not be decided expeditiously and other factors like the nature of the crime, sentence, and whether there were any violations by the accused when they were out on bail.

What does the stay on conviction mean?

Kokate was found guilty by the magistrate court which convicted him under various charges. His lawyers have also sought that the conviction be stayed. The stay in conviction would mean his status as a convict is put on hold. Thus, some of the consequences of being a convict, too, are stayed. For instance, in cases where a person found convicted is barred from certain appointments or jobs, a stay on conviction would bring relief. The Supreme Court, in various orders, has laid down guidelines on when a conviction can be stayed, instead of only a suspension of sentence. It has said that the mere filing of an appeal cannot be grounds to stay the conviction altogether, but it needs to look into the ramifications of keeping a conviction in abeyance. It has also said that stays should be granted when the court is satisfied that there would be prejudice caused: "the applicant must satisfy the court as regards the evil that is likely to befall him, if the said conviction is not suspended".

Why is a stay on conviction crucial for Kokate?

As per the Representation of People Act, a legislature member is disqualified if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years. In such cases, the only relief is if the conviction is stayed, as it would mean none of the consequences of the conviction can remain in effect, including disqualification. If it is not stayed, Kokate can appeal before the Bombay High Court and Supreme Court.



## 32 Punjab MLAs ready to jump ship, says Congress's Partap Bajwa; AAP accuses him of making 'advance BJP booking'



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa Monday claimed that 32 MLAs of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were in contact with him, seeking to switch sides, and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was "in touch" with the BJP, prompting the ruling party's state chief Aman Arora to retort that it was Bajwa who made an "advance booking" to join the BJP. Bajwa, the Leader of the Opposition, further claimed that he has "45 years of political experience" and has never made a false statement. "We had earlier said that the Congress does not have any intention to topple this government. I am reiterating that 32 MLAs are in touch with me. Even ministers are in touch with me. Aman Arora is also aware of this," he said.

Addressing reporters outside the Punjab Legislative Assembly, Bajwa said AAP legislators know that this is their last term. "They are looking for new parties to get tickets. I am in touch with them... Nobody can give them a safe passage other than the Congress. But the party high command will decide who will be taken in, who is likely to win the polls... It will happen at an appropriate time," said the Qadian MLA. Claiming that Mann was also in talks with the BJP, he added, "When (Arvind) Kejriwal decides to remove him, he (Mann) will pack his bags and join them (BJP). The operation to remove him is already on... The same day there will be a parallel operation by the BJP. The BJP's agencies are with him." On the AAP challenging him to provide the list of MLAs who want to switch parties, Bajwa said, "I am a responsible politician. Why would I give them the list? It may not be a big deal that Aman Arora may also join Congress. Aman Arora knows where his heart and soul is. His heart is fluttering the most." Arora, meanwhile, hit back at Bajwa, saying, "Bajwa-ji joining the BJP is almost certain. He has already made an advance booking." "I urge Rahul Gandhi to ask Bajwa about what he was doing in Bengaluru recently and which senior BJP leaders he met there. His script

is prepared in the BJP's offices, much like that of his brother who has already joined the BJP," Arora said. Bajwa, however, claimed that he had gone to Bengaluru "to the same place that Kejriwal often visits". "I had gone there for my health. I had not gone there to meet anyone," he added. Later, in a statement, Arora termed Bajwa's allegations baseless. "Bajwa is spreading rumours and indulging in frivolous statements that hold no merit. The Congress leader doesn't even know the whereabouts of his own MLAs. He lost Sandeep Jakhar to the BJP and yet he talks about destabilising our government. His claims are laughable and lack any factual basis."

The AAP state chief also dismissed Bajwa's threats of destabilising the Bhagwant Mann-led government as ludicrous. "The AAP government in Punjab has 94 MLAs. Even if Bajwa's imaginary tally of 32 MLAs were subtracted, we would still have 62 legislators — a comfortable majority. On the other hand, Bajwa's Congress has just 15 MLAs. If you add another 32 to his count, they still wouldn't be able to form a government. This shows the level of desperation and delusion he is operating under," he added. Arora advised Bajwa to focus on managing his party which is mired in "internal chaos". "The Congress party is in complete disarray. Every MLA there aspires to be a chief minister or party president. Bajwa should spend his energy saving his sinking ship instead of peddling baseless rumours about our government," he said. "Our government is committed to serving the people of Punjab and will continue to deliver on its promises. We are here for the long haul and will return with an even stronger mandate in 2027. The people of Punjab recognise our good governance," Arora stated. Echoing Arora's statements, AAP spokesperson Neel Garg accused Bajwa of prioritising his political ambitions over his responsibilities as the Leader of Opposition. In a video statement, he said, "Bajwa's entry into the BJP is a foregone conclusion. He has already made advance arrangements to secure a BJP ticket. Garg also ridiculed Bajwa for his failure to lead a constructive Opposition. "The people of Punjab expect a responsible Opposition, not someone who spends his time spreading baseless rumours and playing petty politics."

Bajwa's actions only expose his desperation and lack of commitment to public service." Cabinet minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal also hit at Bajwa. "He is a well-educated liar. I challenge him to get three people from the AAP with him. He does not even have a single Congress leader with him. Nobody wants to see his face in Congress. Has he raised any issue in the Vidhan Sabha in three years? If he raises an issue of the people, then people will respect him," said Dhaliwal.

## Why international students in Canada should avoid social media ads offering to complete their assignments

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Several international students in Canada, particularly from Punjab, are being drawn to services that offer to complete their assignments for them. Various agencies, companies, and people provide these services, and many students are opting for them to focus solely on work in Canada and earn money, rather than devoting their time to studying. However, experts in the field have warned students to avoid such practices, as they could lead to failure, which several students are currently facing, and make them ineligible for a postgraduate work permit (PGWP), even if their assignments are submitted on time.

What is assignment work?

Students are required to submit assignments related to their respective subjects during exams. However, many Indian students neglect their studies after arriving in Canada and focus primarily on work to earn money. Most students aim to obtain permanent residency (PR) in Canada through a study permit rather than prioritising their academic progress.

Who is offering assignment work services to students?

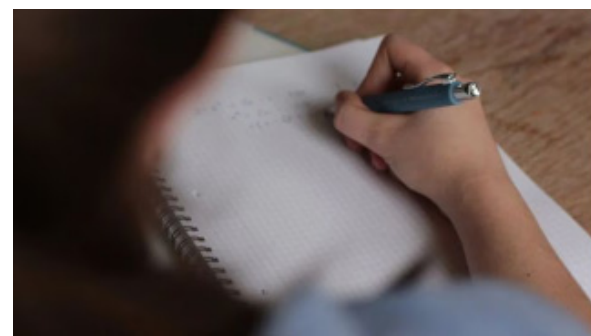
Several agencies and companies are promoting assignment services through ads on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. These ads offer assignment help in exchange for a certain amount of money for various subjects. In one such ad, a student is shown anxiously working on his assignment as the deadline approaches, while another student reassures him, saying he can get it done by a company. The student then feels relieved after hearing the name of the company. "Many individuals, posing as companies, promote assignment services on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube. These ads promise quick, cheap, or even 'free' assignments, which might seem tempting," said Tirath Singh, an expert in Canadian student visa services.

Is it risky for students to use assignment services offered through social media ads?

Experts warn that it is perilous and unfair for students to rely on these services. Most of the assignments provided by such services lack originality and depth. These assignments are often repetitive and fail to meet the specific expectations of professors or college standards. Students miss the opportunity to develop critical thinking and writing skills by using these services. Additionally, it encourages them to bypass their academic responsibilities and rely on shortcuts that do not contribute to their personal growth or learning. "Paid assignment services often provide low-quality work not tailored to the student's specific requirements. These assignments may not reflect the student's true capabilities, which can negatively impact their grades and academic standing. Moreover, relying on these services undermines the integrity of the education system and can lead to serious consequences, such as academic dishonesty charges," explained Gurpreet Singh, another expert, adding that several students practising such services are witnessing failure in their exams.

What happens when multiple students use the assignment service?

When one student buys an assignment from an online service that offers the same to several, it becomes more and less similar. Also, others might end up copying the same work. This results in plagiarism and a lack of originality in their submissions. Colleges are becoming more vigilant and may use plagiarism detection tools, which could lead to academic penalties or even expulsion. "One of the social media influencers studying in Canada revealed in a viral YouTube video that she hired someone from India to complete her assignment. As a result, her college authorities



suspended her degree and questioned her study permit. This serves as a cautionary tale, showing that such practices can have severe consequences for students' academic and professional futures," said Tirath Singh, adding that such practices will never help Indian students obtain PR and many are becoming victims of such practices now.

How can international students succeed and get PR?

According to experts, students should focus on their studies instead of outsourcing assignments. "The primary reason for studying abroad is to gain knowledge and skills in a particular field. To succeed as an international student, the focus should be on academic performance, gaining practical skills by completing assignments, and engaging in extracurricular activities," said Sumit Jain of Jain Overseas, which provides expert services for studying in Canada. "Participating in community service, voluntary work, and developing soft skills like communication and teamwork can significantly enhance a student's profile. These activities contribute to personal development and help students stand out in the competitive job market," added Jain.

What overall message do experts have for students?

By focusing on learning and completing assignments honestly, students set themselves up for a successful career, both academically and professionally. Avoiding shortcuts helps students improve their skills, build knowledge, and gain a deeper understanding of their field. Only authenticity and personal development can help students settle in Canada, not shortcuts or dishonest practices.

## Railway app supports digital payments now, 3 per cent cash back offered on using R-Wallet

Hyderabad: The South Central Railway (SCR) has introduced the facility of online payment through any digital modes using any of the UPIs on its UTS app for buying of tickets. The passengers can use any modes like R-Wallet, Paytm, PhonePe, Google Pay, UPI Apps or through internet banking etc. The R-Wallet will be available in UTS app in which the amount can be deposited up to the limit of Rs 20,000. As a promotional gesture, a three per cent cash back is being given on the tickets purchased through R-Wallet.

A SCR press release said on Tuesday that UTS App received a positive response from rail users and the number of passengers utilizing the app has been increasing. The share of unreserved tickets booked through mobile app has been steadily increasing with the initiatives of the zone. The average passengers in a day availing the UTS mobile App facility in 2023-24 from April to January was 83,510 while the average passengers per day in the current financial year 2024-25 is 93,487, which denotes 12% increase in the usage of UTS App for purchasing tickets.

## USAID row: Information from U.S. 'concerning', government looking into it, says Jaishankar



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Amid a row over USAID funding for certain activities in the country, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on said the information put out by the Trump administration people is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it. During an interaction at an event here late evening, he also said USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith".

"So, it surely warrants a look. And, if there is something to it, I think the country should know who are the people involved in the bad faith activities," the External Affairs Minister said. Mr. Jaishankar during the discussion also asserted that "our idea of security actually has to expand in a tech world". Besides, armed forces, civilian police ensuring law enforcement, security is also about "how your thought processes are influenced, how narratives are set, how facts are presented to you, how your mind moulded without you even knowing it," he said. "And, a lot of that is done through activities of NGOs, of tech, of rankings, you are made to believe your democracy isn't working, it's a very dangerous and Machiavellian....," the External Affairs Minister said,

without naming any entity. "Your security can be threatened without leaving your house, because the thought processes, the influences, the narratives, your morale, your sense of what is right and wrong is all influenced by your phone, what you read everyday, the pictures you see," he said. The interaction was moderated by Sanjeev Sanyal, member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister during the DU Literature Festival, hosted at the Shri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC). Mr. Sanyal asked him about the USAID issue that has been lately hogging headlines. "I think, some information has been put out there by Trump administration people, and obviously that is concerning. It would suggest that there are activities which has a certain objective out here to push a narrative or a view point."

"As a government, we are looking into it, because such organisations, have an obligation to report. And, my sense is, the facts will come out," Mr. Jaishankar said. "I read, so and so dealt with USAID... look it's not a question of, did you deal with USAID or not, USAID was allowed... it has been here historically. But, USAID was allowed here in good faith, to do good faith activities." "Now, suggestions are being made out of America, that there are activities which are in bad faith. So, it surely warrants a look, and if there is something to it, I think the country should know who are the people involved in the bad faith activities," he said. Addressing an event in Miami on Thursday (February 20, 2025), U.S. President Donald Trump questioned the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) funding of \$21 million for voter turnout in India and wondered whether it was trying to get someone else elected. India on Friday (February 21, 2025) said the revelations about USAID funding for certain activities in the country are "deeply troubling" and have led to concerns about foreign interference in its internal affairs. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in response to a query during his weekly briefing, had said "relevant departments and agencies are looking into this matter".

## Avian influenza: Amid rising concerns across India, doctors decode outbreak, explain how to consume poultry safely

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

With concerns over avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu, resurfacing across India, Telangana has ramped up efforts to safeguard its poultry industry. With cases emerging in neighbouring states and the Central government issuing advisories, State authorities are working to strengthen biosecurity measures, educate poultry farmers, and reassure the public about the safety of poultry consumption. The situation gained urgency early this month, when the Telangana Animal Husbandry Department issued a circular alerting District Collectors about the threat posed by highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). The directive highlighted the need to strengthen biosecurity measures to prevent the virus's spread and protect the poultry population. The circular also called for heightened awareness among poultry farmers, stakeholders, and the general public, particularly regarding the transportation of sick birds. Avian Influenza primarily affects birds and is often transmitted through wild migratory species. With recent outbreaks reported in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh, the Central government has urged all states to enhance surveillance and biosecurity protocols at poultry farms.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza A(H5N1) is a subtype of influenza virus that infects birds and mammals, including humans in rare instances. Human infections are primarily acquired through direct contact with infected poultry or contaminated environments. While avian influenza viruses do not currently transmit easily from person to person, the ongoing circulation of these viruses in poultry is concerning, as these viruses can result in mild to severe illness and death, and also have the potential to mutate to become more contagious. Ranga Reddy Burri, president of the Infection Control Academy of India, underscored the importance of timely action in preventing the virus's transmission. "In the past, delays in epidemiological surveys and response measures led to the rapid spread of infections. This year, coordinated efforts between public, private, and government agencies have helped contain the virus in many areas," he said. Fears over poultry consumption

The fear has caused many people to stop consuming chicken and eggs, resulting in a decline in demand. As a consequence, the prices of chicken and eggs in Telangana, particularly in Hyderabad, have dropped by at least 20 to 30 since the news of the outbreak emerged.

Addressing public concerns over poultry consumption, Dr. Burri dismissed fears surrounding chicken and egg safety. "Avoiding poultry consumption due to bird flu is a knee-jerk reaction. Properly cooked chicken or eggs do not pose any risk. However, since birds are handled at multiple stages before reaching consumers, doubts persist. This



uncertainty affects purchasing decisions but has not led to strong protests against poultry consumption." Dr. Burri also warned of the potential for the virus to jump from birds to humans, a phenomenon observed in different parts of the world. He stressed that lapses in biosecurity could increase this risk, particularly among poultry handlers with weakened immunity. "To minimise the risk of transmission, stringent biosecurity measures must be maintained. Biosecurity in poultry is the equivalent of infection control in humans," he explained.

How can meat and eggs be safely prepared? The WHO five keys to safer food: Dr. Kiran Madala, Professor of Anaesthesia at Gandhi Medical College, elaborated on the virus's impact. "Avian influenza, or bird flu, is a viral disease that affects birds. While some birds fall ill, others remain asymptomatic but act as carriers of the virus. This virus has also been detected in mammals, including foxes, minks, seals, and sea lions, and more recently in cows in the United States. In rare cases, humans have been infected through contact with infected birds, mammals, or contaminated environments." He further noted that while zoonotic infections from bird flu are infrequent, they carry a high mortality rate. "The human-to-human transmission of bird flu is very limited. However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified it as a future threat, indicating that the virus could potentially evolve into a pandemic strain. Monitoring strain patterns is crucial," he added. Amid growing concerns, the Telangana Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Department, in its latest bulletin issued on February 20, urged the public not to panic, reassuring that properly cooked poultry remains safe for consumption. Officials emphasized that chicken cooked at temperatures above 70°C for at least 30 minutes is safe, in line with Government of India guidelines. The department has intensified surveillance efforts, conducting inspections at poultry farms and educating farmers on preventive measures, including strict biosecurity protocols. Farmers have been advised to promptly report any unusual bird mortality to the department for timely intervention, the bulletin said.

## Disability rights activists welcome SC deadline to NMC on MBBS admission; big boost to inclusivity

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

The Supreme Court in its recent judgment has directed the National Medical Commission (NMC) to revise its guidelines on eligibility conditions for admission to MBBS course for people with disability and report back on March 3. The direction has come after the Court in a case found the Commission's eligibility conditions that candidates with disabilities must have "both hands intact, with intact sensation and sufficient strength" for admission to MBBS course arbitrary and antithetical to the Constitution.

The Bench was hearing the case of a candidate who suffered from 50% locomotor disability and 20% speech and language disability who aspired to be a medical professional. The candidate had cleared the NEET with flying colours. However, an Assessment Board had found him ineligible to be a doctor due to his hand disability. The Punjab and Haryana High Court had also rejected his plea for relief. Earlier too, the Supreme Court in Om Rathod judgement had directed NMC to revise the guidelines before the NEET 2025 counselling. This case law study was recently published in the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics. In the paper titled "Assessment for inclusion: Promoting equity and justice in Disability Assessment Boards in India", corresponding author Satendra Singh noted that the judgment emphasizes assessing abilities through opportunities like simula-

tion labs and clinical accommodations rather than focusing solely on disability. Highlighting the case of a successful medical aspirant with 88% mobility disability, the paper states that in his case the Court directed an independent functional competency assessment conducted by a doctor with a disability. The paper further notes that the judgment is a watershed moment in the history of inclusive medicine in India.

The paper adds that not only has the medical regulator been directed to revise the guidelines for admission of students with disabilities in the MBBS course, but the Court has, for the first time, recognised lived experience as a form of expertise. Additionally, the Enabling Units (mandated by the University Grants Commission) at medical schools — similar to disability resource/service providers in the USA — will serve as points of contact for applicants with disabilities seeking clinical accommodations. As per the judgment, students must be informed about the enabling units and equal opportunity cells through the information booklet for new MBBS students, the college website, and the equal opportunity policy. Furthermore, the NEET application portal must include details about the accessibility compliance of various colleges to help prospective students with disabilities make informed decisions.



## Taiwan investigating Chinese-crewed ship believed to have severed undersea cable



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Taiwanese authorities are investigating a Chinese-crewed ship suspected of severing an undersea communications cable in the latest such incident adding to tensions between Taipei and Beijing. Taiwan's coast guard intercepted the Togolese-flagged cargo ship Hongtai in waters between its main island's west coast and the outlying Penghu Islands early Tuesday (February 25, 2025), according to a statement by the coast guard. The coast guard had earlier been notified by telecommunications provider Chunghwa Telecom that one of its undersea cables had been severed 6 nautical miles (11 kilometres) northwest of Jiangjun Fishing Harbor. The Hongtai had been anchored in that same area since Saturday evening, the coast guard said. From Saturday until early Tuesday, authorities in the nearby

Anping Port in Tainan had sent signals to the vessel seven times but had received no response. After the Chunghwa Telecom cable damage report, the coast guard approached the ship, which had begun to sail northwestward, and escorted it to Anping Port.

Sabotage or accident? Taiwanese authorities said the ship's entire eight-person crew were Chinese nationals and the case was being handled "in accordance with national security-level principles." "The cause of the underwater cable break, whether it was due to intentional sabotage or simply an accident, is still pending further investigation for clarification," the coast guard said. "The possibility of this being part of a gray-zone incursion by China cannot be ruled out," it added. Backup cable activated Communications on the Penghu Islands were not disrupted because Chunghwa Telecom had successfully activated a backup cable, the coast guard said. This is the latest in a series of incidents in recent years in which undersea Taiwanese cables have been damaged — with Taipei in some instances blaming China. Earlier this year, a Chinese cargo ship was suspected of severing a link northeast of the island. In February 2023, two undersea cables serving Taiwan's Matsu Islands were severed, disrupting communications for weeks. Taipei fears China might damage its underwater communications cables as part of attempts to blockade or seize the island, which Beijing claims as its own. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said during a regular press briefing on Tuesday that he was not aware of the issue and it did not pertain to diplomacy.

## Chinese navy helicopter flies within 10 feet of Philippine patrol plane over disputed shoal



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

A Chinese navy helicopter flew within 10 feet (3 meters) of a Philippine patrol plane on Tuesday (February 18, 2025) in a disputed area of the South China Sea, prompting the Filipino pilot to warn by radio: "You are flying too close, you are very dangerous." The Chinese helicopter was attempting to force a Cessna Caravan turboprop plane belonging to the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources out of what China claims is its airspace over the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Philippines.

An Associated Press journalist and other invited foreign media on the plane witnessed the tense 30-minute standoff as the Philippine plane pressed on with its low-altitude patrol around Scarborough with the Chinese navy helicopter hovering close above it or flying to its left in cloudy weather. "You are flying too close, you are very dangerous and endangering the lives of our crew and passengers," the Philippine pilot told the Chinese navy helicopter by radio at one point. "Keep away and distance your aircraft from us, you are violating the safety standard set by FAA and ICAO."

The pilot was referring to the standard distance between aircraft required by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and the International Civil Aviation Organization to prevent air disasters. There was no sign that the Philippine plane had to alter its planned path and altitude to avoid a collision. The Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fisheries said in a statement that they remain "committed to asserting our sovereignty, sovereign rights and maritime jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea, despite the aggres-

sive and escalatory actions of China." They referred to the Philippine name for the stretch of waters in the South China Sea closer to the Philippines' western coast.

The Chinese military, referring to Scarborough Shoal by its Chinese name, said the plane had "illegally entered the airspace of China's Huangyan Island without the Chinese government's permission." The Chinese Southern Theater Command organized naval and air forces to track and warn the plane away, Senior Col. Tian Junli, spokesperson for the command, said in a written statement posted online. The Philippines "confused right and wrong and spread false narratives," the statement said. Tuesday's encounter, which is expected to be protested by the Philippine government, is the latest flashpoint in a decades-long territorial standoff in one of the world's busiest trade routes, which involves China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. Confrontations on the high seas have spiked between Chinese and Philippine coast guards in the last two years at Scarborough and Second Thomas Shoal, where a grounded Philippine navy ship has served as a military territorial outpost since 1999 but has since been closely surrounded by Chinese coast guard, navy and other ships. China deployed its naval force around Scarborough after a tense standoff with Philippine ships in 2012. The following year, the Philippines brought its disputes with China to international arbitration. A 2016 decision by a United Nations-backed arbitration panel invalidated China's expansive claim in the South China Sea based on the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. China, a signatory to the UNCLOS like the Philippines, refused to participate in the arbitration, rejected its outcome and continues to defy it. Faced by China's military might, the Philippines under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has resorted to a shame campaign — embedding Philippine and foreign journalists in its sea and air patrols in a bid to expose Beijing's increasingly assertive actions. The Philippines has also been strengthening its security alliances with the United States, Japan, Australia, France, Canada, the European Union and other Western countries to shore up its external defense. The United States says it's obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea. China has warned the U.S. and its allies not to meddle in what it calls a purely Asian dispute.

## Trump's abrupt change of U.S. policy on Ukraine raises questions about Taiwan support

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

U.S. President Donald Trump's abrupt reversal of three years of American policy toward Ukraine has raised concerns China might become emboldened to push its territorial claim on Taiwan, though experts say Beijing is most likely in a wait-and-see mode right now to see how the situation in Europe plays out. In the past two weeks, Mr. Trump has falsely claimed Ukraine "should have never started the war," said Ukraine "may be Russian someday" and questioned the legitimacy of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Government, while upending the longstanding American position of isolating Russia over its aggression by beginning direct talks with Moscow and voicing positions sounding remarkably like the Kremlin's own.

Before heading to Washington for talks with Mr. Trump on Monday (February 24, 2025), French President Emmanuel Macron said he would emphasize "you can't be weak in the face of President Putin." "It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest," Mr. Macron said he would tell Mr. Trump. "How can you, then, be credible in the face of China if you're weak in the face of Putin?" Like Moscow's claim Ukraine is rightfully Russian territory, China claims the self-governing island of Taiwan as its own. Chinese President Xi Jinping has not ruled out taking it by force. Mr. Trump on Friday (February 21, 2025) appeared to walk back his earlier comments inaccurately blaming Ukraine for starting the war, but his administration's overall abrupt shift in policy on the conflict could cause some in Taiwan to question "whether the United States could pull the rug out from underneath them as well," said Russell Hsiao, executive director of the Global Taiwan Institute in Washington. Still, while Beijing is certainly paying close attention to Mr. Trump's comments, it is unlikely to act in haste, he said. "I don't think Xi Jinping will be so brash as to roll the iron die on the conclusion that just because Mr. Trump acted in a certain way concerning Ukraine he would do the same over Taiwan," Mr. Hsiao said. "Mr. Trump is too unpredictable." Daniel Russel, who served in senior positions on the National Security Council and in the State Department during the Obama administration, said the shift would strengthen Beijing's efforts to discredit the U.S. "Beijing's campaign against Taiwan is built around showing them that U.S. support is unreliable, and that Chinese domination is inevitable and Mr. Trump has already reinforced this by signalling he's not locked into support for Taiwan," said Mr. Russel, now vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York.

"For China, an America feuding with the West is a weak America," he said. "U.S. allies in Asia might also rethink their reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella," Mr. Russel said. Mr. Trump was quite popular in Taiwan when he left office in 2021 and was widely credited with bringing the U.S. and the democratically governed island closer together. By American law, the U.S. is obligated to supply Taiwan with sufficient hardware and technology to fend off invasion from the mainland but maintains a policy of "strategic ambiguity" on whether it would come to Taiwan's defence. Recently, Mr. Trump has been more critical of Taiwan, saying it should pay the U.S. for its military defence. On several occasions, he also has accused Taiwan of taking computer chip manufacturing business away from the U.S. and suggested earlier this month he might impose tariffs on semiconductors. At the same time, Mr. Trump has appointed many China hawks



in his administration, including in top-level positions, such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth. After meeting NATO allies in Brussels earlier this month, Mr. Hegseth stressed that if the U.S. were to pull back support from Ukraine, it would be to concentrate on the Asia-Pacific region and leave European defence primarily to Europeans.

"The deterrent effect in the Pacific is one that really can only be led by the United States," Mr. Hegseth said. A few days later, Mr. Rubio issued a joint statement with his counterparts from Japan and South Korea after they met on the sidelines of a security conference in Munich, stressing the "importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the international community." In a move that irked Beijing, the State Department also removed a line on American opposition to independence for Taiwan in a revised U.S. government fact sheet on the island. "If I were Beijing, I would be paying the most attention to what Mr. Hegseth said about why the U.S. is changing its support to Ukraine," said Meia Nouwens, senior fellow for Chinese security and defence policy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. "Hegseth said this is about the Indo-Pacific, that the U.S. has priorities elsewhere, and I don't think, from Beijing's perspective, that would have been comforting," Ms. Nouwens said. The shift in Ukraine will give China the opportunity to push a message that the U.S. is an unreliable partner, she said, but it was unlikely Beijing would read Washington's seeming willingness to concede Ukrainian territory as it being somehow open to Taiwan falling into Chinese hands.

"The broader trend lines of each country, of the U.S. and China, looking forward aren't necessarily changing," Ms. Nouwens said. "Neither wants to give up any space, both want to continue on a trajectory that increases their national strength." It is worth noting that in the early months of Mr. Trump's first term, there were concerns his administration might be moving too close to China, but he actually took a much tougher approach than some before him, said Euan Graham, a senior defence analyst with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Mr. Graham said that while all American allies "should be concerned by the Trump administration's abandonment of Ukraine and willingness to deal with Putin," it would be "simplistic" to assume a similar arrangement would apply to the China-Taiwan situation. "It's more likely that the U.S. administration is attempting, misguidedly, to get Ukraine out of the way by making it a European problem, in order to face China from a relatively stronger position," Mr. Graham said. "I think it's a dangerous approach, because of the appalling precedent it sets. But it's unlikely to be repeated with China."

## K.K.S. Murthy: Bengaluru's bookman who caught the pulse of every reader

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Down the first left on Brigade Road, Bengaluru's pulsating heart is a tiny lane that curls past fast-food joints packed with college students and tourists. The street leads towards a set of old buildings with fading yellow paint. Some are homes with mosaic or red-oxide flooring and a few others are stores and one such is Select Bookshop, perhaps the city's first literary lighthouse drawing in readers of diverse interests. Helming this space adroitly with a twinkle in his eye and a warm smile was K.K.S. Murthy, who passed away on Monday. Ailing with age-related issues over the past few months, Murthy still used to turn up while his son Sanjay ran the store. Hunched in the backseat of a taxi parked close to Select, Murthy would be resting but he always had the time to acknowledge regular customers, who would address him as Mr. Murthy or uncle. "How are you?" would be followed by another query: "Found anything interesting?" At times his memory slipped but he would ask the reader's name and soon remember. "Father has health issues, cannot leave him alone at home," Sanjay would say, while dealing with the regulars at Select. Murthy witnessed 94 summers, and his days were a dalliance with words, ancient books, bibliophiles and intellectuals like Ramachandra Guha. With many newspaper offices located nearby, Select was also a spot where journalists had impromptu get-togethers. Back in the 1990s, you could walk

into Select, pick a book, and keep it back due to an anaemic wallet. He would sense the youngster's predicament. A discounted price would be mentioned followed by a line, "Pay me next month, no rush." If the customer insisted on picking the book later, the reply would be, "Okay, I am keeping this book safe for you, till you buy it." Playing Cupid between a book and its lover came naturally to Murthy. The literary axis then would straddle between Select and Premier, run by the late T.S. Shanbagh, who too was extremely kind towards book lovers. Another pitstop was Strand at Manipal Centre. Premier and Strand had shut down while Select chugs along with an old-world feel and Sanjay is always at hand, having seamlessly slipped into his father's big shoes. Murthy would also inform readers about books that had been bequeathed by others. "Ram Guha has given away some from his collection, check that room, switch on that light," he would say and point to another tiny space further inside a shop rich in the scents that old books exude — a blend of papyrus, sawdust and a hint of past sweat of bibliophiles. There were regulars too, the ones who would have tea at Kohinoor and then amble into Select for a chat with Murthy. Clad in a tweed jacket, he would lean his head backwards and laugh when a joke was cracked. There would be one-liners in Kannada and English, an anecdote from a recent book fair perhaps, and at the same time the reader's preferences would be probed.

## North Koreans endure years of forced labour on Chinese ships: report

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Seoul North Koreans have been forced to work on Chinese-flagged fishing vessels without touching land for as long as a decade, facing verbal and physical abuse as well as harsh conditions, a report said Monday (February 24, 2025). Nuclear-armed North Korea has long made a fortune from an army of citizens it sends abroad to work, mostly in neighbouring China and Russia. A 2017 UN Security Council resolution, supported by China, required countries to deport North Korean workers to prevent them earning foreign currency for Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. But analysts have accused Beijing and Moscow of circumventing the measures.

And Monday's report by the London-based Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) alleges widespread abuses of North Korean workers at sea, in violation of sanctions. "North Koreans onboard were forced to work for as many as 10 years at sea — in some instances without ever stepping foot on land," the report said. "This would constitute forced labour of a magnitude that surpasses much of that witnessed in a global fishing industry already replete with abuse." The claims were based on interviews with over a dozen Indonesian and Filipino crew members who worked onboard Chinese tuna longliners in the Indian Ocean between 2019 and 2024. "They never communicated with their wives or others while at sea as they were not allowed to bring a mobile phone," one crew member was quoted as saying. Another said some North Koreans had worked on the vessel for "seven years, or eight years", adding: "They were not given permission to go home by their government." "Tainted by modern slavery" The report also said that vessels carrying the North Koreans were involved in shark finning and capturing large marine animals, such as dolphins, and potentially supplied markets in the Euro-



pean Union, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. In one image, a dolphin can be seen with its head cut off. "The impact of this situation is felt around the world: fish caught by this illegal labour force reaches seafood markets around the world," Steve Trent, CEO and founder of the EJF, said in a statement. "China bears the brunt of the burden, but when products tainted by modern slavery end up on our plates, it is clear that flag states and regulators must also take full responsibility." Asked about the report, Beijing said on Monday it was "not aware" of the specific case. "China always requires its offshore fishing activities to abide by local laws and regulations and relevant provisions of international law," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a briefing. "Cooperation between China and North Korea is carried out in accordance within the framework of international law," Lin added. The U.S. State Department said last year that an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 North Koreans work in China, primarily in restaurants and factories. North Korea withholds up to 90% of wages from its overseas workers and imposes forced labour conditions on them, according to a State Department report.

## French President Emmanuel Macron says France and allies 'united' on Ukraine ahead of U.S. trip

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday (February 19, 2025) that France and its allies agreed Ukraine's rights and European security concerns should be taken into account in any deal to end the war with Russia, before he heads to Washington next week. "The position of France and its allies is clear and united. We wish for peace in Ukraine that is lasting," Mr. Macron said on X after a meeting with the leaders of 19 mostly European countries, with most taking part by video link.

U.S. President Donald Trump has stunned the European Union by saying he is ready to resume diplomacy with Vladimir Putin after three years of Russia's war against Ukraine, over the heads of both European countries and Kyiv. Mr. Macron held the meeting on Ukraine Wednesday afternoon in a bid to coordinate a European response to what he has called an "existential threat" from Russia after the shock U.S. policy shift. Russia reset. On the U.S., Russia, their first major diplomatic interaction "We stand by Ukraine and will carry out all our responsibilities to ensure peace and security in Europe," Mr. Macron said after the video conference. But he said participants, which included the leaders of EU nations as well as Iceland, Norway and Canada, stressed Ukraine should be included and "its rights respected" in the process. They said "robust and credible guarantees" were needed to ensure a lasting deal, and "European security concerns" must be taken into account. "We are convinced of the need to increase our defence and security spending and capacities for Europe and each of our countries," Mr. Macron added. Trip to U.S. 'early next week' Mr. Macron is set to meet Mr. Trump in Washington as early as Monday, Mr. Trump told reporters aboard his plane on Wednesday. A White House official previously told AFP the meeting would take place "early next week", on condition of anonymity. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he will meet U.S. envoy Keith Kellogg on Thursday and that he hopes for "constructive" work with the United States, after Mr. Trump lashed out against him on social media. Mr. Trump on Wednesday called Mr. Zelenskyy a "dictator", after a day earlier accusing Kyiv of

having "started" the war, sparking pushback from even some members of his own Republican party. France has been one of Ukraine's main Western backers since Russia began its full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February 2022. Mr. Macron on Monday hosted key European leaders including from Germany, Britain, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands, as well as NATO and EU chiefs for emergency talks, but several smaller European countries including Romania and the Czech Republic were reportedly aghast at not having been invited. Romania's interim president Ilie Bolojan and Luxembourg's Prime Minister Luc Frieden were present in person at the meeting on Wednesday afternoon, the French presidency said.

The leaders of Lithuania, Cyprus, Finland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia and the Czech Republic meanwhile joined via video conference call. Hungary and Slovakia, whose prime ministers are seen as close to Putin, as well as NATO member Turkey, whose President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is eager to act as a mediator, were not on the list of participants. "Existential threat" Russia poses an existential threat to Europeans," Mr. Macron said in an interview with French regional newspapers published on Tuesday. "Do not think that the unthinkable cannot happen, including the worst." Mr. Macron appeared open to the idea of sending forces to Ukraine but emphasised that this could take place only in the most limited fashion and away from the front lines. France, along with Britain, was considering sending "experts or even troops in limited terms, outside any conflict zone," he said. Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said France may have to make some difficult choices. "Russia has decided to make enemies of us, and we must open our eyes, realise the scale of the threat and protect ourselves," he told broadcaster RTL. "If we do nothing, if we remain blind to the threat, the front line will move ever closer to our borders." He said earlier that only the Europeans could provide the guarantees necessary to ensure long-lasting "peace" in Ukraine. To keep up the pressure on Moscow, EU countries on Wednesday agreed a new round of sanctions on Russia, diplomats said.



## Indian Overseas Bank that had a humble beginning has more than 3,000 branches



Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), headquartered in Chennai, recently commemorated its 89th Foundation Day. It was registered as a joint stock bank on November 20, 1936, in Madras. In 1937, M.Ct.M. Chidambaram Chettyar founded the bank to promote overseas banking and facilitate foreign exchange operations. It initially catered to the Nattukottai Chettiars, a mercantile community that had migrated from Chettinad to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), Malaya, Singapore, Java, Sumatra, and Saigon Chettyar had served as the chairman of the bank since its founding until 1954. According to information from the bank, Chettyar was a member of the Council of State in Delhi. In addition to his role in advancing banking, he was involved in the insurance sector. He served as the chairman of United India Life Assurance Co. Ltd. and held directorial positions in several other prominent Indian companies.

The other key figures who played a vital role in the bank's early growth were K.V.A.I. Rm. Alagappa Chettiar, the deputy chairman. A Barrister-at-Law, he was a prominent banker and businessman in South India. He went on to establish Alagappa University at Karaikudi. H. Bhimasena Rau, the retired Accountant-General of the Government of India, and Chunnilal B. Mehta, a well-known cotton and bullion merchant of Bombay, were also instrumental in driving up the bank's business in its initial days. Two well-known businessmen with investment in Malaya — P.K.N.K.M. Nagappa Chettiar and P.V. Raman Chettiar — also played a key role.

IOB opened its registered office on February 10, 1937, in a rented building on First Line Beach in Madras. After a few months, it was shifted to United India Building, where United India Insurance Co. was operating. The Madras branch began operations on February 10, 1937, and was located in the Esplanade. In the same year, branches were established in Rangoon (now Yangon) in Burma and in Karaikudi. In the 1930s, nearly half the population of Burma consisted of ethnic Indians. And Chettiars from Tamil Nadu were in large numbers, engaged in money-lending and trading. The bank's second overseas branch was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1938, followed by a branch in Ipoh, Malaysia, in the same year. IOB inaugurated a branch in Singapore on February 12, 1941. The bank's authorised capital was ₹100 lakh, consisting of 50,000 shares of ₹100 each. The paid-up capital in the first year was ₹12.50 lakh, consisting of 25,000 shares of which ₹50 per share was called up. By June 1941, ₹30 per share was called up, and the paid-up capital rose to ₹20 lakh. In September that year, the paid-up capital was increased to ₹50 lakh with 25,000

shares of ₹100 each issued at a premium of ₹20 per share and only ₹10 per share called up. The initial subscribers to the capital were K. Srinivasan and K. Gopalan, the brothers and proprietors of The Hindu. S. Krishnaswamy, a retired professor of Madras University, was also one of the prominent shareholders. The net profit earned by the bank from its inception on February 10, 1937 to December 31, 1938 was ₹1,454 annas 8 and pies 8.

Problem in BurmaOne unexpected development the bank had to face was the change in the political system in Burma. In 1963, the Burmese government nationalised the banks. The assets and liabilities of IOB's Rangoon branch were taken over by Peoples' Bank No.8. Over the years, IOB has taken over eight smaller banks in Tamil Nadu. In the 1960s, many smaller banks in the southern States ran into difficulties, with several going into liquidation. Numerous mergers occurred, some voluntarily and some mandated by the regulator. In 2007, it took over one of the banks it had promoted with other private sector banks. For instance, the Coimbatore Varthak Vridhi Bank Ltd. was first merged with Srinivasa Perumal Bank Ltd. in 1964, and the merged entity was then merged with IOB in 1966. The other banks that merged with IOB include South Indian Bank Ltd. (in 1990), Tiruppur Lakshmi Vilas Bank Ltd. (in 1966), Coimbatore Aryan Bank Ltd., Coimbatore Standard Bank Ltd., Kulithalai Bank Ltd., Nanjinad Bank Ltd., Bharat Overseas Bank, and Suvarna Sahakari Bank. The bank has been at the forefront of technological innovation that started with the establishment of the Information Technology Department in 1985, known as the Computer Policy and Planning Department. IOB was among the first public sector banks to achieve 100% branch computerisation by March 31, 2003. It also implemented a data warehouse by 1999. When IOB was in the private sector from 1937 to July 1969, its shares were listed in the Madras Stock Exchange. Its capital was ₹1 crore as on March 1969. From 1969, the Government of India was the sole owner and hence the shares were not quoted until the process of partial privatisation was initiated during 2000. In 2000, as the Government of India started partial privatisation, the bank was permitted to access the capital markets for raising capital.

The first-ever public offer of the bank opened on September 25, 2000. The Government of India, being the sole owner of the bank, was offering 11,12,00,000 shares at the face value of ₹10 per share. The aim was to unlock the value to the tune of ₹111.20 crore and to encourage the culture of equity through sharing of national assets in the form of shares. The issue closed on September 29. It was oversubscribed 1.87 times in spite of unfavourable market conditions. The staff quota was oversubscribed 1.72 times. After this public offer, the government's stake stood at 75%. The shares were listed on the Chennai, Bombay, and National Stock Exchanges. The allotment was made in October 2000. As of December 31, 2024, IOB had 3,322 branches and a customer base of 4 crore, with 21,147 employees. The bank is planning to establish four new regional offices this fiscal, with three already added. Around 100 new branches are anticipated by 2025-26. IOB remains focused on improving its performance and reducing non-performing assets, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable growth and customer satisfaction.

## Four Indian companies among those sanctioned by US over alleged involvement in Iran's oil trade

The United States has sanctioned four India-based companies over their alleged involvement in trade and transportation of Iranian crude oil and petroleum products. As part of the Trump administration's "maximum pressure campaign" on Iran, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and the US Department of State on Monday imposed sanctions on over 30 persons and vessels in various countries, and these four India-based firms are on the list. According to information from the OFAC and the US Department of State, the four Indian companies are Navi Mumbai-based Flux Maritime LLP, National Capital Region (NCR)-based BSM Marine LLP and Austinship Management Pvt Ltd, and Thanjavur-based Cosmos Lines Inc. Three of these four companies have been sanctioned for being commercial or technical managers of vessels allegedly involved in transportation of Iranian oil and petroleum products, while one—Cosmos Lines—has been sanctioned for its alleged involvement in transport of Iranian petroleum.

"Among those sanctioned today are oil brokers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Hong Kong, tanker operators and managers in India and People's Republic of China (PRC), the head of Iran's National Iranian Oil Company, and the Iranian Oil Terminals Company, whose operations help finance Iran's destabilizing activities. The vessels sanctioned today are responsible for shipping tens of millions of barrels of crude oil valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars," the OFAC said in a release Monday.

"The Iranian regime continues to destabilize global security with its nuclear threat, ballistic missile program, and support for terrorist groups. Iran's oil exports are enabled by a network of illicit shipping facilitators in multiple jurisdictions who, through obfuscation and deception, load and transport Iranian oil for sale to buyers in Asia. Today, the United States is taking action under President Trump's maximum pressure campaign on Iran to stem the flow of revenue the regime uses to fund these destabilizing activities," US Department of State said in a separate release. This is not the first instance of Indian companies being placed under sanctions for involvement in sanctioned energy transportation and trade through the so-called shadow fleet of



tankers. For instance, in October, India-based Gabbaro Ship Services was sanctioned for alleged involvement in transportation of Iranian oil. In August and September, three India-registered shipping firms were sanctioned by the US over their alleged involvement in transporting liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Russia's Arctic LNG 2 project, which is under American sanctions.

The shadow fleet refers to vessels involved in Russian, Iranian, and Venezuelan crude oil and petroleum products trade. With Western fleet operators loath to get involved in the oil trade of these countries due to sanctions of varying degrees, operators from countries like Greece, Russia, and China, and tax havens like Marshall Islands, Liberia, and Panama have emerged as the major players. The oil and gas industries of Russia, Iran, and Venezuela have been under sanctions or restrictions from international powers, particularly the US. A large number of opaque fleet tankers have complex and obscure ownership structures and are registered in geographies with lax regulatory oversight. Often, such vessels, which are quite old, operate with substandard insurance and certifications. Sukalp Sharma is a Senior Assistant Editor with The Indian Express and writes on a host of subjects and sectors, notably energy and aviation. He has over 13 years of experience in journalism with a body of work spanning areas like politics, development, equity markets, corporates, trade, and economic policy. He considers himself an above-average photographer, which goes well with his love for travel.

## Meta to expand India operations, hire more for engineering and AI roles

New Delhi: Global technology giant Meta is expanding its presence in India and would hire engineers and product specialists for artificial intelligence (AI) roles. Meta, the parent company of Facebook, has announced a new office in Bengaluru. With this move, Meta is following the path of other major tech giants like Microsoft, Google, and Amazon, which have already established strong engineering and product teams in Bengaluru and across India.

According to a job listing on Meta's website, the company is hiring an engineering director who will be responsible for building a strong technical team in Bengaluru. This role will play a key part in shaping Meta's long-term engineering presence in India. Several Meta employees on LinkedIn shared that the Bengaluru centre is being set up by the company's enterprise engineering team. This team focuses on creating internal tools to enhance productivity within Meta. The company is also recruiting hardware engi-

neers to support its growing AI infrastructure, including data centre operations and custom chip development. Meta, which entered the Indian market in 2010, already has offices in cities like Gurugram, New Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. However, most of its workforce in the country has been engaged in functions like sales, marketing, business development, operations, policy, legal, and finance. The new Bengaluru office marks a shift, as the company looks to expand its engineering capabilities in India. According to the Meta spokesperson, the company is looking to hire a small number of engineering professionals in Bengaluru. India is Meta's largest user market, with over a billion people using its products, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The country has often been a testing ground for Meta's new features and tools. In 2020, Instagram Reels was first widely launched in India after TikTok was banned.

## Over 80% of Indian IT workforce suffers from Fatty Liver Disease: UoH study



Hyderabad: In a concerning trend, about 84 per cent of the IT employees in the country are suffering from Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Fatty Liver Disease (MAFLD). This has been revealed in a study conducted by University of Hyderabad (UoH) scientists and researcher scholars, in collaboration with a senior hepatologist of the Asian Institute of Gastroenterology (AIG) Hospital. The study also found that around 71 per cent of IT employees are obese and about 34 per cent have metabolic syndrome, a cluster of diseased conditions that increase the risk of fatty liver, obesity, diabetes and increased blood pressure. This condition among IT employees is attributed to the sedentary life, involving long hours of sitting at the desk, work-related stress, inadequate sleep and shift work. Unhealthy diets such as intake of high-calorie diet, sugar-sweetened beverages and lack of physical activity is another factor, which is fuelling the risk of several non-communicable diseases including fatty liver disease called MAFLD.

According to researchers, fatty liver occurs when more than five per cent of fat builds up in the liver due to various behavioural and metabolic risk factors. The condition, if unchecked, can progress to severe forms of liver diseases like cirrhosis and cancer, requiring liver transplantation. The research was conducted by Prof. Kalyankar Mahadev and Prof. CT Anitha, along with their research scholars Bharam Bhargava and Nanditha Pramod, in collaboration with senior hepatologist Dr. PN Rao and his team from AIG Hospital. Although most of the major IT companies have an in-built health wellness programme, their employees should take advantage and adhere to the existing programmes for their physical well-being, the researchers said. Regular and periodic health check-ups and screening for fatty liver along with proper work-life balance and stress management programmes may reduce the incidence of fatty liver, they added. The research work has been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal — Scientific Reports by Nature Publishers.

## A dating app that matches you over books, not looks

In an age where dating apps are largely driven by appearances, Bookmark has taken a different approach — one that prioritises conversations over looks. Founded in February 2024, the app connects people through books rather than profile pictures, offering a refreshing alternative to the swipe-first culture of mainstream dating platforms. The idea stems from Cubbon Reads, the silent reading movement in Bengaluru started by Bookmark's co-founders, Harsh Snehanshu and Shruti Sah. Harsh explains, "One beautiful thing we noticed with Cubbon Reads is that many people would come alone the first time. The next week, we would see them coming in groups. People started becoming friends, and over time, some of them also started dating. It happened right in front of our eyes, and we thought, 'Hey, we can use books to connect people.'"

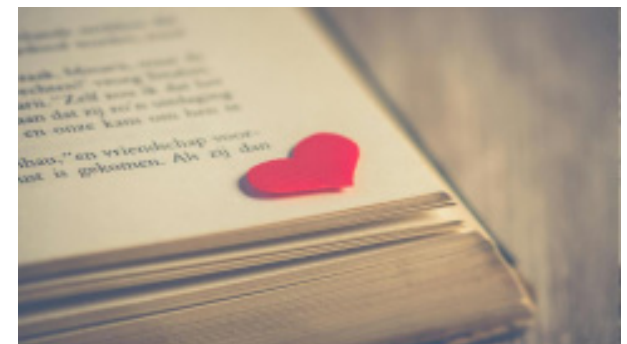
That concept — of books as a bridge between people — became the foundation for Bookmark. Sid Zadaun and Avrojoyti Das, Bookmark's co-founders, helped Harsh and Shruti transform this idea into a full-fledged dating app. Within a year, Bookmark has seen over 15,000 installs across India, facilitated 50,000 matches, and built a strong community of 5,000 monthly active users. More than a dating app, Bookmark is not just about romance — it also enables friendships through its Book Buddy feature, which allows users to connect even if they are not looking for a romantic relationship. "Our larger vision is to give people a primal reason to get back to reading," says Harsh. "If you read, you can find someone to have deeper conversations with. The beautiful thing about books is that they don't follow an algorithm; you have to find your own." The app's unique structure ensures that profile pictures remain hidden until two users have exchanged at least 10 messages. This way, initial conversations are based purely on literary tastes and responses to prompts rather than appearances.

For Swapnil Joshi, a 28-year-old banker, this was a game-changer. "Book lovers are often stereotyped as introverts, and there's some truth to that. It's harder for them to get on dating apps and strike up a conversation," he says. "On this app, you get profiles based on the books you read and your responses to prompts, not on your physical features." This system, he says, leads to better conversations. "Since I read a lot of philosophy, my conversations were often deep and lasted long. Shared literary preferences serve as an excellent icebreaker." Bookmark worked for him — he met his current partner on the app and plans to live with them. Challenging the swipe culture

The modern dating scenario is filled with 'swipe fatigue' — the endless, exhausting cycle of liking profiles without meaningful interactions. Bookmark counters this by limiting users to five likes per day unless they opt for a premium subscription, which allows 30. "There's a lot of discussion around the exhaustion that comes with using dating apps," says Shruti. "People mindlessly scroll through thousands of profiles, not realising there's another human being on the other side. We wanted to make the process more thoughtful." For Hemashwetha KS, a 29-year-old community manager, this deliberate pace is what sets Bookmark apart. "The concept of 'books over looks' really appealed to me," she says. "The 10-message rule means you actually take time to know someone before judging them on their appearance. It feels much more organic." A safer space Online dating safety is a major concern, but Bookmark's structure helps reduce unwanted interactions. The app has 25% paying women users, which the founders claim is five times that of Bumble, a sign that women feel safer and more invested in the platform. "If one doesn't feel like engaging in a conversation, they can unmatch or block the person easily," says Hemashwetha. This sentiment is echoed by Swapnil, who notes that the book-based structure makes it harder for people to pretend. "Women I spoke to on the app told me it was easy to spot pickup artists, who just pretend to like books," he says. The app's gender ratio currently stands at 70 (men):30 (women) — a slight improvement over Tinder's 75:25 split — indicating a healthier balance than many mainstream dating platforms.

What is in store?

With its first year behind it, Bookmark is now looking to expand internationally. The founders see strong potential in the US, Europe, and Australia, with high book readership. "The majority of Goodreads users and book



sales come from these regions," says Shruti. "We're actively seeking investment to scale globally." Beyond geographical growth, Bookmark also plans to evolve into a broader platform for interest-based dating. "Much like how Flipkart and Amazon started with books and then expanded, we want to do the same," says Harsh. "Books are just the starting point because they are easy to showcase on a profile. But we want to create similar spaces for film lovers and music enthusiasts in the future." While reading preferences alone may not guarantee compatibility, they certainly provide a strong foundation. "If your opinions, political leanings, and social interests don't align, what's the point?" asks Shruti. "Everyone I look up to in terms of relationships has told me the same thing — whoever you choose in life, you must enjoy talking to them." Swapnil agrees. "Shared reading interests definitely help," he says. "Of course, compatibility is a mix of emotional and intellectual factors, but this is a great starting point." Ultimately, Bookmark's success lies in its ability to foster connections that go beyond fleeting attraction. Whether it's a romantic relationship or a literary friendship, the app aims to redefine how people engage with online dating. "In the past, people would say, 'He doesn't read, but I love him,'" says Harsh. "That mindset doesn't work anymore. We are living in a time where we need to be informed, and reading is one of the best ways to do that." For those who believe that a well-read mind is the most attractive trait of all, Bookmark offers an alternative to the swipe-first, talk-later culture of modern dating. And as Swapnil's story proves, sometimes, a shared love for books can turn a page into a lifelong chapter.

## Asteroid YR4 spares Earth, 1.7 percent impact peril to moon

Hyderabad: The city-leveling asteroid 2024 YR4, which was hurtling towards Earth from outer space with 3.2 per cent chances of impact, has been downgraded by NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Agency) to 0.004 per cent and is expected to safely pass Earth in 2032. However, there is still a chance of the asteroid YR 4 to impact the moon on December 22, 2032. That probability is currently at 1.7 per cent.

"When first discovered, asteroid 2024 YR4 had a very small, but notable chance of impacting our planet in 2032. As observations of the asteroid continued to be submitted to the Minor Planet Center, experts at NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory's (JPL's) Center for Near-Earth Object Studies were able to calculate more precise models of the asteroid's trajectory and now have found there is no significant potential for this asteroid to impact our planet for the next century. The latest observations have further reduced the uncertainty of its future trajectory, and the range of possible locations the asteroid could be on Dec. 22, 2032, has moved farther away from the Earth," NASA in a statement said. There still remains a very small chance for asteroid 2024 YR4 to impact the Moon on Dec. 22, 2032. That probability is currently 1.7 per cent. NASA will continue to observe asteroid 2024 YR4 with observatories funded by its Planetary Defense Coordination Office, and NASA's James Webb Space Telescope will observe the asteroid in March to further gain insights about its size for scientific purposes, NASA added.



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



In showbiz, what defines a successful film? A gripping story told well, an impressive star cast, and outstanding performances? Not anymore. In 2025, success of a film is dictated by how much money producers, studios, and banners are willing to pump into creating the illusion of a blockbuster.

Recent box office trends indicate a troubling scenario where inflated figures and bulk bookings mislead audiences, making certain films appear as hits when the reality is far from it. Taking the case of three major releases in January 2025—Ram Charan-Shankar's Game Changer, Akshay Kumar's Sky Force, and Shahid Kapoor's Deva—SCREEN spoke to film trade experts to decode the growing trend of block bookings and how the entire system operates.

January 2025: A disappointing start for Bollywood?

Speaking about Bollywood's lacklustre box office performance in January, film exhibitor Akshaye Rathi said, "Among the major releases, Sky Force performed reasonably well compared to his recent films. Apart from that, no film performed well. We had high expectations from Deva, but unfortunately, it didn't live up to them. Game Changer was an underperformer. Everyone expected a lot from Ram Charan, especially since it was his first solo release after RRR, and with a visionary director like Shankar at the helm, but the film fell short. That was disappointing."

Film trade analyst Komal Nahta echoed this sentiment. "When a film fails, it's because the content isn't appreciated. The films released in January simply did not offer what the audience wanted," he said. Some industry insiders claimed that Allu Arjun's highly anticipated Pushpa 2: The Rule affected other films' performances, but Nahta dismissed this notion: "That's just an excuse. We've seen multiple films released on the same day and still become blockbusters—like Lagaan and Gadar, or Gadar 2 and OMG 2. If a film has strong content, it will work regardless of competition." Rathi concurred, saying, "Pushpa 2 had no impact on these films. Every film has its own trajectory. If Game Changer or Devaa underperformed, it was solely because they lacked the merit to bring the numbers we expected."

Is Bollywood heading towards a weak first quarter?

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

inflate box office figures? Naturally, the primary objective is creating a perception of "success". Today, at a time when even the public seem to care about "how much films made," producers add a few crores to films' credit to falsely declare it hits, hoping to convince people that their movies are doing well and worth watching, creating a self-fulfilling cycle of deception.

One of the key strategies used for this deception is "block booking" or "bulk booking"—where large numbers of tickets are bought in bulk to artificially boost films' earnings. According to Rathi, this practice doesn't provide any real benefit: "Inflating box office numbers beyond a point doesn't help anyone. It's common for brands associated with actors to buy tickets in bulk and distribute them among clients or employees. That's fine—it's an age-old practice. But outright fabricating figures serves no purpose because audiences, trade partners, and streaming platforms eventually learn the truth. Those who do this are only fooling themselves by declaring wrong numbers." Nahta was even more critical: "Inflating box office numbers is a disgusting trend. It's been going on long before Game Changer. In fact, Sky Force exaggerated its earnings even more—while it made Rs 40 crore in the first week, the makers claimed it had earned Rs 80-85 crore. Empty theatres were falsely declared "Housefull". On some platforms, if you book a ticket for Rs 300, you get Rs 250 as refund, which is another way to boost numbers. Everybody is thinking of their interest, inflating collections, and showing it's a hit, but nobody is thinking or bothered about the film industry as a whole. It's all selfish producers who do these things." According to Nahta, actors, producers, and studios are all responsible in equal parts for this practice. He explained why it is done: "One, to give the perception that their film is a hit, to fool the trade and the public. The public thinks it's a hit film, so they go to watch it, and makers get the benefit of footfalls. Many stars do it to create hype around them to charge several crores extra for future brand endorsements. The advertising companies and brands come thinking they are working with a big star, but if they get to know the truth, they will not pay what they are willing to pay. Producers and studios do it for the same reason; to show that a hit film has come from their banner. This industry is all about showmanship, but people forget that." Nahta elaborated on the system behind block bookings, revealing a well-organised network that orchestrates ticket purchases: "This level of block booking trend is new. Earlier, block bookings would amount to around Rs 7-10 crore, a trend started by a superstar a few years ago. But this year, Sky Force did block bookings worth Rs 40 crore—an unprecedented amount. Agents are hired to coordinate with corporate houses, who then receive formal invitations to book tickets for their employees and families. These agents specialise in distributing bulk bookings, arrange an audience for watching the film, and they charge a commission for their services." Don't miss: Game Changer Worldwide Box Office Collection Day 1: Ram Charan-starrer's Rs 186 crore debut disputed, analysts allege Rs 100 crore inflation A few months back, when director Anurag Kashyap said Bollywood is doomed, we wondered what he meant. Is the end really near?

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

## Vicky Kaushal's Chhaava is weighed down by its own fundamental cluelessness

There comes a 20-minute stretch, just after the interval, when Chhaava unleashes its grandest onslaught. The Marathas, with their king, Sambhaji Maharaj, leading from the front, rain fury upon the Mughals: across scattered lands, across shifting hours. It is a montage of ambush and illusion. The Marathas descend like phantoms, swinging from trees in the forest, creeping through fields, luring their foes in the guise of women, rising—like apparitions—from the very earth and water. The attack never stops. The montage never ends. In any other film, this would be the moment that crackles, that ignites the screen with tension and thrill. But in Chhaava, a Hindi historical, it is the longest, dulllest 20 minutes you endure. And quite expectedly so.

On the surface, it has everything working in its favour, still nothing quite works. The problems are plenty, yet embarrassingly basic. But none of them stem from the film's clumsy grip on history. Some will call it an account of the past. Others will argue it's a myth repackaged as propaganda. But that's a debate for another day. Chhaava suffers from a far more fundamental crisis—not a seemingly distorted understanding of history, but a cluelessness about the genre it belongs to. At its heart, the film operates within a framework so simplistic, it might as well be a bedtime story. Good versus Evil. Marathas versus Mughals. Sambhaji versus Aurangzeb. And to its credit, the opening half-hour does set up this conflict rather well. We see an aging Aurangzeb (Akshaye Khanna), steeped in tyranny yet craving a worthy nemesis. Someone who can shake him out of the monotony of old age; someone who can reignite his thirst for war. And then, with a background score so thunderous it could wake the dead, enters Sambhaji (Vicky Kaushal), charging at the screen. He fights. He leaps. He soars and roars across rooftops. And in the midst of battle, he even scoops up a crying baby. Because what's a hero without a token act of virtue? Within minutes, the lines are drawn. Good and evil, poised for war. But, being a Hindi historical, Chhaava takes this straightforward premise and turns it into a spectacular mess. And quite expectedly so.

Every compelling story of good and evil has a rhythm: peaks and valleys that lend depth to its conflict. Every compelling story of good and evil thrives on the inevitability of struggle, the moment when good stumbles, when evil almost wins, before the tide turns. But Chhaava refuses this ebb and flow. It is a film of ascension and collapse, but only in one direction. The rise, and rise, and even grander rise of Sambhaji, mirrored by the fall, and fall, and even more humiliating fall of Aurangzeb. A hero untouched by hardship, a villain crumbling without challenge. In its devotion, the film mistakes worship for storytelling, bravery for conflict, vic-



tory for drama. It is not a clash of ideologies, not a duel of wills; it is a coronation masquerading as a battle. After all, no matter how heroic the protagonist may be, he must possess vulnerability for the audience to connect with him, to root for him. Otherwise, grandeur becomes a barrier; he is too towering to relate to, too invincible to invest in. Similarly, an antagonist, no matter how villainous, must exude an air of cunning, a sense of formidable menace that makes him a worthy adversary. Chhaava offers neither. The Mughals are portrayed as incompetent, tactless figures who seem to wait idly for Sambhaji to defeat them. Aurangzeb, in particular, is reduced to an aged, disinterested ruler who commands from his chambers, sleeping beside a lion while his empire crumbles. In contrast, Sambhaji wrestles actual lions, quite literally tearing their jaws apart. The imbalance in characterisation is (stark) almost comical. Every obstacle is a mere formality, every challenge preordained to be conquered. Even in chains, even under torture, Sambhaji does not bend, does not break. And after a while, neither does the monotony. The kind of dynamic that should have crackled between Sambhaji and Aurangzeb: charged with vigor, drama, and razor-sharp banter—is instead found in his bond with his friend and court poet, Kalash (a spectacular Vineet Kumar Singh). Their relationship lends this otherwise glib epic its only moments of solace, it's only moments of reflection. Because whenever Chhaava pauses, it doesn't breathe; it snoozes. And for the most part, it refuses to pause at all. But this ceaseless motion isn't exhilarating—it's exhausting. Not a grand, sweeping saga, but an unrelenting, numbing bloodbath. From start to finish, Chhaava is a war without wit, a battle without buildup. Conflict isn't driven by strategy, mind games, or clashing ideologies; it is brute force, wielded like a hammer against anything in sight. Every problem meets the same solution: violence. And when that doesn't work? More violence.

## Sanam Teri Kasam becomes highest-grossing re-released film; Tumbbad, Ghilli make up the top three



Call it the paucity of old-school entertainers, or just the simple fascination for nostalgia... Indian cinema has been plagued with the phenomenon of re-releases. Over the past couple of years, this re-release trend has caught up across all industries with many such films making more money than the first run of many new films. While this is definitely a sign of people thronging theatres to bask in the familiar, it is also a negative trend because it shows people don't mind coming to the theatres, but they have a problem turning up for new releases. This mixed signal from the audience is proving to be a deterrent for many makers. Nevertheless, the trend seems to be here to stay as the success of recent re-releases, especially Sanam Teri Kasam (2016), has become a story for the ages.

According to popular trade website Sacnilk, Sanam Teri Kasam, directed by Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, has made Rs 32.35 crore nett in its re-release. The film made Rs 9.1 crore nett in the original run. In its second coming, Sanam Teri Kasam, headlined by Harshvardhan

Rane and Mawra Hocane, has earned a whopping Rs 53 crore worldwide. Noted industry tracker Taran Adarsh revealed that the movie has emerged as the highest-grossing re-released film in India. Notably, Sanam Teri Kasam dethroned another cult favourite, Tumbbad, which took the top position in 2024 with its stellar run.

Tumbbad, in its initial run, made Rs 13.5 crore nett in its lifetime, only to find a new lease of life, six years later, in its 4-week re-release. The film actually made Rs 13.15 crore nett in the first week of re-release. It had a surprising run in the second week, with the numbers matching the first week of re-release, and making almost Rs 11.5 crore. It ended its four-week run with almost Rs 30.50 crore nett.

What really makes the success of Sanam Teri Kasam and Tumbbad special is that both films didn't make the expected numbers in the original run, but managed to become cult classics of their genre, and developed a keen fan following over the years. But it was interesting to see these fans actually turn up in droves to watch the re-release, and the number of fans just grew in size. Interestingly, the first re-release to break into the Rs 30 crore club was the Tamil blockbuster Ghilli, headlined by Vijay and Trisha, and directed by Dharani. It surpassed the collections of the re-release of Avatar and Sholay to take the numero uno spot before Hindi cinema caught on to the trend of re-releases, and have been doing excellent numbers in this category. Nevertheless, the success of Sanam Teri Kasam, backed by Deepak Mukut and Sohram Rockstar Entertainment, which has also prompted a sequel in the making, is a sign of things to come. While 2025 has also seen the massive success of Vicky Kaushal's Chhaava, it would be interesting to see how the year unfolds for Hindi cinema. Will the new guard take up the reins? Will the old guard have to swoop in to save the day? Or will Hindi cinema continue to stay afloat by milking the nostalgia cow?

## Suresh Kumar says Mohanlal was 'mised', insists there is no rift ahead of producers' strike: 'What upset the stars is our decision to...'



Mentioning that Mohanlal had been misled by some people, film producer G Suresh Kumar clarified that the recent incidents had not caused any personal rift between them. Malayalam superstar Mohanlal and film producer Suresh Kumar have been friends since childhood.

Despite opposition from the actors' union, the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA), the Kerala Film Producers' Association (KFPA) has reiterated its decision to proceed with the planned strike, starting June 1. Mentioning that AMMA ad-hoc committee president and superstar Mohanlal had been misled by some people, KFPA vice-president G Suresh Kumar clarified that the recent incidents had not caused any personal rift between them. Mohanlal and Suresh Kumar have been friends since childhood, with their camaraderie continuing in the film industry following their respective debuts as well. The producer also denied ever referring to AMMA as an organisation lacking leadership.

Suresh Kumar further maintained that the strike was directed at the government, with demands for reductions in entertainment tax and electricity charges, rather than being a protest against film stars. Addressing the media after an executive meeting of KFPA in Kochi on Monday, he stated, "This strike is not against actors. Only a few stars are involved in film production. If producers decide to halt film production, the industry will come to a standstill." He underscored that double taxation and rising actors' remuneration are among the key challenges faced by producers.

SCREEN Exclusive | Why Malayalam cinema reported Rs 700 cr loss in 2024: Surging production costs, escalating actors' fees, emphasis on star power Regarding producer Antony Perumbavoor's controversial Facebook post about the proposed strike and him, Suresh Kumar said he had no intention of engaging in a conversation with him on the matter. While insisting that he harboured no resentment towards Antony, he maintained that the claims made in the post were incorrect and demanded a retraction. "He questioned my authority to make the statements regarding the strike. My organisation entrusted me with this responsibility. He should have verified the facts before making such remarks," Suresh added. When asked whether Mohanlal's decision not to extend support had upset him, Suresh Kumar responded, "Someone went and misled Mohanlal, which is why he did it. There is no issue between us. So if you say that Mohanlal did something, it is not an issue for me." Notably, Mohanlal had also shared Antony's Facebook post. Among those who supported Antony's stance were actors Prithviraj Sukumaran and Tovino Thomas. Suresh Kumar further remarked, "What upset them is our decision to publicly disclose box office collections of theatrical releases. But we will not back down. The next report, covering February's collections, will be published in a week."

## 'There have been issues between Govinda and Sunita Ahuja,' confirms actor's manager; Krushna Abhishek says 'They will never get divorced'

Rumours about Govinda and his wife Sunita Ahuja parting ways after 37 years of marriage have been making the rounds. While the couple has remained tight-lipped on the matter, Govinda's manager has acknowledged that they are facing issues in their marriage due to certain comments made by some family members. However, Govinda's nephew, actor Krushna Abhishek, has dismissed all such claims.

According to a report in ETimes, Sunita had sent a separation notice to Govinda a few months ago. Addressing the situation, Govinda's manager, Shashi Sinha, told the publication, "There have been issues between the couple due to certain statements made by certain members from the family. There is nothing more to it and Govinda is in process of starting a film for which artists are visiting our office. We are trying to resolve it." However, Govinda himself refused to comment on the rumours and instead shifted the focus to his professional commitments, stating, "I am in the process of starting my films."



Despite growing speculation about their separation, Govinda's nephew, Krushna Abhishek, told SCREEN that divorce is out of the question. "Not possible. They will never do this," he said.

Govinda's niece, Arti Singh, echoed the same sentiment while speaking to News18, firmly denying the rumours, "I am honestly not

in Mumbai right now so I haven't gotten in touch with anybody. But let me tell you something, this is false news. These are just speculations because their bond is so strong. They have built a strong and loving relationship over the years so how can they get divorced? I don't know where people get all such rumours from, completely untrue. People

should refrain from spreading misinformation about their personal lives. In fact, news about my divorce had also broken out for no reason. Such baseless gossip only creates unnecessary stress." Earlier, in an interaction with Hindi Rush, Sunita Ahuja had spoken about their living arrangements, explaining that they live in separate houses. "



## Why the three-year-old Magnus Carlsen vs Hans Niemann cheating scandal is making waves again



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

"If I started cheating, you would never know," Magnus Carlsen, one of the greatest players in the sport, tells Joe Rogan on his podcast with a smirk. It's not just a throwaway line about cheating either. On a two-hour-long podcast, where he touches on mostly everything under the sun, Carlsen fixates on cheating in chess. He also details how a player of his calibre would need very little to cheat in chess. "I would just get a move here and there (from an aide). Or maybe if I am playing in a tournament I just find a system where I get somebody to signal to me when there's a critical moment: a certain moment where a certain move is much better than the others. That's really all I would need to go from being the best to being practically unbeatable. There's so little you need in chess (to cheat). It really is a scary situation," Carlsen said before pointing out how in 2010 the captain of the French chess team was helping a teammate decide his next move at the Olympiad just by standing in specific spots around the table.

The topic of cheating in chess is back in the headlines. More specifically, the infamous Magnus Carlsen versus Hans Niemann incident is back in the headlines after the World No.1 chose to reopen a three-year-old can of worms. After first exploding in 2022 — when Carlsen withdrew from the Sinquefeld Cup tournament after a loss to Niemann before alleging that the American was cheating — the incident led to a \$100 million lawsuit and an uneasy ceasefire. Every once in a while, some sparks of the feud would be reignited: when Carlsen faced Niemann in a game or when Niemann went on a rant about the Norwegian on his X handle. But they would die down soon enough.

But now, in one gasoline-soaked interview three years after the incident, Carlsen has restarted the fire even though there is no new evidence to sway public opinion either way about Niemann's innocence. Carlsen even goes so far as to say that he does not believe in the popular theory that Niemann was cheating using anal beads and admits that the American has become a much better chess player since the incident. Immediately on the heels of the podcast, Hikaru Nakamura, who was the other player who openly spoke about Niemann cheating in 2022, also posted a long video on his YouTube channel. So, why are the players keen to raise fresh hell about an old incident? It could be because there is a new Netflix documentary coming in April as part of the Untold series which will look into the cheating scandal that rocked the sport. Carlsen has reportedly spoken

extensively in the documentary about the incident. Nakamura has also given an interview to the documentary makers. What must also be noted is that the episode on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast was sponsored by Netflix. Documentary or not, chess grandmasters do stand out from athletes in most other sports. Athletes who are considered ambassadors or icons usually don't want to be seen talking about a scandal that raises a stink about the integrity of their sport. Haven't generations of cricketers gone stony-faced when asked about the match-fixing scandal?

Chess stars, though, love talking about — and speculating — cheating in chess even though detecting cheating in chess is as hard as beating Carlsen on the board. You have a former world champion like Vladimir Kramnik who spends most days muckraking on social media about suspicious results of other players. It's almost become his brand. Nakamura has snuck into the DMs of players like Arjun Erigaisi to accuse them of cheating in the past without any shred of evidence. "If you're not cheating in a dumb way, there rarely is going to be a smoking gun. And without that smoking gun it is going to be really hard to catch people," Carlsen admits on the podcast. On their part, chess events do try their best to prevent cheating. There is the pre-game wand that players have to go through to prevent them from carrying any electronic device into the playing area. At certain events, players' ears are checked to see if they're wearing invisible earpieces. The live broadcasts of games are delayed by 15 minutes for big events so that players who want to game the system cannot get real-time advice from an aide from outside (which doesn't amount to a lot when it's a classical game where players can spend as much as 45 minutes at times mulling just one critical move). And at the World Championship, players compete in a sound-proof glass box where they cannot see outside. The measures for online detection involve multiple cameras and using other software. These measures though clearly do little to disperse the thick stench of paranoia that hangs around the sport.

"Top level chess has been based on trust a lot. I don't trust Niemann. Other top players still don't trust him and he doesn't trust me," says Carlsen. "There is still something off about him now. We played an over-the-board tournament in Paris last year where there was increased security and he didn't play at nearly the same level there." Nakamura says that elite grandmasters were speculating that Niemann was cheating for two years before the Sinquefeld Cup incident blew up. But he is quick to add: "Most top players do not believe that Hans cheated in that game against Magnus. Everyone knew Hans had been banned earlier for cheating in online games." The upcoming documentary is unlikely to offer any new perspective on the Sinquefeld Cup incident. It probably won't have any incriminating evidence that Niemann cheated in that game against Carlsen, or has cheated in over-the-board games since then. It will just be fresh he-said, he-said. But the documentary will guarantee that suspicions that elite grandmasters once spoke in backrooms in hushed tones will now play out on a major platform for the wider audience to consume. "As long as there are monetary incentives for people to cheat, there will be cheating in chess," says Carlsen on the podcast.

## 'I'll definitely do it, if it comes my way': Venkatesh Iyer on Kolkata Knight Riders captaincy

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Venkatesh Iyer Kolkata Knight Riders captaincy Venkatesh Iyer of Kolkata Knight Riders celebrates his fifty during match 10 of the Indian Premier League season 17 (IPL 2024) between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Kolkata Knight Riders held at the M.Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru on the 29th March 2024. With the Indian Premier League season right around the corner, speculations have been rife about who will lead the defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders after they let go of their title-winning skipper Shreyas Iyer. One name that has been brought up frequently is allrounder Venkatesh Iyer, who was not retained by the franchise ahead of the IPL 2025 auctions, but was bought back by them for a whopping Rs 23.75 crore.

Venkatesh when asked about if he would want to lead the franchise gave his answer in affirmative in an interaction with ESPNcricinfo. "Definitely, I'm ready. Again, I've always said this: captaincy is just a tag. I believe in leadership. That is a bigger role to play, being a leader. There's no ambiguity surrounding this. I'll definitely do it, if it comes my way. There is no reason not to do it," Iyer said. "You don't necessarily need the tag of a captain to be a leader in your dressing room. You need to set examples. You need to be a good role model, both on and off the field, which I am doing right now in Madhya Pradesh. I'm not the captain of the MP team, but my opinions are respected and I really



love to be in an atmosphere where every individual — new or experienced, Rs 20 lakh, Rs 20 crore, whatever — you just need to have the freedom to voice your opinion. You just need to have the freedom to give opinions and give suggestions and them to be taken in the right spirit," he added.

Iyer had joined the Kolkata franchise in 2021 and has scored 1,326 runs in 51 IPL matches for them. He was also an integral part of the squad which won KKR their 3rd IPL title in 2024. The defending champions will face the Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the opening match of the IPL 2025, scheduled to take place in Kolkata's Eden Gardens on March 22.

## Pakistan will struggle to beat India B team, says Sunil Gavaskar



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Sunil Gavaskar Pakistan India Champions Trophy Pakistan's captain Mohammad Rizwan, right, and his batting partner Saud Shakeel run between the wickets to score during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates.

Sunil Gavaskar had a scathing comment on Pakistan's recent woes when he said that this Pakistan team would struggle to even beat a second string Indian side. Champions Trophy hosts Pakistan have been in the receiving end of endless criticism ever since they lost to India on Sunday and it got much louder after they were dumped out of the

tournament after New Zealand defeated Bangladesh on Monday. "I think a B team (from India) certainly (can give Pakistan a run for their money). C team, I am not too sure. But a B team will be very, very hard to beat for Pakistan in their current form," Gavaskar said on 'Sports Today'.

"I think it's surprising — this lack of bench strength. Pakistan always had natural talent. Natural in the sense that they may not have always been technically correct, but they had an instinctive understanding of bat and ball. Look at Inzamam-ul-Haq, for example. If you look at his stance, you wouldn't recommend that to a young batter, but he had great temperament. With that kind of temperament, he made up for any technical shortcomings," the former India batter added. Gavaskar also pointed out that despite the Pakistan Super League, the Men in Green have failed to produce match-winners.

"How has India produced so many young stars in white-ball cricket? It's because of the IPL. Players from there have gone on to play in the Ranji Trophy and eventually for India. That is something Pakistan cricket must analyse. They need to figure out why they no longer have the bench strength they once did." Since the 2017 World Cup, Pakistan have struggled in ICC tournaments with their best performance coming in the 2022 T20 World Cup where they reached the final and lost. The team also finished fifth in the last two ODI World Cups and have failed to reach any World Test Championship final.

## Sana Mir criticizes PAK team after elimination from Champions Trophy: 'Even if you make MS Dhoni the captain..'



GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Sana Mir India Pakistan MS Dhoni Champions Trophy Players of Pakistan stand for their national anthem before the start of ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Former Pakistan women's team captain Sana Mir slammed the men's cricket team which was eliminated from the Champions Trophy on Monday, saying that even Mahendra Singh Dhoni wouldn't be able to change the fortunes of the team. Pakistan, who lost back to back matches against New Zealand and

Bangladesh, were knocked out of the tournament due to Bangladesh failing to defeat the Kiwis on Monday.

"The 15 that have been selected (in Champions Trophy squad), even if you make MS Dhoni or (former Pakistan skipper) Yousuf Khan captain, nobody can do anything to the team because it has not been selected on the basis of the playing conditions," said Mir on 'Game On Hai' programme. "I was watching the match when I got a message from a friend that India are 100 for 2 'I think it's over'. So, I said the match was over when the squad was announced," she added. Mir, who played more than 300 white ball games for Pakistan, criticized the selection committee for failing to select the team on the basis of conditions. "Half the tournament we had lost when we announced the 15-member squad, and I am saying this from day one. They (selectors) knew that Pakistan had to play at least one match in Dubai, so how did you bring two part-time spinners. Abrar (Ahmed), who is still new in ODI cricket... in the last five months, they have taken two wickets conceding 165 runs. The selectors removed key players who played in last two series against Australia and South Africa," Mir said. "Irfan (Khan) Niazi was a good fielder, showed good power-hitting (in the T20 and ODI series against South Africa)... so, we lost the tournament when we announced the squad," the 33-year-old added.

## Pat Cummins: India have got the obvious benefit of playing all games in Dubai

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Australia captain Pat Cummins, who's out of the Champions Trophy as he nurses an injury, has said India have a "huge advantage" to be based in Dubai for the ongoing Champions Trophy while other countries have to travel around Pakistan for their group games in the tournament, while the countries in India's group have to travel to Dubai too. All of India's Champions Trophy games are staged at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium, while the other seven teams crisscross Pakistan. Cummins told Yahoo Australia: "I think it's good in that the tournament can go on, but obviously it does give them (India) a huge advantage playing on the same ground. They already look very strong and they've got that obvious benefit of playing all their games there."

The hybrid model of the tournament is such that the final will be held in Dubai if India go the distance. This was done after India refused to travel to Pakistan, the original hosts of the event, citing security concerns. India have won both their games, against Bangladesh and Pakistan, comfortably so far and are through to the semifinal. Their last group match is on Sunday against New Zealand, a team that has played in Pakistan so far and has also won both of its games.



Aussie skipper Cummins gave the Champions Trophy a miss to be at home for the birth of his second child and rest a niggling ankle injury. It has granted him precious time with his family and a chance to work on a return to cricket. "It's been nice to be at home with everything going on and the ankle rehab is tracking well, so I will start running and bowling this week," Cummins reported. "There's the IPL (next month) and then we've got the Test World Championship and a tour to the West Indies, so there's a lot to look forward to."

## Virat Kohli is right at the top of the tree in the ODIs: Nasser Hussain

Virat Kohli India's Virat Kohli celebrates after beating Pakistan during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates. (AP) Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain has unanimously called Virat Kohli the best ODI cricketer of all time. Against Pakistan on Sunday in the ongoing Champions Trophy, Virat Kohli became the fastest batter and third man to reach 14,000 runs. He powered the chase to finish on 100 not out — hitting the winning boundary — as India beat Pakistan by six wickets with 45 balls remaining. "Virat Kohli in a run-chase in 50-over cricket, there's been nobody better in the history of the game, really," said Michael Atherton on "Sky Sports Podcast". "51 century is an unbelievable number."

India's Sachin Tendulkar was the previous quickest batter to reach 14,000 ODI runs, taking 350 innings. Tendulkar still tops the overall ODI runs scored with 18,426 in 452 innings. Another retired batting great, Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara, finished his career with 14,234 runs in 380 innings. India's Virat Kohli hits winning runs during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025. (AP Photo) India's Virat Kohli hits winning runs during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025. (AP Photo) "I mean, he's got 51 and he passed



14,000 runs, which only Tendulkar and Sangakkara have got past that mark in one-day cricket," said Atherton. "And he got them in 60-odd innings quicker than Sachin, and I think about 90-odd innings quicker than Kumar. So, I mean, ODI is probably his best. You know, he's been a great all-format player, clearly, but you'd probably say that ODI is his absolute best format," he said. Nasser Hussain also showered praise on Virat Kohli. "He's been an incredible player. Yeah, and you'd have to say probably the best player in ODIs of all time, really, with those stats you mentioned," said Hussain. "You'd have Tendulkar in the same conversation. Kumar, you'd have AB de Villiers. They've been some great ones, but he's right at the top of the tree. "If you ask India what did they want yesterday, beat Pakistan and get Kohli back in nick, they've got both of those."

## HC rejects ace badminton player Lakshya Sen's plea in birth certificate forgery case, paves way for probe

GNS News Agency, Feb 28

Bengaluru: The Karnataka High Court has rejected the petitions filed by ace badminton player Lakshya Sen, his family members, and his coach U Vimal Kumar in connection with allegations of fabricating birth certificates.

The court ruled that there was prima facie evidence warranting an investigation into the case. The case originated from a private complaint filed by M G Nagaraj, who alleged that Lakshya Sen's parents Dharendra and Nirmala Sen, along with his brother Chirag Sen, coach U Vimal Kumar, and an employee of the Karnataka Badminton Association, were involved in falsifying birth records. According to the complaint, the accused allegedly manipulated the birth certificates of Lakshya and Chirag Sen, reducing their age by approximately two and a half years. The alleged forgery was intended to allow them to participate in age-restricted badminton tournaments and avail government benefits.

Nagaraj supported his claims with documents obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act and requested the court to summon original records from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in New Delhi. Based on this evidence, the court directed the High Grounds police station to conduct an investigation. Following the court's directive, the police reg-



istered a First Information Report (FIR) under IPC Sections 420 (cheating), 468 (forgery), and 471 (using forged documents as genuine). However, the petitioners moved the Karnataka High Court in 2022, securing an interim order that stalled the investigation.

The petitioners argued that the complaint and subsequent FIR were baseless, motivated, and intended to harass them. They alleged that Nagaraj was acting out of personal vendetta, claiming that his daughter had applied to join the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy in 2020 but was not selected after the evaluation process.