

Telangana POLYCET results out, girls outdo boys

Hyderabad: The Telangana Polytechnic Common Entrance Test (TG POLYCET) 2025 results were declared on Saturday with 81.88 percent and 84.33 percent students qualifying in the MPC and MBIPC streams respectively. Results are available on the website <https://www.polycet.sbtet.telangana.gov.in>. A total of 98858 candidates appeared and 80949 in MPC and 83364 MBIPC streams have qualified. Once again girls outperform boys in results. As many as 45773 girls took the tests and 85.26 percent in MPC and 88.54 percent in MBIPC streams qualified whereas 53085 boys recorded a qualifying percentage of 78.97 percent in MPC and 80.69 percent MBIPC stream.

The Technical Education department will shortly announce the admission counselling schedule. The TG POLYCET is conducted for admissions to engineering and non-engineering diplomas offered by the SBTET and diplomas in Agriculture, Veterinary and Horticulture Universities.

LIC earns Guinness World Record for selling highest life insurance policies in 24 hours



GNS News Agency, May 24

New Delhi: Life Insurance Corporation of India on Saturday said it has earned a Guinness World Record title for most life insurance policies sold in 24 hours. This historic achievement, verified by Guinness World Records, recognises the extraordinary performance of the

corporation's dedicated agency network on January 20, 2025, LIC said in a statement. On January 20, a total of 4,52,839 agents of LIC successfully completed and issued an astounding 5,88,107 life insurance policies across India, it noted. This monumental effort established a new global benchmark for agent productivity in the life insurance industry within 24 hours, it said. "It is a powerful validation of the relentless dedication, skill, and tireless work ethic of our agents.

This achievement reflects our deep commitment towards our mission to provide vital financial protection to our customers and their families," the statement said. The record attempt was the culmination of an initiative by LIC MD and CEO Siddhartha Mohanty, appealing to every agent to complete at least one policy on 'Mad Million Day' on January 20, 2025. Speaking on the occasion, Mohanty thanked all customers, agents and employees for making 'Mad Million Day' historic.

BRS working president KT Rama Rao emphasises internal democracy, urges unity in party forums

GNS News Agency, May 24

Hyderabad: Reaffirming the Bharat Rashtira Samithi's (BRS) commitment to internal democracy, its working president K T Rama Rao stated on Saturday that the party fostered an environment where every member, regardless of position, is free to share suggestions and ideas with the leadership. At a press conference at Telangana Bhavan, he emphasised that while open dialogue is encouraged, internal issues should be addressed within party forums to maintain unity and discipline.

"BRS is a democratic organisation imbued with the spirit of internal democracy. Anyone can share suggestions with the party chief, orally or in writing, regardless of their role," Rama Rao said. He highlighted that the party provides ample opportunities for workers, functionaries, and office bearers to engage with the leadership, including himself, to voice their views and concerns. Reflecting on efforts to regroup after the 2023 Telangana Assembly election defeat, Rama Rao noted that a comprehensive brainstorming session was held before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "We conducted constituency-wise brainstorming sessions over



two weeks, involving thousands of party workers and functionaries. Some spoke at length, others shared suggestions, and many wrote to the leadership with ideas on moving forward," he said. He stressed the party's inclusive approach to rebuilding but urged that internal matters remain within party forums. "We have designated forums and office bearers for this purpose. Internal issues should stay internal, regardless of one's role in the party," he added.

Uttam Kumar Reddy criticises shift from Pranahita-Chevella to Medigadda



GNS News Agency, May 24

Hyderabad: Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy has reiterated that the Pranahita-Chevella project would have been a more viable option compared to the Medigadda barrage to utilise Godavari water. Addressing a press conference on Friday, he emphasised that the Central Water Com-

mission had confirmed the availability of 160 TMC at Thummidihatti, making Pranahita-Chevella a preferable choice.

Reddy alleged that the project was shifted to Medigadda for political reasons, aiming to deny credit to the Congress. He questioned the accountability in case of issues with the barrage, particularly if 15-16 TMC were stored at Medigadda, as suggested by BRS leaders. He warned that 44 villages along the Godavari banks, Bhadrachalam town and the Sammakka-Sarakka barrage could face risk if the barrage was impounded to its gross storage capacity. The Minister said that action would be initiated against those responsible for structural issues with the KLIS barrages based on the findings of the Judicial Commission, NDSA investigation, and Vigilance Commission. He added that if BRS leaders claim structural issues were caused by an explosion, they should present their case before the commission.

Controversy rocks Miss World pageant in Hyderabad, as Miss England walks out saying she was 'made to feel like a prostitute'

GNS News Agency, May 24

Hyderabad: One controversy after another continues to mar the Miss World 2025 beauty pageant, currently being held in Hyderabad. What the Congress government touted as a prestigious jewel in Hyderabad's vibrant crown has now turned into a major embarrassment for Telangana and the country.

Hyderabad: Miss England Milla Magee quits Miss World 2025, cites exploitation, moral conflict. Following the uproar over local women being made to wash the feet of beauty pageant contestants during their visit to the iconic Ramappa Temple, a more serious controversy is brewing. Miss England, Milla Magee, has reportedly fled the competition, citing "superficial treatment and lack of respect toward contestants." In an interview with The Sun, reigning Miss England Milla Magee levelled serious allegations against the pageant organisers, stating that she "felt like a prostitute" and was "farmed out for entertainment."

Branding the contest "outdated," she added that some of the 109 finalists were given a dressing down by a female official for being "boring" after an event. The point was to do good, promote change, and make a difference. But it became obvious that just wasn't going to happen," Milla told The Sun. Revealing disturbing details, Milla said she realised she was only there to be ogled. She claimed contestants



were instructed to "entertain middle-aged men as a thank you for the money they put into the show." "There were two girls at each table of six guests.

Supreme Court grants stay on Rs 5,712-cr GST notice sent to First Games: Paytm

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has granted a stay on a Rs 5,712-crore GST notice sent to fintech firm One97 Communications-owned real money gaming platform First Games, a regulatory filing said on Saturday.

The Directorate General of GST Intelligence, New Delhi, had issued a show cause notice (SCN) to First Games in April. "We hereby inform you that First Games has informed us on May 24, 2025 at 10:44 am (IST) that in the writ petition ... filed by First Games challenging the said SCN, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has on May 23, 2025 stayed the proceedings of the SCN," the regulatory filing said.

Three southern CMs skip PM-chaired NITI Ayog meet; Stalin, Revanth, Naidu in attendance



GNS News Agency, May 24

Three southern Chief Ministers, including from NDA-ruled Puducherry skipped the NITI Ayog's Governing Council meeting in New Delhi that was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday. Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana-- N Chandrababu Naidu, M K Stalin and A Revanth Reddy, were scheduled to attend the meeting and put forth their views before the council on respective issues. While the Chief Minister of Congress-ruled Karnataka, Siddaramaiah, was busy with "prior engagement" in the state and sent his speech to be read out in the council, Marxist veteran and Kerala CM, Pinarayi Vijayan deputed his cabinet colleague K N Balagopal on his behalf. Last year also, Mr. Vijayan had not attended a Niti Aayog meeting of CMs in Delhi and had sent Balagopal.

In Bengaluru, a source close to Mr. Siddaramaiah said, "The Chief Minister is not boycotting the meeting, but he

has a prior engagement in Mysuru". Similarly, Puducherry chief minister N Rangasamy, who heads the AINRC-led NDA coalition in the union territory, also skipped the event. It was not clear immediately whether the speech of the chief minister would be read out at the meeting. Incidentally, Mr. Stalin had last attended the 2021 governing council meeting. With the opposition AIADMK questioning his motive behind attending today's meeting, he had days ago asserted he would be in the national capital to voice the demand for "fair financial right of Tamil Nadu." He had said: "I will be firm on the ideology! I will get funds for Tamil Nadu through struggle." AIADMK top leader Edappadi K Palaniswami had alleged Mr. Stalin's Delhi visit was for the sake of family's benefit. Niti Aayog's 10th Governing Council meeting, chaired by PM Modi, has the theme 'Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047'. The council, the apex body of Niti Aayog, includes all state CMs, lieutenant governors of Union Territories, and several Union ministers. Prime Minister Modi is the chairman of Niti Aayog.

Politics over patriotism: Congress campaign against India's heroes



GNS News Agency, May 24

In a dangerous descent into political opportunism, the Congress and its allies in the INDIA bloc have crossed a red line—mocking India's military triumph in Operation Sindoor and parroting enemy propaganda. This isn't dissent; it's disinformation warfare waged from within. As soldiers risk lives to dismantle terror, the opposition dismantles truth, morale, and unity. Their refusal to acknowledge India's strategic victories is not just shameful—it's treacherous. When lies become the only currency left, even national security becomes fair game. This piece exposes the toxic ecosystem where leadership is absent, fakery is rampant,

and the only war the opposition wants to win is against India's own pride. The time has come to call their bluff—loud and clear. There was once a time when war was above politics, when the firing of bullets for national security wasn't met with slander from within. That era is gone. Today, the Congress and its INDIA bloc allies have crossed a dangerous line—repeating Pakistan's talking points in their desperate bid for political relevance. Operation Sindoor was a precise, bold strike that dismantled terror camps and propaganda hubs across the border. It should have been a moment of national pride. Instead, the Congress chose to spin lies, malign the armed forces, and slander the government—not in dissent, but in disinformation.

As the operation was still underway, Congress's propaganda machine roared into life. Instead of standing with the soldiers, they chose mockery over respect, and sabotage over solidarity. Jairam Ramesh dismissed PM Modi's address as "hollow film dialogues" and bizarrely invoked Donald Trump's outdated claims about US involvement. This, despite categorical denials from the Prime Minister, the External Affairs Minister, and the DGMO, all of whom affirmed that Operation Sindoor was entirely an Indian effort. Even Trump retracted his claims. But Congress? Stuck in a colonial mindset, it trusts foreign powers over its own institutions. It's pathetic—and dangerous.

Government ratifies employees' provident fund interest rate at 8.25% for FY25

GNS News Agency, May 24

The government has ratified the rate of interest on employees' provident fund at 8.25% for FY25, enabling the retirement fund body EPFO to deposit the annual interest accumulation in the post-retirement funds of over 7 crore subscribers. EPFO, on February 28, had decided to retain the interest rate of 8.25% on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for the financial year 2024-25, equal to the rate provided in the preceding fiscal. The approved rate of interest for 2024-25 was sent for concurrence of the Ministry of Finance. "The Ministry of Finance has given concurrence to an 8.25% rate of interest on the EPF for the 2024-25 fiscal year, and the Labour Ministry sent a communication regarding this to the EPFO on Thursday (May 22, 2025)," a labour ministry official told PTI.

Now the interest amount as per the rate ratified for FY25 will be credited into the accounts of over seven crore subscribers of EPFO. The decision on interest rate was taken at the 237th meeting of the Central Board of Trustees of the EPFO, chaired by Union Minister for Labour & Employment Mansukh Mandaviya in New Delhi on February 28. Compared to many fixed-income instruments, EPF offers relatively higher and stable returns, ensuring steady growth on post-retirement savings. In February 2024, the EPFO had increased the interest rate marginally to 8.25% for 2023-24, from 8.15% in 2022-23. In March 2022, EPFO

had lowered the interest on EPF for 2021-22 to an over four-decade low of 8.1%, from 8.5% in 2020-21. The 8.10% rate of interest on EPF for 2020-21 was the lowest since 1977-78, when it stood at 8%.

Godavari water diversion: Harish Rao questions State's inaction

Hyderabad: Accusing the Congress government in the state and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy of failing to protect Telangana's water rights, BRS leader and former Minister T Harish Rao pointed out that the moves of the AP government to divert Godavari river water through the controversial Banakacharla project would prove costly for the state. Taking to social media platform X, he criticized the Telangana government for its inaction and accused the BJP government at the Centre of favoring Andhra Pradesh and undermining Telangana's interests.

Rao highlighted that Andhra Pradesh's proposed Godavari-Banakacharla link project, estimated to cost Rs. 80,000 crore, was aimed to divert over 200 TMC of Godavari water without necessary approvals from the Godavari River Management Board (GRMB) or the CWC.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

SC ruling can help restore credibility of NEET-PG exams

The rising popularity of a career in the highly lucrative IT sector notwithstanding, thousands of Indians dream of making a name in the world of medicine, across disciplines. Although many embark on a career soon after getting through MBBS or BDS, an umpteen number of them aspire to advance their prospects by opting for post-graduation courses like MD and MS.

The first step towards this goal is coming through the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Postgraduate) or more popularly known as NEET (PG) entrance examination, under the aegis of the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) for both government and private medical colleges. On the face of it, this looks like a sound entry level eligibility criterion but when one looks at it from deep inside, the most glaring aspect, disjuncting at that, is the manner this so-called transparent process is manipulated by vested interests, out to make a killing.

It goes without saying that like with many government departments, even the education system is highly corrupt, especially the admission process. Alas, this applies even to the high-profile NEET (PG), which has been ridden with controversies one too many.

It is a rather sorry state-of-affairs that every year hundreds of hopefuls stare at an uncertain future after appearing for the test and have to rest content with an MBBS or BDS having failed to make the PG cut. The villain of the piece is the dreaded word 'seat-blocking', which is a 'facility' that deprives several deserving students an admission, while those from the elite sections benefit from this counselling manipulation.

Indus Waters Treaty: What the law says

GNS News Agency, May 24

On April 23, 2025, India announced that it will hold the Indus Waters Treaty, 1960 (IWT) in "abeyance" until Pakistan gives up promoting cross-border terrorism. This was in response to the gruesome terror attack in Pahalgam in which 26 people, mostly terrorists, were killed a day earlier. The IWT is a treaty signed by India and Pakistan to share the waters of the Indus and its tributaries. According to Article II of the treaty, the Eastern rivers (Sutlej, Beas and Ravi) shall be available for the unrestricted use of India, while according to Article III, the Western rivers (Indus, Chenab and Jhelum) shall be available to Pakistan and India is obligated to let them flow. It is pertinent to note that India has used the word "Abeyance". This has caused concern and raised several questions.

The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, (VCLT) does not apply to IWT as India is not a signatory while Pakistan has signed but not ratified it. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in various judgements held that VCLT is the codification of Customary International Law and the same is not subsumed into treaty law once a treaty has been signed but exists parallelly as held by the ICJ in Nicaragua v. United States. In the North Sea Continental Shelf cases, the ICJ held that non-parties to the VCLT should also follow it. If argued that the IWT precedes the VCLT, the ICJ held that it still applies in the form of Customary International Law even if treaties have been signed preceding the VCLT, which is a source of law under Article 38 of the ICJ statute.

To make a state liable for the actions of a group of persons for wrongful acts under state responsibility, according to the ICJ in Nicaragua v. United States, it must be proved that they were acting under the directions of that state and there must be effective control proven. Though not easy to prove in this case, India can be confident that the same will be done by its government. Coming to the word "abeyance", it is pertinent that it has been done instead of "suspension", "termination" or "withdrawal". There is no legal backing for the unilateral suspension in the IWT. The only manner in which the treaty can be terminated is under Article XII, where a new treaty may be negotiated. The word "abeyance" does not have legal backing as such neither in the IWT nor in the VCLT. According to the Black's Law Dictionary, "abeyance means, "temporary inactivity; suspension". It may be argued that "abeyance" is being used in the sense of "suspension". For the same to be done unilaterally, the VCLT provides for it under exceptional circumstances under Articles 60 (Material Breach), 61 (Impossibility of Performance) and 62 (Fundamental Change in Circumstances). In the instant case, it may be argued that unilateral withdrawal is being done under a fundamental change of circumstances. The question arises if cross-border terrorism constitutes a fundamental change in circumstances. Pakistan may argue that the change that occurred must be in direct relation to the treaty and the Indus Waters, whereas we may argue that the fundamental change is due to an incessant threat to our national security which has disturbed the notion of cooperation, the basis for the IWT, VCLT or any treaty. It must be noted that the ICJ in the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project case held that political changes do not constitute the basis for the withdrawal of obligations from the treaty. Under the Draft Articles of the International Law Commission (ILC) on State Responsibility, countermeasures are provided. According to Malcolm Shaw, a lawful measure taken by a state against another's wrongful act is known as a countermeasure. It may be argued that abeyance is a form of countermeasure against the recent terror attack.

According to the ILC Commentary on the Draft Articles, the countermeasures taken should be directly connected to the wrongful act done. The direct connection between the terror act and the suspension of the treaty falls in the grey area. According to Judge Stephen M Schwebel in the Gabčíkovo case, the ILC's works may influence the ICJ. In the same case, the ICJ held that violation of general international law in other cases may justify taking countermeasures but not termination of the treaty. Proportionality is mentioned under Article 51 of the Draft Articles. A pertinent question is raised, whether stoppage of water is proportional to the terror act? Pakistan is largely an agricultural economy and is highly dependent on Indus waters. Stoppage of water may affect it during the sowing season. As reservoirs in India cannot hold large quantities of water for long, eventually water would necessarily be left to flow which may cause flooding, affecting the environment adversely in Pakistan. In the Nuclear Weapons case, the ICJ held that the protection of the environment is an obligation of the States.

OPPO Launches New A5x 5G 4+128GB Variant –Featuring Flagship Design, 6000mAh Battery, and Military-Grade Durability



Hyderabad:OPPO India strengthens its commitment to durable, dependable smartphones with the launch of the OPPO A5x 5G—bringing trusted performance and robust build quality to the A Series. Engineered for everyday resilience, the A5x 5G inherits OPPO's legacy of durable design with IP 65 rating, offering enhanced water resistance and improved protection against everyday dust exposure, making it ideal for unpredictable environments. Coupled with a sturdy frame that stands up to daily wear and tear, a long-lasting battery, immersive display, and a sleek yet tough exterior, the A5x 5G redefines value in its category. This launch further reinforces OPPO's vision of democratizing durability, style, and performance for a wider set of consumers across India.

Priced at INR 13,999 for the 4GB+128GB variant, the OPPO A5x 5G will be available from 25th May 2025 onwards across Amazon, Flipkart, OPPO Store, and main-

line retail outlets, in two colour options – Midnight Blue and Laser White. Customers can enjoy ?1000 instant cashback and 3 months of no-cost EMI from SBI Card, IDFC FIRST Bank, Bank of Baroda, Federal Bank, and DBS Bank—making this 5G powerhouse even more accessible. All basic paper-finance offers will also be available with all leading financiers, ensuring flexible and convenient purchase options for a wider range of consumers. The OPPO A5x 5G is designed to deliver a flagship-inspired experience featuring a premium textured deco module, high-strength alloy frame, and IP65-rated water and dust resistance for all-round durability. Built for resilience, its 360° Armour Body is backed by reinforced glass and military-grade shock resistance. Powering users through the day is a massive 6,000mAh battery with 45W fast charging and 5-year battery health assurance. Entertainment and multitasking run smoothly thanks to the MediaTek Dimensity 6300 processor, 120Hz ultra-bright display, and 36-month fluency certification. The camera system includes a 32MP AI-powered rear sensor with features like Dual-View Video and AI-enhanced imaging tools. With Trinity Engine and advanced AI capabilities like AI Eraser 2.0, Reflection Remover, and Smart Image Matting 2.0, the A5x 5G brings flagship-level intelligence and convenience to everyday life.

Flagship Elegance Meets Rugged Reliability

The OPPO A5x 5G redefines everyday durability with a flagship-inspired design that blends aesthetic finesse and robust engineering. With a sleek profile measuring 165.71mm in length, 76.24mm in width, and just 7.99mm in thickness, it weighs around 194g—offering a comfortable in-hand feel without compromising on toughness. Drawing inspiration from premium devices, its textured deco module and simulated anodised mid-frame coating reflect refined craftsmanship. The device is available in two stunning finishes: Midnight Blue, reminiscent of moonlight shimmering on a tranquil lake, and Laser White, a futuristic fusion of laser spectra and pristine elegance. Advanced CNC engraving and UV texture transfer technologies enhance its surface with gloss-matte contrasts for a sophisticated visual appeal.

Let's all work together for TUDA's development - Chairman C. Divakar



“May 24, Indian Chronicle Rayalaseema coordinator” Tirupati Urban Development Authority (TUDA) Chairman C. Divakar called upon officials to work unitedly for the development of TUDA. On Saturday morning, an introductory meeting was held with officials from all departments, presided over by TUDA Vice Chairman N. Mourya. Vice Chairman N. Mourya explained the development works within TUDA's jurisdiction and the duties of officials in various departments. “On this occasion, the Chairman stated that officials from all departments within TUDA should coordinate and cooperate for development. He emphasized that officials should work carefully to ensure all develop-

ment works and layout preparations within TUDA are transparent. He also stressed the need to take appropriate measures to prevent any misuse of TUDA funds. The Chairman urged everyone to work in a way that makes the development happening in TUDA an ideal for other organizations. He also advised taking due precautions in the newly planned layouts. He assured officials and staff that he would always be available to them and encouraged everyone to perform their duties with dedication. “The meeting was attended by Secretary Dr. Srikanth, Superintendent Engineer Krishnareddy, E.E. Ravindra, Planning Officer Devikumari, Horticulture Officer Malathi, and officials and staff from various departments.

Congress Party Holds Press Meet in Eklaspur,



Manthani Mandal“Senior Leaders Condemn Derogatory Remarks Against Minister Sridhar Babu.”“PS Ashokan“Indian Chronicle“Manthani May,24“Eklaspur, Manthani Mandal – The Congress Party convened a high-profile press conference at Eklaspur village, strongly denouncing the recent derogatory remarks made by Peddapalli MP Gaddam Vamsikrishna against Telangana Minister for IT, Industries, and Legislative Affairs, Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu.”“Addressing the media, SC Cell Mandal Vice President Arla Narayana and Youth Congress President Radharapuu Nithish expressed serious concern over the MP's divisive rhetoric and accused him of engaging in anti-party activities. They condemned his public outbursts targeting a senior minister, describing them as ill-conceived, disrespectful, and detrimental to party unity.”“The leaders reminded the MP that his electoral success, secured with a resounding majority of 50,000 votes, was possible only due to the unwavering support of the constituents of Manthani, particularly the Dalit community who stood united

behind his candidature. They emphasized that such ingratitude towards the electorate and senior leadership is unacceptable.”“They further criticized the MP for airing internal party matters in the public domain, asserting that such actions severely undermine the party's credibility and internal cohesion. The use of paid actors in press conferences and the orchestration of staged protests, they said, is unbecoming of a public representative and tarnishes the image of the Congress Party.”“

The leaders issued a stern appeal to the MP to cease his baseless criticisms of Minister Sridhar Babu and to realign himself with the party's core principles and discipline.”“The press meet witnessed the participation of several prominent Congress leaders, including INTUC National Secretary Peravena Lingayya Yadav, SC Cell Division President Manthani Satyam, Village Congress President Boddur Srinivas, former Ward Member Nalla Rajashekar, senior Congress leader Manthani Srinivas, Youth Congress leader Budida Ranjith, among others.

Discontent brews in Congress as BRS turncoats face resistance



GNS News Agency, May 24

Komaram Bheem Asifabad: Legislators and leaders who defected from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) to the Congress continue to face challenges, with differences flaring between them and loyal Congress members across various constituencies.

Sirpur's former MLA Koneru Konappa, who joined the Congress during the 2024 parliamentary elections, alleged that the internal situation in the party was "bad and unbearable." In a video now going viral on social media, Konappa is seen addressing his followers. "After we joined the Congress, the party's vote share increased from 8,000 to 63,000 in the constituency, yet there was no value for us," he said. He further claimed that despite their service to the party, the constituency was not receiving adequate support from the government. There was no respect shown to leaders and no allocation of funds, he reportedly stated.

"Groups are being created in the party and a few leaders are abusing us. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had assured to sanction funds for Koutala bridge works, but they have not been released to date," Konappa said, according to reports.

Owaisi arrives in Gulf and Shinde departs: Operation Sindoor reachout

GNS News Agency, May 24

Dubai: In a significant diplomatic outreach following Operation Sindoor, the central government has been reaching out to prominent countries to present India's stance on the operation. An all-party parliamentary delegation arrived in Bahrain on Saturday. The delegation led by BJP MP Bajajant Jay Panda that included Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi among others was received by Indian Ambassador Vinod K. Jacob. A total of seven delegations with 51 political leaders visiting different parts of the world. Asaduddin Owaisi is the lone parliamentarian from Telangana among them.

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, from Jharkhand, known for his controversial comments on Muslims was also in the delegation along with Owaisi that will also visit Saudi Arabia, birthplace of Islam, Kuwait and Algeria. Dubey had earlier commented that he and Owaisi both in the same delegation "is the beauty of democracy". Former J&K Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and former secretary of external affairs ministry Harsh Vardhan Shringla are other notables in the delegation along with Owaisi. The delegation will travel to Kuwait and from it will visit Saudi Arabia on 27th and leave for Algeria on 30th. Also, another delegation led by Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Eknath Shinde, on Saturday wrapped up its visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where it met top officials to explain India's stance. BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj and Muslim League MP E.T. Mohammed Basheer among others included.

Supreme Court rules that CAPF officers to be 'organised services' for all purposes

GNS News Agency, May 24

The Supreme Court on Friday (May 23, 2025) ruled that Group A officers of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) from batches dating back to 1986 are recognised as "Organised Services" for "all purposes". A Bench of Justice A.S. Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan said in a judgment that the deputation posts of Indian Police Service (IPS) officers in the Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) or up to the rank of Inspector General (IG) in CAPFs should be "progressively reduced over a period of time, say within an outer limit of two years". It was Justice Oka's last day in office.

Friday's (May 23, 2025) judgment paves the way for service rules or recruitment rules to be amended, allowing all connected benefits of Organised Group A Services (OGAS) to CAPFs and cadre review within six months.

Presently, 20% of posts in the rank of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) and 50% of posts in the rank of Inspector General (IG) in CAPFs are reserved for IPS officers. The decision is likely to benefit around 13,000 CAPF officers. A CAPF official said that presently, an officer who joins as Assistant Commandant (AC) takes 25 years to be promoted as a Commandant, whereas he or she should attain the seniority in 13 years. A DIG rank official said that he reached the position after 31 years in service, against the 21-year required tenure.

The CAPFs comprise the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). The issue was earlier examined by the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court in 2015 and 2019, respectively, when it was decided that CAPFs come in the category of organised services such as the Indian Foreign Service and the India Revenue Service (IRS), among others. In 2021, Group A officers of the CAPFs approached the apex court again, seeking Non Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU), cadre review and restructuring and amendment of recruitment rules to eliminate IPS deputation and allow internal promotions up to SAG. The Court said that the "core of the grievances of the appellants as it appears, are non-recognition as OGAS, non-grant of NFFU and service stagnation". In 2006, as a part of the Sixth Central Pay Commission's recommendations, the concept of NFFU was introduced to address stagnation among Group A service officers. So, in case of a lack of vacancies, if an officer of an organised service is promoted, the others of that batch will also get financial upgradation even if they are not promoted.

We regularly organize blood donation camps for the welfare of thalassemia and sickle cell anemia patients



““““V. Siva Naik, first-class judicial magistrate, Bhadrachalam”“““Vikranth Kumar Singh, Assistant Superintendent of Police”““““Ranjith Naik Bhukya, Bhadrachalam, May 24 (Indian Chronicle)”“““On Saturday, a blood donation camp was jointly inaugurated by Bhadrachalam First Class Judicial Magistrate Siva Naik and Bhadrachalam Assistant Superintendent of Police Vikranth Kumar Singh at the Indian Red Cross Society on Kunavaram Road in Bhadrachalam town. The camp was organized under the aegis of the Police Department. Both V. Siva Naik and Vikranth Kumar Singh donated blood at this camp, and they were commended by Red Cross members and advocates. On this occasion, V. Siva Naik stated that the blood donation camp was being organized because thalas-



semia and sickle cell anemia are prevalent in the Bhadrachalam division. He added that the Judicial Department would continue to support and organize blood donation camps regularly in the future.Subsequently, Vikranth Kumar Singh mentioned that thalassemia and sickle cell anemia are congenital diseases, and patients require blood transfusions every 30 days. He emphasized that one blood donation can save three lives and that regular blood donation camps would be organized in the future with the cooperation of the Police Department. He urged youth and urban residents to participate voluntarily. Furthermore, Assistant Superintendent of Police Vikranth Kumar Singh praised the excellent services being rendered by the Indian Red Cross Society in the agency area.On this occasion, IRCS District Coordinator Dr. S.L. Kantharao thanked District Collector Sri Jitesh V. Patil for his full support in applying the Arogyasri scheme to the Indian Red Cross Society Blood Center for thalassemia and sickle cell anemia patients. He explained that this would provide patients with free medicines worth ₹4,000, transportation, and nutritious food. Those who participated in the program included Indian Red Cross Society officials Dr. S.L. Kantharao, G. Rajareddy, Y. Suryanarayana, Dr. A.S.R. Chandra Prasad, Dr. Ramakrishna, advocate Madireddy Ramana Rao, Tippana Siddulu, Bar Association President Kota Devadanam, A. Jagadeesh, Pallanti Desappa, G.S. Shankar Rao, B. Venkatareddy, Dr. Y. Bhanu Prasad, Aleem Khan, B.V. Ramana Reddy, Adinarayana, advocates, Indian Red Cross Society members, police personnel, and students from Maruti Nursing College.

Jitesh V. Patil, the collector, hopes to advance biochar in the district.



““““Ranjith Naik Bhukya, Bhadrachalam, May 24 (Indian Chronicle)”“““Collector Jitesh V. Patil stated that biochar is “charcoal with a permanent carbon reserve formed by burning dried plants and useless tree branches with low oxygen (air).”He is prioritizing biochar production to support natural farming and environmental protection. In this direction, he personally conducted the very first experimental demonstration on Saturday, right next to the Collectorate camp office.First, he took an empty drum and made holes in its bottom for air to enter. He placed the drum between three cement rings, put dried leaves at the bottom, and ignited them. Dried, unusable plant parts were then placed in the upper section, and the drum was covered with a lid. By placing leaves and husks between the rings and igniting them, the smoke formed inside was minimized. The collector personally demonstrated that if the plants burned in low oxygen are cooled with water before turning into ash, the resulting charcoal is called biochar. He mentioned that



using this as a powder in crop fields yields good results, and adding cow urine to it would further enhance the benefits.”“““What is biochar? In the Collector’s Words...”“““Biochar is an eco-friendly material produced by burning organic matter like crop residue, dried plants, and tree branches in low-oxygen conditions. It permanently stores carbon and has properties that enhance soil health.”““The collector explained the uses of biochar as follows:“““He stated that biochar offers benefits such as increasing organic matter in the soil, improving water retention capacity, reducing the need for fertilizers, permanently storing carbon to mitigate adverse climate change effects, and stabilizing the soil.”“Resources such as plant waste after harvest and tree parts generated from village clean-up operations are abundantly available. Utilizing these to set up small biochar units at the village level would not only be financially beneficial for farmers but also pave the way for self-employment. Collector Jitesh V. Patil stated that this stands as the best way to promote natural farming.

It is ok to go to India to build its plants, but Apple is not going to sell in US without tariffs: President Trump

GNS News Agency, May 24

New York/Washington: US President Donald Trump has said it is ok for Apple to go to India to build its plants, but then the tech company will not be able to sell its products in America without tariffs.

Trump’s remarks came as he signed multiple executive orders in the Oval Office to boost US nuclear power. “...But I had an understanding with Tim (Cook) that he wouldn’t be doing this. He said he’s going to India to build plants. I said, ‘That’s okay to go to India, but you’re not going to sell into here without tariffs.’ And that’s the way it is,” Trump said on Friday.”We’re talking about the iPhone. If they’re going to sell it in America, I want it to be built in the United States,” he said. Early on Friday, Trump said in a social media post that he expects Apple iPhones that will be sold in the US to be manufactured in America and “not India, or anyplace else”, threatening to put a 25 per cent tariff on the tech company’s products if it does not comply.”I have long ago informed Tim Cook of Apple that I expect their iPhones that will be sold in the United States of America will be manufactured and built in the United States, not India, or anyplace else. If that is not the case, a Tariff of at least 25% must be paid by Apple to the US. Thank you for your attention to this matter!” Trump said.

Just last week, Trump had said in Doha during his visit to the Middle East that he had told the Apple CEO to not build in India and instead build its manufacturing capacity in the US.”We have Apple, as you know, that’s coming in, and I had a little problem with Tim Cook yesterday,” Trump had said in Doha in remarks to top executives.”I said to him, ‘Tim, you’re my friend. I treated you very good. You’re coming here with USD 500 billion, but now I hear you’re building all over India. I don’t want you building in India. You can build in India if you want to take care of India because India is the highest, one of the highest-tariff nations in the world. It’s very hard to sell into India. And they’ve



(India) offered us a deal where, basically, they’re willing to literally charge us no tariff,” he had said.Earlier this month, Cook had said in a Q2 2025 Earnings Conference call that the existing tariffs that apply to Apple today are based on the product’s country of origin.”For the June quarter, we do expect the majority of iPhones sold in the US will have India as their country of origin and Vietnam to be the country of origin for almost all iPad, Mac, Apple Watch, and AirPods products sold in the US,” Cook had said.On Trump calling for Apple to shift iPhone production from India to the US, research firm Counterpoint Research Research Director Tarun Pathak had said last week that “this is a familiar Trump tactic: He wants to push Apple to localise more and build a supply chain in the US, which is not going to happen overnight.Making in the US will also be much more expensive than assembling iPhones in India.” Counterpoint Research Vice President Neil Shah said that Apple has been doing a lot of groundwork in India, which has helped it successfully manage some of the US iPhone demand from its India production facilities.”In terms of capacity, India has enough to potentially meet all US iPhone demand in the future, but the ecosystem needs to be ramped up.

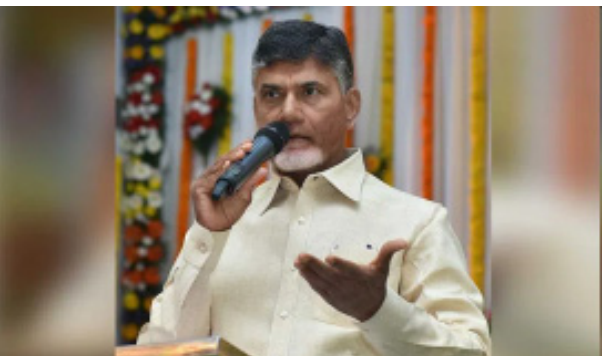
Andhra Pradesh CM Naidu proposes 3 sub-groups of states to fast-track Viksit Bharat vision by 2047

GNS News Agency, May 24

New Delhi: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday proposed the formation of three sub-groups of State governments to accelerate progress towards the Viksit Bharat vision by 2047, asserting that his state is committed to contributing significantly to this national aspiration.Speaking at the 10th Niti Aayog Governing Council Meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Naidu praised India’s remarkable economic transformation over the past decade, rising from the world’s 10th to 4th largest economy and being on track to become the third.

The Telugu Desam Party chief acknowledged transformative reforms, including Digital India, GST, Startup India, PM Gati Shakti, and Jal Jeevan Mission, which he said have redefined India’s development landscape.Emphasising India’s strengthened global stature, exemplified by Operation Sindoor, Naidu noted that having the right leadership at the right time has been crucial in steering the nation toward its ambitious goals, an official statement said.Naidu proposed three focused sub-groups of States, in collaboration with the Union government and Niti Aayog, to fast-track progress towards Viksit Bharat. The first sub-group on GDP growth would aim to boost investments, manufacturing, exports, and job creation, supported by central viability gap funding for PPP projects.The second sub-group on population management would help India leverage its demographic advantage while preparing for future challenges like ageing and low fertility.

The third sub-group would focus on technology-driven governance, utilising AI, quantum computing, drones, and digital platforms for real-time and citizen-centric administration.Naidu also highlighted that Andhra Pradesh’s Swarna Andhra @2047 vision stands as “a bold, inclusive roadmap integrating technology, welfare, and grassroots empowerment”.”The State is committed to contributing significantly to the national aspiration of Viksit Bharat @2047 (and) a USD 30 trillion economy marked by high-quality infrastructure, equitable development, and empowered citizens.” According to the State government, the Chief Minister’s presentation was well-received, with the Prime Minister lauding “Andhra Pradesh’s growth blueprint”.Modi said that “all states should examine and study the reforms



of Andhra Pradesh” and that there could be a “lot of inputs in the blueprint for growth projected by CM Naidu for other states also”, according to the statement.Under its Swarna Andhra @2047 vision, the state aims to achieve Zero Poverty by 2029 through the innovative P4 model, which unites government, private sector, and citizen efforts to support vulnerable families and promote economic upliftment.The Family Benefit Management System digitally tracks welfare benefits at the household level, ensuring transparency and inclusion. The state’s “One Family, One Entrepreneur” initiative fosters entrepreneurship and skill development to boost grassroots employment.Driving technology-led growth, Andhra Pradesh has established specialised hubs, including Quantum Valley in Amaravati, Drone City in Orvakal, and biomedical manufacturing in Visakhapatnam. AI-powered governance and the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub support startups and job creation.

Aligned with the Prime Minister’s Mission Circular Economy, the State is advancing sustainable waste management and balanced regional growth through model economic zones.”Rooted in family-centric governance, innovation, digital infrastructure, and sustainability, the Swarna Andhra @2047 vision offers a scalable, inclusive model for national development,” Naidu added.As India approaches its centenary of Independence, the Chief Minister reaffirmed Andhra Pradesh’s commitment to lead by example, showcasing how states can drive national transformation through strong, coordinated leadership at State and Union levels.

Plea in Madhya Pradesh HC against news outlets over ‘communally inciting coverage’ of Bhopal rape and blackmail case

A petition has been filed in the Madhya Pradesh High Court against the State Government and two Hindi dailies for allegedly running a “communally inciting coverage” and using words like “love jihad” to defame the Muslim community while reporting on a recently-exposed Bhopal rape and blackmail scandal involving multiple college going women. The writ petition, seen by The Hindu, seeks criminal case against the editors of the two newspapers and directions for the government take preventive measures against divisive and communal coverage of issues by the media.

The petition was filed on May 19 by a Bhopal resident of the Muslim community, who wishes to remain anonymous, his lawyer Advocate Deepak Bundeale said. Mr. Bundeale said that the court has tentatively listed the case for June 19 after the holidaysThe matter pertains to multiple sexual assault and blackmail cases lodged by six girl students of a private college over the past one month. The police have so far arrested five men, Including the prime accused Farhan, a former student of the same college, for allegedly befriending them with fake identities, sexually assaulting them and recording their private videos to blackmail them into introducing their friends to more men. Several local media outlets also quoted police sources to claim that the accused were involved in forced religious conversions of the survivors. A National Commission for Women probe panel, that visited Bhopal earlier this month, also claimed in its findings that the accused may be linked with a “drug smuggling or organised criminal network”, as per some reports.

The petitioner had also filed a complaint at Bhopal’s Aishbagh police station on April 30 and alleges that no action was taken in the matter. “The State Government and the Police have been made Martyr in the plea because they failed to take any timely action in the matter. We have at-



tached a copy of the police complaint with the plea,” Mr. Bundeale said. The petition cites multiple news articles and headlines by the two outlets accusing them to be communally inciting in nature.”Through the news published and broadcast by the said newspapers, an attempt is being made to hold all Muslims responsible for the rape and porn incident with the students of a Bhopal-based private college, instead of limiting it to the accused,” the petition reads, while saying that the matter should be seen as a strictly criminal case and the accused should be tried as per law. “But the two newspapers published from Bhopal are continuously using words like love jihad in the context of crime, which neither has any legal definition nor is contained in any law till date, and all Muslims are being targeted for the said crime. Whereas the word love jihad is not mentioned in the Quran,” the plea further argues, accusing the publications of trying to harm the nation’s sovereignty and spread hatred.

“They are playing with the religious beliefs of the applicant, which is a violation of Article 14, Article 15, Article 19, Article 21 and 25 of the Fundamental Rights granted to the petitioner by the Constitution of India,” it claims.

To win over foreign students, India must fix the post-study employment gap

GNS News Agency, May 24

India’s ambitious and well-articulated goal of attracting 500,000 foreign students to its universities is beset by operational and structural inadequacies as well as a dearth of excellent placement chances in the nation’s industrial sector. Still, India is undoubtedly of interest to international students.According to research in the American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, reasons for choosing to study in India include the chance to learn in an academic setting where English is the primary language, as well as the affordability of tuition and living costs. The promise of cultural immersion and the availability of a variety of academic programmes are also important drivers.

The ‘Study in India’ campaign, launched officially in 2018 to establish India as a major international center for higher education, was administered by the Ministry of Education and carried out by EdCIL (India) Limited. It sought to draw foreign students to Indian colleges by providing top-notch instruction at reasonable prices. But after almost five years, it’s clear that intent is insufficient on its own.The numbers are self-evident. According to figures from the Ministry of Education, India hosted less than 47,000 international students in 2023. Even if there are some examples of institutional advancement, structural and operational inefficiencies plague the larger ecosystem. For the record, a majority of international students are from nearby countries like Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and the UAE, and others. Rwanda, Nigeria, Sudan, and other eastern African countries make up a respectable portion.Internationally speaking U.S., Canada, and the U.K. together account for almost 40% of the worldwide international student flow. France, Australia, and Germany are the most alluring study abroad locations in comparison to the big three. China today has around 200,000 international students.The Study in India programme is an interdepartmental endeavor to establish

a clear path for international students to apply to and be admitted into India’s most prestigious universities while offering them all the social and cultural assistance they need. Some top-ranked U.S. and Australian Universities are already talking about setting up campuses in India. It remains to be seen if these campuses can attract international students in the way Study in India seeks to grow.

However, the aforementioned AGMRD report lists several important obstacles, including excessive bureaucracy, safety worries, language problems, and doubts about academic quality. Students have identified a lack of support services, poor campus facilities, and inconsistent English education as the main barriers to their learning and integration.

Today, not many companies in India offer competitive remuneration that is comparable to what students in the U.S. or Europe would have received. R. Subrahmanyam, a former Secretary in the Indian government, says, “Why do students travel abroad to further their education? It encompasses more than just an institution’s calibre or the degree it offers. Crucially, it is for well-paying jobs that are commensurate with the level of study, time, and money a student spends on their higher education.”According to him, this basically suggests that working in India after completing your studies is not seen as a desirable option. According to student comments, delays and communication gaps persist even after the establishment of a dedicated portal. Furthermore, even though colleges have been invited to take part in the programme, many of them are ill-equipped or unmotivated to offer a globally competitive academic and cultural environment.This stands in stark contrast to successful international education destinations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and even up-and-coming hubs like Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates.

Prof Jayant Narlikar, astrophysicist who proposed an alternative to Big Bang theory, passes away at 86



GNS News Agency, May 24

Prof Jayant NarlikarProf Jayant Narlikar seated next to his wife Mangala Narlikar who passed away in July 2023. He was the founder-director of the Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune. Eminent astrophysicist Prof Jayant Narlikar, one of India's best known scientists, passed away in his sleep on Tuesday. He would have turned 87 this July. He is survived by three daughters.

The veteran astrophysicist was the founder-director of the Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune and is known for his seminal works in the areas of cosmology and most importantly, for believing in an alternate model to the popular Big Bang theory for the origin of the universe. He was also a well-known science communicator.Narlikar was an alumnus of Cambridge University, Banaras Hindu University and has worked at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.According to close associates of Prof Narlikar, the scientist had undergone a surgery for a hip fracture at a city hospital a fortnight ago. He was recovering at home. Doctors said that he passed away peacefully at his residence.Prof R Srianand Director of IUCAA told The Indian Express that it was an unimaginable loss. "He has been an inspiration and father of Indian cosmology. Till the last minute, Prof Narlikar was thinking of various aspects of science and science popularisation and would always say that research institutes had a great responsibility in spreading awareness about science," Srianand said.Born on July 19, 1938 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, Prof Narlikar received his early education in

the campus of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), where his father Vishnu Vasudeva Narlikar was Professor and Head of the Mathematics Department. His mother Sumati Narlikar was a Sanskrit scholar. After a brilliant career in school and college, Narlikar got his B.Sc. degree at BHU in 1957. He went to Cambridge for higher studies, becoming a Wrangler and Tyson Medallist in the Mathematical Tripos.

He got his Cambridge degrees in mathematics: B.A.(1960), Ph.D. (1963), M.A. (1964) and Sc.D. (1976), but specialized in astronomy and astrophysics. He distinguished himself at Cambridge with the Smith's Prize in 1962 and the Adams Prize in 1967. He later stayed on at Cambridge till 1972, as Fellow of King's College (1963-72) and Founder Staff Member of the Institute of Theoretical Astronomy (1966-72).

During this period he laid the foundations of his research work in cosmology and astrophysics in collaboration with his mentor Fred Hoyle. Narlikar returned to India to join the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (1972-1989) where under his charge the Theoretical Astrophysics Group expanded and acquired international standing.In 1988 the University Grants Commission invited him to set up the proposed Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) as its Founder Director. He held the Directorship of IUCAA until his retirement in 2003. Under his direction IUCAA has acquired a world-wide reputation as a centre for excellence in teaching and research in astronomy and astrophysics. He was Emeritus Professor at IUCAA. In 2012 the Third World Academy of Sciences awarded him their prize for setting up a centre for excellence in science.In 1966, Narlikar married Mangala Rajwade. She is a Ph.D. in mathematics. They have three daughters, Geeta, Girija and Leelavati, all of whom have opted for research careers in science. Narlikar is internationally known for his work in cosmology, for championing models alternative to the popularly believed big bang model.Anuradha Mascarenhas is a journalist with The Indian Express and is based in Pune. A senior editor, Anuradha writes on health, research developments in the field of science and environment and takes keen interest in covering women's issues. With a career spanning over 25 years, Anuradha has also led teams and often coordinated the edition.

3 jawans posted in J&K held for drug peddling in Punjab, 255 gm heroin recovered



GNS News Agency, May 24

The Ludhiana Rural Police has arrested three Army jawans posted in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, for allegedly procuring heroin from the Line of Control (LoC) and selling in Punjab, officers said.Ludhiana (Rural) Superintendent of Police Ankur Gupta said they will hold a press con-

ference and share further details soon.The accused have been identified as 25-year-old Vikramjit Singh from Ludhiana's Bhanour village, Jaswinder Singh Jassi from Hoshiarpur district's Chingar Kalan village, and Baljinder Singh Balli from Faridkot district's Jaiton, police said.

A senior investigating officer said two days ago, Vikramjit was intercepted at a police checkpoint in Pamaal village, Ludhiana, and 255 gm of heroin were recovered from his possession.During questioning, Vikramjit revealed he was posted in Srinagar as a sepoy."Vikramjit, Jassi, and Balli procured heroin, smuggled from Pakistan, from the LoC and sold in Punjab," the officer said, on the condition of anonymity.Based on information provided by Vikramjit, a Ludhiana Police team went to J&K and arrested Jassi and Balli — both posted as havildars in the Army — from Srinagar.The officer further said: "Vikramjit, who has been posted in Srinagar for over a year, used to take leave and visit his hometown often for this work... The three jawans belong to middle-class families, and had been doing this for easy money."An FIR has been registered against the trio under sections 21 and 25 of the NDPS Act at the Jodhan police station, and more arrests are expected in the case, the officer said.

How to use Google Maps for real-time tracking of Mumbai's BEST buses

GNS News Agency, May 24

Mumbai's most sought-after public transport provider, Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST), has partnered with Google Maps to offer real-time tracking of its buses. Rolled out on May 8, the new feature will allow commuters to plan journeys better by knowing exactly when their bus will arrive, cutting down uncertainty, long waits at stops, and even unnecessary detours.The integration lets commuters see the latest information on bus arrivals, delays, and route choices directly from their Google Maps app. The Maharashtra government kicked off the service, terming it a move towards creating smarter and more efficient public transportation.

What do commuters get out of Google Maps-BEST integration?

The service provides Google Maps users with live updates of BEST buses like route options, estimated arrival times, departure times, and even delays, if any. All buses are colour coded on the app with specifics — green for being on time and red for a delay.For example, a commuter in Sion waiting at the bus stop to go to Churchgate can now look up the app before heading out, check if the bus is late, and make a faster choice to wait or change routes, or switch to a different vehicle. It is particularly helpful during peak hours when time is most valuable.

How does the feature add efficiency to passengers' journeys?

With real-time location information, Google Maps recently provides live route options that integrate multiple modes of transport — BEST buses, local trains, metro lines, autos, and taxis. Passengers going from Andheri to Fort, for instance, will receive a travel guide step-by-step based on the quickest and most dependable connections.It assists individuals in deciding not just the ideal route but also



the time to depart from their office or residence. For intermodal travel across Mumbai's busy zones, this integration offers unmatched convenience with BEST being at the epicentre.

What options does the app give for checking specific stops, buses?

Google Maps now allows users to search for a particular bus stop to view upcoming buses and their live status. If one is already close to a destination and wishes to know which buses are coming, the individual can enter the stop name, and all GPS-equipped buses will pop up with an estimated time of arrival.On the other hand, it also provides information on the nearest bus stop to them, in case one is not aware. This will be useful for people who don't have a fixed schedule or people who are exploring new routes.Recognising the diversity of its users, the feature is available in Hindi, Marathi, and English. Commuters can easily switch between languages using either the Google Maps settings or their phone's language settings. Whether one is helping an elderly family member or using the app in their preferred language, the multilingual support ensures it is inclusive and user-friendly for all.

Dry spell turns into opportunity: Sabarmati River cleaning drive makes progress

GNS News Agency, May 24

Almost 13 years after the Sabarmati Riverfront was inaugurated by the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in 2012, the 11.5 km-long stretch of the riverfront's Phase 1, stretching from Vasna Barrage till Torrent power house, is undergoing cleaning for the second time, however, first time on such a large scale with public participation.Highlighting the significance of the project, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hosted three heads of state on the Sabarmati Riverfront, Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2014, Japanese premier Late Shinzo Abe in 2017 and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2018.

With other cities, including Pune and more recently Delhi planning to have their own riverfronts, even as Sabarmati which boasts to be the first riverfront in the country, the challenges concerning its maintenance and upkeep continue to pose a Herculean task before the administration. The stagnant riverfront will be expanded from 11.5 km to 38 km with the project being implemented in six phases. The Sabarmati Riverfront from Vasna Barrage till Chiloda Bridge near the thermal power plant in Gandhinagar, is set to run through districts of Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar.Due to pre-monsoon repair and maintenance work of gates at the Vasna Barrage, the Sabarmati Riverfront is running dry from May 12 till June 5. The barrage has around 30 gates and usually goes into pre-monsoon repair work annually.Also, as the work of constructing an earthen ramp in the upstream of Vasna Barrage is to be undertaken, the Sabarmati river is required to be completely emptied.

Utilising the moment as an 'opportunity', the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Ltd (SRFDCL) — the city corporation's special purpose vehicle (SPV) launched in 1997 to execute the project — along with Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has launched a joint cleaning campaign.Sharing details, SRFDCL Chairman I P Gautam told The Indian Express, "We are taking advantage of the Irrigation Department's maintenance and repair work of Vasna Barrage gates till June 5."On the first day of the cleaning, a huge temple flag was seen being removed from the Sabarmati River. On the first day of the cleaning, a huge temple flag was seen being removed from the Sabarmati River.

Adding to this, Ahmedabad Municipal Commissioner Banchhanidhi Pani said, "Generally, we do not get any specific occasion to clean the river but with the ongoing repair and maintenance work, we found an opportunity."The cleaning process will also help us to know about the problems, for instance (we can find) the stretch where the garbage is highest.... this in turn would help us to devise enforcement activities," added Pani. This, however, will be assessed at the end of the cleaning exercise.The exercise is undertaken after six years. The last time Sabarmati River along the riverfront was cleaned was in 2019. However, the exercise at that time went on for four to five days and that didn't involve public participation on such a large scale, the Municipal Commissioner said.Within two days, on May 15 and 16, a total of 118 metric tons of garbage was removed. A massive 76 tons was removed on the first day itself when the cleaning campaign was launched from the ghat behind Gandhi Ashram — the stretch between Dadhichi Bridge and Subhash Bridge — by Ahmedabad Mayor Pratibha Jain accompanied by Standing Committee Chairman Devang Dani, SRFDCL Chairman I P Gautam, Municipal Commissioner Pani along with MLAs, corporators and other officials of AMC-SRFDCL.At 21 metric tons, plastic constituted the largest portion of the huge garbage pile. Additionally, 12 metric tons of wood and 7 metric tons of cloth was also removed from the river bed which is a mix of soil in some stretches and stones in others. Remaining 78 metric tons constituted other materials, including glass and used puja material among other things. Nearly 15 heavy vehicles such as JCBs, trucks, tractors, and earth removers were used during two days of cleaning exercise to remove the garbage.

Sharing the issues faced during the exercise, the AMC officials revealed that the drainage system was not plugged majorly at two locations."Under Phase 1, the Ranip drainage system meeting the Sabarmati Riverfront at Dandi Bridge was not plugged. In the ongoing phase 2, the drainage system at Dafnala was not plugged completely. ... much time was lost in getting the Army's permission as the stretch falls under the cantonment area. This led to a lot of garbage running into the river," a senior AMC official said.Further, a



Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) of 50-60 MLD is operational near Dandi Bridge and officials claim that the drainage system along the eastern bank is plugged too.Phase-2 involves extending the existing 11.5 kilometers of Riverfront East and West by 5.8 kms and 5.2 kms, respectively, up to the Indira bridge.

On the first day of the cleaning, a huge temple flag was seen being removed from the Sabarmati River.Looking at peoples' apathy towards the cleanliness of rivers, public participation was intentionally planned. "People were roped in, so they can see for themselves what kind of waste is coming out of the river. Despite awareness campaigns people are throwing stuff like clothes and other material into it," Municipal Commissioner Pani told The Indian Express. Pani informed at least 13000 persons from educational institutions, schools, colleges, universities, religious institutions, social institutions, NGOs and industrial groups will participated in the Sabarmati River Cleanliness Campaign on the first two days.At 21 metric tons, plastic constituted the largest portion of the huge garbage pile. At 21 metric tons, plastic constituted the largest portion of the huge garbage pile. (Express Photo by Bhupendra Rana)

As per the SRFDCL statement, on the first day over 8,998 persons participated in the campaign and 3,789 persons on the second day.With public participation, the 11-km long bank of the Sabarmati Riverfront will be cleaned in phases. Also, in the public participation, individuals who frequently use the riverfront such as cyclists, morning walkers, jiggers among others are also being roped in for cleaning.AMC officials stated that in the initial phase, the civic body decided to take up the cleanliness drive of the river bed "very carefully as the river bed dries up completely".A field assessment of the bed was undertaken to also ensure safety of the citizens joining the drive.Institutes like Anand Agricultural University and Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar (IITGN) were consulted to know the nature of the river before taking up the cleanliness drive, said the officials.Owing to the drying up of the river, a strong stench emanated from the river which the officials said is a 'natural process'. "The stench started on the first day. When you open up the water body because of the sunlight, whatever elements are present get decomposed. It always causes a stench. The process of decomposition is a natural process that causes some stench that is the reason here too. We had consulted scientifically on that aspect as well," Municipal Commissioner Banchhanidhi Pani said.

Scuffle at Tiranga rally in Khammam; CP asks public to maintain peace

Khammam: Commissioner of Police Sunil Dutt warned of strict legal action against individuals who were deliberately spreading rumours on social media about an incident that took place during a Tiranga rally held in Khammam on Monday night.He appealed to the public not to trust rumours being spread on social media. During the rally organised by the BJP, two other youngsters traveling on a motorcycle from ZP Centre towards Khanapuram Haveli were stopped by a traffic constable at Yellandu crossroads as the rally was going on.

The youths, saying that they were going on urgent work entered into an argument with the traffic constable. Noticing this, some BJP activists in the rally also got into an argument with the youths in support of the traffic constable and it led to a scuffle, the CP said.

With highest CTC of Rs 24.73 lakh per annum, 325 students get recruited at Panjab University's UIET



GNS News Agency, May 24

With the highest cost-to-company (CTC) reaching Rs 24.73 lakh per annum, as many as 325 students secured job offers this academic year (2024-2025 or FY25), in the University Institute of Engineering and Technology (UIET), Panjab University (PU).The average CTC stood at an impressive Rs 8.5 lakh per annum, highlighting the institute's growing reputation among top recruiters across IT, consultancy, and core engineering sectors. The UIET is considered a premier engineering institute in north India, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

This year, as many as 325 students have been placed,

with a placement percentage of 78.4. The highest CTC is Rs 24.73, the average Rs 8.5 LPA, with the top sectors being information technology, consultancy, and core engineering, attracting more than 100 recruiters as part of the placements."UIET has grown rapidly in the 23 years since its inception, and this year's placement result highlights its rising strength. Strong industry linkages with Infosys, IBM, and the Bharti Group, along with the support of a vibrant alumni network, have played a key role. I am very pleased to see UIET emerging as a leading hub for engineering talent in the country," Renu Vig, vice-chancellor, PU, said.

Sanjeev Puri, director, UIET, said that the stellar placements are a testament to UIET's continuous efforts to bridge the gap between academia and industry. "We emphasise technical depth, soft skills, and interdisciplinary learning." Sarbjeet Singh, training and placement officer, UIET, explained that the industry collaborations and career-oriented programmes empower students to meet the evolving demands of the corporate world.Anuj Kumar, who got a placement at Cisco, said the placement team's support helped him get his dream job, while Khushi Jain, who Walmart selected, says UIET gave her the confidence and skills to thrive in a global tech environment. Students like Jasjeet Singh and Riya Handa credit industry exposure, rigorous training sessions and real-world projects at UIET that gave them an edge during the recruitment process.

School principal's 'misbehaviour' in Singapore: Punjab education secy, director issue 'contradictory' orders

GNS News Agency, May 24

The Punjab School Education Department has issued two "contradictory" orders against a Fazilka school principal "for misbehaving with a woman tour guide during an official teacher training tour in Singapore".The order issued by Punjab Education Secretary Anindita Mitra says "Gautam Khurana, the principal of Government Senior Secondary School in Fazilka, has been suspended", while the one by Director (School Education) Gurinder Singh Sodhi notes "the complaint has been put under 'daakhil daftar' after issuing a stern warning to the principal".

Officially, "daakhil daftar" or filing means a complaint has been disposed of, and no further action will be taken on it. However, the matter has been stored/ archived in government records.Mitra's order further says the alleged incident took place in the presence of the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) director, who had accompanied the teachers' group during the training held in Singapore. During the suspension, the "principal will be posted at the headquarters of the Education Department, Chandigarh", the order reads, adding Punjab Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains "approved" it.

Meanwhile, Sodhi's order — with the issuance date on May 9 — observes that "after a reply was received from the principal and related comments were given by the SCERT director, the show cause notice to the principal was 'filed' (disposed of), with a stern warning to the principal to remain careful in future".When contacted, both Mitra and



Sodhi confirmed issuing their respective orders, but avoided commenting on each other's letters."I issued the order to file (close) the matter after the SCERT director informed 'the principal had apologised for his behaviour'. I was not aware of the suspension order(s) issued by Secretary madam. Since she is higher in rank, her orders will be implemented," Sodhi said.

Mann govt makes 31 appointments: Kejriwal aide named pollution board chief, Pathak’s former PA to head industry board



GNS News Agency, May 24

Close associates of Aam Aadmi Party’s Delhi leaders, including that of Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Sandeep Pathak, are among 31 persons appointed as chairpersons of corporations and other government organisations in Punjab with Congress terming it as “loot of Punjab’s resources by outsiders who have no respect or love for the state”. Gupta, an AAP national spokesperson considered close to Kejriwal, succeeds Adarsh Pal Vig who was a noted environment scientist from Amritsar’s Guru Nanak Dev University. Vig’s three-year tenure had ended in July 2024 but he had continued on the post as the government had not been able to find his successor. Gupta, a lawyer who was working with the World Bank before quitting in 2011 to join the anti corruption movement of Anna Hazare, was also an advisor to the Environment Minister of Delhi and was later nominated as member of the State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) by the Government of Delhi. She launched a campaign Yuddh Pardushan Virudh in Delhi to fight Delhi’s air pollution.

Gupta’s name along with that of 30 others office bearers of various corporations and government organisations was announced by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. The Chief Minister named Deepak Chouhan as chairperson of Punjab Large Industrial Development Board. Chouhan is an aide of AAP national organisation secretary and Rajya Sabha member Dr Sandeep Pathak and belongs to Uttar Pradesh. Prabhvir Brar, a close aide of Delhi’s former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, has been appointed chairperson of PUNSUP. Brar belongs to Punjab and has been associated with Sisodia in AAP government’s recent campaign to “revolutionise state’s education sector”. This is not for the first time that AAP has appointed an aide of Kejriwal from Delhi in a Punjab government body. Kamal Bansal was appointed chairperson of Tirath Yatra Samiti of Punjab recently. He was earlier heading the Delhi pilgrimage panel. A Delhi IAS officer Satya Gopal was appointed as the chairman of the Real Estate Regulatory Authority. Congress leader Sukhpal Singh Khaira termed the appointments of Chouhan and Gupta as “double blunder” and an insult to the AAP volunteers from Punjab.

“It shows that AAP is so bankrupt of leadership that

they couldn’t find suitable persons from Punjab,” said Khaira in a post on his official handle on X. “This is nothing but loot of Punjab’s resources by outsiders who have no respect or love for the state. Both appointments clearly show Kejriwal wants to control the industry of Punjab through his henchmen. I demand an explanation from Bhagwant Mann as to why he’s surrendering Punjab to outsiders. These blatantly wrong appointments should be scrapped immediately and eminent Punjabis should be appointed to these vital positions,” said Khaira. Leader of Opposition in Punjab Assembly, Partap Singh Bajwa referred to the twin appointments as a “masterstroke” by Mann. In comments posted on X, Bajwa alleged that Chouhan — “an ex-PA to AAP backroom boss Sandeep Pathak — had no industrial experience, was not a Punjabi, and his selection personified loyalty over merit.

“Meanwhile, Gupta, another non-Punjabi and former Delhi SEIAA member, is now chairperson of Punjab Pollution Control Board. Nepotism? No no... it’s called Badlav,” wrote Bajwa in his post. Jalandhar MLA Pargat Singh too condemned the appointments and accused the AAP government of having first, through amendments to the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, given a free hand to polluters poisoning Punjab’s waters, and now, the key post of PPCB has been handed to Gupta. “This blatant imposition of Delhi’s rejected advisors on Punjab’s top environmental post is a betrayal of Punjab’s people and sovereignty,” he said. Meanwhile, the Mann government, while announcing the appointments, also accommodated former SAD leader Pawan Kumar Tinu as chairperson of Punjab State Cooperative Agriculture Development Bank. The bank was in news lately for not being able to recover the loan lent to the farmers. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had chaired a meeting of the bank. Besides, the AAP has tried to placate the original volunteers of the party, who were not actively participating in party programmes recently. A volunteer, Tejpal Singh Gill, who had unsuccessfully contested Lok Sabha election in 2019 from Ludhiana, has been appointed as chairman of PUNGRAIN. Another volunteer from Ludhiana, Deepak Bansal has been appointed Vice-Chairman of Punjab Gau Sewa Commission. Sources said that he was not seen at party’s programmes for a long time now. With the ruling AAP facing a contest in Ludhiana West byelection, the move is aimed at placating all volunteers so that the party can put up a fight. Others who have been accommodated include Harjinder Singh Ghangha as chairman of market committee Panje Ke Uttar, Anu Babbar and Aman Kumar Mittal as directors of Punjab Water Resources Management and Development Corporation Limited, Nayan Chabhra as Vice Chairman of Punjab Youth Development Board, Prabhjeet Singh and Amardeep Kaur as directors of PUNBUS, Daljit Singh Miadian, Lakhbir Singh Aujla and Jagsir Singh as directors of Punjab Dairy Development Board, Roby Kang as director of Infotech and Jasbeer Singh Dhanjal as director Punjab State Backward Classes and Land Development Corporation.

Malad youth forced to work in cyber scam call centres in Myanmar; three booked



GNS News Agency, May 24

Mumbai Police on Sunday booked three members of an international cyber scam gang who lured a Mumbai youth to come to Thailand for a job and later illegally took him to Myanmar and forced him to work at an illegal Chinese-run call centre from where innocent people from across the world were trapped in ‘romance cybercrime’ on social media platforms, and defrauded and extorted. To release the victim and his friend, the gang members also extorted \$1000 from them. The complainant, Mohammed Asif Ali Shaikh, 24, is a resident of the Malwani area in Malad (West), who has filed a police complaint against Mark Melvin and two others.

Shaikh, in his complaint to the Malwani police, said that in July 2024, Melvin, who came in contact with the accused via a friend, told him that there is a job vacancy in a company in Thailand.

After Shaikh showed interest, Melvin lined up Shaikh’s interview over a video call with a Chinese-looking national. Shaikh was told that he cleared the interview and that he was selected for the job in Thailand and his monthly salary would be nearly Rs 75,000. Later, air tickets were also sent to him. On July 25, 2024, Shaikh landed at the Swarnabhoomi International Airport, Thailand. But as he did not have a visa, the gang members picked him up from the airport and took him to KK Park in Myawaddy Township, Myanmar, via road and sea routes. As per Shaikh’s complaint, Melvin told him that he has got a job as a chat executive at the X Max company. In this job the employees were made to send friend requests on Facebook to rich people, entrap them in love relationships, and then induce them into investing money in fraudulent cryptocurrency schemes and extract money from the gullible people, Shaikh stated in the FIR. “These call centres were run by the Chinese ‘gangsters’. When any employee refused to do the illegal work, they would be beaten,

Shot fired at Pune Shiv Sena youth wing leader Nilesh Ghare’s car, minutes after he exited vehicle

GNS News Agency, May 24

Two men on a bike opened fire at Shiv Sena youth wing leader Nilesh Ghare’s parked car in Pune late on Monday night, minutes after he had exited the vehicle. The Pune police, who have launched a probe, said the incident occurred next to Ghare’s public relations office in the city’s Warje area and that no injuries were reported.

According to the preliminary information, the incident occurred around 11.30 pm in the Ganpati Matha area of Warje. “Ghare had come to his office sometime around 11.30 pm. Minutes after he exited the vehicle and entered his office, two suspects came on a bike. They came near Ghare’s car, and one of them fired a bullet. The duo fled the scene after that. No one was present inside the vehicle, and no injuries were reported,” an officer from Warje Malwadi police station said.

Punjab school mentorship programme: 80 IAS/IPS officers adopt govt schools, visits begin



The Punjab government’s ‘School Mentorship Programme’ will begin on Tuesday with the final list of 80 IAS/IPS/PCS/PPS officers, who have adopted as many government schools, regularly interacting with students and providing them career guidance. For instance, Khanna SSP Jyoti Yadav, the wife of Punjab Education Minister Harjot Bains, has adopted School of Eminence, Nangal, in Roopnagar district, their home district. Ludhiana Deputy Commissioner Himanshu Jain has adopted School of Eminence, Dholewal, Ludhiana, while Amritsar Deputy Commissioner Sakshi Sawhney has adopted School of Eminence, Khanna. Moga SSP Ajay Gandhi has adopted School of Eminence at Landeke in Moga district, while former education secretary Kamal Kishor Yadav has adopted School of Eminence in Nakodar. Punjab Education Secretary

Anindita Mitra said, “The department has allotted schools to the officers. The programme will begin on Tuesday, with the officers visiting their respective schools.”

According to the letters, “Your presence and guidance will offer much-needed motivation to school staff and students and can significantly contribute to strengthening the culture of aspiration, dreams and highest performance in our government schools.... The School Mentorship Programme is conceived as a long-term engagement, with officers encouraged to continue mentoring the same school for a minimum of five years. The nature of engagement is flexible and may be shaped as per mutual convenience. However, officers are expected to maintain continuity of interaction and aim for at least one in-person visit per month, supplemented by remote follow-ups as feasible.” “The role of the mentor officer is non-administrative and facilitative. Officers are not expected to intervene in routine operations or school-level administration. Rather, they are expected to offer encouragement, constructive feedback, and strategic support to the school leadership.... All engagement under this programme shall be treated as part of official duties,” the letter adds. The Punjab government has introduced a unique ‘School Mentorship Programme’, in which bureaucrats are being roped in to inspire and guide young minds to aim high in life. The initiative aims to bridge aspirations and opportunities for government school students by connecting them with civil servants.

New Congress chief in Himachal shouldn’t be a rubber stamp: Minister Vikramaditya Singh

Himachal Pradesh Cabinet Minister Vikramaditya Singh Monday said that the next state Congress chief should not be a “rubber stamp” but a strong, mass leader with clout in at least three to four districts. “The decision lies with the high command, but in my view, the next party chief must be a tall leader who commands respect and influence on his own. The Congress in Himachal Pradesh needs young blood and a leadership which is not just symbolic. The new party chief shouldn’t be remote-controlled,” Vikramaditya said.

The remarks come days after Vikramaditya termed Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri as “one of the tallest Congress leaders who never lost from his Haroli seat in Una”. Vikramaditya had then reacted to a Facebook post by Agnihotri wherein the Deputy CM had said, “Times of conspiracies are on while falsehood doesn’t hold ground”. According to party insiders, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu is pitching for new party chief of his choice. Interacting with the media persons at his office, Vikramaditya expressed concerns over “delay” in the reconstitution of disbanded party units. “Incumbent party chief Pratibha Singh has taken up this issue with the high command several times,” he said. The son of six-time chief minister Virbhadra Singh, Vikramaditya recalled that his mother Pratibha Singh was appointed party president in a challenging political situation in 2021. To a specific query, Vikramaditya said only the party high command can decide if Pratibha Singh would continue as party state chief or a new president will be appointed. The PWD minister further said he would speak to the central leadership for early appointment of the state party chief.

Congress national president Mallikarjun Kharge had on November 6, 2024 dissolved the Pradesh Congress Committee in Himachal Pradesh along with the district and block units with immediate effect, but allowed Pratibha Singh to continue as party president till further orders. A section of Congress leaders is said to be unhappy with the working of the state government — an issue that Pratibha Singh too



had flagged earlier asking for a better coordination with party unit and its dispensation. Pratibha Singh had also several times in the past sought posts for hardworking and loyal party workers.

Talking about development issues, Vikramaditya said, “A comprehensive strategy is being implemented to accelerate projects under the Public Works and Urban Development departments. A recent high-level meeting reviewed the progress of schemes under Phase IV of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Himachal is leading the country in uploading DPRs and aims to construct 1,500 km of roads, but a delay in the availability of land could reduce the target to 400-500 km”. He said a performance index is being introduced in the PWD divisions to evaluate work efficiency. “To ensure accountability, PWD divisions have been classified into red, yellow, green and non-performing zones. Strict action, including blacklisting and chargesheets, will be taken against underperformers,” the PWD minister said. Vikramaditya also spoke on the trade and tourism boycott of Turkey for their support of Pakistan in the conflict with India. “I would also speak to Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari to ban Turkey-based companies and joint ventures as Turkey had openly supported Pakistan during the recent war between India and Pakistan,” he said.

Complainants against Ashoka University professor: Haryana women’s panel chief, sarpanch who’s BJP Yuva Morcha member

GNS News Agency, May 24

The height of it for the Srinagar-born Bhatia was playing former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto in a short film in 2008. One reason was her perceived resemblance to Bhutto. Before that, from 1991-2000, she was a Doordarshan anchor. However, Bhatia says, politics was never out of the picture. “My family has long been associated with the RSS and BJP,” she explains, adding that she followed suit soon after settling down in Faridabad. In 2000, Bhatia was elected municipal councillor of Faridabad on a BJP ticket and became the city’s deputy mayor. She contested as councillor again in 2010 but lost “because the Congress fielded six women candidates named Renu Bhatia”. Bhatia’s long wait for a breakthrough ended only in January 2022, when she was picked to become chairperson of the Haryana State Commission for Women by the BJP government. Her three-year-tenure at the commission was supposed to end on January 18, 2025. But the Haryana government extended her tenure “until a further order on existing terms and conditions of service”.

Bhatia has certainly had an eventful time in the job. Months after she took over as chairperson of the women’s body, a video of her arguing with a woman police officer and rebuking her over a case of marital dispute had gone viral. Ashoka University prof held for Operation Sindoor remarks; deplorable, says Opposition Professor Mahmudabad In 2023, Bhatia took up a sexual harassment case and pushed for its probe after more than a hundred girls came forward with a complaint against the principal of a school in Jind district. In December 2024, she was again in the news after a video surfaced of her threatening to deport a man, presumably an NRI. Bhatia explained that it was in response to a case filed by the man’s wife. It isn’t the first time the Haryana State Commission for Women under Bhatia has gone after the professor of a private university in the state either, on almost the same charges. In December 2023, the panel filed an FIR against O P Jindal Global University professor Dr Sameena Dalwai, who specialises in gender, sexuality and law, for “outraging the modesty” of women students by showing them profiles on a dating app. The sarpanch of village Jatheri in Sonapat district, Yogesh is a member of the BJP Yuva Morcha. He filed the complaint against Mahmudabad as he was “trying to instigate people’s feelings” at a sensitive time, Yogesh told The Indian Express. “I have a law background. I know the law very well. As a member of the BJP youth wing, I have been visiting colleges and universities for a long time. He [Mahmudabad] said the government was working against the Muslim community and that Colonel Sofiya Qureshi addressed the press briefings just as a show. He made these statements in my presence. Four to five others were also present when he said this.” Yogesh, who claims a long



family association with the Army, said.

Yogesh added that Mahmudabad also said that tensions at the Indo-Pak border were a “result of some mentally unstable soldiers”. “These remarks are provocative and he [Mahmudabad] spread communal disharmony... This is why I lodged a complaint seeking legal action against him.” In his social media post, Mahmudabad wrote: “There are those who are mindlessly advocating for a war, but they have never seen one, let alone lived in or visited a conflict zone... War is brutal. The poor suffer disproportionately and the only people who benefit are politicians and defence companies.”

Harshal Patel sets new record

Hyderabad: One of the unsung heroes of IPL, Sunrisers Hyderabad’s fast bowler Harshal Patel set a new record in the IPL by reaching the magical 150-wicket mark quicker than any other bowler in the championship’s history in terms of number of balls bowled. Harshal’s first wicket of the match pushed him into an elite group of IPL legends for he became the 13th bowler in the league’s distinguished history to have taken more than 150 wickets. The unassuming fast bowler, who earlier won the Purple Cap in the IPL, achieved the in a mere 2,381 deliveries, surpassing the previous record held by the legendary Sri Lankan fast bowler Lasith Malinga, who took 2,444 balls to reach the same mark. This achievement also meant that Harshal, whose first IPL was in 2012 with Royal Challengers Bengaluru, leads the select band of IPL greats including Yuzvendra Chahal (2,543 balls), Dwayne Bravo (2,656 balls), and Jasprit Bumrah (2,832 balls). While Harshal Patel has played 117 matches, spanning 114 innings, to reach this milestone — a figure only surpassed by Lasith Malinga’s 105 matches — his consistent performance and his proven ability to deliver effectively in high-pressure situations have been defining characteristics of his Indian Premier League career.

Fans defend Aamir as boycott calls grow for 'Sitaare Zameen Par'



GNS News Agency, May 24

Hyderabad: Aamir Khan's upcoming film Sitaare Zameen Par, which is set to release soon, has found itself at the centre of an online storm. Despite receiving praise for casting actors with disabilities and telling a heartwarming story, the film is being targeted by boycott trends on social media. Many users are calling to avoid the film, accusing Aamir of being "anti-national" a charge that has now become common against several celebrities who do not toe the political line.

The backlash seems to have two major triggers. One is Aamir Khan's supposed "delayed" response to Operation Sindoor, a recent military strike by the Indian Army against terror camps in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The second reason is a resurfaced video from a 2020 visit to Turkey, where Aamir met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's wife. The meeting, which took place during the shoot of Laal Singh Chaddha, had drawn criticism even back then because Erdogan is seen by many as a controversial and conservative leader.Critics say Khan's reaction to Operation Sindoor was limited to an Instagram story, calling it a "bare minimum" gesture. Some also believe he only did it to promote his film. "Toh aur kya karega? Border pe thodi jayega?" wrote a Reddit user, ques-

tioning the unfair expectations placed on an actor.In a move that some believe is damage control, Aamir Khan Productions recently changed its display picture on all social media platforms to the Indian National Flag. While supporters found the move patriotic, others dismissed it as a strategy to calm public anger.Reddit threads discussing the boycott are filled with a mix of frustration and sarcasm. "These keyboard warriors won't actually boycott cheap Chinese goods, but will go after films," one user wrote. Another pointed out that "those who shout boycott are not even regular movie-goers."

The film, which is reportedly inspired by the Spanish movie Champions, tells the story of a basketball coach who trains a team of players with disabilities. Many netizens appreciated the decision to cast real people with disabilities instead of able-bodied actors playing such roles. "It's a rare film that speaks about real issues," one user noted.Yet, the calls for boycott reflect a deeper trend rising hyper-nationalism and religious targeting. "His hatred started a decade ago when he spoke about growing intolerance in India," wrote a Redditor, referring to a 2015 comment by Aamir that triggered nationwide controversy. "Since then, everything he does is politicised, mainly because he is Muslim," the user added.Some, however, have also raised fair criticism. One user pointed out the hypocrisy of meeting Erdogan, a known fundamentalist, while opposing extremism in India. "It's like a Turkish actor shaking hands with Modi and expecting no backlash in Turkey," they said.Still, others defended Aamir Khan by reminding people that even Prime Minister Narendra Modi had once made a surprise visit to Pakistan to meet Nawaz Sharif and had also hugged Erdogan in a global event. "So where does the outrage go then?" asked a commenter.The noise online has once again opened up a discussion about where we draw the line between political beliefs and artistic expression. Whether Sitaare Zameen Par will succeed at the box office despite the boycott calls remains to be seen, but many fans and neutral observers are urging people to watch the film and judge it for what it is, rather than a politicising it.

Trump announces Russia-Ukraine ceasefire talks will begin immediately following call with Putin

GNS News Agency, May 24

President Donald Trump said Monday (May 19, 2025) that Russia and Ukraine will "immediately" begin ceasefire negotiations after what he described as an "excellent" call with Russian President Vladimir Putin that lasted more than two hours.Mr. Trump also spoke with with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders in hopes of making progress toward a ceasefire.

"The conditions for that will be negotiated between the two parties, as it can only be, because they know details of a negotiation that nobody else would be aware of," Mr. Trump said in a social media post.Mr. Trump said the call was "excellent," adding, "If it wasn't, I would say so now, rather than later." The conversations came after the White House said the U.S. leader has grown "frustrated" with both leaders over the continuing war in Ukraine.After the call, Mr. Putin said Russia was ready to continue discussing an end to the fighting, but he indicated there was no major breakthrough in what he termed a "very informative and very frank" conversation with Mr. Trump. Mr. Putin said the warring countries should "find compromises that would suit all parties."Moscow, he said, will "propose and is ready to work with" Ukraine on a "memorandum" outlining the framework for "a possible future peace treaty."

"At the same time, I would like to note that, in general, Russia's position is clear. The main thing for us is to eliminate the root causes of this crisis," the Russian President said.Mr. Trump has struggled to end a war that began with Russia's invasion in February 2022. That makes these conversations a serious test of his reputation as a deal maker after having claimed he would quickly settle the conflict once he was back in the White House, if not even before he took office.Mr. Trump expressed his hopes for a "productive day" Monday — and a ceasefire — but ahead of the call, Vice President JD Vance said Mr. Trump is "more than open" to walking away from trying to end the war if he feels Mr. Putin isn't serious about negotiation."He's grown weary and frustrated with both sides of the conflict," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Monday ahead of the call. "He has made it clear to both sides that he wants to see a peaceful resolution and ceasefire as soon as possible."The Republican President is banking on the idea that his force of personality and personal history with Putin will be enough to break any impasse over a pause in the fighting.

"I'd say we're more than open to walking away," Vance told reporters before leaving Rome after meeting with Pope Leo XIV. Mr. Vance said Mr. Trump has been clear that the U.S. "is not going to spin its wheels here. We want to see outcomes."Mr. Trump said the Vatican expressed interest in hosting the negotiations, but there was no immediate confirmation that any talks had been scheduled.Mr. Trump's frustration about the war had been building before his post Saturday on Truth Social about the coming calls.

Mr. Trump said his discussion with Putin would focus on stopping the "bloodbath" of the war. It also will cover trade, a sign that Trump might be seeking to use financial incentives to broker some kind of agreement after Russia's invasion led to severe sanctions by the United States and its allies that have steadily eroded Moscow's ability to grow.Mr. Trump's hope, according to the post, is that "a war that should have never happened will end."Mr. Vance said Mr. Trump would press Mr. Putin on whether he was serious about negotiating an end to the conflict, saying Trump doesn't believe he is and that Trump may wash his hands of trying to end the war."It takes two to tango," Mr. Vance said, adding that "if Russia is not willing to do that, then we're eventually just going to have to say, this is not our war. It's Joe Biden's war, it's Vladimir Putin's war."His treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Trump had made it clear that a failure by Putin to negotiate "in good faith" could lead to additional sanctions against Russia.Bessent suggested the sanctions that began during the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden were inadequate because they did not stop Russia's oil revenues, due to concerns that doing so would increase U.S. prices. The United States sought to cap Russia's oil revenues while preserving the country's petroleum exports to limit the damage from the inflation that the war produced.Putin recently rejected an offer by Zelenskyy to meet in-person in Turkey as an alternative to a 30-day ceasefire urged by Ukraine and its Western allies, including Washington. Instead, Russian and Ukrainian officials met in Istanbul for talks, the first such direct negotiations since March 2022.

Those talks ended Friday after less than two hours, without a ceasefire in place. Still, both countries committed



to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, with Ukraine's intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, saying on Ukrainian television Saturday that the exchanges could happen as early as this week.While wrapping up his four-day trip to the Middle East, Mr. Trump said Friday that Putin had not gone to Turkey because mr. Trump himself wasn't there.

"He and I will meet, and I think we'll solve it or maybe not," Mr. Trump told reporters after boarding Air Force One. "At least we'll know. And if we don't solve it, it'll be very interesting."Mr. Zelenskyy met with Mr. Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Rome on Sunday, as well as European leaders, intensifying his efforts before the Monday calls.The Ukrainian President said on the social media site X that during his talks with the American officials, they discussed the negotiations in Turkey and that "the Russians sent a low level delegation of non-decision-makers." He also said he stressed that Ukraine is engaged in "real diplomacy" to have a ceasefire."We have also touched upon the need for sanctions against Russia, bilateral trade, defense cooperation, battlefield situation and upcoming prisoners exchange," Mr. Zelenskyy said. "Pressure is needed against Russia until they are eager to stop the war."The German government said Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French, British and Italian leaders spoke with M.r Trump late Sunday about the situation in Ukraine and his upcoming call with Putin. A brief statement gave no details of the conversation, but said the plan is for the exchange to be continued directly after the Trump-Putin call.

US announces visa restrictions on travel agencies based in India facilitating illegal immigration

New York/Washington: The US on Monday said that it is imposing visa restrictions on owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies in India for knowingly facilitating "illegal immigration" to the United States.

"Mission India's Consular Affairs and Diplomatic Security Service work every day across our Embassy and Consulates to actively identify and target those engaged in facilitating illegal immigration and human smuggling and trafficking operations," the State Department said in a statement.

The Department of State is "taking steps today to impose visa restrictions on owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies based and operating in India for knowingly facilitating illegal immigration to the United States", it said.The statement added that the US will "continue to take steps to impose visa restrictions against owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies to cut off alien smuggling networks".

"Our immigration policy aims not only to inform foreign nationals about the dangers of illegal immigration to the United States but also to hold accountable individuals who violate our laws, including facilitators of illegal immigration," the State Department said, adding that enforcing US immigration laws and policies is critical to upholding the rule of law and protecting Americans.It said this visa restriction policy is global and even applies to individuals who otherwise qualify for the Visa Waiver Programme.When asked about the travel agencies and people against whom visa restrictions have been effected, a US embassy official in New Delhi said the details cannot be provided.We cannot provide a list of individuals or travel agencies the United States is taking steps to impose visa restrictions on due to visa record confidentiality, the official added.

Russia, Ukraine to begin ceasefire talks ‘immediately’, says Trump



GNS News Agency, May 24

Washington: US President Donald Trump said that Russia and Ukraine will begin ceasefire negotiations and that the Vatican has offered to host them.Trump's announcement came after a two-hour-long phone call with President Vladimir Putin. He conveyed details of the conversation to Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in a separate call and to other European leaders."Just completed my two-hour call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia. I believe it went very well. Russia and Ukraine will immediately start negotiations toward a Ceasefire and, more importantly, an END to the War," Trump wrote in a long post on Truth Social, his social media platform.

Trump simply wanted to step into spotlight, there was no nuclear signalling or threats from Pakistan, says government

GNS News Agency, May 24

New Delhi: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, in a closed-door briefing to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, clarified that India did not carry out any strikes on Pakistan's nuclear infrastructure during Operation Sindoor.According to sources present at the meeting, the government made it clear that the operation remained entirely conventional in nature, and there was no nuclear signaling or threats from the Pakistani side during the recent military confrontation.The briefing was held against the backdrop of heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, following the Pahalgalam terror attack and India's retaliatory Operation Sindoor, which targeted terror infrastructure across the Line of Control. The committee, chaired by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, questioned the Foreign Secretary on several key aspects of the operation and its strategic implications.

In response to enquiries about whether India suffered any aircraft losses during the operation, the government stated that such details fall under operational secrecy and cannot be disclosed publicly.Members also sought clarification on an X post by US President Donald Trump, in which he implied that his intervention helped broker a ceasefire between India and Pakistan. Sources said the government firmly denied any such role, stating that the ceasefire was a bilateral decision between New Delhi and Islamabad. According to Misri, Trump did not coordinate with India or seek permission to make public statements, sources said. "He simply wanted to step into the spotlight," the panel was reportedly told.

There were also questions raised regarding External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's earlier statement, which some interpreted as contradictory to the government's military position. The Foreign Secretary clarified that the minister's comment referred specifically to the first phase of Operation Sindoor, when India conducted strikes on nine

Russia-Ukraine talks have taken place in fits and bursts amidst efforts by the American president to end the three-year war. Negotiations between the two sides were to take place directly between Putin and Zelensky in Turkey last week, but the Russian leader did not show up. Trump, who was on a West Asia tour at the time, had indicated he might go over but did not.The conditions for the ceasefire will be "negotiated between the two parties, as it can only be, because they know the details of a negotiation that nobody else would be aware of. The tone and spirit of the conversation were excellent. If it wasn't, I would say so now, rather than later", Trump said further.

"Russia wants to do large-scale TRADE with the United States when this catastrophic 'bloodbath' is over, and I agree. There is a tremendous opportunity for Russia to create massive amounts of jobs and wealth. Its potential is UNLIMITED. Likewise, Ukraine can be a great beneficiary on Trade, in the process of rebuilding its Country. Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine will begin immediately," he added.Trump noted in the post that he had "informed" President Zelenskyy, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, French President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy, Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany, and President Alexander Stubb of Finland.Finally, he said, "The Vatican, as represented by the Pope, has stated that it would be very interested in hosting the negotiations. Let the process begin!"



terror camps on the night of May 6-7. Misri, according to sources, said that Pakistan had been informed about those strikes after they occurred, and that Jaishankar's statement was being misrepresented.Sources further revealed that the committee unanimously passed a resolution condemning the remarks targeting Foreign Secretary Misri and his family. Members expressed full support for Misri and praised his handling of the situation during a sensitive time.During the meeting, Misri also offered a frank assessment of India's diplomatic position with Pakistan. He stated that relations have remained poor since 1947 and are unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future. Speaking on other geopolitical dynamics, Misri commented that India has historically never had strong ties with Turkey, and Ankara's stance during the recent crisis has no real trade or diplomatic consequence, sources said.The committee was told that communication channels between India and Pakistan's military leadership, particularly at the DGMO (Director General of Military Operations) level, remained open and active during the crisis.These lines of communication played a key role in avoiding further escalation and stabilising the situation post-strike.

China to speed up construction of dam in Pakistan

GNS News Agency, May 24

Beijing: China has announced plans to accelerate work on a "flagship" dam in Pakistan to ease pressure on its all-weather ally, weeks after India placed the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance following the Pahalgalam terror attack, according to a media report.The state-owned China Energy Engineering Corporation has been working on the Mohmand Hydropower Project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in north-western Pakistan since 2019.The project was scheduled to be completed next year.On Saturday, state broadcaster CCTV reported that concrete filling on the dam had started, marking "a critical construction milestone and a phase of accelerated development for this national flagship project of Pakistan", the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.The project officially began in September 2019 and was scheduled to be completed next year. The move comes ahead of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Beijing on Monday for talks with top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi.China's move followed India's announcement to suspend the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty after the deadly militant attack on tourists at Pahalgalam on April 22.

The Mohmand dam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is designed to serve as a multi-purpose facility for power generation, flood control, irrigation and water supply and is



designed to generate an estimated 800MW of hydropower and supply 300 million gallons a day of drinking water to Peshawar, the capital and largest city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.Under the Indus Waters Treaty, Pakistan has access to the waters of the Indus and Jhelum and Chenab rivers, while India is entitled to use those from the eastern Ravi, Sutlej and Beas rivers.Waters from the rivers constitute about 80 per cent of drinking and irrigation supplies to Pakistan.Days after the Pahalgalam terror attack on April 22, India informed Pakistan of its decision to keep the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance with immediate effect, saying Pakistan has breached the conditions of the treaty. PTI

UP businessman arrested on charges of spying for Pakistan

Lucknow: Days after the arrest of Haryana-based YouTuber and travel blogger Jyoti Malhotra on charges of espionage, the Uttar Pradesh Police's Special Task Force (STF) has arrested a businessman from Rampur for allegedly spying for Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).The accused, identified as Shahzad, was arrested in Moradabad after the STF received intelligence regarding his involvement in cross-border smuggling and espionage activities for Pakistan. According to officials, Shahzad had been passing sensitive national security-related information to his handlers in Pakistan.The STF, in a statement, said Shahzad had visited Pakistan several times in recent years under the pretext of conducting business. He was reportedly engaged in smuggling items such as cosmetics, clothes, spices, and other goods across the border. However, the agency revealed that this illegal trade served as a front for his covert operations on behalf of the ISI.

Further investigation indicated that Shahzad not only shared strategic information with Pakistani agents but also played a role in facilitating their operations within India. He used to provide Indian SIM cards and money to ISI agents operating in India, according to the STF.Authorities also dis-

covered that Shahzad was responsible for sending individuals from Rampur and other parts of Uttar Pradesh to Pakistan to work for the ISI. The visas for these individuals were arranged by ISI agents.Following the confirmation of these findings, an FIR (No. 04/25) under Sections 148 and 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) was registered at Police Station ATS, Lucknow.This arrest comes on the heels of a similar case involving travel blogger Jyoti Malhotra, who was detained by Haryana Police earlier this week, along with five others, for allegedly spying and providing sensitive information to Pakistani operatives. Malhotra, who had travelled to Pakistan twice in 2023, was placed in police remand for five days after her alleged links to a spy network spanning Haryana and Punjab came to light.According to the First Information Report (FIR), Malhotra visited the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi in 2023, where she met Ehsan-ur-Rahim, alias Danish, a Pakistani High Commission staffer. She reportedly shared sensitive information related to Indian locations and military movements, while also portraying Pakistan in a positive light through her social media content.Danish was recently declared persona non grata by the Indian government and expelled from the country on May 13.

As BJP, AIADMK reunite, what it means for the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls next year



The BJP had just announced that it had managed to bring the AIADMK back to the NDA fold, almost two years since their alliance broke down, in time for the Assembly elections next year. The photo, however, underlined that AIADMK chief EPS, as Palaniswami is popularly known, had ensured that Annamalai, the outgoing Tamil Nadu BJP president, would not be around to queer the pitch for him. The discord between the two stemmed not from Annamalai's criticism of the Dravidian party's icons Jayalalithaa and C N Annadurai, the first Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, but from the fact that both are from the same region (western Tamil Nadu) and the same caste (Gounders). This makes them rivals and claimants for the same political base.

Shah, the Union Home Minister, made it clear that EPS would lead the NDA in Tamil Nadu, signalling that the AIADMK chief would be the alliance's chief ministerial candidate. In all likelihood, Annamalai will now move to national politics. Despite the cop-turned-politician's hard work to build the BJP in the state, the party did not perform as well as expected, with its vote share jumping from 3.7% in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls to only 11.24% last year. The case for the two parties to come together is compelling. Their alliance got 40% of the vote share in the 2021 Assembly elections, with the DMK-Congress-Left alliance polling over 45% of the votes. When the AIADMK broke away from the NDA and contested last year's Lok Sabha elections on its own, it got 20.46% of the votes while the BJP-led group got 18%, together polling 41%. With the DMK-led alliance increasing its vote share to 47% in 2024, the difference between the two alliances has been around 5-6% in recent elections. If the NDA manages to make up some of this difference, the contest could become close.

After Jayalalithaa died in 2016, a weakened and fragmented AIADMK performed poorly in both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. The M K Stalin-led DMK, in comparison, outperformed its Dravidian rival. It won the 2021 Assembly elections and fared handsomely in the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Though the DMK has a core following, the BJP and the AIADMK will look to tap into an anti-incumbency sentiment. All eyes are also on actor Vijay, popularly referred to as "Thalapathy (commander)" by his legions of fans. He has caught the imagination of many, particularly the youth who are tired of the existing parties and want a change. During a recent trip to Tamil Nadu, I

found many speculating whether Vijay's party Tamizha Vetri Kazhagam (TVK) would join hands with the AIADMK and the BJP. Though seemingly unlikely — Vijay has not only attacked the DMK but also the BJP — if it happens, the combination will be a formidable one. Vijay has not yet opened his cards and is busy completing his films. If he decides to fight on his own, he is bound to divide the anti-incumbency votes, thereby helping the DMK. AIADMK leaders, however, feel that being a Christian, Vijay may take away some minority votes from the DMK, and that may help the NDA. EPS, RSS, and a paradox

Till last year, the BJP was thinking about building the party first, with Annamalai leading the attack on the two Dravidian majors. By deciding to piggyback the AIADMK, the party's strategy has undergone a significant shift. The BJP hopes that its grassroots outfits will help strengthen its base in a state that has resisted its advances so far. For EPS, this is his last chance to go for the kill, given the weakening and fragmentation of the AIADMK since Jayalalithaa's death. When people look at an alternative nowadays, they like the leadership question to be settled and for the leader to be strong — in this case, someone who will stand up for the state's interests in Delhi. With Stalin expected to pursue his agenda of upholding "Tamil pride" — he has done so in recent weeks — the BJP brass will be called to tone down its position on contentious issues that deepen the North-South fault lines, something that can be electorally counter-productive.

Stalin has opposed issues related to the New Education Policy, resisting the "imposition of Hindi", and called for the postponement of the delimitation exercise by 25 years. The southern states fear the "D" factor will strengthen the political clout of the Hindi heartland states even more. Stalin has even gone to the extent of urging people to "make more babies", with BJP ally and Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu also singing the same tune. Where does this leave EPS, who will be constantly under pressure on questions of Tamil identity? If he can persuade Delhi to revisit some of these issues, he may gain in stature. A Common Minimum Programme for the alliance is being talked about, and there is precedence from the Atal Behari Vajpayee days. Under the former Prime Minister, the newly formed NDA placed the BJP's controversial core issues — Ram Mandir, Article 370, and Uniform Civil Code — on the back burner. The return of the AIADMK-BJP alliance also shows that the RSS is back at the high table. Amit Shah called on RSS ideologue and Tughlak editor S Gurumurthy, with their discussions reported to have gone on for a couple of hours. The Sangh and the BJP may have calculated that Tamil Nadu is close to a "post-Dravidian" era, and the ground-level sentiment on something like opposition to Hindi is not as intense as in the 1960s, when widespread violence occurred. Then there is the inexplicable paradox of political Hindutva failing to take off so far in Tamil Nadu, though the people of the state are deeply religious (every village has a temple that hundreds flock to). The alliance appears to be the BJP's calculated gamble to break new ground in the South, where it has faced resistance. Whether it will succeed or not will be as clear as day within a year.

Expert Explains: US-Iran nuclear talks — what has happened so far, why, and the road ahead

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and United States Special Envoy Steve Witkoff held indirect talks in Muscat on Saturday. Their objective is to reach a deal that ends US economic sanctions on Iran, in return for Tehran giving up its stockpile of enriched uranium and attempts towards nuclear weaponisation. "The talks were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect... Both sides decided to continue the process in a matter of days," Araghchi posted on X. US President Donald Trump first confirmed such talks during a press conference with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on April 8. He has repeatedly expressed his desire for a deal, and threatened Iran with bombing, "the likes of which they have never seen before... if they don't make a deal".

The Iranians have long agreed to negotiate, but "indirectly", as an article in The Washington Post by Araghchi emphasised on April 9. Trump and Witkoff have repeatedly characterised any talk as "direct". The two sides entered negotiations with several such fundamental differences, but they are at the table — a scenario few expected, least of all just three months after Trump took office and amid a large-scale US campaign against the Iran-backed Houthis. Why? The change has been more in Iran than in the United States.

What has changed for Iran?

Iran is at a watershed moment. The average Iranian is 32 years old, and the newer generations have not witnessed the three formative events that bind political leaders from older generations — the 1979 revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the only succession of a Supreme Leader (Ali Khamenei succeeded Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989). In the last two decades, the Iranian regime has successfully weathered and neutralised threats from mass protests (usually led by the youth) through a mix of limited concessions and coercion. It has built a 'resistance economy' in response to Trump's 'maximum pressure' policy since 2018. In August 2024, President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran needed at least \$100B in foreign investment to achieve a growth rate sufficient to slow double-digit inflation and high unemployment rates. Iranian leaders, including Araghchi, are advocating doing business with the United States and deals like the one with Boeing in 2015 for 80 commercial aircraft (when the earlier nuclear deal took effect). Recently, Pezeshkian even said Khamenei was not opposed to US entities investing in the Iranian economy as long as they were genuine investors.

The economic need for sanctions relief has helped Iranian reformists press for a nuclear deal, while conservative politicians (who hold a majority in the Iranian Parliament) voice caution but do not upend negotiation efforts. In its neighbourhood, the severe weakening of Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' (even if temporary) has coincided with a strong Arab interest in improving cross-Gulf ties. Capitals such as Riyadh, which vociferously opposed the 2015 nuclear deal (along with Israel), are now in favour of a negotiated settlement and greater economic integration. Even Iran's extra-regional allies such as Russia, who largely stopped pushing Iran to give up nuclear enrichment after Tehran's support to Moscow over Ukraine — have freshly reiterated the preference for a deal.

How has the Iran-Trump equation evolved?

Tehran has a 22-year history of such negotiations; with the E3 (France, Germany, UK) since 2003, and with the United States since 2013. These often occurred alongside American military threats to improve Washington's bargain-

ing position. Following Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Obama-era deal in 2018, Iran learnt two main lessons — that Tehran had to improve its bargaining position through greater uranium enrichment (which it eventually did, to 60%), and that the Washington could not be trusted as a negotiating partner (Khamenei declared a 'no war, no talks' policy in 2018). Iranian acrimony towards Trump increased after the US' assassination of Iran's most celebrated General — Qassem Soleimani — in January 2020.

But Tehran's need for sanctions relief, which had brought it to the 2015 deal, progressively increased. It needed to reconcile this need with an effort to pre-empt another 2018-like possibility. Hence, despite indirect negotiations in Vienna in 2021 and 2022 with the Biden administration, Iran remained non-committal to the older deal (without formally abrogating it). In retrospect, this approach has been vindicated within Tehran as it allows fresh negotiations with Trump for a deal he can claim credit for. Abbas Araghchi's recent article even blamed the Biden administration for the Vienna talks' failure and asserted that "there is a chance for the United States to finally have a president of peace", pandering to Trump's personality.

What lies ahead?

At their very core, Washington's and Tehran's immediate objectives are aligned — Iranian nuclear disarmament, and economic engagement. Iran has consistently maintained that nuclear weapons are theologically prohibited (with Khamenei having issued a fatwa against them), and that nuclear enrichment is only a response to American aggression. The question is if the Trump administration will push for more concessions, as it did in 2017, demanding the limiting/eliminating of Iran's ballistic missile capabilities and a cessation of Iranian support to proxy groups.

Trump has a maximalist approach to deal-making — to first impose almost unacceptable terms substantiated by a strong bargaining position, and eventually settle for as many concessions as possible. Witkoff has confirmed that there is room for compromise. Hence, Washington's position might not be entrenched. Its ally Israel, however, has been lobbying for an end to all Iranian nuclear activity (which Tehran categorically rejects), and a military approach to achieve this.

Even as Trump has declared that Israel will lead anti-Iran military action if negotiations fail, the US retains room to dilute its additional demands vis-à-vis Iranian strategic capabilities. Iran too has the ability to scale down its relationship with the Yemeni Houthis (whose history reveals more autonomy than other Iran-backed groups).

A blueprint for a deal has been available since 2015 and Khamenei has reportedly given Araghchi "full authority" for negotiations. Should the Arab states boost the Iranian position during Trump's upcoming visit to the region, Netanyahu's ability to undercut US-Iran negotiations would be further dented.

Also, while US Vice President JD Vance has asserted that a war with Iran is not in America's interest, Tehran's leaders have reciprocated this reasoning for Iran (unless militarily provoked). It is also uncertain if a deal is possible within Trump's (initial) two-month timeline. US-Iran talks in 2013 had begun in March, but a blueprint was fully ready only by November, and in force only by 2015.

Ultimately, however, this seeming détente between Tehran and Washington will depend on their ability to silo negotiations from other regional developments, including Israel's war in Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon.

Space tech offers a replicable template, iDEX in defence & BIRAC in biotech working well: PSA Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood



According to the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, Ajay Kumar Sood, while there is now an increasing sensitivity to putting deep tech startups on an accelerated path, India needs to think beyond manufacturing. Prof. Sood, who is also the Chairperson of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology & Innovation Advisory Council and is a National Science Chair Professor at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore, told Anil Sasi in an interview that Indian startups are working well in sectors such as quantum technology and that his office is working on how to include deep tech startups in allocations from the fund-of-funds announced earlier. One of your key mandates is technology foresight. When we look at sectors such as deep tech startups, the one big concern is that the number of deep tech startups that are coming out in India is low and that they are not really in the cutting-edge technology segments. Do you see that changing?

So, the good news is that there is an increasing sensitivity to take the deep tech startups on an accelerated path. Our office has helped prepare a deep tech policy (the National Deep Tech Startup Policy), which was up for public consultation and so on... What we would like to do from that is make an action plan, not us, but DPIIT (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) and other places, make an action plan to see how it can help. For example, this fund-of-funds that has been announced in this year's Budget, the question is, can we allocate some of it for deep tech startups? That is a suggestion we have. And also we have this Rs 1 lakh crore corpus fund, which was announced in last year's Budget... which is like a loan, a zero per cent loan. Again, the question is how do we include deep tech startups? Because deep tech startups, as you know, need long-term patient funding that (might be) difficult with the venture capital funds and others, because they may not wait for so long (for projects to pick up)... So our goal will be to create instruments. Some of them could be policy decisions. Some of them can be like the fund-of-funds and so on, so that our deep tech startups get stabilised here and they remain with their IP (intellectual property) here... Because it's not only starting up, it also should be sustainable here... So, for example, in quantum itself, there are now about 35 companies alone, and they are deep tech, obviously. A few of them are big. But many of them are small startups. So, under the National Quantum Mission, there is a provision to fund startups, and is being done. Now, eight startups have been funded under the quantum mission for these deep tech startups. Similarly, this will happen in the AI mission. In the AI mission, which is now being done by MeitY, one vertical is full on startups. So, my own sense is now that there is very high sensitivity to enhancing deep tech startups, but we have to see that all conditions are favourable (for fostering this).

There is this conversation around this proposed centre for deep tech translation. How do you see this evolving?

So we may not have a centre, per se, because that is just an articulation of the high priority we will give (for this initiative). It can be a centre, it can be a distributed effort, it can be a virtual centre. But what we are saying is there has to be a concerted effort, a body that should focus on deep tech startups in a consolidated manner by looking at all aspects of it. So, it may not be an institute, or any such thing. But it could be a mix of many things, it could possibly be virtual. The intention is to step up the focus on these deep tech startups.

One area where India has done exceedingly well is the national space programme, not just proving that we can do cutting-edge stuff, but that it can be done by the public sector, and at a fraction of the cost benchmarks. And now we are getting in private players who are doing well too. Can we replicate the success of the space sector to other areas, such as deep tech, or nuclear, or EVs?

For example, in defence, there is the iDEX programme (Innovations for Defence Excellence, an initiative of the Ministry of Defence to support innovation and technology development in the defence and aerospace sectors). Actually, iDEX is a huge success. People probably don't know much about it. iDEX is for the deep tech startups in this space, because they are working on cutting-edge technologies that are required by the strategic sector. It's not a random thing, it is what is needed (in the sector). Can you come up with a solution (for this problem)? That's the challenge,

and iDEX (is) enormously successful. And, in recent years, the funding for this has been increased.. So, iDEX is a very good example. Similarly, there is BIRAC (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, a Department of Biotechnology initiative) to promote startups in the biotechnology sector. The biotech ecosystem has grown in startups because of BIRAC. They have invested probably a few hundred crores over the years, and it has resulted in many times more biotechnology companies coming up. And they are also deep tech projects.

So two examples are there already, iDEX in defence and BIRAC in biotechnology, they are very similar to what we're doing in space. See, in space, there is an advantage, because the players exactly know what to do. Similarly, in defence too, one knows exactly what is required. But in other areas, we have to also create the demand for future products. So, this is where we will need the support. Another thing which should happen, is that we have been very good in design, because we have a lot of designers. Over 2,000 or so, or more. But what we need is that we should have designing capabilities on our specifications, not on someone else's specifications, which means some intellectual thinking has already (been done) somewhere else. So that's what will make our country a leading product nation. What do you need in a product nation?

Think about it. It's not manufacturing... Manufacturing, of course, is required, down the line, but it (manufacturing) is not the only thing, because then you will get into the middle-income trap. Because the profits will go somewhere else, and much of the profits are before and after manufacturing. So, what we need is, can we really have a product that is not based on somebody else's design, but our design. So, I think, that is what the culture we need to bring in. Our youngsters are very, very good, actually. I mean, the design companies that are there in Bengaluru, all our engineers there, are very good, but they are designing for somebody else and to their specifications. Question is, why can't we have our GCC (global capability centres). And there are some companies that are coming up now, in manufacturing, such as Bharat Forge, the Tatas are doing (some work), Tech Mahindra is there... More has to happen. So, my passion is how to foster that.

In the nuclear sector, with the US Department of Energy specific authorisation (10CFR810) that enables an American company Holtec Inc. the possibility of transfer of technology to at least three companies to start off with, how crucial is this development in your view?

See, nuclear energy is inevitable, because if you look at the energy mix, which is required for net zero carbon by 2070, nuclear energy is integral to this energy transition period. You can't get away from that. Given that, whatever is required: whether it is SMR or whether it is 500 megawatt conventional reactors or any other reactor type, all has to be used now. SMRs have a distinct advantage, that if you need a very focused energy supply, like for data centres, and there could be many more examples, an SMR offers a possible application, even if it is not economical. So, I would like to say that we need to keep all options open and it's not a question of 'or'; rather it should be, 'and', when it comes to multiple technologies.

On EV mobility, your department has kept the technology option open, just like you mentioned for the energy sector. But within sections of the government, the conclusion seems to be that battery electrics are the only option. Shouldn't we pursue a multiple technologies pathway to achieve electrification of mobility?

I completely agree, multiple technologies (is the way forward). Take the fuel cell, green hydrogen, and the fuel cell is a very good option, along with EVs. I'm not saying EV should be (ruled) out, but with EVs, I don't think that lithium chemistry (for batteries) is the end of the world... Other electro chemistries have to be tried, and are being tried... Solid-state batteries are the ultimate, in my view, because they'll be the safest, and energy density will be the highest, but there you still have some R&D issues, so it's still not commercial yet... But that's where we should work. Fully solid-state batteries, where the electrolyte is also solid. But sodium ion batteries are already an option. Our R&D roadmap (e-mobility R&D Roadmap for India' released last year) actually tells you which technologies you have to (pursue) now, so that you are not import dependent after five years. And based on that, the good news is that in the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (established through the ANRF Act of 2023 that was notified in February 2024 and is chaired by the Prime Minister), the first mission we have launched is on electric vehicles and the R&D needed. (This is) where we need to be competitive. It's not a replacement R&D, there's a difference. Something we are importing, you want to replace that. That is one option. But you have to also know what you will need after five years, three years, because R&D takes that long... So EVs are absolutely essential, but when I say EV, it should be more generic (in technology terms). Fuel cell is one option, and hybrids, and so on... So, options are there. And in my view, a country of our size and our breadth, we need all

“Every child is born with extraordinary abilities”

My belief in the incredible potential of every child truly began when I became a mother. Watching my son grow in those first two years was nothing short of magical. I saw him go from lying down to sitting, crawling, walking, talking, and laughing. It was so clear to me in those moments that every child is born with extraordinary abilities — what I like to think of as their own superpowers. That experience deeply shaped my understanding of children as naturally curious, capable, and full of potential. Later, when I started my school, I saw this truth reflected in so many other children. And through my travels to different countries, I have been struck by how universal this is — no matter where a child is born, this innate potential exists within them. For me, it all began with the awe and wonder of motherhood.

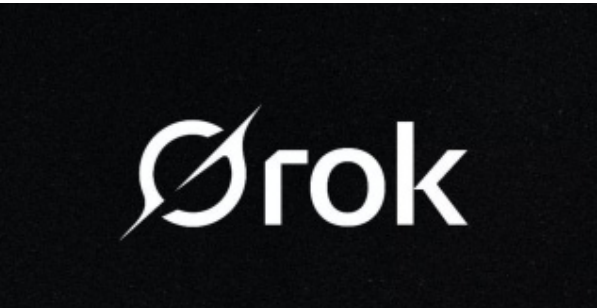
What are your fondest memories from your school days?

My fondest memories of my school days were not really about the learning itself, but the friendships that I built over the years. I went to a small, all-girls school, and the connections we formed were truly special. It was those simple moments — eating lunch together, playing games, and chatting — that stayed with me the most. This was before the era of television, so our entertainment was just spending time with each other. Looking back, those small, everyday interactions made those years unforgettable.

How would you describe the philosophy behind Riverside School's design-led approach?

The core philosophy of Riverside's design-led approach lies in a simple yet profound shift: moving from designing for the student to designing with the student. This change in perspective unlocks the power of co-creation and collaboration, which are essential for discovering meaningful solutions. What we now call the Riverside design-led approach focuses on involving all key stakeholders — whether it is the students, parents, or teachers — in the decision-making process and the design of solutions. By doing so, we create a sense of ownership and agency that truly empowers our children. It is about recognizing that when students are active participants, rather than passive recipients, their capacity to contribute and innovate flourishes. You studied at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. When you interact with teachers who feel intimidated by the vocabulary associated with “design thinking”, how do you break down the concept in a friendly and accessible way? To introduce design thinking or the design process to someone new — whether a teacher or a student — it is helpful to think of it as a recipe. A simple recipe. When followed step by step, leads to a wonderful outcome. And the more faithfully you follow each part of the recipe, the more meaningful or “delicious” the result becomes.

Grok, unhinged! Who is responsible for its sensational responses on X?



GNS News Agency, May 24

With the Indian government in touch with Elon Musk’s X over stirring responses generated by its artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot Grok, the question that many in the government are grappling with is: who is actually responsible for the retorts that the AI has been producing on the social media platform? Laden with profanities, sweeping takes, colouring some conservative users, including founder Musk, as the biggest spreaders of misinformation – Grok’s responses to questions posed by Indian users have so far turned out to be an amalgamation of the attitudes and demeanour familiar to those who frequently use the social network.

Here are some facts: Grok is not a person, at best, it is computer code running on high-end compute at the backend, and at its worst, that code periodically churns out the underbelly of the data that has been fed to it. Grok is artificial, its intelligence debatable. So, when Grok uses a misogynist Hindi expletive when responding to a user about their most prominent mutuals, or calls Musk one of the biggest sources of misinformation on the social media platform – it led to people asking Grok a flurry of questions, directly through their posts, or as comments to other posts. This piece aims to demystify three main concerns around what’s happening with Grok: who is responsible for its responses, are the people asking it questions somehow liable, and if Grok is a source of truth.

Who is liable, can people be penalised?

Internet platforms like X, Meta, and YouTube have legal protection from the content that their users post. This, in law, is called safe harbour – the argument being platforms have no control over what users are posting. They are mere conduits, so they can not be held liable for hosting third-party content. While that convention itself is currently being debated given virality and the potential of speech on such platforms to cause real world harms, the million dollar ques-

tion is if Grok, an artificial output generator, can have safe harbour protections. That is a complex question to deal with for lawmakers. X has told the Indian government that it has been trained on the open-Internet, which presumably also includes content users post on X. So, in a way, everything that Grok generates is based on what people spending years on the Internet have produced. But can then they be held responsible? That is like asking if the ocean can be sued for being wet. Besides, speech is a highly protected category in India, with the Indian Constitution affording the freedom of expression as a fundamental right, with some reasonable restrictions. But, those rights are available to human beings. Humans’ speech should be censored only under select circumstances when they obviously violate restrictions laid down in the Constitution. Does Grok have the right to unfettered free speech? And what is Grok’s free speech even – its code essentially determines what the next word in a sentence should be, which is a factor of the underlying dataset it has been trained on, which in turn is generated by actual humans. Both the code, and the content in the language model. So, many would argue that the liability of Grok’s responses primarily lies with xAI, its creators, and X for allowing Grok to produce responses without any filters. But that too raises some pertinent questions. How does one hold creators of an algorithm responsible? Is it the highly-paid people who have written the code, or the low-wage data annotators? These are questions that regulators around the world are unlikely to have a quick, and accurate answer to. “Grok is certainly not a real person, it’s an artificial entity. But some of its responses are definitely problematic. It’s an interesting, and difficult problem, that us in government will have to figure out,” a senior government official said.

Should one trust Grok?

The short answer to that question is, AI responses should not be treated as accurate pieces of information, no matter how much they satiate one’s socio-political beliefs. Already, platforms are applying filters on their AI models to restrict their political speech in order to stay safe from government scrutiny. As India headed to Lok Sabha elections last year, Google said it will restrict the types of election-related questions users can ask its artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot Gemini in the country. Earlier, Krutrim, the chatbot developed by an Indian AI startup founded by Bhavish Aggarwal of Ola, had been found to self-censor on certain keywords. AI platforms are built to predict the next word in a phrase, and to try and satisfy the query a user has asked – and models like Grok have so far shown they will do anything to achieve that, beg, borrow or steal.

India’s oil import dependency on course to hit fresh full-year high in FY25 amid growing demand, stagnant domestic production

Growing demand for fuel and other petroleum products amid stagnant domestic crude oil output led India’s reliance on imported crude oil to increase to over 88 per cent in the first 11 months of the current financial year ending March (FY25), indicating that the import dependency for the full financial year could breach the all-time-high level of the last financial year. The latest data released by the oil ministry’s Petroleum Planning & Analysis 1Cell (PPAC) shows that India’s oil import dependency was 88.2 per cent in April-February, up from 87.7 per cent in the corresponding period of the last financial year (FY24). For the full FY24, reliance on imported oil was 87.8 per cent. Industry watchers believe that the import dependency level for the entire FY25 could be a tad higher than the April-February level, as was the case in the previous financial year.

India’s energy needs are consistently growing, leading to higher oil imports. This is fuelled by factors like growing energy-intensive industries, increased vehicle sales, a rapidly expanding aviation sector, growing consumption of petrochemicals, and a rising population. India’s reliance on imported oil has generally increased over the years, with the exception of FY21 when demand was suppressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. India’s oil import dependency was 87.8 per cent in FY24, 87.4 per cent in FY23, 85.5 per cent in FY22, 84.4 per cent in FY21, 85 per cent in FY20, and 83.8 per cent in FY19.

India’s heavy reliance on imported crude oil makes its economy vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. This also impacts the country’s trade deficit, foreign exchange reserves, the rupee’s exchange rate, and inflation rate, among others. The Indian government aims to reduce the country’s reliance on imported crude oil but faces challenges due to sluggish domestic oil output amidst rising demand. In 2015, the government aimed to reduce reliance on oil imports to 67 per cent by 2022. However, import dependency has only increased. The government has implemented several policy reforms to encourage investments in India’s oil and gas exploration and production sector, the latest being the Oilfield (Regulatory and Development) Amendment Bill, which was recently passed by the Parliament. The government is also



promoting electric mobility, biofuels, and other alternative fuels to reduce oil imports. While there has been an increase in electric mobility adoption and the blending of biofuels with conventional fuels, it is not sufficient to offset petroleum demand growth. India’s crude oil imports rose to 219.9 million tonnes in the 11 months to February from 213.4 million tonnes in the year-ago period. Meanwhile, domestic oil production declined slightly to 26.2 million tonnes from 26.9 million tonnes. Total domestic consumption of petroleum products in April-February rose 2.6 per cent year-on-year to 218.3 million tonnes, of which only 25.8 million tonnes of products estimated to have been produced from domestic crude oil, resulting in a self-sufficiency level of just 11.8 per cent, per the PPAC data. The calculation of the extent of import reliance is based on the domestic consumption of petroleum products and excludes petroleum product exports as those volumes do not represent India’s demand. India—the world’s third-largest consumer of crude oil and also one of its top importers—is a net exporter of petroleum products. The country’s gross oil import bill for April-February was \$124.7 billion, an increase of almost 3 per cent year-on-year. Crude oil imports top the list of India’s merchandise imports. India’s crude oil consumption and imports are projected to rise further due to growing domestic demand. Consumption of petroleum products is projected to increase by 4.7 per cent in FY26, reaching 252.93 million tonnes, per PPAC projections.

UK’s Prudential to float venture with HCL group for health insurance

Prudential plc, Prudential plc joint venture with Vama Sundari Investments, Vama Sundari Investments (Delhi) Private Ltd, HCL Group, Indian express business, business news, current affairs Apart from 27 non-life insurance companies, seven standalone health insurance firms are already operating in India. UK-based insurance giant Prudential plc has announced its plan to establish a joint venture with Vama Sundari Investments (Delhi) Private Ltd, an HCL Group’s promoter company founded by Shiv Nadar, to operate a standalone health insurance business in India. Subject to obtaining regulatory approvals, Prudential Group Holdings, a UK subsidiary of Prudential plc, will hold a 70% stake in the joint venture, while Vama will hold the remaining 30% stake. Prudential plc is a member of the UK FTSE 100 Index. Prudential’s announcement comes three days after the exit of German insurance giant Allianz from joint ventures with the Bajaj group. In India, Prudential’s business primarily consists of a 21.97 per cent holding in the Indian Stock Exchange listed life insurance business, ICICI Prudential Life, and 49 per cent of the asset manager, ICICI Prudential Asset Management Company Limited, through its asset management business Eastspring Investments. Anil Wadhvani, CEO, Prudential plc, said: “India is a key strategic market for Prudential and we have a deep connection with the country having opened our first

branch in Kolkata in 1923. Today, we have a significant presence with life insurance and asset management businesses providing a comprehensive offering of insurance and wealth products. Prudential plc (UK) provides life and health insurance and asset management in 24 markets across Asia and Africa. Apart from 27 non-life insurance companies, seven standalone health insurance firms are already operating in India. “India’s growing economy, population and middle class create significant opportunities for growth in its insurance market, especially in the health, savings, protection, and retirement sectors,” he said. “Transforming access to healthcare and increasing insurance penetration are strategic priorities for Prudential and through our comprehensive health solutions we aim to offer help to millions of Indian consumers when they need it most,” Wadhvani said. “Through this collaboration, we aim to advance our common mission to enhance access to quality health insurance and drive greater penetration across the country. It reflects our commitment to improving the well-being of millions of Indians and contributing to a stronger, more inclusive healthcare ecosystem,” said Shikhar Malhotra, Executive Director, Vama Sundari Investments. The joint venture health insurance company will be led by industry veteran Amar Joshi (CEO designate), subject to regulatory approval.”

Man got a fungal infection on his lungs after repeatedly smelling his own socks; doctor explains how



It started as an odd habit — one that seemed more quirky than consequential. But for a man from Chongqing, China, regularly sniffing his dirty socks after a long day turned into a serious medical ordeal. Identified only by the pseudonym Li Qi in a report by The Sun, the man began experiencing severe, unrelenting coughing fits that progressed into sleepless nights and bloodshot eyes. At first, he resorted to over-the-counter cough syrup, but his symptoms only worsened. According to Dr Liang Peiqiang, chief physician in the hospital’s Department of Respiratory Medicine, Li Qi’s CT and MRI scans revealed signs of inflammation and infection in the lower right lung. A bronchoscopy confirmed the diagnosis: he was suffering from a fungal lung infection caused by the Aspergillus fungus — a condition medically referred to as aspergillosis. Dr Peiqiang told the People’s Daily Health Client that the patient’s peculiar sock-sniffing habit may have exposed him to spores of the fungus. “After hearing what he said, we realised that this habit of Li Qi might be the culprit that caused his lung inflammation,” he noted, as per The Sun.

What is Aspergillosis, and how dangerous is it?

To better understand the medical implications of this case, Dr Vikas Mittal, Director and Pulmonologist at CK Birla Hospital, Delhi, explained that Aspergillus is a common mould found in damp environments such as compost, rotting leaves, or even worn socks. “Inhalation of these fungal spores is usually harmless to healthy individuals,” Dr Mittal said, “but in people with compromised immunity or pre-ex-

isting lung conditions, the spores can colonise and lead to serious infections.” lung health In more severe cases, patients might cough up golden-brown mucus plugs or even blood. If untreated, the infection can invade lung tissue and become life-threatening. (Photo: Getty Images/ Thinkstock) Dr Mittal emphasised that the severity of aspergillosis can vary — from mild allergic reactions to life-threatening invasive infections. “The fungus thrives in areas of mucus buildup or structural lung damage,” he added, “and symptoms often mimic conditions like tuberculosis, making diagnosis challenging.”

Can sniffing socks really lead to a fungal lung infection?

While it might sound bizarre, the connection isn’t completely implausible. Dr Mittal clarified: “Smelling dirty socks alone is unlikely to cause aspergillosis in a healthy individual. However, the habit may introduce a high load of fungal spores into the nasal and respiratory passages, especially if the socks are damp and kept in poorly ventilated environments.” In Li Qi’s case, the sock-sniffing was likely a contributing factor rather than the sole cause. “It’s more about the immune status of the individual,” said Dr Mittal. “Those with chronic conditions like diabetes, HIV, or COPD are far more susceptible to such infections.” Li Qi’s symptoms — persistent cough, insomnia, and bloodshot eyes — were textbook signs of aspergillosis. In more severe cases, patients might cough up golden-brown mucus plugs or even blood. If untreated, the infection can invade lung tissue and become life-threatening. Treatment for aspergillosis generally involves antifungal medication, with voriconazole being the standard choice. Dr Mittal stressed the importance of early diagnosis: “The prognosis is usually good with timely treatment, but delays can result in the infection spreading and becoming much harder to control.” As a cautionary note, Dr Mittal advised that immunocompromised individuals — including those undergoing chemotherapy, transplant recipients, or people with uncontrolled diabetes — should avoid environments where mould is likely to grow. That includes damp laundry, poorly ventilated rooms, and yes, funky gym socks. “Maintaining basic hygiene and ensuring good air circulation at home are simple but effective preventive measures,” he said.

‘What kind of Muslim is she’: Nushrratt Bharuccha opens up about being trolled for praying in temples, mosques; how spiritual freedom shapes mental peace

In today’s digitally driven world, many are quick to judge others’ personal choices, especially when it comes to religion and expression. Amid this, actor Nushrratt Bharuccha’s words strike a powerful chord about staying rooted in one’s beliefs while embracing spiritual openness.

In a recent conversation with journalist Shubhankar Mishra, she opened up about navigating faith, identity, and online criticism with unwavering clarity. “Wherever you find peace, whether it’s in a mandir, a gurudwara, or a church, you should go there. I even say this openly: I pray namaz. If I get time, I pray five times a day. I even carry my prayer mat while travelling. Wherever I go, I find the same peace and calm. I’ve always believed there’s one God, and different paths to connect with Him. And I want to explore all those paths,” she said. Bharuccha then addressed constant trolling online by those who question her choices. “Whether it’s about my clothes or where I go, I’ve faced comments. When I post my picture, people ask, ‘What kind of Muslim is she?’ Look at her clothes.’ How do I handle it? Just like any other criticism.” “It doesn’t change me. It won’t stop me from going to a temple or praying namaz. I’ll keep doing both. Because that’s my faith,” she added. She described herself as a liberal Muslim who chooses to practice spirituality in a way that feels most authentic to her. “When you’re clear in your thoughts, spirit, and mind, no one in the world can shake you,” she stated.

But what does this kind of inner clarity involve psychologically, and how can someone cultivate it when facing external disapproval?

Neha Cadabam, Senior psychologist and executive director at Cadabams Hospitals, tells indianexpress.com, “Inner clarity is often the result of a well-integrated sense of self, knowing who you are, what you stand for, and why certain values matter to you. Psychologically, it’s associated with high self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and a stable internal value system. People with this clarity tend to respond to criticism with reflection rather than reactivity.” Cultivating this state begins with introspection, Cadabam adds. Practices like therapy, meditation, and value-based exercises can help individuals explore what



truly matters to them. It’s also helpful to engage in self-affirming routines, surround oneself with authentic relationships, and make time for environments that foster internal peace. “It’s not about becoming immune to criticism, but about knowing where your identity rests, so that external noise doesn’t overpower internal truth,” the expert highlights.

How important is spiritual freedom for one’s sense of identity and mental peace?

Spiritual freedom plays a deeply personal role in mental well-being and identity formation. Cadabam explains that the ability to connect with one’s beliefs, whether through prayer, meditation, or simply contemplation, “provides a sense of grounding and inner harmony.” When this freedom is respected, individuals are more likely to experience psychological safety and authenticity.

“When societal norms attempt to confine or judge such expressions, it can lead to inner conflict, especially if one feels forced to choose between belonging and being true to oneself. For many, spiritual practice is not just ritualistic, it’s restorative. It offers space to reflect, recharge, and find meaning amidst external pressures,” stresses Cadabam. Supporting this freedom is essential not only for individual peace but also for cultivating a more inclusive and emotionally intelligent society. Encouraging open, respectful conversations around belief systems can help reduce judgment and foster shared understanding.

Govt looks for integration of unconventional datasets in census, other surveys

census, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, MoSPI, unconventional datasets in census, Indian express business, business news, current affairs The linking statistical data to geospatial locations and making it easily accessible to various data users was discussed in the session.

The government is looking to tap unconventional datasets and share alternative, administrative datasets with various stakeholders to enable integration with census and other surveys. In a brainstorming session on ‘Leveraging Non-Conventional Data Sources for Official Statistics’ held by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Thursday, discussions were held that there should be efforts to create an enabling environment to use all possible data sources — conventional and non-conventional — to use for decision making. “It was discussed that the ministries / departments may use the alternative datasets for the real time monitoring and tracking the decision variables. In addition, it also emerged that the ministries / departments may make available alternative / administrative datasets to various stakeholders so that their integration with census / survey data may become possible,” an official statement said. MoSPI Secretary Saurabh Garg urged representatives of the central ministries and departments including statistical advisors to explore the possibility of reusing datasets generated by the other agencies. “The culture of data sharing, however, maintaining the sanctity of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) must be fostered in the working of all the stakeholders,” the statement quoted him as saying. The session was attended by Kris Gopalakrishnan, Chairman, Axilor Ventures and co-founder of Infosys; Rana Hasan, Regional Lead Economist, South Asia, Asian Development Bank (ADB); and Shombi



The government is looking to tap unconventional datasets and share alternative, administrative datasets with various stakeholders to enable integration with census and other surveys

Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) among others. In total, 150 delegates attended the session. Gopalakrishnan stressed on the importance of non-conventional data by citing use of Aadhaar. He said there is a need for standardisation of various datasets, strengthening data processing capabilities, and developing data governance framework, adding that there should be a system to allow access to private data, legally backed and for rightful usages. The linking statistical data to geospatial locations and making it easily accessible to various data users was discussed in the session. Ayago Wambile, Senior Economist, World Bank, spoke about different non-traditional data sources such as scanner data, mobile phone data etc. Tags:

Strings of legacy: the lone veena-maker of Nuzvid



Nestled in the narrow lane opposite the now-defunct Apsara Theatre in Nuzvid, a town famed for its luscious mangoes, the third house from the entrance looks markedly different from its neighbours. Unlike the well-maintained, urbane-looking houses, this house lays bare its brickwork, giving off an incomplete, rickety appearance. Yet, within this modest-looking abode thrives a legacy of cultural richness.

This is the house of Sheikh Mabu Saheb, 50, where more than 70 or 80 Veenas — India’s national instrument — reside alongside the dying craft of making them. “Just like playing a veena, making it is a skill which only a few can master,” says Sheikh Mabu, seated on the floor surrounded by his tools and materials, carefully sandpapering a veena. Brushes, paint bottles, wooden logs, chisellers and hammers of all shapes and sizes lie scattered around him, each playing a role in the designing and making of the instrument. “This is a Madhura Veena. It is distinguishable by its pear-shaped body. This particular one is bound for overseas,” he says, while meticulously brushing the sandpaper over the veena’s wooden surface. Nearby hang rows of finished and unfinished veenas, ready to be dispatched upon receipt of an order.

For over seven decades, this dilapidated structure has served both as a residence and a workshop for Sheikh Mabu’s family. The family does not own any land, and neither does Sheikh Mabu have a storefront. He relies on word of mouth to sell his instruments. “It is not a business, you see. Those who know my work come here to buy,” he says. He crafts all kinds of veenas, including the famed Saraswati veena, Madhura veena, Mayur veena, Sankhu veena, Rudra veena, Vipanchi veena, and the Gotu or Chitra veena. He also makes the folding veena, which can be dismantled, and a 21-inch veena. The 21-inch veena was recognised as the smallest playable veena in the world. While the normal size of a veena is 53 inches, Sheikh Mabu used his skill in crafting the smallest one, which retained all the ‘sapta swaralu’ (seven strings), which took over a month to craft. “It is difficult to put a number on the orders we get,” he says, adding that, on an average, 20 to 30 veenas get sold in a year. But, orders or no orders, Sheikh Mabu sits down to make veenas every single day since his family has been dependent on this for decades. “It takes 12 days for one person to finish making a Veena. It requires a lot of patience, perseverance and attention. There should not be any scope for errors,” Sheikh Mabu says, adding that making the 21-inch veena took him more than a month. Having more craftsmen could have helped him finish work in less time. Earlier, there used to be 10 skilled persons to help him with designing or chiselling. “Some of them left for better work, while some died. Nuzvid had around 20 craftsmen earlier who made musical instruments. Their number, too, has shrunk over the years due to lack of support from the government,” he says, his voice tinged with sorrow. Sheikh Mabu, whose family has been making veenas for more than 50 years, is the last man standing in Nuzvid, once known for the veena industry, striving to preserve the art despite the challenges.

Laborious processThe entire instrument is made from a single piece of wood procured from the jackfruit tree. Three to four instruments can be made from a single tree, depending on its size. Sheikh Mabu says the tree has to be 70 to 80 years old for its wood to be useful. “We usually go to Devarapalle in West Godavari for the tree. We have to cut down there itself and transport it to our place by truck, after paying for the tree, for cutting and transporting,” he says, adding that these days the Forest Department’s permission has to be sought. Once the logs reach home, they are put aside for a month to dry. Once they are dried and hardened, he begins carving, shaping, and smoothing the body using sandpaper. To make the resonators, one called Tumba and the other Kunda, a circular shape on the wood is carved at first. The log is then hollowed and plated. After the initial carvings, the artisans use sandpaper to smoothen the wooden surface. The whole process takes 10-12 days for a single person. The entire process is meticulous and labour-intensive. Purchasing the wood alone and other raw materials, none of which are available in Nuzvid, cost him around ₹40,000. The starting price of the veena is ₹50,000.

Forging leadership with India’s youth power

Every year, January 12 is celebrated across the length and breadth of India as ‘National Youth Festival’, a day which is also the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue is an innovative one, launched with the vision of engaging India’s youth in the developmental journey of the nation. The programme seeks to harness the collective energy, creativity and leadership potential of young minds to contribute towards realising a Viksit Bharat, i.e., a Developed India. In line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s belief that the youth of the country are central to India’s growth, the dialogue provides a platform for young leaders to engage in discussions, exchange ideas, and collaborate on solutions to the nation’s challenges. The competition and its stages are designed to inspire the youth to think critically and contribute in a proactive way towards India’s progress. A dialogue, its competitive nature

The dialogue is a dynamic, multi-stage initiative, designed to engage and empower India’s youth in the country’s developmental journey. The competition has four stages, the first being a Viksit Bharat quiz held digitally on the My Bharat platform. This stage tested a participant’s knowledge about India’s achievements, challenges, and vision for a developed future, covering areas such as sustainable development, technology, and national policies. The top scorers moved on to the second stage, i.e., essay and blog writing, where they had to write on themes such as tech for Viksit Bharat and empowering youth for Viksit Bharat, reflecting on their vision for India’s future. These submissions were evaluated for originality. In the third stage, the Viksit Bharat Vision Pitch Deck, participants at the State level presented innovative ideas for India’s development through a compelling pitch deck. The best teams from each State advanced to the fourth and last stage of the Viksit Bharat National Championship, which will be held at the Bharat

The folding veena is the costliest at ₹1.50 lakh, but the expenses are also much more. “In any case, the profit margin is hardly ₹10,000 or less, which is hardly enough for sustenance these days,” Sheikh Mabu says, wondering how a family can live on such a low income.

Despite low returns and hardships, he wants to ensure that the art lives on. While his son and nephew know the process, he fears that the art, which was propelled to fame by his father, would die out if there are few to take it forward. Nuzvid’s veena connection Nuzvid has been associated with veena-making for centuries. Tracing its history, Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee Ayyagari Syamasundaram, who was also the principal of Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao Government Music College in Vijayawada for 15 years, says classical music flourished under the patronage of kings and zamindars. “The art received great patronage from them. The flourishing of music led to a boom in musical instrument makers,” says Mr. Syamasundaram, who is himself an eminent veena player. Sheikh Mabu’s grandfather, Sheikh Kasim Saheb, began the family’s association with veena-making, followed by his father, Sheikh Meera Saheb, who gained a reputation for his lightweight, finely tuned instruments. “My father was particularly fascinated by the veena as in those days it was common to see yesteryear actresses such as Anjali Devi, Jamuna and Savitri playing the instrument,” Sheikh Mabu says. Then, his father left for Vijayawada, where he learnt its manufacturing from one Ratna Varma, whose son Lakshmana Rao used to run the lone veena manufacturing shop in the city. After learning the ropes, Sheikh Meera Saheb went back to Nuzvid and began making veenas on his own. After he became adept at the skill, he presented the instrument as a gesture of gratitude to all three actresses. He also presented veenas to former President late A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a keen aficionado of the instrument, and spiritual guru Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swami. Later, as he grew famous, legends of Carnatic music such as Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna, M.S. Subbulakshmi and veena maestro Chitti Babu procured their veenas from this humble household, recalls Sheikh Mabu. “Sheikh Meera Saheb’s veena was known for its lightweight, slender body. The sound from the resonators was of great quality and the veena would last for years. All the maestros of the day would source their instruments from him,” recalls Mr. Syamasundaram, who recommends his students to purchase veenas from Sheikh Mabu.

“In Sheikh Mabu’s case, the apple did not fall far from the tree,” smiles Mr. Syamasundaram, noting how Sheikh Mabu has carried forward his family legacy with unstinting devotion to his craft. He wonders where the next generation of veena enthusiasts would have procured the instrument from had Sheikh Meera Saheb’s sons chosen to pursue a different path. Both Sheikh Mabu and his brother, who from a tender age saw their father making veenas and playing on them, naturally gravitated towards the art. While his brother died at a young age, Sheikh Mabu carried the legacy forward. “It is the grace of Ammavaru (Goddess) that we, being Muslims, were able to learn this art. The veena is highly revered in Hinduism. How else can one explain it?” he says. Today, his name is taken in the same breath as the veena, and has come to be known as Veena Sheikh or Mabu Veena. He not only exports the instrument to different cities but also to other countries. Sheikh Mabu fondly recalls being approached by temple authorities to repair the golden Veena at the Durga Malleswara Swamyvarla Devasthanam in Vijayawada. He has also presented a veena to the Saraswati temple in Nuzvid, the Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai and Durga temple at Patamata in Vijayawada. Sheikh Mabu has been a recipient of many awards and certificates, including from the A.P. Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited in 2014, ‘Aasthana Vidwan’ from Avadhoota Datta Peetham, and Wonder Book of Records for the smallest veena, among others. “While I am thankful to all those who recognised my work, my humble request to the State government is to grant me two acres, which I can use to set up an institute to teach others,” Sheikh Mabu says, adding that the jackfruit tree, too, should be available to them free of charge. The Central government, recognising the art as an endangered form, is organising training sessions in veena making under the mentorship of Sheikh Mabu through the Lepakshi Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited. At a workshop near Nuzvid, 30 trainees, including 20 women from farming backgrounds, are learning the basics. The five-month classes will go on till March. “All 30 people are being given a stipend. Once the sessions are over, they will be taken into work by Sheikh Mabu,” says Lakshmi Kanth Inapala, Managing Director, Lepakshi. He said the training sessions are part of their efforts to preserve the ancient art of veena making, found only in Bobbili and Nuzvid in Andhra Pradesh. For Sheikh Mabu, the veena is more than an instrument — it is a lifeline to a rich cultural heritage he refuses to let fade into obscurity.

Mandapam in New Delhi on January 11-12, 2025. In the finale, the selected teams will pitch their visionary solutions to the Prime Minister. This in itself is a unique opportunity to influence national policy and contribute to India’s vision of a Viksit Bharat. The competition is structured to test not only a participant’s knowledge and creativity but also their leadership and communication skills. The features this year The National Youth Festival is an annual celebration of India’s youth, fostering a spirit of national integration and promoting the ideals of youth empowerment and creativity. However, this year’s festival stands out in several ways. The focus this year is on Youth for Sustainable Development, a theme that resonates with growing recognition of young people as the drivers of global change. In line with India’s commitment to the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), the festival has incorporated workshops, seminars and cultural activities that align with the vision of a greener, more inclusive, future. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on the role of technology and innovation in achieving national goals, with specific sessions dedicated to Tech for Good and Innovation for India’s Development. Another unique feature this year is expanded virtual participation. With digital platforms having been integrated into the festival, young people from remote corners of the country can participate in discussions, workshops, and showcase their talents and ideas online. This inclusivity broadens the festival’s reach and ensures that youth, regardless of location, has the chance to contribute. The 2025 National Youth Festival will feature: workshops and panels on leadership and innovation. With a focus on topics such as youth leadership, digital entrepreneurship, and sustainable living, these sessions will equip participants with the skills necessary to drive change in their communities. Second, cultural programmes.

Is it time for an Indian Banksy? The list of issues in need of public scrutiny is growing by the day but Indian street art continues to play it safe



Some years ago, in the U.S., I remember attending a charity auction organised by the Philadelphia Arts League. Local artists were invited to display and sell their works by placing them on a conveyor belt that moved slowly towards a shredder. If a piece was picked by a buyer, the proceeds went to the children’s hospital; if not, it was shredded into the garbage bin. The artist merely watched helplessly. London-based street artist Banksy similarly sold a painting at a Sotheby’s auction for £1 million. As soon as the bid was accepted and the hammer came down, the artwork slipped out of its frame and shredded onto the floor. The self-destruction ironically increased the artistic value of the painting which was renamed Love is in the Bin.

Whether the shredding was an artistic act done to add theatrical value to the painting, it is hard to say, but in all likelihood it was part of Banksy’s plan to ensure that art is not taken too seriously. His bigger works are altogether different. In 2017, in West Bank, Banksy established the Walled Off Hotel, a temporary art exhibit on the tragedy of Palestine. A play on New York’s Waldorf chain, the hotel looks right into Israel’s West Barrier and proudly boasts the worst view in the world. Part art, part politics, part satire, the artwork has to date attracted over 140,000 visitors. A 2017 Banksy mural shows cherubs prying open the separation barrier in Bethlehem, West Bank, opposite the Walled Off Hotel. Without a doubt, Banksy is today one of the most important and prolific street artists of our time. In August 2024, nine animal-related artworks appeared in quick succession on London walls. A gorilla at the entrance to the local zoo, two elephants stretching trunks out of building windows, pigeons on an imaginary wire — the graphic simplicity of much of the work is often undercut by scathing satire. Two surveillance cameras strut about like pigeons on the sidewalk; on a wall in Ukraine, a young boy wrestles a bully to the ground; another is seen painting a sign ‘Graffiti is a Crime’.

Medical education in India is at a crossroads; here’s a road map

The Indian government replaced a system — the Medical Council of India, which was regulating medical education and practice for over eight decades — due to allegations of inefficiency and corruption. NITI Aayog was a strong proponent of this change, and even the judiciary advocated the need to improve medical education. The Medical Council of India was superseded by the National Medical Commission in 2020, through an Act of Parliament, which now sets new standards and regulations to reform the system. This has compelled even private medical schools to comply with certain norms. The medical community, particularly academicians and educators, closely observe the NMC’s operations. Although it may be premature to evaluate its performance within just four years, the regulators’ eagerness to implement significant changes to the curriculum has led to considerable disarray and confusion. Adhering to Western medical policies without considering India’s unique circumstances has contributed to this turmoil. The implementation of the new curriculum has been counterproductive in many medical schools. Competency-based medical education (CBME) was introduced to emphasise practical skills over theoretical knowledge. However, the opposite occurs, with more time allocated to lectures (symposiums, group discussions, seminars, etc.). Reforms have made medical education shrivelled and truncated. Previously, medical students would begin clinical rotations from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. after completing one and a half years (Basic Science) of the MBBS course. They would spend time in wards, procedure rooms, and operating theatres, with theory classes scheduled for the evening (2 p.m. to 4 p.m.). This schedule has been inverted, with students attending clinics after 10 a.m. and theory classes in the morning. Consequently, students are no longer seen with teachers during the morning rounds, a departure from the past when unit chiefs, associates, assistants, residents, and students were all present. Bedside teaching is a crucial component of medical training, yet it has nearly vanished from medical schools. Students are now often seen merely following faculty to get their logbooks signed, where high scores are prevalent. Teachers are deeply concerned, but collective action to address this issue with policymakers is lacking. Medical professional bodies and other stakeholders must seriously address this concern.

More medical schoolsThe graph depicting the growth of medical colleges from 1974 to 2024 illustrates a sharp increase in both government and private institutions. In 1970, India had fewer than 100 medical colleges for a population of 54 crore but today, there are 766 medical colleges across both government and private sectors for a population of 144 crore. The past decade alone has seen a rapid increase in new medical colleges leading to increased MBBS seats from 64,464 to 1,15,812 seats and PG seats from 31,185 to 73,111 seats. The number of medical colleges in India almost doubled to 595 from 335 between 2011 and 2021. This year, the government sanctioned 60 new medical colleges. According to Western standards, we would still need 300 more medical schools based on our population size. Since 2014, there has been a rapid rise in the number of seats for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Last year, on the 78th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a plan to create 75,000 new medical seats across India over the next five years. The government’s policy changes aim to transform general and district hospitals into medical colleges and ease the criteria for establishing new ones. While these changes may appear beneficial, a deeper analysis suggests they could lead to academic decline. The well-known lack of adequate infrastructure and faculty, even in established institutions, is concerning. Many new institutions are missing basic amenities and have a shortage of faculty, threatening the quality of medical education.

Adopting the Western model without the necessary infrastructure and faculty could have catastrophic conse-

It is hard to qualify Banksy’s work — site-specific and done at night — as art or vandalism; but as a critic noted, it is the most essential form of public vandalism. Sadly, such vandalism falls entirely out of the framework of art in India. How well would Banksy do in a country where the primary showcase for public art is a triptych of the Mahabharata in a metro station, or a bronze statue of Shivaji at a roundabout? Would he be allowed to run his painterly fingers on the walls surrounding Churchgate Station in Mumbai, or to deface Delhi’s India Gate? Could he in fact write a cryptic message about Indian democracy on the dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan, or wrap the new Parliament building in plastic. Unlikely.

For the past decade, despite increasing popularity and visibility, Indian street art has been a reluctant commentator in the public sphere, even though it originally evolved from the political graffiti of Kolkata. Since then it has progressed to three-dimensional wall paintings, quotations, and many forms of caricature and large-scale imagery, visible in many cities. In Delhi’s Lodhi Colony, high-walled arched colonial compounds are filled with a bright colour palette that skilfully disguises the fraying neutrality of the old colonial architecture. At Kala Ghoda in Mumbai, and annual street art festivals in Bengaluru, Kochi and Pune, portraits of famous personalities cut across building facades, trees spread their painted branches around corner walls; murals even appear on private properties that abut the road. Talented local artists display their work on many varied themes with an unusually rich style of pictorial representation.

Banksy’s work, by contrast is remarkably spare — relying on the directness of its evocative message. It is unusual in content, display and execution as much as it is a product of its surprising location. As always, the artist remains hidden in plain sight. Everyone knows him, but publicly, he remains invisible, going about his nightly production without frill or fuss. A pandemic poster, ‘Do not wash your hands’ — is it social comment or satire?; Girl with Balloon — graphic art or cultural artefact?; surveillance cameras posing as street pigeons — public protest or political comment? The calculated absurdity of the artist’s position is baffling, clever, disturbing, always surprising, but rarely self-conscious. When will it appear next, where, and in what medium...? As the Indian art season reopens, our own ill-tempered cities — desolate, bereft of landscape, and falling apart — cry out for such expression. Religion, separatism, censorship, communal rage, growing illiteracy, bureaucratic apathy, political arrogance, business bluster, media manipulation, the list of Indian issues in need of public scrutiny grows day by day. But an Indian Banksy refuses to step out of the shadows.



quences for our educational system. Unlike Western countries, where the faculty-student ratio fosters a conducive academic environment, the situation is reversed here. Additionally, examination results from medical colleges indicate a troubling trend: four decades ago, with more government and fewer private medical colleges, the failure rate was about 20-30% among meritorious students. Now the failure rate is 1-2% only, that too with mediocre students. Some people reason that the decline in failure rates could indicate lowered educational standards, affecting the the overall competence of future doctors. The dramatic shift in the quality of medical education, inspection standards, and regulatory inconsistency certainly pose a major concern. Producing well-qualified doctors is essential for societal welfare. Academic institutions and regulatory bodies should indeed prioritise these issues. Regular and thorough inspections are crucial to ensure the quality of education. Examinations and testing While the National Exit Test (NEXT) is a step in the right direction, the delays and inconsistencies are disheartening. A clear, consistent plan needs to be established for such crucial examinations. Reforming this system requires collaboration between academicians, professional bodies, and regulators. Are there some practical steps that can be taken right now to improve the situation? The main issue, however, is the lack of adequate infrastructure and faculty. An independent study by a professional body would reveal startling findings. The government should not relax norms and regulations merely to start new institutions due to political compulsion. In the long term, this approach is detrimental to the quality of doctors in India. Immediate action from academicians, professional bodies, and policymakers is required to address these issues. The government’s focus on expanding medical education should be balanced with ensuring adequate infrastructure and sufficient qualified faculty. An in-depth independent study is crucial to uncover the extent of these problems .

Despite farmers' appeal, Congress govt continues with land acquisitions in Rangareddy

HYDERABAD: Turning a blind eye to farmers’ appeals and protests against acquisition of their lands, the State government is continuing land surveys in different mandals of Rangareddy. For the last many days, farmers in Kandukur, Yacharam, Gajulaburi Thanda, Agarmiyaguda and neighbouring villages in Rangareddy district have been protesting against the land acquisition for laying roads to the proposed Fourth City. A video of a tribal woman farmer crying inconsolably and pleading with the officials not to acquire lands is going viral. In the video, a group of officials and police personnel are seen passing through agricultural lands and the woman farmer from Marlakunta village is appealing to the officials to spare her lands.

Delays and opacity in regulatory clearance can impact timely conclusion of FTAs: Nirmala Sitharaman



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday (May 20, 2025) cautioned that delays in regulatory clearance and opacity in processes can create uncertainty and erode deal value, and has serious connotations for the timely conclusion of free trade agreements. This comes at a time when Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is currently in the U.S. for negotiations on a FTA with that country. Negotiations with the EU and New Zealand are also ongoing in parallel.

Notably, during her speech at the 16th Annual Day function of the Competition Commission of India, Ms. Sitharaman also highlighted the importance of a free and fair market in India and how this benefits the entire economy. Her comments come against the backdrop of several customer-centric sectors such as aviation, telecommunications, and food delivery are either already in a duopoly structure or in danger of falling into one.

"In today's interconnected and fast-paced economy,

delays in regulatory clearance can lead to uncertainty, disrupt commercial timelines and potentially erode the intended value of transactions and globally it has an impact, even as we negotiate free trade agreements with different countries," Ms. Sitharaman said. "The ability, nimbleness and readiness of the regulators is very keenly watched by investors." These aspects of the regulatory framework, she added, have "very serious connotations" when trying to complete FTAs "within a reasonable time".

"So, whether it is litigation, time consumed in litigation, or when regulators are less transparent, negotiations can get complicated," she noted. "It is therefore imperative that regulatory frameworks, while maintaining rigorous oversight, also facilitate swift and seamless approvals for combinations that pose no harm to competition." The Finance Minister also spoke at length about the importance of fostering competition in India, with a key principle being that "markets must work for the many and not just for the few". A free and fair market ensures no single player can corner resources, suppress choice, or to distort price discovery," she noted. "Competition ensures the voice of consumers, that is the voice of the common people matters and therefore businesses are forced to listen." Ms. Sitharaman's comments come at a time when several sectors are increasingly becoming dominated by just a few players. In aviation, for example, Indigo and the Air India Group together account for about 85-90% of the market share. In telecom, Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel together make up about 77-80% of the Indian market. In food delivery, Zomato and Swiggy are the only two large players operating at a national level.

Three southern cities dominate GCC space leasing in Jan-March quarter, says study

Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad, the top three southern cities dominated Global Capacity Centre (GCC) space leasing in the January-March 2025 quarter according to a study by Anarock. Of total 8.35 million sq. ft. gross office spaces GCCs in top seven cities during the quarter Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad collectively leased approx. 5.34 million sq. ft.; Delhi-NCR saw 1.95 million sq. ft. gross space leased to GCCs, as per the study.

Gross leasing of overall office space in top seven cities at 19.47 million sq. ft. in the quarter, with GCCs comprising a 43% share (8.35 million sq. ft.). In the same period last year GCCs leased approx. 4.87 million sq. ft. space, up 72% year on year. "IT/ITeS held a 35% share of overall GCC leasing this year, followed by BFSI with 22%, and manufacturing and industrial with 13%," Anarock said. The top seven cities together had 1,700+ GCCs by 2024-end, with a market value of approx. \$52 billion and housing 1.70-1.80 million working professionals.

Amid high demand, total number of GCCs in top cities may hit 2,200-2,300 by 2030 with a market size of \$100-110 billion and 2.4-2.8 million employees, the study emphasised. Mid-sized GCCs for 1,000-2,000 employees appear to dominate upcoming influx in India, it pointed out. A ramp up of presence of GCCs have been seen on India's commercial real estate landscape in the last few years, with a government initiative announced in the last Union Budget is accelerating this trend. The Union Budget 2025-26 had



made a provision for a National Framework to provide guidance to states for promoting Global Capability Centres in emerging tier 2 cities. The taskforce has been assigned the task to suggest 16 measures for enhancing availability of talent and infrastructure, building-byelaw reforms, and mechanisms for collaboration with industry. As per Anarock study top cities are witnessing escalating demand from both new GCC entrants and those expanding their existing operations. Peush Jain, MD, Commercial Leasing & Advisory, ANAROCK Group, said, "City-wise data indicates that Bengaluru leads in gross leasing by GCCs in Q1 2025 with a 40% share, or approx. 3.3 million sq. ft., followed by Delhi-NCR with a 23% share - or approx. 1.91 million sq. ft. and Chennai with 1.22 million sq. ft., or a 15% share."

Mumbai, Delhi investors pump over Rs 26 lakh crore into mutual funds; number of women investors rises

India's mutual fund assets are heavily concentrated in the top five cities, with Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune, and Kolkata collectively accounting for a staggering 52.52 per cent of the country's total mutual fund assets under management (AUM) as of March 2025. This means as much as Rs 34.52 lakh crore of total AUM corpus of Rs 65.74 lakh crore came from these five cities.

Mumbai leads the pack with a 27 per cent share (Rs 17.75 lakh crore), followed by New Delhi with 12.63 per cent, Bengaluru with 5.39 per cent, Pune with 4 per cent and Kolkata with 3.49 per cent. This trend is consistent with the previous year's data, according to the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI). The dominance of these cities highlights the skewed distribution of mutual fund investments in India. "Since most of the corporates are headquartered in these five cities, their investments (in mutual fund schemes) also get accounted there. This is the reason that the numbers are always skewed," said A Balasubramanian, managing director & CEO, Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund.

The MF industry had a total of 5,34,20,840 unique investors as of March 2025; of this, 25.91 per cent (or 1,38,40,740) were women. This represents a marked increase from 24.2 per cent in March 2024, underscoring the growing financial independence and awareness among women. "The rise in literacy rates and the growing presence of women in the workforce have been instrumental in enhancing their economic contributions and, as a result, women are now emerging as a key participant in the MF investor base," AMFI said in its annual report. Individual investors, including high-net-worth individuals, retail investors and non-resident Indians (NRIs), hold 63.2 per cent of the total industry AUM (Rs 65.74 lakh crore) — consistent with the previous year's trend (63.4 per cent). As of March 2025, individual investors hold 65 per cent of AUM in equity funds, 18 per cent in hybrid funds, 9 per cent in debt funds and 7 per cent in passive funds, it said.

According to AMFI, a notable observation is that in most states, individual investors accounted for more than 63 per cent of the MF AUM, with the exceptions being New Delhi (52.77 per cent) and Maharashtra (48.22 per cent). In fact, in several states — Lakshadweep, Tripura, Daman and Diu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar and Puducherry — individual investors dominate with over 95 per cent of AUM. The investment landscape has evolved over the years, with shifting investment preferences among individuals across different age brackets. A key trend observed in the net flows is the increased risk appetite of investors, who are seeking higher returns. "Data shows a shift towards more aggressive investment strategies, par-



ticularly among younger investors, whereas older investors prioritise risk management through diversification," AMFI said. AMFI analysis reveals that younger investors are more inclined to take on higher risks, as can be gauged from their significantly higher share of net flows in the equity segment whereas the older investors exhibit a more cautious approach, with comparatively lower percentage of net flows in equity and higher allocation towards debt. Notably, in the higher age brackets, the investors are increasingly opting for hybrid schemes, which provides a balanced blend of growth and stability. As many as 70 NFOs in the equity category were launched in fiscal 2025, collectively mobilising Rs 85,244 crore, marking a significant increase from the 58 schemes launched in fiscal 2024, which garnered Rs 39,297 crore. Sectoral/thematic funds emerged as the largest category within equity followed by Flexi-cap and Mid-cap. Together, the three categories accounted for 43 per cent share of the total equity AUM as at end-March 2025, AMFI said. Equity mutual funds saw a record inflow of Rs 4.17 lakh crore, the highest ever in a financial year. The net inflows during the year exceeded twice the net inflows in the previous year. "

This, combined with valuation gains, propelled the AUM of equity-oriented schemes by 25.4 per cent to Rs 29.45 lakh crore at end-March 2025. During the same period, Nifty TRI rose by 6.7 per cent," it said. The MF industry ended fiscal 2025 with AUM at a record Rs 65.74 lakh crore in March 2025 as against Rs 53.40 lakh crore in March 2024, marking an on-year rise of 23.11 per cent. The expansion in AUM was primarily driven by robust net inflows during the fiscal year. Additionally, mark-to-market (MTM) gains provided a supplementary boost, underpinned by positive performance in both equity and debt markets. According to SBI Funds Management Ltd's deputy managing director & joint chief executive officer, DP Singh, another important factor for higher contribution to the total MF AUM from the top five cities is that most of the country's wealth is also concentrated in these locations.

Can New Caledonia gain independence from France? | Explained



The story so far: A high-stakes attempt by French Overseas Minister Manuel Valls to broker a new political accord for New Caledonia collapsed on May 8, plunging the French Pacific territory into profound uncertainty.

What is its current status?

For decades, New Caledonia, a French island territory of approximately 2,71,400 people in the southwest Pacific Ocean, has been on a complex journey regarding its status. The 1998 Nouméa Accord, born from a history of colonial tensions and a near civil war in the 1980s, explicitly recognised the "trauma" inflicted upon the indigenous Kanak people. It also led to three referendums on independence, in 2018, 2020 and 2021, of New Caledonia from France. While all three rejected independence, the final vote was boycotted by pro-independence parties and its legitimacy has been contested.

Why is independence still a demand?

New Caledonia's modern history began with its seizure by France as a penal colony in 1853. Despite attempts to ease colonial rule, such as granting French citizenship to all inhabitants in 1957, deep divisions persisted, culminating in the 1984-1988 conflict. The Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) emerged during this period as a powerful political force, advocating for complete independence. The 1998 Nouméa Accord was a landmark compromise. It established a unique sui generis status for New Caledonia within the French Republic. It granted the

territory significant autonomy, including its own Congress with law-making powers, and incorporated "New Caledonian citizenship" which restricted voting rights to long-term residents, a key provision for Kanak political representation. However, due to the FLNKS boycott of the last independence referendum, over COVID-19 and customary mourning periods, the final solution to New Caledonia remained uncertain.

Why did recent talks fail?

The period following the contested 2021 referendum was marked by heightened tension, which exploded in May 2024 over a French proposal to "unfreeze" the electoral roll (to change rules which restrict voting rights to only long-term residents). The ensuing riots, the worst in decades, resulted in 14 deaths, and hundreds injured. In this volatile context, the French government, through Mr. Valls, intensified efforts to find a "third way" — a new institutional status that could offer a form of sovereignty without complete traditional independence. Mr. Valls's mission aimed to facilitate dialogue between FLNKS and loyalist factions towards such a consensual outcome. The concept of "sovereignty in partnership" became central. This envisioned New Caledonia gaining enhanced international recognition and control over most aspects of governance such as the judiciary, but with an immediate, negotiated delegation of the exercise of these powers back to France. However, this path was abruptly blocked on May 8. During the negotiations, the proposal was decisively rejected by headline loyalist factions in the island. They deemed the "sovereignty in partnership" model as tantamount to disguised independence. Instead, these loyalist groups proposed a form of partition, with the pro-independence North and Loyalty Islands provinces having an association status, while the wealthier, loyalist-majority South Province would remain fully French. This solution was found unacceptable to both the French state, which upholds New Caledonia's indivisibility, and the independents who called this "paramount to apartheid". The failure of the talks has significantly amplified the obstacles. The immediate challenge is the upcoming provincial elections, due by November 2025, which will now proceed without a prior political agreement on the territory's future.

All you need to know about: prostate cancer

Former United States president Joe Biden was diagnosed with prostate cancer last week, with his office announcing that it was an 'aggressive' form of the disease, as cancer cells had spread to the bone. His office however, also said that the cancer appeared to be hormone-sensitive which "allows for effective management" and that the president and his family are reviewing treatment options with his physicians." Many political leaders, including current U.S. President Donald Trump sent Mr. Biden wishes for his recovery.

What is prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is a cancer that develops in the prostate gland, which is part of the male reproductive system. The prostate gland is about the size of a walnut but tends to grow with age. It is located just below the bladder, in front of the rectum. The main job of the prostate gland is to produce a fluid that becomes part of the semen. Prostate cancer is a common cancer: according to 'The Lancet Commission on prostate cancer: planning for the surge in cases', 2024, prostate cancer is the most common cancer by incidence in men in 112 countries (as of 2020), and accounts for one in every 14 cancers diagnosed globally, and 15% of all male cancers. Among men, the disease ranks second only to lung cancer in terms of cancer mortality. In the United States, it is second only to skin cancer among men, while in India, it is third-most common cancer among men as of 2022.

What are the risk factors of prostate cancer?

Risk factors for prostate cancer include: age -- as men grow older, their risk of getting prostate cancer increases; family history -- men who have had a close family member with prostate cancer have an increased chance of getting it; obesity -- studies have linked being overweight to having a greater chance of getting prostate cancer. Other risk factors include ethnicity as African American men are at greater risk.

What are the signs and symptoms of prostate cancer?

In the early stages, prostate cancer may not always cause symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they may include: a frequent need to urinate, trouble passing urine or a weak flow or pain and burning while urinating, blood in the urine (making it look pink or red), blood in the semen, pain in the lower back, hips or thighs and painful ejaculation. Severity of symptoms may depend on where the cancer is located and how advanced it is. Changes in urinary functions could also be symptoms of a common condition, an enlarged prostate -- it is important to consult a doctor for the right diagnosis.

What are the stages of prostate cancer?

Healthcare providers may use a scale known as the Gleason score to determine how serious the cancer is. Under the Gleason score, the more abnormal cells you have, the higher your score. These scores range from 2 to 10. A score of below 5 is not considered cancer. Scores from 6 to 10 are considered cancer -- with 6 being a slow-growing cancer and 10 being a fast-growing cancer. The cancer is also staged. In the early stages (stages 1 and 2), the



cancer is localised and has not spread beyond the prostate. In the locally advanced stage or stage 3, it has spread outside the prostate but only to nearby tissue and structures. In the advanced or metastasised stage or stage 4, it has spread to other parts, possibly lymph nodes, bones, liver, lungs or other organs.

What is the treatment for prostate cancer?

Treatment depends on several factors including age and overall health condition, the stage and grade of the cancer and its spread. Early-stage cancers can have a good outcome with treatment. One treatment option for small and slow-growing cancers may be active surveillance, where the patients get screened and tested regularly to monitor the cancer grow. If tests show that the cancer is growing, then other treatment options may be considered. Other treatment options include surgery, radiation therapy and systemic therapies. Surgery, known as prostatectomy, is the removal of the prostate gland. It may be used when the cancer is just in the prostate gland and has not spread. Radiation therapy uses high-energy beams to kill the cancer. It may be offered in combination with other treatments as well.

Systemic therapies can include hormone therapy, which involves using medication to stop the hormone testosterone from boosting cancer cell growth. Chemotherapy uses medication to destroy cancer cancer. In immunotherapy, medicines are used to strengthen the immune system to fight off cancer cells. Targeted therapy involves finding the specific mutations that cause healthy cells to become cancerous and prevent this. Other, newer forms of therapy, some of which are still considered experimental, such as focal therapy involve destroying the tumour inside the prostate without having to remove it.

What are the projections for prostate cancer?

The Lancet Commission projects that the number of new cases of prostate cancer annually, will rise from 1.4 million in 2020 to 2.9 million by 2040. Changing age structures and improving life expectancy are predicted to drive big increases in the disease, it says. The Commission also states that late diagnosis of prostate cancer is widespread worldwide but especially in low and middle income countries (LMICs), where late diagnosis is the norm. "The only way to mitigate the harm caused by rising case numbers is to urgently set up systems for earlier diagnosis in LMICs. Trials of screening are urgently needed in LMICs to better inform ways to improve early diagnosis," it says.

Myntra extends its foray with Singapore, targets Indian diaspora

New Delhi: Fashion and lifestyle e-commerce platform Myntra on Monday announced its foray into Singapore as part of its growth strategy.

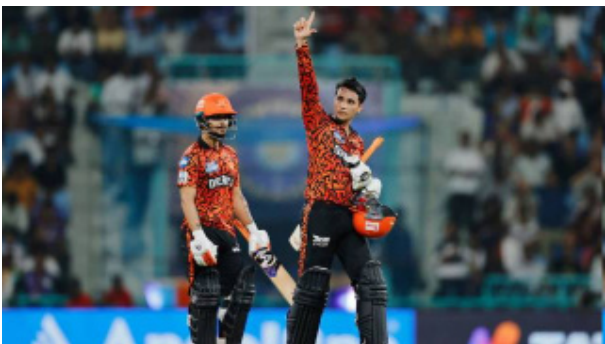
The move, targeted at around 650,000 Indian diaspora in the Lion City, is part of Myntra's broader growth strategy, aiming to tap into new customer segments and build stronger international brand affinity over the coming years, Myntra said in a statement. Myntra has already observed notable organic interest, with around 30,000 users from Singapore visiting its existing platform, Myntra CEO Nandita Sinha said.

"We have launched Myntra Global in Singapore, focused on presenting Indian fashion to the world. Made in India brands, which cater to the Indian diaspora, especially around Indian needs, are what we are bringing to the customers. "We have a huge Indian diaspora in a country

like Singapore — almost 650,000 Indians live in Singapore. As we were going through our data...we realised that almost 30,000 of these users are actually visiting us every month. We then decided to launch Myntra Global in Singapore," Sinha noted.

The Myntra Global website will showcase around 35,000 styles from over 100 Indian brands, spanning categories such as apparel, footwear, home, and accessories. Brands like Aurelia, Global Desi, The Label Life, House of Pataudi, Anouk, Bombay Dyeing, Rare Rabbit, and Nasher Miles have been featured. Orders placed on Myntra Global will be shipped from India and delivered within an average of 4-7 days, supported by third-party cross-border logistics services. Founded in 2007 and now part of the Flipkart Group, owned by Walmart, Myntra has over 70 million monthly active users and a catalogue of more than 3.9 million styles from over 9,700 brands.

Abhishek Sharma stars at the top as already-eliminated Sunrisers take Lucknow Super Giants down with them



GNS News Agency, May 24

Lucknow Super Giants' hopes were hanging by a thread and by the time the night ended, it was curtains down as Sunrisers Hyderabad easily chased down 205. The fight for the one remaining play-off spot is now between Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals as Hyderabad put an end to Lucknow's slim hopes by pulling the plug on Monday. After making an impressive comeback with the ball in the first half of the match, the Sunrisers batsmen completed the job by reaching the target of 206 with six wickets and 10 balls to spare. There was no Travis Head for company due to a Covid infection, but that didn't stop Abhishek Sharma from giving Hyderabad the required start in their chase of 206. Atharva Taide got a look-in, and perished for 13 in the second over before Abhishek took the job in his own hands.

A boundary off Akash Deep in the third over got him going as barring the fifth over delivered by Digvish Rath, Lucknow appeared totally short on answers, not for the first time with the ball this season. Abhishek then took on Kiwi pacer Will O'Rourke as 29 came off the third and fourth overs before Rathi applied the breaks by conceding only 6 in the fifth. Off the next, Avesh conceded 14 before Ravi Bishnoi bore the brunt of Abhishek's bat. In a season where the leg-spinner has struggled with his line and length, Abhishek wasted no time in launching an assault as he hit him for four consecutive sixes which took him past fifty. The over went for 26 runs and by the time Rathi returned for his second, Abhishek was back in the dugout, having made a 20-ball 59. With that sort of a start, Abhishek had ensured Hyderabad were ahead of Lucknow throughout the chase and with enough overs to come, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen minimised the risks while ensuring the asking rate never got beyond their reach.

After resisting for a while, Ishan ended up giving away his wicket, going for a reverse-sweep off Rathi – the lone bright spot in Lucknow's attack – to give them a bit of a hope. However, next man Kamindu Mendis not only calmed Hyderabad's nerves, but also gave the best possible company for Klaasen, who was in his groove. The Sri Lankan hit three successive fours of Rathi and the required run rate,

which was over 10 at the start of the innings, came down below seven by the 14th over.

Though Klaasen (out for 47) and Mendis (32 retired hurt) departed in the space of three deliveries in the 18th over, Hyderabad ensured there wasn't room for any drama. It was a tale of two halves when Lucknow Super Giants were asked to bat first. Given the net run rate (NRR) situation, there wasn't much of a choice left for them in deciding their approach. Before other results could go in their favour, for them to stand a chance of qualifying, they had to improve their NRR and batting first made it only more challenging. And on a night when they lost their way and drifted off in the middle overs, they had to thank three of their overseas players for putting up a total of 205/7 as the rest of the batting unit came a cropper, appearing to squander their good work.

Aiden Markram and Mitchell Marsh, in many ways, reflect Lucknow's season so far. It has been a tournament where they have struggled for consistency, appearing in good nick in one game and out of sorts in the next. On Monday, they breathed fire at the top, putting together 115 runs for the first wicket in the easiest of fashions as Hyderabad's sloppy fielding also played a helping hand. As has been the case, it was Marsh who got going from first ball, taking on Australia captain Pat Cummins for a boundary and six in the first over to kickstart the assault. Once Markram got his first boundary in the third over, there was no stopping Lucknow as Hyderabad's attack bowled to their strengths. It allowed them space to pull and cut, which both these batsmen – proficient in horizontal bat shots – feasted on as Lucknow once again got a good start in the Powerplay, making 69.

Even though they didn't shift gears significantly, runs flowed in the middle overs before Marsh's dismissal in the 11th over changed the course of Lucknow's innings. Rishabh Pant, coming in at No 3, endured another low score as his form continued to go the wrong way, Eshan Malinga being rewarded for some exceptional bowling. Nicholas Pooran's arrival in the 12th over should have taken Lucknow beyond Hyderabad's reach. Instead, with the pitch beginning to show signs of slowing, Hyderabad would begin their comeback. After repeated attempts, Harshal Patel would nail his slow yorker that saw the back of Markram for 61 as Lucknow's required grandstand finish never came, even though Pooran fought valiantly. On a night when they struggled for inspiration, Malinga provided Sunrisers with plenty of it as Pooran was made to wait till his 25th ball for his first six, that too in the final over. From 108/0 in 10 overs, 205/7 in 20 appeared to be an unsatisfactory total. Brief scores: Lucknow Super Giants 205/7 in 20 overs (Marsh 65, Markram 61, Pooran 45; Eshan Malinga 2/28) lost to 206/4 in 18.2 overs (Abhishek Sharma 59, Klaasen 47; Rathi 2/37) by 6 wickets

How Delhi Capitals' collapse against Mumbai Indians triggered contrasting campaigns

GNS News Agency, May 24

Even as Sai Sudharsan and Shubman Gill were plundering the Delhi Capitals' attack, the body language of the fielders changed. The season that had started so brightly for them was spinning out of their control. It was their best start ever in the IPL, winning the first four games. But since then, their downward spiral has left them facing the scenario of not even qualifying for the playoffs.

It was the game against the Mumbai Indians on April 13 in Delhi that had flipped the narratives for both sides in the campaign. At that stage, Delhi were yet to lose a game, and Mumbai had a solitary win from five games. Hardik Pandya's side defending 205 looked uncomfortable. Karun Nair's pristine 39-ball 89 was getting under the skin of Mumbai's ace bowler Jasprit Bumrah. Then came a pearly from Mitchell Santner – a delivery that spun to hit Nair's off stump. But the game was still in control, but the Capitals shot themselves in the foot, losing seven wickets for 58 runs, including three runouts. From that game on, Mumbai's championship-winning teams' DNA started to kick in, where they start the tournaments slowly and pick up the momentum. For Delhi, the lack of a winning pedigree began to take its toll. While Mumbai grew solid, Delhi started to chop and change too much, trying to fix too many things at once. Behind Mumbai's winning streak, Mumbai's pace attack with Jasprit Bumrah, Trent Boult, and Deepak Chahar looked unbreachable at the time of the auction. But Bumrah missed a few games early on because of his injury and both Boult and Chahar were unable to create the early breakthroughs in the powerplay. In the first six games, which include the game against the Capitals, Mumbai picked up six wickets in powerplay, out of which four came against one opposition (Kolkata Knight Riders). They had also been quite expensive in that phase. But in the next six games, Mumbai managed to pick up 12 wickets in the powerplay. Mumbai adhered to a method of bowling first, restricting the opposition to below-par totals, and the batting side took care of the runs. And when they had to bat first, batsmen exploded to put up an overpowering score, and the bowlers killed the game with killer blows in the first six overs.

Rohit Sharma, who had been struggling for runs, began to turn the tide against the Chennai Super Kings, scoring 45-ball 76, since then, with Ryan Rickelton, he has been providing good starts. Delhi was not tipped as hot favourites ahead of the season but with their collective performances in the initial stage of the tournament, they did pluck out some comprehensive results. But as the tournament went on, Delhi's dependence on KL Rahul with the bat grew. He is the top scorer for them with 493 (after 12 games), and the next best has been Abhishek Porel (295 runs). Faf du Plessis, the other experienced campaigner in the lineup, has been in and out of the side due to injury, which has not let him settle into the rhythm of the tournament at 40 years of age.

Faf's injury issues alongside Jake Fraser-McGurk's poor form forced the Capitals to keep juggling the top three constantly. Rahul, because of his experiences of batting in various positions for both franchise and country, has been able to adapt to it. But the likes of Porel and Karun's form did fall off a cliff. More often than not, it had to be Rahul and Axar Patel who had to bail them out, with Ashutosh Sharma putting up his hand on a couple of occasions (against Lucknow Super Giants and Sunrisers Hyderabad). Delhi does have wily spinners, including the captain himself and Kuldeep Yadav. However, they lacked a reliable Indian seamer, which they have had in the past with Khaleel Ahmed. Mukesh Kumar and Mohit Sharma have failed to impress playing the role of death bowlers, which made the Capitals turn to the second overseas seamer Dushmantha Chameera, who has picked up three wickets from five



games and is going at 10.22. Mitchell Starc's non-return after the break only further takes out the sting in the attack. With three berths for the playoffs already taken by the Gujarat Titans, Punjab Kings, and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Capitals not only have to fight tooth and nail but also need to turn the tide around for the fourth spot. "We still have two chances. If we win two-on-two, we still have chances to qualify," said an optimistic Abhishek Porel.

LSG spinner Digvish Rath fined for breaching IPL Code of Conduct



GNS News Agency, May 24

HYDERABAD: Digvish Singh Rath, Lucknow Super Giants leg-spinner, has been fined 50 per cent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his team's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) at the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow. This was his third Level 1 offence under Article 2.5 this season and hence, he has accumulated Two Demerit Points, in addition to Three Demerit Points he had accumulated earlier – One Demerit Point against Punjab Kings on April 01, 2025 and Two Demerit Points against Mumbai Indians on April 04, 2025. As he now has Five Demerit Points this season – which result in a one-game suspension – Digvish will now be suspended for LSG's next game – against Gujarat Titans on May 22, 2025 in Ahmedabad. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding. Abhishek Sharma, All-rounder, Sunrisers Hyderabad has been fined 25 per cent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his team's match against Lucknow Super Giants at the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow on Monday.

Mumbai Indians announce Rs 7 crore-worth replacement signings for Rickelton, Jacks and Bosch



GNS News Agency, May 24

IPL 2025: Mumbai Indians have announced three replacement players for their potential Playoff matches. (BCCI) IPL 2025: Mumbai Indians have announced three replacement players for their potential Playoff matches. (BCCI) Mumbai Indians on Tuesday announced three major replacement signings as they continue to remain in the race for the last IPL 2025 Playoffs spot alongside Delhi Capitals. Should they qualify for the last-four stage, MI are set to lose the services of wicket-keeper Ryan Rickelton, all-rounder Will Jacks and seamer Corbin Bosch to their respective international commitments. With two games left in the league stage, MI have announced their three signings

for the Playoffs stage, should they qualify for the same by ensuring a win over the Capitals on Wednesday.

Using the temporary replacement rule, Mumbai have signed up Jonny Bairstow, Richard Gleeson and Sri Lanka T20I skipper Charith Asalanka for the Playoffs, which begins on May 29. The BCCI confirmed that the three players will join the squad if MI secure qualification. "Jacks will be replaced by English wicketkeeper-batter Jonny Bairstow, who will join at a price of INR 5.25 crore. "English pacer Richard Gleeson will be a replacement for Ryan Rickelton at a reserve price of INR 1 crore. Charith Asalanka will come in as a replacement for Corbin Bosch at a reserve price of INR 75 lakhs," the IPL statement read. MI can assure qualification should they beat the Delhi Capitals at home at the Wankhede Stadium in their upcoming match. MI are slated to play their final game against the Punjab Kings at the Sai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur. South Africa keeper Rickelton, named in the squad for the World Test Championship final against Australia, has been an integral member of the side, scoring 336 runs opening the batting alongside Rohit Sharma. Marking a return to the England limited-over side, Jacks has chipped in with 192 runs in 11 games for MI, besides snapping a handful of wickets. Meanwhile, Bosch who made his IPL debut recently, registered 47 runs and a wicket in three outings.

LSG's Digvish Rath suspended after Abhishek Sharma clash in Lucknow



GNS News Agency, May 24

Lucknow Super Giants spinner Divesh Rath has been suspended for the team's final league-stage match after accumulating more demerit points from a Code of Conduct breach following a tussle with Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Abhishek Sharma at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow on Monday. The tournament organisers confirmed that Rath had committed a Level 1 offence for the third time this season, tallying five demerit points that warrant a one-match suspension.

"This was his third Level 1 offence under Article 2.5 this season and hence, he has accumulated Two Demerit Points, in addition to Three Demerit Points he had accumulated earlier – One Demerit Point against Punjab Kings on April 01, 2025 and Two Demerit Points against Mumbai Indians on April 04, 2025. "As he now has Five Demerit Points this season – which result in a one-game suspension –

‘Entire bowling attack is injury-prone’: Rishabh Pant laments LSG injury list after elimination, Mohammed Kaif slams retentions

GNS News Agency, May 24

IPL 2025: LSG owner Sanjiv Goenka and skipper Rishabh Pant chat after Monday's clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad. (BCCI) IPL 2025: LSG owner Sanjiv Goenka and skipper Rishabh Pant chat after Monday's clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad. (BCCI) Lucknow Super Giants' bid to make the IPL 2025 Playoffs crashed at their home ground at the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow on Monday, with Rishabh Pant's men failing to defend a 205-run total against the SunRisers Hyderabad.

Save for Avesh Khan's economical spell and Digvish Rath's two-wicket burst, the rest of the Lucknow bowling was peppered by the SRH batters, handing them their seventh loss of the season. Former India batter Mohammed Kaif slammed the LSG management for their auction and retention plans, hinging on a string of injury-prone bowlers. Ahead of the IPL 2025 auction, Lucknow retained speedsters Mayank Yadav (Rs 11 crore) and Mohsin Khan (Rs 4 crore).

While Mohsin was ruled out of the season in its entirety, Mayank made a return to competitive action in the second half of the tournament, only to play two games before a recurring back issue marked him out of the edition. India seamer Akash Deep too had his share of troubles and wasn't available consistently through the league stage. "I would rather pay money to retain players who can play the full season. LSG's entire bowling attack is injury-prone. I'm not saying injuries don't happen, but for players who are



more susceptible to them, stop retaining them for big money. Instead, pick them up at the auction," Kaif said in a video after the match.

Reflecting on the loss, Pant admitted that the team's season could have been a lot different if not for a spate of injuries. "It could have been one of our best seasons, but coming into the tournament, we had a lot of gaps, injuries, and as a team we decided to not talk about that, but it became difficult to fill those gaps for us," Pant said after the game. "The way we planned the auction, if we had had the same bowling... but this is cricket, sometimes things go your way and sometimes they don't, we take pride in the way we played and take the positives from the season rather than the negative side," he added.

‘I don't care how old players are...’: Stephen Fleming says CSK's one 'poor season has shaken everybody'

GNS News Agency, May 24

CSK head coach Stephen Fleming says the team is attempting to get the balance of experience and youngsters right in its roster. (BCCI) CSK head coach Stephen Fleming says the team is attempting to get the balance of experience and youngsters right in its roster. (BCCI)

Even as his side attempts to balance continuing to support the experience of veterans and handling transition, Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming has backed their traditional style of emphasising the wisdom of their senior players. Speaking ahead of Tuesday's clash with fellow league laggards Rajasthan Royals in Delhi, Fleming insisted that he continues to believe in CSK's formula of banking on experienced players on the other side of 30.

"I don't care how old the players are. The experience has served us really well over the past years that we have had. It hasn't worked out quite well for us this year. I assume it could be a bit of form, it could be strategy, it could be a number of things that just don't quite work out. The competition is very even," Fleming said. With injuries ham-

pering Chennai's season, the team opted for an uncharacteristic overhaul by roping in young players such as Ayush Mhatre, Dewald Brevis and Urvil Patel, all of whom have put in impressive performances to provide hope for the upcoming years.

"The fact that we have been so consistent over a number of years to have a poor year has shaken everybody. It is understandable given the excellence with which the franchises are operating. The challenge for us is making sure that we go over everything that we are doing and have done in the past, to make sure we are keeping up with the philosophies, but also identifying talent."

Fleming admitted that young players have taken over the league's batting charts with their fearless brand of cricket with franchises also catering to the experience factor. You have a look at the top run scores and wickets. It seems to be a bit of experience there. But what it's sprinkled with is some amazing performance by young players who are playing sort of fearless cricket, so it's getting that balance right, but most importantly, it's getting the player and the personnel right," the Kiwi added.

Amitabh Bachchan bought first home Prateeksha after Sholay’s success: Abhishek-Aishwarya Rai married here, was locked up after his mother’s death, later gifted Rs 50 cr house to daughter Shweta



Actor Amitabh Bachchan’s decision to gift his Rs 50 crore bungalow, Prateeksha, located in Mumbai’s upscale Juhu area, to his daughter Shweta Bachchan made headlines in November last year. But Prateeksha isn’t just another property owned by the Bollywood megastar — it is the first bungalow that Big B and his wife, veteran actor Jaya Bachchan, bought as a couple, and it holds deep emotional value for the Bachchan family. From Amitabh’s father Harivansh Rai Bachchan giving it its name, to welcoming both the children Abhishek and Shweta in this house, to his son Abhishek Bachchan tying the knot with Aishwarya Rai within its walls, here’s a look at the iconic bungalow’s history.

Though Amitabh Bachchan owns multiple bungalows in Mumbai, Prateeksha was the first bungalow he bought in 1976, right after the massive success of his 1975 film Sholay. By this time, Amitabh and Jaya Bachchan had been married for three years, and Prateeksha became their first home. “The day in 1976 we moved into the first house that this generation had ever bought and built, and called it own,” Amitabh had written in one of his blogs. The bungalow, surrounded by a lush lawn and tall trees, seemed like an oasis amid the hustle and bustle of Mumbai. Soon after moving into the house, Big B invited his parents — poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan and mother Teji Bachchan — to live with them in Prateeksha. This was also the house where both their children were born. “At Prateeksha, she was brought to the home, our first home of our own, when she was barely 2, and Abhishek a few months old... and today to see them celebrate the day in the same home on the same table and surroundings... LIFE IS A WONDER... Children and grandchildren all together,” Bachchan had written in the blog when Shweta celebrated her 50th birthday.

The name Prateeksha was given by Amitabh’s father, Harivansh Rai Bachchan. In an earlier interaction on one of the episodes of Kaun Banega Crorepati, the Deewar star shared the story behind its name. He said, “Prateeksha is a very beautiful name. People ask me why did you keep your house name Prateeksha, but I convey to them that I did not choose it, my father did. Therefore I questioned my father why did you keep the name Prateeksha, he has a poem where there is a line that goes — ‘Swagat sabke liye hain par nahi hain kisi ke liye Prateeksha (It is welcome for all, but wait for none).’” Since Prateeksha holds sentimental value for the Bachchans, Big B’s son and actor Abhishek tied the knot with Aishwarya in the same house in 2007. The house was decorated beautifully and the couple tied the knot according to North Indian, Bengali, and South Indian (specifically Tulu) rites.

Amitabh had mentioned their wedding in one of his blogs. The actor wrote about how the Gulmohar tree that he had planted after buying the house stood witness to Abhishek and Aishwarya’s wedding and many other happy and sad occasions. He wrote, He wrote, “The children grew up around it .. as did the grandchildren .. their birthdays and

the festivities of festivals all decorated this GulMohar beautiful tree , with its bright orange flowers that bloomed during the summer ... the children did get married just a few feet away from it ... and it stood guardian above them .. its branches bowed down with the weight of grief and sorrow when the elders passed away .. Babuji, Maa ji .. their prayer meet on the 13th and the 12th day after the passing all within its shadow of grief .. the holika .. the burning of the evil forces a day before the celebrations of Holi , burnt about it ... as did all the lights of Deepavali adorn its branches .. the pooja’s of Satyanarayan and the havans for peace and prosperity , within its watchful grace.” Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan tied the knot at Prateeksha. (Pic: Express Archive) Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan tied the knot at Prateeksha Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan tied the knot at Prateeksha. (Pic: abujanisandeepkhosla Instagram)

Aaradhya Bachchan brought to Prateeksha after birthNot just Aishwarya and Abhishek’s wedding, even their daughter Aaradhya was first brought to Prateeksha after her birth. By the time Aaradhya was born, the Bachchan family had shifted to Jalsa, the bungalow where they currently reside. But after Aaradhya’s birth, they didn’t take her to Jalsa directly. Instead, they brought her to Prateeksha first to seek the blessings of her late great-grandparents. Mentioning the same in his blog, Amitabh had written, “Today, we brought bityia (Aaradhya) home. We are very happy. Hamare ghar Laxmi aayi hai, Abhishek, Aishwarya and bityia are all well and in good health. Life changes when a new life comes to your house. I would say Laxmi Ratna has arrived in our house.” He added, “We first took her to Prateeksha because that is our first home. After taking blessings from my ma and babuji (Amitabh’s parents), we have come to Jalsa.”

Eventually, the Bachchan family moved to Jalsa after the death of Big B’s parents. He kept the house locked after the demise of his mother in 2007, and it remained shut for nearly two decades. However, the actor preserved Prateeksha just the way it was, maintaining the rooms of his father and mother to keep their memory alive. He wrote about the same in his blog, “In reverence... the room remains so... permanently... and she remains permanently with us... Amma ji... the most beautiful Mother in the entire Universe,” he wrote. In November last year, several portals confirmed that the Sholay actor transferred ownership of Prateeksha to Shweta through two separate gift deeds, with a stamp duty payment of Rs 50.65 lakh. In an earlier interaction with Subhash K Jha, Amitabh had shared that he wanted to gift the house to his daughter Shweta as he doesn’t differentiate between his son and daughter and ensures they both have equal rights to his properties. He had said, “I don’t believe in discrimination between the son and daughter. To me, Abhishek and Shweta have equal rights on my property.”

Farah Khan’s cook Dilip pokes fun at Shah Rukh Khan as he cries while chopping onions: ‘Kal Ho Naa Ho ka climax yaad aa gaya’



Farah Khan recently revealed that her cook, Dilip, who rose to fame after appearing in her vlogs, ended up ‘replacing’ her in an advertisement alongside Shah Rukh Khan. Now, a video has been circulating on social media offering a glimpse of the hilarious commercial they shot together. In the clip, it’s clear that Dilip is having more fun on set than the King Khan himself.

The clip shows Shah Rukh dressed dapperly in a red jacket and black T-shirt. The superstar is seen chopping onions, tears streaming down his face, when Dilip steps into the frame and quips, “Sir, Kal Ho Naa Ho ka climax yaad aa gaya (“Sir, it reminds me of Kal Ho Naa Ho’s climax).” Dilip’s comment leaves Shah Rukh momentarily stunned. While makers have released only this teaser, more details about the full ad are eagerly awaited.



eyes, never imagining that one day, the man who built those worlds would speak my name.

Akshay Kumar sues Paresh Rawal for Rs 25 crore over ‘gross unprofessional conduct’ after his midway exit from Hera Pheri 3: report

While fans have been eagerly waiting for the beloved Hera Pheri franchise to return with a long-overdue third instalment, the controversies surrounding the film don’t seem to end. After Paresh Rawal declared his exit from the comedy film on social media, it is now reported that his co-star Akshay Kumar is suing him for Rs 25 crore for dropping out of the project. According to a report in Hindustan Times, Akshay is suing Paresh Rawal for ‘unprofessional conduct’ and for walking out of Hera Pheri 3 despite signing a legal contract. Akshay is also the producer of Hera Pheri 3, having bought the film’s rights from producer Firoz Nadiadwala. The actor is pursuing legal action through his production house, Cape of Good Films. This is also the first time Akshay has sued a fellow actor in his 35-year-long career.

Hera Pheri 3 had already begun shooting in April this year, with Paresh filming alongside Akshay and Suniel Shetty. According to the website, Paresh decided to exit the film after the producer had already invested money into the shoot. Recently, Paresh tweeted about his exit from Hera Pheri. The actor clarified that, while it was speculated that he left the film due to creative differences, the reality was different. While the exact reason for his exit isn’t clear, the report stated that the actor “did not feel like being a part of the film.” Paresh has abruptly exited films in the past as well. He had quit Shah Rukh Khan’s Billu Barber, which was also directed by Priyadarshan, after committing to the project. He had also rejected Oh My God 2 in 2023,



as he didn’t like the script. Paresh has also spoken about not finding Hera Pheri’s sequels creatively fulfilling. He dissed the film’s sequel in the past and compared it to Rajkumar Hirani’s Lage Raho Munna Bhai. He told Lallantop, “You cook up the same thing when you make sequels after sequels, not like Lage Raho Munna Bhai was to Munna Bhai MBBS where you take characters in a different direction. Everybody wants to encash on sequels but do something different with the character that has Rs 500 crore worth goodwill. Why not fly with it? But there’s mental bankruptcy or mental lethargy. I’m doing the sequel because I don’t want the film to get stuck but there is no happiness.”

Michelle Williams says late ex-boyfriend Heath Ledger had ‘incredible sensitivity’; makes rare comments about him and daughter Matilda: ‘Thank god there’s...’

Recently, his former girlfriend Michelle Williams — who shares a 19-year-old daughter, Matilda Ledger, with him — fondly recalled what an incredible person Heath Ledger was. Actors Heath Ledger and Michelle Williams in Brokeback Mountain.

Although it has been close to two decades since he tragically passed away, Heath Ledger is still widely regarded as one of the finest actors of the 2000s. His performances as the Joker in Christopher Nolan’s The Dark Knight (2008) and Ennis Del Mar in Ang Lee’s Brokeback Mountain (2005) continue to inspire many. Recently, his former girlfriend Michelle Williams — who shares a 19-year-old daughter, Matilda Ledger, with him — fondly recalled what an incredible person Ledger was. During a chat with her on a recent episode of his Armchair Expert podcast, actor-comedian Dax Shepard spoke about the late thespian, “I feel obligated to say that I knew him a little bit when he was getting sober. I can feel the weight of the world on him in a very special way that kind of broke my heart. I was very, very sad, and I thought he was just so special.”

In response, Williams said, “So special, so special. Thank god there’s Matilda.” Heath Ledger and Michelle Williams met each other on the set of Brokeback Mountain and started dating soon after. In 2005, they welcomed Matilda. Ledger and Williams were in a relationship for three years. In September 2007, her father, author Larry R Williams, revealed that the two actors had split up. He passed away a few months later from an accidental overdose.

When Shepard described Ledger as “this heart here that’s just leaking out of everywhere”, Williams added, “Yeah, an incredible sensitivity.” E! News quoted her as saying, “We had a baby, but I suppose maybe the good thing about being young is that you don’t have so much life experience that you can contextualise things. So, you’re really just going with the

Opening up about motherhood, Williams, who shares three children with her current husband Thomas Kail, said, “Kids are such great life checkers. They force you to put



your best self in front of them. You can’t abdicate your life and your work and your own desires, but you do have to put them in check and figure out which master you’re going to serve.”

Following Williams and Ledger’s breakup, her father, Larry R Williams, told The Daily Telegraph, “We’ve known about their troubles for a while, but it’s always a very difficult thing in life when these things happen. I know Heath and Michelle still care about each other deeply and are very committed to being great parents to their daughter.” Must Read | When Amitabh Bachchan decided not work with Shatrughan Sinha anymore: ‘Kaala Pathhar was the last nail in the coffin of our friendship’ He also attributed their split to the demands and pressures of Hollywood. “You can never be stunned by what happens in Hollywood — I learnt that when we were dealing with Michelle’s career when she was younger. Michelle was grown up at 16, and just like Heath, her life has had an extremely fast pace to it. But they are both very talented artists, and they live with their hearts. I feel tremendously for her and for him and hope they will find what they want in life. I have a great respect for Heath, and I know he cares tremendously for Michelle.”

SS Rajamouli showers praise on the film Tourist Family, asks netizens not to miss it; director Abishan Jeevinth left in disbelief



The Tamil film Tourist Family continues its golden run at the box office, having earned a solid ₹70 crore so far, and is now basking in glowing critical acclaim. The latest and perhaps most significant endorsement came from none other than filmmaker SS Rajamouli, who took to his official X (formerly Twitter) account to heap praise on the film.

“Saw a wonderful, wonderful film Tourist Family. Heartwarming and packed with rib-tickling humour. And kept me intrigued from beginning till end,” wrote Rajamouli. He didn’t stop there, adding, “Great writing and direction by Abishan Jeevinth. Thank you for the best cinematic experience in recent years. Don’t miss it...”

Naturally, Rajamouli’s endorsement sent social media into a frenzy. But perhaps no one was more thrilled than the film’s director, Abishan Jeevinth, who made his debut with the film. Overwhelmed by the praise from one of Indian cinema’s most respected voices, Jeevinth responded with heartfelt gratitude: “Thank you so much, SS Rajamouli sir! Your tweet was such a wonderful surprise, it truly made our day even more special. Grateful beyond words :)” Still soaking in the moment, Jeevinth followed up with another emotional tweet a few hours later: “Still in disbelief... I

watched his films with stars in my eyes, never imagining that one day, the man who built those worlds would speak my name. SS Rajamouli sir, you’ve made this boy’s dream larger than life.” Tourist Family, which clashed at the box office with Suriya’s Retro, tells the story of a Sri Lankan family of four who illegally enter Tamil Nadu in search of a better life in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis. As they struggle to assimilate into society under the constant threat of arrest, the film unfolds as a deeply human tale, blending drama, humour, and heartwarming moments.

Sonu Nigam: It's Mohammed Rafi who made me who I am today

Mumbai: Sonu Nigam paid tribute to Mohammed Rafi with “Sau Saal Pehle 2.0 – Ek Baar Phir Se.” The renowned singer called the late legend his guru and credited him for who he is today. Speaking at the show, Sonu said, “Mohammed Rafi sahab was my first guru. And I am so grateful to the Almighty and my parents for giving me an opportunity to learn from my musical father. It was my father who introduced me to Rafi Sahab’s music, and it was Rafi Sahab who made me who I am today...” “Rafi Sahab ki wajah se main hoon, mera wajood hai (Because of Rafi Sahab, I exist; I have an identity). Hence, this concert holds a very special place in my heart as it’s like a bhakt showing his devotion to his guru,” Sonu added. Organised by NR Talent & Event Management, the concert was a fitting tribute to Mohammed Rafi’s enduring legacy, with Sonu paying homage to his musical father. The lineup included iconic songs from Mohammed Rafi’s timeless repertoire, accompanied by a live orchestra.