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## Retired teacher dies on the spot, son injured as car overturns in Telangana's Adilabad

Adilabad: A 65-year-old man died on the spot, while his son sustained injuries when their car overturned on NH44 at Narayanapur village in Neradigonda mandal on Monday. Police said Nomula Venkat Reddy, a retired teacher from Kouta (B) village in Boath mandal, was grievously injured, while his son Sharath Reddy had minor injuries when the car turned turtle after one of the tyres burst.

The car crashed into another car moving in the same direction. Death was instant for Venkat Reddy. Sharath was admitted to a hospital in Nirmal town and his medical condition is said to be stable.

## AAP govt only promotes students sure to pass Class 10, says Prime Minister



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

New Delhi: Hitting out at the AAP government in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday it denies students to take Class 10 exams if they perform poorly in Class 9 so that board exam results are not marred, and its

image is protected. In an interaction with a group of students here, he said,

"I have heard that in Delhi they do not promote students to Class 10 if they perform poorly in Class 9." "They only allow those students in Class 10 who are guaranteed to clear the exam. They fear that if the results are poor, the image of their government will be tarnished," the PM said in the interaction, a short video of which was shared by BJP leaders on social media. BJP leaders said Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party compromised students' future just to make its education model appear successful. "Instead of focusing on improving learning outcomes, they denied students the opportunity to take exams, prioritising propaganda over real progress," a BJP leader said. The AAP, BJP and Congress are locked in a triangular fight in the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections. The counting of votes will take place on February 8.

## Telangana's Nizamabad Central Prison gets weaving unit, will employ 26 inmates

Hyderabad: Director General of Prisons Dr Sowmya Mishra inaugurated a weaving unit at Central Prison Nizamabad on Monday in presence of Nizamabad CP Sindhur Sharma. The weaving unit, comprising 13 weaving machines, will employ 26 jail inmates who will make towels, napkins, bedsheets and clothes, among others. "The products will be distributed to prisoners and convicts, and will also be sold to public through the Prison Department's stalls," Mishra said. The machinery was shifted from Central Prison Cherlapally to Central Prison Nizamabad recently and assembled there. Already, there is a steel industry unit, printing press unit, tailoring unit and phenyl unit at the Nizamabad jail where prisoners work and earn substantial wages.

## HM Shah targets Kejriwal, Sisodia, says time to boot out corrupt 'Bade mian, chhote mian'



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

New Delhi: Describing AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia as 'Bade mian, chhote mian', Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the duo would lose from their New Delhi and Jangpura seats due to the corruption they perpetrated in Delhi over the past 10 years. Addressing a rally in Jangpura on the last day of campaigning for the February 5 poll, HM Shah said, "Chhote mian' Manish Sisodia has come to contest from Jangpura as he failed to keep the promises in his earlier seat of Patparganj. If you see Sisodia campaigning, do ask him what forced him to change his seat and come to Jangpura. 'Enlisting a dozen alleged scams under the AAP government, HM Shah said they came to power on the promise to end corruption but both 'Bade mian, chhote mian' went to jail in the liquor scam. Seeking votes for BJP candidate from Jangpura, Tarvinder Singh Marwah, HM Shah claimed, "The only achievement of Sisodia as

Deputy Chief Minister in the last 10 years was to open liquor vends near gurdwaras and temples." "He is the only education minister in the country who has gone to jail in a liquor scam," he said, adding that the AAP stands for "lies, deceit and fraud" as they have failed to deliver on several counts including their promise to fight corruption, close liquor vends in residential areas, making Yamuna as clean as London's River Thames and doubling hospital beds. Talking about the alleged corruption in construction of the Rs 52-crore 'Sheesh Mahal' for Kejriwal, HM Shah said the money spent on the lavish residence was that of Jangpura residents. "They indulged in corruption worth thousands of rupees but the time has come to reclaim the swindled money," he said. HM Shah claimed that the AAP is a party which is known to break promises whereas every word that Prime Minister Narendra Modi says is etched in stone. "They are spreading lies that welfare schemes will be suspended but I want to assure you that PM Modi has given his guarantee that no welfare scheme will be stopped. Above that, a monthly amount of Rs 2,500 will be given to women in Delhi," he said, adding that residents of slum clusters will get ownership rights. He said the time has come to show the door to 'Bade mian, chhote mian' and make Delhi the best Capital in the world by backing the BJP and strengthening the hands of PM Modi. He also repeated the BJP's promises for freehold rights for properties of refugees who came from Pakistan during the Partition, de-sealing of 13,000 shops shut in the city by Kejriwal and health and life insurance schemes for autorickshaw, taxi, e-rickshaw drivers, gig workers and the poor. After the voting on February 5, the Assembly election result will be declared on February 8. In the outgoing 70-member House, the AAP has 62 MLAs, the BJP has eight and the Congress has no representation.

## Telangana Congress caught in caste and communal turmoil

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Hyderabad: Even as the internecine tussle among the loyalists, defectors, MLAs and Ministers within the Congress is threatening to assume bigger proportions, the party appears to be caught in the quagmire of caste and communal politics as well now. The silence of the party leadership and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, with no action against those playing such politics, has triggered discussions in political circles whether this was a deliberate move to divide Telangana on casteist lines.

Sample this. The Congress Telangana unit had promised SC categorisation before the elections and assured to implement the Supreme Court judgment. However, Chennur MLA G Vivek Venkatswamy has been raising his voice against the SC categorisation and is demanding 20 per cent reservation for the Mala community. He had even organised a 'Malala Simha Garjana', a massive public meeting in the city on December 1. This has not gone down well with a section of Congress leaders and they are demanding that disciplinary action should be taken against Vivek. Former MLA and AICC Secretary SA Sampath Kumar reminded that the Congress had announced its commitment towards SC classification in its manifesto. Revanth Reddy had also made an announcement in the State Assembly, he stressed. If a few leaders, including Vivek and others, raise objections over SC categorisation, it would be equal to raising their voice against the party. Disciplinary action should be taken against such leaders, he insisted recently. Countering his comments, Vivek Venkatswamy had said that he was only striving for the welfare of his community. "My community's self-respect is important for me and I am prepared to go to any extent," Vivek had said. Another issue that is worrying the State leadership is the promised 42 per cent reservations to the BC community in local bodies. Even as it is yet to find a solution, Congress MLC Teenmaar Mallanna and a few other leaders have been alleging an upper hand for upper castes in the party. After the party declared Narendra Reddy as its candidate for the Karimnagar-Nizamabad-Adilabad MLC constituency elections, Mallanna openly challenged the Reddy community leaders to win the elections with-



out seeking BC community votes. At a public meeting in Warangal on Sunday, the Congress MLC also made some casteist remarks using filthy language against the Reddy community. On Monday, continuing his tirade, the Congress MLC dubbed the Congress government's caste survey report as bogus and said the survey done during former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao's tenure was genuine. He even urged the BC community leaders to burn the caste census report. This apart, he wanted the State government to cancel the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) reservation. In sharp contrast to Mallanna's demands, Telangana Government Advisor and former Minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir said the State's caste survey had provided strong evidence to protect the four per cent Muslim reservation. The survey classified 10.08 per cent of Telangana's Muslim population under the BC category, strengthening the case for four per cent reservation in jobs and education, which is pending in the Supreme Court, he said. This reservation was first proposed by the Kotla Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy regime in 1994 but implemented only in 2004 by YS Rajasekhara Reddy, he pointed out at a press conference here on Monday. Meanwhile, a few Muslim community leaders too are unhappy with the Congress government for failing to fulfill its promise made to the community. Mohammed Mushtaq Mallik, president of Tehreek Muslim Shabban, an organisation that supported the Congress in the 2023 polls, has been expressing concern over the lack of a Muslim Minister in the State cabinet. He has also been raising concerns over the delay in implementation of the Minorities Sub-Plan and the under utilisation of allocated funds.

## BJP MPs file privilege notice against Sonia Gandhi over remarks on President



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

A group of BJP MPs from the tribal community filed a breach of privilege notice on Monday (February 3, 2025) against Congress parliamentary party leader Sonia Gandhi for using "derogatory and slanderous" words against President Droupadi Murmu. Led by BJP leader and former Union Minister Fagga Singh Kulaste, they met Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and sought disciplinary action against Ms. Gandhi, contending her remarks lowered the dignity of the office of the President.

The notice was filed over Ms. Gandhi's remark on President Murmu after her address to a joint sitting of Parliament on Friday (January 31, 2025). Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were seen discussing the speech on the Parliament complex. "The poor lady, the President, was getting very tired by the end... she could hardly speak, poor thing," Ms. Gandhi was purportedly heard saying in a video doing the rounds on social media.

The BJP MPs said in the notice that the remarks are "a clear manifestation of elitist and anti-tribal mindset of Smt. Gandhi who is yet to understand the struggle and sensitivity of a tribal poor". "We write this with great dismay about

certain unparliamentary, derogatory and demeaning remarks recently made by Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, against the Hon'ble President of India, which warrant serious consideration and disciplinary action. "It is with deep concern that we highlight this statement, which appears to demean the stature and dignity of the President of India, the highest constitutional authority of our nation," they said in the notice. They said such remarks not only undermine the dignity of the office but also violate the sanctity of parliamentary procedures and conventions. A separate breach of privilege notice was also submitted by 22 parliamentarians from tribal communities, including Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday (February 3, 2025), seeking action against Independent MP Pappu Yadav for his remarks against Murmu.

## Telugu film producer arrested in drugs case dies by suicide in Goa

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Hyderabad: Telugu film producer turned drug peddler KP Chowdary alias Sunkara Krishna Prasad Chowdary allegedly died by suicide in Goa. As per available information, his friends in the film circles said Chowdary was reportedly upset since his arrest in a drug case and also financial problems. KP Chowdary, who hails from Khammam district, entered the film industry in 2016. He was the producer of the Telugu film Kabali. In 2023, he was arrested by the Cyberabad Police in possession of 93 grams of Cocaine. Police found that Chowdary's clients were allegedly spread across movie circles including actors and actresses from Telugu and Tamil film industries and also in business circles.

## Asia's biggest airport Jewar to start operations from April

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

New Delhi: The Jewar international airport is emerging as the largest airport in Asia and regular operations will start from April, Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu said in Rajya Sabha. Responding to supplementaries during Question in the Rajya Sabha, he said the airlines are also excited to start operations from there and improve connectivity across the world. "Jewar airport is emerging as the country's and Asia's biggest airport. We have conducted the validation flight in December at the airport. Everything is going according to timelines and very soon in the month of April we will see regular operations starting from Jewar-Noida international airport," the Minister told the Upper House. He said all airlines including Air India and IndiGo are very excited to improve connectivity from the Noida airport. "... The airport lies right next to Noida expressway and we will see connectivity of roads happening very soon," he said. Responding to other supplementaries, the Minister said the UDAN (Ude Desh



ka Aam Naagrik) scheme has been a revolutionary scheme and it will be extended for ten more years. "The government is working on adding another 100 airports across the country," he informed. To a question on the starting of the Kushinagar airport, he said "it would be opened soon and we are working towards it".

## Devotees throng Basar temple in Nirmal on Vasantha Panchami



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Nirmal: The famed Sri Gnana Saraswathi Devasthanam saw a surge in influx of devotees in connection with the auspicious Vasantha Panchami, the birthday of the deity celebrated in Basar, on Monday.

Officials of the temple said around 50,000 devotees from not only several parts of Telangana, but also neighbouring Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh visited the shrine and performed special prayers by forming serpentine queues from 3 am onwards. They earlier had a holy dip in the Godavari river flowing on the outskirts of the town. Some of them expressed dissatisfaction over poor arrangements made by the authorities. They said they were forced to wait in queues to take darshan of the deity for three hours. They alleged that they were fleeced by private lodges as the Endowment Department did not have enough choultries. Meanwhile, hundreds of parents performed Aksharabhyasam or initiation into the world of alphabets on the premises of the temple and special venues created around the shrine. The sleepy temple town has come alive following the presence of the devotees. The devotees arrived at Basar through jeeps, cars, trolleys, buses, etc.

## India, U.K. to resume talks on proposed trade agreement from Feb. 24

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

India and the U.K. are expected to resume the talks for the proposed free trade agreement from February 24, an official said. The U.K. Trade Minister is likely to visit the national capital soon, the official said. The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles. The agreement is aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investments.

In such pacts, two countries either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties of maximum goods traded between them. They also ease norms for promoting trade in services and bilateral investments. The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty. On

the other hand, the U.K. is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items. Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services, including banking and insurance. The talks for the agreement may get an impetus as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday proposed to raise the foreign investment limit to 100% in the insurance sector as part of new-generation financial sector reforms. Presenting Union Budget 2025-26, the Finance Minister has said the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit for the insurance sector will be raised from 74% to 100%. The two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty (BIT). There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which includes goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Finally, I-T cuts

For years, India's middle class has been caught in a financial squeeze — rising prices, stagnant wages and a tax burden that rarely felt fair. With Union Budget 2025, the Modi government has finally offered substantial tax relief by raising the exemption limit and lowering tax rates. Now, individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh pay no tax. The revised structure increases disposable income, potentially boosting consumer spending while easing inflation. The expected rise in consumption could counterbalance the reduced tax revenue. For salaried individuals, the simplified regime is a welcome departure from the complexity of deductions and compliance. Senior citizens stand to gain with limit for tax deductions on interest income doubled to Rs 1 lakh annually. This will provide meaningful relief to the retirees relying on fixed-income sources. And, those dependent on rental income will gain from the increased TDS threshold, now raised to Rs 6 lakh annually, offering greater financial flexibility. However, the fine print presents concerns as the changes come with trade-offs. While lower rates seem beneficial, the removal of key deductions — on EPF, PPF, insurance and home loans — may erode the common man's actual savings. A deeper concern is the potential decline in long-term savings. The new regime discourages investments in PFs and social security schemes. While taxpayers enjoy greater flexibility, the absence of forced savings could weaken their financial security in the long run. Additionally, the upcoming Eighth Pay Commission could push government salaries higher, placing employees in higher tax brackets and offsetting relief. For now, middle-class taxpayers can breathe easier. But real economic relief requires more than tax cuts — it demands sustained income growth, inflation control and an expanded tax base. Plus, a social security net for the retirees — at present, it is almost nil for the private sector.

## Karnataka HC declares ED proceedings against MUDA official over land allotted to CM Siddaramaiah's wife as illegal

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

In a ruling that may have a bearing on the money laundering investigation concerning the allotment of housing sites by the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife and others, the Karnataka High Court stated on Monday that the Enforcement Directorate's searches and summons against a former MUDA commissioner were illegal. Former MUDA commissioner D B Natesh, who headed the civic agency in 2021 when 14 housing plots were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife B M Parvathi, approached the Karnataka High Court over an ED search operation at his residence from October 28 to October 29 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

He questioned the ED's actions against him, including the issuance of summons dated October 29 and November 6 and the recording of his statements when he was not accused in the predicate offence of alleged corruption registered by the Karnataka Lokayukta police against Siddaramaiah, his wife, and others on September 28. The Karnataka HC ruled that the searches conducted at the residence of Natesh and statements recorded after the searches "under Section 17(1)(f) of PMLA, 2002 is vitiated on the grounds of absence of 'reason to believe', and is hereby declared invalid and illegal".

"The impugned summons issued under Section 50 of PMLA, 2002, dated 29.10.2024 and 06.11.2024 and the various statements recorded under Section 50 of the Act are hereby quashed," a single-judge bench of Justice Hemant Chandangoudar ruled on January 27. Since the former MUDA official is not accused in the predicate corruption offence he cannot be expected to disclose any facts over the alleged illegal allotment of 14 sites, the HC said. It also observed that the ED "is expected to discharge its duties with fairness" as a premier investigation agency.

"The right to liberty and privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution vests a right against the conduct of arbitrary searches, and therefore, the search conducted on the premises of the petitioner under the garb of investigation, when there is no prima facie evidence to establish the offence under Section 3 is but an abuse of process of law," Justice Hemant Chandangoudar said.

The court noted, "The alleged predicate offence pertains to the illegal allotment of sites during the petitioner's tenure as the Commissioner of MUDA. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate that any consideration passed in relation to the conveyance or relinquishment of such sites was received by the petitioner." The HC observed that the reasons for the money laundering proceedings against the former MUDA commissioner provided by the ED "in the sealed cover, indicates no specific allegation against the petitioner, except that of improper allotment of sites in favour of Smt B.M Parvathi, and that the petitioner is close to realtors". "Thus, this court is of the opinion that the impugned search and seizure conducted at the residence of the petitioner was unwarranted and based on unfounded suspicion and is, therefore, an abuse of process of law," the HC added.

The HC said that since no prima facie case had been established against the former MUDA commissioner under the PMLA at the time of the search of his residence, "the issuance of summons to the petitioner lacks legal authority". "The petitioners cannot be compelled to appear and record their statements or produce documents, as such actions would unjustly infringe upon their personal right to liberty," the court observed. "The Enforcement Directorate cannot give the elements of procedural fairness contained in the PMLA a go-by in the course of its administration. It is pertinent that the right to liberty and privacy of individuals cannot be trampled upon and that any curtailment of civil liberties is subject to the due process of law," Justice Hemant Chandangoudar noted. Incidentally, on the same day, a separate bench of the high court stayed the summons issued by the ED to Parvathi and the Urban Development Minister B S Suresha on the grounds that the ED notices could "frustrate proceedings" already underway in the HC on whether the predicate offence of corruption should be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The ED registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) on October 1, 2024, based on an FIR filed by the Lokayukta police on September 28 over the alleged illegal allotment of 14 sites by MUDA in 2021 during the tenure of the BJP to Siddaramaiah's wife

## Karnataka High Court issues interim stay on central order barring ex-judge P N Desai from govt appointments



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Karnataka High Court has issued an interim stay on a November 2024 order by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. The Karnataka High Court has issued an interim stay on a November 2024 order by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions that barred Justice P N Desai, who had retired from the court, from taking up government appointments for three years. Justice Desai was appointed by the state government as the one-man commission of

inquiry to investigate the alleged MUDA land scam in July last year.

Senior advocate Udaya Holla, representing Justice Desai, argued that the retired judge had made a communication on August 14, 2024, to the effect that he thanked the government for his appointment as a member of the Central Administrative Tribunal but he could not take up the role as he had already accepted the assignment of the Karnataka government. Holla argued that the consent of the selected candidates was required before proposals were sent to the secretariat of the appointment committee. If appointed candidates did not join their posting for thirty days, the procedure is to send a 15-day notice informing of possible debarment. It was further argued. On Tuesday, a bench of Justice R Devdas issued an interim stay on the Union ministry's order until the next date of hearing in the matter, February 6. The court's interim order said, "Learned Senior Counsel submits that neither the petitioner was informed of his selection nor was a notice issued to the petitioner before passing the impugned order of debarment. Moreover, it is submitted that some of the newspapers are carrying the information that the petitioner has been debarred from further appointment as a judicial member of the Central Administrative Tribunal."

## Cinematographers' meet in Mumbai to shine spotlight on their journey, challenges



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

In a recent masterclass, senior cinematographer Kiran Deohans recounted the challenges of lighting a romantic sequence in the song "Inn Lamhon Ke Daaman Mein" from the 2008 film Jodhaa Akbar, starring Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. He explained that they had to create an elaborate setup to give the impression that the room was illuminated by the reflection of the setting sun. Later in the song, the lighting changes as the crescent moon comes up, and the room is filled with candlelight. The masterclass by Deohans, who has shot Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (1988), Karan Johar's iconic Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (2001) and others, was hosted by Flare Cinematography Film Festival. Cinematographer Pooja Gupte,

who founded Flare with the aim to build a community of cinematographers to share their expertise and help build their skill set, believes that learning about such fascinating experiences, unique challenges and how to manage intricate setups is the idea behind holding such masterclasses and discussions.

In continuation of that effort, Flare was set to host a cinematographers' meet on Wednesday as part of the ongoing Kala Ghoda Arts Festival at Cama Hall in Mumbai. Cinematographers Deohans, Fowzia Fathima, Siddharth Diwan, Deepti Gupta, Neha Parti Matiyani, Anil Mehta, and Priyanka Singh will take part in the meet. "While the American Film Institute and various cinema bodies in Europe hold such masterclasses and conversations regularly, we rarely do that in India," said Gupte, who studied cinematography at Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata. Sharing personal experiences, believes Gupte, is a step towards "creating a community and to facilitate skill development". One of the major challenges that cinematographers face while working on a big set is to handle the light and maintain continuity. "While an action scene needs choreography, lighting is of utmost importance in a romantic scene," said Gupte. That apart, one of the biggest teams on a film set belongs to the cinematography department. "So, managing a team is another challenge," added Gupte.

## Awaiting civic amenities for 50 years, Maharashtra department seeks Rs 425 crore for 332 displaced villages

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

More than 50 years after being displaced and rehabilitated due to various irrigation projects, around 332 villages across Maharashtra have yet to receive the civic amenities promised to them. These villages were displaced before the implementation of the Maharashtra Project Affected Persons Rehabilitation Act, 1976. The Act came into effect in 1977, and no comprehensive rehabilitation policy was in place before that. Now, Maharashtra's Relief and Rehabilitation Department has sought Rs 424.60 crore in funds from the finance department to ensure that all requirements of civic amenities are fulfilled. On Monday, in a review meeting of the department, the pending issue of providing civic amenities to these rehabilitated villages was discussed. As per the data presented in the meeting, 568 villages were rehabilitated since the formation of the state until the implementation of the Act — between 1960 and 1976. Out of these villages, only 236 have been given all necessary civic amenities.

"Around 332 villages still need several civic amenities. Almost Rs 424.60 crore are required to solve this issue permanently and it was presented in the meeting," said an official of the Relief and Rehabilitation department who was present during the meeting. "All these numbers are from the irrigation projects completed before the enactment of the Act. Before it, there was no comprehensive policy for rehabilitation and even after 50 years, the problems have



not been solved," said the official. Among these 332 villages, the highest or 129 are from the Pune division, and 75 are from Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. The Konkan and Nasik divisions have 61 and 60 villages, respectively, and the Amaravati has 6, and the Nagpur division has only one village. The note presented in the meeting showed that among the big irrigation projects such as Koyana and Jayakwadi, around 93 and 48 rehabilitated villages are yet to get all necessary civic amenities.

The Pune division has sought around Rs 162 crore, and the Nasik division has sought Rs 129 crore for the villages under them. For Amaravati, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar and Konkan divisions, Rs 21 crore, Rs 64 crore, and Rs 46 crore, respectively, have been sought.

## Asst professor moves Gujarat HC over termination of employment, court orders status quo

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Gujarat High Court was hearing the petition filed by Dr Deepali Jain against the Registrar and Governing Council of Rashtriya Raksha University. The Gujarat High Court was hearing the petition filed by Dr Deepali Jain against the Registrar and Governing Council of Rashtriya Raksha University. The Gujarat High Court Tuesday issued a notice to the Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU) after an assistant professor of forensic science challenged the non-renewal of her contractual employment of three years. The court ordered that the professor remain employed at the university until the court gave its ruling in the case. The HC was hearing the petition filed by Dr Deepali Jain against the Registrar and Governing Council of RRU after she allegedly received an email on December 31, 2024, informing her that her contract had not been extended and directing her to submit her "No Due Certificate" and "Hand Over Note". On January 11, the university also allegedly directed her to vacate the university residential accommodation, the petition states. Granting time until February 11 to RRU, the court said: "The respondents (RRU) are directed to maintain status quo qua service condition of the petitioner as if the employment contract of the petitioner is not terminated or put an end to". In an oral order, Justice Nirzar Desai observed: "There was no specific order putting the services of the petitioner to an end or stating that the petitioner's contract is not renewed". Jain's case is that she was appointed as assistant professor with the School of Forensics, Risk Management & National Security (SFRMNS), RRU, on October 29, 2021. The petition claims that her contractual em-

ployment was extended thrice until December 31, 2024. "Because of the non-extension of her service, her students, including Ph.D. students will suffer in their academic work... She is the senior-most faculty amongst the Forensic Science faculty, working on a contractual basis," the petition states. Jain, 39, told the court that she was assigned several assignments during her tenure, including the director-in-charge, SFRMNS, as well as the in-charge assistant director, and later, head of administration at the School of Behavioural Sciences and Forensic Investigations (SBSFI). She said that in August 2023, RRU appointed her as the nodal officer for a CDSL-funded research project under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on "Prevention of Victimization from Forgery and Financial Fraud". The total project outlay was Rs 36 lakh for one year out of which, the salary for the Forensic Chair (Nodal Officer) was to be Rs 11 lakh per year. The petitioner received Rs 6.87 lakh out of the total amount. After the completion of her tenure as a nodal officer, the University demanded a refund of Rs 6.87 lakh paid to her for the reason that she could not get salaries from two sources and that she could not have taken another assignment while her contract with the university subsisted," the petition states, adding that Jain had allegedly contended with the university that the posting "was not an employment with an external body". However, the university allegedly held back her salary for two months, the petition states, while also "downgrading her performance assessment". The issue escalated when the university published an advertisement inviting applications for ad hoc appointments of academic faculty on a contractual basis.

## Guillain-Barré Syndrome suspected after 17-year-old dies at Kolkata hospital



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Class 12 student from West Bengal's North 24 Parganas had died at NRS Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. The Class 12 student from West Bengal's North 24 Parganas had died at NRS Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. A 17-year-old who showed symptoms of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) has died at a Kolkata hospital, sources said. The class 12 student from West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district died Monday morning at NRS Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. According to hospital sources, the teenager died of septic shock and myocarditis, with doctors suspecting that GBS may have been the underlying condition. Investigations are ongoing to confirm the exact cause of death. Two children from West Bengal, currently diagnosed with GBS, are on ventilator support at the Institute of Child Health in Kolkata. The first patient, an 8-year-old from Baguihati in North 24 Parganas, has been on ventilation for the past 12 days and is critically ill. The second patient, a 7-year-old from Dakshin Barasat in South 24 Parganas, who has been receiving treatment for 25 days, is showing slight improvement and can now speak. "Symmetrical progressive muscle weakness usually starts from the lower limb and gradually involves the trunk and the upper part of body muscles. Presentation depends on which body parts are involved. First, there is difficulty in standing/sitting, and later breathing difficulty, swallowing problems, etc. The rapidity of progression varies from patient to patient. Older children can complain of tingling sensations, muscle pain, etc. Sometimes, the autonomic nervous system is also affected, presenting with fluctuations in blood pressure, heart rate, and others. In severe cases, there is respiratory failure due to muscle weakness and (the patient would) require ventilation for survival," said Dr Somnath Gorain, a renowned pediatrician.

As per the figures available, of the 110 reported cases of the GBS in Maharashtra, 88 are from Pune, 15 are from Pimpri and the remaining seven are from other districts. Out of these reported cases, 73 are men and 37 are women. A total of 13 of them are currently on ventilators. GBS is a neurological disorder that occurs when the body's immune system attacks the peripheral nervous system. While the exact cause is unknown, it is often preceded by an infection. Many GBS patients report having had a respiratory or gastrointestinal infection in the weeks before symptoms appear, with Covid-19 being one of the possible triggers.

## Mumbai police book 3 for 'casteist' comments on news clip of Bhim Army leader criticising govt over Beed sarpanch murder

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Mumbai police on Tuesday booked three people for allegedly posting casteist remarks in the comments section of a news clip online featuring Bhim Army Bharat Ekta Mission head Ashok Kamble. The accused have been identified as Sandeep Pattekar, Prateek Darade and Krushna Munde. As per the First Information Report (FIR) filed under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, Kamble went to the Beed district of Maharashtra to meet family members of the murdered Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh on December 9.

Deshmukh was allegedly abducted, tortured and murdered earlier in the day. Initial investigations indicated that he was killed after he attempted to prevent an extortion attempt on an energy company involved in a windmill project in the area. After he met with Deshmukh's family, Kamble spoke to a Marathi news channel, which put up his comments as a news clip. In the clip, he stated that the Maharashtra government was attempting to protect the accused. He also mentioned that Valmik Karad, the prime suspect and close aide of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister Dhananjay Munde, voluntarily went to the CID office to surrender and was not arrested by the local police. Kamble said when he checked the news clip online on January 9, he found that three men had made casteist and abusive comments in the comments section. Alleging they were supporters of Karad, he approached the local Ghatkopar police station and gave a written complaint. Based on the complaint, the police conducted an initial probe before booking Pattekar, Darade and Krushna Munde. An officer said no arrests had been made and they would contact the trio to record their statements regarding the case.

## Symphony launches 'hair fall control geysers' for healthier hair and skin

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Hyderabad: Symphony has launched a new range of water heating solutions presenting them as hair fall control geysers for healthier hair and skin. The company in a press release announced that it has come up with a range of water heaters with a 9-layer PuroPod Technology that converts hard water into soft water, filtering out harmful chemicals and sediments — one of the causes of hair fall. The company has launched 3 models — 9 SKUs in the water heater segment — Symphony Spa, Symphony Sauna, and Symphony Soul in 10-litre, 15-litre, and 25-litre capacities. Additionally, the company has introduced SmartBath technology in its Symphony Spa range, making it India's first water heater powered by Artificial Intelligence, the press release said. Achal Bakeri, Chairman and Managing Director, Symphony Ltd, said, "we developed this unique geyser after gathering consumer insights on the impact of hard water on hair and skin, as well as the inconvenience of operating geysers installed at a height."

## Looking to raise women officers' strength in AFMS to 25%, says Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) is looking to increase its strength of women officers to 25 per cent from the present 21 per cent, said Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin, the first woman officer who took charge as Director General, AFMS, in October last year. Surg Vice Adm Sarin is in Pune for the 73rd annual Armed Forces Medical Conference being held from January 28 to 30. She inaugurated Indian Council of Medical Research Advanced Molecular Oncology Diagnostic (DIAMONDS) centre during the conference, apart from a smart lecture hall for postgraduate training at Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC).

DG, AFMS, functions under the Ministry of Defence, and is responsible for all medical policy matters related to the Armed Forces. In an interview with The Indian Express, Surgeon Vice Adm Sarin said that the organisation offers ample opportunities for young women to take up leadership roles. AFMS The officer was in Pune for the 73rd annual Armed Forces Medical Conference being held from January 28 to 30. "Priorities include bolstering disaster preparedness, integrating advanced medical technologies, enhancing operational capabilities through mobile and modular healthcare units and enhancing our cooperation with Friendly Foreign Nations," Sarin said. Excerpts from the interview:

Q: Three months into your tenure as the first woman DG what have been your key areas of focus?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin: It is an incredible honour and privilege to have been bestowed the opportunity to serve as the first lady Director General, Armed Forces Medical Services. This speaks of the highest standards of professionalism and gender neutrality in AFMS. These past three months have been marked by both challenges and opportunities, where I have strived to enhance operational medical readiness, while maintaining the highest standards of healthcare delivery. My focus has been on building a more inclusive, adaptive, and technologically advanced medical service that aligns with the evolving needs of our Armed Forces personnel.

Q: What plans are being taken to upskill medical officers with the latest developments in the field of medicine?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: Continuous professional development is critical in ensuring our medical officers remain at the forefront of medical science. We have partnered with leading national and international institutions for augmenting our training programmes. Emphasis is being placed on skill development in conventional fields of medical sciences as well as emerging fields such as personalised medicine, telemedicine, and artificial intelligence applications to facilitate diagnostics and treatment. Regular workshops, CMEs, and exchange programmes are also being enhanced. AFMS officers are encouraged to undertake short-term and long-term training programmes, including PhD to enhance their skills. AFMC has recently conducted a CME on AI in Medicine and we ensure Medical Officers in remote areas also participate through hybrid mode to remain updated.

Q: There are over 400 vacancies of medical officers in the Armed Forces, as per reports. What is the requirement and when will these be filled?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: The requirement of manpower is assessed periodically, and the organisation's mandate is to induct the best human resource to serve our clientele and fulfill various operational needs. Armed Forces Medical College, Pune, one of the premier medical colleges in the country trains medical graduates for serving the Armed Forces. In addition, we regularly conduct interviews for selection of medical officers for AFMS, from other medical colleges too. Regular efforts are underway to attract the best talent in AFMS. Outreach programmes are being

organised at various medical institutions to sensitise the medical students about the career opportunities being offered by AFMS. Last year only we recruited around 220 MOs in AFMS.

Q: Can you elaborate on several research projects that have been taken up along with DRDO and other defence institutions?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: Significant progress has been made in research collaborations with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and other institutions over the years, with exceptional efforts of my predecessors whereby collaborations with Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), AIIMS (New Delhi), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), IDEX and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) have been undertaken. Institutionalisation of High Altitude Medical Research Centre, Leh, into an independent research institute and a centralised repository of data generated by various research projects are also on the cards. The areas in which we intend to evolve our existing protocols and innovate are (a) Field Diagnostic Kits for rapid diagnosis and treatment of medical ailments in remote locations (b) Artificial blood substitutes for emergency transfusions and (c) development of AI models for data pertaining to diagnostics in Pathology and Radiology.

Q: How is digital transformation reshaping healthcare and medical training, and what role does AI play in enhancing medical services?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: Digital health initiatives are a top priority, with projects like an integrated electronic health record system being rolled out across the Armed Forces hospitals. AI is being utilised for predictive health analytics, personalised treatment plans, and enhanced diagnostics in radiology and pathology. AI-enabled software in diagnostics and pathology which will enable us in clinical decision making, precision medicine, triage, injury prevention are also being worked upon. In medical training, simulation-based learning, augmented reality tools, and AI-driven virtual instructors are being adopted to elevate the skills of our medical personnel. Story continues below this ad

Q: Are there any programmes tailored for mental health care needs for those in the Armed Forces? What is the burden of stress-related disorders in the Armed Forces?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: Mental health care remains a critical focus area in AFMS. Further, AFMS encourages preventive mental health and has instituted several projects towards improvement of mental health and stress related disorders through wellness clinics, adoption of Hub and Spoke model and resilience building workshops. TELEMANAS cell, a dedicated 24 x 7 mental health initiative tailored for the unique challenges faced by military personnel and their dependents is functional at Armed Forces Medical College, Pune.

Q: You have played a key role in inspiring young women to join the Armed Forces and are an icon of the Nari Shakti initiative of the Government. How do you see women's participation in the Armed Forces?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: The growing participation of women in the Armed Forces is a testament to the Government's Nari Shakti initiative. Women have played key role in AFMS since the 1950s, while women entered in the other services in the 1990s. 75% of top leadership appointments in AFMS are held by women. Women Agniveers have been recruited in the Navy and the Air Force in various roles, and in the Corps of Military Police in the Army. Women have taken up combat role as fighter pilots in the Indian Air Force since 2016. The National Defence Academy has started admitting lady cadets since 2021, which exemplifies gradual and systematic increment in the role of women in the Armed Forces. Women officers constitute over 21 per cent of the officer strength in the Armed Forces Medical Services, which we are looking forward to increasing to 25 per cent in the times to come. As you are seeing, the organisation offers ample opportunities for young women to take up leadership roles.

Q: Has AFMC got the status of institute of national importance?

Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin: Achieving the status of an Institute of National Importance for AFMC remains a key objective and we are putting in our best efforts for the same.

## Bombay High Court constitutes 8-member panel for social audit of 30 BMC-run maternity homes



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Bombay High Court Wednesday constituted an eight-member committee to conduct a social audit of the 30 maternity and nursing homes run by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). A bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and Neela K Gokhale passed an order while hearing a plea related to the investigation into the deaths of a 26-year-old woman and her newborn at the Sushma Swaraj Maternity Home in Bhandup (West) last year. The plea was filed by the woman's husband, Khusrudin Ansari, who alleged negligence and misconduct by the civic hospital.

Ansari, through senior advocate Gayatri Singh, cited the failure to provide medical records of his wife within 72

hours of the request. Ansari also claimed that the maternity home lacked electricity, adequate staff, and beds. He contended that power failure happened several times during the date of the incident. On Wednesday, Singh suggested the names of six of eight members to which Advocate Purnima H Kantharia, representing the hospital and BMC, said she had no objection. Kantharia added that two doctors belonging to state-run hospitals be added to the panel.

The court then constituted a committee of Dr Kamaxi Bhate, retired Professor of Community Medicine from civic-run KEM Hospital, Dr Padmaja, Head of Gynecology at KEM Hospital, Dr Reena Vani Cooper, Professor at Cooper Gynecology Department, Brinelle D'Souza, Chairperson of Centre for Health and Mental Health at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Sonya Gill, Vice-President of Akhil Bharatiya Janwadi Mahila Sanghatana (All India Democratic Women's Association), and health and women's rights advocate Sangeeta Rege. Moreover, two doctors from state-run Nair Hospital and J J Hospital will also be part of the panel. Kantharia said the audit will be conducted as per Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) under LaQshya or Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative, launched by the Central Government in 2017 to reduce preventable maternal and newborn mortality. The court said that four teams of two doctors each will visit the said nursing homes to conduct their social audit as per SOPs, and directed the panel to submit a report within eight weeks.

## 'Dhananjay Munde special to Devendra Fadnavis, Ajit Pawar; his resignation impossible,' says NCP (SP) MLA Sandeep Kshirsagar

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

A day after Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar reiterated his support for NCP leader and minister Dhananjay Munde, NCP (SP) MLA Sandeep Kshirsagar alleged on Wednesday that Munde's resignation "was impossible" as he was close to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as well as his party chief. "Walmik Karad is special to Dhananjay Munde. Similarly, Dhananjay Munde is special to Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar. And that is why Dhananjay Munde's resignation is now impossible. No matter how much evidence Anjali Damania submits to Ajit Pawar, it will be of no use," Kshirsagar, the MLA from Beed, said in a post on X.

Munde has been facing the heat after his close aide Walmik Karad was arrested in a case linked to the murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district. On Tuesday, he left a Cabinet meeting midway and refused to comment on the demands for his ouster. Social activist Anjali Damania, who met Ajit Pawar on Monday night and reportedly presented him with evidence against Munde, said in Mumbai, "Now it has become clear. They want to save their friend even if that friend crushes people." On Tuesday, Ajit Pawar had said that "the guilty should get capital punishment" in the Beed murder case. "In this case, if anyone is not involved, then there is no question of investigating that individual. If anyone is involved, then we will not spare him. This is the government's stance," Pawar said. The proof submitted by Damania would be handed over to the Special Investigation Team probing the case, he added. Karad



was arrested on December 31 after he surrendered himself before the Pune CID in connection with an extortion case related to Deshmukh's murder case. He was later booked under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act. On BJP MLA Suresh Dhas accusing Karad of being complicit in Deshmukh's murder, Pawar said, "I don't know what Dhas thinks. I have nothing to do with it. I deal with BJP's senior leaders.

I deal at the highest level, I don't bother myself about what party workers say." Responding to demands for his resignation from his own party leaders and the Opposition, Munde said on Tuesday, "Whether I should resign or not, whether I am guilty or not, the chief minister and the deputy chief ministers should take the decision."

## Construction sites are 'public places' under Motor Vehicles Act, Karnataka HC rules

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

construction sites, public spaces, Karnataka HC The court clarified that under the Motor Vehicles Act, places to which the public has access or right of thoroughfare would also be a public space. The Karnataka High Court has held that construction sites will be considered "public spaces" for the purposes of the Motor Vehicles Act. The ruling came as the court rejected an insurance firm's appeal filed in connection with the death of a construction worker in 2011 in Bengaluru. The order, passed by Justice Hanbate Sanjeevkumar last month, was recently made public. As per the court documents, Devendra Eligar was working at a construction site on the Beguru-Koppa road in 2011. After work, he went to sleep at the site around 11 pm when a "rashly driven" truck barged into the compound and struck Eligar, killing him. In 2014, the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal ordered the insurance firm to pay a compensation of Rs 11.5 lakh to the man's heirs.

The firm, however, argued that third-party risks such as these were not covered under plant and machinery policies. Further, it was argued that the vehicle owner and not the insurance company should be liable to pay the amount since the site was not a public place as per the Motor Vehicles Act. The opposing counsel informed the court that the insurance policy did indeed cover third-party risks and pointed out that the construction area should be considered



a public place as it is accessible to the public. The court concurred with this view and stated, "Though the construction area is private property, it is accessible to all public... to workmen, supervisors, managers, engineers... Here these type of persons who are involved in construction activities are part of the public, the site in which the accident occurred is not fully occupied for private purpose of the construction site." "It is still at the stage of construction and these workers above stated are accessible to the site for constructing the building therefore, it is accessible to the public," the judge held. Story continues below this ad. The court clarified that under the Motor Vehicles Act, places to which the public has access or right of thoroughfare would also be a public space.

## At Rs 1 for a kilo, Punjab's cabbage, cauliflower farmers feel the pinch of glut

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Farmers across Punjab are reeling under heavy loss as a glut of cabbage and cauliflower has caused wholesale prices to crash to as low as Rs 1-2 per kg. The major glut has now led to even retail rates falling to Rs 7-10 per kg. With production costs soaring to Rs 40,000 per acre, cultivators are struggling to recover their expenses, raising serious concerns about the lack of a structured approach to manage surplus production. Lakhwinder Singh Grewal, a farmer from Ludhiana's Sahnewal, cultivated cabbage on 1.5 acres after the paddy harvest in October. His crop matured by the end of December, but he is now forced to sell at rock-bottom prices in wholesale markets. "With such rates, I can't even cover my costs," he lamented. Darshan Singh, a cauliflower farmer from Giddranwali village in Abohar, is facing a similar fate. Frustrated by the dismal rates, he has resorted to feeding his produce to cattle. "What's the point of taking it to the mandi when I'll only get Rs 1 per kg?" he questioned. Weather woes and call for policy intervention. Farmers attribute the crisis to unpredictable weather patterns. Amarinder Singh from Lakhowal village in Ludhiana explained that higher temperatures in November led to poor early yields, while a sudden temperature drop in December caused early and late varieties to ma-

ture at the same time, flooding the market. "This happens with many vegetables, and the state government needs to wake up and find ways to manage such situations," he added. Grewal emphasised the need for better planning by state agricultural bodies, including the Horticulture Department, Agriculture Department, and Punjab Agricultural University (PAU). "They need to assess how much land should be allocated for each vegetable crop and organise farmers into clusters to regulate supply. This will prevent unpredictable price crashes," he said, criticising the state government's tendency to shift blame to the Centre instead of taking responsibility. He said agriculture is a state subject, hence some homework needs to be done by them to justify their salaries. He also pointed out Punjab's potential to export vegetables to Arab countries that currently import the produce from Europe. "Why can't we tap into that market? Instead, the state blames the Centre, and the Centre blames the state—everyone is just playing vote politics," he remarked. According to agricultural data, around 20,000 hectares in Punjab are under cauliflower and cabbage cultivation this year. The early August-sown varieties that hit the markets in November fetched ₹30-40 per kg, but the supply was limited. "This is no price for a farmer," said Amarjeet Singh, a Ferozpur-based cultivator, recalling that capsicum faced a similar price collapse last year.

## Mumbai police book 3 for 'casteist' comments on news clip of Bhim Army leader criticising govt over Beed sarpanch murder



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Mumbai police on Tuesday booked three people for allegedly posting casteist remarks in the comments section of a news clip online featuring Bhim Army Bharat Ekta Mission head Ashok Kamble. The accused have been identified as Sandeep Pattekar, Prateek Darade and Krushna Munde. As per the First Information Report (FIR) filed under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, Kamble went to the Beed district of Maharashtra to meet family members of the murdered Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh on December 9.

Deshmukh was allegedly abducted, tortured and murdered earlier in the day. Initial investigations indicated that he was killed after he attempted to prevent an extortion attempt on an energy company involved in a windmill project in the area. After he met with Deshmukh's family, Kamble spoke to a Marathi news channel, which put up his comments as a news clip. In the clip, he stated that the Maharashtra government was attempting to protect the accused. He also mentioned that Valmik Karad, the prime suspect and close aide of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister Dhananjay Munde, voluntarily went to the CID office to surrender and was not arrested by the local police.

Kamble said when he checked the news clip online on

January 9, he found that three men had made casteist and abusive comments in the comments section. Alleging they were supporters of Karad, he approached the local Ghatkopar police station and gave a written complaint. Based on the complaint, the police conducted an initial probe before booking Pattekar, Darade and Krushna Munde. An officer said no arrests had been made and they would contact the trio to record their statements regarding the case. The Maharashtra CID earlier this month charged Karad under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

## Saif Ali Khan attack: Bandra court sends accused to 14 days judicial custody

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

A local court in Mumbai Wednesday refused to grant an extension of police custody of Bangladeshi national Mohammed Shariful Islam, arrested in connection with the attack on actor Saif Ali Khan, and remanded him in judicial custody for 14 days.

While seeking an extension of police custody of the accused, the investigation officer submitted before the court that the accused had done a reconnaissance of Khan's building before committing the crime and also made preparations. The officer also informed the court that a team was in Kolkata probing if anyone helped the accused. "Who helped the accused illegally coming to India from Bangladesh and through whom the accused sent money to his family in Bangladesh? We wish to probe this." However, the lawyer for the accused submitted that the investigation is over and police custody is not required.

## Weeks later, police takes u-turn, arrests 2 for role in Gumtala post 'terror attack'



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

A similar blast was reported near Bakshiwal police checkpoint in December last year. A similar blast was reported near Bakshiwal police checkpoint in December last year. Weeks after claiming that a car radiator had gone off making a loud boom outside Gumtala Police Post in Amritsar, the Punjab Police on Tuesday called the same incident a terror attack and claimed to have arrested two behind the crime that took place on January 9.

Punjab Police's State Special Operation Cell (SSOC) Amritsar unit on Tuesday said that they have busted a Pakistan's ISI-backed narco-terror module being operated by USA-based Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passian and USA-based notorious drug smuggler Sarwan Bhola and arrested two of its members for their role in "lobbying hand-grenade on Gumtala Police Post in Amritsar". However, denying any wrongdoing, Assistant Commissioner of Police

(West) Shiv Darshan Singh had on January 9 said that the noise was due to a radiator explosion which was a result of a coolant leak from a vehicle kept near the police post. A day later, terrorist organisation BKI had claimed responsibility for the act on social media. In a statement issued here on Tuesday, Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav said, "Some people had hurled a hand grenade at Gumtala Police Post in Amritsar Commissionerate on January 9 this year and terrorist organisation BKI had claimed responsibility for the act on social media. Those arrested have been identified as Bagga Singh of Guru Teg Bahadur Nagar in Sirsa, Haryana, and Puskar Singh alias Sagar of Amarkot, Amritsar. Police teams have also recovered one hand grenade and two sophisticated pistols along with ammunition from them. DGP Gaurav Yadav said that investigations have revealed that arrested accused Bagga Singh is a relative of Sarwan Bhola, who is the brother of notorious smuggler Ranjit Singh alias Cheeta — currently lodged in Bathinda jail in 532 kg heroin recovery case. Sarwan Bhola is also wanted in 532 kg heroin recovery case and carries Rs 2 lakh reward announced by National Investigation Agency. The DGP added that Bhola, who has been operating a drug smuggling network from USA, has handed over his relative Bagga and his associate Pushkaran to Happy Passian and Harvinder Rinda to carry out terror activities in the border state. In the recent spate of attacks on police posts, it is, however, not the first time that police took a u-turn. A similar blast was reported near Bakshiwal police checkpoint in December last year. Even though police denied any terror angle in the incident initially, three people were later killed in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit for their alleged role in the blast.

## Violence breaks out in UP village over Ambedkar statue; 4 cops injured

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Four policemen were injured and at least six police vehicles were burnt as violence broke out in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh district late Tuesday evening over the removal of a B R Ambedkar statue that was allegedly illegally installed on a property. The incident took place at Bhimpura-Ibrahimpur village. While a mob pelted stones at the police team that removed the statue and set police jeeps and bikes on fire, the police fired bullets in the air, lobbed tear gas shells and baton-charged the crowd, officials said.

A First Information Report was lodged at Roravar police station late Tuesday night and three people, including Gram Pradhan Asha Lodhi, her husband Nirdesh Lodhi, and former village head Chatarpal, were arrested, the police said. Fourteen known and 150-200 unidentified people were booked for attacking the police team and indulging in arson, the police added. "The situation is under control now. A heavy deployment of police force has been made to ensure peace. We will arrest those involved in Tuesday's incident," Sanjeev Suman, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Aligarh, said. "The statue of Dr Ambedkar was installed illegally on land owned by the Gram Sabha. We asked the locals to remove it but they refused and instead attacked the police. We have arrested three people and raids are being conducted to nab the others. The villagers have fled,"



SSP Suman added. According to the police, two plots owned by the Gram Sabha were lying vacant in the village. While locals installed an Ambedkar statue in one of the plots on January 25, members of the Baghel community — an Other Backward Class community in Uttar Pradesh — raised a boundary wall on the other plot and claimed that a temple would be constructed inside it, the police said. "We tried to resolve the contentious issue through mutual dialogue following which the temple proponents agreed. We razed the boundary wall but those backing the statue refused to remove it. They engaged in stone pelting and arson after the police removed the statue," said Mrigank Shekhar Pathak, Superintendent of Police, Aligarh.

## Himachal Pradesh custodial death case: They were hung upside down, assaulted with sticks, a bichoo butti plant

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Among the testimonies of prosecution witnesses in the CBI case that led to the conviction of eight Himachal Pradesh (HP) Police officials, including former IG ZH Zaidi, one key statement came from Dinesh Kumar, a constable then posted as a sentry at Kotkhai police station. During his examination-in-chief, Dinesh deposed that Manoj Joshi, the then DSP of Theog, had told him: "Dinesh, is main kuch nahi hota, ye dharam yudh hai, is main koi bhi mara jayega. Suraj Singh toh accused tha hi, use toh fansi honi hi thi, agar woh humse mara gaya toh kya hua." (Dinesh, there is nothing in this, it is a religious war, and anyone can die. Suraj Singh was an accused and was to be hanged anyway, so what difference does it make if he died at our hands?)

However, during cross-examination, Dinesh was confronted with his statement under Section 161 of the CrPC, where no such remarks were recorded. He admitted that the exact words attributed to Joshi had not been mentioned earlier. The testimonies of CBI's key witnesses, including Dinesh, Rajinder alias Raju, Subhash, and then night Munshi Mukesh Sharma, were challenged by the defence on the grounds of inconsistencies and alleged tutoring by the CBI. The defence also argued that Dinesh and Mukesh Sharma had given contradictory statements. However, the CBI court, in its 364-page judgment, observed: "It can be fairly inferred that these witnesses were subjected to extensive and lengthy cross-examination. Despite that, their testimony on material particulars could not be shattered. Some discrepancies are bound to occur in natural testimony, depending on factors such as background and perception. Witnesses cannot be expected to make parrot-like depositions." The court also noted that the incident took place in 2017, and witnesses were deposing after a gap of four to five years, which could explain minor inconsistencies.

The night of Suraj Singh's death According to the court's judgment, Dinesh was posted on general duty at Kotkhai police station from October 2016 to July 2017. On July 18, 2017, he was assigned sentry duty at the lock-up from 9 pm to midnight. At around 9:30 pm, three suspects — Subhash, Rajinder Singh alias Raju, and Suraj Singh (since deceased) — were brought from Jubbal police station. SHO Kotkhai, Rajinder Singh, directed Dinesh to provide them with food. Story continues below this ad Around 11:45 pm, SHO Kotkhai and other accused police officials brought Suraj Singh downstairs in an unconscious state, telling Dinesh that he had fainted during interrogation and was being taken to the hospital. Dinesh further testified that DSP Theog (Manoj Joshi) told SHO Kotkhai to remain calm, as they would portray the incident as Rajinder alias Raju killing Suraj Singh inside the lock-up. Later, Dinesh learned from SHO Kotkhai that Suraj had died.

The next day, SHO Kotkhai told Dinesh that since the incident had occurred during his duty hours, an FIR would be registered based on his statement. He was asked to state that Suraj Singh had been killed by Rajinder alias Raju. When Dinesh later narrated the incident to IG Zaidi, constable Vipan took his signature on a complaint. Dinesh said



However, during cross-examination, Dinesh was confronted with his statement under Section 161 of the CrPC, where no such remarks were recorded. He admitted that the exact words attributed to Joshi had not been mentioned earlier

he signed it in a state of fear and confusion, believing he was telling the truth to his superiors. On July 20, 2017, Dinesh received a call from SHO Kotkhai, instructing him to come to Theog to record his statement under Section 176 of the CrPC. Before giving the statement, he was advised to meet DSP Joshi, who assured him that his deposition would be taken before the magistrate in the evening. Joshi allegedly pressed upon him to state that Raju had killed Suraj Singh.

From July 20 to July 23, 2017, Dinesh received multiple phone calls from SHO Kotkhai, who pressured him to give a statement that would save all the accused officers. Eventually, Dinesh began recording these calls. During one of these conversations, SHO Kotkhai allegedly told him that IG Zaidi and DSP Joshi had assured him that nothing would happen to them and that they would "manage" the CBI inquiry.

Testimonies of torture Rajinder Singh alias Raju, one of the suspects initially booked for Suraj Singh's murder, testified that he, Suraj, and others were brutally beaten in custody. According to Raju's statement, they were assaulted with sticks and a bichoo butti plant (a stinging nettle) and hung upside down to force a confession. Raju, initially named as one of the five suspects in the case of a minor's rape and murder, was later cleared by the CBI. The CBI found no evidence linking him, Suraj, or the other suspects — Subhash, Rajinder, Lokjan, and Deepak — to the crime. Eventually, a Shimla court convicted a man named Anil for the minor's rape and murder. Meanwhile, the detailed judgment in the custodial death case of Suraj Singh was released on Tuesday, convicting former IG ZH Zaidi and seven other policemen of murder.

## ED claims CA Amber Dalal, arrested in investment fraud, used funds to buy properties, cover losses



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has claimed that chartered accountant Amber Dalal, arrested in an alleged investment fraud, used investors' money to cover losses incurred by him in stock market trading, paying credit card bills, and buying properties, including one in Dubai near Burj Khalifa. Dalal was arrested on November 27, 2024, by ED following his arrest in March 2024 by the Mumbai police. ED has claimed that Dalal operated a Ponzi scheme, where only a small percentage of the investors' funds were used for investment or trading and old investors were being paid using funds from new investments.

Earlier this month, ED filed its prosecution complaint (chargesheet) against Dalal and an acquaintance Rashmi Prasad. The Central agency has claimed that the proceeds of crime in the case are to the tune of Rs 564 crore, layered

in various bank accounts and entities belonging to Dalal or his family. ED has alleged that Dalal collected investments through his firm Ritz Consultancy Services, from over 2,000 people, promising returns of 1.5-1.8 per cent per month by trading in nine commodities like gold, silver, crude oil, natural gas, lead, and aluminium. He instead diverted the funds for his personal and unrelated uses, ED has claimed. ED has attached assets valued at around Rs 67 crore, including immovable properties, bank accounts, and insurance policies. The agency has also claimed that there are more than 42 bank accounts of Dalal and his family which were used to layer the funds collected from investors.

"Considering the role of both the accused persons and their involvement in the crime, it has been prima facie brought on record that the accused persons are involved in generating proceeds of crime, projecting it and claiming it as untainted amount," Special Judge A C Daga said in an order passed on January 24, issuing notice to Dalal and Prasad. ED claimed that investors were provided with an undated cheque for their invested amount, promising them that their capital was safe and the amount could be redeemed whenever they wanted. The returns were regularly given till February 2024 after which Dalal absconded in March, ED has claimed. Of the diverted funds, a property of Rs 4.19 crore was purchased in Dubai. The agency has also added details from his trading accounts, claiming that he incurred losses of Rs 80 crore. Statements of his family members show that Dalal operated all transactions and accounts.

## Amid demands for his resignation over Beed murder case, Dhananjay Munde leaves Cabinet meeting mid-way

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Maharashtra minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Dhananjay Munde, beed sarpanch murder case, Mumbai news, Indian express Maharashtra minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Dhananjay Munde. Maharashtra minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Dhananjay Munde Tuesday left a Cabinet meeting mid-way, and refused to comment on the rising demands of his ouster in connection with the murder of Santosh Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog in Beed. Munde's close aide Walmik Karad has been arrested in a case linked to the murder of Deshmukh. "I will not comment about demands of my resignation. She (Anjali Damania) has met Ajit Pawar with papers. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar can speak on this," said the Maharashtra Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Minister. The Maharashtra minister was referring to activist Anjali Damania who met Ajit Pawar Monday night, and reportedly presented him with evidence against Munde. Damania has demanded Munde's resignation from the state cabinet and may approach the court over the issue. Before the Cabinet meeting, Fadnavis and Pawar met, and according to sources, they discussed the issue of Dhananjay Munde. Fadnavis will visit the Beed district on February 5.

While Munde did not attend the full Cabinet meeting and left immediately, his office said, "The agenda was very short and there were no other important points on the agenda. Therefore, he left. All speculations about him being unhappy



or told about resignation are false". On Tuesday, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Suresh Dhas, who has been raising the issue of Deshmukh's murder for over a month, met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. While he has accused Walmik Karad of being complacent in the murder of Massajog sarpanch, he has not named Munde. Speaking with reporters after the meeting, Dhas said, "I have not demanded the resignation of Dhananjay Munde yet. Moreover, why should our chief minister be asked about Munde's removal from cabinet? He is from the NCP and it is the responsibility of NCP president Ajit Pawar to decide about this". Other than Walmik Karad, seven others have been arrested in connection with the murder of Santosh Deshmukh on December 9. Deshmukh was murdered reportedly for trying to thwart an extortion attempt from a windmill company by the accused.

## Haryana ACB recovers Rs 3.65 crore, gold from retired panchayat dept official

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

The Haryana Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has recovered Rs 3.65 crore and gold worth Rs 6.5 lakh from the residence of a retired Haryana Development and Panchayat department official. The recovery comes after the ACB conducted a raid at the Panchkula residence of the official on Monday in connection with a scam worth Rs 50 crore and arrested the accused identified as Shamsher Singh, who retired on November 30 last year.

ACB officials said that currency notes were found in a bed and almira at Shamsher's Panchkula Sector 28 house. To count the notes, two machines from the Punjab National Bank were used and it continued till Tuesday morning. Shamsher along with an arrested official of the treasury office in Hodal (Panchkula) were produced before a court in Faridabad on Tuesday. On the request of the ACB, both accused have been sent to police remand till February 2. The ACB had registered an FIR on January 24 this year against junior officials of Haryana Development and Panchayat department posted in Faridabad apart from a



firm of outsourcing services under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 and BNS. An audit report of Comptroller of Auditor General (CAG) had earlier found that funds were disbursed to the Palwal District Development and Panchayat Officer for the financial year of 2023-24 and 2024-25 without approval of Chief Accounts Officer of the panchayat department.

## Irked by Army's attitude, Punjab and Haryana HC grants additional compensation to Vir Chakra awardee

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

lawyers The court imposed the additional interest for unnecessarily challenging an Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) order in favour of Captain Reet MP Singh of 8 Cavalry, who was decorated with the Vir Chakra for his role in the 1965 war in the Khemkaran sector. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the Army and the Central government to pay an additional 15 per cent interest on the arrears of war injury pension to an Army Captain who was awarded the Vir Chakra in the 1965 Indo-Pak War.

The court imposed the additional interest for unnecessarily challenging an Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) order in favour of Captain Reet MP Singh of 8 Cavalry, who was decorated with the Vir Chakra for his role in the 1965 war in the Khemkaran sector. He lost an eye in a tank skirmish near Village Machhike in Khemkaran. The war-injured officer sustained 80 per cent disability and lost an eye in the war but was not granted enhanced disability benefits under the 'broad-banding' policy introduced by the central government in 1996. These enhanced benefits were initially extended by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) only to post-1996 "invalidation" cases, excluding pre-1996 cases and those who were released with disability or war injury pension upon completing their terms, voluntary retirement, or superannuation. The Supreme Court, however, struck down the cut-off date, quashing the distinction based on the mode of exit from service. It directed that benefits be paid with arrears from 1996, along with 8 per cent interest, to all af-

ected disabled retirees. Despite these rulings, several AFTs and High Courts had to repeatedly direct authorities to release the benefits. The financial wing of the MoD, however, instructed the Army to challenge such orders, leading to a series of strictures and strong observations, including from the Supreme Court, which criticised the Army's practice of contesting disability pension cases. A bench comprising Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma and Justice Meenakshi I Mehta expressed shock that the war hero was dragged into litigation despite the Supreme Court having already settled the issue. The court noted that the AFT had ruled in his favour in 2018, yet the Army was still contesting the decision. It then imposed an additional 15 per cent interest on the amount due to him, to be recovered from the officers responsible for withholding the payment.

Earlier this month, the Supreme Court expressed its displeasure over the Army challenging disability benefits for a veteran who developed diabetes during service. In December 2024, it imposed costs of Rs 50,000 on the Army and the MoD for contesting a military widow's pension. In March 2024, the Supreme Court granted disability pension and compensation of Rs 50 lakh to a soldier who had contracted HIV in service and had been denied pension by both the Army and the AFT. Advocates handling military cases say courts across the country are being flooded with petitions and appeals from military authorities against their own disabled soldiers, widows, and pensioners — a stark contrast to the approach of other ministries and departments.

## 1985 Air India bombing: Hitman given life sentence in Canada for murder of suspect in 2022



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

A hitman convicted in Canada of murdering an acquitted suspect in the 1985 Air India bombings that killed 331 people was sentenced on Tuesday (January 28, 2025) to life in prison. Tanner Fox and his accomplice Jose Lopez pleaded guilty in October 2024 to the second-degree murder of Ripudaman Singh Malik. While they confessed that they were paid to carry out the July 2022 shooting in a sub-

urb of Vancouver in western Canada, they have not revealed who hired them. Lopez is due back in court on February 6. Malik, along with his co-accused Ajaib Singh Bagri, had been acquitted two decades ago of charges related to the 1985 bombing due to a lack of evidence. Deadliest air attack The bombing of Air India Flight 182 off the coast of Ireland that killed all 329 passengers and crew had been the deadliest act of airborne terrorism prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

The Montreal-New Delhi Air India 'Kanishka' Flight 182 exploded 45 minutes before it was to have landed at London's Heathrow Airport on June 23, 1985. It came as another bomb exploded at Japan's Narita airport, killing two workers who were loading baggage onto an Air India flight. Both suitcase bombs were later traced back to Vancouver, home to a large Sikh immigrant population. Inderjit Singh Reyat is the only person to have been convicted in the plot, for making the bombs and for lying at the trials of Malik and Bagri. The attacks took place during an Indian crackdown on Sikhs fighting for an independent homeland, and those behind it were alleged to have been seeking revenge for the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by Indian troops.

## US issues new waiver for humanitarian aid amid freeze

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a waiver on Tuesday (January 28, 2025) for life-saving humanitarian assistance during a 90-day pause in foreign aid while Washington undertakes a review, according to a State Department memo seen by Reuters. Just hours after taking office a week ago, U.S. President Donald Trump announced the pause so foreign aid contributions could be reviewed to see if they align with his "America First" foreign policy.

The waiver issued on Tuesday (January 28, 2025) for life-saving aid comes after Mr. Rubio initially gave an exemption on Friday (January 24, 2025) for emergency food assistance. Mr. Rubio defined life-saving humanitarian assistance as core life-saving medicine, medical services, food, shelter, and subsistence assistance, supplies and reasonable administrative costs as necessary to deliver such assistance. "This waiver does not apply to activities that involve abortions, family planning conferences, administrative costs ... gender or DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) ideology programs, transgender surgeries, or other non-life saving assistance," Mr. Rubio's memo said. The U.S. foreign aid pause risks cutting off billions of dollars of life-saving assistance. The United States is the largest single donor of aid globally. In fiscal year 2023, it disbursed \$72



billion in assistance. There was initial confusion among U.S. lawmakers, aid groups and the United Nations over the scope of Mr. Trump's order. That was partially cleared up on Friday (January 24, 2025), when the State Department issued a "stop-work" order for all existing foreign assistance and paused new aid, according to a cable seen by Reuters. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday (January 27, 2025) called for the United States to consider additional exemptions to "ensure continued delivery of critical development and humanitarian activities."

## India's winding road to '#EndTB'

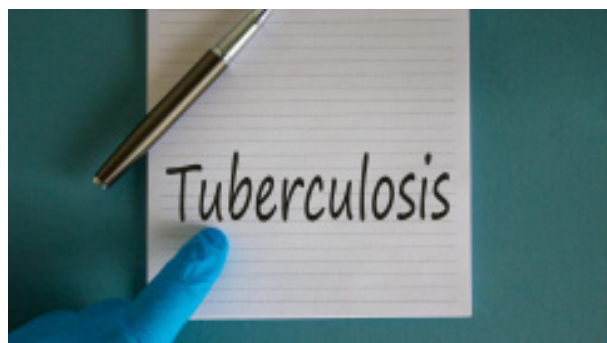
GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Last year, tuberculosis (TB) emerged, once again, as the leading infectious disease killer globally. The goals, i.e., End TB targets of 90% reduction in TB deaths, 80% reduction in new cases, and zero TB-affected families facing catastrophic costs by 2030, seem to be a distant dream. In 2018, India extended the highest level of political commitment for the cause by pledging to achieve End TB targets on an accelerated timeline by 2025. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was a huge pushback to the efforts. According to the World Health Organization's Global Tuberculosis Report 2024, India continues to lead in the global TB burden (26% of cases) and is also the hub for drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) and TB deaths. While ambitious policies and initiatives are rolled out from the national level, the ground reality in India needs to be better understood to translate them into effective interventions. Focus on vulnerable groups

India's National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) clearly defines the high-risk or vulnerable groups that are at risk of contracting TB and developing adverse outcomes. Dr. Pavitra Mohan, paediatrician and founder of Basic Healthcare Services, a non-governmental organisation working in south Rajasthan, says, "We get around 1000 persons with TB in our clinics every year and many of them have severe lung damage owing to fine dust inhalation from mining and stone carving. They are at risk for TB due to contributory factors like silicosis, undernutrition, overcrowding, and uncontrolled co-morbidities like diabetes." Migrant workers also have an added disadvantage of poor access to health-care facilities. Dr. Mohan says, "They prefer to go back to their native place if they fall ill and hence it is not easy for the healthcare delivery system also to keep track of their treatment." While a lot of attention is being paid to tackling undernutrition among persons with TB (pwTB), a host of other contributory factors in each geography needs to be addressed, requiring multisectoral action. TB is a curable disease with effective and free drugs from NTEP. A significant achievement for India is the treatment initiation in more than 95% of notified cases. This was possible, over the years, by establishing an exclusive procurement and supply chain system for the NTEP. However, in 2023, there was a country-wide break in the supply chain — it still continues in many parts. Shortage of key drugs in the centres, many of which are unavailable in the open market, left the beneficiaries and their families in a struggle. Nandita Venkatesan, data journalist and two-time TB survivor, says, "It takes many a mile for pwTB to reach the finishing line of treatment combating a wide range of side effects. Shortage of such critical medicines disrupts the treatment, risking resistance to antibiotics and poor disease outcomes. Moreover, having to buy drugs from outside leads to catastrophic health expenses."

On extrapulmonary TB Extrapulmonary TB (EP-TB) affects any organ of the body — lymph nodes, the kidneys, the brain, the spinal cord, bones, joints, and skin. However, the NTEP's main focus has been on pulmonary TB affecting the lung, as it is most common and transmissible.

The share of EP-TB is about 24% of the notified cases, but with wide geographical variations. It is often missed/delayed from being diagnosed due to symptoms which are vague and mimic other diseases. Dr. Deepak Chandra Badhani, a surgeon working in rural Chhattisgarh, says, "Doctors in Indian settings should have a high index of suspicion for TB in the cases they see. Proper history taking, thorough clinical examination and simple tests such as pus staining from a non-healing ulcer can help diagnose TB. But sadly, we wait for expensive, advanced tests just to start treatment and depend heavily on specialists to diagnose, leading to substantial delays and advanced disease." He lays emphasis on the training of general practitioners to pick up EP-TB at the earliest and of the need to sensitise frontline workers and integrating EP-TB into their screening algorithms. A study by Daniels and colleagues in Mumbai shows that only 35% of private practitioners and 75% of government doctors could correctly diagnose a patient pre-



## The chances of ending TB by 2025 appear bleak, but there is some hope

sending with classical symptoms of TB. Dr. Vasundhara Rangaswamy, a microbiologist working in rural Chhattisgarh, says the reluctance to notify the disease further impacts diagnosis as private practitioners prescribe antibiotics and refer without any diagnostic tests.

TB is an area where guidelines are updated quite frequently. However, studies done by Shah and colleagues and also Hiremath and colleagues show that a shortage of adequately trained human resources is a major challenge affecting implementation of the NTEP. Dr. Rangaswamy says, "Molecular tests are expensive and often take time to access as they are mostly available only at district level. Results take time due to the heavy workload and shortage of trained staff. In effect, patients have to travel and incur more expenses." Dr. Mohan says, "The CBNAAT [Cartridge-based Nucleic Acid Amplification Testing] and Truenat machines are not available at many places, [as they are] mostly placed at [the] district level. And very often, when a machine is available, the lab technician will not be there and if the lab technician is there, cartridge supply for the test would not be there." The staff pattern within the NTEP does not meet the growing demands, with most now having more work.

What needs to be done Ownership at all levels is essential to make programmes work. Idukki district in Kerala collaborated with Kudumbashree, one of the largest women's self-help networks in the world, for their TB elimination efforts. This resulted in widespread community participation and advocacy by government/leadership levels created a huge impact. "It helped us achieve our targets and sustain the activities," says Dr. Cency B., former District TB Officer of Idukki district, and current Assistant Director, Kerala Health Services. She says, "Advocacy by political leadership helps in providing platforms for cross learning from best practices across geographies. But programme implementers will have to go beyond their routine work scope to achieve this." While the chances of ending TB by 2025 look bleak, there is some hope. India's case notification reached the highest level and deaths due to TB declined by 24% as compared to 2015, which is way more than the global decline. The administrative levels of the NTEP are designed to adapt to the innumerable contextual challenges. New bodies of knowledge from different parts of the world need to be considered. Vietnam, a high burden country, recently showed the effective use of active case finding for TB (advocated for high-risk groups) among the general population, so that targeted interventions could work better. Perhaps India too needs to restructure and redefine its many conventional frameworks, to combat this deadly disease. Swathi Krishna Njarekkattuvalappil is a public health physician and researcher based in Pune, working in tuberculosis, health policy and systems research. Parth Sharma is a community physician and public health researcher based in Delhi and is the founder of the public health advocacy organisation, Nivarana

## Household nutritional support can avert 0.36 million TB deaths



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

That targeted nutritional support to TB patients and household contacts can improve TB treatment outcomes, reduce the number of new cases and deaths is now well known, particularly after the RATIONS trial carried out in between August 2019 and August 2022 in four districts of Jharkhand among 2,800 pulmonary TB patients and 10,345 household contacts. The trial found that nutritional support provided to household contacts for the duration of treatment reduced the number of new pulmonary TB cases by 48%, and deaths among those under 35 kg body weight (severely underweight) was only 7%. Now a modelling study has estimated the epidemiological and economic benefits of providing nutritional support for the duration of treatment to both adult TB patients and household contacts. At 50% coverage, providing nutritional care to adult TB patients and household contacts for the duration of treatment could help avert over 361,000 deaths and over 880,000 new TB cases by 2035 at a cost of \$167 per disability-adjusted life-year, suggests the study from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, and Yenepoya Medical College, Mangalore.

This would be equivalent to averting approximately 4.6% TB deaths and 2.2% TB cases, the study notes. It also found that the median number of households needed to treat to prevent one TB death was 24.4 and to prevent one TB case was 10. It also estimates that provision of this support is very likely to be cost-effective. The number of TB deaths prevented and new cases averted will be even bigger if child and adolescent TB patients and their household contacts too are provided nutritional support. The study was published recently in the journal The Lancet Global Health.

The researchers used previously published, age-stratified, compartmental transmission models of TB in India, and incorporated explicit BMI strata linked to disease progression and treatment outcomes, and used the results of

the RATIONS trial to estimate the impact and costs of nutritional support. Based on the modelling study the authors write: "A nutritional intervention for tuberculosis-affected households could avert a substantial amount of tuberculosis disease and death in India, and would be highly likely to be cost-effective on the basis of the tuberculosis-specific benefits alone." Compared with a population-level intervention to improve nutrition, which could have a substantially larger effect size, an intervention targeting only those on TB treatment and their households is able to avert a relatively low proportion of TB incidence and mortality, they say. However, in a resource-constrained setting such as India, targeting the intervention to high-risk household contacts offers the opportunity to maximise cost effectiveness within a feasible budget, they say.

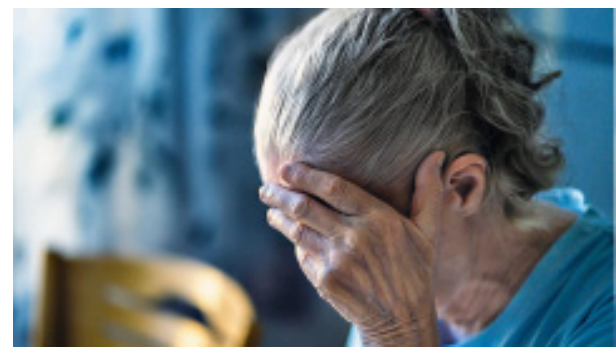
To understand the impact of nutritional support in preventing deaths and new cases, the authors compared the outcomes when nutrition is provided only to adult TB patients, only to household contacts but not to adult TB patients, and finally to both adult TB patients and household contacts. While nutritional support to adult TB patients alone reduced the number of new cases by 46,700, and deaths by 234,300, nutritional support to household contacts alone (excluding adult TB patients) led to a larger drop in new cases (833,700) and deaths (129,200) but still far less than when both adult TB patients and household contacts were provided nutritional support. "When we say nutritional support is given to household contacts, we mean just that — not given to people on TB treatment but only to their household contacts. This obviously would not happen in practice, but is a way for us to tell where the intervention effect is coming from," Dr. Christopher Finn McQuaid from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and the corresponding author of the paper explains in an email. The study found that nutritional support provided to adult TB patients averts deaths due to improved treatment outcomes. Importantly, it also averts new cases in these people. "These individuals [TB patients] see an increase in their BMI, which leads to reduced reactivation or progression to disease if they are reinfected," Dr. McQuaid says. Dr. McQuaid says: "This paper could provide guidance for policymakers selecting TB interventions, highlighting the importance of nutritional support in addressing the TB epidemic, and the real benefits this is likely to provide not just to affected households but at a national level." Dr. Rebecca Clark, a Research Fellow at The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and a co-author of the paper adds: "International and national decision-makers could use our findings to advocate for better, as well as more targeted and relevant, interventions when it comes to support for TB patients and their families."

## Indian Institute of Science researchers highlight India's need for national dementia policy with focus on cultural factors

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

A recent paper by researchers from the Centre for Brain Research at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has highlighted the need for a comprehensive dementia policy in India to address the needs of the older population and their caregivers on a national scale. This policy should prioritise effective dementia prevention strategies and equitable allocation of resources, incorporating evidence-based approaches. The policy should integrate dementia care into both geriatric and mental health plans, stated the paper published in The Lancet Psychiatry on January 23. India is expected to have 340 million older adults (aged 60 and older) by 2050, of whom 5.3 million will have been living with dementia since 2020. In the paper, the team of researchers from the Centre for Brain Research reviewed various reports that highlighted the disease's degenerative character, reducing memory, cognition, and the ability to perform daily living activities. Need to expand healthcare infrastructure Asserting the importance of early detection, awareness and effective care systems, Thomas Gregor Issac, associate professor at the centre, who is the corresponding author of the paper, told The Hindu that there is a need for expanded healthcare infrastructure, professional training, and a national dementia policy. This will help address India's growing dementia challenge, which includes early diagnosis and treatment gaps, he said. "As of 2023–2024, the health expenditure of India amounts to 1.9% of its gross domestic product, with ₹16.14 billion (0.033% of total ₹48.21 trillion budget) allocated for mental health and older population care. In 2023, The Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI) and LASI-Diagnostic Assessment for Dementia reported that the prevalence of dementia in India among individuals aged 60 and older was 7.4%, with higher rates in women and in rural regions, and estimated that by 2036, the number of cases would quadruple," the doctor explained.

Pointing out that dementia is often misunderstood in India, he said this is owing to a lack of awareness and cultural misconceptions, which lead to delayed evaluation and diagnosis. This in turn considerably impairs the quality of care, he said. "In a value-driven society such as India, where inter-generational support and family ties are strongly embedded in cultural norms, help seeking behaviour for dementia remains low. The idea of using care facilities or depending on care homes is often perceived as a failure to fulfil familial responsibilities and is associated with stigma.



The absence of proper support networks for caregivers greatly increases the financial, emotional, and physical strain, which frequently results in stress, burnout, and weakened health, all of which influence the standard of care given to people with disabilities or chronic illnesses," the doctor explained. The paper also reviewed various State-level dementia plans and strategies. "The Kerala State Initiative on Dementia that began in 2014 is a comprehensive dementia care model providing dementia awareness programmes, caregiver training, memory clinics, and residential care facilities," it said.

In 2015, the Longitudinal Cognition and Aging Research on Population of the National Capital Region was initiated for population-based prospective cohort research in South Delhi, focusing on middle-aged and older individuals to evaluate the prevalence of stroke and dementia. "The major goal of the study was to create risk prediction models and discover new biomarkers for the early identification and prevention of cognitive diseases. While the study's findings were expected to be applicable to people living in urban areas in northern India, the study faced challenges during the investigation, which led to unclear results," the paper stated. The paper also put on record the Karnataka Brain Health Initiative that was launched in 2023 in partnership with NIMHANS and Niti Aayog. "This effort intends to build specialist clinics for brain illnesses in the community. The Centre for Brain Research is performing breakthrough research with projects such as the Tata Longitudinal Study of Aging and the Srinivasapura Aging, Neuro Senescence, and COGNITION study, which includes urban and rural participants. These efforts, while not complete, represent important strides forward for improving neurological treatment and assistance for older people in India," stated the paper.

## Sudan's largest oil refinery on fire amid civil war, satellite photos show

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Fighting around Sudan's largest oil refinery set the sprawling complex ablaze, satellite data analyzed by The Associated Press on Saturday (January 25, 2025) shows, sending thick, black polluted smoke over the country's capital. The attacks around the refinery, owned by Sudan's government and the state-run China National Petroleum Corp., represent the latest woe in a civil war between the rebel Rapid Support Force (RSF) and Sudan's military, who blamed each other for the blaze. This Planet Labs PBC satellite image shows Sudan's largest oil refinery north of Khartoum, Sudan as of October 2024. International mediation attempts and pressure tactics, including a U.S. assessment that the RSF and its proxies are committing genocide, have not halted the fighting. The al-Jaili refinery sits some 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of Khartoum, the capital. The refinery has been subject to previous attacks as the RSF has claimed control of the facility since April 2023, as their forces had been guarding it. Local Sudanese me-

dia report the RSF also surrounded the refinery with fields of landmines to slow any advance. An attack on Thursday (January 23, 2025) at the oil field set fires across the complex, according to satellite data from NASA satellites that track wildfires worldwide. Satellite images taken by Planet Labs PBC on Friday (January 24, 2025) for the AP showed vast areas of the refinery ablaze. The images, shot just after 12:00 GMT, showed flames shooting up into the sky in several spots. Oil tanks at the facility stood burned, covered in soot. Thick plumes of black smoke towered over the site, carried south toward Khartoum by the wind. Exposure to that smoke can exacerbate respiratory problems and raise cancer risks. In a statement released Thursday (January 23, 2025), the Sudanese military alleged the RSF was responsible for the fire at the refinery. The RSF "deliberately set fire to the Khartoum refinery in al-Jaili this morning in a desperate attempt to destroy the infrastructures of this country," the statement read.

## 'Waste of taxpayer dollars': Donald Trump orders to pause all federal grants, loans



serve."

The freeze, which took effect at 5 pm ET Tuesday, excludes Social Security, Medicare, and direct assistance to individuals, but the impact on healthcare programs for veterans and low-income individuals remains unclear. Agencies have until February 10 to provide detailed reports on suspended programs. The memo said the freeze included any money intended "for foreign aid" and for "nongovernmental organizations," among other categories.

Nonprofit leaders expressed alarm over the pause with Diane Yentel, president of the National Council of Nonprofits, warned it could halt critical services, including childhood cancer research, food assistance, domestic violence shelters, and suicide hotlines. "The impact of even a short pause in funding could be devastating and cost lives," she said. Democrats too, quickly condemned the move as unconstitutional. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer called it a harmful overreach, stating, "It will mean missed payrolls and rent payments and chaos for everything from universities to non-profit charities, state disaster assistance, and aid to the elderly." The administration defends the decision as fulfilling campaign promises, with Republican Representative Tom Emmer stating, "He was elected to shake up the status quo. That is what he's going to do."

## Green energy, AI to shape future of humanity: Mukesh Ambani

Reliance Industries chairman and MD Mukesh Ambani on Tuesday said green energy and artificial intelligence (AI) will shape the future of humanity. Ambani said the transition from fossil fuels to clean and green energy has to be accelerated. "Talking of artificial intelligence, I have a piece of advice to our young students. You must be good at using AI as a tool in learning. But do not give up your own critical thinking," Ambani said at the 12th Convocation of Pandit Deendayal Energy University (PDEU).

"The intersection of green energy, green materials and artificial intelligence is going to shape the future of humanity," he said, adding that India will become the most prosperous nation by the end of the century. "I am supremely confident that green technologies and green enterprises can reverse the ecological degradation and - indeed - make our planet more beautiful and more liveable for future generations," Ambani said. "We must not allow economic growth endanger planet earth and further worsen the climate crisis," he said. Ambani said within a couple of years, India will



emerge as the third largest economy in the world. "No power on earth can stop India's growth trajectory."

I can clearly foresee that India will become the most prosperous nation in the world before the end of this century. But India, along with other large economies, also has a big responsibility," he said.

## Rs 79,398-crore loan: Railways wanted it as grant, gets partial relief

Covid-related disruptions, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance, special loan, Indian express news, current affairs The Railways has instead been given a two-year moratorium just ahead of the loan redemption deadline in the coming financial year 2025-26. To ensure its fiscal math doesn't go awry, the Ministry of Finance has turned down a request by the Ministry of Railways to convert a Rs 79,398 crore 'special loan' taken four years ago into a grant. The loan was taken during 2020-21 to manage Covid-related disruptions, and partly to fund the pension liabilities. The Railways has instead been given a two-year moratorium just ahead of the loan redemption deadline in the coming financial year 2025-26.

The Central government extended a special loan to Railways to cover the revenue loss due to the halting of train operations during March-May 2020 after the onset of the pandemic and to shore up its pension fund. In its pre-budget consultations with the Finance Ministry, the Railways proposed that the loan be turned into a grant, but eventually, both agreed on a two-year moratorium. Responding to queries by The Indian Express, the Ministry of Railways said it has been "granted a moratorium of another two years for financial loan components" and will pay interest of Rs 1,358 crore for 2024-26.

Budget 2021-22 documents show that a "special loan" of Rs 79,398 crore was extended to the Railways for the "COVID-related resource gap" in 2020-21 to meet the pension expenses of 2019-20. The opening balance of Railways' pension fund for 2020-21 showed a deficit of Rs 28,398.46 crore. In a statement, the Ministry of Railways said, "Indian Railways is performing well. Considering IR (Indian Railways) in the transformation phase of heavy infrastructural development, IR has been granted a moratorium of another two years for financial loan components. However, during the financial years, 2024-26 will pay the interest components of Rs 1,358 crore."



Even as the redemption deadline for Covid-related loans was approaching, the Centre anticipated its finances to be stretched and hence undertook a series of buybacks and switches of dated securities totalling Rs 2.15 lakh crore in 2024-25. The special loan was provided by the Centre to the Railways contingent to certain repayment conditions linked to its performance metrics. However, it is learnt that the Railways found it difficult to meet the terms and conditions related to certain performance metrics. Following this, the Railways sought a conversion of the loan to a grant in its pre-budget consultations. While the Ministry of Railways refused in January to share details of the loan following an RTI query citing these as confidential, the Ministry of Finance in its response said the issue of repayment of the loan by the Ministry of Railways is in "the advance stage of deliberation and is part of the Pre-Budget discussion for the ensuing Budget 2025-26", and hence "cannot be shared".

## Tata Steel becomes India's first to develop hydrogen transport pipes

Ranchi: Tata Steel on Wednesday claimed that it has become India's first steel company to develop pipes for hydrogen transportation, marking a significant milestone in the country's hydrogen mission. The pipes, processed at Tata Steel's Khopoli plant using steel manufactured at its Kalinganagar plant, have successfully met all the critical properties required for hydrogen transportation, the company said in a statement. The complete technology development, from designing and manufacturing hot-rolled steel to producing the pipes, was done entirely in-house, demonstrating Tata Steel's ability to deliver critical energy infrastructure. In 2024, Tata Steel became the first Indian steel company to produce hot-rolled steel for the transportation of gaseous hydrogen.

"The hydrogen qualification tests were carried out at RINA-CSM S.p.A, Italy, a leading approving agency for hydrogen-related testing and characterisation," the statement added. The new hydrogen-compliant API X65 grade pipes can be used for transportation of 100 per cent pure gaseous hydrogen under high pressure (100 bar), it said.

Prabhat Kumar, vice-president - marketing & sales (flat products), Tata Steel, said, "Tata Steel has always been at the forefront of developing technologies for manufacturing critical steel grades. The successful testing of the new ERW pipes demonstrates our capabilities to deliver critical physical infrastructure for the energy sector, domestically. We are proud to contribute to India's National Hydrogen Mission, which by itself is a key component of the country's ongoing clean energy transition."

Kumar added, "Tata Steel is proud to be the first Indian steel company to successfully take on this challenge and deliver products to cater to the emerging domestic and



The National Hydrogen Mission will enable India to build capabilities to produce at least 5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of Green Hydrogen per annum by 2030

global demand for these special grade steel pipes." The company said its research and development team has extensively developed innovative and sustainable solutions for hydrogen transportation and storage. The National Hydrogen Mission will enable India to build capabilities to produce at least 5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of Green Hydrogen per annum by 2030, with the potential to reach 10 MMT per annum with additional demand for exports which would require substantial investments in generation and transportation, it added. The demand for steel compliant with hydrogen transportation is expected to start from 2026-27, with the total steel requirement of 350KT spanning over the next 5 to 7 years. While various mechanisms of hydrogen transportation are available, steel pipelines are considered economically more viable for mass transportation.

## How to achieve universal health coverage across India



In the book Mission Possible by Swami Subramanian and Aparajithan Srivathsan (Notion Press, Chennai), they suggest ways to pave the road to Universal Health Coverage. It is a positive book that suggests paving the way to universal health coverage, with particular focus on India, which has a population of 143 crores (of which children account for 38% and senior citizens 11%). To offer universal health coverage to these people is no easy task, and the authors suggest ways to achieve this.

Thanks to the advances in modern methods of analysis, using information technology appears doable, as the article "Reimagining India's Health System" from The Lancet pointed out. This effort needs to be spearheaded by leaders from academia, scientific community, civil society, and private healthcare. The Public Health Foundation of India had proposed the creation of an Integrated National Health System in India through provision of universal health insurance, establishment of autonomous organisations to enable accountable and evidence-based good-quality healthcare practices and development of appropriately trained human resources, the restructuring of health governance to make it coordinated and decentralised, and legislation of health entitlement for all Indian people.

Improving quality This involves strengthening the public health system as the primary provider of promotive, preventive, and curative health services in India, to improve quality and reduce the expenditure on health care through

## Community-led framework addressing twin epidemics of TB and mental health released

An off-neglected but critical aspect in the fight against tuberculosis, is the impact the disease has on the mental health of those affected by it. To address this gap, a community-led framework that focuses on the integration of TB and mental health care, addressing these two interlinked epidemics, has been released by Survivors Against TB, a group of tuberculosis survivors who advocate on key issues around TB in India, to impact policy and create awareness. The framework, supported by the Stop TB partnership, seeks to answer the question: What can be done now to address the impact of TB? It seeks to mainstream mental health care and address stigma—both of which are key challenges that hinder access to TB care, particularly among vulnerable populations with intersectoral barriers to health, says Chapal Mehra, convener of the organisation, in the document. What it offers, is practical suggestions that can be implemented through policy changes, funding allocation, administrative reforms, and skill-building within both the health system and communities.

Tuberculosis, an ancient disease, continues to remain the leading infectious disease killer globally. According to the Global Tuberculosis Report 2024, as of 2023, India has the highest tuberculosis burden in the world, accounting for 26% of all cases worldwide. In March 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set an ambitious target of eliminating TB by 2035, five years ahead of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals deadline of 2030. However, experts indicate that this goal is unlikely to be achieved. Even while the country battles TB, the need for a holistic approach to care -- one that takes into account the mental health challenges faced by patients from diagnosis, through treatment and post-cure -- is stressed in the framework.

The document points out that the relationship between TB and mental health (MH) is bidirectional, creating a cycle where each condition can influence the severity and management of the other. "On the one hand, mental illness can increase vulnerability to TB... On the other hand, having TB can significantly impact an individual's MH," it says. Additionally stigma surrounding TB and MH is a deeply ingrained and multifaceted barrier that affects individuals on both so-

cial and psychological levels, severely limiting access to integrated care, it says. The framework outlines a model that includes: integrated screening for TB and MH issues at all stages of the care cascade; psychosocial support to address stigma and emotional challenges; community-based interventions, leveraging peer networks and family support; disease literacy and education to empower affected individuals; post-treatment support for sustained recovery; capacity building for healthcare providers to deliver integrated care effectively and policy advocacy for increased resource allocation and holistic guidelines.

"Our lived experiences have shown us that the intersections of TB and mental health are critical yet often ignored in care models," say Akshata Acharya and Deepthi Chavan, both MDR TB survivors, in the document. "Our hope is that this framework will not only improve the quality of care for those affected by TB and mental health challenges but also dismantle the stigma that persists in our societies," they say. In her foreword to the framework, former World Health Organization Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan says: "The integration of mental health into TB care is not just an option—it is an urgent necessity. It is my hope that this framework provides insights to policymakers, healthcare providers, and communities worldwide to reimagine TB care with a lens of compassion, inclusivity, and resilience."



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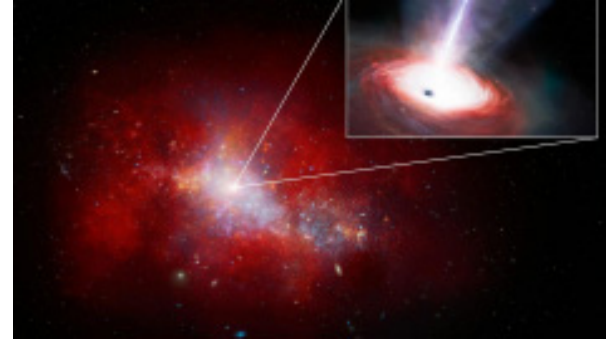
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## Space telescopes stumble on rule-breaking black hole in early universe

An international team of researchers using NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and the Chandra X-ray observatory has discovered a bizarre black hole that may provide insights into the genesis and growth of supermassive black holes. Supermassive black holes are among the most common types of black holes in the universe. Most galaxies contain a supermassive black hole at their centres. These black holes have masses ranging from millions to billions of times that of the sun. The supermassive black hole Sagittarius A\* located at the center of the Milky Way galaxy has a mass of approximately 4.3 million solar masses. However, scientists are not yet fully certain how these giants grow to become so big. Beyond the upper limit

The newfound black hole, designated LID-568, is a low-mass supermassive black hole that existed just 1.5 billion years after the Big Bang. If the universe were a human, it could be said to be around eight years old at this time. A detailed analysis of its effects on its neighbourhood indicated that the black hole was feeding on a surrounding cloud of matter at an exceptional rate — almost 40-times greater than what astrophysicists thought was the upper limit. The study was led by International Gemini Observatory/NSF NOIRLab astronomer Hyewon Suh and the results were published in the journal Nature Astronomy in November 2024. "We first identified this unusual object through Chandra X-ray observations, as it was exceptionally bright in X-rays but completely invisible in the deepest optical and near-infrared observations, even with the Hubble Space Telescope," Suh, the lead researcher, said.

"Because it was only detected in X-rays, we couldn't determine its nature. With JWST's unparalleled sensitivity in the infrared, we were finally able to uncover this exotic object, highlighting the complementary power of these observatories," she added. The rate at which a black hole feeds on matter is governed by what astronomers call the Eddington limit. This limit — named after the English astronomer Arthur Stanley Eddington because he worked it out first — is also related to how brightly a black hole can



shine. Nothing can escape a black hole of course. But when a black hole pulls surrounding matter towards itself, the infalling material becomes compressed, heats up, and emits radiation, especially X-rays. The concept behind the Eddington limit is straightforward: as matter collects around the black hole and gets packed into the disc, it heats up and emits radiation that generates an outward pressure capable of counteracting the gravitational pull of the black hole. When this radiation pressure balances the force of gravity, the black hole will stop accreting the matter. Ergo, there is a limit on how brightly the black hole can shine. If this limit is crossed, the scenario is called a super-Eddington accretion. This is the category in which LID-568 lies. Suh said that they measured the total light coming from the black hole and its mass using observations from Chandra and JWST's Near-Infrared Spectrograph instrument, which revealed the exceptional accretion behavior of LID-568. Experts have hypothesised that super-Eddington black holes can exist. They have even found a few. But LID-568 has defied their expectation in two ways. First, it's much, much farther away. The most distant of these other black holes is 'only' around 2.3 billion light years from earth. Second, while the known rule-breakers exceeded the Eddington limit by a factor of two or three, LID-568 has done so by a factor of roughly 40, according to Suh.

## Parvathy Thiruvothu, Bhagyalakshmi spar over WCC's functioning; ace dubbing artiste reveals why she stayed away from the collective



a session in Kozhikode titled "Undercurrents: Women and Cinema," Parvathy spoke at length about the challenges women face in the industry and how the WCC helped create a more inclusive space. When the floor was opened for public to ask questions, Bhagyalakshmi tore into the collective, arguing that it lacked accessibility.

Introducing herself as a vocal critic of the WCC, Bhagyalakshmi, who was in the audience, pointed out flaws in the organisation's operations, stressing the need for more engagement with women who want to share their experiences with it. "Many women, including artistes and technicians in the film industry, approach me seeking guidance to approach you. The WCC should consider their request," OnManorama quoted her as saying. In response, Parvathy asked, "You know me very well and it would not be difficult for you to obtain my phone number. Why don't you join the WCC?" As the audience erupted in applause, Parvathy reminded them that this was a respectful conversation and not a confrontation.

Only in SCREEN | Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: The role Mammooty first declined over shaving his moustache, but later immortalised giving '10 days every month until film was done' Bhagyalakshmi, however, went ahead and revealed why she had chosen not to be part of the collective, recalling an incident where she felt sidelined during its formation. She said, "On the morning that you planned to meet the Chief Minister (Pinarayi Vijayan) to submit the complaint, you had discussed the matter with me. However, I later saw on TV that you met the minister without me. I enquired about it and a person in your group told me that some of you did not want me to join you. When I realised that certain people in your group didn't need me, I kept away from WCC." Pointing out that the WCC is open to all, including its critics, Parvathy said, "We have a space where anybody can come and if you are criticising, join us. Show us the way. We are also doing it for the first time."

Introducing herself as a vocal critic of the WCC, Bhagyalakshmi pointed out flaws in the organisation's operations to Parvathy Thiruvothu. While Parvathy spoke about how the WCC helped create a more inclusive space in the film industry, Bhagyalakshmi argued that it lacked accessibility.

Actor Parvathy Thiruvothu and dubbing artiste Bhagyalakshmi recently engaged in a debate in public about the functioning of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), a group of women professionals in the Malayalam film industry, formed in the aftermath of the 2017 abduction and sexual assault of a prominent female actor in Kochi. During

## 'Ford failed in India, but Hyundai worked; why?' Namita Thapar hits Shark Tank India pitchers with difficult questions

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Two cousins pitched their pickleball business, Goodland, on the latest episode of Shark Tank India, and told the panel of 'sharks' that they expect the sport to gain rapid popularity in India in the next few years. They said that they have been in operation for only nine months, and have already earned a revenue of nearly Rs 2 crore. They said that they are targeting Rs 50 crore in revenue in the next two years. The cousins asked for Rs 80 lakh in exchange of 4% equity, valuing their business at Rs 20 crore. But the 'sharks' were concerned about one of them, Hemant, not being clear about whether he wants to build the business in the United States, where he lives, or to introduce it to the Indian market. To demonstrate the sport, they invited Anupam Mittal and Aman Gupta to play a match against each other, which Aman ended up winning. He confessed that he is completely obsessed with padel, another tennis competitor that is gaining popularity across the world. The cousins told the 'sharks' that a padel court is bigger than a pickleball court, and said that they are also in the business of constructing high quality courts, producing equipment such as racquets and nets, and building clubs.

But Anupam wasn't sure about their business model. He advised the cousins to give their business another couple of years and see where the opportunity lies. He also advised them to focus on expanding in the United States. "You're being opportunists," he said. Kunal Bahl agreed, and said that he can't see much clarity of vision, and backed out of the deal. He did, however, admit that he was interested in the business, but advised them to not get distracted. Namita Thapar expressed her views via an example. "Why did Ford and GM fail in India while Hyundai and Kia succeeded?" she asked them. Hemant said that it was probably because of the costs. "Wrong. Ford failed and



Hyundai succeeded because Ford thought that doing a copy-paste job in the Indian market would be enough. But Hyundai and Kia actually took the time out and studied the market," she said, noting that they can't replicate what worked in the US in India. My biggest concern is that you live in the US, and you want to copy-paste what works there in India. I'm excited about health and fitness, but you're all over the place," she said, backing out as well.

Aman was the only 'shark' who was interested in making an offer. But he had a couple of conditions. He wanted the entrepreneurs to commit to creating a club within two months, and wanted Hemant to spend at least six months in India. He offered them Rs 80 lakh in exchange of 5% equity, and asked for 1% in royalties until he makes his investment back. The cousins took a moment to consider the offer, and countered by offering Aman 6% equity, but asked that he lower the royalty ask to .5%. Aman felt it was fair, and they agreed on the terms.

## Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor fence their balcony; request paparazzi to not click Taimur, Jeh for security reasons



Weeks after actor Saif Ali Khan got stabbed in his home in Bandra, Mumbai, the actor and his family had added some extra security measures at their home. Videos from the apartment of Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor suggest that they have added some extra fencing to their balcony, so no one can enter their house via the balcony. The intruder who attacked Saif entered their house via the stairs. Saif has been given extra security by the police as well.

The couple has also asked the paparazzi in Mumbai to not photograph their children Taimur and Jeh after the incident. They have also requested the photographers to not crowd around their house as constant vigilance upon the actors can aid those who are trying to track their movements. Kareena and Saif's apartment building was previously a hub for paparazzi as they always photographed the family coming in and out of their house. The culture of Indian paparazzi saw a significant shift after Taimur Ali Khan's birth in 2016, and since then, the cultural has gotten increasingly invasive.

Saif was attacked on January 16 in his home in Bandra. The actor was stabbed six times by an intruder who was allegedly spotted in Jeh Ali Khan's (3) bedroom by his nanny Eliyamma Philip. Eliyamma tried to stop the intruder and asked what he wanted and he apparently asked for Rs 1 crore. Eliyamma alerted the other members of the house as a scuffle ensued. It was in this scuffle that Saif got injured in trying to protect his family. The intruder was temporarily locked in the room but he managed to get away. Three days after the attack, a man named Mohammed Shariful Islam was taken to custody by the police for allegedly attacking Saif. He has now been sent to judicial custody for 14 days.

Weeks after actor Saif Ali Khan got stabbed in his home in Bandra, Mumbai, the actor and his family had added some extra security measures at their home. Videos from the apartment of Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor suggest that they have added some extra fencing to their balcony, so no one can enter their house via the balcony

## 'Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In' movie review: Soi Cheang's action-packed spectacle speaks louder than words



There is something inherently fascinating about places where rules crumble, where chaos reigns, and where survival is dictated by sheer will. Hong Kong's Kowloon Walled City, once the most densely populated and lawless enclave in the world, has been a symbol of urban dystopia and human resilience. It is this enigmatic world that director Soi Cheang explores in *Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In*. It has been released in India with a dubbed Hindi version and a different title—*Hongkong Warriors*. A love letter to the myths of the Walled City, the film is a relentless action spectacle. Set in the 1980s, when Hong Kong was still a British territory, Cheang meticulously recreates the claustrophobic corridors of the Walled City. From the moment we step into its neon-lit labyrinth, dripping pipes, and makeshift dwellings, the setting feels almost like a living, breathing character. The film's production design deserves immense credit for recreating this infamous locale, relying on a life-sized replica that brims with authenticity. It doesn't merely set the stage; it immerses you, suffocates you, and holds you captive.

At the heart of the story is Chan Lok-kwan (Raymond Lam Fung), or simply Lok, a desperate man from mainland China who finds himself thrust into the treacherous underbelly of the Walled City. His arrival is not by choice but by necessity. Initially an outsider, Lok soon becomes deeply entwined in the city's brutal ecosystem. The Walled City itself mirrors his internal prison—chaotic, unyielding, and devoid of redemption. His journey is as much about self-discovery as it is about survival. Lok's betrayal at the hands of Mr Big, a cunning and ruthless crime lord played by the legendary Sammo Hung, sets him on a collision course with Cyclone (Louis Koo), the city's de facto protector. Cyclone is more myth than man, a force who maintains a fragile balance in this chaotic world. Louis Koo plays him with understated charisma, making Cyclone a rare figure of stability amid the anarchy. While the film is rich in action, at its core, it is about human connections forged under extreme conditions. Lok finds solace among a ragtag group of individuals—Shin (Terrance Lau Chun-Him), Cyclone's most

trusted man; AV (German Cheung Man-Kit), the group's medic, whose role, though unassuming, proves vital; and Twelfth Master (Tony Wu), each bringing a unique dynamic to the story. Their camaraderie provides moments of warmth and levity, contrasting the unrelenting grit of their environment. The standout among the cast, however, is Philip Ng Wan-Lung's portrayal of King, the right-hand man of Mr Big. King is the kind of antagonist audiences love to hate—sadistic, unapologetically cruel, and driven by the sheer thrill of domination. He revels in the misfortunes of others, mocking every challenge thrown his way. His menace reaches new heights when it is revealed that he possesses supernatural abilities, rendering him nearly unstoppable. In one jaw-dropping scene, a character brings a hammer down on his head with full force—only for the hammer to shatter into dust while King remains unfazed. The film never fully explains how he acquired these powers or why he alone possesses them, leaving an air of mystery that only Cheang can answer.

Where *Twilight of the Warriors* truly excels is in its action sequences. Cheang, paired with fight choreographer Kenji Tanigaki, delivers visceral, stunning set pieces. The combat is brutal yet balletic, with every punch, kick, and impact carrying weight and purpose. The film masterfully uses the Walled City's claustrophobic architecture to heighten the action, turning every corner and corridor into a potential battlefield. A still from movie 'Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In' One particularly gripping sequence unfolds on precarious rooftops, with combatants teetering on the edge of life and death. Another takes place in a cramped alleyway, where the camera captures every bead of sweat, every laboured breath, and every crushing blow.

Yet, the film is not merely an adrenaline rush. Cheang uses action to further the story and deepen character arcs. Every fight is a reflection of the characters' internal struggles, their desperation, and their will to survive. This marriage of narrative and spectacle elevates the movie above the standard action fare. And beyond the relentless action, *Twilight of the Warriors* poses thought-provoking questions about morality. In a world where the line between right and wrong has blurred beyond recognition, what does it mean to be a good person? The film challenges conventional ideas of justice and redemption, forcing the audience to reconsider their own moral compass. While the performances are generally solid, Philip Ng Wan-Lung is the standout, delivering a chilling portrayal of a villain who commands every scene he's in. The film's ambition and execution outweigh its minor shortcomings, and while not every character gets the depth they deserve, the sheer spectacle keeps you invested. Whether you come for the high-octane fights, the gritty atmosphere, or the layered storytelling, one thing is certain: you'll leave with a piece of the Walled City etched in your memory.

## Govinda's wife Sunita Ahuja was certain someone shot at the actor, was afraid he would get a heart attack: 'Lag gayi ya maar di?'

Actor Govinda was in the news after he accidentally shot himself in the leg with a licensed gun at his residence in Mumbai. In a new interview, his wife Sunita Ahuja has recalled her reaction to the incident as she was not at their residence at the time. She said that after the incident, Govinda's driver called her up to share the news.

Speaking with Hindustan Times, Sunita recalled the incident and said that she never panics. She shared, "My driver calls me saying, 'Sahab ko goli lag gayi' (Sir has been shot). I said 'lagi ya kisine maar di?' (Did he shoot himself or someone shot at him?) That's when he said, 'revolver rakh rahe the, gir gaya' (the revolver fell when he was keeping it away). Then Govinda spoke to me saying 'goli lag gaya'. I told him, 'Tumne kahi khud toh nahi maar diya' (Did you shoot yourself?) He said, 'Abhi bhi mazak soojha raha hai' (You are still joking)? That's when I told him not to panic and calm down. I feared he might get a heart attack. I called Tina, who was at home, and told her not to panic and take him to the hospital. I never panic in any situation." Sunita often becomes a target for the trolls for her carefree statements against her family, husband and even the industry. Reacting to the same, Sunita said that these trolls don't impact her. She said, "Trolls and negative comments don't affect me. I will not change myself or my nature due to people's reaction. I am who I am, you can speak to me if you like me if not, you can get out. My nature is not to sulk or be sad. Trolls keep me in the news."

Previously, speaking with Hindi Rush, Sunita had joked about the shooting incident. She said, "I wasn't in Mumbai, and Yash (son) was in Bangkok. I didn't tell him, but I also went to Khatu Shyam to offer prayers. The day he was shot, I was meditating in the morning. He was going to go to Kolkata for Durga Puja in the morning. My driver called suddenly, I generally don't answer calls during my meditation. However, he called twice, I think Govinda must have asked him to call me."

She added, "My first question was, 'Isko maara kisne hai (Who shot him)?' He said, 'No, it was an accident'. I



asked him not to panic and immediately rushed there. Even when I reached, I asked him, 'Tune khud hi maara hai kya? Laga bhi toh yahan par, jahan par lagna chahiye tha vahan nahi laga (Did you shoot yourself deliberately? It didn't hit you where it should have)?' He said, 'Khush toh bahut hogi tum (You must be really happy)'. Khush toh tab hoti jab seene mai lagta (Would have been happy if he was shot in the chest)," she had said. Talking about the shooting incident, Govinda told media post his discharge, "Initially, I couldn't believe it had happened. Thoda gehra lag gaya tha, jab laga tab vishwas nahi hua. Aisa laga ke yeh kya hua? (It is a deep wound, and I couldn't believe it had happened. I thought, 'What just occurred?') I was getting ready to leave for the show... for Kolkata. It was in the morning, around 4.45-5 am. Woh giri aur chal padi (the revolver fell and missed). I felt a jhatka (I was shocked) and when I saw... there was a fountain (of blood)."

## This has become Samantha Ruth Prabhu's 'anchor'; check out

Mumbai: Samantha Ruth Prabhu has talked about the importance of meditation in her everyday life and says that for her it has become "her anchor". Samantha took to Instagram, where she shared a video where she is seen meditating. For the caption, she wrote: "Meditation. If there's one thing I wish all of you would try, it's this. Just 15 minutes of meditation every day — in whatever way works for you. Sit in silence, focus on your breath, or follow a guided meditation on YouTube. There's no right or wrong way, nothing formal — just the simple act of tuning in. For me, meditation has become my anchor — a way to return to the ocean of calm and peace that's always within. (sic)"

She added that no matter how chaotic the world gets, I know that quiet spot inside her is "always there, waiting". "When you learn to find your way home to yourself, the noise outside loses its grip. Try it. Just for today. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and see what happens. PS: Don't bother about the chatter in your mind. The trick is to simply watch your thoughts and let them pass. Don't get entangled with

them. PPS: Don't forget to tell me how it goes. Let's do this!! (sic)" Earlier this month, the actor shared some simple and powerful mantra that has proved to be a game changer for her with her fans. She wrote, "I've been practicing this little ritual for the past two years, and it's what's got me through some of my toughest moments. It's simple but powerful: taking a moment to appreciate where I've been, where I am, and what lies ahead. I know it sounds squishy but it really isn't and there's enough data to prove that it helps. (sic)"

The actor encouraged her followers to write down three things that people were grateful for. "If writing comes naturally to you, jot down three things you're grateful for today — they don't have to be big, just honest. But if writing feels hard or forced, that's okay too. Try saying it in your head or sharing it with someone you trust. Sometimes, just sitting with a quiet 'thank you' — in your heart is also enough. (sic)" "This small practice might feel subtle and simple at first, but it has the power to change the way you see everything. Give it a try — it's been a game-changer for me."

## Varun Chakravarthy's 5-for in vain as Adil Rashid helps visitors stay alive



GNS News Agency, Feb 3 The last flicker of India's slow-burning chase was extinguished on the first ball of the 19th over. Hardik Pandya, raging against the tide of defeat, flat-batted Jamie Overton to long-off. The batsman swiped the air in anger, as he couldn't get underneath the ball as much as he wanted to; Jos Buttler, the catcher and England captain, flung the ball into the air in delight. The 26-runs victory ensured that his team would stay alive in the five-game series that India leads 2-1.

The hosts would consider it an aberration — they have looked invincible since early 2023, having claimed seven of their last eight series and drawn the other, apart from being world champions. Such days — when India restricted England to 171, even though they let them off the hook from 127 for eight, but couldn't gather enough impetus to hunt down the target — are bound to occur in a series. For England, their first win after Brendon McCullum took the white-ball keys, this would be a sign of an upturn in fortunes. The neutrals, though, would purr over two contrastingly exciting leg-spinners. The new-age one in Varun Chakravarthy, whose five-for went futile, and the anachronism that is Adil Rashid, whose one-wicket burst proved more decisive to the game's outcome. Both have ample tricks up their sleeve, have common threads too, but use their gifts in distinct ways to achieve the same end of picking wickets and winning matches.

Varun has every pyrotechnic in his repertoire, even though he relies more on over-spun wrong-uns with snappy drift and dip, shrewd change of pace (from 90 kph to 112), sliders, and seam-up straighteners (that foxed Jos Buttler and precipitated a collapse, from 83 for 1 to 127 for 7) these days. He doesn't deal in mystery balls, but the mystery-halo shimmers around his crew-cut head. Rashid doesn't exude wonderment. A man of mild manners, stifled celebrations, with no tattoos blaring from his sleeves, he operates in incognito mode. His presence is so inconspicuous — no tantrums or strut — that he is noticed when he breaks into a stroll disguised as his four-step run-up. But he is arguably the finest white-ball spinner his country ever owned. More remarkably, he is one of the handful who possess the leg-break. Most leg-spinners in the T20-multiverse trade in wrong-uns and sliders. So much so that the away-spinner is a rare change-up even for left-arm spinners, whose currency is the armer. The Indian leg-spin duo of Ravi Bishnoi

and Varun is a classic example of leg-spinners, by natural instinct, breaking the ball into the right-handed batsman. Rashid, however, is a throwback. Not that he is averse to wrong-uns or sliders — he judiciously unlocks his variations — but in his pliant wrists, the leg-break has rediscovered itself in this format.

He uncorked a pearler to eject Tilak Varma, unconquered in his last four outings. The ball, generously imparted with revolutions, drifted away from the left-hander. The scrambled seam, and the pace (82.7 kph), misinformed Varma that the ball would slide away. He plunged on to his backfoot, shaping to slap the ball in front of square. But after landing, the ball took a drunken reroute. It barked back and slipped through Varma's late retaliatory measures to disarray his stumps. Varma wore a petrified look, as it required a near-unplayable ball to break his run meditation. The ball had gripped and turned more than any other on the day (5.7 degrees). The pitch was not a turner either, more sluggish and low in nature.

The wicket, with the score on 68 for 4, filled England with hope. Soon, it transformed into belief when India stumbled to 123 for 6, and 131 for 7 when Pandya departed. But Tilak's wicket was the game's mood-drifter. If Tilak, India's most prolific T20 batsman in recent times, could not fathom Rashid, what of the rest? The leggie ended the night with barely believable figures of 4-0-15-1. No fours or sixes, 10 dot balls, numerous edges and near stump-shaves, his efforts not only gave England a toe-hold into the game, but also illustrated that there is space for leg-breaking leg-spinners in this format. This was not a one-off — India's high-flying batsmen have managed only 56 runs in his 10 overs this series.

What has shone in Rashid is his supreme faith and devotion to his craft. Like many who were born in the Test-ODI era and had to tweak their tunes to suit the T20 milieu, Rashid was prone to over-using the wrong-uns in the middle of his career. But a frank conversation with captain Eoin Morgan before the 2019 World Cup, a surgery on his aching shoulder, and wisdom that came with age brought peace and clarity. The most obvious change, though, has been in Rashid's length. Of late, he has been bowling shorter than ever before. Like Sunil Narine and Rashid Khan, he is pounding the back-of-length, a markedly shorter length than the norm in Test matches, more often. The method dilutes a spinner's traditional gifts in the longer format, prodigious turn, in favour of control. But Rashid gets the ball to turn when he wants to. "As you play more and get more experience, you start developing certain things. I think one of my strengths is being able to mix it up and react to the pitch," he explained the essence of his bowling. Simple words from a simple cricketer.

The leg-spinners' battle would resume on Friday and would probably define the series. Brief scores: England 171/9 in 20 overs (Ben Duckett 51, Liam Livingstone 43; Varun Chakravarthy 5/24) beat India 145/9 in 20 overs (Hardik Pandya 40; Jamie Overton 3/24, Brydon Carse 2/28, Jofra Archer 2/33, Adil Rashid 1/15) by 26 runs

## Steve Smith hits 35th Test hundred after scoring 10,000th run in Sri Lanka, breaks records

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Steve Smith struck his 35th Test hundred after completing 10,000 runs in the format in Galle on Wednesday. (AP) Steve Smith struck his 35th Test hundred after completing 10,000 runs in the format in Galle. After starting his innings with a milestone single that took him to 10,000 Test runs, Steve Smith registered his 35th Test century for Australia on day 1 of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle.

Walking in at number four, Smith cruised to a breezy century after putting on a hefty partnership with opener Usman Khawaja. Smith's 35th Test century in only his 205th innings put him third on the all-time charts, only behind Ricky Ponting (195) and Sachin Tendulkar (200) in terms of innings. Overall, Smith is only the seventh Test batter to reach 35 Test centuries after Tendulkar (51), Jacques Kallis (45), Ponting (41), Kumar Sangakkara (38), Rahul Dravid (36) and Joe Root (36). Standing in as skipper in place of the injured Pat Cummins, Smith's ton was also his 16th as an Australian captain, surpassing the likes of Steve Waugh and Allan Border's tally of 15 centuries. Among Australian captains, only Ponting (19) has struck more centuries. Overall, Smith ranks fourth among Test captains with South Africa's Graeme Smith (25) and India's Virat Kohli (20) lead-



ing the charts. Closing in on 4000 Test runs as captain, Smith's average stands north of 68. It is only bettered by the legendary Don Bradman who averaged over 101 among captains who recorded at least 3000 Test runs. Earlier in the day, Smith became the 15th batter to reach the 10,000-run milestone in Test cricket. Smith is the fourth Aussie batter after Border, Waugh and Ponting to reach the feat and ranks the fifth-fastest in terms of innings, behind Tendulkar (195), Brian Lara (195), Sangakkara (195) and Ponting (196).

## On occasions you get stuck and that's life...but more often than not, Sanju Samson comes up with the goods: Kevin Pietersen



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Sanju Samson after having a fruitful 2024 as an opener has started the 2025 slowly in T20I format. In three games so far against England, he scored 34 runs at an average of 11.33. Former England player Kevin Pietersen backed Samson to come good at some point and said by taking risks "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose."

"I just think that on occasions you get stuck and that's life. You've got to take risks at the top of the order. Same as Abhishek Sharma, same as all these batters. They're taking risks at the top of the order. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, but more often than not, Samson comes up with the goods," Pietersen said on Star Sports. "I think mentally he's sound. I really like Sanju Samson as a batter. I actually love him. I was pretty surprised that he hasn't

had more of a consistent role over the last few years. Yes, he's got a game here at the top of the order, but listen, these things happen. Things happen so quickly in the shortest form of the game," he added. Not only Samson is going through a lean patch but his dismissals are identical. He got out to pulling the short ball in all the games. "If he keeps doing it over the next six weeks or he does it over the next couple of months, then I'd probably have a look at it and start to question his technique. But I think that he's a fabulous player. I think he plays the short ball extremely well, and I just think he's a rock solid player. So from that standpoint, there's no way that I'm going to stand here and critique his play of the short ball," Pietersen would say.

## Vandana named in India's hockey team for Bhubaneswar Leg of FIH Pro League

New Delhi: Veteran striker Vandana Kataria was on Wednesday named in the 24-member Indian women's hockey team for the Bhubaneswar leg of the FIH Pro League, beginning next month, while teenage forward Sonam was included as a standby. India will face England, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany twice each from February 15. Dynamic midfielder Salima Tete will continue to lead the Indian team with forward Navneet Kaur serving as her deputy. Kataria, who was not a part of the squad for the women's Asian Champions Trophy, along with defenders Nikki Pradhan and Jyoti Chhatrui, midfielder Baljeet Kaur

## 'What will girls do playing hockey?' Pritam Rani Siwach's journey from hearing taunts to producing champion women hockey players



GNS News Agency, Feb 3

More than two decades ago, former India hockey team captain Pritam Rani Siwach and her husband Kuldeep Siwach had a minor disagreement that would eventually go on to shape their lives. Pritam's eyes fell on an unmaintained land in Sonapat, Haryana which she felt would be a good place to start coaching young girls in the area. Growing up in Jharsa, she faced innumerable hurdles on her way to becoming the leader of the national side. Now, she wanted to create a nursery for hockey that would help girls learn the basics easier than it was for her. Kuldeep, however, wasn't sold initially but Pritam wouldn't let it go, her mind was made up and the seeds were sown for Pritam Siwach Hockey Academy.

night, there was an immense sense of pride as Pritam and Kuldeep watched on as the Women's Hockey India League final unfolded at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro Turf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi. When Sharmila Devi was speeding along the flanks for Soorma. When Nisha was marshaling the troops for Odisha Warriors. When Jyoti was named the player of the tournament. When Odisha's teenagers Sakshi Rana and Kanika Siwach (indeed, their daughter) were rubbing shoulders with some of the best in the business. And when Neha Goyal lifted the trophy as the captain of Odisha Warriors. All of them, and a few more in the league, were beneficiaries of that decision Pritam made in 2004. "Bada achha laga ji," Pritam told The Indian Express. Seeing my students play and one of them even led a team as captain and won the trophy... it felt really good. My mind went back. When Neha was a little kid, hanging on the grill of the gate, came to the ground wearing unkempt clothes... today she is leading a HIL team that has Olympic gold medalists, and not just that, playing so well too. It's a moment of immense pride, and not just about Neha, all my kids who played in the league. "Hockey Pritam Rani Siwach Pritam Siwach (fifth from left) with India coach Harendra Singh (c) and players who are from Pritam's academy after the Women's HIL final.

Odisha had Neha, Nisha, Sakshi and Kanika. In the Soorma squad, there were Jyoti and Sharmila. With a couple of players in reserves across the two finalists, and the likes of Shilpi Dabas, Mahima Choudhary for Bengal Tigers and Manisha for Delhi SG Pipers, a total of 12 players in the HIL learned their trade at Pritam and Kuldeep's academy. Underneath the sense of joy, there was an un-

## What is Virat Kohli's Ranji Trophy record ahead of 2025 comeback for Delhi?

GNS News Agency, Feb 3

Virat Kohli has featured in 23 Ranji Trophy matches ahead of his comeback game in the 2024-25 season. (Express Photo by Praveen Khanna) Virat Kohli has featured in 23 Ranji Trophy matches ahead of his comeback game in the 2024-25 season. India's senior batter Virat Kohli will mark his return to the domestic grind with a one-off appearance for his home state Delhi in the Ranji Trophy 2024-25 round seven match against Railways, starting Thursday at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi. Kohli's much-awaited return has taken the spotlight in the last round even as 15 teams will be in contention to secure the seven remaining spots in the quarter-finals. The 36-year-old was recently scene rekindling his game after a lowly Border-Gavaskar Trophy series in Australia ended with Kohli being peppered by deliveries outside the off-stump. Following the recent BCCI diktat that the senior India stars are mandated to play in the domestic circuit, Kohli will don the Delhi jersey after 13 years, having missed out on the last round due to a reported neck sprain issue.

Kohli's last appearance for Delhi dates back to an entirely different era in Indian cricket, before his meteoric rise in the Tst set-up over the previous decade. Kohli featured in a one-off game in the 2012-13 Ranji Trophy in Ghaziabad, not far from his hometown. Turning up for Delhi, Kohli then met Uttar Pradesh at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Ghaziabad, scoring 14 and 43 across two innings in a match



that his side lost by six wickets. Kohli was accompanied by four other India internationals then, including current India head coach Gautam Gambhir, Virender Sehwag, Ishant Sharma and Ashish Nehra. Meanwhile, the opposition attack comprised Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Praveen Kumar besides Suresh Raina and Mohammed Kaif. Bhuvneshwar had dismissed Kohli in both innings, marking his last Ranji outing. Returning to the Ranji Trophy, Kohli has appeared in 23 matches previously in the premier red-ball tournament since his debut in November 2006 against Tamil Nadu in November 2006. Kohli fell for 10 in his only innings on debut but went onto compile five hundreds and as many fifties in his next 22 matches across six years. Kohli has aggregated 1574 in 36 innings, averaging 50.77.

and forwards Mumtaz Khan and Rutaja Dadas have been added to the squad.

"This team brings a good blend of experienced players and exciting young talent, which will be crucial as we face top-level competition in the tournament. Our focus has been on building a balanced squad, with strong options in every position," Indian women's hockey team chief coach Harendra Singh said. Goalkeepers Banwari Solanki, defenders Akshata Abaso Dhekale, and Jyoti Singh, along with forwards Sakshi Rana, Annu, and Sonam have been added

as standbys. The 19-year-old Sonam, in particular, stands a chance to make her senior international debut after an impressive performance in the recently concluded women's Hockey India League, where she was the second-highest scorer. "I am particularly excited to see how some of the younger players perform, especially those who have shown great promise in the Women's Hockey India League," Harendra said. "We are confident in the team's preparation, and I believe we have the potential to deliver strong performances against some of the best teams in the world," he added.