

# INDIAN CHRONICLE

28 December, 2024 | Saturday | Volume No:12 | Issue No:274 | Pages: 8+8 | www.indianchronicle.com | Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State) ₹ 3

## NIN scientist elected as fellow of National Academy of Agricultural Sciences

Hyderabad: Dr G Bhanuprakash Reddy, Scientist G and Head, Biochemistry, National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), has been elected as the Fellow of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) in recognition of his significant research contributions to nutritional sciences. Dr Reddy's research focuses on aspects of human nutrition, including nutrient requirements, deficiencies and the effect of food/nutrition on chronic diseases. His studies discovered the role of micronutrients in the development of diabetic complications and revealed how deficiency of some micronutrients can influence the molecular processes involved in age-related disorders.

## Fresh alarm in Nalgonda as new cases of fluorosis detected

Hyderabad: In an alarming development, fresh cases of dental fluorosis were reported from Marriguda mandal of Nalgonda district, just three years after the union Government patted Telangana for getting rid of the fluorosis problem largely through supply of potable water through taps under the ambitious Mission Bhagiratha scheme, the brainchild of former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao. Marriguda mandal in Nalgonda district, once a fluoride hotspot, has now reported new cases of dental fluorosis identified among children. It indicated a relapse in the fluoride problem reigniting concerns over water contamination issues in the region.

## Telangana pinning high expectations from Union Budget 2025-26



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Accordingly, the State government has outlined its priorities, seeking financial assistance worth Rs 1.63 lakh crore for infrastructure projects, including Regional Ring Road, Phase-2 of Hyderabad Metro Rail, Musi Riverfront Rejuvenation project and others. Hyderabad: Notwithstanding the years of poor treatment of Telangana in budget allocations, the Congress government is pinning high expectations on the Union Budget for 2025-26 scheduled to be introduced in the Parliament in February next.

Accordingly, the State government has outlined its priorities, seeking financial assistance worth Rs 1.63 lakh crore for infrastructure projects, including Regional Ring Road, Phase-2 of Hyderabad Metro Rail, Musi Riverfront Rejuvenation project and others. The Congress government

in the State is also hoping for the resolution of pending financial issues including funds from the Centre as well as Andhra Pradesh pertaining to Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act since 2014. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, and other Ministers concerned have already submitted proposals to the union Ministers in this regard, over the last a couple of months. Among the proposals, the Regional Ring Road project, estimated at ₹34,367 crore, is viewed as essential for boosting industrial growth, logistical hubs, and the pharmaceutical sector. The State government has already initiated land acquisition but awaits required clearances.

Additionally, the second phase of the Hyderabad metro rail expansion, covering 76.4 km at an estimated cost of Rs 24,269 crore, has been proposed for joint funding between the State and the Centre. Another significant initiative is the Musi Riverfront Development project, which includes Gandhi Sarovar, sewerage upgrades, and heritage bridge construction. Besides seeking 220 acres of defence lands abutting Musi River, the State government sought funds amounting to Rs 14,100 crore for the project. Telangana has also sought for the release of pending grants totaling Rs 1,800 crore for several fiscal years, along with its share of funds owed under the AP Reorganisation Act. The State is seeking the Centre's intervention to address Rs 2,547.07 crore in loans attributed to it following bifurcation and an additional Rs 495.20 crore to be transferred from Andhra Pradesh towards funds allocated in 2014-15 towards Central Sponsored Schemes (CSS) to Telangana, based on population distribution. Further, the State continues to emphasise the importance of fulfilling commitments under the Reorganisation Act, such as the establishment of an integrated coach factory at Kazipet and a steel plant at Bayyaram, among others. Proposals also have been submitted for improved railway connectivity and establishment of new airports.

## History will be kinder: Singh's final words as PM resurface a decade later as India mourns its loss



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

In his final press conference as Prime Minister on January 3, 2014, Dr Manmohan Singh delivered a remark that has resurfaced numerous times across social media in the decade that followed. When asked by NDTV's Sunil Prabhakar about his inability to rein in his ministers and his reluctance to act in certain situations, Dr Singh, with a calm smile, responded, "I honestly believe history will be kinder to me than the contemporary media or, for that matter, the Opposition parties in Parliament." He went on to add, "I cannot divulge all that transpires in the Cabinet system of government. Given the circumstances and the pressures of a coalition polity, I have done the best I could under the conditions at hand." At that time, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-II government was grappling with serious allegations of corruption across various ministries. These scandals were one of the key factors behind the Congress' de-

feat in the 2014 general elections, which led to the rise of Narendra Modi and the BJP to power.

On Thursday, at the age of 92, Dr. Singh passed away after battling health issues for some time. The AIIMS hospital issued a statement revealing that he had been receiving treatment for age-related ailments. His condition worsened at home, where resuscitative measures were initiated immediately. Despite efforts to revive him at AIIMS, he was declared dead at 9:51 PM. Before becoming Prime Minister, Dr. Singh had served as the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and played a pivotal role in India's economic reforms as Finance Minister under Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and other prominent leaders visited the residence of the late Dr Manmohan Singh to pay their respects and offer condolences to his family. PM Modi expressed his deep sorrow and praised Dr Singh's immense contribution to the nation's progress. "Dr Manmohan Singh's vision and integrity as a leader will forever remain etched in India's history," PM Modi said in a statement. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also paid his last respects, calling Dr Singh a statesman and a distinguished economist who played a pivotal role in shaping India's modern economic policies. The Central government announced a seven-day period of national mourning until January 1, 2025, to honour the legacy of Dr Singh. A notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs directed all states and Union Territories to lower the national flag to half-mast during this period and cancel all official entertainment programmes.

## Telangana HC extends protection to KTR in Formula E-race case

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Hyderabad : The Telangana High Court on Friday extended till December 31 its orders barring the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) from arresting Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president and former minister K.T. Rama Rao in the Formula-E race case. The court took up a hearing on the quash petition filed by Rama Rao, popularly known as KTR. The ACB filed a counter to the petition and pleaded to the court to set aside the interim orders, barring it from arresting KTR. The High Court adjourned the hearing to December 31 and extended operation of its interim order till the next hearing. The High Court on December 20 had directed the ACB not to arrest KTR till December 30. While granting relief to KTR, the court allowed the investigation to continue and directed the state government to file its counter by December 23. The court had adjourned the hearing to December 27.

The ACB on December 29 booked a case against KTR, senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) former chief engineer B.L.N. Reddy for alleged irregularities in organising the Formula E-car race last year. The First Information Report (FIR) was registered under various sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act on allegations of financial irregularities in conducting the Formula-E race when BRS was in power. The FIR was registered on a complaint by M. Dana Kishore, Principal Secretary, Municipal Administration and Urban Development. This followed permission given by Governor Jishnu Dev Varma at a request by the state government.

The ACB registered the FIR registered under Sections 13(1)(A) and 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, along with Sections 409 and 120(B) of the Indian Penal Code. The



complainant alleged payment of over Rs.54.88 crore was made to UK-based Formula-E Operations Limited (FEO) and others in "gross violation of established procedures". It is alleged that at the direction of then industry minister Rama Rao, the HMDA transferred money to FEO in violation of RBI guidelines. The payment was allegedly made without obtaining approval. On December 25, the ACB recorded the statement of Dana Kishore. The anti-graft agency is said to be preparing the grounds for issuing notices to KTR and others. KTR has denied the allegations of corruption and accused the Congress government of political vendetta. He claimed that the Formula-E race was hosted to make Telangana the hub of electric vehicles. After the ACB registered FIR, the Enforcement Directorate also registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against KTR, Arvind Kumar and B.L.N. Reddy. The ED is probing the allegations of violations of PMLA and Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) in transferring money to a foreign entity.

## Manmohan Singh was my friend, philosopher and guide: Sonia Gandhi

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Describing former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's death as a "personal loss", Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chief Sonia Gandhi on Friday (December 27, 2024) said he was her friend, philosopher and guide and that in his death, the party has lost a leader who was the epitome of wisdom, nobility and humility. In her message on Singh's demise, Sonia Gandhi said he leaves a void in the national life that can never be filled.

"We in the Congress party and the people of India will forever be proud and grateful that we had a leader like Dr Manmohan Singh whose contributions to India's progress and development are immeasurable," she said. "In Dr Manmohan Singh's passing, we have lost a leader who was the epitome of wisdom, nobility and humility, who served our country with all his heart and mind. A luminous and beloved guiding light for the Congress party, his compassion and vision transformed and empowered the lives of millions of Indians," the former Congress president said. Singh was loved by the people of India for his pure heart and fine mind, Gandhi said, adding that his advice, "wise counsel" and views were eagerly sought and deeply valued across the political spectrum in the country.

"Respected and admired by leaders and scholars all over the world, he was hailed as a statesman of immense wisdom and stature. Dr Manmohan Singh brought brilliance and distinction to every high office that he held. And he brought pride and honour to India," she said. "For me, Dr Manmohan Singh's death is a deeply personal loss. He was my friend, philosopher and guide. He was so gentle in his manner but so resolute in his deeply held convictions." His commitment to social justice, secularism and democratic



values was deep and unwavering. To spend any time with him was to come away enlightened by his knowledge and sagacity, moved by his honesty and integrity, and awed by his genuine humility," Sonia Gandhi said. Earlier in the day, the CPP chairperson paid homage to Singh at his residence where his mortal remains are kept for people to pay their last respects. She also attended a Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting convened to pay tributes to the former prime minister.

## Nampally Court Orders Police to File Counter in Response to Allu Arjun's Regular Bail Petition



Hyderabad: In the ongoing legal proceedings regarding the Sandhya Theatre stampede case, the Nampally Court has instructed the police to file a...

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Hyderabad: In the ongoing legal proceedings regarding the Sandhya Theatre stampede case, the Nampally

Court has instructed the police to file a counter regarding the regular bail petition filed by actor Allu Arjun. The court issued this order following the expiration of the actor's interim bail, which was granted earlier by the High Court.

Allu Arjun's legal team had filed a petition seeking regular bail after the interim bail period ended. The court's order for the police to submit a counter indicates that further deliberations are expected before a final decision is made regarding the regular bail request.

The Sandhya Theatre incident, which took place during a promotional event for Pushpa 2: The Rule, led to a tragic stampede, causing one fatality and multiple injuries. The police are continuing their investigation into the incident, and the court's decision to request a counter emphasises the seriousness with which the case is being handled.

Allu Arjun's lawyers are expected to present arguments for his regular bail in the next court session. The outcome of the hearing will be closely watched, as it may influence future cases involving large-scale public events and the responsibilities of event organizers. The court will review the police counter before making its final ruling on the matter, which is expected to have significant implications for both the actor and the film industry.

## As many as 493 APGVB branches in Telangana to merge into TGB from Jan 1

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Hyderabad: The branches of Andhra Pradesh Grameena Vikas Bank (APGVB) in Telangana will be merged with Telangana Grameena Bank (TGB) with effect from January 1.

As many as 493 branches of APGVB, located in Telangana, will be merged with TGB as part of the process. The decision to merge APGVB branches with Hyderabad-based Telangana Grameena Bank was taken by the union Finance Ministry in November this year. At present, APGVB operates a total of 771 branches in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana — 493 in Telangana and 278 in Andhra Pradesh. These 278 branches will continue to operate in Andhra Pradesh as APGVB. In a statement issued here, Telangana Grameena Bank chairman Y Sobha said at present, the TGB was catering to the needs of the customers of five erstwhile districts — Adilabad, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Rangareddy and Hyderabad and post-merger, all the 33 districts of Telangana would come into the TGB fold.

"TGB has at present a turnover of Rs 30,000 crore with 435 branches working in 18 districts. Post-merger, the TGB will have a network of 928 branches with a turnover of around Rs 70,000 crore," she said.

To ensure smooth merger of the branches and systems, banking services across branches online platforms, including ATM, Mobile Banking, Internet Banking and Customer Service points would not be available from Decem-



ber 28 to January 1, she said, adding that the TGB would resume all operations from January 1.

For emergency requirements, TGB was providing a facility to withdraw an amount of Rs. 5,000 by visiting the home branch on December 30-31, she said, adding that the Non-home transactions would not be allowed during this period.

The customers of APGVB branches in Telangana should visit their respective branches on or after January 1 for replacement of ATM cards and re-registration of mobile banking, Internet banking and UPI services, she added. The cheques, demand drafts of APGVB issued upto December 31 would be accepted for payment or clearing upto March 31. For clarifications, customers can log on to www.tgbyd.in or contact the nearest branch.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## PSU losses in HP

THE financial health of Himachal Pradesh's public sector undertakings (PSUs) continues to deteriorate, with cumulative losses exceeding Rs 4,900 crore across 12 entities, as per the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) 2022-23 report. The Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC) and Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (HPSEB) alone account for losses of Rs 3,500 crore. Their being in the red has been exacerbated by social welfare responsibilities like subsidised power and transportation. Successive governments have failed to address this crisis, burdened by entrenched inefficiencies and resistance to reforms. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's push to merge loss-making PSUs offers a glimmer of hope. Other steps like withdrawing power subsidies for income tax payers and reducing free travel for certain groups also signal fiscal prudence.

Sukhu's proposal to merge Agro Industries Corporation with the Horticulture Produce Marketing and Processing Corporation is a pragmatic start. Such mergers can reduce administrative overheads, streamline operations, and consolidate resources. But these efforts must address employee concerns through transparent dialogue, retraining programmes and assurances of job security as employee opposition remains a major roadblock to effective mergers. The adoption of modern management practices, such as digital transformation and efficiency audits, could curtail recurring losses. The HRTC could benefit from route optimisation and an upgraded fleet, while the HPSEB might reduce transmission losses by investing in renewable energy infrastructure. Governance reforms are equally critical. Appointing a capable leadership, setting performance benchmarks and fostering accountability at all levels can ensure long-term sustainability. Public-private partnerships could also unlock growth potential in sectors like tourism and horticulture.

From logo-branded pens and bags to wallets with engineering formulae, IIT Bombay's rebooted souvenir shop offers great memorabilia



From regular merchandise such as logo-branded pens and bags to quirky products like coffee mugs with powerful quotes and wallets featuring numerous engineering formulae, the souvenir shop of the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, has become a one-stop destination for those seeking IIT Bombay memorabilia, just two months after its reboot in October

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

From regular merchandise such as logo-branded pens and bags to quirky products like coffee mugs with powerful quotes and wallets featuring numerous engineering formulae, the souvenir shop of the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, has become a one-stop destination for those seeking IIT Bombay memorabilia, just two months after its reboot in October. Located on the ground floor of the Gulmohar building on IIT Bombay's Powai campus, the shop presents a unique blend of nostalgia, creativity, and institute branding. It offers a wide array of products that appeal to students, faculty, alumni, and visitors alike, serving as an effective branding platform for the institute through its alumni spread across the globe. IIT Bombay The shop features a diverse selection, from apparel and personal accessories to sportswear, stationery, gift boxes, electronic items, cabin trolley bags, and official items like tiny lapel pins made of metal, woven ties, formal shirts, and tailor-made blazers adorned with the IIT Bombay emblem.

The shop features a diverse selection, from apparel and personal accessories to sportswear, stationery, gift boxes, electronic items, cabin trolley bags, and official items like tiny lapel pins made of metal, woven ties, formal shirts, and tailor-made blazers adorned with the IIT Bombay emblem. A special corner showcases products made by IIT Bombay students and alumni. In the near future, the souvenir shop plans to display books about IITians and those written by IITians who have made significant contributions to the world. A spokesperson for the institute stated, "Our merchandise is most valued by students and provides them with an emotional link to the IIT Bombay community. However, unlike western college merchandise stores, the IIT Bombay Souvenir Shop also makes an effort towards nation-building ideas by procuring products that positively affect local artisans in different parts of the country. For instance, the jute products are produced in West Bengal, leather products are from Kanpur, items in mango wood and brass are from the interiors of Saharanpur, and terracotta products are from Pokhran, with khadi products sourced from the Magan (Mahatma Gandhi) Sangrahalay in Wardha."

IIT Bombay The merchandise is most valued by students and provides them with an emotional link to the IIT Bombay community. Long before the merchandise movement in India, IIT Bombay set up a souvenir shop in the same building in January 2010. It was the first college merchandise shop in the country. It offered both offline and online sales channels, with global delivery. The refurbished souvenir shop aims to elevate the memorabilia experience. "Most of the students and alumni come to the shop floor to 'feel the vibe' as the shop is perfectly located near a canteen and not far from the campus' main road," said the spokesperson. After nearly 100 days in offline mode, the shop's online channel will be available from January 2025, allowing alumni and admirers of IIT Bombay from around the world to buy products.

## 'To tarnish Kejriwal's image': Punjab Police register FIRs over morphed videos of AAP chief's speech on SC community



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

KejriwalThe FIRs state that the morphed video of Kejriwal has hurt the sentiments of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) community and can violate the peace in Punjab and other states. The Punjab Police has registered at least six FIRs, including two against Delhi-based lawyer Vibhor Anand and four others against unidentified persons, for allegedly uploading the "morphed and edited speeches" of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Dalits and farmers.

The FIRs state that the morphed video of Kejriwal has hurt the sentiments of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) community and can violate the peace in Punjab and other states. They further state that the video has been uploaded intentionally to tarnish Kejriwal's image. All six FIRs have been registered by Ludhiana city police on the com-

plaints of local AAP leaders belonging to the Valmiki community. The FIRs have been registered under the offences of giving provocative statements to cause riots and forgery under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and other sections of the SC/ST Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act at different police stations. Ludhiana Police Commissioner Kuldeep Singh Chahal confirmed that the FIRs have been registered.

One such FIR registered at Salem Tabri police station against unidentified persons, on the complaint of AAP leader Vijay Danav, also a senior leader from Valmiki community in Ludhiana, states that Kejriwal's morphed and edited video can "violate peace among common people, and it has also hurt sentiments of the community in Punjab and other states, and this derogatory video has been uploaded to tarnish image of Arvind Kejriwal". Similar FIRs have been registered at Dugri, Sahnewal, Haibowal, division number 5 and Model Town police stations. The FIRs against Anand have been registered at Dugri and Sahnewal police stations.

Surinder Kalyan, also a local AAP leader and the national president of Bharatiya Valmiki Sewa Dal Bhawasad, is the complainant in the FIR registered at Model Town Police station. Kalyan's wife Usha Rani recently won the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation polls on an AAP ticket from ward number 47. All FIRs have been registered under sections 192 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot), 336(4) (forgery), 352 (intentional insult with intent to breach peace), 353(2) (creating enmity between different groups) of the BNS; Section 3(1) of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act; and Section 65 of the IT Act.

## How a literary tour in Europe nudged Anita Nair to branch out as an author

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

From books with a distinct literary bend to gritty crime novels and even historical fiction, it is rare to find authors with a list of works as long and prolific as Anita Nair. Looking back on an incredibly diverse writing career, the writer shared her insights and memories in a conversation with The Indian Express. Nair, who had come to Bengaluru as an advertising professional, recalled, "I've been in Bangalore since 1989, more than half my life. I had been living in Chennai and Kerala. I knew the Chennai of that period so well, and it lacked excitement for me. When I moved, everything was different – the weather, the way people spoke... It was a very laid-back city. It did not have the frantic pace of the bigger cities, yet it was cosmopolitan. In many ways, I don't know if I would have been the writer I am today without Bangalore."

By 2001, Nair was writing full-time. Having started in 1997 with a collection of short stories, by 2001 she had already published The Better Man and Ladies Coupe, both of which achieved considerable literary acclaim. "I decided to give myself a year to try and be a full-time writer. The transition was not overnight. It was a process I went through. I started working as a consultant in 1996. I was working three mornings a week, then two mornings... I asked myself, why was I so afraid to let go? Then I chose May 1, Labour Day, to become unemployed," she recounted. Anita Nair is an author from Bengaluru. By 2001 Nair had already published 'The Better Man' and 'Ladies Coupe', both of which achieved considerable literary acclaim. Nair had, of course, been writing long before Bengaluru, penning poetry as a seven-year-old and having never stopped since. In the wake of the literary fiction of her earlier career, some of her later work might come as a surprise – namely, the Inspector Gowda crime series featuring the eponymous Inspector Borei Gowda. After the release of her book Lessons in Forgetting, Nair was on a European literary tour when she started to think about diversifying.

She said, "I was getting the same questions in differ-



ent languages – the question of whether my work was getting pigeonholed was bothering me. Am I going to be seen only as a literary fiction writer who writes only serious stuff...?' Bengaluru's Shivajinagar – through which she commuted daily – became the setting of Nair's first work after she decided to try her hand at crime writing. "Crime is a way of making social commentary for me, which is something I couldn't do with my literary novels. Those examine the inner space of a character and not as much how the settings influence the character. So Bangalore became the setting that allowed me to comment on where the city and the country were." Nair noted that despite the breadth of genres she has dealt with, a distinct "voice" is not something she aimed for but rather it was a question of knowing the characters in a book and how they were going to evolve. On her writing habits, she said, "Initially, I could write wherever, even in a crowded place.

I can still do that. But over the years, you get used to the comfort of certain things. It was a conscious thought that once I became a full-time writer, my profession needed that kind of space. I write every day, but I am a morning person so I try to finish my writing for the day before 10 am." Passing on advice for new writers, she said, "Ask yourself why you are writing what you are writing, and write every day."

## Taslima accuses Mamata govt of forcing removal of 'Lajja' play from West Bengal theatre festivals

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin accused the West Bengal government of stifling the voice of artists and writers, claiming that the play 'Lajja' (Shame), adapted from her novel, was forced to be canceled at two theatre festivals in the state. Nasrin alleged that the police intervened at the Gobardanga Natyoutsav in North 24 Parganas and the Pandua Natyoutsav in Hooghly, pressuring organizers to remove the play from the schedule, citing concerns that it could provoke communal riots. "While the schedule of the play had been announced two months back, all of a sudden the police prevailed upon the organizers to omit 'Lajja' from the list. Let me remind you, a theatre group had staged the same play three times in Delhi before a packed auditorium," she wrote in a post on Monday. Nasrin criticized the West Bengal administration for using the excuse that the play could lead to violence. She lamented, "I was forced to leave West Bengal with the apprehension that my presence would provoke fundamentalists to engineer riots. I can't fathom why no action is taken against the rioters and the voices of free expression by writers are being muzzled."

The BJP backed Nasrin's claims, with Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar accusing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of hypocrisy. "The little difference between fundamentalists in Bangladesh and West Bengal Chief Minister



has ceased to exist, as she is not allowing a popular stage play of protest against fundamentalism, apprehending it will lead to riots," Majumdar said. BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya posted, "If Mamata Banerjee is unable to manage law and order in Bengal and is so intimidated by Muslim veto that even art, culture, and freedom of expression are being stifled, then she should consider stepping down." Organizers of the Gobardanga theatre festival confirmed that 'Lajja' was removed from the lineup, but they declined to provide any further reasons. State police officials have neither confirmed nor denied the involvement of the administration in halting the play.

## Maharashtra govt to appoint testing firm to oversee new Shivaji statue's construction

Maharashtra Shivaji statue collapses, new one to be made. The construction of the new statue will be undertaken by Ram Sutar Art Creations Pvt Ltd, which built the Statue of Unity in Gujarat. The Maharashtra government, which was left red-faced after a 35-ft-tall statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji collapsed at Rajkot Fort in Malvan in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district earlier this year, is set to appoint an independent testing agency to monitor the building of a new statue of the Maratha king. The contract to build a new 60-ft Shivaji statue at a cost of over Rs 20 crore has been awarded to renowned sculptor Ram Sutar and his son Anil's firm Ram Sutar Art Creations Pvt Ltd, which built the Statue

of Unity in Gujarat. "We have invited proposals from eligible agencies for quality control and testing services, from concept to commissioning of the statue. The agency will prepare detailed reports of all tests and inspections. These reports will be submitted to the Public Works Department (PWD) on a regular basis, documenting the progress of the reconstruction and any issues that may need attention. If any quality-related issues are identified, the agency is responsible to recommend appropriate corrective action and work with the PWD to ensure these measures are implemented," a PWD official said. The firm will be provided a space within the Rajkot Fort premises for setting up a laboratory.

## Congress' CWC in Belagavi: Party to decide 2025 action plan, take up Ambedkar 'insult' issue strongly



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Jairam Ramesh. Jairam Ramesh said there is only one solution that the home minister be sacked and must apologise for his remarks. The Congress will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Belgaum session of the party that was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi with an extended session of the CWC which will decide on an action plan for the next year.

The opposition party asserted that the "insult" to B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah will be strongly taken up at Belagavi and deliberated upon. Addressing a joint press conference along with Congress general secretary organisation K C Venugopal and AICC media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on December 26 has been named 'Nav Satyagraha Baithak'. He said two resolutions will be passed at the meeting. The Congress has been marking Ambedkar Samman Saptah against the "insult" of B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah, Ramesh said. He said there is only one solution that the home minister be sacked and must apologise for his remarks. Ramesh said on December 27, a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally will be held in Belagavi.

Venugopal said the Congress has strongly taken up the issue of the "insult" of Ambedkar by the home minister and has been demanding the sacking of Shah as well as an apology from him. He said the issue would be strongly taken up in Belagavi and ways to take it forward in the future will also be deliberated upon, he said. Almost 200 leaders will be attending this "historic" session, he said. Congress MPs, leaders and lakhs of workers will participate in the rally, Venugopal said. The CWC will discuss an action plan for the next year and deliberate on the two resolutions, he said.

## Delhi Police arrest 11 people for aiding illegal entry of Bangladeshi immigrants

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

delhi police, delhi school bomb threat, indian express On Sunday, a senior police officer said that 175 individuals have been identified as suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants during an extensive verification drive conducted in outer Delhi. The Delhi Police have recently arrested 11 people for their alleged involvement in aiding the entry of Bangladeshi nationals into India by forging documents, including Aadhaar cards and voter IDs, the police said.

Ankit Chauhan, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South Delhi), said on Tuesday that the accused, including Aadhaar operators and tech experts, created fake websites to create the fake documents, and facilitated the entry of illegal immigrants through forest routes and express trains. On Sunday, a senior police officer said that 175 individuals have been identified as suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants during an extensive verification drive conducted in outer Delhi.

The Delhi Police launched a drive for identifying illegal Bangladeshi immigrants on December 11, a day after L-G Secretariat ordered a crackdown on such persons residing in Delhi. Ravi Kumar Singh, DCP (South East Delhi), had said that 916 people were verified in South East Delhi till December 13 and eight illegal immigrants had been detained, including six Bangladeshi nationals. Two of them – Abdul Ahad, 22, and Mohammad Azizul, 32, were arrested on December 10 and 12, respectively, from Hazrat Nizamuddin for illegal stay in India, the officer said. The police had produced both the men before the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) for deportation proceedings. The police conducted an operation in the E-44 Jhuggis of New Seemapuri in Shahdara on December 12 to identify illegal immigrants. Prashant Priya Gautam, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Shahdara, had said that police teams visited multiple slums and collected documents of 32 people for further verification.

## 8-year-old girl found dead at abandoned building in Southwest Delhi



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

An 8-year-old girl was found dead in an abandoned building in Southwest Delhi's Shankar Vihar Tuesday noon after she was reported missing Monday night.

The girl's parents noticed that she was not home Monday evening and began looking for her in nearby areas with some neighbors. However, as hours passed and the girl was nowhere to be seen, the parents registered a missing person report to the police on Monday night. Residents said when the girl was found dead, she had marks around her neck, showing signs of strangulation.

## After the death of Anarkali, why Byculla Zoo in Mumbai will no longer house elephants



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Anarkali, an elephant at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Vanaspati Udyan and Zoo in Mumbai's Byculla, breathed her last on November 10, bringing an end to the zoo's association with the gentle giants. With 58-year-old Anarkali's passing, senior officials of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said no other elephants will be brought into the zoo, also known as Byculla Zoo, as the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) guidelines don't allow further intake of these animals into its collection. Life and times of Anarkali

Anarkali, along with Laxmi, was brought into the Byculla Zoo from a circus in Bihar in 1977. She was only 12 years old at the time. Over the years, Laxmi and Anarkali had developed a playful bond, much to the delight of visitors. Anarkali also gave rides to scores of visitors in the city's only zoo — before the provision was discontinued in the 1990s amid protests by animal rights activists. After Laxmi's demise in 2020, owing to a chronic heart attack, Anarkali was so aggrieved that she started exhibiting sadness through behavioural change for several months. Since Laxmi's passing, Anarkali had been the lone elephant on the zoo premises as well as its oldest resident.

Anarkali would actively participate in enrichment ex-

ercises which were replete with soil area, grass section, water tank etc. A biologist said, "As a part of her exercise, we would create honey trails for Anarkali and had a wooden ball for her to play with. We also had an arrangement of artificial rain through showers where she would cool herself. During summers, we would also make fruit popsicles for Anarkali." Anarkali had been engaging in regular enrichment activities until November 8, when she fell in her paddock area. Veterinarians at the zoo concurred that Anarkali's demise was primarily due to old age. "Soon after, we tried to lift her using cranes but she was unable to stand or move. Then, we started treating her on the spot. Unfortunately, she passed away on November 10, 2024. While the cause of her death was primarily owing to old age, the PM report also showed that she had cardio-respiratory failure," a biologist at the zoo told The Indian Express. An elephant typically has a lifespan of 60 years. Spanning over 4000 square metres, the elephant premises are currently unoccupied. Senior BMC officials said no elephants will be housed within the zoo facility, despite the presence of the huge enclosure. Sanjay Tripathi, Director, Byculla Zoo said, "The guidelines issued by CZA in the early 2010s banned elephants from further addition into the animal collection at a zoo. Therefore, no elephants will be brought into the zoo now". According to officials, the new guidelines had been implemented by a panel to improve management as well as ensure the well-being of elephants who demand large open spaces for movement which several zoos fail to offer. Tripathi said the existing facility will be re-developed into an enclosure for other animals. "We already have an animal collection of approved species. Each animal has a separate set of demands. We will determine and check which species the existing facility will cater to in the best way. Accordingly, we will take further decisions and submit documents to the Central Zoo Authority for its approval," added Tripathi.

## Anil Masih says Sonia, Rahul Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal 'out on bail' as Congress, BJP councillors clash at Chandigarh civic body meet

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Congress and BJP councillors clashed with each other at the general house meeting of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation on Tuesday over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's controversial remarks on B R Ambedkar. Congress and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillors passed a motion against Shah, calling for his resignation. BJP's Anil Masih, who was allegedly involved in tampering with the mayoral polls held earlier this year, shouted that Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia were all "out on bail". He argued that the Congress had no right to criticise others. Congress councillors pulled out old newspaper clippings showing Masih looking directly at the camera during the mayoral elections. Congress councillor Gurpreet Singh labelled him the real "chor" (thief) for allegedly stealing the people's mandate and votes.

Masih, the returning officer for the Chandigarh mayoral elections held on January 30, was allegedly caught on camera defacing eight votes from AAP councillors in an apparent attempt to sway the election results in favour of the BJP. In response to a show-cause notice from the Supreme Court for making a false statement, he later issued an unconditional apology to the court. As soon as Gurpreet showed the clippings, BJP councillors surrounded him and jostled him to force him to put them down. As the situation grew tense, several councillors rushed in to manage the



chaos and calm everyone down. Eventually, the situation escalated to the point where a ten-minute break had to be announced to de-escalate tensions. Opposition parties have been demanding Shah's resignation over his comment in Parliament that it had become a "fashion" for the Congress to take Ambedkar's name. "It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. If they had taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven," Shah said while replying to the two-day debate in Rajya Sabha on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India" on December 17. After that, Congress and Opposition MPs, including Rahul Gandhi, protested on Parliament premises, holding Ambedkar's photos.

## 'If Modiji can stop war between Russia and Ukraine...': Punjab CM Mann hits out at Centre over farmers' protest

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

A day after Punjab BJP president Sunil Kumar Jakhar criticised his upcoming Australia visit over its timing saying the state was facing pressing issues, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday targeted the central government, urging it to abandon its "stubbornness" towards protesting farmers. "The central government should abandon its old stubbornness and open the way for talks with the farmers' organisations... I don't know what penance the central government is doing now? If Modiji can stop the war between Russia and Ukraine, then can't he talk to the breadwinners sitting 200 km away? What are you waiting for...?" Mann wrote on X in Punjabi. Mann's scathing attack on the BJP-led Centre comes just before he is to fly to Australia. Farmers have been protesting at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders since February 13 seeking a legal guarantee for minimum support prices along with several other demands. The protests are led by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha.

SKM (non-political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal has been on a hunger strike since November 26 to press for the fulfilment of his demands. His fast entered its 29th day on Tuesday. Various political leaders have visited him at the Khanauri border, but the chief minister has not met him



yet. The Supreme Court recently directed the state government to ensure Dallewal's admission to a hospital. However, the farmers surrounding him have prevented the administration from reaching him. The government has assigned police to talk to the farmers and ease tensions. The chief minister had maintained silence on the farmers' protest since Dallewal started his hunger strike. He had spoken about the issue only once before, while campaigning for municipal elections in Patiala last Thursday. Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Sandhwan has urged the Centre to engage with the farmers' leaders and resolve their issues.

## Class 10 student ends life after being caught with mobile phone during exam

Dhar: A class 10 student allegedly committed suicide after being caught using a mobile phone during a pre-board examination in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district, police said. The incident occurred on Monday night in Utawad village, around 10 km from the district headquarters. The questioning of the family members indicated the deceased was caught using a mobile phone during the examination at a private school on Monday, Naugaon police station in-charge Sunil Sharma said. According to the student's family members, the school management took action against him after he was caught with the phone during the exam, which possibly led him to take the extreme step, he said. The boy's family members later at night brought him to a hospital where he was declared dead, the police said. Prima facie, it was

found the student died due to hanging, following which a case was registered, Sharma said. Dhar Public School principal Rakesh Yadav told reporters that the student was found using a mobile phone during the pre-board mathematics examination. The in-charge teacher deposited the phone and gave him another answer sheet to complete the exam, he said. After completing the exam, the student came to the school office and said he would bring his elder brother on Tuesday and take back the phone, Yadav said. He said that around 9 pm on Monday, they received information about his extreme step. Gaurav Raghuvanshi, a relative of the deceased, said the school had informed the boy's family that he was caught with a mobile phone, which was deposited.

## A father's unbearable loss and a family's plea for justice



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

What happens when a family, striving to make an honest living, loses everything in the blink of an eye? For Ritesh Pawar, 26, a father of two and a husband, life changed irreparably in the early hours of Monday when a truck ran over his family, who were sleeping on a footpath in Wagholi. Ritesh, a migrant who has been working in Pune for seven years, is from Mangrul Chawal village, Amravati. He returned on Sunday from his seasonal stay to his village with his wife, only to witness the tragic deaths of his daughter, Vaibhavi (one-year-old), and two-year-old son, Vaibhav. Ritesh's wife, Janaki, 22, is in critical condition and is being treated at Sassoon Hospital. Beside Janaki, five other survivors were rushed to Sassoon Hospital around 1:30 am in a police vehicle. All the six survivors are currently under treatment.

"My whole family is destroyed," said Ritesh, his voice trembling with grief. "I've lost my children who were my life.

Now my wife is fighting for her life. Doctors aren't sure if she will survive. What should I do? Nothing can compensate for the loss I've faced." The Pawars, like many migrant workers, officially recognised as a de-notified tribe, had come to Pune in search of a better future. Unable to afford housing, they resorted to sleeping on the footpath. Like Ritesh, others in his community earn around Rs 700 to 800 a day for a family.

"We have no specific work. It's uncertain and unpredictable to say what we are going to work on tomorrow. We are daily wage workers and are here to work honestly instead of begging. What was our mistake? We just needed a place to sleep. Are we not even allowed that?" Ritesh asked, tears streaming down his face. "Vaibhav and Vaibhavi were too young to start school. What was their mistake? They didn't even get a chance at life," Ritesh said.

Adding to his anguish is the harrowing choice he now faces: "As a father, I need to perform my children's last rites. As a husband, I must stay by my wife's side. But how can I be in two places at once?" Doctors have warned that Janaki may slip into a coma even if she survives. She deserves to perform her children's last rituals," Ritesh said. "What will I tell her if she survives?" The tragedy has also devastated the children's grandmother, Nanishah Bhosale. "At least let us perform their last rites," she said. "Is it so difficult for the government to allow this? Don't we have a basic right to say goodbye to our loved ones." For Ritesh Pawar, the days ahead are filled with impossible decisions and an unbearable void. "I feel completely helpless," he says. "All I wanted was to give my children a better life, but now I have nothing left to fight for."

## Dharavi Redevelopment Project: No building maintenance charges for a decade

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Residents of Dharavi, one of Asia's largest slums, will receive relief from building maintenance charges for a decade under the Dharavi Redevelopment Project, a joint venture between the Maharashtra government and Adani Group. For the first 10 years, maintenance charges for new societies will be fully covered by the developer, as confirmed by officials of the Dharavi Redevelopment Project-Slum Rehabilitation Authority (DRP-SRA). This initiative includes free maintenance and aims to provide housing while enhancing residents' long-term financial well-being, said an official. The Maharashtra government has designated 10 per cent of the built-up area in the rehabilitation component for commercial use. This revenue-generating model is designed to support community maintenance beyond the initial ten years. As a result, residents will not face the service charges commonly imposed in cooperative housing societies, including those managed by the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA). To support this framework, a statutory corpus fund will be established for each tenement, providing residents with an additional layer of financial security, said an official. "This innovative approach ensures that Dharavi residents not only enjoy better homes but also a worry-free lifestyle in planned, sustainable communities," said a senior official.

According to officials, the redevelopment project offers modern amenities such as reliable water and electric-



ity supply, private toilets, and kitchens—significantly improving the current living conditions of residents. Eligible residents (those who settled before 2000) will be provided with homes measuring 350 square feet, which are 17 per cent larger than the units offered in other slum rehabilitation schemes. The 2022 tender for the Dharavi Redevelopment Project addresses the shortcomings of previous efforts by emphasising both financial and infrastructural sustainability. A key feature of this plan is the inclusion of upper-floor residents who are often overlooked in slum rehabilitation schemes. With these measures, the Dharavi Redevelopment Project aims to transform housing and establish a model for inclusive and financially sustainable urban renewal, said an official.

## 'If our village didn't face shortage of water, I wouldn't have had to leave'

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

"If water issues in our village had been resolved, I would never have had to leave," said Sudhakar Pawar, a migrant worker whose voice was heavy with grief. "As Pardhis we are forced to move wherever survival seems possible, but the water crisis in our village is so severe that we often travel to Pune and return only after earning a little." Pawar shared his pathos as he mourned the tragic loss of his brother's children, who were killed when a truck rammed into them while they were sleeping on a footpath at Wagholi at around 1 am y. Sudhakar, from Mangrul Chawala village in Amravati district, is one of the hundred members of the Pardhi community temporarily living on land near Wagholi Phata in Pune for the last seven years. He is the eldest of his brothers and works as a daily wage labourer, primarily in masonry-related work.

Explaining the incident that occurred at night when the out-of-control heavy vehicle entered their settlement, Sudhakar said he nearly became a victim himself, had he not woken up in time. He heard the crash and the engine's noise, and upon waking, saw his cousin Ritesh Pawar's two children: a one-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son, being crushed to death. "This is so tragic. We had just returned to Pune on Sunday from Mangrul, only to face the loss of our children," he said. "For many years, we've been sleeping on footpaths, as it feels open and safe, but now we realise it's not."

Sudhakar said Ritesh's wife was also in critical condition with severe injuries. Another relative, Vishal Pawar (22), also lost his life. Six other family members survived but sustained injuries and are being treated at Sassoon Hospital. Sudhakar further said the driver of the heavy vehicle was drunk, and after witnessing the death of his family, he shouted out to alert others. "I woke up on time and began shouting, which made the driver divert his vehicle;



otherwise, more people would have been killed," Sudhakar added. "I was so furious that I picked up a large stone, intending to harm him. I grabbed his collar, but the police arrived just in time to stop the confrontation."

Sudhakar has accused the driver of being the same person who had earlier warned the labourers to clear the land for heavy vehicles. "The women in our community told me that, a week ago, two men came and threatened that if the land wasn't cleared and the encroachment wasn't removed, they would kill them," he said. Among the injured are Janaki Ritesh Pawar, 21; Rinisha Vinod Pawar, 18; Roshan Bhosale, 9; Nagesh Nivrutti Pawar, 27; Darshan Sanjay Vairal, 18; and Alisha Vinod Pawar, 47. While talking to The Indian Express at Sassoon hospital, Nagesh Pawar has urged the government to bear the cost of treatment as they are poor labourers. Pressing the demand for compensation, Neha Pawar, wife of Nagesh Pawar said she will move to court to get justice. "I won't stop until I receive compensation. I am ready to move court if required. I just need the culprit punished. We have limited access and people to look after our injured relatives. It is difficult to manage medication and more," she said.

## From Tsunami's grip to life's leap: The rise of 'Baby 81'

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Kurukkal Madam (Sri Lanka): Rescued as an infant after the catastrophic Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, Jayarasa Abilash—known globally as "Baby 81"—is now a 20-year-old with dreams of higher education. His story, a symbol of tragedy and hope, captured hearts worldwide after the disaster that claimed over 35,000 lives in Sri Lanka.

At just two months old, Abilash was swept away by the tsunami and later found by rescuers far from home. Registered as patient No. 81 at the hospital, he unknowingly sparked an emotional court battle. His father, Murugupillai Jayarasa, had scoured the ruins for days, first finding his mother and wife but not their baby. A nurse initially took the child, later returning him after learning his family

was alive. The challenges didn't end there. Nine other families claimed the baby as their own, prompting a court-ordered DNA test. While the others withdrew, Jayarasa and his wife proved their parentage and were finally reunited with their son. The story made headlines worldwide, with the family even travelling to the United States for interviews.

Today, Abilash is preparing for his final high school exams and hopes to pursue a degree in information technology. While growing up, he was teased as "Baby 81" or "tsunami baby," which embarrassed him, especially on tsunami anniversaries. But as a teenager, he embraced his story, transforming the nickname into a personal "code word." Reflecting on his extraordinary journey, Abilash carries no fear, only ambition. "Now I only take it as my code word," he jokes, turning a symbol of survival into a badge of

## School Connect campaign to include awareness on government-provided coaching platform for entrance exams



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Colleges in Maharashtra have been urged to become nodal centres for SATHEE (Self-Assessment Test and Help for Entrance Exams), a new platform by Union Ministry of Education in association with IIT Kanpur which aims to provide students the opportunity for a self-paced interactive learning and assessment platform to prepare for various competitive entrance exams, virtually. As Maharashtra's higher and technical education department has announced second year of 'School Connect 2.0' campaign — which aims at creating awareness among students from Classes 9 to 12 regarding various higher education opportunities available for them to increase gross enrolment ratio (GER) — providing information on SATHEE is included in the list of objectives along with other schemes by the government to support students seeking higher education.

The state's higher and technical education department issued a government resolution (GR) on Saturday declaring that the 15-day 'School Connect 2.0' campaign will start on January 1, 2025. As a part of the second year of this campaign, universities are expected to provide information on various new aspects of higher education such as Ap-

prenticeship-Embedded Degree Programme (AEDP), Internship, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Vidyalaxmi Loan Scheme, SATHEE among others, along with awareness on National Education Policy, 2020, and the changes it has brought to the spectrum of higher education. Highlighting that the campaign includes awareness on SATHEE, whereas becoming a nodal centre is a separate process, Vikas Chandra Rastogi, the principal secretary for higher and technical education department of Maharashtra said the two are interlinked due to similar target audience. "As SATHEE is launched with an idea to bridge the gap for the students in society who cannot afford the costly entrance exam guidance and coaching, the government of India is looking to create SATHEE centres across different parts of the country and higher education institutions in Maharashtra are urged to become part of it," he said, while adding that Vice-Chancellors (VCs) of different universities in the state are told to invite expressions of interest from colleges willing to become nodal centres. 'Coaching culture unaffordable for many' As nodal centres of colleges will be expected to assign a person along with providing a space to help young students navigate through SATHEE which offers online guidance on various entrance exams such as Joint Entrance Exam (JEE), National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Central University Entrance Test (CUET), Staff Selection Commission (SSC).

Mumbai University (MU) V-C Dr Ravindra Kulkarni said: "Amid growing coaching culture, which is unaffordable for many, colleges becoming nodal centres for SATHEE will allow students from interiors of a state greater access to this knowledge available through internet." The MU has also started preparing an elaborate awareness programme to follow under the School Connect 2.0 that will include educating higher education aspirants on various available options across disciplines through events such as workshops, campus tours etc.

## No insurance, mounting expenses: In Delhi's Jangpura, why many senior citizens pin hopes on AAP's free treatment promise

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Dileep Khurana (65) and his wife Madhu (60) have spent a lot of money on various illnesses at private hospitals. Residents of a DDA flat in Sunlight Colony near Jangpura, Madhu has had thyroid, blood pressure, and diabetes while Dileep suffers from BP. The couple does not have any health insurance. Madhu said they prefer going to private hospitals despite the steep cost as the government ones "take a long time to give appointments and tests". So when Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal came calling on Monday to hand over the 'Kejriwal Kavach' card, the couple was relieved. This card guarantees free treatment to all Delhi voters over the age of 60 in government and private hospitals, under the party's newly launched Sanjeevani Yojana, if the AAP returns to power post the elections. The Khuranas, whose house was the first one Kejriwal visited, said if the AAP government wins and the city gets to have the scheme, it will take a load off their backs. "We've spent so much money on treatment in private hospitals," said Dileep, who had a small business of repair parts. Now, their sons look after the family and finances. "Last year, Madhu had to be hospitalised to get insulin which cost Rs 70,000, including the admission charges and tests. She has had diabetes for 20 years now," he added. "If the party comes to power, it will be a big help to us," said Madhu.

Promoting one of the biggest promises ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and former Deputy CM Manish Sisodia kicked off the registration process under the Sanjeevani scheme at Jangpura. Visiting homes around Sunlight Colony along with party workers, they handed over the cards to five-six eligible people. During his visit, Kejriwal personally informed residents about the scheme, checked their voter ID cards and assisted them with filling out registration forms. "Registration for the Mahila Samman Yojana and Sanjeevani Yojana has begun today. We started registration for Mahila Samman from the New Delhi constituency. Now, we have commenced registration for the Sanjeevani Yojana in the



Jangpura constituency. Here, we registered some senior citizens," he said. For Shyamendra Saini, who used to work as a civil draughtsman for 30 years till 2020 when his son secured a job as an architect at a private firm, said if this scheme works, it would be a major benefit for him and his family. He does not have health insurance and neither does his son. "I had taken insurance but couldn't pay the premium so the policy lapsed," the 62-year-old said. Saini has diabetes and goes for regular checkups at private hospitals near his Jangpura home, where he spends a good amount on tests and consultations. "It costs a minimum of Rs 1,000 per consultation. Tests can range from Rs 1,000-2,500," he said. Kishan Lal, a taxi driver, said his experience at the government-run mohalla clinics and dispensaries has not been good — there were no medicines available when he visited.

The 63-year-old, who suffers from diabetes, said he goes to Holy Family Hospital for checkups. "I spend around Rs 8,000-Rs 10,000 every month — half of my salary — on treatments," he added. He didn't get the card today. But he is hopeful that if he too gets it, and if the Kejriwal government comes to power again, the Sanjeevani Yojana will be of help to him. Announcing the drive on X (formerly Twitter), Kejriwal wrote, "... We registered some elderly people for this scheme today. All the elderly people of Delhi are like my parents, their treatment is my responsibility. Our team will register all the elderly by going door to door."

## In sync, Pune's choir groups share their love for carol singing: 'Our aim is to surprise and uplift'

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Choir groups across Pune have been pouring their hearts into perfecting carols that mark the true spirit of Christmas. From soulful hymns to lively new compositions, each group brings its own charm, spreading joy and community spirit through their melodies. "We started preparing for carols last month," shared Noel Vinod, 19, Choir Master of Holy Trinity Church, Sangvi. "Though the time was short, the excitement and joy carried us through. Our group of 13 to 14 young bloods may not have the best voices, but we bring a whole lot of vigour and enthusiasm to every hymn we sing," he added. For Sandra Sushinathan Pillay, 25, a choir member of the same Holy Trinity Church group, carols are more than just a tradition. "Carols are an invitation and proclamation that mark both Advent and the New Year, with Christ at its centre. It's a time for all of us to sing and dance out our joy over the festive season—a delightful break from the monotony of daily life." Adding their unique touch, Noel explained their innovative approach. "We mix languages and add our lively flavours to hymns. Sometimes, we even introduce new numbers. Our aim is to surprise and uplift with every performance!" he said.

Neville Mendes, 25, from Our Lady Consoler of the Afflicted (OLCA) Church, Pimpri, said that carols are a year-round effort. "We've been practising for the carols for a couple of weeks now but honestly, it's a continuous effort. It's not just about preparing for an event—it's about leading the congregation in prayer with music that uplifts," he shared.

For Mendes, carols carry a deeper message. "The tune of carols marks the advent of Christmas. They elevate the joy of celebrations and reveal the deeper meaning of Christmas. It's not just about the melodies; it's about the message they carry," he said. His choir of 15 members works meticulously, "paying attention to the smallest details to ensure every word is in sync and tune, creating a



beautiful harmonious effect." At Holy Cross Church in Dapodi, Leonel Vaz, 30, highlighted the impact of their carolling efforts. "This year, we continued the tradition of carolling from house to house, spreading festive cheer and keeping the Christmas spirit alive. Additionally, we donated 700 blankets to the less privileged and distributed sweets, spreading warmth and joy to those in need," Vaz said.

For Vaz, carols are more than music. "They remind us of the core values of Christmas—love, kindness, and the celebration of life. Carol singing is about building connections and truly embodying the spirit of Christmas," he said. Meanwhile, at St Francis Xavier Church, Chinchwad, 19-year-old Chrystal Cyril Nicholas talks about how her group of 14 members began practising in mid-November. "To get each carol just right, we break the songs down into sections and practice them individually. Regular rehearsals help us refine the delivery and ensure every carol feels meaningful and special," Nicholas said. This year, her group tried something new. "We have included psalms we have not sung before and focused on liturgical hymns that actively engage the congregation. Together, we want to spread the message of hope and faith in a way that resonates deeply with the spirit of the season," Nicholas said.

## 'Happy to return home, was treated well in India': 12 Bangladeshi fishermen released from West Bengal jail after Centre's prod



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

In a gesture of goodwill, India released 12 Bangladeshi fishermen jailed in West Bengal. The fishermen are now on their way back home. This was after the Central government asked the West Bengal government to "withdraw from prosecution" of the fishermen, who had entered Indian waters mid-September when their boat capsized near Patharpratima. They had been arrested under Section 14 of the Foreigners Act and sent to jail. Debabrata Roy Chowdhury, controller of the Subsidiary Correctional Home, was present during the release. He said, "We obliged the court order. The 12 Bangladeshi nationals were released and handed over to state administrative officials." The move

comes at a time when 95 Indian fishermen are lodged in jails in Bangladesh.

On Tuesday around noon, the Bangladeshi fishermen were released from the Diamond Harbor Subsidiary Correctional Home and handed over to the district officials of South 24 Parganas. "I am so happy to return home. I thank the government. We were safe and kept well here. The jail authorities took good care of us," said Sakil Muhammed, one of the released fishermen, speaking with mediapersons after his release. "The recently developed perception that India is not safe or proper for us, is wrong. I was treated well here. I also wish that those Indian fishermen who are now in Bangladesh jails be released too," added Muhammed. According to the district administration, the 12 fishermen will be kept at a temporary shelter in South 24 Parganas before they are handed over to the Border Security Force who will then send them back to Bangladesh.

In October, six trawlers from West Bengal entered Bangladesh waters, following which the Bangladesh Navy detained 95 persons, who were later arrested. The move comes at a time when India-Bangladesh relations are strained and the latter has sent a diplomatic note seeking extradition of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Hasina had fled to India after her regime fell in Bangladesh amidst mass protests. Earlier, India had expressed concerns over the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das, a monk, and alleged atrocities on minorities in Bangladesh.

## In case filed by parents of R G Kar rape-murder victim, Calcutta High Court says 'don't want to intervene'

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

R G Kar The counsel for the parents of the victim stated that the parents do not have confidence in the current investigation led by the CBI. (Express Photo) The counsel for the parents of the victim stated that the parents do not have confidence in the current investigation led by the CBI. The Calcutta High Court said Tuesday the court does not want to intervene in the new case filed by the parents of the trainee doctor who was raped and murdered in R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. However, the single bench of Justice Tirthankar Ghosh sought clarification from the Supreme Court as to whether it can take up the matter.

The bench observed that the division bench of the Chief Justice had earlier ordered a CBI probe into the R G Kar rape and murder case, and that progress reports would have to be submitted regularly in that case. Hence, the bench said there is court supervision. Last week, the parents of the victim had moved the Calcutta High Court, seeking a fresh investigation into the case. In court, their counsel stated that the parents do not have confidence in the current investigation which is being led by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). They appealed to the court to order a fresh investigation "soon" as all the evidence "has disappeared in the name of this investigation". The CBI counsel in court had stated that a chargesheet was filed and after that, three status reports had been filed at "regular intervals". The par-



ents' counsel submitted that they are not standing in the way of the trial but would like an investigation into those aspects that have "not been investigated" by CBI. The single bench of Justice Tirthankar Ghosh had then asked CBI to be made a party in the case. The matter will be next heard on January 25. Sandip Ghosh, former principal of R G Kar Medical College and Hospital, and Abhijit Mondol, then officer-in-charge of Tala police station, were granted bail in the case by a court in Kolkata on December 14 after the CBI failed to submit a charge sheet within 90 days. On September 14, CBI arrested them for allegedly tampering with evidence in the case and allegedly trying to "hush up" the August 9 incident.

## Calcutta High Court rejects bail pleas of Partha Chatterjee, 4 others in SSC scam case

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

SSC scam case In November, a two-judge division bench of the high court delivered a split verdict on a bail petition moved by Chatterjee and the four other accused in the case. The Calcutta High Court has rejected the bail pleas of former education minister Partha Chatterjee and four others in the School Service Commission (SSC) recruitment scam case which is being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The others who had submitted bail pleas include former senior officials of the education department Subiresh Bhattacharjee, Ashok Kumar Saha, Kalyanmoy Ganguly, and Santi Prasad Sinha. The bench of Justice Tapabrata Chakraborty observed that if the accused are released on bail, it will be an injustice to the deserving candidates, besides having an impact on the education system as a whole. The court further observed that it was unable to understand why the chief secretary and the state administration were completely silent on the matter.

In November, a two-judge division bench of the high court delivered a split verdict on a bail petition moved by Chatterjee and the four other accused in the case. While Justice Arijit Banerjee approved the bail pleas of all who appealed before the bench, Justice Apurba Sinha Ray decided against granting bail to Chatterjee and the others. Among the other accused, Bhattacharjee served as the former state SSC chairman and subsequently as vice-chancellor of North Bengal University, while Saha acted as the former assistant secretary to the commission during the time period of the scam. Ganguly was president of the



state secondary education board during the period, and Sinha is the former advisor to the state SSC. Last Friday, the Supreme Court granted conditional bail to Partha Chatterjee in connection with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) probe into the alleged teacher recruitment scam in the state. The bench of Justice Surya Kant and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan said the suspended TMC leader must be released on February 1, 2025, or earlier if the trial court was able to complete certain proceedings before then. Directing the trial court to expedite the proceedings in the case, it also said that the TMC leader should not be appointed to any public office upon release, but can remain an MLA. In July 2022, the ED arrested the then West Bengal industries and commerce minister and senior Trinamool Congress leader Partha Chatterjee in connection with irregularities in recruitment to the West Bengal School Service Commission. Chatterjee was a minister of state in the education department when the alleged irregularities occurred.

## HC seeks Delhi Police response in ex-AAP councillor Tahir Hussain bail plea in IB staffer murder case

Tahir Hussain Hussain who was arrested on March 16, 2020 over the alleged killing Ankit Sharma during the 2020 North East Delhi riots is seeking bail on grounds of long period of incarceration. The Delhi High Court on Tuesday sought a response from the Delhi Police in a regular bail plea moved by former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Hussain in a murder case of an Intelligence Bureau (IB) staffer during the 2020 North East Delhi riots. Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta issued a notice to the Delhi Police and posted the matter for consideration on January 15, 2025. Hussain who was arrested on March 16, 2020 over the alleged killing Ankit Sharma during the 2020 North East Delhi riots is seeking bail on grounds of long period of incarceration and said that of the 20 prosecution witnesses examined so far by the trial court, most of the eyewitnesses have not supported the prosecution case.

Hussain has also highlighted that the co-accused people in the case have been granted bail by the High Court.

IB security assistant Sharma is among the 53 people killed in the communal riots that hit the district. The body of Sharma, 25, was recovered from a drain in Khajuri Khas near Chand Bagh. The post-mortem report stated that there

were 51 injury marks caused by sharp-edged weapons and blunt force. Sharma's father, in his complaint lodged at Dayalpur police station, had claimed that he had strong suspicion that his son was killed under the orders of Hussain.

Sharma's father had informed the police on February 26, 2020, that his son, who had stepped out of the house on February 25 evening to see what was happening in his trouble-torn locality hit by the riots, did not return home. The AAP had suspended Hussain after he was named as an accused in the case. The trial court framed charges against Hussain and 10 others in March last year under Indian Penal Code sections 147 (punishment for rioting); 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon); 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc.); 302 (punishment for murder); 365 (kidnapping or abduction with intent secretly and wrongfully to confine person); 120B (punishment of criminal conspiracy); 149 (every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object); 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant); and 153A (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot).

# How one man became a Ukrainian traitor and Russian spy



ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine, GNS News Agency, Dec 27 The Ukrainian citizen said his father was a Soviet intelligence agent in Cuba during the Cold War, posing as a translator, and his cousin works with the Russian security service. That made him a prime candidate for wartime espionage. Kolesnikov told Reuters he agreed to supply the Russians with information about military sites and troop movements in his home city of Zaporizhzhia, and report back on where their missiles had landed.

He had supported the concept of the "Russian World", a doctrine backed by President Vladimir Putin that emphasizes Moscow's historical and cultural ties to neighbouring nations, and one which some hardliners in Moscow have used to justify intervention abroad in defence of Russian speakers. "I didn't do this for money," he said.

But he had regrets: That the inaccuracy of some missile strikes led to civilians being killed, and that the war - which he had assumed would be a swift, clinical affair - has dragged on for almost three years, devastating his homeland. "I thought they (the Russians) would advance rapidly," said the 52-year-old, a former state land manager who grew up in a Soviet Ukraine. "It turned out like it always does. They plan one thing and another thing happens entirely." His wife left him when he was arrested for treason, taking their 11-year-old child with her.

Reuters spoke to Kolesnikov in a police facility in Zaporizhzhia in April, in the presence of an officer from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), five months before he was sentenced to life in prison for treason. His is among more than 3,200 state treason cases launched by Ukrainian authorities since Russia's full-scale invasion, including feeding information to Moscow to assist missile strikes and spreading Russian propaganda, according to the SBU.

Reuters interviews with three informants convicted by Ukraine and two SBU Ukrainian counter-intelligence officers spoke to the divided loyalties felt by some people in Ukraine, where older generations grew up as part of the Soviet Union before the bloc's breakup in 1991 ended the Cold War. Vasyl Maluk, the head of the SBU, told Reuters that Ukrainian counter-espionage work to root out Russian agents was key to victory in the war, adding that the Kremlin had been "secretly infiltrating" the country and recruiting assets for decades.

"Our systematic approach is yielding results," he added. "We have purged enemy agents in all spheres of life and continue to do so." Russia's foreign ministry and Federal Security Service (FSB) didn't respond to requests for comment for this article. Ukrainian spies have also played a prominent role in the conflict, which erupted in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion.

Last week, the SBU orchestrated a bomb blast outside a Moscow apartment block that killed Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, according to a source at the agency. This was the latest in a string of targeted assassinations that Moscow says Ukraine has carried out during the war. In November 2022, Reuters interviewed several residents of Kherson who supplied information to help Kyiv

conduct strikes on Russian targets to help Ukraine recapture the southern city.

HOW TO CATCH A SPY SBU counter-espionage work has identified different categories of citizens prone to being recruited by the enemy, according to an SBU officer interviewed by Reuters in Zaporizhzhia who identified himself by the call sign "Fanat". They are people who were openly pro-Russian or have family links to Soviet or Russian intelligence; relatives of captured Ukrainian soldiers; and the family of people living in occupied territory. Kolesnikov was category one, he added.

He was convicted in September of supplying the Russians with the coordinates and other information about dozens of mainly military sites, according to his treason verdict, which was seen by Reuters. It didn't say how many of those locations were hit by strikes. Kolesnikov's lawyer said he mainly helped verify the aftermath of strikes rather than helping identify targets.

Kolesnikov told Reuters that in September 2022 he passed information to the Russians about a meeting of local officials that was meant to happen at the Sunrise Hotel in Zaporizhzhia. The building was struck by a Russian missile the following day, on Sept. 22, 2022, according to the verdict. The meeting didn't take place, for undetermined reasons, though the strike devastated the building in Zaporizhzhia's old town, killing a civilian and hurting five others, the verdict said. The hotel conference hall and cratered summer terrace remained strewn with rubble during a Reuters visit to the site in April this year. Fanat said SBU agents began closing in on Kolesnikov after the suspect's car was spotted by witnesses at the site of a Russian strike in March last year that narrowly missed a television tower and hit an apartment block, killing several civilians. Kolesnikov told Reuters he was there afterwards checking on the results of the attack.

Ukrainian agents traced Kolesnikov's phone to numerous impact sites, according to Fanat. The breakthrough in the case came after they planted a bug in his car and overheard him discussing his plans with Vitaly Kusakin, a friend who worked as a chauffeur for a local official, and whom Kolesnikov had recruited to help gather intelligence, the SBU officer said. Kolesnikov was arrested at his home on May 5, 2023.

Testifying at his trial at a district court behind closed doors in Zaporizhzhia, Kolesnikov said he was opposed to the Ukrainian government, but not Ukraine itself, the verdict said. He pleaded "partially" guilty to the treason charges against him, saying he had not known that his cousin who asked him to supply information was a member of the FSB at the time, according to the verdict. A panel of judges rejected that plea and found him guilty of "intentional actions" involving "providing assistance to a representative of a foreign state in conducting subversive activities". Maluk, the head of the SBU, said his agency had uncovered 47 Russian agent networks last year and 46 more this year, comprising people ranging from lawmakers to active servicemen, he added, without identifying the suspects. As the war has raged on, reducing the ease of travel from one side of the front to the other, recruitment methods have had to change, security officials said. Before the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian nationals were mainly recruited during trips to Russia, but approaches are more often made online now using social networks, the SBU said. "People who express pro-Kremlin views are identified and found based on their comments, and then contacted," it said.

The motives for acting as an informant range from ideological to promises of financial or other rewards and blackmail or other threats, the SBU said. For Kolesnikov, who says he provided his services freely, the future looks bleak. He told Reuters his only hope of salvaging his life was to be released in a future prisoner swap with Russia. "I would like to be exchanged," he sighed. "But that doesn't depend on me." The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here.

# South Korean opposition puts off plan to impeach acting president Han

SEOUL, GNS News Agency, Dec 27, South Korea's main opposition party vowed on Tuesday to impeach acting president Han Duck-soo but reversed an earlier plan and decided to wait until later in the week, party officials said, as the risk of further political uncertainty heightened. The move comes as the political is reeling from impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived bid to impose martial law on Dec. 3 that he partly blamed on the opposition's propensity to impeach government officials.

Opposition Democratic Party (DP) floor leader Park Chan-dae said the party will wait until later this week to decide whether to go ahead with the plan to impeach Han. Earlier, the party said it would introduce a bill to impeach Han on Tuesday. The DP, which has a majority in parliament, is taking the step after Han postponed signing legislation to launch a special counsel investigation into President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed bid to impose martial law.

It said Han was acting against the will of the people, effectively aiding Yoon, whose powers have been suspended after parliament voted to impeach him on Dec. 14. Once an impeachment bill is submitted then formally introduced at a plenary session, it must be voted on within 24 to 72 hours. If Han is impeached, the finance minister would be next in line to lead the government as acting president, according to South Korean law. Prime Minister Han took over from the suspended Yoon, who faces a Constitutional Court review on whether to oust him or restore his powers. "Acting president Han made it clear at today's cabinet meeting that he would not greenlight the special prosecution law," the DP's Park said.

"There is no way to interpret it other than that he is delaying time." With its parliamentary majority, the DP passed bills this month to appoint a special counsel to pursue charges of insurrection, among others, against the conservative Yoon, and to investigate his wife over a luxury bag scandal and other allegations. An unnamed high-ranking official from Han's office called the DP's move to impeach Han "highly regrettable", the Newsis news agency said. "The international community is currently supporting the acting president system ... Impeachment could undermine that trust, and adversely affect the economy," Newsis cited the official as saying. Han's office could not immediately be reached for comment.

Yoon's ruling People Power Party (PPP) has accused the DP of threatening to topple the government for not complying with their demands, at a time when South Korea's key ally the United States has just restarted planned communications with the country under Han's stewardship. Yoon has yet to announce his legal team or appear publicly since



a televised statement on Dec. 14, the day parliament impeached him. Seok Dong-hyeon, a lawyer advising Yoon, told reporters on Tuesday that Yoon is unlikely to appear for questioning on Wednesday, Christmas Day, in answer to a summons by authorities investigating his move to impose martial law. Yoon is prioritising the Constitutional Court's trial, Seok said.

# Aisake Eke elected as Tonga's new Prime Minister

Suva: Aisake Valu Eke was elected as Prime Minister of Tonga on Tuesday. He will replace Hu'akavameiliku Siaoisi Sovaleni, who resigned on December 9. Valu Eke, who will be officially sworn in as Prime Minister in February, was first elected to parliament in 2010 and served as minister of finance between 2014 and 2017. He will be in office for less than a year before the South Pacific island nation of 105,000 people holds its next election in November 2025. Tonga's Parliament consists of 17 lawmakers elected by the public and nine who are nobles, elected by a group of hereditary chiefs. Two members of Parliament were unable to vote. Aisake Eke studied at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, where he was awarded a PhD for his thesis "An exploratory study on the quality of service in the public sector in Tonga" completed in 2013. A former Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, he was first elected to the Legislative Assembly at the November 2010 general election as MP for Tongatapu 5. Though close to the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands, and despite having considered running as a party member, he stood as an independent, taking the seat with 24.1 per cent of the vote and a 63-vote margin.

# UK PM says festival is reminder of what's really important, such as family, friendship, fellowship



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

London: Keir Starmer has said he will be hoping for peace in the Middle East, the birthplace of the Christmas story, and a brighter future for all in his first festive message since being elected British Prime Minister. In a video message released by Downing Street ahead of Christmas Day on Wednesday, Starmer attempts to strike an optimistic tone and encourages people to "look after those around us". He extended his special gratitude to the armed forces and frontline workers who will be helping people up and down the country.

"This Christmas, I will be hoping for peace, particularly in the Middle East as the birthplace of the Christmas story," said Starmer. "I'll be looking towards a better, brighter future for every person and celebrating the joy and wonder that Christmas brings," he said. He said the festival was a reminder of what's really important, such as family, friendship and fellowship between all people. He added: "Being

there for one another - in these celebrations, as well as the more difficult times. I'd like especially to thank those who will spend their Christmas serving others this year.

In our NHS [National Health Service] and emergency services, our Armed Forces and the churches and charities that will welcome every person this Christmas." "Because I know that this is not an easy time for everyone, and my thoughts are with all those who are lonely this Christmas. Having a tough time, missing a loved one. You are not alone, because as Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Christmas story reminds all of us to look out to one another. To care for one another. And to reach after those around us," he said.

Earlier, Downing Street indicated that Starmer and his family would spend Christmas at the Prime Minister's country retreat of Chequers in Buckinghamshire. He is then set to travel abroad "for a few days" for his first family holiday since taking charge at 10 Downing Street following the July general election. It comes as King Charles III set a new tradition for his customary Christmas Day message and chose Fitzrovia Chapel in London for its recording. It is understood that his speech will reflect on international, national and personal challenges and how they can be overcome by communities supporting one another. "The living Christmas tree shown in this year's broadcast was decorated with sustainable decorations including pinecones, metal bells, twisted glass and glass baubles," Buckingham Palace said. It added that 2024 marks the first time a British monarch's Christmas message has been filmed outside a royal residence since 2006 when the late Queen Elizabeth II filmed a message at Southwark Cathedral in London.

# Global hunger crisis deepens as major nations skimp on aid

GNS News Agency, Dec 27, It's a simple but brutal equation: The number of people going hungry or otherwise struggling around the world is rising, while the amount of money the world's wealthiest nations are contributing toward helping them is dropping. The result: The United Nations says that, at best, it will be able to raise enough money to help about 60% of the 307 million people it predicts will need humanitarian aid next year. That means at least 117 million people won't get food or other assistance in 2025.

The U.N. also will end 2024 having raised about 46% of the \$49.6 billion it sought for humanitarian aid across the globe, its own data shows. It's the second year in a row the world body has raised less than half of what it sought. The shortfall has forced humanitarian agencies to make agonizing decisions, such as slashing rations for the hungry and cutting the number of people eligible for aid. The consequences are being felt in places like Syria, where the World Food Program (WFP), the U.N.'s main food distributor, used to feed 6 million people. Eyeing its projections for aid donations earlier this year, the WFP cut the number it hoped to help there to about 1 million people, said Rania Dagash-Kamara, the organization's assistant executive director for partnerships and resource mobilization. Dagash-Kamara visited the WFP's Syria staff in March. "Their line was, 'We are at this point taking from the hungry to feed the starving,'" she said in an interview.

U.N. officials see few reasons for optimism at a time of widespread conflict, political unrest and extreme weather, all factors that stoke famine. "We have been forced to scale back appeals to those in most dire need," Tom Fletcher, U.N. under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, told Reuters. Financial pressures and shifting domestic politics are reshaping some wealthy nations' decisions about where and how much to give. One of the U.N.'s largest donors - Germany - already shaved \$500 million in funding from 2023 to 2024 as part of general belt tightening. The country's cabinet has recommended another \$1 billion reduction in humanitarian aid for 2025. A new parliament will decide next year's spending plan after the federal election in February.

Humanitarian organizations also are watching to see what U.S. President-elect Donald Trump proposes after he begins his second term in January. Trump advisers have not said how he will approach humanitarian aid, but he sought to slash U.S. funding in his first term. And he has hired advisers who say there is room for cuts in foreign aid. The U.S. plays the leading role in preventing and combating starvation across the world. It provided \$64.5 billion in humanitarian aid over the last five years. That was at least 38% of the total such contributions recorded by the U.N. The majority of humanitarian funding comes from just three wealthy donors: the U.S., Germany and the European Commission. They provided 58% of the \$170 billion recorded by the U.N. in response to crises from 2020 to 2024. Three other powers - China, Russia and India - collectively contributed less than 1% of U.N.-tracked humanitarian funding over the same period, according to a Reuters review of U.N. contributions data.

The inability to close the funding gap is one of the major reasons the global system for tackling hunger and preventing famine is under enormous strain. The lack of adequate funding - coupled with the logistical hurdles of assessing need and delivering food aid in conflict zones, where many of the worst hunger crises exist - is taxing efforts to get enough aid to the starving. Almost 282 million people in 59 countries and territories were facing high levels of acute food insecurity in 2023. Reuters is documenting the global hunger-relief crisis in a series of reports, including from hard-hit Sudan, Myanmar and Afghanistan. The failure of major nations to pull their weight in funding for global initiatives has been a persistent Trump complaint. Project 2025, a set of policy proposals drawn up by Trump backers for his second term, calls on humanitarian agencies to work harder to collect more funding from other donors and says this should be a condition for additional U.S. aid. On the campaign trail, Trump tried to distance himself from the controversial Project 2025 blueprint. But after winning the election, he chose one of its key architects, Russell Vought, to run the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, a powerful body that helps decide presidential priorities and how to pay for them. For secretary of state, the top U.S. diplomat, he tapped Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who has a record of supporting foreign aid. Project 2025 makes particular note of conflict - the very factor driving most of today's worst hunger crises. "Humanitarian aid is sustaining war economies, creating financial incentives for warring parties to continue fighting, discouraging governments from reforming, and propping up malign regimes," the blueprint says. It calls for deep cuts in international disaster aid by ending programs in places controlled by "malign actors." Billionaire Elon Musk has been tapped by Trump to co-lead the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), a new body that will examine waste in government spending. Musk said this month on his social media platform, X, that DOGE would



look at foreign aid.

The aid cuts Trump sought in his first term didn't pass Congress, which controls such spending. Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and close Trump ally on many issues, will chair the Senate committee that oversees the budget. In 2019, he called "insane" and "short-sighted" a Trump proposal to cut the budget for foreign aid and diplomacy by 23%. Graham, Vought, Rubio and Musk did not respond to questions for this report.

OLYMPICS AND SPACESHIPSSo many people have been hungry in so many places for so long that humanitarian agencies say fatigue has set in among donors. Donors receive appeal after appeal for help, yet have limits on what they can give. This has led to growing frustration with major countries they view as not doing their share to help. Jan Egeland was U.N. humanitarian chief from 2003 to 2006 and now heads the Norwegian Refugee Council, a nongovernmental relief group. Egeland said it is "crazy" that a tiny country like Norway is among the top funders of humanitarian aid. With a 2023 gross national income (GNI) less than 2% the size of America's, Norway ranked seventh among governments who gave to the U.N. that year, according to a Reuters review of U.N. aid data. It provided more than \$1 billion. Two of the five biggest economies - China and India - gave a tiny fraction as much. China ranked 32nd among governments in 2023, contributing \$11.5 million in humanitarian aid. It has the world's second-largest GNI. India ranked 35th that year, with \$6.4 million in humanitarian aid. It has the fifth-largest GNI.

Egeland noted that China and India each invested far more in the type of initiatives that draw world attention. Beijing spent billions hosting the 2022 Winter Olympics, and India spent \$75 million in 2023 to land a spaceship on the moon. "How come there is not more interest in helping starving children in the rest of the world?" Egeland said. "These are not developing countries anymore. They are having Olympics ... They are having spaceships that many of the other donors never could dream of."

Liu Pengyu, spokesman for the Chinese embassy in Washington, said China has always supported the WFP. He noted that it feeds 1.4 billion people within its own borders. "This in itself is a major contribution to world food security," he said. India's ambassador to the U.N. and its Ministry of External Affairs did not respond to questions for this report. To analyze giving patterns, Reuters used data from the U.N.'s Financial Tracking Service, which records humanitarian aid. The service primarily catalogs money for U.N. initiatives and relies on voluntary reporting. It doesn't list aid funneled elsewhere, including an additional \$255 million that Saudi Arabia reported giving this year through its own aid organization, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid & Relief Centre. RESTRICTIONS AND DELAYSWhen aid does come, it is sometimes late, and with strings attached, making it hard for humanitarian organizations to respond flexibly to crises. Aid tends to arrive "when the animals are dead, people are on the move, and children are malnourished," said Julia Steets, director of the Global Public Policy Institute, a think tank based in Berlin. Steets has helped conduct several U.N.-sponsored evaluations of humanitarian responses. She led one after a drought-driven hunger crisis gripped Ethiopia from 2015 to 2018. The report concluded that while famine was avoided, funding came too late to prevent a huge spike in severe acute malnutrition in children. Research shows that malnutrition can have long-term effects on children, including stunted growth and reduced cognitive abilities. Further frustrating relief efforts are conditions that powerful donors place on aid. Donors dictate details to humanitarian agencies, down to where food will go. They sometimes limit funding to specific U.N. entities or nongovernmental organizations. They often require that some money be spent on branding, such as displaying donors' logos on tents, toilets and backpacks. Aid workers say such earmarking has forced them to cut rations or aid altogether. The U.S. has a long-standing practice of placing restrictions on nearly all of its contributions to the World Food Program, one of the largest providers of humanitarian food assistance. More than 99% of U.S. donations to the WFP carried restrictions in each of the last 10 years, according to WFP data reviewed by Reuters.

## Fresh US-China trade war breaks over chips, 'connecting economies' like India could gain



In what hints at the trade relation between the United States (US) and China going forward under incoming President Donald Trump, the two largest economies have got into a fresh tit-for-tat trade restriction. After the US announced export restrictions on computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips, China on Tuesday retaliated by banning export of gallium, germanium, antimony, and other key high-tech materials to the US. The fresh trade war assumes significance as "connecting economies" that are preserved as neutral and do not fall into the US or China camp, such as India, have benefited from the geopolitical tensions between the US and China since Trump's first term. As China's export share in the US saw a decline from 2019, countries like Vietnam, Mexico, and India have witnessed an increase in export opportunities to the US.

China on Tuesday said it is banning export of gallium, germanium, antimony, and other key high-tech materials with potential military applications. Beijing had earlier, too, partly restricted exports of strategically important materials by asking exporters to apply for licences. The Chinese Commerce Ministry announced the move after the US expanded its list of Chinese companies subject to export controls on computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips. In a speech earlier this year, First Deputy Managing Director at International Monetary Fund (IMF) Gita Gopinath had said that evidence suggests non-aligned countries (such as India) did not play an impor-

tant role serving as connectors between rival blocs during the Cold War — likely because they had a much smaller economic footprint, and global supply chains were not yet developed. But today they have greater economic and diplomatic heft and are much more integrated into the global economy and their role as connectors this time can help attenuate some of the costs of fragmentation.

Gopinath had compared current trade fragmentation with that of the Cold War-period, stating that trade between rival Western and Eastern blocs was significantly depressed during the Cold War, relative to trade within these blocs. "Thus far, today's fragmentation is not significantly different from the initial years of the Cold War. However, compared to the average 'between-bloc trade shortfall' during the entire Cold-War-period, fragmentation so far is an order of magnitude smaller," she said. Explaining her cause of concern during the current period, Gopinath said that trade fragmentation is much more costly this time around because unlike the start of the Cold War when the ratio of goods trade to GDP was 16 per cent, now that ratio is 45 per cent. "Moreover, while back then countries within a bloc were taking off trade restrictions, now we are in an environment of growing protectionism with several countries turning inward. The potential role of non-aligned countries in the current trade frictions also makes the situation today different from the Cold War experience," she said. Notably, India is planning to increase the funding outlay for chip manufacturing incentive policy to \$15 billion from the \$10 billion it had committed for the first phase. Tata is building India's first commercial fabrication plant along with its Taiwanese partner Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) for a cost of more than Rs 91,000 crore. The government has also approved three assembly and testing plants, which are called ATMP and OSAT in chip parlance. The assembly and testing plants are less complex than the semiconductor fabrication plant. The first of these three plants was approved in June 2023, and is being built by US-based Micron Technology. Tata is building an assembly plant in Assam while the third facility is being built by CG Power and Industrial Solutions of the Murugappa Group, in partnership with Renesas Electronics of Japan.

## Rupee recovers from all-time low, rises 3 paise to 84.69 against US dollar

The rupee recovered from its all-time low level and settled for the day with gains of just 3 paise at 84.69 (provisional) against the US dollar in a range-bound trade on Tuesday, amid a positive trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said the rupee has been on a downtrend largely on the back of Donald Trump's rhetoric on BRICS currency, political instability in the Eurozone, weaker domestic macroeconomic indicators and unabated foreign portfolio outflows. US President-elect Trump on Saturday threatened a 100 per cent tariff on BRICS nations if they act to undermine the US dollar. Moreover, market participants are also awaiting cues from the upcoming RBI monetary policy on December 6, which will likely focus on balancing inflation and growth. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.75 and moved in a narrow range and touched an intra-day high of 84.64 and an all-time low of 84.76 against the greenback. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 12 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.72 against the dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.18 per cent at 106.25. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose by 1.11 per cent to USD 72.63 per barrel in futures trade.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary on Monday said in Parliament that the rupee remains one of the best-performing Asian currencies despite geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and other headwinds, indicating India's sound economic fundamentals. One of the main reasons for the depreciation of INR has been the broad-based strength of the USD, he said. "During CY 2024, Dollar Index has increased by about 4.8 per cent till November 19, 2024. More recently, the Dollar



Index touched 108.07 on November 22, 2024, its highest in more than a year, exerting pressure on emerging market currencies," he said. Further, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and uncertainty surrounding US elections results also added to the headwinds. The depreciation of a currency is likely to enhance export competitiveness, which in turn impacts the economy positively. On the other hand, depreciation may raise the prices of imported goods.

He further said, the RBI monitors key developments across the globe which may have an impact on USD-INR exchange rate. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed 597.67 points, or 0.74 per cent higher, at 80,845.75. The Nifty rose 181.10 points, or 0.75 per cent, to settle at 24,457.15. Traders said the persistent selling pressure by foreign funds added further strain on the currency. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 238.28 crore, according to exchange data.

## IndiGo takes Mahindra Electric to court alleging trademark infringement after automaker uses '6e' in name of new electric SUV



India's largest airline IndiGo has filed a case in the Delhi High Court against automobile major Mahindra & Mahindra's (M&M's) electric mobility arm, Mahindra Electric Automobile (MEAL), for using the airline's identifier code 6E in the name of its recently unveiled electric vehicle BE 6e. IndiGo has the registration for the "6E" trademark and uses it extensively in its branding and advertising. "The '6E' mark is an integral part of IndiGo's identity for the past 18 years and is a registered trademark that holds strong global recognition. The '6E' mark, whether standalone or in its variants and formative forms, is extensively used by IndiGo for its offerings and for goods and services provided in collaboration with trusted partners. Any unauthorised use of the "6E" mark, whether standalone or in any form, constitutes an infringement of IndiGo's rights, reputation, and goodwill. IndiGo is committed to taking all necessary and appropriate steps to safeguard its intellectual property and brand identity," the airline said in a statement. MEAL unveiled its electric-origin SUVs — BE 6e and XEV 9e — on November 26, and has applied for trademark registration for "BE 6e". In a filing with the stock exchanges, M&M said that it does not see any conflict with IndiGo pertaining the trademarks, and that along with MEAL, it is in talks with the airline to arrive at an "amicable solution". "...the Company (M&M) does not see a conflict as Mahindra's mark is 'BE 6e', not the standalone '6E'. It differs fundamentally from IndiGo's '6E', which represents an airline, eliminating any risk of confusion. The distinct styling further emphasizes

their uniqueness," M&M said, adding that the trademark registration filed by MEAL is specifically for vehicle class. "The Company and MEAL has taken on board the concerns that InterGlobe Aviation Limited ('IndiGo') have to infringement of their goodwill, which was not our intention. The Company and MEAL are engaged in discussions with them to find an amicable solution," the automobile company said. The case came up for hearing before the Delhi High Court on Tuesday, and is now likely to come up for hearing next week. The starting price for the BE 6e is Rs 18.90 lakh and it will be launched in a phased manner from January-end. MEAL expects to start deliveries towards the end of February or early March.

## Sumadhura Group eyes Rs.2,500 crore revenue with new uber luxury residential offering

Hyderabad: Sumadhura Group, a leading real estate player in South India will develop Palais Royale, an uber luxury project in Hyderabad with an estimated revenue potential of Rs.2,500 crore. Nestled in proximity to the thriving Financial District, Palais Royale will offer the residents a seamless connectivity to major business hubs, entertainment zones, and lifestyle destinations. It will spread across 7.35 acres of land parcel with a saleable area of 2.6 mn sq. ft, feature a magnificent 52-storeyed high-rise tower spread across three wings, and compose of 523 units of 4 & 5 bed residences. The project will also include five levels of basement parking, to be handed over in December 2029. Along with the high-end residences, the project will comprise a wide array of luxurious amenities and biophilic designs, inspired by a unique blend of nature and technology. Palais Royale will house an 85,000 sq. ft floating grand clubhouse, over 85% landscape area, and cutting-edge Luxury Tech integrations, a press release said.

## 'Arey, aurat kyu sex ke baare mein baat kar rahi hai?': Ahsaas Channa highlights the stigma around women's sexual desires



In an interview with Hauterfly, the actor highlighted how society often places excessive importance on male pleasure, celebrating men's sexual experiences as a form of achievement. "If a woman is saying, 'I've not had sex for a very long time, I'm h\*\*ny'... and they just flip calling her a s\*\*t (sic)." She continued, "Male pleasure ko bohot zyada mahatwa diya jaata hai... ki 'tu score kiya... arey tuijhe sex kyu nahi mill raha hai' (Male pleasure is given too much importance... like 'you scored... why aren't you getting sex?'). But if we say the same thing to a woman, then it's frowned upon... ki arey, aurat kyu sex ke baare mein baat kar rahi hai? (Like, why is a woman talking about sex?)" This disparity in how male and female sexual behaviour is perceived reflects deeper societal biases that influence how women's worth is often linked to their sexual history.

Why are there such stark double standards?

Gurleen Baruah, existential psychotherapist at That Culture Thing, says, "Much of it stems from deeply ingrained societal and cultural narratives. Historically, men were seen as protectors and providers, roles that associated them with dominance, autonomy, and control. Over time, this dominance extended to how their sexual behaviours were viewed." On the other hand, women were traditionally assigned the role of nurturers, with their worth tied to purity and chastity. Their sexuality was policed under the guise of protection, reinforcing the belief that women's sexual autonomy needed to be controlled, often by men. Even today, she admits, these perceptions persist, reinforced by media, cultural conditioning, and outdated beliefs. "Men are often praised for their sexual experiences, which are seen as

achievements, while women face judgment and derogatory labels for similar choices. There's also a lingering notion, rooted in outdated evolutionary psychology, that men are naturally wired to seek variety. At the same time, women are biologically programmed for selectivity and nurturing—ideas that have little scientific grounding yet continue to shape societal attitudes." Baruah stresses, "The irony is that we no longer live in a world where these traditional roles hold relevance. Women are just as autonomous and capable as men and sexuality should be seen as a personal and equal experience." Creating a supportive environment where women can express their sexuality without fear starts with comprehensive sexual education that normalises conversations on consent, equality, and patriarchy from a young age. Creating a supportive environment where women can express their sexuality without fear starts with comprehensive sexual education that normalises conversations on consent, equality, and patriarchy from a young age. (Source: Freepik)

Role of s\*\*t-shaming in perpetuating harmful gender norms around sexuality s\*\*t-shaming is a harmful practice rooted in traditional gender norms and patriarchal values, targeting women who openly discuss or express their sexuality. "By labelling them with derogatory terms like 's\*\*t' or 'wh\*\*e', society seeks to control their autonomy and confine them to outdated roles of submissiveness and restraint," highlights Baruah. This judgment is perpetuated by both men and women, reflecting deep-seated fears about female sexual agency. The psychological toll is profound, Baruah says, often leading to lowered self-esteem, shame, and even behaviors driven by rebellion or a need for validation. Slut-shaming is not about morality; it is a tool of control that undermines women's worth, autonomy, and equality. Creating a healthier, more supportive environment where women feel comfortable expressing their sexual desires. Creating a supportive environment where women can express their sexuality without fear starts with comprehensive sexual education that normalises conversations on consent, equality, and patriarchy from a young age. Baruah says that addressing patriarchal systems that control women's sexuality is essential, advocating for autonomy and equality in all spheres. Media, families, and institutions must model positive discussions and celebrate diverse experiences of desire.

## Air pollution causes male infertility while prolonged exposure to road traffic noise causes female infertility: Study

A study published in the BMJ Journal recently has linked exposure to two common environmental factors — air pollution and road traffic noise — to infertility in men and women. According to the study, long-term exposure to particulate matter (PM2.5) has a significant impact on male fertility, while women, particularly those above the age of 35, are more affected by prolonged exposure to road traffic noise. Researchers mentioned, "Among men, we observed that exposure to PM2.5 was associated with a higher risk of infertility, with similar sized hazard ratios in the two investigated age groups (30-36.9 and 37-45 years)."

It further added, "Among women, noise was associated with a higher risk of infertility in the 35-45 age group, whereas no association was observed in the 30-34.9 age group." Infertility is already a growing concern globally, with various factors including lifestyle choices, health conditions, and now, environmental factors playing a critical role. This study sheds light on how invisible pollutants can interfere with reproductive health, posing new challenges to both public health and individual well-being.

How does exposure to particulate matter (PM2.5) lead to reduced sperm count or impaired sperm quality in men?

Dr Suri Raju V, senior consultant urologist at Regal Superspecialty Hospital, Bengaluru, highlights that exposure to PM2.5, tiny particles less than 2.5 micrometres, is increasingly recognised as a significant factor affecting male fertility. These particles, when inhaled, enter the bloodstream and cause harm, primarily by inducing oxidative stress. PM2.5 contains toxic elements like heavy metals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that generate reactive oxygen species (ROS). "Excessive ROS can damage sperm DNA, membranes, and impair sperm motility, leading to reduced sperm count and quality. Additionally, PM2.5 can disrupt hormone production, particularly testosterone, further impairing sperm production. It also triggers systemic inflammation, affecting reproductive organs like the testes, contributing to male infertility," he mentions. When exposure to high levels of air pollution is unavoidable, such as during commuting, wearing N95 masks can help filter out PM2.5 particles. When exposure to high levels of air pollution is unavoidable, such as during commuting, wearing N95 masks can help filter out PM2.5 particles. (Source: Freepik)

Specific biological mechanisms triggered by noise pollution that might lead to infertility in women The link between road traffic noise and infertility, particularly in women over 35, highlights the impact of environmental stress on reproductive health, says Dr Suri Raju. Prolonged noise exposure triggers several biological mechanisms that can affect fertility. Chronic Stress: Continuous noise above 55 decibels activates the stress response, raising cortisol levels, which can disrupt reproductive hormones like oestrogen and progesterone. This may lead to irregular menstrual cycles or conditions like anovulation (absence of ovulation) and amenorrhea (absence of menstruation).

Sleep Disruption: Noise pollution affects sleep, reducing melatonin levels, which are crucial for ovarian function and fertility. For women over 35, this exacerbates age-related fertility decline. Oxidative Stress and Inflammation: Noise increases oxidative stress and inflammation, potentially harming egg quality and endometrial receptivity. It can also contribute to conditions like endometriosis or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), which impact fertility. Cardiovascular and Metabolic Effects: Noise pollution is linked to hypertension and metabolic disorders, which affect blood flow to reproductive organs and can lead to fertility issues like PCOS. Preventive measures individuals can take to minimise exposure to air pollution and traffic noise With increasing evidence linking environmental pollutants like air pollution and noise to infertility, individuals, particularly those living in urban areas, can take several proactive steps to minimise their exposure, according to Dr Suri Raju: Air Quality Awareness: Staying informed about the air quality in your area is a crucial first step. On days when the air quality is poor, avoid outdoor activities, especially during peak traffic hours when pollution levels are at their highest. Indoor Air Quality Management: In addition to using air purifiers, regular ventilation and the use of houseplants known for their air-purifying properties, such



as snake plants and peace lilies, can help improve indoor air quality. Regularly cleaning and vacuuming with HEPA-filtered devices can also reduce particulate matter buildup indoors. Personal Protective Measures: When exposure to high levels of air pollution is unavoidable, such as during commuting, wearing N95 masks can help filter out PM2.5 particles. Using protective eyewear can also reduce irritation from airborne pollutants, which may indirectly affect overall health and well-being. Noise Reduction Strategies: For those exposed to constant road traffic noise, investing in soundproofing measures at home, such as double-glazed windows, heavy curtains, or soundproof panels, can significantly reduce indoor noise levels. Noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs can be used during sleep or relaxation to minimise noise disturbances.

## Yashoda Hospitals doctors treat 'lung attack' successfully for first time in India using Inari device



Hyderabad: Doctors at Yashoda Hospital have treated 'lung attack' successfully for the first time in India using Inari device. Mali Rishikesh, a 20-year-old student from Karimnagar district, was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition after a blood clot formed in the pulmonary artery, the blood vessel that carries oxygen-depleted blood from the heart to the lungs. The blood flow to the lungs was stopped due to a "pulmonary embolism".

For the first time in India, Yashoda Hospitals doctors removed the blood clots using a state-of-the-art medical device called 'pulmonary thrombectomy' and gave Rishikesh a new life. Yashoda Hospitals group, Director, Dr. Pavan Gorukanti, said Pulmonary embolism (PE) is like heart attack or brain stroke where a blood clot that typically originates from the deep veins of the legs breaks loose and travels through the bloodstream to the lungs, blocking a pulmonary artery or one of its branches.

## Parmeet Sethi reveals Aditya Chopra refused to cast him as DDLJ bad guy: 'You give very good vibes, I want someone...'



Apart from Raj and Simran, Aditya Chopra's directorial debut Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge gave audiences a host of iconic characters, including Parmeet Sethi's portrayal of the negative character Kuljeet Singh. In a recent interaction, Parmeet revealed that although Aditya Chopra had initially finalised another actor for the role, he insisted on auditioning for the part and ultimately won it. His wife, actor Archana Puran Singh, also shared how she helped him secure the role.

Speaking with comedian Bharti Singh and her husband Haarsh Limbachiya on their YouTube channel Bharti TV, Parmeet shared, "Somebody else had signed that role, but I wanted it. I couldn't sleep at night thinking it was my role. After 15 days, I called Aditya and asked him for an audition." Parmeet elaborated that Aditya was initially hesitant, stating that Parmeet gave off "very good vibes" due to his positive role in the popular television show Dastaan.

Parmeet explained that in DDLJ, Kuljeet Singh's character doesn't necessarily do anything outright wrong. "In fact, his fiancée is taken away by Raj (Shah Rukh Khan). So, to play this role, Aditya needed someone who really looked like a villain to make it convincing for the audience," he said.

Archana Puran Singh shared how she helped Parmeet crack the audition, saying, "I am from Delhi, and he is this sophisticated man from Mumbai. I know how those chauvinist men talk about women, so I taught him some slangs and mannerisms to capture how they tease women."

Recalling how Aditya eventually confirmed him for the role, Parmeet said, "Aditya came and watched my audition. He didn't speak for some time." Archana added that Karan Johar, who was an assistant on the film, was also present in the room, handling the camera. Parmeet continued, "So both Aditya and Karan were present at my audition. Aditya was quiet for a while, then stood up and said, 'You are my Kuljeet.'" The actor went on to share how ecstatic he was after bagging the role. "I was so happy that when I got inside my car, I shouted loudly," he recalled.

## Varun Dhawan protected Keerthy Suresh when other heroes asked for her phone number: 'Baby John, Bhabhi jaan'

Varun Dhawan spoke about protecting Keerthy Suresh when they were shooting in Mumbai. (Photo: Varun Dhawan/Instagram) Varun Dhawan spoke about protecting Keerthy Suresh when they were shooting in Mumbai. Actor Keerthy Suresh is making her Hindi film debut with the Varun Dhawan-starrer Baby John, and in a recent interview, Varun said that he took the responsibility to protect Keerthy when they were shooting in Mumbai. Varun said a lot of male actors would ask him about Keerthy, but since she was in a committed relationship, and had not made it public, he had to dodge them.

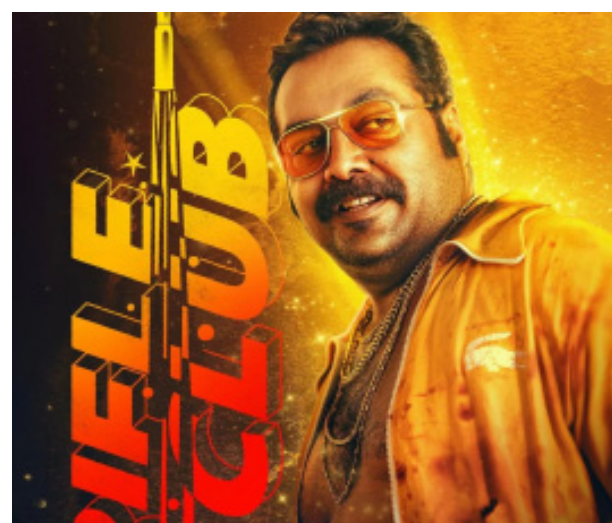
In a chat with Filmfare Middle East, Varun said that "the bonding between me and Keerthy is the word marriage." "She was preparing for marriage, I was married. From earlier, she was like, when I become a wife, I will this type of wife and look at her what kind of wife she has played in the film. She is the wife of the year," he said, to which Keerthy responded, "Kuch bhi!"

Varun then said that Keerthy is a "heartbreaker" and said that "nobody knew about her relationship for many years." Keerthy added, "People very close to me, they knew. Atlee and his wife, Varun knew from the time I met him, from two years. Otherwise, a lot of my very close friends knew, but we try to keep it very private."



Keerthy recently tied the knot with her longtime boyfriend Antony Thattil in Goa. "In Mumbai, when we were shooting... so many people would message me about her, so many heroes. I can't be like, 'Here's her number, let's meet,' because eventually, it's my responsibility to take care of her," Varun said, and concluded, "So the joke is Baby John, Bhabhi jaan."

## Anurag Kashyap on why Bollywood can never be as good as Malayalam cinema: 'It's all about money; obsession with box-office crores'



When jokingly asked if he is considering relocating to Kochi altogether, Anurag Kashyap laughed but didn't dismiss the idea. Anurag Kashyap plays the role of Dayanand Bare in director Aashiq Abu's Malayalam action thriller Rifle Club.

Legendary Bollywood filmmaker Anurag Kashyap is currently basking in the success of his latest acting venture, director Aashiq Abu's Malayalam action thriller Rifle Club, which marks the former's debut as a performer in the regional industry. Interestingly, it wasn't the makers of Rifle Club who first approached him to be a part of the film, but rather the other way around.

"When they announced the movie, I went to Aashiq Abu's Instagram page and wrote, 'Do you want a Hindi-speaking actor?' on his post. That's how it all started," Anurag revealed during a chat with Gulf News. "I thought Rifle Club sounded so cool. I knew Aashiq and Syam, and I thought, 'Something good will come out of this,'" he added. Penned by Syam Pushkaran, Dileesh Karunakaran and Suhas, Rifle Club also stars Vijayaraghavan, Dileesh Pothan, Vani Viswanath, Surabhi Lakshmi, Darshana Rajendran, Suresh Krishna, Vineeth Kumar, Unnimaya Prasad and rapper-songwriter Hanumankind in key roles.

Lauding the Malayalam film industry for its spirit of collaboration, Anurag also contrasted it with Bollywood's ego-driven star system. "The working ethics (in Malayalam) are phenomenal! There's no star system, no massive vanity vans. Everyone's together. Compare that to Bollywood, where actors are isolated, with entourages and vanity. That camaraderie reflects in the film. Hindi cinema could never make a Rifle Club. They'd rather remake it," he remarked, taking a jab at the Hindi film industry. Lauding the Malayalam film industry for its spirit of collaboration, Anurag Kashyap also contrasted it with Bollywood's ego-driven star system. Interestingly, it wasn't the makers of Rifle Club who first

approached Anurag Kashyap to be a part of the film, but rather the other way around. (Image: Aashiq Abu/Instagram)

"It's all about money — obsession with box-office crores (in Bollywood). Everything is a formula. Filmmakers can't sell originals without a reference point," he said, recalling how Bollywood eagerly sought the rights to remake the Malayalam film Manjummel Boys after it emerged as a blockbuster. "Honestly, I feel more at home in South India, where I've found my tribe... Here storytelling trumps all."

Watch Rifle Club trailer here: When jokingly asked if he is considering relocating to Kochi altogether, Anurag laughed but didn't dismiss the idea. "I'd love to. Kochi feels like a place where I can truly write. The people, the environment—everything fits," he said, describing the city as an ideal space for creative work. In his review of the movie, SCREEN's Avinash Ramachandran wrote, "This Aashiq Abu film is like a Varathan on steroids, and it helps that the team didn't rely on someone with a superstar stature to be at the centre of things, and allows every actor to play a superstar character."

## Asif Ali sets out to unravel mystery surrounding Anaswara Rajan as 'only corpses are left behind wherever she has been'

Rekhachithram trailer: After a remarkable 2024, during which he took on diverse roles and earned widespread acclaim for his performances, actor Asif Ali is poised to make a grand entry into 2025 with yet another investigative thriller. The trailer for his upcoming movie Rekhachithram (Sketch) is here, teasing a high-stakes, edge-of-the-seat cinematic experience. Featuring Anaswara Rajan also in a significant role, Rekhachithram promises to be a theatrical spectacle you won't want to miss. The 120-second trailer opens with an eagle-eye shot of a forest, where a man is seen walking through the middle of the wilderness. As the camera zooms closer, it becomes evident that he is an elderly person with age-related difficulty in walking. However, a closer look reveals his left hand soaked in blood, followed by a chilling shot of his lifeless body lying beneath a tree. Enter Asif Ali as the investigating officer. Although his character is portrayed as a mid-level police officer stationed at Malakkappara, the trailer highlights his relentless determination, showing him willing to wade through muck and grime to uncover the truth. As it unfolds, the promo video hints at a tangled narrative spanning two timelines — one set in the past and the other in the present.

## 'Pushpa Pushpa' singer Nakash Aziz on DSP's allegations against film's makers: 'South Indian music industry is the most ethical'

The Allu Arjun-Rashmika Mandanna starrer Pushpa: The Rule continues to dominate the box office, becoming the highest-grossing Indian film of 2024. The movie, which released on December 5, surpassed Rs 1,000 crore worldwide within seven days, and its magic shows no signs of slowing down. The film's music, composed by Devi Sri Prasad (DSP), has also garnered significant attention. Nakash Aziz, who sang the hit track "Eyy Bidda Ye Mera Adda" in Pushpa: The Rise, returned to lend his voice to "Pushpa Pushpa" in Pushpa: In an interview with SCREEN, Nakash discussed DSP's recent allegations against the film's producers, his experiences working across Hindi and South Indian film industries, and much more.

On DSP controversy DSP recently addressed controversies surrounding delays in delivering the background score, stating that he had faced complaints from the producers and had to fight for "credit" and "payments". When asked about this, Nakash said, "I actually don't know anything about it. How would I know when I haven't even heard that something like this happened? I find the South Indian music industry to be one of the most ethical and professional ones." When asked if he has ever faced issues with credit or payments, Nakash said, "Fortunately, I've worked with very respectable and ethical people. I do hear about such issues, but I've been lucky. In fact, there have been times when I forgot to send my bills, and music directors reminded me to do so. I feel blessed." On working with DSP and differences between music industries Calling DSP a "rockstar," Nakash spoke about his collaboration with the National Award-winning composer. "DSP has incredible energy. Even at 4 AM, he is in the studio. He's always making us laugh and is great with wordplay. He calls me 'Lambu Aziz' because of my height. There's so much to learn from him," he said. The singer, who has sung several Bollywood



tracks like "Naach Meri Jaan" (Tubelight) and "Cutiepie" (Ae Dil Hai Mushkil), noted the stark difference between Bollywood and South Indian music industries. "The South Indian industry works with a lot of clarity. In Bollywood, it's more of a melting pot with so many people bringing different ideologies. While this can be enriching, the corporate-like culture often results in too many inputs, which can be confusing and, at times, annoying. Too many minds is not a good thing sometimes," he said.

Having worked on the music for both Pushpa instalments, Nakash said, "The first film was tougher because we were experimenting so much. With the second one, everything was planned, making it more fun to work on. However, there was pressure to deliver, I won't lie. When something works so well, you have to give it your best to see that magic again. You start craving to witness that magic," he said.

## Shark Tank India's Anupam Mittal wears a 'magic' locket that records every conversation he has, identifies people by their voice

Entrepreneur Anupam Mittal, who appears as one of the 'sharks' on the reality show Shark Tank India, opened up about how artificial intelligence can change the world by citing the example of a company that he has recently invested in. Anupam said that the founders, two young Indian 'kids', have devised a 'locket' that virtually functions like 'magic'. In an interview, he described the gizmo's capabilities.

Appearing on Himesh Madaan's YouTube channel to promote the upcoming fourth season of Shark Tank India, Anupam spoke about the impact that AI is going to have on business all over the world. "There is a mindboggling opportunity in healthcare with AI. The cost of healthcare is growing, and everybody accumulates several test reports over the course of their lives. But if a healthcare-centric large-language model emerges, then your entire health history can be mapped. That's going to happen. Because in India, if we want to solve healthcare for 1.5 billion people, we can't implement western solutions, because it's too damn expensive. We cannot afford it," he said.

Anupam Mittal predicted that everybody 'will have a co-pilot in the next five years', making a reference to AI assistants. Citing the example of a company that he has personally invested in, Anupam said, "I'm actually the founding investor in a company that has created a locket... Sig-



nificantly advanced technology is no different than magic. Two kids have made this. You wear it on your neck, it listens to all your conversations, recognises who you're talking to based on their voice. It has access to your email and contact book. Based on that, I can just look at an app on my phone, and it will tell me exactly what we spoke about the last time, and what I should be talking to you about next." Anupam has appeared on every season of Shark Tank India, and will return for the fourth season as well. The show will return in January.

## Mohanlal recalls his prediction about Fahadh Faasil after his debut movie fiasco: 'It came true'

While there are many similarities between Mohanlal and Fahadh Faasil, the most significant is that both acting legends were introduced to the world of cinema by the same person: Fazil, who is also Fahadh's father. However, even as Fazil made a significant impact by introducing Mohanlal in his debut movie Manjil Virinja Pookkal (1980), with both receiving widespread acclaim for their works, he couldn't emulate the same success while introducing Fahadh in Kaiyethum Doorath (2002), as his performance faced heavy criticism. Fahadh immediately withdrew from cinema and took a long hiatus before making a successful return later in the decade, delivering a string of impressive performances and solidifying his place in the industry.

Meanwhile, Mohanlal recently took a trip down memory lane and shared how he believed in the talent of the Aavesham star even when the whole world didn't. The Malayalam superstar recalled that even before Fahadh's return from his break, he was confident the young actor would achieve great success in his life. "His father (Fazil) was my first director... Later, I had the opportunity to act with him (in director Prithviraj Sukumaran's Lucifer). Last month, we worked together on Empuraan (Lucifer's sequel). My family has known Fazil's family for a long time. I have known Fahadh since his school days," Mohanlal told Sun Music. Identity trailer | Tovino Thomas, Trisha promise the 'ultimate suspense action thriller spectacle of the season'

Mohanlal recently recalled that even before Fahadh Faasil's return from his break, he was confident the young actor would achieve great success in his life. Mohanlal with



Fahadh Faasil and his family. Fahadh's wife Nazriya Nazim and father Fazil are also seen. "Once, Fazil Sir asked me, 'How would you rate Fahadh as an actor?' This was when he was studying in the US. I told him, 'Let Fahadh return and act in films.' When he did return, my prediction came true. He is a great actor and is doing very well," the Malayalam legend added. Though they didn't share scenes, Mohanlal and Fahadh Faasil collaborated in director Salam Bappu's Red Wine (2013). They are now working together in Mahesh Narayanan's upcoming multi-starrer film, tentatively titled MMMN. The movie also stars Mammootty, Kunchacko Boban and Nayanthara in key roles.

## Allu Arjun humbled by YRF's best wishes on 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' success

Telugu superstar Allu Arjun, whose movie 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' has set the box-office on fire, has reacted to Yash Raj Films' congratulatory message on the success of his film. Recently, the social media handle of YRF posted a message in light of the success of 'Pushpa 2: The Rule'. They wrote, "Records are meant to be broken and new ones push everyone towards excellence. Congratulations to the entire #Pushpa2TheRule team for rewriting history books. Fire nahi, Wildfire The handle also tagged lead actors Allu Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna, director Sukumar, and production house Mythri Movie Makers in its tweet. Responding to the same, Allu wrote on his X, "Thank you... so graceful. Humbled by your wishes. Thank you, I am touched. May this record soon be broken by a heart-melting 'YRF' film, and may we all collectively move towards excellence (sic)."

The past few days have been extremely testing for the actor as he was arrested in Hyderabad after a stampede at a local theatre. Earlier, the actor was arrested from his house in Hyderabad, and was taken in for questioning by the cops. The 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' actor also expressed his discontent at the cops who entered his bedroom, and reportedly told them that it was wrong on their part to enter his private space. Allu Arjun was arrested in connection to a fan death at Sandhya Theatre. On December 4 during the premiere of his film, the actor visited Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad to watch the film with fans. The crowd surge there resulted in a stampede, with a fan named Revathi and her young son asphyxiated in the crowd. She lost her life, and her son has been hospitalised in critical condition. The cops arrested the owner and two employees of Sandhya Theatre based on a complaint filed by her family.

## CA's South Asian outreach: WhatsApp, mailing list of 40,000 subcontinent students



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

Australian regional cricket representative programs run on local, state, and national levels, have witnessed 17 per cent of their players belonging to South Asian heritage, according to ABC sports. In the Under 12 age group that number is an astounding 40 per cent in boys and 25 per cent in girls – numbers that tie in with Cricket Australia's plans to bring diversity to the game. While the professional ranks see fewer than five per cent subcontinental origins make the cut, CA's outreach especially in Melbourne's suburb like Truganina has seen a proliferation of South Asian participation – from 160 teams to now 420 teams in 8 years.

However, deeper issues of racism have persisted for long – something CA aren't unaware of. In the final game between India and Pakistan of the Benson and Hedges World Championship of Cricket at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, a local cricket fan was holding a banner titled: "Bus Drivers versus Tram Conductors." In 2020-21, India pacer Mohammed Siraj was called a "Brown Dog" and "Big Monkey" in a series of racist slurs hurled by a group of Australian spectators. To combat racism, Cricket Australia had come up with the Multicultural Action Plan, whose sole aim was to battle racism. "I think first and foremost, we have to acknowledge that racism still exists in society and hasn't gone away," Michael Napper, who came up with Cricket Australia's initiative to engage with multicultural audiences, had told The Indian Express from Melbourne. "It's very simple. If we can identify and know who has done an act like that, whatever that act might be, they would immediately be asked to leave. I'm saying that politely, they'll be removed. And that will happen within the venue itself. They would then be part of... call it a legal process where we would look at a potential banning order. And so they can't come to cricket going forward. If it happened in grassroots and playing cricket, it would be a similar thing, we would go through a tribunal process, there'd be an investigation. And likewise, if they were found to have made racist remarks or

comments, there would be some sort of sanction, whether that be a ban, a fine or something like that. It's something we are taking very seriously." Napper explains why they want to tap the rapidly increasing South Asian population in Australia, and when they came up with the plan. "Over the last 10 years, there is a high level of migration. Within cricket, we've been seeing more and more South Asian heritage or ancestry or even people who were born in South Asia coming to our games, following cricket, and being part of the Australian cricket family. So for us, it's really about making sure that they feel included in everything we do. "When COVID hit really, we were redesigning our new strategic plan to better engage with the multicultural and South Asian audience within Australia to really make them feel part of the sport. And so that was where the Multicultural Action Plan came from," he says. Cricket Australia has also tapped into the sub-continent students studying in universities across Australia.

"We know the student population in Australia is massive, particularly in Melbourne. We have reached out to them, and you've seen the impact that had in the recent Pakistan game, the ODI that we had over at the MCG. That crowd was so young, so vibrant, making so much noise, a huge amount of that comes down to the work we've done in contacting universities. "We've got a WhatsApp group or a mailing list of 40,000 students now from a South Asian background. So yeah, spot on. It's a key audience for us and someone who we want to continue connecting with, not just for international cricket, because obviously, you know, Pakistan or India might come once every few years. But we want to make sure that you're also coming to the Big Bash and being part of Australian cricket. We want to make sure that they can enjoy cricket regardless of the year," says Napper.

There is also the very important aspect of educating immigrants about Australian culture. "And it's a two-way thing. We actually are trying to do that in all forms to get right. So we know that if you're attending games, it's about understanding that, you know, Australian fans will typically visit the game with their friends, have fun, drink alcohol, and celebrate. And it's much more of that more laid-back affair where you see it in the sun, you watch the game, and there's that constant buzz. "Then you have the Indian fans coming in who want to bring instruments, they want to shout, they want to make noise, they want to have that festival-like atmosphere. And it's making sure both of those things can coexist. And then similarly, when you're talking about grassroots cricket, or you're talking about watching cricket, it's about making sure those cultures can all come together and enjoy it in a way that suits them."

## Will Rohit Sharma and Usman Khawaja, Shubman Gill and Rishabh Pant, finally stand up?



GNS News Agency, Dec 27

"Sin", screamed the text on his black T-shirt. He was standing on the steps of the Flinders Station, near the federation square of Melbourne City centre, and evangelising about how to save oneself from the sins. "Just the right time before Christmas Day". A irate lady walks to him, muttering something, and she is politely asked to move away. Then an Indian-origin man walks across to him, laughs, and asks what about the day after Christmas: "Who will win the Boxing Day Test?!" The man mumbles and shoos him away, "What boxing day Test? What are you talking about?" Laughter erupts among those milling around. An artist chalk-drawing a portrait of Mother Mary on the pavement laughs too.

It's Christmas Eve evening, and yachts are bobbing on the Yarra river. People walk here and there, on the bridge, under it by the water. The riverside pubs and cafes are spilling with happiness. Beside many of the tables, shopping bags lie on the floor. Bright sunshine at 7:00 pm even, gifts, festival, and then the Boxing Day Test next day with 90,000 expected on a day where temperatures are forecasted to soar around 40 degrees. It's the traditional way to spend New Year eve, at the Test that's synonymous with cricket in Australia forever.

Only it isn't. "Boxing Day Test is a perfect example of the power of marketing," says Dr Thomas Heenan, who teaches sport studies at Monash University in Melbourne. "Australians love instant-tradition," Heenan laughs. "Only after Kerry Packer, who ran the rebel league of world series that threatened the traditional structures of cricket, announced truce after he got the TV broadcast rights to cricket did Boxing Day game really become a thing. "Only four Tests had been held on December 26th at MCG before 1980 – in 1952, 1968, 1974 and 1975. Three more were held, scattered across decades, in Adelaide. The 1975 game against West Indies where nearly 86000 people heaved around the MCG on the first day when Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson ripped through the West Indies squad set off the administrators' interest but Packer had intervened with his white-ball and coloured-clothing cricket.

"It's not a coincidence that once Packer won the rights in 1979, Boxing Day Test became a thing from next year. Instant tradition! The city of Melbourne itself had lost its manufacturing hubs and was looking to organise itself around sport. The AFL grand final, the Melbourne Cup, the Australian Open, and this cricket game fitted right into the scheme of things. The real Boxing Day game tradition was the domestic derby between New South Wales and Victoria, that goes back to the late 1880's, but it's not fashionable to say that, these days!" Inside the MCG, a TV panel lists Indians who have starred at the venue and it starts from Bhagwat Chandrasekhar, the beguilingly pacy-spinner, who took six wickets apiece in both innings to bowl India to a famous Test win in December 1977. "Great performance, but mind you, not a Boxing Day Test; that one started on December 30th!" Keenan says. It would be mainly reserved for the cricketing heavyweights of West Indies and England, initially. "India began to start featuring in the casual Australian cricket fan after the 1983 world cup triumph. These days, it's not just the competitive sporting rivalry itself but the sheer number of Indians who live in Australia that makes the spectacle even more riveting. What was the last great sporting spectacle at the G? The India vs Pakistan T20 world game, of course! Boxing Day Test hopefully lives up to it!" says Keenan.

An equal battle Just before he wished "Merry Christ-

## A secured Virat Kohli, cautious Rohit Sharma and Nitish Kumar's battle with Jasprit Bumrah

Virat Kohli bats during play on Day 3 of the third Test at the Gabba in Brisbane; India captain Rohit Sharma bats during play on Day 3. (PHOTOS: AP) Virat Kohli bats during play on Day 3 of the third Test at the Gabba in Brisbane; India captain Rohit Sharma bats during play on Day 3. India got a chance to bat in the nets on fresher pitches on Tuesday, their last day of training. Christmas day is a rest-day for them, just as Monday was. On Sunday, they had trained on old pitches that were used for training ahead of Big Bash games. It wasn't a surprise or by any deliberate decision by Cricket Australia as the curator had said on Monday how the fresh pitches are usually available for three days before the Test – in this case from Monday to Wednesday. Just that India chose to train during the weekend, and chose to rest on Monday and Wednesday, the days Australia have chosen to train.

Of all the pre-game nets he has had so far, this was the day Kohli looked the most secure, confident, and tight with his game. Of course, what happens at nets might not have any reflection in the actual game, but there was a compactness in his game on Tuesday. He had stood outside the crease in Perth nets, retreated to the crease at Adelaide, tried pushing back before pressing forward at Brisbane nets but was often caught on the move. And as he walked back that day at the Gabba from the nets, he banged his bat. On Tuesday, in Melbourne, his game seemed at its best it has been on this tour. He has refined his movement at the crease, stopped his attempts to move furiously forward as he did in the previous game, and was far more steadier. He stood just outside the crease, pressed back a touch, and sort of stayed there, just taking care to press his front leg down the pitch and play the ball. Over the last three net sessions, he has also been leaving the balls outside off stump far more than before. Asked if he considers telling Kohli, "wide ball hai to chod dena yaar", Rohit Sharma would

smile and got up to leave, the Australian coach Andrew McDonald would say the 1-1 was probably a "fair reflection" of both teams. Rohit Sharma echoed the sentiment later. Both men would dismiss talks of momentum and past, but still cling to suspiciously similar-feeling sentiments from the past game. McDonald would talk about how they were ahead but rain beat them at Brisbane. Rohit will talk about how the saving of the follow-on and the game reflected the "fighting attitude" of his team who first showed it after "getting bowled out for 150 in Perth".

The scoreline is a fair reflection of two below-par batting units who haven't come to terms with the moving Kook-aburra newish ball that does its bit for nearly 30 overs before it goes soft and loses its teeth. The two team's batsmen haven't been able to stand up to the bowlers. That Australians have scored more runs is perhaps down to the fact that there has been a gulf between Bumrah and the rest. But the quality of the cricket has overall been not so memorable; one can isolate Bumrah's first spell at Perth, a beaut of a ball from Harshit Rana to take out Travis Head there, a Pat Cummins' special to rattle the off stump of Rohit Sharma at Adelaide and such. But there have been enough mediocrity to spoil the memory. India were looking decent in the pink-ball Test's first innings but Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill would gift their wickets with loose drives to derail the innings – and the game. Again, at the Gabba, the Indian top order combusted, chasing wide balls or flicking straight to hands. It hasn't helped that their captain Rohit Sharma is yet to look convincing in the middle. Prior to the series, he had imploded in a home series, looking to be rather too aggressive. Here, demoting himself to the middle-order, he has gone the other way, trying to survive but not quite able to do it. More movement

On Monday, the pitch curator Matt Page talked the good talk: about how for the last two years, MCG has been producing pitches that have helped the fast bowlers do the damage with the new ball as they have been leaving more grass than before. "It won't be as pacy and bouncy as Perth can be, but sideways movement has been there consistently for two years now. And I expect the new ball to continue doing that on all five days." There was some rain on Monday afternoon, and the sun bore down harshly on Tuesday. Wednesday is expected to be scorching hot that the CEO of the MCG administration issued a public plea about hydrating, sunscreens, and how 150,000 bottles of water (apart from the tap water) would be available. It's set to cool down again from the second day on.

It will make an interesting decision at the toss. Would either captain want to put themselves through the wringer on that swelteringly-hot day on field or get tempted by the presence of grass? For a change, for the sake of 90,000 at the stadium and millions on the television, hopefully the batsmen will earn their money. There are several big names, a couple of modern-day greats, talented youngsters in Gill and Jaiswal and a new kid on the block in Sam Konstas – perhaps a couple of them will treat the audience to something special. It's been great to see the bowlers do well, but how about some more fight from the other end? Travis Head has been sensational, though he is now fighting against a strain on his thigh. It's time for the other batsmen, the most mollycoddled lot in cricket, to register their presence. Back in that 1977 triumph triggered by Chandra, Sunil Gavaskar, who was out for a duck in the first innings, had responded with a hundred in the second to make sure Australia were set 387, before Chandrasekhar bundled them out for 164. It wasn't quite Boxing Day, but in modern lore it has become one. Can Rohit or Virat do it here?

smile and say, "like you said, he is a modern-day great, and one just leaves these greats alone".

Not much could be made of his efforts at the MCG nets. Just that he seems to have definitely given up on his earlier efforts to stand with his back leg on the popping crease. He stood in his usual way, one foot behind the crease. But on Sunday, he got hit on the knee as he missed a pull, and had to cut short his nets. On Tuesday – Monday was a rest day for India, he didn't bat for long and eventually when he did, he batted a bit gingerly. He was distinct in his method at the nets, changing his position at the crease almost every ball depending upon who was bowling at the nets. Sometimes, outside the crease, at times on the crease, and in a few instances, inside. The pattern was that if it was a hit-the-deck pacer, he would retreat inside and the slower the bowler, he would come more forward. On all net days, he also trained for the real full deliveries that can cause him issues as he doesn't quite lean into his drives or move towards the ball that much. For those types of deliveries – these were specifically asked for by him to the throwdown specialists, he would press back and just move his hands to play them, without much foot movement but with an effort to flex his knees. Not the purist way but that's the Gill way. On Tuesday, he found himself in a good battle with Jasprit Bumrah at one net and Ravindra Jadeja at the other. For Bumrah he stood on the middle-stump guard, with his bat on off and middle line, and stood with one foot inside the crease. There were of course a few deliveries where he was beaten, but for the main part, he punched and drove pretty neatly. Against Jadeja, he had a rather interesting battle. This was also Jadeja's best stint at the nets thus far in the crease perhaps. Always on target, and mixing up his deliveries and pace rather well. Nitish kept trying to punch-drive or cut him, and once lost his off stump. Another time, came the one with the arm to trap him 'lbw'.

## Rajasthan teen Sanskar Saraswat, whose father is a big Lee Chong Wei fan, wins his first Senior National doubles title

GNS News Agency, Dec 27

On Tuesday afternoon, 18-year-old Rajasthan youngster Sanskar Saraswat paired up with Arsh Mohammad of Uttar Pradesh to claim the senior national doubles title with a 21-12, 12-21, 21-19 win over the pair of Naveen P and Lokesh V in the Senior National Badminton Championship at Bengaluru. The Rajasthan youngster who had earlier won a junior singles title as well had paired up with Arsh to claim the U-19 doubles title in the 31st Smit Krishna Khaitan Memorial Badminton Tournament at Panchkula in September and the youngster had shared how he aspires to achieve glory in both the categories.

Saraswat's father Raj Saraswat also happens to be a former national level singles and doubles player and Saraswat had shared about his father's influence on his game. "My father Raj Saraswat too played both singles as well as doubles but one of his memories was seeing Lee Chong Wei playing in the Asian Satellite Tournament in Jaipur in 2003, where he too played. My father would always tell me that Chong Wei focussed on one format and look where he reached. But then I am still young and enjoy playing both singles and doubles. To win both the titles here is my aim and hopefully I can achieve that," the Rajasthan youngster had told The Indian Express in September early this year.

The Rajasthan youngster had started playing badminton on the insistence of his father at the Drona Sports Academy, an academy opened by Saraswat Senior. Five years later, the youngster became the U13 national doubles champion along with Tushar Suveer in Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh and then paired up with Bhuvan Singh to become the U15 national doubles champion at Bhubaneswar in 2019.

While he and doubles partner Arsh Mohammad had reached the boys' doubles final in the Asian Junior Championships in 2022, Saraswat had also reached finals and



semi-finals in the All India. Ranking Tournaments in singles' in the last two years. The Panchkula singles' title also propelled him to the top spot in the U19 BAI national rankings. "The attacking drives game in singles as well as doubles have always fascinated me. While I train for singles' only, I have been visualizing doubles scenarios in my mind in my free time. It's all about the timing as well as understanding with one's partner in doubles and luckily, I have been able to utilise my singles' strengths of net game as well as back court game to my advantage in doubles," Saraswat had said.

The youngster now is part of the National Centre of Excellence at Guwahati since the last one year and has been training under Malaysian coach Sankar Annamalai. After the Panchkula win, Saraswat also reached the singles' quarter-finals in the NDMC-Telangana International Challenge. "Sankar sir's focus has been on my fitness as well as the attacking drive as well as smashes in singles. But then the amount of training we do for singles, helps me in doubles too where it's a much faster game and the drives also help. Singles are also all about patience and right now, I am being patient in making the choice. I have one more year in juniors before I decide whether I will choose only singles or doubles," Saraswat had told The Indian Express.

## 19-year-old Sam Konstas all set to make Test debut for Australia at MCG

Melbourne: Teen batter Sam Konstas is set to make a dream debut at the MCG during the Boxing Day Test against India even as an injury cloud looms over prolific run-getter Travis Head, who suffered a quadriceps muscle strain during the third game at the Gabba. Konstas, 19, will become the 468th Australian men's Test cricketer to don the Baggy Green during the fourth Border-Gavaskar game on December 26 after selector Tony Dodemaide informed him about his inclusion during training at the MCG here on Tuesday morning.

Konstas will become the youngest Test debutant for Australia since 18-year-old Pat Cummins broke into the squad in 2011. "We wanted clarity for our batting unit before the team meeting," Australia coach Andrew McDonald said ahead of the fourth Test with the series locked at 1-1.

Dodemaide informing Konstas about his inclusion was a departure from protocol as traditionally, it's the Australian skipper who confirms the playing XI on match eve or on the morning of the match. "It's (breaking the news) something we don't usually do because haven't had too many moving parts, but we thought we'd get that out of the way so everyone knows that he's in the team," said McDonald. "He (Konstas) has been very similar to what I've seen on the outside within (the team) – composed, relaxed, knows his game. And what he's shown is an array of shots, the ability to put pressure back on to opponents and he gets his opportunity," he added. Konstas replaces Nathan McSweeney



Dodemaide informing Konstas about his inclusion was a departure from protocol as traditionally, it's the Australian skipper who confirms the playing XI on match eve or on the morning of the match. "It's (breaking the news) something we don't usually do because haven't had too many moving parts, but we thought we'd get that out of the way so everyone knows that he's in the team," said McDonald.

in the side after the opener was dropped because of a string of poor scores in the three Tests so far. However, McDonald said, Head, one of the in-form batters having scored two centuries so far in the series, had a "small strain to the quad" picked up during the last day of the third Test at the Gabba.