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Ahead of New Year, tipplers guzzle liquor worth Rs. 402 crore on Monday in Telangana

Hyderabad: In what is dubbed as a record sale, liquor worth Rs.402.62 crore was sold across the State on Monday, in the run-up to the New Year's eve. According to excise officials, 3,82,265 cases of liquor and 3,96,114 cases of beer were sold on Monday. Hyderabad and surrounding districts of Ranga Reddy and Medchal recorded the highest liquor sale in the State, added officials. An average of Rs 70 crore to Rs 100 crore of liquor is sold in the State daily, while liquor worth Rs. 402 crore was sold in a single day. In December alone, the government had billed the shops a record Rs. 3523.16 crore as against the Rs 2,764 crore it did in the same month last year.

Inter first year student found hanging in BC Gurukul in Khammam

Khammam: An intermediate first year student died, allegedly by suicide, at the BC Gurukul College at Krishnapuram in Madhira mandal in the district. According to police, the deceased, Sai Vardhan of Mudigonda, came back to the college on Monday after four days of leave. He was found to be moody after he returned from home and during midnight hours he told his friends that he would go to the dormitory upstairs, but did not return to his hostel room. On Tuesday morning when the college students tried to open the door of the dormitory, they found that it was locked from inside. After a while they opened the window doors and found Sai Vardhan hanging from the ceiling fan in the dormitory.

SC grants additional time to Punjab govt to hospitalise Dallewal

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday deferred till January 2 the hearing on a contempt plea seeking action against the Chief Secretary of Punjab for not complying with its earlier orders, where the Punjab government was directed to hospitalise farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal. The 70-year-old cancer patient has been fasting at Khanauri, the border point between Punjab and Haryana, since November 26 in support of their long-pending demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops, loan waiver and reforms to improve conditions in the agricultural sector.

A Vacation Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant decided to defer the hearing after Punjab's Advocate General (AG) Gurminder Singh sought additional time to comply with its December 20 decision, where the Punjab government was directed to ensure the stable health condition of Dallewal, who is on a fast unto death. "It is entirely the responsibility of the State of Punjab to ensure the stable health condition of Mr Jagjit Singh Dallewal, for which if he requires hospitalisation, the authorities must ensure to do so. The State Government, therefore, will take a call as to whether Mr Dallewal can be shifted to the makeshift hospital (temporary hospital, which is said to have been set up at a distance of 700 metres from the site) or to any other well-equipped hospital," the SC had ordered. AG Gurminder Singh submitted before Justice Kant-led Bench that a proposal has been submitted before the Union government stating that if the protesting farmers are invited to hold talks, Dallewal will likely accept medical aid. Adjourning the hearing to January 2, 2025, the Bench, also comprising Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia, said that it was only concerned with the compliance of its judicial orders and nothing else. In a special sitting on Saturday, the top court pulled up the Punjab government over its failure to ensure the stable health condition of Dallewal. After the Punjab government stated that other protesting farmers were obstructing the medical aid to Dallewal, Justice Kant-led Bench suggested that it could direct the Union government to provide logistical aid. The apex court ordered the Punjab Chief Secretary and Director General of Police (DGP) to comply with its directions within two days and posted the matter for hearing on December 31. It cautioned that if orders are not followed, the Supreme Court will consider framing charges of contempt



of court against the officials on the next date of listing.

Earlier, the Supreme Court had issued notice on a plea seeking contempt action against the Chief Secretary of Punjab for not complying with the apex court's orders. It said, "Medical aid has to be given (to Dallewal) and the impression is that you (Punjab authorities) are not following our orders." Expressing concern over Dallewal's life and safety, it had ordered the Punjab government to comply with its direction to get him hospitalised. Before this, the Justice Kant-led Bench said that protesting farmers were free to put their grievances directly before the top court after it was told that the farmer leaders did not attend the meeting with the court-appointed panel.

Remarking that the court's doors were always open, it said that farmers could put forth their demands directly before the apex court or through their authorised representative. In September, the Supreme Court ordered the formation of a committee to amicably resolve the grievances of the farmers protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border. It had suggested the panel headed by Justice Nawab Singh, a former judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court, to hold negotiations with the protesting farmers for the removal of their tractors, trolleys, etc., from the National Highway for the ease of the general public. Further, the apex court had granted liberty to farmers to shift their peaceful protests to an alternative site. Apart from Justice Nawab Singh, the panel comprised former Haryana DGP B.S. Sandhu, agricultural analyst Devender Sharma, Prof Ranjit Singh Ghuman, agricultural economist Dr Sukhpal Singh, and Prof Baldev Raj Kamboj as a special invitee.

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Reflecting the mood of a confident India eager to march ahead, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday wished a Happy New Year to countrymen in a post on X and recounted the remarkable progress and transformation achieved in 2024. Calling it a "poetic celebration", PM Modi, in his post in Hinglish, said, "Mera Bharat Badh raha (My India is taking big strides of progress)." "From space to soil, railways to runways, culture to innovation, #IndiaIn2024 marked a year of remarkable progress & transformation!" wrote PM Modi in a heartfelt message. "A poetic celebration as we stride confidently into 2025," said the Prime Minister as he leads the nation into 2025. The PM's New Year post also carried a 2.41-minute video animation clip depicting the achievements made in an eventful 2024. The milestones depicted in the video included the country's space launches, supercomputing, a boost in defense manufacturing, growth in the aviation industry, and infra marvels like the underwater Howrah Maidan Metro, Rameswaram rail bridge, and Vande Bharat rail. The video also highlighted increased medical colleges and improved health facilities for the public, Atal Pension scheme, PM Awas, the first temple in Abu Dhabi, and the introduction of the three new criminal laws. In a virtual report card of the government's performance in 2024, the animation clip had special information on the economy. Besides highlighting the \$700 bil-



lion foreign reserves, it also showcased the country's emergence as the third biggest force in Asia and 24.82 crore people emerging from poverty. On the job creation front, the video highlighted the Rs 2 lakh crore package for 4.1 crore youth. In the sports domain, the PM's video on 2024 highlighted the record 29 medals won by India in the Para-Olympics. For the environment, the PM's video gave the message of "Ek ped Maa ke Naam" which has led to the plantation of 102 crore saplings and highlighted the boost in India's green power generation capacity. Known to celebrate his September 17 birthday with military jawans, PM Modi also likes to wish countrymen the New Year hoping that it would bring forth prosperity, peace and health for all.

Telangana High Court reserves judgement on KTR's quash petition

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Hyderabad: The Telangana High Court on Tuesday reserved its judgement on the quash petition filed by BRS working president KT Rama Rao against the case filed by the Anti-Corruption Bureau in connection with the Formula-E race. Justice K Lakshman also extended the interim orders prohibiting an arrest till the court gave its judgement. Earlier, senior advocate Siddhartha Dave, appearing for Rama Rao, argued that there was no evidence of any misappropriation of funds in the case. There was no instance of funds being used for personal purposes and there was not a single rupee's benefit for Rama Rao, he said, pointing out that even the Sections under which the case was registered on December 9 by the ACB were not applicable. Also stating that the case was registered after



one year as if an afterthought, Dave argued that the case was nothing but an instance of political vendetta.

Telangana police on high alert to tackle drug abuse during New Year parties in Hyd

GNS News Agency, Nov 21

Hyderabad: As Hyderabad gears up to bid adieu to year 2024 and usher in the New Year on Tuesday, revelers are under the close radar of the authorities for possible use of drugs. Telangana police has geared up to tackle the drug abuse during New Year parties at recreational hubs of the city. The Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau, in association with the Prohibition and Excise Department and local police formed 19 teams to conduct checking at pubs, bars, hotels, farm houses and places where New Year events are scheduled.

The police are deploying sniffer dogs to assist them in finding substances hidden at secret places by the drug addicts and smugglers. "Intelligence network is activated and basing on inputs special teams will conduct raids or search operations to check drug abuse in parties," said the official. In last three days, the police had intensified its checking at the pubs, bars, resorts, farm houses and places where events are planned. The police officials said they would not hesitate to check the events in gated communities, if they get any information about revelers using drugs.



Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau (TGANB) and Cyberabad Police raided on Sunday a party and subjected 14 persons to advanced drug testing out of which 8 tested positive. A case is registered against them. Meanwhile, the traffic police teams will conduct drunk driving checking from 8 pm onwards till the wee hours next day to curb accidents. The traffic police across the State have formed special teams for taking up the exercise.

Green corridor to shift toxic waste from Bhopal's UCIL to Pithampur

GNS News Agency, Nov 21

Bhopal: Over 12 containers, carrying around 337 tonnes of toxic waste, from the premises of Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) will drive to Indore's Pithampur area from Bhopal, for which a green corridor has been created. All the containers will move together through a green corridor of around 250 km between the UCIL site to the dumping point in Pithampur. The process of packing and loading hazardous waste, which began on Sunday, was underway.

The authorities will move the waste to Pithampur Industrial Waste Management Pvt. Ltd. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department officials suggest that containers will move once the loading work is completed. Waste packing is being done in airtight bags and containers amid tight security and under the supervision of senior officials, ensuring the safety of workers enrolled for it. All roads leading towards defunct UCIL premises have been banned. The waste is expected to be moved to Pithampur in Dhar district any day now as the state government has to submit an affidavit in the High Court's Jabalpur bench on January 3. The process for disposal of



toxic waste is being started following the Madhya Pradesh High Court's order on December 3. The court granted three weeks to the state government to complete the disposal process. Notably, the waste has been lying at the UCIL premises since the Bhopal gas tragedy on the intervening night of December 2 and 3 in 1984 when a highly toxic gas, methyl isocyanate, leaked from the factory killing 5,479 people, as per the government estimates.

Technology-driven home pension monitoring yields good results, 93 % pensions distributed

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The state government of Andhra Pradesh has achieved significant milestones in its NTR Bharosa social pension program, ensuring that 91 percent of pensions were distributed within just 12 hours on Tuesday. In a noteworthy development, 93 percent of these pensions were delivered directly to beneficiaries at their homes, showcasing a commitment to accessibility and efficiency. The government has allocated a substantial Rs. 2,717 crore for the January pension disbursement, benefiting approximately 6.38 million individuals. This initiative is a part of the coalition government's broader efforts, which have seen over Rs. 20,000 crore spent on pensions since its inception. Notably, provisions are in place to provide immediate widow pensions to eligible recipients when a family's pension holder passes away. This month alone, 5,402 new widow pensions were granted, alongside a one-time distribution for 50,000 individuals who had not received pensions for three months.

Utilizing advanced technology, the state has actively geo-tagged the homes of 6.33 million pension beneficiaries. This innovative approach allows real-time monitoring of pension distribution, ensuring that funds are delivered directly to households. In instances where distribution does not meet expectations—such as beneficiaries receiving pensions more than 300 meters away from their homes due to connectivity issues—officials are taking corrective measures. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has emphasized the importance of beneficiary satisfaction in the pension distribution process. In adherence to his directives, secretariat employees have been instructed to utilize social media platforms to address and resolve complaints



related to home delivery of pensions. The real-time analysis of geo-coordinates aids in identifying areas where pension distribution is lacking and helps officials implement necessary improvements swiftly.

The recent reporting indicates that as of noon on December 31, 91 percent of pensions had been distributed, with a commendable 93 percent delivered within 300 meters from beneficiaries' residences. Officials acknowledge that some distribution delays are attributed to signal problems in remote agency districts, such as Alluri Seetharama Raju. However, the administration remains committed to achieving the goal of delivering pensions directly to beneficiaries at their homes, with ongoing efforts to overcome any technological obstacles. In concluding remarks, government sources reaffirm that they are diligently working to enhance the pension distribution system, ensuring that every eligible resident can receive their entitlement in a timely and efficient manner.

Police serve notice to former BRS MLA Patnam Narender Reddy

GNS News Agency, Nov 21

VIKARABAD: The Bomraspet Police under Kodangal constituency have served notice to former BRS MLA Patnam Narender Reddy to appear before them at 11 am on January 2 in connection with a case on the attack on Congress leader A Shekhar at Rotibanda thanda. The notice was served on Monday night and the BRS MLA has been directed to appear before the Investigation Officer. The BRS MLA has secured anticipatory bail to avoid police arrest in connection with the case.

Patnam Narender Reddy spent a month in jail in connection with the Lagicherla incident in which District Collector Prateek Jain was attacked by villagers. The court granted bail to him last week. On October 26, tension had prevailed at Rotibanda thanda under Dudyala mandal in Kodangal constituency as farmers and villagers declared that they would not part with their lands for pharma village. A public hearing programme was organized in the village on the day



and Congress mandal president A Shekar was obstructed by the villagers from entering the village. As the Congress leader entered into arguments with the villagers, they locked him up in the panchayat office.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Assault on Aravallis

THE majestic Aravalli hills, a crucial ecological barrier against desertification, continue to bear the brunt of relentless exploitation. Even as the mountains are enduring the ravages of illegal mining, it has come to the fore that the fragile ecosystem is also under attack from scrap mafia. Illegal portable waste kilns along the Rajasthan-Haryana border burn vehicle scrap, especially rubber tyres, emitting toxic fumes. The noxious gas is not only polluting the air, water and soil but also displacing wildlife and threatening the health of local communities. The crisis is exacerbated by a lack of accountability. Jurisdictional confusion between Haryana and Rajasthan allows the waste mafia to operate with impunity, much like their mining counterparts. Villagers' complaints about pollution and health hazards are met with bureaucratic inertia. Efforts by law enforcement authorities to tackle the illegal portable kilns are hobbled due to staff shortages and unclear boundaries. Unsurprisingly, such administrative lapses have emboldened the culprits. They brazenly evade action by crossing state borders. This environmental catastrophe demands coordinated intervention. Haryana's Forest Minister has promised raids and penalties for both offenders and negligent officials, but piecemeal measures will not suffice. Multi-state collaboration is imperative to eliminate this toxic menace. Advanced surveillance technologies, such as geospatial mapping and drone patrols, should be deployed to monitor activities in the Aravallis. In addition, stringent penalties and swift legal action are essential to deter culprits. Empowering local communities with resources and platforms to report violations could bolster enforcement efforts. The Aravallis are a lifeline for millions of local residents. They are crucial to regulating groundwater recharge and mitigating urban heat. Their destruction for short-term gains is an environmental injustice that future generations will not forgive. Resolute action is needed to save this irreplaceable treasure.

Maharashtra asks primary govt schools to implement 'Aamche Guruji' again, teachers to not comply with order



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Maharashtra Even as the objective of the initiative is unclear, many have linked it to instances where 'bogus' teachers were found working in government schools. (Express File Photo) Even as the objective of the initiative is unclear, many have linked it to instances where 'bogus' teachers were found working in government schools. A circular issued by the Nandurbar district education officer in Maharashtra on Monday to implement 'Aamche Guruji' (Our Teacher) initiative has sparked a controversy wherein the government primary school teachers have been directed to display their photos in schools.

The circular, which is applicable to all schools irrespective of medium and management, has asked the schools to submit a compliance report by January 2, 2025, to ensure that the initiative is fully implemented before the deadline of January 5. It referred to a virtual meeting held by the state Directorate of Primary Education that gave directions for the orders, indicating that other districts are likely to follow suit.

"All primary schools are instructed to prepare flex-boards having photos of their permanent teachers in size of 6X4 inch along with information such as their names, educational qualifications, and subjects they teach. These flex-boards should be displayed prominently outside of the school-principals' office. This is expected to provide visitors with information on teachers working in the school and their subjects," it read. No state-wide circular Even as there is no state-wide circular in this regard, Sharad Gosavi, director of primary education, confirmed that his office has given orders to all education officers to implement 'Aamche Guruji'. "This is a Central government initiative and is applicable in different states," he added. The Nandurbar district education officer's circular has, however, triggered a row with the teachers planning to continue with their earlier stand of non-compliance. The state government first launched the initiative in July last year and sought compliance in December 2024. "There is no clear objective of this initiative which definitely has no significance in academic activities. This is just another way of keeping teachers busy in unnecessary activities when clearly all students and parents — and in case of interiors of Maharashtra, the entire village — personally know their school-teachers," said Mahendra Ganpule, former head of the Maharashtra School Principals' Association. Teaching community ridicules motive Even as the objective of the initiative is unclear, many have linked it to stem instances where 'bogus' teachers were found working in government schools. However, the motive has been ridiculed by many from the teaching community. "If bogus teachers are working, it is the failure of the system to keep a strict vigil. Putting up photos of teachers is not the solution," said Vijay Kombey, head of Maharashtra Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Samiti, an association of primary school teachers.

Masked men fire dozens of shots at 3 men outside gym in Haryana's Yamunanagar; 2 dead



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The shooting took place in the morning in Kheri Lakha village of Yamunanagar when three to four masked men, who were wearing shawls and headgear, reached outside the gym and started indiscriminate firing at the men who came out of the gym after their workout. A group of masked men fired indiscriminately at three men after they came out of a gym after their morning workout in Haryana's Yamunanagar Thursday, killing two of them on the spot and leaving the third injured, in a suspected gang war. The Yamunanagar police said a gang war between the two groups could be one of the reasons behind the shootout, adding they were investigating the crime from all possible angles. The shooting took place in the morning in Kheri Lakha village of Yamunanagar when three to four masked men, who were wearing shawls and headgear, reached outside the gym and started indiscriminate firing at the men who came out of the gym after their workout. All three men were shot at from point-blank range, said the police.

"When they were heading towards their Mahindra Scorpio, the three masked men approached them and opened fire. While Golani village's Virender Kumar and Pankaj Kumar of Barot village in Uttar Pradesh died on the spot, Unheri village resident Arjun is battling for his life. It is suspected that the total number of assailants could be more than three. So far, the exact motive behind this killing is not yet known," one of the investigating police officers said.

According to the police and eyewitnesses, the assailants fired dozens of gunshots before they fled on a motorcycle. The police recovered over 40 empty cartridges, and CCTV footage in which assailants could be seen firing multiple gunshots. "In the CCTV footage, it can be seen that the moment the victims opened their SUV's doors to get in, the assailants closed in and fired at them. The route and the vehicle on which the assailants fled are being ascer-

New Year calendar and diaries counter digitisation with customization, cultural relevance and embedded chargers

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The calendar and diary printing industry in India, once a booming sector, has undergone significant transformation over the years. With the advent of digital tools and changing consumer preferences, the industry has shifted its focus from mass production to customization and niche markets. For decades, printed calendars and diaries were indispensable in Indian homes and offices, marking the end of the year with a flurry of activity in the printing sector. Calendars served not only as functional tools but also as cultural symbols, reflecting India's religious and regional diversity. Hindu calendars adorned with images of gods and festivals, Hijri calendars marking Islamic events, and Gregorian calendars for general use dominated the market. Religious institutions and businesses often distributed these as gifts, cementing their role in society. "At the end of the year, we were so busy printing tons of calendars. It was hectic, but orders kept pouring in," said H. Virani, a veteran in the printing industry in Pune.

The rise of smartphones and digital platforms has significantly reduced the demand for physical calendars. Mobile applications like Google Calendar and specialized software for tracking religious events have gained popularity, particularly among younger generations.

The demand for mass-produced calendars and diaries has come down significantly," said Veer, owner of Tirumala Printers. However, he added, "In the era of customization, everyone will customize it for commercial use." Corporate offices and small businesses now prefer personalized calendars and diaries, which double as branding tools. Some even have embedded mobile chargers.

The rise of smartphones and digital platforms has significantly reduced the demand for physical calendars. Customization has become the industry's lifeline, as businesses increasingly use printed calendars and diaries for marketing purposes. "I am ordering calendars for my clients as New Year gifts, and I also get the diaries customized because I want them to be unique," said businessman Chirag Mishra.

This trend has allowed printers to cater to specific client needs, offering products such as luxury leather diaries, religious-themed calendars, and even wedding calendars. "Customization has breathed new life into the business, allowing us to meet specific needs while preserving the essence of these timeless tools," Veer noted.

Despite digital alternatives, printed calendars continue to hold cultural significance. Hindu families rely on physical calendars for tracking festivals and auspicious dates, while Panchangam calendars remain essential in Tamil Nadu for religious ceremonies. Similarly, Hijri calendars are vital for observing Islamic holidays like Ramadan and Eid. In Maharashtra few households can do without the omnipresent Kaliniraya calendar. In rural and semi-urban areas, simpler printed calendars are still widely used, especially among communities less inclined toward digital tools. New year calendar Many printing companies have also expanded into other areas like wedding invitations and promotional materials. Economic Impact

The decline in demand for traditional calendars has impacted small printers and allied industries. Many have diversified or scaled down operations. Larger printing companies have adapted better, leveraging digital printing technology to produce high-quality customized products in smaller batches. Many have also expanded into other areas like wedding invitations and promotional materials. Positive environmental impact The reduced demand for printed calendars has positively impacted the environment, with less paper consumption and fewer trees being cut. Some printers have embraced sustainable practices, using recycled paper and plant-based inks.

Innovation is reshaping the industry, with hybrid products like calendars featuring embedded QR codes linking to digital content gaining popularity. The industry's future lies in specialty markets and corporate gifts. Products like personalized leather diaries, photo calendars, and customized corporate offerings continue to thrive.

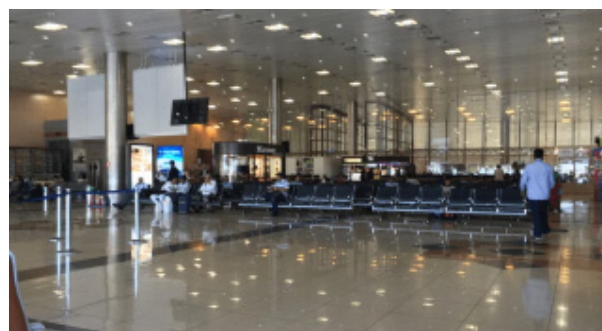
"The industry is no longer about mass production but about creating products that are meaningful and unique. That's how we stay relevant," Veer emphasized.

Pune International Airport records this year's highest passenger traffic in November

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Pune International Airport recorded the highest passenger traffic of the year in November, with a 44 per cent growth in international passengers and approximately five per cent growth in domestic flyers compared to October. With 20,554 international flyers, November saw a significant increase of 6,316 more travellers compared to October, which recorded 14,238 international passengers. This rise has helped Pune Airport surpass 1.70 lakh international passengers from January to November. In contrast, domestic passenger traffic grew by five per cent, reaching 8.80 lakh flyers, up from 8.44 lakh flyers in October. However, while the Airport Authority of India's data shows a percentage growth for international passengers, the overall increase in numbers is more notable in domestic traffic. More than 35,000 additional flyers contributed to the airport's growing traffic, which is expected to continue rising in December.

The previous highest passenger traffic this year was 8.94 lakh passengers, recorded in May. But November broke the record, surpassing 9 lakh passengers in a single month, including both domestic and international traffic. Airport Director Santosh Dhoke attributed the increase in passenger numbers at Pune Airport to the launch of new flights and the commencement of operations under regional connectivity initiatives. In November, IndiGo launched two direct flights to Dubai and Bangkok. The Pune-Dubai flight



departs daily at 5.40 pm, arriving in Dubai at 10.10 pm, with the return flight leaving Dubai at 12.15 am. The Pune-Bangkok flight operates three times a week—on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays—departing Pune at 11.10 pm, with the return flight from Bangkok departing at 01.15 am. According to the airport director, December is expected to see an increase in international flyers as Air India Express has launched a direct flight from Pune to Bangkok starting December 21. Five international flights operate from Pune Airport across three routes: Singapore, Bangkok, and Dubai. IndiGo operates flights to Dubai and Bangkok, SpiceJet serves Dubai, Air India (formerly Vistara) operates flights to Singapore, and now connects Pune to Bangkok.

Public engagement and awareness program on NEP 2020 in Maharashtra, training for professors

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The Maharashtra higher education department recently decided to roll out a public engagement and awareness program on various aspects of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Under this program, there will be open virtual sessions with NEP experts; and dedicated training for professors across the state. Starting this Saturday, there will be interactive online sessions every Saturday with one of the nine members of the steering committee the government had constituted to create the NEP implementation plan for the state. Dr Shailendra Deolankar, Director of Higher Education, Maharashtra, said, "A link to every week's virtual interaction will be widely circulated. It will have a capacity of 1,000 participants who will be able to understand salient features of the revised education system in addition to a session on doubt-solving with an objective to create awareness."

Deolankar mentioned even though the state rolled out NEP 2020 in autonomous colleges last year and in all colleges this year; there was still confusion among stakeholders on the types of changes it brings to higher education.

"We have already launched a School Connect campaign which is targeted to improve the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and also educate participants on NEP. Apart from this, many NEP awareness activities are being held



across universities. These sessions with experts will help individuals understand NEP better," said Deolankar, issuing a circular in this regard on Tuesday. The higher education department is also in the process of creating a curriculum for NEP training for professors. "The plan is to offer seven-day online training for all professors. The higher education department is working with the Maharashtra State Faculty Development Academy (MSFDA) to create a curriculum for this training. The curriculum will then be shared with all universities in the state with instructions to ensure that all professors from their departments and affiliated colleges complete this seven-day training online," said Deolankar.

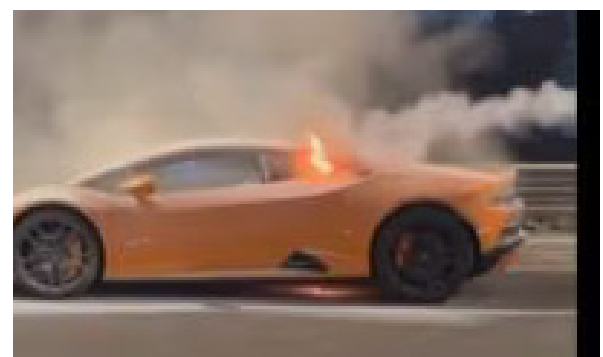
Police intensify security in Delhi's border areas for New Year eve celebrations

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The Delhi Police has intensified security arrangements and increased deployments in the border areas of the national capital for New Year celebrations, officials said. More than 10,000 police personnel, including traffic police are expected to be on the ground to rein in hooliganism and traffic violations, they said. "After Christmas, we have made a robust plan for the security arrangements for New Year eve. We want everyone to welcome the new year with great zeal but no one will be allowed to breach the law," a senior police officer said. According to police, additional pickets, barricades and personnel — including paramilitary deployment — will be made at the borders to tackle nuisance by people from the adjoining states, said the officer. Delhi shares borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and lies close to Rajasthan. A large number of people from these three states arrive in the national capital for New Year celebrations. The police said they have already deployed police personnel at more than 10 locations for Christmas, but now they have intensified their security and heavy deployment has already

been done on more than 15 locations from where vehicles enter the national capital. "The traffic police has already chalked out a plan to combat motorcycle stunts and drink driving. Additional forces from different police stations will be deployed to help the traffic police," another senior police officer said. According to the police, there will be shift duties and SHOs have been ordered to be on the road with their teams to maintain law and order on New Year Eve. Teams will impound two or four wheeler immediately if anyone is found indulging in stunt-like activities. Strict action will be ensured, said the police officer. "For New Year celebration, our teams are checking bus stands, railway stations, hotels, dharamshalas, night shelters and other locations to verify if anyone is staying without providing proper documents. We have already launched our special drive to identify those who are staying illegally in the national capital," said the officer. More than 10,000 police personnel from traffic and other units of the Delhi Police will maintain vigil. A senior police officer of the Delhi Traffic Police said traffic personnel will be deployed in adequate strength.

Lamborghini catches fire on Mumbai road, Raymond's Gautam Singhania expresses 'concerns about reliability, safety'



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

A Lamborghini car caught fire news agency quoted officials as saying. Gautam Singhania, the chairman and managing director of Raymond and a self-described car enthusiast, shared a video of the burning supercar at Breach Candy on the Mumbai Coastal Road. While a person can be seen trying to douse the fire in the video, a fire engine was also pressed into action and the fire could be extinguished in about 45 minutes. The cause of the fire wasn't immediately known and no casualties have been reported. Still, the incident has sparked questions about the safety apparatus available in such a high-end car.

"Concerns about safety" "Incidents like this raise serious concerns about the reliability and safety standards of Lamborghini. For the price and reputation, one expects uncompromising quality — not potential hazards," Singhania wrote on X. Spotted by me: A Lamborghini engulfed in flames on Coastal Road, Mumbai. Incidents like this raise serious concerns about the reliability and safety standards of Lamborghini. For the price and reputation, one expects uncompromising quality — not potential hazards. @MumbaiPolice... pic.twitter.com/IIC7mYtoCBEarlier, he had questioned the Italian automaker for not responding to complaints regarding his car. His Lamborghini Revuelto refused to budge during a test drive due to a "complete electrical failure" at Mumbai's Trans Harbour Link.

54-year-old neighbour arrested for rape, murder of 2 minor sisters in Pune district

The Pune Rural police on Thursday arrested a 54-year-old man who allegedly murdered two minor sisters, aged eight and nine years, after sexually assaulting them at a town in Pune district, officials said. A preliminary probe has revealed that the accused who works as a cook at a local hotel is also a neighbour of the victims and was known to their family, said an officer. According to the police, they found the bodies of the girls inside a drum used for storing water at a room near their house on Wednesday night. The police launched a search based on the complaint of the parents after they were unable to trace the girls who were seen playing near their residence on Wednesday morning. Police said the father of the victims is a conservancy staff and mother a labourer. The police registered a case against the accused man at a police station in Pune district under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act.

‘Act against Ajay Maken in 24 hours’: AAP hits back over his ‘anti-national’ remark, says Congress working with BJP



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

With the Delhi Assembly elections around the corner, the ruling AAP accused the Congress, its INDIA bloc partner, on Thursday of helping the BJP and said the saffron party was funding Congress candidates' poll campaigning. Taking strong exception to senior Congress leader Ajay Maken's remarks about Arvind Kejriwal, the AAP demanded the party take action against Maken within 24 hours, warning that it would otherwise consult other INDIA parties to remove Congress from the national Opposition bloc.

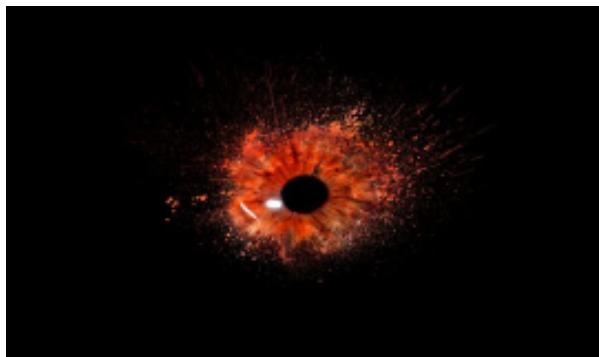
"Yesterday, he (Maken) crossed all limits. He called our leader, the country's most loved leader, Arvind Kejriwal, anti-national. Till date, Ajay Maken or any other Congress leaders have not called any BJP leader anti-national. But we are anti-national? What kind of statement is this?... I saw yesterday they are also lodging an FIR against Kejriwal... He is the person who campaigned for Congress leaders during Lok Sabha polls even in Chandigarh," AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said at a press conference. "Congress in Delhi is standing tall with the BJP. The party here is doing everything to help the BJP in the upcoming polls. They have a leader here in Delhi, Ajay Maken, who reads the scripts prepared by the BJP, follows all the directions of the BJP and targets the AAP with statements against AAP leaders," he said. Maken made the remarks at a press conference on Wednesday where the Congress released a "white paper" on the "unfulfilled" promises of the both AAP government and the BJP-led Centre. "Making an alliance with the AAP for Lok Sabha polls was one of the biggest strategic blunders," he said. He reportedly called Kejriwal "anti-national" citing the AAP's stance on issues such as the Uniform Civil Code, abrogation of

Article 370 and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. AAP sources said Kejriwal was very upset over Maken's remarks.

"During the Haryana election, we tried till the end to contest the polls together, but they were not ready and went alone. But we did not say a word against Congress... But today, you see they are making such statements against us and Arvind Kejriwal just to harm the AAP in the upcoming polls," Sanjay Singh said. The Rajya Sabha MP further attacked the Congress also over its Assembly poll candidates. "Just look at their list... They have brought in people like Sandeep Dixit and others to just harm the AAP in Delhi. They have fielded a person like Sandeep Dixit against Kejriwal from New Delhi... Now all the limits have been crossed. I request the Congress to take action against Maken within 24 hours, or we will speak with other parties in the INDIA alliance to remove Congress from the alliance," he said. Singh added that if the Congress leadership does not take action against Maken, "it will be clear that the AICC is also part of this plan". Congress getting crores of rupees from BJP: Atishi

Chief Minister Atishi asked if the Congress had ever called the BJP anti-national. "No, but today you are calling AAP and Arvind Kejriwal anti-national; you filed an FIR against me and Kejriwal ji... It is very clear that the Congress is siding with the BJP to cut our votes in the Assembly polls. Because if they cut our votes, who will benefit? BJP..." she said. Atishi further alleged that the BJP was funding the election campaign of Congress candidates. "The BJP is funding all Congress candidates. Top of the list is Sandeep Dixit and Farhad Suri, who have been fielded against Kejriwal and Sisodia. They are getting funds in crores from the BJP... Why did you make an alliance with us if you think we are anti-national? Why did you take help from Kejriwal for campaigning for your candidates? It is very clear that Congress leaders in Delhi are helping the BJP win the upcoming Assembly polls. They have made some pacts with the BJP to make them win the polls and harm the AAP," she said. Atishi also demanded action against the Youth Congress. The Congress and the AAP had an alliance in Delhi for the Lok Sabha elections and contested three and four seats respectively. However, both parties were defeated by the BJP. Soon after the polls, the AAP announced it would not make any alliance with the Congress for the Assembly polls, while Congress said that vote transfer did not happen in its favour despite the alliance.

What causes red-eye effect in photographs?



Hyderabad: In a world, where selfie-clicking and posting them online is the happiest pass time, imagine a scenario when your best friend posts a picture of yours in which your eyes are blood-shot red and you have the crazy zombie look. So, what makes eyes look red in photographs? The answer is simple; it all concerns the camera flash reflecting off the eye at a specific wavelength.

The eyes enable us to see the world around and that's why it is one of the five senses to perceive the world. Light

comes into the eye through the cornea. The retina then perceives the light and its images are sent to the brain via the optic nerve. The pupil controls the amount of light that gets to the retina. If it's a sunny day, the pupil constricts and allows a small amount of light in. During night-time, the pupil dilates and becomes quite large to allow as much light as possible. Sitting between the retina and the sclera (the white part of the eye) lays a layer of connective tissue called the Choroid, an extremely vascular area containing many blood vessels. When the light from a camera flash goes off, the pupils do not have time to constrict, so a large amount of light is reflected off of the Fundus melanine (the eye's interior surface). Due to the large amount of blood in the Choroid, the light picked up by the camera lens appears red. The closer the flash is to the camera lens, the greater the chance the lens sees the reflected light. The darker the environment a person is in, and thus the wider their pupils are, the greater the chance of having blood-shot eyes. Other factors for the red-eye effect are the amount of melanin behind the retina and the person's age. The red-eye effect is stronger in light-skinned people with blue eyes than in dark-skinned people with brown eyes. Children also tend to get a red-eye effect more as a child's pupil will dilate faster than adults in low-light situations.

Which disease has the potential to turn into epidemic in 2025?

Hyderabad: Since the emergence and killing of millions of people around the world by COVID-19, most people have been nervous about the emergence of the next big infectious disease – be that a virus, bacterium, fungus, or parasite. With COVID-19 in retreat, the three infectious diseases causing public health officials the greatest concern are malaria (parasite), HIV (virus) and tuberculosis (bacterium). Between them, they kill around 2 million people each year. And then there are the watchlists of priority pathogens – especially those that have become resistant to the drugs usually used to treat them, such as antibiotics and antivirals.

Scientists must also constantly scan the horizon for the next potential problem. While this could come in any form of pathogen, certain groups are more likely than others to cause swift outbreaks, including influenza viruses. One influenza virus causing great concern right now is influenza A subtype H5N1, sometimes referred to as "bird flu". This virus is widely spread in both wild and domestic birds. Recently, it has also been infecting dairy cattle in the US States and is found in horses in Mongolia. When influenza cases start increasing in animals such as birds, there is always a worry that it could jump to humans. Indeed, bird flu has infected humans in the US this year, mostly resulting from farm workers and people drinking raw milk. Luckily, H5N1 bird flu doesn't seem to transmit from person to person, which greatly reduces its likelihood of causing a



pandemic in humans. Influenza viruses have to attach to molecular structures called sialic receptors on the outside of cells to get inside and start replicating. A recent study showed that a single mutation in the flu genome could make H5N1 adept at spreading from human to human, which could jump-start a pandemic. Even without the potential ability to spread between humans, bird flu is likely to affect animal health even more in 2025. This not only has large animal welfare implications but also the potential to disrupt food supply and have economic effects as well. The governments also must not forget about the continuing "slow pandemics" in humans, such as malaria, HIV, tuberculosis and other pathogens. Tackling them is paramount alongside scanning the horizon for any new diseases that might yet come.

A flashback to simpler 'prints' and purer vibes

Mood Indigo in 1987 was an experience as pristine as the freshly developed photographs by its then-sponsor, Lazor – a name synonymous with the cutting-edge (pun intended) technology of photographic printing at the time. Back then, the darkroom was yielding to automation, and we Osmania University students – our team of ten brimming with enthusiasm – were armed with literary and mental skills, art, and quiz prowess. The atmosphere at the Powai campus was electric, yet simple. There were competitions and workshops on photography conducted by masters in the field, where we learned the art of capturing light and emotion. Music filled the air, with performances and competitions in singing, and budding pop bands took the stage to showcase their talent. It was about ideas, creativity, and cultural exchanges, where students from across the country came together, not just to compete but to collaborate and create lifelong memories.

But perhaps the highlight of that edition was its spell-binding star attractions. The audience was mesmerised by a dance ballet performance by Hema Malini, choreographed by the illustrious Bhushan Lakhndri, whose every move seemed to weave a story of grace and artistry. In contrast, the festival also featured a captivating performance by the contortionist and pioneering dancer Astad Deboo, whose innovative blend of modern and traditional Indian dance left the crowd in awe. These unforgettable performances set a benchmark for what a cultural festival could aspire to be, leaving us both entertained and inspired.

Fast forward to today, and I must say, the 'mood' has dramatically shifted. This year, Mood Indigo found itself in a rather sticky situation, thanks to a sponsor whose cheeky condom ads were apparently dumped – pun intended – on campus overnight. While we enjoyed quizzing each other's brains in '87, the students of 2024 were greeted with slogans like, 'Always up for a good screw,' leaving everyone scratching their heads – not for answers, but for some decorum. Perhaps the sponsors were only trying to 'pro-



tect' the festival's fun factor, but IIT Bombay's cultural fabric doesn't seem ready for such 'elastic' interpretations of modern marketing. It's ironic that the festival's once-innocent charm has now become a battleground of appropriateness. While Lazor's swift photo-processing back then represented progress and innovation, today's 'medical essentials' sponsor has managed to snap quite a few threads of tradition.

The competitions and workshops that once inspired us to hone our craft have given way to bold slogans. I can't help but marvel at how the times have shifted. Our stays on IIT Bombay's Powai campus were about mingling over late-night chai (or beer and weed for the fun-seekers), soaking in soulful music, and exchanging cultural ideas – not questioning the fine print on provocative banners. One wonders, will future Mood Indigo festivals feature slogans even bolder, or will they find their way back to the timeless simplicity we cherished? As someone who cherished the 1987 edition, I'm reminded of how diversity of thought and expression defined the festival's spirit. By all means, let the sponsors support the show – but maybe next time, they could tone down the condescension. After all, some legacies deserve a softer lens.

Mumbai's BEST workers' union protests over BMC's neglect, calls for revival steps

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

BEST buses, BMC, Mumbai silent protest was staged by workers of Brihanmumbai Electric Supply & Transport (BEST) across Mumbai, demanding reforms and better support from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in light of the growing discontent with the cash-strapped public transport undertaking. A section of workers at Brihanmumbai Electric Supply & Transport (BEST) staged a silent protest across Mumbai by wearing black armbands on Thursday, to highlight their growing discontent with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) approach towards the cash-strapped public transport undertaking. Workers affiliated to the Shiv Sena (UBT)-backed BEST Kamgar Sena staged the protest in depots of Mulund, Colaba, Oshiwara, Malwani, Malad, Bandra, and Poinisur to highlight the need for reviving the public transport system. Their key demands include halting the privatisation of BEST services, ending the wet lease system for buses, procuring self-owned buses, recruiting new staff, and clearing pending gratuity and Covid-19 allowances

for employees. The union argued that these steps are important to revive BEST buses from financial loss, shrinking fleet, and rising accidents. The protest follows BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani's reported statement that BEST does not come under the civic body's responsibility. However, Suhas Samant, president of BEST Kamgar Sena, hit back saying that BMC is BEST's parent body and hence responsible for its condition. "The Commissioner speaks of cooperation, but responsibility means guardianship, not mere assistance," Samant said on Thursday. After the BEST bus accident on December 9 that killed eight people, Kamgar Sena representatives had demanded Gagrani for a more proactive approach and urged BMC to take full control of BEST operations instead of offering just financial aid. "This is a fight for the survival of BEST. The current approach is unsustainable, and systemic reforms are urgently needed," added Samant. On the other hand, the BMC has refuted allegations of neglecting BEST, stating it has provided Rs 11,232 crore financial aid over the last decade, including Rs 850 crore this year.

Squid Game Season 2: The Pink Guards are watching you!

Brace yourselves for another intense round of Red Light, Green Light—Squid Game is back with Season 2. The much-anticipated South Korean thriller returns, with new episodes now streaming on Netflix. Squid Game, the hit South Korean dystopian survival thriller, is making its highly anticipated return with Season 2. The second season premiered on Netflix globally on December 26, with fans in India getting their first taste at 1:31 pm (IST).

However, there was a slight surprise when the show didn't drop exactly at midnight on Wednesday, as many expected. For those eager to binge-watch, there's another change this season—the number of episodes. Season 2 consists of seven episodes, which is two fewer than the nine episodes in Season 1. But there's a good reason for the shorter run: Squid Game has already been renewed for a third and final season, set to premiere in 2025.

The excitement around the show's return is palpable on social media, with fans expressing their enthusiasm. One user posted, "The Top Rapper is here!" while another added, "How I will sleep knowing that I will wake up to the new season of Squid Game! Guards around the world are anticipating your arrival. The clock is ticking. Are you ready? The Front Man awaits." The hype continues to grow, with users speculating about the surprises in store for fans, especially with In-ho's mysterious character. No matter where viewers are, the Pink Guards are always watching. As the clock ticks down to the new season, the stakes have never been higher.

Lee Jung-jae reprises his role as Seong Gi-hun, the winner of the deadly Squid Game from Season 1, but his return in Season 2 comes with a twist. Three years have passed since Seong Gi-hun won the 45.6 billion won prize, and this time, he's not returning just to play for money or fight for survival. His goal is far more significant: to put an end to the game once and for all.

Gi-hun is determined to take down the mysterious Front Man—the mastermind behind the Squid Game. Player 456



has a new mission: to stop the deadly competition from claiming any more lives. With a burning desire for justice, Seong Gi-hun is ready to risk everything to dismantle the game that has caused so much destruction.

While Season 2 promises new challenges, high stakes, and the usual Squid Game tension, fans can also look forward to a deeper dive into the game's origins and the enigmatic characters who control it. The return of familiar faces, along with the introduction of new players, ensures that the series will continue to captivate its audience. As the journey continues, viewers will witness the ever-looming presence of the Pink Guards, who are ready to keep a close watch on all players. The game is far from over, and the mystery surrounding the Front Man will only deepen as the season progresses.

With a confirmed third and final season set for release in 2025, Squid Game fans can rest assured that the story of Seong Gi-hun and the deadly competition is far from finished. As the tension builds and more secrets are revealed, Season 2 is just the beginning of a thrilling conclusion to this unforgettable series. Are you ready for the challenge? The Pink Guards are waiting, and the Front Man's plan is only just unfolding.

Of human greed and vanishing mountains

India's oldest mountain range — Aravalli — had long become the victim of human greed, with 31 out of the 128 hillslocks vanishing. The environmental degradation of the three-billion-old Aravalli range, which straddles the States of Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat, exposes the apathy of successive governments towards the open plunder of mineral resources. Once a thriving ecosystem of hills, forests, fauna, aquifers and natural drainage, the Aravallis now carries the dubious distinction of being the country's most degraded forest range. Taking advantage of the jurisdictional ambiguities, miners have ravaged the hills, particularly in villages along the Haryana-Rajasthan border, leaving flattened landscapes and staggering losses. In 2023 alone, over eight crore tonnes of minerals vanished from the hills due to relentless assault from illegal mining, reducing their majestic peaks to rubble. Despite repeated FIRs and complaints by the affected villagers, no action to halt the destruction is visible. The loss is not just economic — it has devastated local habitats, displaced communities and disrupted groundwater recharge zones critical for the Delhi-National Capital Region's ecology. The Haryana government has estimated a Rs 2,500-crore loss over the last two years due to illegal mining by contractors from Rajasthan, who, it alleges, exploit the lack of demarcation to expand their activities unchecked. To counter this menace, Haryana has planned to use LiDAR (light detection and ranging) technology for boundary demarcation and intends to recover costs from Rajasthan. However, this jurisdictional tussle only underscores deeper governance failures. Collabora-

tive action by the two States is essential to resolve disputes and implement the Supreme Court directives banning mining in the Aravallis.

A 2023 study shows that nearly 8% of the Aravalli mountains have disappeared since 1975, with projections indicating a 22% loss by 2059 if rapid urbanisation and mining continue. However, the focus must shift to preventive measures — deploying advanced surveillance technologies, imposing strict penalties on unscrupulous miners and bolstering enforcement. The ambitious Aravalli Green Wall Project, an eco-restoration initiative by the Centre, gives some hope. It has the potential to become a turning point in combating land degradation and desertification. Covering over 1.1 million hectares across Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi, this 1,400-km-long and 5-km-wide green corridor aims to restore the Aravalli hills' ecological vitality. It seeks to reverse the destruction. Haryana's proactive measures, such as reviving 75 water bodies and restoring 35,000 hectares of degraded land, exemplify the potential of collaborative efforts among States to tackle this environmental crisis. The World Bank is supporting the project with funding for initiatives like afforestation, water conservation and pollution control. Notwithstanding the lofty goals, the project's success, however, depends on enforcing conservation laws to prevent illegal mining and encroachments. The States must transcend political boundaries to protect these shared ecological treasures. The Green Wall Project is a fight to reclaim the Aravallis and reverse decades of destruction.

Evidence of crime scene being disturbed: FSL report on RG Kar rape and murder case



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Kolkata doctors Women march towards the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) office in protest against the alleged rape and murder of a woman medic at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, in Kolkata. The crime scene in the RG Kar case "was not in well-preserved condition, there were evidences of disturbances evident on the scene", a team from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL), Delhi, has said in its report, which is now part of a Central Bureau of Investigation chargesheet in the rape and murder of a junior doctor at the hospital. The 12-page report is dated September 11. The report, compiled by a 14-member multi-institutional medical board (MIMB) comprising senior doctors, scientists and forensic experts who visited the crime scene several times, came days after the August 9 rape and murder of the junior doctor in the seminar room of the hospital, triggering massive protests by doctors in the state.

Sanjoy Roy, a civic volunteer working for Kolkata police, was arrested in connection with the crime on August 10. Significantly, former RG Kar director Sandeep Ghosh has been accused of having ordered renovation at the hospital just after the rape and murder came to light. This was after a memo, allegedly issued on the West Bengal

government's letterhead to its Public Works Department and calling for urgent repairs at the hospital a day after the rape and murder, led to allegations of a "cover-up" and "evidence tampering" against Ghosh.

"Here one demolished wall was evidently corresponding pre-presence of a door area, another demolished wall area was having fixed and functional electric peripherals and as such did not correspond to pre-presence of a particular passage. The concrete materials, building materials, broken tiles were found scattered on the floor of the said rooms and corridor also evaluated forensically by the CFSL team. The adjacent room (meant for inhouse doctors' rest purposes) was also found to be demolished in unprofessional manner. Its wall was found smashed that was corresponding to an entry gate," the report said. "In this restroom, some patient beds and wooden furniture with dirty mattresses/bedsheets were kept haphazardly, whereas, demolished concrete material was not found. The two wooden gate frames (stated to be removed) were found to be kept in front of the demolished wall of the Room 1 (seminar room) in the corridor area," it said. Evidence of possible struggle "shown by the victim to the assailant or fight in between them found missing in the shown area of occurrence," the report states. "There is less possibility that someone (in the presence of the official attendees present in the 24x7 operational hospital corridor, doctor's duty-nursing station area) can enter into the seminar hall unnoticed, for committing offence," it states. The findings have come into the public domain at a time when the parents of the victim moved the Calcutta High Court seeking a fresh investigation into the case, saying they didn't have faith in the current investigation led by the Central Bureau of Investigation, which took over investigation into the case in August from the Kolkata Police on the directions of the Calcutta High Court. The parents' decision to move the HC comes days after a local court granted bail to Ghosh and Abhijit Mondol, the former officer-in-charge of Tala police station after the CBI failed to submit its chargesheet against them within the mandated 90 days.

After sexually assaulting Chennai university student, roadside vendor took her number, threatened her to keep meeting him

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

After a roadside biryani vendor was arrested Wednesday for allegedly sexually assaulting a student of Chennai's Anna University on the institute's campus Monday night, the BJP and AIADMK have led the Opposition's attack on Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK, with some leaders claiming that the accused had links to Chief Minister M K Stalin's party. The DMK has denied any association with the accused, 37-year-old Gnanasekaran. According to police, the assault occurred around 8 pm Monday, when the student was chatting with a friend at a secluded area of the 180-acre campus. "Gnanasekaran approached the students and threatened them by saying he had taken their video. He then demanded that the male friend leave. The victim was assaulted thereafter. We have recovered his cellphone with evidence of the crime that he had recorded. We are now examining the device to find if there were more such crimes he committed and deleted evidence," an officer said. After the incident, the student contacted the police on Tuesday morning and filed a complaint with the university's Internal Complaints Committee for Prevention of Sexual Harassment. A case was registered under Section 64 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and the Kotturpuram all-women police formed four teams to apprehend the accused. The police reviewed CCTV footage extensively and identified Gnanasekaran as the suspect. He was known to have been involved in at least 13 petty crimes in the past, including minor theft and robbery, police said.

"He also threatened the survivor by taking her phone number, saying she must meet him whenever he called her," an officer said. The assault has sparked widespread criticism of security measures at Anna University, located near the high-security Raj Bhavan and IIT Madras. The campus has over 400 CCTV cameras, and advanced face-recognition attendance systems for staff, but no stringent measures to restrict outsiders' entry. The university has also not had a vice-chancellor since August.

University Registrar J Prakash said security personnel were always on duty on the university campus. "Surveillance cameras are also installed. Despite all that, this unfortunate incident has taken place. Additional security measures will be taken at the university level to ensure that such incidents do not repeat," he said. Targeting the DMK government over their alleged inability to maintain law and order, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said in a social media post that it was a shame that such a crime took place within the campus of a university in the



heart of Chennai. "Chief Minister M K Stalin has pushed law and order in the state backwards. Whenever I pointed out the lapses in the law and order situation in Tamil Nadu, the state government was only keen on opposing my statements. Had it acted promptly, we could have avoided such incidents," he said. BJP state president K Annamalai said, "Tamil Nadu, under the DMK government, has become a breeding ground for unlawful activities and a haven for criminals. Women don't feel safe in the state anymore, as the police are kept busy by the ruling administration to silence the Opposition." "The BJP Tamil Nadu demands that the Chief Minister take responsibility at least now, and address the people on the status of this sexual assault case in Anna University and do justice to the portfolio he holds," Annamalai said. Annamalai also alleged that the suspect had DMK links, and posted his pictures with senior DMK leaders. A senior officer probing the case said the accused had been close to a local DMK leader, but is not part of the party structure. PMK founder S Ramadoss also condemned the incident, citing it as an example of a deteriorating law and order situation. "Every time such an incident occurs, the ruling government attempts to divert the public's attention without improving the law and order situation. The people of Tamil Nadu are watching, and they will punish the DMK government at the right time," he said. Tamil Nadu Law Minister S Regupathi said the accused, Gnanasekaran, is "not even an ordinary party member". He said the arrest of the accused in a matter of five-six hours showed police's swift action, and that the government had no necessity to hide anything. Higher Education Minister Govi Chezhian defended the government's efforts. "Steps will be taken to prevent recurrence of such incidents. Those who are trying to politicise the issue should not forget the Pollachi sexual assault cases (that took place under the AIADMK regime)," he said.

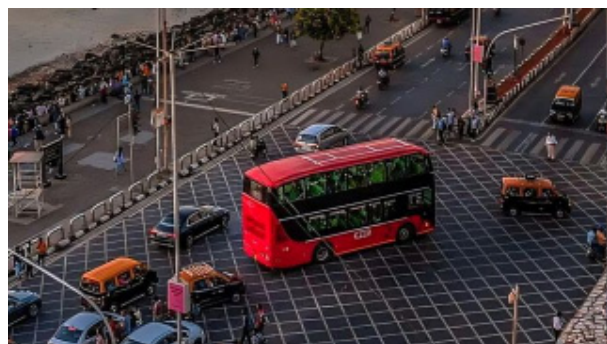
Mumbai's BEST workers' union protests over BMC's neglect, calls for revival steps

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Their key demands include halting the privatisation of BEST services, ending the wet lease system for buses, procuring self-owned buses, recruiting new staff, and clearing pending gratuity and Covid-19 allowances for employees. The union argued that these steps are important to revive BEST buses from financial loss, shrinking fleet, and rising accidents. The protest follows BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani's reported statement that BEST does not come under the civic body's responsibility. However, Suhas Samant, president of BEST Kamgar Sena, hit back saying that BMC is BEST's parent



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'Exchanged 36 calls (with accused), kept requesting police to act': Brother of sarpanch brutally killed in Maharashtra's Beed



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Extortion, murder and a political sluffest that forced even the CM to respond – the murder of a beloved sarpanch in Maharashtra's Beed district has led to anger that refuses to die down. At the village of Santosh Deshmukh (45), the sarpanch of Massajog in Kaiz tehsil, posters demanding justice for his killing are ubiquitous. Since his murder on December 9 – allegedly by local strongmen with links to the NCP – his family has seen a constant stream of visitors, from well-wishers to politicians and social activists. The family, which hails from Barshi tehsil around 80 kilometres from Massajog, shifted here around 50 years ago and settled at Deshmukh's uncle's home.

When The Indian Express visited the village, a pandal had been erected alongside a local temple, where Deshmukh's brother Dhananjay sat on the ground, receiving those who came to pay their condolences. On a table was a garlanded photo of Deshmukh and text in Marathi that read: "Nyay pahije (need justice)." Another poster in the village read, "Aamcha rajala nyay pahije (justice for our king)." Santosh Deshmukh, sarpanch murder, maharashtra beed news, indian express A pandal had been erected alongside a local temple, where Santosh Deshmukh's brother Dhananjay sat on the ground, receiving those who came to pay their condolences.

"He was known to help anyone who approached him. He never cared for what the post of sarpanch would get him; only the development of the village. That is why he held the post for 15 years," said Mihi More, 70, a resident. On December 9, Deshmukh was kidnapped in broad daylight, shoved into a black Scorpio, and allegedly assaulted for around three hours before he succumbed. His body was dumped on a road near his village. The post-mortem indicates he died "due to haemorrhage and shock due to multiple injuries".

He is survived by his elderly parents, wife, and two children aged 13 and 17. Four people have been arrested so far – NCP's former Beed tehsil president Vishnu Chate, Jairam Chate, Mahesh Karad and Pratik Ghule. Following his arrest, Vishnu Chate was expelled by the Ajit Pawar-led NCP on December 14. Three others are absconding – Sudarshan Ghule, Krushna Andhale and Sudhir Sangle. The family has also alleged the involvement of Walmik Karad, a relative of the main accused Vishnu Chate. Karad is a group leader in Paril Nagar Parishad, president of the Ladki Bahin Yojana in Beed, and NCP's member of the Beed district planning committee. Both Karad and Chate were named in an extortion FIR filed just days before the murder.

Dhananjay, the victim's brother, claimed Deshmukh was killed because he tried to prevent an extortion racket being run by the accused. "They wanted to set an example through my brother," he said. Deshmukh's elder child, Vaibhavi, who is in class 12, also demanded prompt action against the accused and said she would take part in an all-party protest being organised in Beed on December 28. The issue also rocked the winter assembly session, with opposition legislators staging protests and demanding the arrest of the accused. A BJP MLA from the district shared details in the assembly of how Deshmukh was allegedly tortured. Maharashtra beed, sarpanch murder news, indian express The family has also alleged the involvement of Walmik Karad, a relative of the main accused Vishnu Chate. (Express Photo by Deepak Joshi) While the Opposition criticised the Fadnavis government's "failure to maintain law and order" in Beed, even leaders of the ruling dispensation pointed fingers at Karad — alleged to be a close associate of Maharashtra's Food and Civil Supplies Minister Dhananjay Munde.

Amid demands that he address the issue and sack

Munde, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced a judicial probe and transferred the Beed district superintendent of police. He also said the murder would be probed by a Special Investigation Team headed by an Inspector General-level rank officer. Fadnavis informed the assembly that Karad has been booked for extortion under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crimes Act and would also be booked in Deshmukh's murder if his role is found. Meanwhile, Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde, who belongs to the Beed district, met Fadnavis Thursday. Talking to reporters after the meeting, state Food and Civil Supplies Minister Munde said a meeting of his department was around the same time as the chief minister's meeting at the Sahyadri guest house in Mumbai. The minister said that from the very beginning, he had been demanding that Deshmukh's killers be "hanged to death" and also accused the media of "trying to finish him off". "Even if the killers may be close to anyone including me, I have said the accused must be punished. Still, if I am being targeted, one can make out what kind of politics this is," he said. "What can be the objective of the media trial against me... (but) to finish me off politically." The case

Police say their investigation so far suggests the murder stemmed from a brawl between Deshmukh and the four arrested accused on December 6 at the site of a windmill energy project being executed by Avada Energy in Massajog village. According to the police, on December 6, four persons, including accused Sudarshan and Pratik Ghule, went to the project site and allegedly abused and assaulted a security guard and the project manager after they were stopped from entering. The security guard, who belongs to Massajog village, alerted Deshmukh since he was the sarpanch. Deshmukh rushed to the site along with a few villagers and the two groups engaged in a brief clash, his family members, villagers and the police told. Maharashtra beed, sarpanch murder news, indian express Police say their investigation so far suggests the murder stemmed from a brawl between Deshmukh and the four arrested accused on December 6 at the site of a windmill energy project being executed by Avada Energy in Massajog village. Later that evening, the project manager lodged an extortion complaint with the police, based on which an FIR was filed. Chate, Karad and another person were accused of demanding Rs 2 crore from the firm that is installing a windmill in the district. The accused were arrested and released on bail.

On December 9, according to an FIR registered with the Kaiz police station by Deshmukh's cousin Shivraj, when they were heading to their village in a vehicle, they were intercepted by a black Scorpio near Dongaon toll plaza around 3:15 pm. According to the FIR, six persons with rods, stones and beer bottles exited the SUV, assaulted both of them and forced Deshmukh into their vehicle. Shivraj said he informed Deshmukh's brother Dhananjay over the phone and asked him to reach the police station to lodge a complaint. Around 6:30 pm, the police found Deshmukh's body dumped in the area. "As soon as we got to know about the abduction, I rushed to the police station. The police team started looking, but they could not trace him. Meanwhile, since Shivraj had recognised the accused as supporters of Vishnu Chate, I called him directly. He initially said he would look into it and later called me saying my brother would return in some time," Dhananjay claimed. "In two hours, we spoke 36 times over the phone but my brother did not return. During this time, I kept requesting the police to trace my brother, but they took it lightly. They said I should continue to be in touch with Chate and inform the police once he returns. After four hours, we received information that my brother's body had been found. It was only then that the police took the official complaint," Dhananjay alleged.

How a blood-soaked shirt, CCTV footage helped Mumbai police arrest accused in actor Kritika Chaudhary's murder case

Nearly a month later, officers from the Amboli Police Station managed to nab the two accused, including a delivery person for a drug peddler and his fruit vendor friend, with the help of a blood-stained shirt found at the crime spot, blurred CCTV footage, and Chaudhary's contacts. The police arrested the two accused on July 10 that year for killing the television and film actor hailing from Haridwar allegedly over a dispute over Rs 6,000 she owed to the accused.

After neighbours complained of a foul smell emanating from inside her home, the police on June 12, 2017, reached the Bhairavnath SRA building near the Regional Transport Office (RTO) where Chaudhary lived and found her body. They said Chaudhary had been killed at least two to three days earlier. The police said they recovered a blood-soaked shirt belonging to foreign brand 'Royal Premium' near her body, along with a pair of brass knuckles allegedly used to kill her. They also found that her jewellery was missing. As the police started their investigation into the murder, blurred CCTV footage revealed that two men entered Chaudhary's building on June 8. The police also inquired with all major retailers about the shirt's origin, but could not find any clue. They said the security guard, a witness in the case, identified one of the men in the CCTV footage as Shakeel Nasim Khan (then 33), who was wearing the said shirt. The police claimed the shirt was a crucial piece of evidence to prove Khan's involvement in the crime. Besides CCTV footage, the police also scanned her cellphone con-

tacts and questioned those who were in touch with her, and zeroed in on Khan from the Govandi area, who had been in contact with Chaudhary for more than a year. Khan had been arrested by the Mumbai police's Anti-Narcotics Cell in August 2016 in another case for delivering Mephedrone and was released on bail in November of that year. Before his arrest in that case, Khan had allegedly supplied drugs to Chaudhary and she owed him Rs 6,000 for the same. As per the police, demonetisation had come into effect when he was released on bail, and as he faced a cash crunch, Khan had started visiting Chaudhary's house seeking money. They said she was allegedly stalling the payment. On the day of the incident, Khan allegedly asked his friend Badshah alias Basudas Makamlal Das (then 40), a fruit vendor from Nalasopara who was also in need of money, to accompany him to Chaudhary's house. As per police, when Chaudhary said she would pay him later, Khan hit her on the head with brass knuckles, changed his blood-soaked shirt by leaving it on the floor, and wore a fresh one that he was carrying with him. Before leaving, the accused allegedly switched on the air conditioner to mask the smell of the decomposing body. Khan then moved from Nalasopara to other places and later stayed with a relative in Panvel, from where he was arrested, after which Das was detained from Govandi. The police found the jewellery belonging to Chaudhary in Khan's possession and also recovered the key with which they locked the door of the actor's flat from Das.

COP29 U.N. Summit: Civil society protests against climate finance proposal, calls for 'no deal' over 'bad deal'



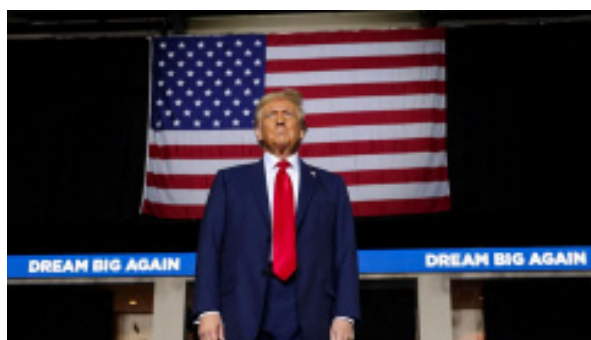
GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Civil society members staged a silent march at the U.N. climate summit, condemning the developed nations' proposal to increase annual climate finance to a meagre \$250 billion by 2035. They called on the developing world to reject what they described as an "insulting" and "unjust" deal. With their arms crossed in defiance, protesters walked silently through the summit venue, where chanting is prohibited. "We urge you to stand up for the people of the Global South, and we insist: no deal in Baku is better than a bad deal, and this is a very, very bad deal because of the intransigence of developed countries," said Climate Action

Network (CAN), a global coalition of more than 1,900 civil society organisations, in a letter to G77 and China, the largest bloc of developing nations. The letter urged negotiators to abandon weak agreements, saying, "If nothing sufficiently strong is forthcoming at this COP, we urge you to walk away from the table to fight another day, and we will fight the same fight." Shailendra Yashwant, senior advisor at CAN South Asia, denounced the proposal, saying, "The NCQG (New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance) number of \$250 billion in the latest ministerial text is not a joke, it's an insult to the people of the Global South salvaging their belongings and trying to rebuild their lives from floods, heatwaves, cyclones, landslides or forest fires and other climate change-induced disasters." Harjeet Singh, Global Engagement Director for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, called the proposal "a disgrace".

He said, "Developed countries are fully aware of the cost of climate action, which is running into trillions of dollars annually. Yet they had the audacity to offer this paltry amount." Renowned activist Greta Thunberg also slammed the draft text on climate finance, calling it "a complete disaster" and a "death sentence" for millions already vulnerable to the climate crisis. At the U.N. climate conference in Baku, countries are required to reach an agreement on a new climate finance package to help developing countries cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the warming world. The summit was scheduled to conclude on Friday (November 22, 2024) but spilled into overtime as developed nations only presented a concrete climate finance figure in the closing hours. The \$250 billion amount they have offered is a far cry from the trillions required to tackle the escalating climate emergency. Developing nations have been demanding at least \$1.3 trillion annually -- 13 times the \$100 billion pledged in 2009 -- starting in 2025 to address their escalating climate challenges. They have said that a significant portion of this \$1.3 trillion should come directly in public funding from developed countries.

U.S. President-elect Trump taps Bessent as Treasury Secretary, Chavez-DeRemer as Labor Secretary and Dr Nesheiwat as Surgeon General



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

President-elect Donald Trump has announced that he will nominate well-known international investor Scott Bessent for Treasury Secretary, Congresswoman Lori Chavez-DeRemer for Labor Secretary, and Dr. Janette Nesheiwat as the next Surgeon General of the U.S. Making a slew of announcements for top administrative positions on Friday (November 23, 2024), Mr. Trump appointed Alex Wong as Principal Deputy National Security Advisor and Dr Sebastian Gorka as Senior Director for Counterterrorism.

Former Congressman Dr. Dave Weldon has been nominated to serve as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Marty Makary for FDA (Food and Drug Administration) Commissioner, and Scott Turner as Housing and Urban Development Secretary. Russell Thurlow Vought has been appointed Director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). All the appointments would come into effect on January 20, 2025, when Mr. Trump would be sworn in as the 47th president of the U.S. The nominations need to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate before the nominees are sworn in to their respective positions.

Talking about his Treasury nomination, Mr. Trump said, "Scott is widely respected as one of the world's foremost international investors and geopolitical and economic strategists. Scott's story is that of the American Dream." Bessent is an American investor, philanthropist, and educator. He is the Founder and CEO of Key Square Group. "On the eve of our great country's 250th Anniversary, he will help me usher in a new Golden Age for the United States as we fortify our position as the world's leading economy, centre of innovation and entrepreneurialism, and destination for capital, while always, and without question, maintaining the U.S. Dollar as the Reserve Currency of the World," he said.

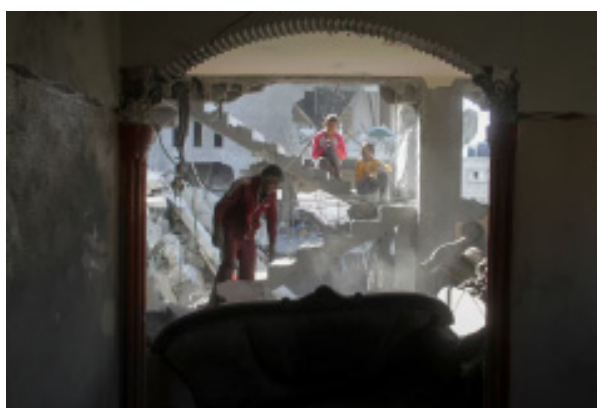
"Unlike in past Administrations, we will ensure that no Americans will be left behind in the next and greatest economic boom, and Scott will lead that effort for me and the great people of the United States of America," he added. Mr. Trump said Congresswoman Chavez-DeRemer's strong support from both the business and labour communities would ensure that the Labor Department can unite Americans of all backgrounds behind the "agenda for unpre-

cedented national success - Making America Richer, Wealthier, Stronger and more Prosperous than ever before!" "Dr. Nesheiwat is a fierce advocate and strong communicator for preventive medicine and public health. She is committed to ensuring that Americans have access to affordable, quality healthcare, and believes in empowering individuals to take charge of their health to live longer, healthier lives," Mr. Trump said about his Surgeon General nominee. Alex Wong served during his first term as the Deputy Special Representative for North Korea and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Department of State. He was also Trump's nominee in the first term for U.S. Ambassador for Special Political Affairs at the United Nations. As Deputy Special Representative for North Korea, he helped negotiate Mr. Trump's Summit with North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un. Alex also led the State Department's efforts to implement the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. "Dr. Sebastian Gorka will be returning to the White House as Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Counterterrorism," Mr. Trump said.

"Since 2015, Dr. Gorka has been a tireless advocate for the America First Agenda and the MAGA Movement, serving previously as Strategist to the President in the first Trump Administration," Mr. Trump said. Americans have lost trust in the CDC and in the federal health authorities, Trump said, alleging that these have engaged in censorship, data manipulation, and misinformation. "Given the current chronic health crisis in our country, the CDC must step up and correct past errors to focus on the prevention of disease," said the President-Elect. "In addition to being a Medical Doctor for 40 years and an Army veteran, Dave has been a respected conservative leader on fiscal and social issues and served on the Labor/HHS Appropriations Subcommittee, working for Accountability on HHS and CDC Policy and Budgeting," Mr. Trump said. Observing that the FDA has lost the trust of Americans and the sight of its primary goal as a regulator, Mr. Trump said the agency needs Marty Makary as Commissioner. "FDA has lost the trust of Americans and has lost sight of its primary goal as a regulator. The agency needs Dr. Marty Makary, a highly respected Johns Hopkins Surgical Oncologist and Health Policy Expert, to course-correct and refocus the agency," he said. "Dr. Makary has been a pioneer in the fields of public health, cancer care, and surgery and a tireless voice for vulnerable populations. He is the recipient of the Nobility in Science Award from the National Pancreas Foundation and numerous teaching awards," Mr. Trump said. Dr. Makary currently leads the evidence-based medicine and Public Policy Research Group at Johns Hopkins, he added. Mr. Trump's nominee for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Scott Turner is an NFL Veteran who, during his first term, served as the First Executive Director of the White House Opportunity and Revitalisation Council (WHORC), helping to lead an "unprecedented effort" that transformed the most distressed communities.

charges Israeli officials deny. In his comments Friday, Mr. Orban, a close Netanyahu ally, called the arrest warrant "outrageously impudent" and "cynical." He said he would invite Mr. Netanyahu to Hungary later Friday and vowed to disregard the warrant if the invitation is accepted. "We will defy this decision, and it will have no consequences for him," Mr. Orban said. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto earlier criticised the ICC's warrant as "absurd." Israel and its top ally, the United States, are not members of the court. But other Israeli allies, including some of its close European friends, are put in an awkward position by the warrants. Several, including France, welcomed the court's decision and signalled they might arrest Mr. Netanyahu if he visited. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said President Joe Biden's administration was "deeply concerned by the prosecutor's rush to seek arrest warrants and the troubling process errors that led to this decision." Mr. Netanyahu on Friday praised Hungary for its stance on the warrant, saying in a statement: "Against the shameful weakness of those who stood by the outrageous decision against the right of the State of Israel to defend itself.

Israeli strikes kill dozens in Gaza over 48 hours, damage hospital in north, Palestinian medics say



GNS News Agency, Dec 31 CAIRO, Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip have killed at least 120 Palestinians over the last 48 hours and hit a hospital on the northern edge of the enclave, wounding medical staff and damaging equipment, Palestinian medics said on Saturday. Among the dead were seven members of one family whose house was hit overnight in the Zeitoun suburb of Gaza City, the health officials said. The rest were killed in separate Israeli strikes in central and southern Gaza. At the same time, Israeli forces deepened their incursion and bombardment of the northern edge of the enclave, their main offensive since early last month.

Israel's military says it aims to prevent Hamas fighters from waging attacks and regrouping in the area. Local residents say they fear the aim is to permanently depopulate a strip of territory as a buffer zone, which Israel denies. At Kamal Adwan Hospital, one of three medical facilities on

the northern edge of Gaza that is barely operational, director Hussam Abu Safiya said the ongoing Israeli bombardment appeared aimed at forcing hospital staff to evacuate something they have refused since the incursion began. "Yesterday (Friday), from the afternoon until midnight, the bombardment directly targeted the entrance to the emergency and reception area several times," he said in a statement, adding that 12 staff members including doctors and nurses were injured. The strike also caused significant damage that disrupted the electrical generator, oxygen supply network and water supply, he added. Asked to comment on Abu Safiya's statement, the Israeli military said that following an initial review it was "not aware of a strike in the area of the Kamal Adwan Hospital".

"The IDF (Israel Defense Forces) ... is doing everything possible to avoid causing harm to civilians," it added. Israel says Hamas uses hospitals and civilians as human shields, and has made public videos and photos to support that claim. Hamas rejects the allegations and says it does not use the civilian population or facilities for military purposes. Israel's 13-month campaign in Gaza has killed more than 44,000 people and displaced nearly all the enclave's population at least once, according to Gaza officials. The war was launched in response to an attack by Hamas-led fighters who killed 1,200 people and captured more than 250 hostages in Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, according to Israeli tallies. Months of attempts to negotiate a ceasefire have yielded scant progress and negotiations are now on hold, with mediator Qatar having suspended its efforts until the sides are prepared to make concessions. Hamas wants a deal that ends the war, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the war can end only once Hamas is eradicated.

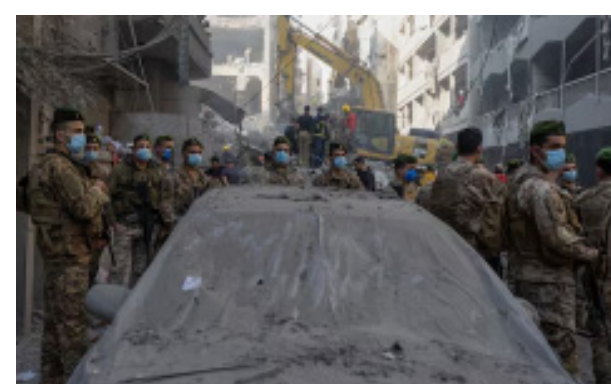
Powerful Israeli airstrike in central Beirut kills 11, Lebanese health ministry says

BEIRUT, GNS News Agency, Dec 31, A powerful airstrike killed 11 people in central Beirut on Saturday, the health ministry said, shaking the capital as Israel pressed its offensive against the Iran-backed Hezbollah group. An eight-story building was struck with four missiles, including bunker-penetrating types designed to hit underground targets, said a Lebanese security source. Israel has used bunker-busting weapons to kill senior Hezbollah figures, including its veteran leader Hassan Nasrallah in a strike on southern Beirut in September. Saturday's blasts shook the capital at around 4 a.m. (0200 GMT) and left a deep crater. Beirut smelled strongly of explosives for hours afterwards. Rescuers searched through rubble, in an area of the city known for its antique shops.

It was the fourth Israeli airstrike this week targeting a central area of Beirut, in contrast to the bulk of Israel's attacks on the capital region, which have hit the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs. On Sunday an Israeli airstrike killed a Hezbollah media official in the Ras al-Nabaa district of central Beirut. The Israeli air force also struck Hezbollah targets in the southern suburbs of Beirut, the group's stronghold, the Israeli military said. In a statement on actions on Saturday, it did not mention the strike on central Beirut. It accused Hezbollah of embedding its infrastructure in civilian areas and using the population as human shields, allegations the group denies.

HOSPITALISED DAUGHTER man whose family was hurt in the strike in central Beirut tried to comfort a traumatized woman outside a hospital. Car windows were shattered. "There was dust and wrecked houses, people running and screaming, they were running, my wife is in hospital, my daughter is in hospital, my aunt is in the hospital," said the man, Nemir Zakariya, who held up a picture of his daughter. "This is the little one, and my son also got hurt - this is my daughter, she is in the American University (of Beirut Medical Centre), this is what happened."

Separately, at least five people were killed and two wounded in an Israeli strike on Roum village in southern Lebanon on Saturday, according to the Lebanese state



news agency. Israel launched a major offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon in September, following nearly a year of cross-border hostilities ignited by the Gaza war, pounding wide areas of Lebanon with airstrikes and sending troops into the south. Israeli strikes killed at least 62 people and injured 111 in Lebanon on Thursday, bringing the toll since October 2023 to 3,645 dead and 15,355 injured, Lebanon's health ministry said. The figures do not distinguish between combatants and civilians. Hezbollah and the Lebanese government accuse Israel of indiscriminate bombing that kills civilians. Israel denies the allegation and says it takes numerous steps to avoid the deaths of civilians. Hezbollah strikes in the same period have killed more than 100 people in northern Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. They include more than 70 soldiers killed in strikes in northern Israel and the Golan Heights and in combat in southern Lebanon, according to Israel. The conflict began when Hezbollah, Tehran's most important ally in the region, opened fire in solidarity with its Palestinian ally Hamas after it launched the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel. A U.S. mediator travelled to Lebanon and Israel this week in an effort to secure a ceasefire. The envoy, Amos Hochstein, indicated progress had been made after meetings in Beirut, before going to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz.

Rich countries boost COP29 climate finance offer as developing nations seethe

BAKU, GNS News Agency, Dec 31 The European Union, U.S. and other wealthy countries at the COP29 summit have agreed to raise their offer of climate funding to \$300 billion per year by 2035 to help developing nations grapple with climate change, sources told Reuters on Saturday, after a previous proposal was dismissed as insultingly low. The summit had been due to finish on Friday but ran into overtime as negotiators from nearly 200 countries - who must adopt the deal by consensus - tried to reach agreement on a climate funding plan for the next decade.

A \$250 billion proposal for a deal, drafted by Azerbaijan's COP29 presidency on Friday, was deemed woefully insufficient by developing countries. It was not clear if the wealthy countries' revised position had been formally communicated to developing countries at the gathering in the Azerbaijan capital Baku, and whether it would be enough to win their support. The COP29 talks have laid bare the divisions between wealthy governments constrained by tight domestic budgets and developing nations reeling from the soaring costs of storms, floods and droughts fuelled by climate change. Past failures to meet climate finance obligations have also made developing countries mistrustful of new promises. The new goal is intended to replace developed countries' previous commitment to provide \$100 billion in climate finance for poorer nations per year by 2020. That goal was met two years late, in 2022, and expires in 2025. Five sources with knowledge of the closed-door discussions said the EU had agreed it could accept the higher number of \$300 billion a year. Two of the sources said the United States, Australia and Britain were also on board. A European Commission spokesperson and an Australian government spokesperson both declined to comment on the negotiations. The U.S. delegation at COP29 and the UK energy ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment. With no formal update yet of the deal draft from the COP29 presidency, the mood was tense among negotiating groups. "There is no clarity on the way forward. There is no clarity on the political will that we need to get out of this," said Panama's lead negotiator, Juan Carlos Monterrey Gomez. Three negotiators described the mood in the room as angry. Sierra Leone's environment minister, Abdulai Jiwoh, declined to comment on the \$300 billion figure, saying: "We're still working on the number with other parties." Marina Silva, Brazil's minister of the environment and climate change, had said on Friday that the Amazon rainforest nation - which is set to host next year's COP30



climate summit - was pushing for \$390 billion annually from developed countries by 2035. "We cannot leave Baku without a decision that lives up to the challenge we are facing," she said via a translator. "We need to reach \$300 billion by 2030, then \$390 billion by 2035 so we can achieve this goal." Delegates were awaiting a new draft text of the deal after negotiators worked through the night to bridge wide gaps in their positions. Any deal would require agreement on more than just the headline amount. Negotiators have worked throughout the two-week summit to address other critical questions on the target, including who is asked to contribute and how much of the funding is on a grant basis, rather than provided as loans. The roster of countries required to contribute - about two dozen industrialised countries, including the U.S., European nations and Canada - dates back to a list decided during U.N. climate talks in 1992. European governments have demanded others join them in paying in, including China, the world's second-biggest economy, and oil-rich Gulf states. Donald Trump's U.S. presidential election victory this month cast a cloud over the Baku talks. Trump, who takes office in January, has promised to again remove the U.S. from international climate cooperation, so negotiators from other wealthy nations expect that under his administration the world's largest economy will not pay into the climate finance goal. A broader goal of raising \$1.3 trillion in climate finance annually by 2035 - which would include funding from all public and private sources and which economists say matches the sum needed - was included in the draft deal published on Friday.

Hungary's Orban vows to disregard international arrest warrant for Netanyahu

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Friday denounced the International Criminal Court's issuing of an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying he would defy it by inviting him to Hungary. In comments to state radio, Mr. Orban accused the International Criminal Court (ICC), the world's top war crimes court based in The Hague, of "interfering in an ongoing conflict for political purposes," saying the decision to issue the warrant for Mr. Netanyahu over his conduct of the war in Gaza undermined international law and escalated tensions. Member countries of the ICC, such as Hungary, are required to detain suspects facing a warrant if they set foot on their soil, but the court has no way to enforce that. The ICC issued the arrest warrant on Thursday for Mr. Netanyahu as well as for his former defence minister and Hamas' military chief, accusing them of crimes against humanity in connection with the 13-month war in Gaza. The warrants said there was reason to believe Mr. Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant used "starvation as a method of warfare" by restricting humanitarian aid and intentionally targeted civilians in Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza -

Cost of borrowing very stressful, banks need to make interest rates affordable: FM



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said bank interest rates are very stressful for some people, and steps are needed to make them affordable. Amid

widespread concerns about a possible slowdown in economic growth, the finance minister assured that the government is fully aware of the domestic and global challenges, and added that there is no need to have "undue concerns".

What is important is when you look at India's growth requirements, and you can have so many different voices coming out and saying the cost of borrowing is really very stressful, and a time when we want industries to ramp up and move (to) building capacities, bank interest rates will have to be far more affordable," Sitharaman said. Speaking at the annual business and economic conclave organised by SBI, the minister also asked banks to concentrate on their core function of giving loans and added that the "misselling" of insurance products also indirectly adds to the cost of borrowing for an entity.

After slow start to capital expenditure in FY25 due to elections, Capex recovery likely in H2FY25, but 40-52% push needed to meet targets

After a slow start to capital expenditure by both states and the Centre during the ongoing financial year 2024-25 that has been primarily attributed to the general elections earlier this year, a pickup in the second half of the fiscal is predicated on an increase in government spending. This expected pickup comes amid concerns over a general moderation in domestic consumption demand and flagging of other growth indicators. While a belated government spending push would be a major impetus to flagging economic momentum, the prospect of getting government spending up to speed could mean a daunting 40-52 per cent increase in government capex during October-March, the second half of the financial year, to come anywhere close to the budget targets.

Given the likely contraction of over 10 per cent in the capex in the first half of FY25, states would require an over 40 per cent expansion in capex during the remaining six months to meet their budget targets. As per rating agency ICRA, data for 15 major states shows that the combined revenue receipts, revenue expenditure and capex are required to expand by 30 per cent, 26 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, in the second half (H2) of FY25, to meet the budgeted target for the fiscal. The flagging pace of capex has also been a concern for the Centre, which has already nudged departments and ministries to speed up the pace of spending in the ongoing quarter as much as possible. The government has nudged the ministries to expedite the pace of capital expenditure to avoid bunching up of capex in the January-March quarter, with the government expected to relax the cash management limits for the last quarter. As per the latest data by Controller General of Accounts, the Centre's capital expenditure during September stood at Rs 1.14 lakh crore, down 2.4 per cent from the year-ago period. Cumulatively, during April-September, the first half of the financial year, capex was down 15.4 per cent year-on-year to Rs 4.15 lakh crore. The second half of the financial year will pose a challenge to the Centre as capex will have to grow by 52 per cent to achieve the FY25 Budget target of Rs 11.11 lakh crore.

States are facing a similar challenge to boost their capex. The combined capital spending and net lending of 15 major states declined by 7.5 per cent in H1 FY25 as against a 21 per cent year-on-year expansion pegged in the budget estimates, ICRA said. Amid the compression in capex, the fiscal deficit of the 15 states stood at Rs 3.5

lakh crore in the first half (H1) of FY25, or 42 per cent of the budget estimates. "While we expect a pick-up in the growth of the revenue receipts in H2 FY25 led by states' own tax revenues, the required rate of 30 per cent seems challenging, led by various domestic and global factors as well as our assessment of continuing contraction in grants. Additionally, notwithstanding highly back-ended capex in FY25, we expect it to undershoot the levels indicated in FY25 BE (Budget Estimates)," ICRA said. In the first half, revenue receipts for these 15 states have been slower, rising by 7.3 per cent as against the 20 per cent expansion estimated in the BE, led by lower-than-budgeted growth in the states' own tax revenues reflecting moderation in consumer demand amid elevated inflation, elections and climate-related disruptions in economic activity in H1, it said. Investment announcements which are indicative of the investment intentions of the business enterprises in the economy were lower by 29.5 per cent in the first half of FY25 whereas investment projects completed dropped by 53 per cent year-on-year (YoY) in the same period, according to CMIE data. Not only were the investment announcements and completions lower than a year ago period, but they also fell short of the half-yearly (H1) average seen over the last decade. This is mainly because of poor data for Q1 of FY25 due to election related restrictions and uncertainties. Project investment announcements during first half of FY25 till October 2024 were down at Rs 8.9 lakh crore as against Rs 12.6 lakh crore in the first half of FY24 while projects completed were Rs 1.6 lakh crore in the first half FY25 till now as against Rs 3.5 lakh crore in the same period of last year, as per CMIE data. As per CareEdge Ratings, state government capex for 20 major states contracted 10.5 per cent in H1, while aggregate capex by major central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) contracted by 10.8 per cent at Rs 3.4 lakh crore, which is around 43.6 per cent of the annual target. "Centre has achieved 37 per cent of its budgeted capex target in H1, while 20 major states, at an aggregate level, have achieved only 28 per cent of their budgeted target. It is crucial to monitor the trajectory of the public capex going forward. Any further slowdown in subsequent quarters could result in a shortfall relative to budget estimates. Hence, the possibility of a downward revision in the capex target remains," CareEdge Ratings said in a note. India Ratings and Research expects states' aggregate capex to increase to 1.4-1.5 per cent of GDP in H2 FY25.

As India's oil demand growth surpasses China's, crude diversification efforts may gather steam

India, which is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil, is expected to end 2024 with an oil demand growth rate surpassing that of China — a trend that is expected to continue in the coming year as well — making the South Asian country one of the fastest-growing major oil consumption centres globally, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights (SPGCI). This is expected to further accelerate Indian refiners' capacity expansion plans and provide a fresh impetus to their efforts to widen crude diversification by importing more from an expanding slate of source markets. "India will be the leading driver, along with Southeast Asia and other parts of South Asia, of the region's future oil demand growth," said Kang Wu, global head of macro and oil demand research at SPGCI. According to Wu, in 2025, India is forecast to deliver a relatively faster growth of 3.2 per cent in oil demand vis-à-vis China's 1.7 per cent. In January-October of 2024, China's oil demand rose by 148,000 barrels per day (bpd), or 0.9 per cent, year-on-year, lagging India's growth of 180,000 bpd or 3.2 per cent, per SPGCI data.

China is the world's second-largest consumer of crude oil behind the United States (US), but is the commodity's biggest importer globally. But oil demand growth in China has been subdued in the post-pandemic era due to a combination of factors. These include a slump in sectors



like real estate and construction, investments shifting to sectors that are not oil intensive, declining population, and growing adoption of vehicles powered by electricity and other alternative fuels. India, on the other hand, is still seen as a growth centre for oil demand given the future potential in energy-intensive industries, growing vehicle sales, a rapidly expanding aviation sector, expected growth in consumption of petrochemicals, and a still growing population with relatively low per-capita energy consumption. In fact, India is among the few markets where refinery capacity is expected to expand substantially over the coming years. In February, Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) had said that India's oil demand growth was expected to overtake China's by 2027, making the former the biggest driver of global oil demand growth through the remainder of the decade "underpinned by strong economic and demo-

graphic growth". According to the IEA's projections, India is on track to post an increase of nearly 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in oil demand by 2023, accounting for more than a third of the projected global demand by the end of this decade. India's growing crude diversification is intensifying efforts to diversify its crude import basket to reduce reliance on a few supplying countries. For instance, the Indian government as well as refiners are understood to be in active discussions with new source markets like Guyana for oil purchases. Currently, India relies heavily on Russia and West Asian oil exporters for its oil imports, although it has a fairly extensive slate of source markets from which oil can be bought to suit local refinery configurations. New Delhi depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its oil requirement for meeting domestic demand. The

country's leadership had time and again stated that Indian refiners will continue to buy oil from the cheapest available sources. "Recent diplomatic visits will help bring in crude oil from Africa and Latin America, but the growth in absolute volume would depend on the overall crude market... The share of Middle Eastern crude shipments to India's basket is likely to drop by a few percentage points due to the diversification," said Abhishek Ranjan, South Asia oil research lead at SPGCI. Expanding refining capacity India is set to see significant refining capacity growth in 2025, SPGCI said. The country is only months away from launching its first greenfield integrated refinery and petrochemicals complex (HPCL Rajasthan Refinery project in Barmer) in nearly a decade. By 2030, India aims to expand its refining capacity to 450 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) from the current capacity of almost 257 mtpa,

Doctor explains how pollution from old vehicles affects health



These measures, coupled with those already in place under previous stages of GRAP banning BS-IV or older diesel vehicles, aim to curb pollution and improve air quality in the region. These measures, coupled with those already in place under previous stages of GRAP banning BS-IV or older diesel vehicles, aim to curb pollution and improve air quality in the region. As Delhi-NCR's air quality plummeted to a "severe plus" level on Sunday evening, authorities were forced to implement the most stringent anti-pollution measures under Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). To mitigate the health risks posed by the hazardous air, several restrictions have been imposed: School Closures: All schools, except for classes 10 and 12, have been ordered to shift to online classes. Vehicle Restrictions: Entry of non-essential diesel-powered medium and heavy vehicles into Delhi has been banned. Construction and demolition activities have also been halted, with certain exceptions. Work-from-Home: Offices in the NCR have been advised to implement a 50% work-from-home policy. These measures, coupled with those already in place under previous stages of GRAP banning BS-IV or older diesel vehicles, aim to curb pollution and improve air quality in the region.

Air pollution continues to pose serious health risks, particularly in urban areas. Dr Vikas Mittal, a Pulmonologist at CK Birla Hospital, Delhi, explains how emergency measures like GRAP 4 can alleviate pollution's harmful effects,

'The two of us go to a therapist for our relationship': Aamir Khan on why he and daughter Ira chose joint therapy

In a clip shared by Netflix India, where actor Aamir Khan appeared with his daughter Ira Khan to discuss mental health with the host, Dr Vivek Murthy, the actor revealed that they have been attending joint therapy to address issues in their relationship. He said, "Therapy is so helpful. I think she (Ira) pushed me down that path. I would strongly recommend therapy to anyone who feels the need for it. It has been helpful for me. In fact, Ira and I also have started joint therapy. The two of us go to a therapist for our own relationship. To work on how to make that better and issues which have been there for over years."

Khan asserts the importance of therapy later during the interview as well. "Therapy is a very powerful thing. I'm a fairly intelligent guy. I can think things through. I'm a sensible guy. If there's an issue, I can sort it out for myself. But no, I can't. It doesn't matter how intelligent you are. It doesn't matter how worldly-wise you are. We know so little about our minds... That a person who has a lot more knowledge and has got the basics right really helps you in leaps and bounds to understand it," he added. The actor highlighted how this experience has helped them navigate their challenges and strengthen their bond. Ira also shared that working on your relationship with your parents is very important.

What is joint therapy?

To understand the concept of joint therapy further indianexpress.com spoke to Gurleen Baruah, organisational psychologist and existential therapist at That Culture Thing. She says, "Joint therapy is a collaborative form of counselling where family members work with a therapist to address relationship issues and improve their dynamic. It's somewhat similar to couples therapy, as the focus is on the connection between participants rather than their individual experiences." In joint therapy, both members attend sessions together, allowing the therapist to observe their interactions and guide them in breaking unhealthy patterns, improving communication, and fostering mutual understanding. This process is often accompanied by individual therapy for one or both participants, Baruah adds, depending on their needs. The challenges parents and children might face in joint therapy largely depend on the family dynamic. The challenges parents and children might face in joint therapy largely depend on the family dynamic (Source: Freepik)

Benefits of joint therapy for parents and children Baruah

You will not believe how many tiny plastic particles plastic-coated paper cups can release when exposed to tea, coffee for just 15 minutes

Drinking hot beverages like tea or coffee in disposable paper cups is common. However, some people claim that doing so can lead to the ingestion of microplastic particles, which are a health hazard. Recently, in Maharashtra's Buldhana city, its district collector, Dr Kiran Patil, passed a directive to ban paper cups. In a statement, he claimed that paper cups "are the main reason behind the rising cases of cancer." So, we decided to verify from experts. Acknowledging that there's a debate going on regarding the safety of paper cups, especially for those using them daily, Dr Tirathram Kaushik, consultant oncologist, Wockhardt Hospitals Mira Road, said that while paper cups are not directly associated with cancer, the chemicals used in their linings, such as microplastics or perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), could cause cancer. Microplastics are minute particles made out of plastics that have embedded themselves in our natural environment. Their interaction with human's biological ecosystem is under scrutiny, said Dr Mridul Malhotra, consultant, medical oncology, Manipal Hospital Dwarka, New Delhi. "Chemical composition contamination: Microplastics may carry and deliver chemicals containing carcinogens to the tissues in the human body. Inflammation: Microplastics can induce cellular changes that can lead to cancer in the body. — Disrupting the mucus layer: Microplastics can disrupt the mucus layer, particularly of the gastrointestinal tract, and further compromise the protective barriers of the human body. It is also a fact that when any hot beverage is served in a paper cup, some substances may get absorbed into the beverage, raising concerns about prolonged exposure over time, which can impact one's well-being in the long run, asserted Dr Kaushik.

while ageing vehicles, especially diesel ones, exacerbate the problem by releasing toxic emissions. Understanding these factors is essential for improving air quality and protecting public health. Respiratory Relief: By lowering exposure to airborne toxins, GRAP 4 prevents acute respiratory conditions and asthma exacerbations. Cardiovascular Protection: Decreased particulate matter helps reduce risks of heart diseases and strokes. Focus on Vulnerable Groups: Children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions benefit significantly from the cleaner air. Delhi flights diverted, Delhi air pollution Traffic passes on a road as the sky is enveloped with smog after Delhi's air quality turned "severe" due to alarming air pollution, in New Delhi, India, November 18, 2024. (Photo: Reuters)

Health risks from pollution by ageing vehicles Pollution from old vehicles, particularly diesel-based ones, Dr Mittal said, significantly degrades air quality and endangers public health. Harmful Emissions: Aging vehicles release higher levels of carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and particulate matter (PM), which are linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Deep Lung Penetration: Fine particulate matter from exhaust enters deep into the lungs, causing chronic respiratory conditions and even increasing cancer risks. VOCs Exposure: Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) from old vehicles harm vulnerable populations, including children and those with existing health issues. The diesel factor: Older diesel vehicles pose even greater threats due to deteriorating engine components and outdated emission technologies, Dr Mittal said. Key concerns include: Increased Nitrogen Oxides and Soot: Diesel engines emit NOx and black carbon (soot), aggravating lung diseases and contributing to climate change. Carcinogenic Effects: Diesel exhaust is a recognized carcinogen, raising the risk of lung cancer and heart disease. Inefficiency Over Time: Aging diesel engines result in incomplete combustion, worsening emissions. To improve air quality, adhere to GRAP 4 measures and support policies promoting cleaner vehicles and reduced diesel usage.



informs, "The emotional benefits of joint therapy for parents and children navigating complex family dynamics are significant. Family relationships often involve layers of unspoken feelings, misunderstandings, and unresolved conflicts. Joint therapy provides a safe, structured space where these complexities can be unpacked with the gentle guidance of a psychologist. "A key benefit is the opportunity for open and authentic communication, says Baruah. "Therapy allows family members to express their emotions honestly, fostering emotional honesty and vulnerability." According to Baruah, joint therapy helps families recognise patterns and roles within their dynamic. "Another emotional benefit is the sense of relief and reflection therapy provides. Joint therapy allows these feelings to surface, helping families collectively process past traumas, grief, or unresolved issues," she notes.

Potential challenges or obstacles The challenges parents and children might face in joint therapy largely depend on the family dynamic and the individual members involved, remarks Baruah. "One key factor is whose idea it was to start therapy and whether all members are willingly participating. If some family members feel forced into therapy or are resistant, it can create tension and impact the effectiveness of the process." Another common obstacle is lack of participation or openness. Some members might struggle to engage, avoid addressing deeper issues, or feel distrustful of the process. To overcome these challenges, the family must first discuss why therapy is being considered. For reluctant members, the emphasis should be on creating a space of choice, not force — encouraging them to try therapy with an open mind, rather than demanding participation.



"It's important to note that current research hasn't definitively proven that the occasional use of paper cups causes cancer. There is no evidence available to back up this claim," said Dr Kaushik. Citing an August 2024 study, Dr Malhotra said that exposure to hot liquids in plastic-coated paper cups for just 15 minutes can release approximately 25,000 tiny plastic particles. "Individuals drinking near to three cups of hot beverages in their daily routine may ingest around 75,000 invisible plastic particles," said Dr Malhotra. The pros of paper cups include convenience and lightweight design. "The disadvantages would be that the cups may contain chemicals that can raise environmental concerns from single-use waste. For safer use, opt for paper cups labeled BPA-free and consider using reusable alternatives like ceramic cups to minimise exposure and environmental impact," said Dr Kaushik. According to Dr Malhotra, there are a few precautionary measures to avoid microplastics in food: — Using glass or stainless steel vessels — Avoiding food to be heated in plastic containers — Choosing microwave-safe containers — Reducing single-use plastics — Drinking water from filtered sources

To be a character or an actor in an MT Vasudevan Nair script — that was everyone's dream



I still remember the first time I read the book Parinayavum Mattu Thirakkathakalum, featuring three screenplays — Parinayam, Kadavu and Sadayam — written by MT Vasudevan Nair. I had watched all three films growing up, probably more than once, but reading their texts was a truly defining experience for me. As a teenager, it was then that I realised films are much more than just actors and their performances. Soon, I managed to find a copy of the film Sadayam (1992) and revisited it, keeping the book beside me, soaking in the magical way in which written words transformed into visuals, moving images, and eventually a complete film.

The literary flow of the work, paired with the outstanding characterisations — where each person has sharp and strong arcs — further enriched by vivid imagery and meticulous descriptions, taught the young me, who was already enamoured with movies, valuable lessons on cinema. At the same time, I also couldn't help but marvel at how MT, renowned for his exceptional novels and short stories, wherein one has the space and luxury to delve into inner thoughts and character backgrounds, could craft such remarkable screenplays — where one needs to show more than tell. Well, that was MT Vasudevan Nair; whatever the medium was, if it involved language, he aced it, whether it was written or visual. As much of a doyen of Malayalam literature as he was, MT was also one of the path-breaking figures in the cinematic landscape, redefining the grammar of the medium at a time when it was still largely influenced by the traditions and style of professional drama. By facilitating the marriage between literature and cinema in Malayalam, MT, alongside other legendary authors like Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Uroob, P Kesavadev and Malayattoor Ramakrishnan, ushered in a new era in the industry, defined by stories that evoked humanism and ensured realistic portrayals of the lives, struggles and redemptions of ordinary people.

Born on July 15, 1933, in Kudallur village of Palakkad district, by the time he ventured into cinema, MT had already won the hearts of countless Malayalees through his impactful and poignant short stories and novels, including Naalukettu, Pathiravum Pakalvelichavum, Asuravithu, Manju and Olavum Theeravum, which were instrumental in shaping modern Malayalam literature. Remarkably, MT refused to confine himself to a single style or genre and explored a wide array of themes and narratives. Cinematographer Vincent, Chandrathara Productions' RS Prabhu, Ramu Kariat, K Parameswaran Nair, MT Vasudevan Nair, Adoor Bhasi, film distributor Chandran and K Padmanabhan Nair. Living up to the hype surrounding his arrival, MT made a spectacular entry into cinema with Murappennu, directed by legendary cinematographer-director A Vincent, which became an immediate success, earning widespread acclaim. Centred around the practice of cousin marriage, Murappennu also exposed the arbitrariness of blood relations, emphasising that financial worth often dictates one's place within familial structures. Interestingly, the movie, starring Prem Nazir, Sharada, Madhu, KP Ummer, PJ Antony and Jyothi Lakshmi, also exposed the hollowness of the so-called prestige and the "value of a word" that the savarnas often glorify and wear as a badge of honour, showing how these ideals are, in fact, up for sale.

MT's literary mastery and command over the Malayalam language made an instant impression on both filmmakers and audiences alike. Thus, he continued to receive projects one after the other and he delivered exceptional works, with notable titles such as Pakalkkinavu (1966), Iruttinte Athmavu (1967), Nagaram Nandi (1967), Asuravithu (1968), Nizhalaattam (1970), Olavum Theeravum (1970), Mappusakshi (1971), Kuttyedathi (1971), and Vithukal (1971), many of which were based on his own literary works. As much of a doyen of Malayalam literature as he was, MT was also one of the path-breaking figures in the cinematic landscape. MT Vasudevan Nair was born on July 15, 1933, in Kudallur village of Palakkad district.

Both MT's literary works and films delved deeply into the fabric of society and human nature, exposing the grey within too. He also consistently challenged conformist ideologies, distancing himself from the dirt of his time. While many filmmakers often resorted to portraying rape victims as outcasts or even killing such characters off — a trope that persisted until recent years — MT took a radically different approach, asserting that survivors should never carry the burden of shame for crimes committed against them.

Sanjay Kapoor was jealous of Boney Kapoor after hair transplant, says doctor: 'It is better than mine'

Boney Kapoor has been quiet vocal about his physical transformation. The producer has given several interviews talking about his decision to lose weight as well as get his hair transplant done. Now, in a new interview, Boney Kapoor shared how he was given a luxury treatment with in-house masseuse and his favourite song. Talking about Boney's hair transplant, the producer's doctor shared that his younger brother Sanjay Kapoor was quiet jealous of him.

In an interview with ABP Live, Boney Kapoor's doctor said, "I had met Sanjay Kapoor at a party. He told to me, 'You have done such great work with Boney's hair transplant'. He has got it done from some place else, so he was quiet jealous about it." Boney Kapoor shared his experience and called it a picnic. He said in the same interview, "Getting my hair transplant done seemed like a three-day picnic to me. The doctors were quiet entertaining. They were danc-

In Olavum Theeravum, the protagonist Baputty (Madhu) declares without hesitation that his lover Nabeesa (Ushanandini) has not lost even a drop of her dignity or worth due to the rape she faced. Confronting the perpetrator Kunjali (Jose Prakash), he proclaims, "She did not consent to what happened. Not even a small part of her heart agreed to it. Knowing fully well that you violated her, I will marry Nabeesa." For a society that treats women as lesser mortals — let alone survivors of sexual violence — and worships gods who abandon their wives over accusations of promiscuity, this dialogue and Baputty's stance are a powerful, groundbreaking statement.

Two years later, when he made his directorial debut with Nirmalyam (1973), MT broke further away from conventional cinematic and societal norms. He crafted a film that critically examined theism, exposing the futility of blind devotion and questioning the time people spend praying for a better life instead of actively pursuing it. What set MT apart was his ability to weave such strong political commentary into his work without sacrificing its aesthetic value. In one of Indian cinema's most iconic and evocative scenes, Nirmalyam ends with the protagonist, an oracle (PJ Antony), performing a traditional dance before the goddess and in an act of defiance, he spits blood at the deity, condemning the god for ignoring his suffering and ruining his life despite his unwavering devotion. Not just MT but others also received prestigious accolades, including both National and State Film Awards, for their contributions to movies written by him. MT Vasudevan Nair receives the National Film Award for Best Screenplay from the then President R Venkataraman. (Express archive photo)

Remarkably, MT refused to confine himself to a single style or genre and explored a wide array of themes and narratives. Yet, all his works carried his unmistakable signature — authentic, deeply rooted characters, particularly women, whose inner lives were meticulously explored, as evident in films like Kanyakumari (1974), Neelathamara (1979) and Oppol (1981). In the 1980s, MT forged impactful collaborations with filmmakers and actors, partnerships that significantly shaped his career and integrated him deeper into mainstream cinema. During this period, he joined forces with filmmakers IV Sasi and Hariharan, delivering remarkable films such as Uyarangalil (1984), Aalkkootathil Thaniye (1984), Adiyozhukkukal (1984), Anubandham (1985), Panchagni (1986), Nakhakshathangal (1986) and Abhayam Thedi (1984).

Many of these films featured emerging actors Mammooty and Mohanlal, for whom collaborating with MT proved transformative. One of the hallmarks of MT's scripts was his ability to create opportunities for both actors and technicians to excel. His films were not just about his writing prowess but collaborative efforts where every cast and crew member was given the space to shine. Films like Amrutham Gamaya (1987) and Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha (1989) were pivotal not only in establishing Mammooty and Mohanlal as exceptional actors but also in enhancing the careers of all involved. Not just MT but others also received prestigious accolades, including both National and State Film Awards, for their contributions to movies written by him. While PJ Antony became the first Malayalam actor to win the National Film Award for Best Actor for Nirmalyam, Balan K Nair (Oppol), Mammooty (Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha) and Monisha (Nakhakshathangal) also earned National Awards for their performances in MT's films. MT's cinematic brilliance became even more evident through his partnership with Bharathan. As a painter-turned-director, Bharathan ensured visually stunning storytelling and the director masterfully translated MT's evocative narratives into striking visuals, creating unforgettable cinematic experiences in films like Vaishali (1988) and Thazhvaram (1990). During this time, MT also ventured into new territories, creating folklore-inspired films such as Perumthachan (1990) and Vaishali while also exploring genres he had not previously tackled, as exemplified by the mystery thriller Utharam (1989), considered one of the finest Malayalam films in that genre. In the 1990s, MT shifted his focus to darker and more introspective themes, producing some of Malayalam cinema's most emotionally intense films, including Kadavu (1991), Sadayam and Sukrutham (1994).

MT's cinematic brilliance became even more evident through his partnership with Bharathan. MT Vasudevan Nair with Babu Antony, Asokan, Bharathan, Nedumudi Venu, MM Ramachandran, Krishnamurthy and Madhu Ambat on the sets of Vaishali. However, MT's repertoire wasn't limited to political themes or hard-hitting dramas as he also crafted deeply touching films that explored the intricacies of human relationships and the yearning for companionship in movies like Ennu Swantham Janakkittu (1998), Oru Cheru Panchiri (2000) — one of the most genuine love stories in Malayalam cinema — and Theerthadanam (2001). By the 2000s, MT had largely stepped back from cinema, having achieved unparalleled success. His only major original work during this time was Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja (2009), an epic period drama directed by Hariharan and starring Mammooty. In 2013, MT and Hariharan reunited and revived their shelved 1982 project Evidayo Oru Shathru. The narrative was reworked and filmed anew as Ezhamathe Varavu, featuring Indrajith Sukumaran, Vineeth and Bhavana in key roles. Notably, 2024 also marked the release of Manorathangal, an anthology streaming series comprising nine segments based on MT's short stories. The series served as a heartfelt tribute to the legendary Jnanpith awardee, celebrating his unparalleled contributions to Malayalam literature and cinema. Yes, the passing of MT Vasudevan Nair has created an irreplaceable void in the realms of Malayalam literature and cinema. Yet, it is not a loss, for he departed only after gifting his people, us, every story he had within him, leaving no tale untold or unshared. Thank you, MT, for teaching us that a story sans a soul is no story at all.

ing and singing and playing my favourite songs. I had people giving me massage there. They played me all my favourite Shammi Kapoor songs. It seemed effortless."

Previously, Boney Kapoor shared, "My wife Sri used to tell me, 'Boney, first lose weight then you can fix your hair. Later, some people told me, bald people are often lucky. They gave examples of Yash Chopra. They would say, 'Look, Yash Chopra is also bald but so rich.' So I fell for this and remained bald for quiet some time. Finally, one day, I was convinced to get a hair transplant. In three days, they planted almost 6,000 hair." Talking about his journey of body transformation, Boney said, "It all began when I started losing weight. I decided to lose weight and when I lost about 13-14 kg, I thought, 'Abhi shape pehle se better ho gaye hai.' I have come down to 94-95 kg. Considering my height, I should be just around 87-88. I still have about 8-9 kgs to lose."

Janhvi Kapoor adds a pyjama twist to Christmas night



Taking to her Instagram handle, the actor reposted her friend Nikita Chowhan's post featuring Janhvi and her other friends, including Radhika Ambani. In the image, Janhvi is seen smiling as she happily poses with her friends. Earlier, Orry gave fans a glimpse of the festive spirit by sharing an adorable Instagram Story featuring Janhvi and Khushi Kapoor decorating their Christmas tree. Janhvi was seen mid-decoration, casually dressed in a simple t-shirt and black-and-white checkered pants, while Khushi looked cosy in pajamas. Orhan also delighted everyone with a glimpse of a star-studded bash held in Jamnagar. He celebrated Christmas with Janhvi, her boyfriend Shikhar Pahariya, Khushi Kapoor, her rumoured beau Vedang Raina, and Radhika Ambani. Orry took to his Instagram handle to share a series of photos and a vibrant reel from an eventful evening in Jamnagar, capturing the festive vibes. Among the highlights was a video showcasing a Christmas dance sequence featuring Janhvi Kapoor, Orry, Vedang Raina, and Khushi Kapoor. The group grooved to the beats in solo shots around a grand, beautifully adorned Christmas tree. On the professional front, Sidharth Malhotra and Janhvi Kapoor are set to make their first-ever on-screen pairing in the upcoming romantic comedy-drama 'Param Sundari'. The makers recently unveiled the motion poster and also announced the release date: July 25, 2025. Both actors shared the motion poster on their Instagram handles, writing, "North ka swag, South ki grace — two worlds collide and sparks fly. Dinesh Vijan presents #ParamSundari, a love story directed by Tushar Jalota, coming to cinemas on 25th July 2025. Meet the suave Sidharth Malhotra as Param and the vivacious Janhvi Kapoor as Sundari (sic)."

How Keanu tried to find beautiful spirit of Shadow in 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3'

Playing Shadow in 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3' has been very special for me. I read the script as his internal struggle and I felt sorry for him. He has lost the one person he really cared about and spent 50 years in suspended animation, shared the Hollywood superstar Hollywood superstar Keanu Reeves, who has lent his voice to the character of Shadow in the upcoming movie 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3', has shared that he tried to find the beautiful spirit of his character in his portrayal.

Keanu discussed embracing his darker side as the antagonist in the film as he took on the role of Shadow. He said in a statement, "Playing Shadow in 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3' has been very special for me. I read the script as his internal struggle and I felt sorry for him. He has lost the one person he really cared about and spent 50 years in suspended animation." He further mentioned, "He is understandably angry at the people who took Maria from him and he blames G.U.N. He wants revenge and he knows how to get it. But ultimately his heart is still the same. I tried to find the beautiful spirit that Shadow is."

In the upcoming movie, Sonic, Knuckles and Tails reunite against a powerful new adversary, Shadow, a mysterious villain with powers unlike anything they have faced before. With their abilities outmatched in every way, Team Sonic must seek out an unlikely alliance in hopes of stopping Shadow and protecting the planet. Earlier, Idris Elba, who voices the character of Knuckles in the upcoming movie 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3', shared that he has finally perfected



the enunciation of 'Echidna' in the movie. He said, "It feels great to be back in the old Knuckles fists, as they are. He's a great character. I like playing him. There could be other actors who will play Knuckles one day, but right now it's my job and I love that because he is such an icon." Packed with sky-high stakes, lightning-fast thrills, and the iconic trio tackling their toughest challenge yet, 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3' is all set to deliver a blockbuster adventure like never before. The film is set to debut in cinemas on January 3, 2025 in 2D and 4DX.

Honey Singh questions censorship of Diljit Dosanjh's music: 'Let's make India a dry country first...'



Honey Singh comes in support of Diljit Dosanjh Honey Singh questions the directives to Diljit Dosanjh to not have references to alcohol in his songs. There can be no doubt that 2024 was a landmark year for actor-musician Diljit Dosanjh. His appearances in international talk shows, musical collaborations on the global level, the super success of his national and international concerts, and of course, Amar Singh Chamkila, definitely makes the year a very important one for the multihyphenate talent. But the dizzying success also came with its share of controversies. The chief among them was the advisories he received about singing songs that have reference to alcohol and violence.

Diljit received it in multiple places where he had his concerts, and he followed the directives by changing the lyrics, but also said, "If all states ban liquor consumption, I will never sing a song about alcohol in my entire life..." Interestingly, Diljit found solidarity from popular rapper, Honey Singh. In a recent interview to India Today, Honey called out the dichotomy of states who gave this advisory and goes on to make revenue from selling liquor. Honey Singh said, "They aren't shutting down liquor stores. Let them make it a dry state, and make India a dry country. Then we can have a conversation about all this." In fact, he also went on to share his solidarity towards a campaign for an alcohol-free country. While it might seem like too ironic a statement, especially since a majority of his songs do have references to alcohol in some form, it is to be noted that he has quit drinking. "We'll definitely join this campaign. We'll sing a song about lassi, about chhaas, about jal jeera. You know, something similar," said the singer in jest. Interestingly, when asked about what he'd have done if his songs, especially "Char Bottle Vodka," had to be reworded to adhere to such directives, Honey said that the song would just be an instrumental. The iconic rapper also spoke about how alcohol references have seeped into everyday conversations, and it is even part of the culture in many places. He also added that it cannot just be called a 'Punjabi' thing when there is alcohol present in festivities and parties across cultures and communities. "We go to parties; people are drinking. We go to weddings; people are drinking. It's in the culture, not just in Punjab..."

Allu Arjun's film leaves behind new releases Baby John, Viduthalai 2

Pushpa 2 box office collection day 22 early report: The holiday season seems to be boosting the earnings of Allu Arjun-starrer Pushpa 2 with most people choosing the action drama over newly released films like Baby John and Viduthalai 2. The film, which has successfully crossed the Rs 1100 crore mark in India, and earned over Rs 1600 crore globally in 21 days of its release, doesn't seem to slow down with the Christmas and New Year season bringing in more footfalls to theatres across the country. On its 22nd day, Pushpa 2: The Rule has already earned nearly Rs 5 crore. According to Sacnilk, Pushpa 2 has earned Rs 4.74 crore by 5 pm today. The film witnessed around 21.76% Telugu occupancy on Thursday with over 500 shows across India. In the Hindi language, the film witnessed an occupancy of about 14.75% with over 3000 shows across India. According to the makers, the movie has earned Rs 1705 crore gross globally in 21 days of its release, making it the highest grossing Indian film of 2024. Meanwhile, Baby John, despite it being a new release, has earned just Rs 1.82 crore on Thursday so far, according to Sacnilk. The film had opened to Rs 11.25 crore on Christmas. Baby John, starring Varun Dhawan, Wamiqa Gabbi, and Keerthy Suresh, has over 4200 shows in Hindi across



India. Meanwhile, Vijay Sethupathi's much-awaited action drama Viduthalai 2 just earned Rs 81 lakh on Thursday as of 5 pm. In seven days of its release, the film's total collection stands at Rs 31.5 crore. Pushpa 2: The Rule is the sequel of the 2021 film Pushpa: The Rise. The film, directed by Sukumar, stars Allu Arjun, Rashmika Mandanna, and Fahadh Faasil in the lead roles.

Ravi Shastri on Australian batting order: 'I think it's been pretty brittle'



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

With most of the Australian batsmen struggling in the first three Test matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with the exception of Travis Head, former Indian coach Ravi Shastri had called the Australian batting 'brittle' and believes Indian bowlers will be exploiting that. While Head leads the most runs scored list in this series, only two Australian batsmen including Alex Carey and Steve Smith have crossed the 100-run mark in the series. "I think it's been pretty brittle. When you look at this Australian line-up, it's been a long time since I've seen an Australian line-up where the top order is that brittle. India have exploited that and continue to exploit it," Shastri told news.com.au when asked about Australian batting. While Travis Head has hit two centuries and one half-century in the series, the only Australian batsman showing consistency in the series has been wicket-keeper Alex Carey.

None out of Australia's top three in the three Tests so far have crossed the 50-run mark. Opener Usman Khawaja and now-excluded Nathan McSweeney have struggled mostly with the new ball with Marnus Labuschagne too struggling in terms of runs. The trio has a total of 217 runs among themselves in the three Tests so far in the series and Shastri counts youngster Sam

Konstas to do the work for Australia. "As far as Konstas goes, I think he's very refreshing. He's got flair, he's got flamboyance. But Test cricket is Test cricket. I think his technique will tighten up and he will be the future for Australia. McSweeney was very unfortunate. I thought he did the hard yards but he's a middle order batsman. I see him travelling to Sri Lanka when the Australian team go there and rebuild his career from there. But I think it's a good move getting Konstas in because you need someone who can take the attack to the Indian team, because the punches were coming from nowhere," said Shastri.

With Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah leading the wicket-takers list in the series with 21 wickets, the spotlight once again will be on Bumrah during the Boxing Day Test at MCG. If India is able to win the series, the feat will also make India just the third touring country to win three consecutive series in Australia with West Indies and South Africa being the other two sides. "India is 1-1 in the series and that man (Bumrah) has almost single-handedly got India into that position. Australia hammers sides when they come here. For India to pull off three on the trot will be something special. But they'll have to play good cricket. I see Australia coming hard in this Test match, especially with the bowlers. It's the batting that'll be the challenge for Australia more than anything else. India have come here to win, they haven't come here to fill in the numbers. Even when I was the coach, our mantra was to play extremely hard, fair and to win," said Shastri. The former coach and now commentator also put his weight behind the opening day of the Boxing Day Test in determining the rest of the series. "You have to think of a method to beat Australia and not just compete. You've got to plan properly, how to take your 20 wickets. India have done that and been very aggressive. They've been in the face of Australia and give as good as they get. It's been entertaining and feisty stuff. India have their nose ahead. I think the first day of the Boxing Day Test will determine which way the series will go," said Shastri.

Travis Head has treated Jasprit Bumrah like any other bowler and disrupted his rhythm, says Greg Chappell



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(LEFT) Travis Head plays a shot during Day 2 of the third Test between India and Australia at the Gabba; (RIGHT) Jasprit Bumrah appeals unsuccessfully for the wicket of the Australia opener. (AP Photo)(LEFT) Travis Head plays a shot during Day 2 of the third Test between India and Australia at the Gabba; (RIGHT) Jasprit Bumrah appeals unsuccessfully for the wicket of the Australia opener. Travis Head, who cleared the fitness Test and was named in Australia's playing 11 for the Boxing Day Test starting Thursday, was hailed as the 'best batsman in the world' by Australia legend and former India coach Greg Chappell. Chappell said Travis Head's 'fearless approach' exemplified the 'Australian way of batting' and praised him for the way he has tackled India's Jasprit Bumrah.

Travis Head has been the most dominant batsman in the ongoing Border Gavaskar Trophy, scoring 409 runs in the first three Tests with two hundreds and a fifty. Writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, Chappell said Travis Head's simplicity and aggression are behind his success. "Head's performances against Jasprit Bumrah in this series exemplify his fearless approach. While most batsmen struggle to survive Bumrah's unorthodox action, sharp pace, and relentless accuracy, Head has treated him like any other bowler," Chappell wrote. "By playing with intent and looking to score off Bumrah, Head has not only nullified his threat but disrupted his rhythm. His ability to dispatch short deliveries with authority and drive fuller ones with precision has been remarkable, underscoring the strides he has made." Head had suffered a quad strain during the third Test in Brisbane. There were concerns over his availability for the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground but he passed the fitness test during the optional practice session on Christmas day, captain Pat Cummins said. Chappell said Travis Head's flourish in the recent years across formats is due to an uncluttered mindset. "From a raw, unpredictable talent to one of the most dominant male batters in world cricket, Travis Head has soared into his prime with an almost ethereal elegance," Chappell noted. "His story is not just about overcoming challenges but about embracing a simplicity of style that has become his hallmark — one that allows his mind to remain uncluttered and his game devastatingly effective."

Pat Cummins' message for Sam Konstas: 'Play like you do when you're a kid in backyard'

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Australia's Sam Konstas reacts during a cricket team training session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Tuesday. (AAP Image via AP) Australia's Sam Konstas reacts during a cricket team training session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. With the Australian team management picking up 19-year-old youngster Sam Konstas in their squad for the Boxing Test match against India in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at Melbourne, Australian skipper Pat Cummins has put his faith in the youngster. Cummins, who had made his debut in South Africa in 2011, remembered days prior to his debut and told Sam Konstas to 'enjoy the moment'. "I think you always want to do well (but) I was saying this to Sam (Sam Konstas) the other day, I remember that as an 18-year-old, I was thinking I got a lot more leeway because I was young. It almost felt like if I didn't have a great game, it wasn't my fault. It was the selectors' fault for picking me. I was like, 'Well, they're the idiots who picked an 18-year-old'. You're so young starting out your career (and) it's Boxing Day. It doesn't get any better than this, so just enjoy the moment," Pat Cummins told the media ahead of the Boxing Day Test.

The 19-year-old opener has made his way into the Australian Test squad after the exclusion of Nathan McSweeney. While McSweeney could only manage 72 runs in six innings in the three Tests in the series, Australia's constant struggles at the top led them to call up Sam Konstas. The 19-year-old has so far played in 11 First Class matches in his career amassing 718 runs. Last week, the youngster also became the youngest player to hit a half-century on debut in Big Bash League. Cummins believes that the young opener will have to deal with the call up coming up so early in his career and the team has been backing him up. The pacer had a talk with Sam Konstas and shared how he talked about his early inclusion in the game too in South Africa. "It's pretty awesome. I spent a bit of the time wondering



why or how I was there (because) it happened so quickly. I just remember being really excited and I think, similar to Sammy this week, there's a level of naivety that you just want to go out and play like you do when you're a kid in the backyard. You just want to take the game on and have fun and ... not overthink it. So that's the message of Sam. That's definitely how I felt as an 18-year-old. I was just really excited. And once the kind of game started, you go into game mode and it's just like any other game," Pat Cummins added. Sam Konstas became the youngest player since Ricky Ponting's feat in 1993 to hit two centuries in a Sheffield Shield match when he hit a century against South Australia in a Sheffield Shield match early this year. Cummins too had spent time with Sam Konstas during the domestic one-day Cup, which has been named after late Australian cricketer Dean Jones. "He didn't play, but he was down there, so I spent a bit of time with him (and) he was great. He was quite relaxed and good fun. (He was) happy to ... roll along with the jokes and take the mickey out of himself and others. We will just always encourage him to be himself. But he seems ... like he's got a good head on his shoulders for a 19-year-old, so we're there backing him up," recalled Pat Cummins.

Pat Cummins on MCG pitch for Boxing Day Test: 'There's a bit of grass coverage, feels nice and firm'

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Australia's captain Pat Cummins celebrates the wicket of India's Nitish Kumar Reddy during play on day four of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024. (AP Photo) Australia's captain Pat Cummins celebrates the wicket of India's Nitish Kumar Reddy on the third Test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane. With the series hanging in balance, the spotlight has been on the pitch at the MCG ahead of the Boxing Day Test match in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. While the series has seen the pace bowlers dominating the series with spinners only getting six wickets out of the total 93 wickets to fall so far in the series so far, the MCG pitch too is expected to support pace and bounce. Australian skipper Pat Cummins feels the MCG pitch is 'nice and firm'. "The pitch looks really good. (It is) quite consistent to what it has been here for the last few years. (There is a) bit of grass coverage and it feels nice and firm. They've done a great job here for ... probably the last five to six years with their pitches and I suspect (it will be) the same this year. (But we will see) how the heat changes it. We'll get to the ground tomorrow and kind of assess it, but it looks like it is a good wicket," said Cummins while talking with the media.

While the third Test at Brisbane saw constant rains interrupting the match, it also saw temperatures reaching around 35 degrees during the sunny phase. With the ongoing Australian summers seeing occasional rains this month, Melbourne though is expected to see hot weather and Cummins was of the view that heat is one of the factors in the MCG Test. "(We will) look at the pitch and get a bit of a



sense of what the day is going to feel like, and then you kind of make a decision from then. So I think (the heat) is a factor. Last week in Brisbane was hot, which is kind of a bit of a tick. Starcy and I bowled a lot in the heat, and (Nathan) Lyon as well, and got through it fine, so I don't think it scares us too much. But we wait and see. 39 can get pretty hot," said Cummins.

MCG curator Matt Page too had shared his views on the pitch curated for the Boxing Day Test. Page, who has been the curator at the MCG since 2017, shared that the fast bowlers will get excited about the pitch on offer. "All the good bowlers get excited when they come here now. It gets through well for us. We're never going to be as quick as Perth and Brisbane, but over the last few years, we've managed to get some pace in it, which has created that excitement. There's a bit of grass on it. If you're a fast bowler, and you look at it, you probably do get excited," Page had said on Monday.

England coach blames Women's Premier League for 'rammed' Ashes schedule

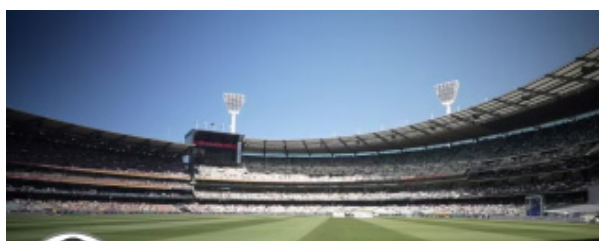


GNS News Agency, Dec 31

In the space of just three weeks, the England women's team will play three ODIs, three T20s and a four-day Test in Australia. The reason for the 'rammed' schedule, according to England coach Jon Lewis, is the Women's Premier League (WPL) in India. The women's

Ashes begins on January 12 in Sydney and will be played across five Australian cities. The WPL begins on February 21, forcing the authorities to compress England's tour to Australia. Lewis was miffed with the cramped schedule, especially with a four-day gap between the third T20 and the four-day pink-ball Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. "My preference would be that there's more space between the games, and the players' preference would be as well," Lewis was quoted as saying by The Guardian. "I'm pretty sure we would have requested more space between the white ball [games] and the Test match, but the schedule came back as it was. It won't be straightforward. The schedule is pretty rammed close together. There's no flexibility because of WPL and Christmas." The report added that while the WPL begins on February 21, the players would be needed in India earlier for acclimatisation and media commitments. Six England players who are a part of the Ashes squad will also be competing in the five-team WPL. They include Alice Capsey, Nat Sciver-Brunt, Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Kate Cross, Sophie Ecclestone and Dani Gibson.

Melbourne Cricket Ground: From Gavaskar's ton to 13-year unbeaten run, for India 'M' in the MCG stands for merry



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Pat Cummins was running after his young son, with his pregnant wife all smiles trailing behind them. Marnus Labuschagne scooped his little daughter in his left hand and chatted with his wife to his right. All around them are kids, playing, diving, lying, and laughing at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, bathed in warm sunshine. It's about 9am, Christmas Day, on the eve of the Boxing Day Test and the Australian cricketers are having a family time. "It's absolute chaos," says Cummins with a smile. "On average, two kids per member and everyone running around with presents and hyper!"

In the outdoor nets, where Travis Head would have a stint after his successful fitness test, coach Andrew McDonald was throwing to his spectacled son and the assistant coach Michael Di Venuto was watching his teenage son unfurling gorgeous cover drives — almost as good as the old man's. A glimpse of a flamboyant cover drive on a bent knee, the father's signature shot, would have been the cherry on top; perhaps it shall come next Christmas Day. All around happy laughing faces. MCG has always had that kind of happy association with the outside world, especially the Indian fans. Never mind this generation which hasn't seen India lose a Test here since 2011, or the end 70's when Bhagwat Chandrasekhar sent 12 bewildered Aussies on their way and Sunil Gavaskar hit a hundred to win a Test here. This happy association has been present despite the results, though the good ones certainly have helped. Like Ravi Shastri driving his Audi at the MCG after the triumph at the World Championships in 1985. Even Gavaskar walked off, threatening to take his partner Chetan Chauhan with him, before better sense prevailed from the manager at the G. Though in revisionist history that moment of regret from him has now been turned around by Fox Sports of all people as the moment India began standing up for themselves. They started with that visual in their promo for this current series, the narrator Justin Langer saying 'And it all began here with Sunny'.

But above all for generations of Indians waking up to

old-fashioned specialist alarm clocks to watch the cricket in Australia, MCG was the happy space. It didn't trigger the tremors up the spine as the old hot and spicy WACA could. It wasn't the Gabbatour where the visiting batsmen used to struggle with seam movement and bounce, and stood no chance. It wasn't the almost subcontinental tracks at Sydney or the flat track of Adelaide where the oldtimers would murmur dismissively about good knocks 'Yeah good, but it was just Adelaide or SCG' as if tons were flooding for Indians overseas, even in those venues. But there was something about MCG, especially once the Boxing Day instant tradition set in from 1980 on. It was still typically Australian pitch, a wholesome Australian venue with 90,000 sunscreened and often intoxicated fans hollering, and where the sun and light bounce off the seats and cast a charming hue to the proceedings — be it day or night.

One of the more famous and familiar photographs, a regular centre spread feature in sports magazines of the past, was of the long shot of MCG from outside, with its light towers on, wrapped in this ethereal orange-ish hue. A perfect poster to fumble with cello tapes and plaster on the bedroom walls as kids. MCG and SCG were the acronyms that Indian kids were aware of pretty early in their lives. And MCG could be further shortened and just called the 'G', and they would still know and recognise it.

Above all, the fans at the stadium: the sheer number of the people boxed in together, the notorious barracking crowd of Bay 13 which has been romanticised and vilified — the romance emerging from it being the personification of the burly surly drunk abusing Aussie fan and the vilification coming from the fact that the posh card-carrying members who get plied with free drinks all day can at times be more obnoxious than paying members of the 13, who are caught in the perception-bubble about them and feed it further.

"One significant factor about this Test is that the Aussie fans can't 'other' the Indians as people from a faraway exotic land," says Dr Thomas Heenan, who teaches Sports Studies at Monash University in Melbourne. "The days of that kind of 'othering' are gone. Not because of the cricket and IPL, that may be more so for the players. For the regular fans, the reason is the large number of Indian population who live in this country, especially more in the bigger cities. They are constantly interacting, working, socialising, partying or observing with the Indian-origin people for a while now. The Indian population has exploded in recent years; the last cricket series was during the pandemic crowd-less affair. This series has been different in that regard and I am interested to see how that plays out on the Boxing Day Test."

Hyderabad's Trisha, Drithi in India's U-19 WC squad

Hyderabad: Hyderabad cricketers G Trisha and Drithi Kesari have been named in the India Under-19 women's cricket team, which will take part in the next year's ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup to be played in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from January 18 to February 2.

The Women's Selection Committee of the BCCI announced the squad to be led by Niki Prasad, while Sanika Chalke will be the vice-captain. The squad has two wicketkeepers Kamalini G and Bhavika Ahire, while three standby players, Nandhana S, Ira J and Anadi T, have also been included. The 16 competing teams have been divided into four groups. India are the defending champions, and are placed in Group A alongside hosts Malaysia, West Indies and Sri Lanka. The tournament will be hosted by Bayuemas Oval. India will begin their campaign against West Indies on January 19, followed by matches against Malaysia (January 21) and Sri Lanka (January 23). Following the group phase, which runs from January 19-23, the top three teams from each group will advance to the Super



6 stage — two groups of six —, which will take place from January 25-29. Group 1 in Super 6 will include the top three teams each from Group A and D, while Group 2 will have the top three teams each from Group B and C. The top two sides from the two Super 6 stage groups will qualify for the semifinals, slated for January 31 while the final will be played on February 2.