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Fire breaks out at timber depot in Attapur; No casualties reported

Hyderabad: A fire broke out at a timber depot at Gudimalkapur in Attapur on Friday afternoon. No casualties were reported. The cause of fire was yet to be ascertained. As per available information, fire erupted in the timber depot warehouse located at PVNR Expressway Pillar No. 111 near Attapur. The flames swiftly spread to an automobile mechanic shed adjacent to it, gutting both places. Local residents panicked at the sight of huge flames and alerted the fire department and local police. On receiving information, the fire department personnel along with the Attapur police reached the spot and first shifted out gas cylinders kept in the mechanic shed, which averted a possible major mishap.

SC defers plea for verification of EVMs used in Haryana polls; hearing on Feb 11



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday deferred hearing on a plea filed by Congress leaders seeking verification of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used during the Haryana Assembly polls. A Bench headed by Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan said that a Special Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Datta will hear the batch of petitions relating to verification of EVMs and allied issues on February 11 in terms of the previous order.

Earlier on December 20, for the second time in a row, a Bench of CJI Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar opined that the plea seeking directions to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to lay down a memorandum for the checking and verification of the original burnt memory/microcontroller of the four components of the EVM should be taken up for hearing by a Bench comprising Justice Datta in January 2025. Before this, a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and P.B. Varale opined that the fresh plea should be placed before the same Bench which had passed directions on EVMs in April 2024.

The Justice Nath-led Bench said that the fresh petition related to the interpretation and implementation of the previous judgment of the apex court and therefore, the registry should place the papers before the CJI, who is the

master of the roster, for passing appropriate orders as to whether the petition should be listed before the previous Bench. In order to strengthen the integrity of the election process in the country, a Bench of Justices Khanna (now CJI) and Datta, in April 2024, passed a direction for checking and verification of the burnt memory/microcontroller in 5 per cent of EVMs for any tampering or modification on a written request made by candidates securing second and third highest votes in an election.

The checking and verification exercise was directed to be undertaken by a team of engineers from the manufacturers of the EVMs, with the candidates and their representatives having the option to remain present at the time of such an exercise, it said. The latest petition, filed by Karan Singh Dalal, a former five-time Congress MLA, said that the ECI has not issued any procedure for checking and verification of the original burnt memory/microcontroller of the four components of the EVM (Control Unit, Ballot Unit, VVPAT and Symbol Loading Unit) in terms of the SC judgment.

The plea sought directions to the poll body to lay down a memorandum for checking and verification of the original burnt memory/microcontroller of the four components of the EVM. It further sought that the above exercise be undertaken within eight weeks and be made applicable to the EVM checking and verification forms dated October 14, 2024, submitted to the ECI. The petition, filed through advocate Neha Rathi, said the issue raised in the petition requires to be authoritatively decided by the apex court owing to significant public importance and ramifications across the country. "The matter affects the functioning of democracy in the country and elections being held across the country in various states, and therefore needs to be urgently and authoritatively decided," it said. The absence of any procedure for verification of burnt memory for tampering shows reluctance on the part of the ECI to subject the original burnt memory microcontroller to any scrutiny whatsoever, the petition contended.

Hyderabad-based pharma major Dr Reddy's Laboratories shares down 5% on Q3 earnings

New Delhi: Shares of Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Friday ended 5 per cent lower after the company's third-quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. The stock tanked 5.01 per cent to settle at Rs 1,224.70 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it dropped 6.65 per cent to Rs 1,203.60. At the NSE, it slumped 4.90 per cent to Rs 1,226.20. Intra-day, the stock declined 6.66 per cent to Rs 1,203.50. Its market valuation eroded by Rs 5,399.33 crore to Rs 1,02,187.12 crore. In traded volume terms, 1.68 lakh shares of the firm were traded at the BSE and 70.82 lakh shares on the NSE during the day. Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Thursday said its consolidated net profit increased 2 per cent to Rs 1,413 crore in the third quarter ended December 31, 2024.

CM Revanth Returns from Davos Visit, Receives Grand Welcome in Hyd



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister Revanth

Reddy returned to Hyderabad after a successful visit to Davos, where he participated in investment meetings to promote the state as a global business destination. The CM was warmly received at the Shamshabad Airport by ministers, officials, and supporters. The Davos trip proved fruitful for Telangana, with the state securing investments worth ₹1.79 lakh crore.

The government signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with 20 leading companies across various sectors, including technology, manufacturing, and infrastructure. The Chief Minister expressed confidence that these investments would further boost Telangana's economic growth and generate significant employment opportunities. The agreements reflect Telangana's growing reputation as a hub for global investments.

India 'concerned' with pro-Khalistan elements disrupting screening of 'Emergency' in U.K.

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

India on Friday expressed concern over certain pro-Khalistani elements disrupting the screening of the movie "Emergency" in the U.K. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India hoped that those involved in disrupting the screening will be held accountable. "We consistently raise concerns with the U.K. government regarding incidents of violent protest and intimidation by anti-India elements," he said. Freedom of speech and expression cannot be applied selectively and those obstructing it must be held accountable, Mr. Jaiswal said. We hope that the U.K. side will take appropriate action against those responsible, he said. Earlier, an Opposition Conservative Party Member of Parliament urged the U.K. Home Secretary to intervene after his constituents in north-west London were threatened by "masked Khalistani terrorists" who burst into a screening of Kangana Ranaut's film 'Emergency'.

Bob Blackman told the House of Commons that similar disruption of the screenings of the "very controversial" film took place in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Slough, Staines and Manchester. It has resulted in the Vue and Cineworld cinema chains deciding to pull the film from many theatres in the U.K. "On Sunday, many of my constituents gathered and paid for a screening of the film 'Emergency' in the Harrow Vue cinema. At about 30 or 40 minutes into the screening of the film, masked Khalistani terrorists burst in, threatened members of the audience and forced the screening to end," Mr. Blackman said in Parliament.

"The film is very controversial, and I am not commenting on its quality or content, but I defend the right of my constituents and other members' constituents to be able to view it and make a decision on it. It covers the period when

Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India," he said. The MP noted that there are certain views in the U.K. that it is an "anti-Sikh film" but asserted that his constituents should be able to judge for themselves and not be "threatened by thugs who want to disrupt democratic opportunities to see public films".

"May we have a statement from the Home Secretary [Yvette Cooper] next week on what will be done to ensure that people who want to see such films, which have been passed by censors, can do so in peace and harmony? I absolutely defend the right of people to demonstrate outside cinemas, but not to disrupt viewings," he added. Leader of the Commons Lucy Powell responded on behalf of the Labour Party government by saying that Mr. Blackman had raised a "very important matter about the relationship between free speech and the right to protest peacefully". "The ability of people to go about their activities freely whatever they choose to do, whether that is seeing a film which, as he says, has been agreed by the censors and all those who look at those issues. I will certainly ensure that he and the whole House get an update on the very important matters he raises," said Ms. Powell. Some British Sikh groups have organised protests against 'Emergency', disrupting its screenings at some cinemas in the U.K. since its release last Friday. The Sikh Press Association group had stated on social media that the film is seen as "anti-Sikh" and these protests resulted in cancelled screenings in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands region of England. Community organisation Insight U.K. had posted a video on its X platform showing masked protesters interrupting a London screening of the film, directed by Ranaut who also essays the role of former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

47-Year-Old Woman Killed By Tiger In Wayanad Coffee Estate, Protests Erupt

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

A 47-year-old woman was mauled to death by a tiger on Friday morning while working in a coffee estate at Priyadarshini Estate in Mananthavady village, Wayanad. The victim, identified as Radha, a resident of Pancharakolli, was attacked while plucking coffee. The incident has triggered widespread protests from local residents, many of whom are estate workers, demanding immediate action to address safety concerns. The attack occurred just a day after Kerala Forest Minister AK Saseendran informed the state assembly that human-animal conflicts in the region were reportedly on the decline, citing government efforts to mitigate such incidents.

Radha was attacked while working on the estate early in the morning. Her body was later discovered by forest officials during a routine patrol. Forest Minister Saseendran confirmed the incident and stated that orders had been issued to capture or eliminate the tiger responsible. Angry residents gathered at the scene, refusing to allow Radha's body to be taken for postmortem until their demands were addressed. The protestors insisted on immediate measures to ensure community safety, including the capture or killing of the tiger.

OR Kelu, the Minister for the Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward Classes, visited the site and assured protestors that their concerns would be addressed. He also acknowledged delays in implementing a long-proposed fencing project to protect the area and promised its swift completion. Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) have been deployed to patrol the area and nearby



forests, with authorities intensifying monitoring efforts. Minister Saseendran stated that enhanced vigilance was necessary due to the potential migration of wild animals like tigers and elephants from the neighboring Bandipur region in Karnataka. Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi expressed condolences on social media, stating, "I am deeply saddened by the tragic loss of Smt. Radha, who was killed by a tiger while harvesting coffee in Pancharakolli, Mananthavady. My heartfelt condolences to her family." She also emphasized the urgency of sustainable solutions to human-animal conflicts. The tiger's capture or elimination will follow the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) under the Central Wildlife Protection Act. If attempts to capture the tiger using traps or tranquilizers fail, the final step would involve eliminating the animal. The protests continued at the estate office, with residents demanding compensation for Radha's family and immediate action to prevent future incidents.

'Just marketing and becoming a leader is not enough': Amit Shah fires fresh salvo against Sharad Pawar

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday slammed NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar for failing to do anything for the cooperative sector during his 10-year tenure as the agriculture minister in the UPA government at the Centre.

"I would like to ask Pawar saheb what he has done for the cooperative sector which was under him when he was Union agriculture minister for 10 years in Delhi? What has he done for the farmers? What did he do to address the income tax issues related to sugar cooperative mills?" Shah asked while addressing a cooperative conclave at Malegaon in Maharashtra's Nashik district on Friday. "Just marketing and becoming a leader is not enough. You have to work in the field," he added.

Shah and Pawar have been engaged in a war of words this month with the senior BJP leader accusing Pawar of starting the "politics of betrayal and treachery" in the state, and the veteran NCP (SP) leader hitting back saying none of India's previous home ministers were "tadipaar" like Shah, referring to his extortion from Gujarat. On Friday, Shah mentioned how it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who decided to set up a separate Cooperative Ministry. "It was during Modi's regime that we resolved the long-pending Rs



10,000 crore income tax issue enforced on cooperative sugar mills in Maharashtra. Apart from that, initiatives were taken to reduce Rs 46,000 crore taxes on sugar cooperative mills. A Rs 10,000 crore loan was extended to sugar cooperative mills. Above all these measures, a policy decision to allow ethanol blending was taken to help cooperative sugar mills emerge financially robust," Shah said. Saying that he was not here to do politics, Shah said that the BJP-led NDA government was committed to make farmers in the cooperative sector "self-reliant and economically prosperous".

KTR raises concern over lack of support to IT Hubs under Congress regime

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao criticised the Congress government for allegedly neglecting IT Hubs established by the previous BRS government across the State. He raised concerns that Tier-II IT hubs, which were thriving under the BRS government's initiative to expand Telangana's IT sector beyond Hyderabad, are now faltering. "Leave alone establishment of new companies, but the Congress government should ensure the existing ones do not disappear," he remarked. The BRS had previously established eight IT hubs to promote growth in smaller cities, aiming to decentralise development across the State. Charging the Congress with mismanagement of IT Hubs, he said the small and medium scale IT firms established in these IT Hubs were struggling to survive. He cited rising electricity and internet bills as reasons for companies shutting down, and urged the government to stop actions driven by political vendetta against the previous



BRS regime. "These IT Hubs were created with the intention of providing jobs to Telangana's youth. I appeal to the Congress government to run them efficiently instead of letting them deteriorate," he added.

Telangana govt hands over Hyderabad kidney racket case to CID

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Hyderabad: The Telangana government has decided to entrust to the Crime Investigation Department (CID) the investigation into a kidney racket that was busted three days ago at a private hospital in Saroornagar on the outskirts of Hyderabad. Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha on Friday issued orders handing over the case to the CID.

Rachakonda police have reportedly arrested eight accused in the racket that was uncovered at Alakananda Hospital in Saroornagar in Rangareddy district on January 21. Special teams constituted by Rachakonda police were already looking for accused in various states. Health authorities and police raided the hospital on January 21 and sealed it after a tip-off. The hospital was found to be functioning without authorisation. During the raid, the officials found four individuals at the hospital, two kidney donors and two recipients, all from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. They were shifted to government-run Gandhi Hospital for treatment.

A preliminary investigation by the authorities revealed that doctors, who were brought from other states, conducted surgeries on January 16. Both the donors and the recipients were allegedly connected through agents, operating in various states. The racket reportedly involved doctors from other states, including Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, who were lured with financial incentives to perform illegal kidney transplants in collaboration with the hospital staff. Two donors were reportedly paid Rs 4 lakh each for their kidneys, while Rs 50 lakh was collected from each recipient. Preliminary findings reveal that the recipients hailed from Karnataka, while the donors were from Tamil Nadu. The Health Department has already constituted a committee to investigate. The committee comprising Dr Nagender, former Superintendent of Osmania General Hospital; Dr Sadhana, an anaesthetist; Dr Mallikarjun, a urologist; and Dr Kiranmayi, a nephrologist visited the seized hospital and gathered information from the Rangareddy District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Venkateswar Rao. After the committee presented preliminary report, the Health Minister decided to

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Raining freebies

As Delhi gears up for the Assembly elections, the political narrative is dominated by freebies as the key contenders for power — Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), BJP and Congress — are engaged in a no-holds-barred race to woo the electorate with handouts. From cash incentives for women and the elderly to subsidised cooking gas and free electricity, the main political players are doubling down on populist measures to win over voters. While such strategies may yield short-term electoral gains, the long-term implications for governance, and fiscal stability are profound and troubling. The ruling AAP has promised to raise the financial assistance under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana from Rs 1,000 per month to Rs 2,100, while the BJP has come up with the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana', under which Rs 2,500 each will be provided. Not to be left behind, the Congress has announced the 'Pyari Didi Yojana', which promises monthly aid of Rs 2,500 to all eligible women. The AAP's governance model over the past decade has been defined by populism, with free water, electricity and bus services forming the backbone of its voter outreach. While these measures have undoubtedly provided relief to the city's underprivileged, they have also strained Delhi's finances, reducing its revenue surplus significantly in recent years. What is concerning is the escalation of this competition. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi had, in 2022, castigated other parties for propagating a "freebies culture", the BJP's manifesto has, ironically, sought to go one up on the AAP playbook.

Keen to beat the ruling party at its own game, the BJP has made a slew of promises, including handouts to pregnant women, subsidised cooking gas and aid to students. There is no denying that the demarcation between welfare schemes and freebies is blurred. Also, incentivising voters is not illegal.

How the first English factory in India was established at Surat

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Captain William Hawkins arrived at Surat, during Jahangir's reign in 1608, on behalf of the East India Company. He was accompanied by a number of English merchants and carried a letter from King James I for Emperor Jahangir to secure royal permission for the English nation to establish trade in the Mughal dominions. He also brought several presents for the emperor sent by the East India Company. However, despite a stay in Surat for five months and subsequently at Agra in attendance at the Imperial Court for more than two years, he left the Mughal capital at the end of 1611, disappointed.

The main opposition came from two quarters: the Portuguese, who had made a determined effort to maintain their trade monopoly on the West Coast, which they had established for nearly 100 years, aided by their unquestioned naval supremacy in the Indian seas. They were supported by the powerful influence of the Jesuit mission at Jahangir's court. Though primarily a religious mission, it functioned as a political embassy on behalf of the Viceroy at Goa to further the political and commercial interests of the Portuguese state in India. The second objection came from Muqarrab Khan, the Mughal governor of Surat and Cambay (now Khambhat). He persistently thwarted the English attempts to settle at Surat, as he was wholly in favour of the Portuguese, having been on very "friendly" terms with them.

The English first encountered Portuguese hostility when two small boats with 30 Englishmen, carrying their goods towards the mouth of the Tapti (now Tapi) river, were captured by the Portuguese. They confiscated the goods and took the crew to Goa as prisoners. All protests by Hawkins were treated with contempt, and he was told that the Indian seas belonged exclusively to Portugal. Subsequently, adding insult to injury, Muqarrab Khan visited Hawkins' residence and seized goods that caught his fancy, offering only a price he deemed appropriate. Nevertheless, Hawkins managed to reach the Imperial Court, where he was admitted among the select company of high nobles of Jahangir and given a small mansab (position). However, he faced formidable opposition from the Jesuit priests regarding any trade concessions to the English company. Additionally, the Portuguese governor of Goa closed the ports of Gujarat to all trade as a protest against the friendly reception of the English, rendering Hawkins' stay at the Imperial Court inconsequential. Eventually, his patience exhausted, he sought and was granted permission to leave.

Some seven months after Hawkins departed, and following another inconsequential attempt that left hopes for establishing English trade on the West Coast at a low ebb, Thomas Best of the East India Company arrived with two ships at Surat on September 7, 1612. This was a memorable event in Indian history, for he and the English merchants aboard the ships were to establish the first English factory of the company at Surat, thereby laying the foundations of the trade connection between England and India, which would have significant political consequences. Best sent some of his merchants to the town to explore the situation. They returned after a few days with reports of a warm reception and assurances of peaceful trade. The welcome offered to Best by the civil authorities, especially the governor of the castle, was equally cordial. Thereafter, all the English merchants left the ships to settle in the town, and the cargo brought in the ships was also landed in Surat. On October 13, a formal conference took place at Suvali in the Hazira suburb of Surat between Captain Best, the diwan from Ahmedabad and a top Surat official to settle the terms for formally establishing English trade. This lasted for two days and ended in the signing of an agreement comprising 13 articles. The diwan promised to secure an imperial farman (royal order) in confirmation of the agreement within 40 days. The Portuguese, having prior knowledge of the arrival of the English ships, wasted no time in equipping a powerful armada to drive out these intruders on their nation's monopoly of trade with the East. Against the large Portuguese armada comprising 2,000 men, Best had only 200 Englishmen. Though few in number, these Englishmen were expert seamen and gunners and their national combativeness was heightened by the awareness that defeat would mean the destruction of their vessels and imprisonment in a Portuguese prison. Rather than remaining in the confined waters of the Swally Hole, Best sailed out to the open sea, where his light vessels would have more scope for outmanoeuvring their opponents. The first naval action took place on November 30, 1612, almost within sight of the shore.

'Yes, I did it': Saif Ali Khan attacker admitted to crime after being caught from Thane, say Mumbai police



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

After being caught from Thane on Saturday night, the man suspected of having stabbed actor Saif Ali Khan at his residence allegedly admitted to the crime, saying, "Ha maine hi kiya (Yes, I did it)." A police officer among the approximately 100 police personnel searching for the accused in Thane confirmed this to The Mumbai police later on Sunday

morning said primary evidence revealed that the attacker is a Bangladeshi national who does not have any valid Indian identity proof. They identified him as Mohammad Shariful Islam Shahzad, 30, who had changed his name to Vijay Das after entering India to hide his Bangladeshi origins. Islam allegedly stabbed Saif Ali Khan on Thursday early morning at his Bandra residence during a failed robbery attempt. After the attack, he allegedly changed his locations multiple times, avoided getting captured by CCTV cameras, and hid in the Dadar and Worli areas. He was eventually caught from Thane's Ghodbunder area while he was hiding in dense mangroves nearly 70 after the attack. The police said Mohammad Shariful was scared as he sensed that someone was very close to him. As a result, he hid himself in the mangroves but was eventually caught, they said. He was currently being interrogated by the police in the Khar police station and would be produced in the Bandra metropolitan court on Sunday afternoon. The police also gathered information that the accused spent time in the Talaja jail for a theft case. However, they were verifying this information.

NGT asks under-scanner Punjab Pollution Control Board to act tough against other violators

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

The National Green Tribunal ordered the Punjab Pollution Control Board to take action against Batala Municipal Corporation officials for continuous violations of solid waste management rules on January 7. Three days later, PPCB Chairman Adarsh Pal Vig, along with Mines Minister Barinder Kumar Goyal, received a Lokpal notice asking why an inquiry should not be initiated into the government machinery's alleged failure to stop illegal mining in Mohali. The NGT order came after the Public Action Committee and residents of Batala moved court against the illegal dumping of solid waste in Batala, including on roadsides and inside Kasoor Nalah

The NGT bench said in its order, "On these facts and circumstances, we find that the conduct of Municipal Corporation Batala is highly deprecable and shows an adamant attitude and continuous violation of statutory provisions with regard to the management, handling, and disposal of solid waste. They are continuously non-compliant with the provisions of SWM Rules, 2016, read with EP Act, 1986. This continuous contravention attracts provisions of Section 15 of EP Act, 1986." The order further read, "PPCB shall immediately take action against responsible authorities of Municipal Corporation of Batala for imposition of penalty under Section 15 of EP Act, 1986, by initiating proceedings before the Adjudicating Authority in accordance with law and submit a compliance report before the Tribunal." The bench also directed the authorities to recover the environmental compensation of Rs 60 lakh imposed on the Batala Municipal Corporation. During the hearing, the PPCB informed the NGT that the violations were continuing even after a showcause notice was issued and fine imposed in the past and that there was no satisfactory compliance on the part of the municipal corporation. The NGT has asked the PPCB to take



punitive action against the corporation officials by initiating proceedings before the adjudicating authority before March 15, 2025.

However, the PPCB itself is accused of not following environmental laws and regulations. In December 2020, the NGT, while passing an order in a case related to illegal mining in parts of Punjab, commented on the PPCB and other departments concerned, "There is thus a huge amount of illegal mining. Its extent is to the tune of more than one crore MT, of the value of more than Rs 600 crore, as shown by the reports furnished to this Tribunal by statutory authorities. There is no effective action on the ground except paperwork of calculating compensation. Can such a situation be allowed by authorities if the doctrine of public trust and good governance is to be followed? This should be an eye-opener for the authorities in the State of Punjab, but it seems that no attention is being paid to the same. There is a clear need for continuous evaluation and remedial action." Lokpal Justice Vinod K Sharma is looking into allegations against the PPCB that it failed to stop illegal mining in Mohali district.

How a diesel mechanic pursued his passion to become a seasoned Marathi actor, fought off cancer



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

"The stage gives no second chances," recalls Sharad Ponskhe, a 58-year-old veteran Marathi theatre actor, recounting a moment when he forgot his lines during a live performance. "It was the first time in my life that I went completely blank. In theatre, there's no retakes," he reflects on a moment that, rather than happening to a novice as it might to many, occurred to him as a seasoned actor—making the experience even more challenging. The incident occurred at Balgandharva Rangmandir, Pune, in December 2024 when Ponskhe forgot his lines mid-way through the play 'Purush'. When he couldn't go on even after a break, he apologised to the audience and left. The show was cancelled. But within hours Ponskhe performed the same play again in the evening — and to perfection. "It happened so quickly that it was hard to understand and overcome. I'm incredibly grateful to the audience for their love, patience, and faith in me," says the actor, who has a career spanning over 25 years. He has appeared in more than 65 TV serials and 110 films in both Marathi and Hindi cinema. Throughout his life, he has faced and overcome significant challenges, from starting out as a diesel mechanic to battling cancer.

Balancing a day job with a burgeoning acting career was no easy feat. Despite the initial challenges, his love for the stage pushed him forward. "There were days when I worked from 9 am to 4 pm, then rushed for rehearsals or performances," he says. His acting journey began in 1978 through one-act play competitions in Mumbai. He earned just seven rupees for his first role, but he persevered, eventually performing in over 14 professional plays and later landing roles in Marathi television serials and films. "I couldn't afford to leave my job, but my passion for acting kept me going," he says. Balancing acting and his job at BST required ingenuity, but as he says, "This industry is full of surprises. It needs a lot of patience, just wait and watch, and have faith." Marathi television series a turning point

His breakthrough came with the Marathi television series 'Damini', the first daily serial in Marathi television history. Ponskhe also worked as an assistant director on two films, cherishing every opportunity to learn. Despite early struggles and roles with little recognition, he drew inspiration from icons like Amitabh Bachchan, whose performances he mimicked and practised at home. A turning point came when he bagged the role of Nathuram Godse in the eponymous play 'Me Nathuram Godse Boltoy'. On July 10, 1998, when 'Me Nathuram Godse Boltoy' had its first performance in Shivajinagar, Pune, his life changed. "I became the spotlight. I got the role because of actor and director Vinay Apte." The portrayal of Nathuram Godse propelled him to fame and challenged him as an artist. "That role required deep introspection and understanding, pushing me to evolve as an actor," Ponskhe adds. Drawing inspiration from legends like Vikram Gokhale, Amrish Puri, and Amitabh

Bachchan, Ponskhe says, "Success demands relentless effort and perseverance. Amrish Puri started in background roles before becoming a household name. Their journeys remind us to stay determined." According to Ponskhe, every play is a teacher, "One thing that plays taught me is that no one is a bad person; it's the situation that makes them bad. Everyone has their own stories." Ponskhe also stars in the upcoming Marathi film Banjar, which is set to release in April. "Notably, it is the first Marathi film to be shot 90 per cent in Sikkim in extreme -8 degrees Celsius temperatures, ensuring breathtaking visuals from the region," he mentions. Even after appearing in over 100 films and TV serials, the actor remains grounded. "The stage demands discipline and humility," he says. "Every time I step on stage, I bow to the goddess of theatre, asking her to guide me and forgive my mistakes."

His family of four comprises his wife, son Sneha, an actor and daughter Siddhi, a pilot, "My family has always been my strongest support system," he says. "They always showed a lot of understanding towards me and my profession." This is also what gave him the strength to fight the often debilitating cancer. "I consider cancer as one of the barriers that I crossed with Bappa's blessing. It affected my journey a bit but I resumed it with more positivity." Ponskhe returned to acting in 2019 after his illness with the play 'Himalayachi Savali'. He is now most enthused about his upcoming drama 'Kalchakra'. In addition to playing the lead role of a 75-year-old man, Ponskhe is also the project producer. The drama delves into the emotional struggles of elderly parents in today's society, where children often move abroad or form nuclear families, leaving their parents isolated. "It's a story about the challenges they face and the decisions they must make," says Ponskhe as he readies it for a 2026 release to mark another milestone in his extraordinary life.

One more farmer ends life in erstwhile Adilabad

Adilabad: A 40-year-old tenant farmer, who attempted to die by suicide a week back, died while undergoing treatment at Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) here on Sunday. Family members and locals said that Rathod Gokul from Lingojiguda Thanda in Uttoor mandal tried to kill himself by consuming some pesticide on January 12. He was initially admitted to a hospital in Hyderabad.



He was later shifted to RIMS-Adilabad on Saturday, where he breathed his last. Gokul was cultivating cotton crop in a 10-acre of land rented from a farmer. He was reportedly depressed over his inability to repay mounting debts caused by losses in farming. The quantum of loans was not yet known. Based on a complaint received from the wife of the farmer, a case was registered. Investigations were taken up. This is the second death by suicide of a farmer in erstwhile Adilabad in two days after another farmer died in similar manner in a bank in Nirmal

Leopard mauls man to death, injures another in Gujarat's Gir Somnath



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

A 44-year-old man was killed and another sustained serious injuries when a leopard attacked them in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district, a forest official said. The men were sleeping outside their houses near a farm when a big cat attacked them late on Saturday night in Kodiya village in Gir Gadhada taluka, the official said.

One person died on the spot, while the other man was rushed to a hospital where he is undergoing treatment, Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) Karan Bhatia said. "The leopard first attacked Waghbhai Vaghela and dragged him some distance away when people raised an alarm. The animal killed Vaghela and escaped. It returned after some time and attacked another person, leaving him injured," he said. The official said six cages were placed in the area to trap the big cat. The attack has come a few days after an elderly woman was similarly killed by a leopard in the same region. Diwaliben Jogia, 76, was attacked and killed by a leopard when she was sleeping on the porch of her house in Fareda village on Tuesday night. A seven-year-old girl was similarly mauled to death two days ago in the neighbouring Amreli district. Increasing human-animal contact in the region has become a cause for concern, with local leaders calling for a proactive measure to cage leopards roaming near human habitats and shift them to forest areas.

Waterlogging woes to wealth: Hoshiarpur farmer's inspiring fish farming journey

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Settled in the Shivalik foothills, 65-year-old Khushwant Singh Cheema from Chhargla village in Dasuya tehsil has turned adversity into an opportunity by transforming his waterlogged field into a thriving fish farming enterprise and has been earning lakhs from it. A graduate and recipient of the Chief Minister's Award for fish farming during the Pashu Palan Mela organised by Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana, in 2023, this innovative farmer has led by example by showcasing the potential of fish farming as a profitable alternative to traditional agriculture.

Decades ago, this farmer faced the harsh reality of waterlogging caused by seasonal streams, locally known as Choes, which rendered his land unsuitable for cultivating wheat and reduced paddy yields. With nearly 30 acres of his 75-acre joint family land waterlogged, he struggled to revive it but in vain. However, in 1997, an agricultural officer introduced him to the concept of fish farming, which turned out to be a life-changing solution. "I had no knowledge about fish farming initially, but with brief training and government support, I started with five acres. The results were promising, and over the years, I converted the entire 30-acre waterlogged area into fish ponds," he said.

"Starting small, now I operate several fish ponds on my land, rearing five varieties of fish, including Indian species like Rohu, Katla, and Murag, as well as Chinese varieties such as Grass Carp and Common Carp. Each acre of his fish farm generates an income of Rs 3 to Rs 3.5 lakh annually, with a net profit of Rs 1.25 to Rs 1.5 lakh per acre after accounting for expenses which included seed, feed, equipment's and labour. "Fish farming is far more lucrative than cultivating wheat or paddy but it needs proper attention and monitoring of the ponds and fishes. With hard work, latest tools and more resources even farmer can double his income from fish farming," said he, adding that his annual earnings from fish farming now exceed Rs 38 to Rs 40 lakh from this land which was once turned waste for me and it can be enhanced manifold with the government support. The government provides subsidies for digging ponds, which is a one-time cost except for occasional repairs. The farmer credits the officials from Fishery department Punjab for their guidance on technical aspects and subsidy programs. However, he emphasized the need for greater government support to unlock the sector's full potential. During a government-organized visit to China, he witnessed advanced fish farming techniques, including automated equipment for feed distribution and oxygen supply, which resulted in yields of up to 8-10 tonnes per acre—significantly higher than Punjab's current average of 2.5 to 3 tonnes. "If the government supports farmers by subsidizing modern equipment and providing better pond concrete lining systems, production could increase manifold, encouraging even small farmers to adopt fish farming for its high returns," he said.

"The modern technology and government initiatives can revolutionize the sector. Fish farming is an untapped goldmine in Punjab. Even small farmers with just one acre can earn significant profits if given the right tools and training," he said, adding that there is no problem in its marketing as buyers themselves come to his fish farm to catch the fishes and transport from here. He urges authorities to focus on equipment subsidies, technical training, and marketing support to boost fish yields and profitability across the state.

In addition to fish farming, the farmer continues to grow wheat, paddy, and agroforestry on the remaining 45 acres of family land. Notably, the nutrient-rich water from his fish ponds is recycled for crop irrigation, enhancing soil fertility and reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. Farming runs in the farmer's veins. His grandfather, Dr. Ganda Singh Cheema, a former director of horticulture in undivided Gujarat after Partition, instilled a deep connection to the land. After migrating to Punjab during Partition, his family received 100 acres of land, which they have cultivated ever since. "My wife has been a pillar of support in this journey. Together, we've ensured that our land remains productive despite the challenges," he remarked. By embracing fish farming, he has not only overcome the challenges of waterlogging but also created a sustainable and profitable agricultural model that inspires farmers across the region, said Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Deputy Director Punjab Fishery Department Hoshiarpur, said that it is a cash crop farming and government provides several subsidies on it.

POCSO court sentences man to death for rape-murder of minor girl in Bengal



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

A Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) court in West Bengal's Hooghly district on Friday (January 17, 2025) sentenced to death a man for the rape and murder of a five-year old girl at Gurap in the district. The accused Ashoke Singh (42) was found guilty of the rape and murder of minor. The court had held the accused guilty of the crime on Wednesday and on Friday pronounced the verdict. The crime took place on the evening of November 24, 2024. The girl had gone missing and after a search by her family members in the locality, her body was found in the house of the convict, who happened to be the neighbour of the victim. He was arrested by the Gurap police on the same night. The chargesheet was filed 14 days after the crime and the award of punishment comes 54 days

after the crime.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee congratulated the police and the judiciary for the prompt action and thorough investigation in the case. "Today, the court has pronounced death sentence for the convict who had raped and murdered the small girl of Gurap and I thank the judiciary for that. I thank Hooghly Rural District Police for their swift action and thorough probe that ensured speedy trial and conviction in 54 days," Ms. Banerjee said in a statement on social media. The Chief Minister added that "a rapist has no place in our world". "All of us together will make it a safer place for our children through stringent law, social reforms, effective and unforgiving administration. No such crime will go unpunished," she said.

This is the third crime in the past few months where capital punishment has been awarded by courts in West Bengal. Earlier on December 6, a court awarded death sentence to the convict in the rape and murder of a minor at Kulti in South 24 Parganas district. The death sentence to Mostakin Sardar came 62 days after the crime was committed. On December 13, a court in Murshidabad awarded death sentence to Dinabandhu Halder for the rape and murder of a minor at Farakka in Murshidabad district. The sentence was awarded on the 61st day of the crime, and the investigation was completed and chargesheet submitted by the police in 21 days. Another convict Subhojit Halder, an accomplice in the case, was awarded life sentence.

Who is Mohammad Shariful Islam Shahzad, arrested by the Mumbai Police for attacking Saif Ali Khan?



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

saif a li khan attack The police said the accused, Mohammad Shariful Islam Shahzad, 30, had changed his name to Vijay Das after entering India to hide his Bangladeshi origins. Mohammad Shariful Islam Shahzad, a 30-year-old man of Bangladeshi origin, was arrested by Mumbai Police on Saturday, almost 70 hours after the stabbing of Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan at his Bandra residence. Shahzad, who had changed his name to Vijay Das upon entering India, had been living in Mumbai for just six months. His alleged motive behind the crime, according to authorities, was robbery. Police say that Shahzad was unaware that he had entered Khan's residence during his attempt to steal.

From Bangladesh to Mumbai After crossing into the country "illegally", Shahzad settled in Mumbai and found work at a bar in Thane, a satellite city on the outskirts of Mumbai. However, he left his job just a week before the

attack, hoping to find better employment. According to the police, Shahzad also did not have any valid Indian identification documents.

According to police reports, Shahzad allegedly entered Khan's Bandra residence with the intention to rob, but the encounter turned violent, leading to the actor being stabbed six times. After the attack, Shahzad fled, taking a train from Bandra to Dadar and then heading to his temporary residence in Worli. When he saw his image being circulated across news channels and social media platforms, fear took over, and he decided to go into hiding. Shahzad's escape led him to the dense mangroves near a labour camp in Kasarwadavli, Thane, where he managed to avoid capture for nearly three days. The Mumbai Police, led by Deputy Commissioner Navnath Dhawale, launched an intensive manhunt involving nearly 20 police teams in pursuit of the suspect. During his interrogation, Shahzad revealed that after fleeing to Thane, he had tried to keep a low profile, moving from one temporary hideout to another.

The breakthrough in the investigation came through a series of digital clues that pieced together Shahzad's movements. First, a CCTV camera in a mobile phone shop captured Shahzad on video. However, it was his own UPI (Unified Payments Interface) transaction that helped the police close in on him. Shahzad had purchased a mobile cover using Google Pay, leaving behind a digital trail that allowed the authorities to trace his movements post-attack. Using mobile records, the police tracked Shahzad's last-known location, eventually narrowing their search to a labour camp where he had stayed. With the help of his former employer, a contractor named Pandey, the police were able to locate the exact spot where Shahzad was hiding.

How an electric scooter startup serves up solution for Gandhinagar's last-mile connectivity woes



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Gujarat capital Gandhinagar is a well-planned city, similar to Chandigarh, but it has struggled to establish a reliable public transport system that ensures last-mile connectivity. Recognising this opportunity, White Carbon, a local electric bike startup deployed single-seater vehicles at the Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) and other campuses, where they have quickly gained popularity and high demand. Manthan Parekh, a final-year BA LLB honours student at GNLU, shares how easy it has become for him to commute in the capital, which is now home to several leading universities. He booked a scooter from White Carbon on January 14 with two of his friends. Since it was a holiday for Makar Sankranti, they rode to the international kite festival at the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad. They had lunch at a restaurant, spent some time at a mall, and then returned to their campus in Gandhinagar at the end of the day, paying Rs 190 per bike.

"Even if we had hired a cab service or Rapido bike, we would have had to pay much more than this. Besides being cost-effective for students, it was also fun with friends," he tells The Indian Express. The distance between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar is approximately 30 km. Although there is a Metro service and a double-decker bus service connecting the two cities, students and residents express their dissatisfaction, stating that these services only operate along the main road. Consequently, they are not helpful for small errands such as grocery shopping, purchasing emergency medications, or socialising with friends on weekends. Pragna Kanth, a third-year student from out of town at Pandit Deendayal Energy University (PDEU) in Raysan, on the outskirts of Gandhinagar, spends over Rs 200 for even the shortest trips to buy groceries.

She explains, "The recent Metro service that started from right outside our campus doesn't meet our needs as students. The waiting time is one hour, and the last trip is at 6.30 pm. Additionally, there are limited areas connected by the Metro, no provision for last-mile connectivity, and to reach Ahmedabad, we have to change trains at various stations. While it may be cheap, it is not convenient for us," says the 20-year-old. The Gandhinagar-Ahmedabad Metro, operated by the Gujarat Metro Rail Corporation (GMRC), features eight train stations including GNLU, PDEU, and GIFT City. GIFT City houses the Australian Deakin and Wollongong offshore campuses, as well as the Gujarat Biotechnology University, which is run in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Gandhinagar Municipal Commissioner J J N Vaghela says, "Currently, the Metro service is functioning well in these areas, particularly in the Knowledge Corridor, which serves the premier institutes. Since it is still in the trial run phase, the frequency and operations are limited, but these will be increased over time. At this moment, there is no need for additional public transport in these areas." Regarding last-mile connectivity for Metro stations, Vaghela says, "Stations should be located at a distance of at least 500 meters to one km, allowing users to walk this distance. This is why the initial plans did not include provisions for parking spaces at Metro stations. We have yet to fully understand the concept of the Metro." But for students like Kanth and Parekh, riding a bike is more convenient. Parekh shares that the friends also enjoyed a "fun ride" to GIFT City at night on the kite-flying holiday. "It's not that I had never been to GIFT City before; I have cycled there several times. However, riding an electric vehicle (EV) at night with friends was a completely different experience," he explains. He also mentions how the bike helped him fetch medicines for a fellow student from a pharmacy in Bhajipura. Ideal for gig workers, students

White Carbon was launched in 2020 by Pratik Singh Sankhla, 32, and Rushabh Maniar. The company manufactures the O3 micro-mobility vehicle for rental purposes at the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) estate in Gandhinagar. White Carbon has two charging stations located in Palaj and Sector 1, Gandhinagar. Additionally, the GNLU and the International Automobile Centre of Excellence (iACE) have their own solar charging facilities on-site. The service provider, equipped with 25 compact, eco-friendly electric vehicles designed for short-distance travel, seems ideal for gig workers, students, and corporate employees. It started out with stations-Kudasan and International Automobile Center of Excellence (iACE)-located within a distance of 5 km in February 2024. On January 10 this year, White Carbon launched its electric scooter

rental services in the GNLU with ten vehicles. "In a week, we gave over 300 free rides to students of the GNLU, and we completed over 200 paid rides. With such a response among students, we are adding another 30 vehicles by the end of this month and another 10 at iACE. So by the end of January, we will have a fleet of 86 vehicles in Gandhinagar," Sankhla, a mechanical engineer with a master's in machine design, told The Indian Express. Sankhla has eight years of experience in the EV industry while Maniar was his colleague in an EV manufacturing company. In the last eleven months, since White Carbon began offering rental services in Gandhinagar, it has covered 16 lakh km and over 900 rides every month as more than 300 riders have tried and used the paid service. Among regular users are 163 gig workers, 88 students from GNLU and nearby universities like National Forensic Science University (NFSU), National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology (DAIICT), Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) as well as employees from Google, TCS and other MNC employees users on weekends.

The rental service offers fares starting at Rs 50 for one hour, extending to Rs 290 for students and Rs 250 for gig workers for 24 hours. The operations are managed by 12 staff members working in three shifts, 24/7. Additionally, around 15 field marshals are responsible for monitoring violations and preventing vandalism of vehicles. This initiative has quickly become a popular choice. "After using it for the first time, I was so excited that I marketed it to all my friends. If I am travelling slowly and solo, I should not be going alone. So now in the evenings we ride in groups for utility and fun as well. Now I am using it more than thrice a week with an increased frequency on weekends," says Kanth. The short-comings of Gandhinagar's public transport infrastructure The public transport infrastructure in the Gandhinagar urban area, which mainly serves bureaucrats and politicians, has primarily been designed with government employees in mind. Recently, the Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation (GSRTC) launched an electric double-decker bus service just a few days before the Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2024. This service operates daily between Sarkhej in Ahmedabad and GIFT City and Gandhinagar Pathikashram and GIFT City, excluding the second and fourth Saturdays and Sundays when government offices are closed.

The connectivity offered by the GSRTC and the city bus service provided by the Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation does not extend to the internal roads within Gandhinagar city. Additionally, areas such as Randheja, Kudasan, Raysan, Pethapur, and other recently incorporated villages are also not covered. The Gandhinagar Urban Development Authority (GUDA) launched a bicycle-sharing service in 2016, but it was later discontinued. Currently, the GMC has no plans to introduce a similar service for city commuters. "White Carbon saw problems faced by these people, which are very common, but everyone seemed to have accepted that there is no solution to this. Like a gig worker who is not a graduate, they don't have a good CIBIL score and don't have proper residence as many come from nearby states. They are not eligible for a loan, but they came this far to work, and all they needed was a vehicle. We provide the solution to that. The same goes with students; major university students are from different states, and for local commuters, they depend on cabs or auto rickshaws, which charge them extremely high. They have been at their university for years, so they don't buy new vehicles, so renting is always a good option for them," Sankhla says. With a big push to the development of GIFT City, boosting the development of surrounding areas, people are commuting from different states for food and to buy basic groceries. They also face the same problem. "There is a trend in corporations that people switch jobs in search of better opportunities or to get close to their family; not everyone is looking to buy their basic commute. So we brought these solutions," he adds. The data maintained by the company indicates that the overall number of users increased organically by 28 per cent before the introduction of e-bikes at the GNLU. However, after that, the demand surged dramatically by 115 per cent. Students typically book the service for either 1-3 hours, while employees tend to book it for 6-12 hours. "Among students this is popular mostly in the evenings when their classes get over. On the other hand, employees' peak hours are mostly on weekends and they take it in the evening or for the full day to finish their work," says Sankhla.

The startup aims to expand to universities in Gandhinagar, promoting sustainability in educational institutions and providing a reliable green mobility solution for students and staff as first and last mile connectivity. "White Carbon has signed a MoU with the International Automobile Center of Excellence (iACE) and we plan to collaborate with other organisations to further grow its footprint in Gandhinagar first. First we want to cover all the touch points of Gandhinagar and GIFT City through continuous innovation in electric vehicle solutions for all types of users. We aim to be a key player in transforming urban mobility through electric vehicles and contribute to reducing carbon emissions while offering efficient, cost-effective transportation solutions," says Sankhla.

SGPC seeks ban on liquor stores, tobacco sales near Golden Temple, wants holy city status for Amritsar

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, sgpc, liquor ban, golden temple. In November last year, BJP's Dr Jagmohan Singh Raju too had demanded a ban on the sale of liquor and tobacco products within a one-mile radius of the Golden Temple. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee has urged the Punjab government to declare Amritsar as holy city, the demand coming months after a BJP leader protested outside the Golden Temple for a day to press for the same demand. In a letter to the state government, SGPC secretary Kulwant Singh has written that there are liquor vendors and tobacco vendors on the route to Darbar Sahib. "SGPC has long been demanding a complete ban on liquor stores and tobacco sales around the central religious shrine of the Sikhs, the spiritual center of humanity, Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, as well as on the routes leading to it. However, no appropriate and effective measures have been taken in this regard by the state government," reads the letter. "This lack of action negatively impacts devotees. Amritsar is a sacred city, known as the City of the Guru, where millions of devotees from across the country and abroad visit daily. It is the government's duty to recognize the ambience of Darbar Sahib and grant the city status of a holy city. With hope for full cooperation," it adds. In November last year, Dr Jagmohan Singh Raju, who resigned as additional chief secretary in Tamil Nadu to unsuccessfully contest the 2022 Punjab Assembly elections from Amritsar East, too had



demanding a ban on the sale of liquor and tobacco products within a one-mile radius of the Golden Temple. Raju's demand had come four decades after the BJP held a pro-cigarette and beedi march, displaying tobacco products, to protest against a SGPC call to declare Amritsar holy city. In a Facebook post, Raju had said Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's government has not responded to his representation regarding this demand, prompting him to protest outside Darbar Sahib for one day. On September 27, 2022, Raju had requested the National Commission for Minorities to direct the Punjab government to ban the sale and consumption of liquor and tobacco products within a one-mile radius of historical gurdwaras, including the Darbar Sahib. He also called for a complete ban on smoking and drinking in public places in the state and suggested declaring gurdwaras (days related to Sikh Gurus) as dry days.

Delhi man found dead in pond, landlord's son arrested for killing him over financial dispute

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The Delhi Police on Saturday arrested a man for allegedly shooting dead another man over financial disputes. The victim was identified as Rakesh, 29, and the accused as Govind Ballabh, the son of the victim's landlord. On Friday afternoon, a control room call at the Alipur police station reported the body of a man found floating in a pond. When police officers arrived at the scene, they uncovered what appeared to be a meticulously planned murder. Nearby, the roof of an undivided ancestral building owned by the victim's landlord bore faint but telling bloodstains, hastily wiped clean. According to the police, an empty 7.65 mm cartridge, recovered from the rooftop, cemented suspicions that Rakesh was shot there before his body was disposed of in the pond to conceal the crime. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed to unravel the case. The team began reconstructing the events that led to Rakesh's murder. Rakesh's mother Bhagwati Devi provided crucial testimony. She revealed that her son had left home earlier on Friday with Govind, their landlord's son, a man with whom Rakesh shared a contentious relationship over property and financial dealings.

An FIR was lodged, and the police shifted their focus to locating Govind Ballabh, who had since vanished. The investigation revealed that the conflict between the two men stemmed from a high-stakes financial arrangement gone awry. According to Govind's eventual alleged confession, Rakesh had been working as a loan recovery agent for him. Govind entrusted Rakesh with Rs 5 lakh to secure a Rs 40 lakh loan, but Rakesh allegedly requested additional money without fulfilling the promised arrangement. Rakesh also allegedly took possession of Govind's luxury Mercedes car, ostensibly to sell and recover funds, but the vehicle mysteriously disappeared, said the police. Under mounting financial pressure, Govind confronted Rakesh on the roof of the ancestral property, said the police. There, in a moment of rage, he allegedly shot Rakesh in the head, killing him instantly. After the murder, Govind attempted to clean the crime scene and discard the body in the nearby pond, hoping to erase any evidence linking him to the act, said the police. According to the police, during questioning, Govind revealed the sequence of events and admitted to disposing of Rakesh's mobile phone, which was later recovered.

BSE expects record-breaking IPO run to continue unabated in 2025, CEO says



up. "BSE earned 1.57 billion rupees in listing fees in the first-half of 2024-25, according to East India Securities. This compares to 1.3 billion rupees in fees reported a year earlier.

Mr. Ramamurthy declined to comment on BSE's financials ahead of its upcoming quarterly earnings. The gains from the IPO pipeline, however, are being tempered by tighter rules for trading derivatives. The notional value of derivatives traded in India has declined 40% since September, in anticipation of the new rules, while premiums have fallen 15%-20%, Mr. Ramamurthy said. A further decline could be expected since three of the six new rules introduced by the markets regulator will be implemented by April. "We have to wait till April to judge the final impact," he said. BSE's shares have doubled since November 20 when the rules were implemented as analysts expect a lower impact on the exchange compared to the NSE, which has larger derivative trading volumes. DIVERSIFYING REVENUE STREAMS BSE, which earns a major chunk of revenue from transaction charges and services to firms including listings, is looking to diversify its income streams, Mr. Ramamurthy said. It aims to grow its index business, which licences indexes used by funds to benchmark investments. "We have launched 15 indices since the middle of last year and there is room to continue working on that front," he said. It is also considering expanding its co-location services, which are in demand as high-frequency and algorithmic trading increase. "There is good possibility of generating revenue (in co-location), but we have not made a decision yet. We will look at it after April once market volumes settle down."

India's record-breaking capital-raising spree will continue in 2025 given the strong pipeline of firms looking to go public, the head of the country's oldest exchange told Reuters. "There are 90-plus companies that have already filed their draft prospectus with the regulator, looking to raise an estimated 1 trillion rupees (\$11.65 billion) at some point this year," Sundararaman Ramamurthy, the CEO of BSE said on Thursday. Last year, 91 large firms went public on the BSE, earlier known as the Bombay Stock Exchange, and the NSE, or National Stock Exchange, raising a record 1.6 trillion rupees via initial public offerings (IPOs), according to analytics firm Prime Database. Overall public equity fundraising more than doubled to 3.73 trillion rupees. Mr. Ramamurthy said the IPO boom has more offers for Sale (OFS), where large shareholders sell existing shares, with the proceeds going to them, instead of fresh issues that provide firms with capital to invest. "I would like to see the OFS percentage coming down and fresh capital raising go

All about the utility of hybrid mutual funds

When we think of mutual funds (MFs), we think of equity funds. There are also hybrid funds with their own utility. These funds can add to tax efficiency. To recap, taxation of equity funds, for a holding period of more than one year, is 12.5% plus surcharge and cess. For a holding period of less than one year, it is 20% plus surcharge and cess. For debt funds, it is your marginal slab rate, irrespective of the holding period. For most investors, it is 30% plus surcharge and cess. Hybrid funds with allocation of more than 65% of portfolio to equity, are equity funds for tax purposes. In the process, the debt component of the fund also gets taxed at a lower rate i.e. 12.5%.

Fund details There are six hybrid fund categories defined by Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI). We start with the category called Aggressive Hybrid funds. These funds are mandated to have allocation to equity in the range of 65 to 80% of the portfolio. It is compulsory to have this allocation to equity, hence, this category is just one notch below equity funds. The allocation to debt, 20-35% of portfolio, leads to lower volatility than pure-play equity funds. Equity allocation being more than 65% of portfolio, taxation is that of equity. Then there are Balanced Hybrid funds with equity allocation 40-60%. As per rules, an Asset Management Company (AMC) can have either Aggressive or Balanced Hybrid fund not both. Given a fund with over 65% allocation to equity is taxed as equity and investors prefer equity taxation, AMCs have not initiated Balanced Hybrid funds. SEBI defines Dynamic Asset Allocation or Balanced Advantage Funds (BAFs) as 'investment in equity/debt that is managed dynamically'. However, the MF industry has positioned BAF in a particular manner.

Equity component is maintained at over 65%, to be eligible for equity taxation. A part of the equity exposure is 'hedged'. Hedging is done by taking a contra position i.e. sell/short position in stock futures. The effect is the net equity exposure, subject to market volatility, is much lower. As an illustration, let us say the in a BAF with a corpus of ₹100, equity exposure is ₹75 and debt exposure is ₹25. There is a short position in equity of say ₹35. Thus, the net equity exposure is ₹40. The extent of the hedge is decided by the fund manager as per market valuations. The reason to make the net equity exposure lower than the apparent exposure is to make it defensive. If the equity market were to correct, the adverse impact would be to the extent of ₹40 and not ₹75. In Equity Savings Funds, SEBI norm sets minimum investment in equity and equity-related instruments



at 65% of total assets and minimum investment in debt at 10% of total assets.

There has to be an usual or unhedged exposure to equity, and a hedged exposure to equity adding up to minimum 65% of portfolio. The balance portfolio is in debt. The industry practice is the usual equity component is maintained in the range of 20-40%, and so is the hedged portion. Though Equity Savings Funds are equity funds from a tax perspective, the equity (unhedged) portion in the range of 20-40%, resembles fixed income or debt-oriented funds. Arbitrage Funds earn returns from the price differential between equity stocks in cash market and stock futures market, for 65% of the portfolio.

The price at which a stock is sold in the stock futures market is higher than the price at which it is purchased in the cash or spot market. These funds have 65% or more of the portfolio in cash-futures arbitrage and 35% or less in debt or money market instruments. Returns come from price differential between the two segments. Multi Asset Funds (MAFs) are those with exposure to a minimum of three asset categories and minimum 10% in each category. Here as well, most AMCs run portfolios with equity exposure of over 65% to be eligible for equity taxation. The balance is invested in debt and gold, or some other asset class. As we can see in the above fund categories, exposure to equity being less than that of pure-play equity funds, you have diversification built in the fund. At the end of the holding period, you may end up with returns less than equity-only funds, but volatility during holding period will be relatively lower. If you want to maintain equity exposure at a certain level, in a disciplined manner, you may resort to the relevant hybrid fund.

tility levels. Declining fertility rates have resulted in a rapid demographic transition in many southern States. The consequences of this — an ageing population, a declining young workforce and increased demands on healthcare and social security measures for the care of an increasing population of the elderly — are being acutely felt in States such as Kerala. Migration of youngsters in search of better prospects is also an issue.

What is happening in the southern States?

There is concern over the irreversible fertility decline across the country, but more so in the southern States, where fertility rates had dropped below the replacement levels much earlier than the rest of India. Kerala led the demographic transition in the South, achieving the replacement level fertility rate in 1988, with the other four States achieving this by mid-2000. Along with education and women's empowerment and development in the social and health sectors, which were the hallmark of Kerala's high human development index, the State has also seen low economic investments and growth. Educated youth are leaving the State; the proportion of the aged population is expected to surpass that of children (23% in 2036). Changed attitudes towards marriage and motherhood are beginning to reflect in the health of women, leading to an increasing proportion of older mothers and pregnancy-related morbidities. Kerala's high labour wages and high quality of life index are attracting internal migration from other States to supplant a shrinking workforce.

The State Planning Board reckons that by 2030, the proportion of migrant labour could be close to 60 lakh, about one-sixth of the State's population. Fertility decline is almost always irreversible and the graph, once it starts going down, may never bounce back. Countries like South Korea, which tried to stem the demographic crisis by pumping in millions have failed and the fertility rate plunged from 0.78 in 2022 to 0.73 in 2023. Demographers suggest that socio-economic policies that propel the growth of the economy, improve job prospects for the youth and tap the potential of a growing population of senior citizens, can help in reducing the impact of a long spell of low, sub-replacement level fertility rates on countries.

Reiterating the cancer risks of alcohol consumption



Alcohol consumption is the third-leading preventable cause of cancer in the U.S., after tobacco and obesity. Photograph used for representational purposes only. In early January, United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who released the new Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk, called for cancer risk warnings on alcohol-containing beverages.

The health risks associated with alcohol consumption are well-known; and the advisory stating that alcohol consumption is the third-leading preventable cause of cancer in the U.S., after tobacco and obesity. The World Health Organization (WHO), in its Global status report on alcohol and health and treatment of substance use disorders, noted that "the global burden of disease and injuries caused by alcohol consumption can be quantified for 31 health conditions on the basis of available scientific evidence for the role of alcohol use in their development, occurrence and outcomes." "When it comes to alcohol consumption, there is no safe amount that does not affect health," the WHO said in a statement published in The Lancet Public Health.

However, how far this message has penetrated and how much of it was understood, especially in a setting like India, remains debatable. The fact remains that consuming alcohol increases the risk of at least seven types of cancer -- mouth, pharynx, voice box, esophagus, breast (in women), liver, colon and rectum. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-2021), 18.8% of men and 1.3% of women aged 15 and above consume alcohol in India. Myths surrounding alcohol Surendran Veeraiiah, professor and head, Psycho-oncology and Resource Centre for Tobacco Control, Cancer Institute (WIA), said that there was confusion among the people due to misinformation about alcohol and cancer. "Some doctors say that drinking alcohol in moderation or drinking red wine is good. Such myths and misconceptions only mislead people. It is clearly established that alcohol is carcinogenic. So, it is important for healthcare professionals to take this up seriously and communicate to people that alcohol is carcinogenic. They should discourage alcohol consumption," he said. Reducing the availability of alcohol is not a deterrent, he said, adding: "Policy makers should understand that alcohol is not a substitute for revenue generation. Revenue making was how it started off for tobacco -- stating that tobacco companies pay tax," he said.

India's real growth rate and the forecast

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

The First Advance Estimates (FAE) of National Accounts for 2024-25 show a real GDP growth of 6.4% and a nominal GDP growth of 9.7%. These numbers have fallen short of the Reserve Bank of India's revised growth estimate of 6.6% for real GDP, as in its December 2024 monetary policy statement and 10.5% for nominal GDP growth as in the 2024-25 Union Budget presented in July 2024. The annual growth of 6.4% can be seen as consisting of 6% growth in the first half and 6.7% growth in the second half. There is, thus, a clear improvement expected over the Q2 growth of 5.4%. The sharp fall in 2024-25 annual GDP growth from that of the previous year at 8.2% is seen only in the case of GDP. With respect to Gross Value Added (GVA), this difference, between 7.2% and 6.4%, is much less. On the GVA side, it was the manufacturing sector which suffered a sharp fall in sectoral growth from 9.9% in 2023-24 to 5.3% in 2024-25. Growth prospects for 2025-26

The Gross Fixed Capital Formation rate at constant prices has ranged between 33.3% and 33.5% during 2021-22 to 2024-25. Thus, it appears to have stabilised around 33.4%. It is expected to continue at this level in 2025-26. The average Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) has been marginally higher than 5 in recent years. Assuming ICOR to be 5.1 in 2025-26, we may consider a 6.5% real GDP growth to be realistic. There may not be much change in the global economy even though Donald Trump's assumption of office may create more uncertainty. India will have to largely depend on domestic demand. In particular, the Government of India has to ensure that there is no relaxation in its investment expenditure. In fact, the slightly lower growth in 2024-25 is largely linked to the slowdown in the Government of India's investment growth which has remained negative at (-)12.3% even after eight months into the fiscal year.

With a lower nominal GDP growth in 2024-25 of 9.7% as compared to the budgeted nominal GDP growth of 10.5%, the budgeted Gross Tax Revenue (GTR) of ₹38.4 lakh crore may not be realised if the budgeted buoyancy of 1.03 is maintained. As per Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data, GTR growth for the first eight months was 10.7%. If this growth is maintained for the remaining months also, the realised buoyancy would be about 1.1, which is higher than the budgeted buoyancy. In such a case, tax revenue shortfall will be minimal. In other words, any revenue constraint or likely pressure on fiscal deficit would not constrain the government's ability to achieve its capital expenditure target of 11.1 lakh crore.

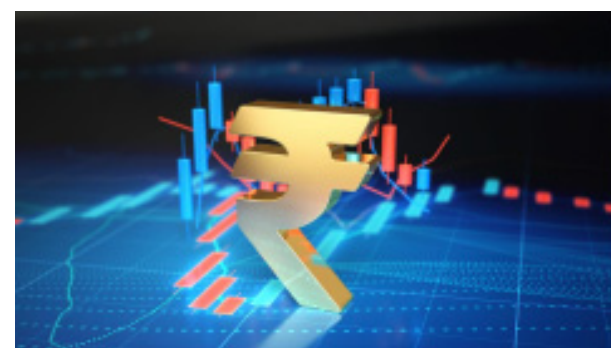
Reason for the dip However, after the first eight months, the level of the Government of India's capital expenditure has remained limited to ₹5.14 lakh crore, that is 46.2% of the Budget target. In the remaining four months, the Government of India's capital expenditure may be accelerated. It may still fall well short of the target. This has been the main reason for the dip in overall real GDP growth in 2024-25. Going forward in 2025-26, the Government of India will have to continue to rely on an accelerated capital expenditure growth which can be kept at least at 20% on the revised estimates for 2024-25. Sustained government capital expenditures can have a favourable effect on private investment. The size and the pattern of investment expenditure of the government should be designed to accelerate private investment as well. Medium- to long-term growth prospects Over a period of next five years, the best that India may hope for is a steady real GDP growth rate of 6.5%. This is in line with the International Monetary Fund's real GDP growth projection for the Indian economy, as in its October 2024 release, which is at 6.5% over the period 2025-26 to 2029-30. This real GDP growth may be accompanied by an implicit price deflator (IPD)-based inflation of

Senior surgical gastroenterologist R. Surendran, who was formerly the director of Institute of Surgical Gastroenterology, Government Stanley Medical College Hospital, said alcohol is the main cause of cirrhosis of liver in India. "Nearly 20% of cirrhosis cases could progress to liver cancer. So, alcohol is directly a cause for liver cancer. Alcohol is definitely dangerous to health and there are many myths that surround its consumption," he said. He added that consuming alcohol was bad for the health and both drinking in moderation or binge drinking were an absolute no-no.

Treatment for alcohol use disorder remains low The WHO observed that access to screening, brief intervention and treatment for people with hazardous alcohol use and alcohol use disorder remains very low, as well as access to medications for treatment of alcohol use disorders. "Overall, the proportion of people with alcohol use disorders in contact with treatment services varies from less than one per cent to no more than 14% in all countries where such data are available," it said.

India's Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had developed standard treatment guidelines for management of alcohol dependence in 2017. The objectives were: to provide advice on assessment, investigations, short-term and long-term medical management of individuals presenting with alcohol dependence and provide advice on psychosocial interventions for patients with alcohol dependence. Talking about support services in Tamil Nadu, P. Poorna Chandrika, professor of psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health, said the psychiatry departments in all government medical college hospitals offered special de-addiction services that included inpatient de-addiction services. "In every district, the District Mental Health Programme provides de-addiction services. All psychiatrists are also trained in de-addiction," she said. Motivation, a key factor for de-addiction

Motivation is key in alcohol de-addiction, she said, adding that people come for treatment for various reasons: insistence by relatives, financial constraints, workplace consequences and a small percentage walk in wanting to quit. "There may be multiple relapses and slip-ups may occur. It is a difficult path but regular follow-up, medication along with motivation and a support system will help," she said. In addition, co-morbidities associated with alcohol dependency including anxiety and other mental health issues should be addressed. "Pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments should go hand in hand. Attending alcoholic anonymous meetings alone without medication is also a risk factor for relapse," she said. There are many concerns. One of the main causes for worry is the early initiation of drinking, doctors said. Lack of continuous monitoring of private de-addiction facilities is another area of concern, they say. As a result, human rights violations do occur. There have been instances of patients crowded in a single room, scabies as well as deaths. The only solution is continuous monitoring and regular review of these centres. Increasing awareness among the public is also crucial, doctors say.



about 4% which can give a nominal GDP growth in the range of 10.5%-11%. In years in which global conditions improve and the contribution of net exports to GDP growth becomes significant, real GDP growth may touch even 7%. If a real growth of around 6.5% and a nominal growth in the range of 10.5%-11% are maintained over the long run with an average exchange rate depreciation of 2.5% per annum, India should be able to reach a per capita GDP level consistent with a developed country status in the next two and half decades. But the task is not going to be easy. It will be hard to grow at 6.5% as the base keeps on increasing. In fact, in the earlier years, the growth rate will have to be higher. But, at present, the potential rate of growth appears to be 6.5%. However, it can change. In the light of a potential growth rate of 6.5%, the achievement of 6.4% in 2024-25 should not be considered as disappointing. In fact, the achievement of 8.2% in 2023-24 should be considered as a flash in the pan. The current year's growth rate of 6.4% as in the first advance estimates should be seen in the context of India's potential growth rate. C. Rangarajan is former Chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, and former Governor, Reserve Bank of India. D.K. Srivastava is Honorary Professor, Madras School of Economics, and Member, Advisory Council to the Sixteenth Finance Commission. The views expressed are personal

TGSPDCL invites firms for installation of underground cables in Greater Hyd

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

HYDERABAD: The Southern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited (TGSPDCL) is inviting firms for replacing the existing overhead lines with underground cables in the entire GHMC area and adjoining municipal corporations, municipalities and panchayats within Outer Ring Road (ORR). There are 498 substations of 33/11 KV, 1,280 kms of 33 KV underground cables, 3,725 kms of 33 KV Overhead (OH) lines, 1022 Power Transformers (PTRs) provided in substations, 957 kms of 11 KV UG cables, 21,463 kms of 11 KV OH lines, 1,50,992 distribution transformers and 58,271 intermediate poles in the region. TGSPDCL intends to implement the underground power cabling project under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) or any other feasible funding model. As part of the project work, a detailed survey and feasibility study would have to be conducted, besides design and engineering, procurement and installation, integration with existing infrastructure, testing and commissioning and Operation & Maintenance (O&M). All the interested parties would be called for making a presentation on February 7.

Gaza ceasefire and hostage release set to begin; Israeli troops start withdrawing from Rafah



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

A ceasefire in Gaza between Israel and Hamas is set to come into effect on Sunday (January 19, 2025) morning with a hostage release to follow hours later, opening the way to a possible end to a 15-month war that has upended the Middle East. Israeli forces started withdrawing from areas in Gaza's Rafah to the Philadelphi corridor along the border between Egypt and Gaza, pro-Hamas media reported early on Sunday. The ceasefire agreement followed months of on-off negotiations brokered by Egypt, Qatar and the United States, and came just ahead of the Jan. 20 inauguration of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump. The three-stage ceasefire will come into effect at 06.30 GMT (12:00 p.m. IST) on Sunday.

Its first stage will last six weeks, during which 33 of the remaining 98 hostages — women, children, men over 50, the ill and wounded — will be released in return for almost 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees. They include 737 male, female and teen-aged prisoners, some of whom are members of militant groups convicted of attacks that killed dozens of Israelis, as well as hundreds of Palestinians from Gaza in detention since the start of the war. Three female hostages are expected to be released on Sunday afternoon through the Red Cross, in return for 30 prisoners each. After Sunday's hostage release, lead U.S. negotiator Brett McGurk said, the accord calls for four more female hostages to be freed after seven days, followed by the release of three further hostages every seven days thereafter. During the first phase the Israeli army will pull back from some of its positions in Gaza and Palestinians displaced from areas in northern Gaza will be allowed to return.

U.S. President Joe Biden's team worked closely with Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff to push the deal over the line. As his inauguration approached, Mr. Trump had repeated his demand that a deal be done swiftly, warning repeatedly that there would be "hell to pay" if the hostages were not released. But what will come next in Gaza remains unclear in the absence of a comprehensive agree-

ment on the postwar future of the enclave, which will require billions of dollars and years of work to rebuild. And although the stated aim of the ceasefire is to end the war entirely, it could easily unravel. Hamas, which has controlled Gaza for almost two decades, has survived despite losing its top leadership and thousands of fighters.

Israel has vowed it will not allow Hamas to return to power and has cleared large stretches of ground inside Gaza, in a step widely seen as a move towards creating a buffer zone that will allow its troops to act freely against threats in the enclave. In Israel, the return of the hostages may ease some of the public anger against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing government over the Oct. 7 security failure that led to the deadliest single day in the country's history. But hardliners in his government have already threatened to quit if war on Hamas is not resumed, leaving him pressed between Washington's desire to see the war end, and his far-right political allies at home. And if war resumes, dozens of hostages could be left behind in Gaza.

Outside Gaza, the war sent shockwaves across the region, triggering a war with the Tehran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah movement and bringing Israel into direct conflict with its arch-foe Iran for the first time. More than a year later, the Middle East has been transformed. Iran, which spent billions building up a network of militant groups around Israel, has seen its "Axis of Resistance" wrecked and was unable to inflict more than minimal damage on Israel in two major missile attacks. Hezbollah, whose huge missile arsenal was once seen as the biggest threat to Israel, has been humbled, with its top leadership killed and most of its missiles and military infrastructure destroyed. In the aftermath, the decades-long Assad regime in Syria was overturned, removing another major Iranian ally and leaving Israel's military effectively unchallenged in the region. But on the diplomatic front, Israel has faced outrage and isolation over the death and devastation in Gaza. Mr. Netanyahu faces an International Criminal Court arrest warrant on war crimes allegations and separate accusations of genocide at the International Court of Justice. Israel has reacted with fury to both cases, rejecting the charges as politically motivated and accusing South Africa, which brought the original ICJ case as well as the countries that have joined it, of antisemitism. The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel in which 1,200 people were killed and more than 250 taken hostage, according to Israeli tallies. More than 400 Israeli soldiers have been killed in combat in Gaza since Israel's 15-month campaign in Gaza has killed nearly 47,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health ministry figures, which do not distinguish between fighters and civilians, and left the narrow coastal enclave a wasteland of rubble.

Biden won't enforce TikTok ban, official says, leaving fate of app to Trump



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

President Joe Biden won't enforce a ban on the social media app TikTok that is set to take effect a day before he leaves office on Monday, a U.S. official said Thursday, leaving its fate in the hands of President-elect Donald Trump. Congress last year, in a law signed by Biden, required that TikTok's China-based parent company ByteDance divest the company by January 19, a day before the presidential inauguration. The official said the outgoing administration was leaving the implementation of the law — and the potential enforcement of the ban — to Trump. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss internal Biden administration thinking. Trump, who once called to ban the app, has since pledged to keep it available in the U.S., though his transition team has not said how they intend to accomplish that.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew is expected to attend Trump's inauguration and be granted a prime seating location on the dais as the president-elect's national security adviser signals that the incoming administration may take steps to "keep TikTok from going dark." Incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz on Thursday told Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends" that the federal law that could ban TikTok by Sunday also "allows for an extension as long as a viable deal is on the table."

The push to save TikTok, much like the move to ban it in the U.S., has crossed partisan lines. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said he spoke with Biden on Thursday to advocate for extending the deadline to ban TikTok. "It's

clear that more time is needed to find an American buyer and not disrupt the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans, of so many influencers who have built up a good network of followers," Schumer said Thursday on the Senate floor.

Democrats had tried on Wednesday to pass legislation that would have extended the deadline, but Republican Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas blocked it. Cotton, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said that TikTok has had ample time to find a buyer. "TikTok is a Chinese Communist spy app that addicts our kids, harvests their data, targets them with harmful and manipulative content, and spreads communist propaganda," Cotton said. TikTok CEO's is expected to be seated on the dais for the inauguration along with tech billionaires Elon Musk, who is CEO of SpaceX, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, according to two people with the matter. The people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning. Last week, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a legal challenge to the statute brought by TikTok, its China-based parent company ByteDance, and users of the app. The Justices seemed likely to uphold the law, which requires ByteDance to divest TikTok on national security grounds or face a ban in one of its biggest markets. "If the Supreme Court comes out with a ruling in favor of the law, President Trump has been very clear: Number one, TikTok is a great platform that many Americans use and has been great for his campaign and getting his message out. But number two, he's going to protect their data," Waltz said on Wednesday. "He's a deal maker. I don't want to get ahead of our executive orders, but we're going to create this space to put that deal in place," he added. Separately on Wednesday, Pam Bondi, Trump's pick for attorney general, dodged a question during a Senate hearing on whether she'd uphold a TikTok ban.

Trump has reversed his position on the popular app, having tried to ban it during his first term in office over national security concerns. He joined TikTok during his 2024 presidential campaign and his team used it to connect with younger voters, especially male voters, by pushing content that was often macho and aimed at going viral. He pledged to "save TikTok" during the campaign and has credited the platform with helping him win more youth votes.

Bitcoin soars past \$100,000 ahead of possible early action on crypto by Trump

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The price of bitcoin topped \$100,000 again early Friday as a pumped up cryptocurrency industry expects early action by Donald Trump when he's sworn in as president next week. Once a skeptic who said a few years ago that bitcoin "seems like a scam," Trump has embraced digital currencies with a convert's zeal. He's launched a new cryptocurrency venture and vowed on the campaign trail to take steps early in his presidency to make the U.S. into the "crypto capital" of the world. His promises including creating a U.S. crypto stockpile, enacting industry-friendly regulation and event appointing a crypto "czar" for his administration. "You're going to be very happy with me," Trump told crypto-enthusiasts at a bitcoin conference last summer. Bitcoin is the world's most popular cryptocurrency and was created in 2009 as a kind of electronic cash uncontrolled by banks or governments. It and newer forms of cryptocurrencies have moved from the financial fringes to the mainstream in wild fits and starts.

The highly volatile nature of cryptocurrencies as well as their use by criminals, scammers and rogue nations, has attracted plenty of critics, who say the digital currencies have limited utility and often are just Ponzi schemes. But crypto has so far defied naysayers and survived multiple prolonged price drops in its short lifespan. Wealthy players in the crypto industry, which felt unfairly targeted by the Biden administration, spent heavily to help Trump win last November's election. Bitcoin has surged in price since Trump's victory, topping \$100,000 for the first time last month before briefly sliding down to about \$90,000 earlier this week. Two years ago, bitcoin was trading at about \$20,000. On Friday, bitcoin rose about 5% to around \$104,000 according to CoinDesk.

Trump's picks for key cabinet and regulatory positions are stocked with crypto supporters, including his choice to lead the Treasury and Commerce departments, as well as the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Key industry players are throwing a first ever "Crypto Ball" Friday evening, which promised on its website to include "an elite lineup of musical entertainment" to celebrate the first "crypto president." The event is sold out, with tickets costing several thousand dollars. Here's a look at some detailed action Trump might take in the early days of his administration: As a candidate Trump promised that he would create a special advisory council tasked with providing guidance on creating "clear" and "straightforward" regulations surrounding crypto within the first 100 days of his presidency. Details about the council and its membership are still unclear, but after winning November's election, Trump named tech executive and venture capitalist David Sacks to be the administration's crypto "czar." Trump also announced in late December that former North Carolina congressional candidate Bo Hines will be the executive director of the "Presidential Council of Advisers for Digital Assets." At last year's bitcoin conference, Trump told crypto supporters that new regulations "will be written by people who love your industry, not hate your industry." Trump's pick to lead the SEC, Paul Atkins, has been a strong advocate for cryptocurrencies.

Crypto investors and companies chafed at what they said was a hostile Biden administration that went overboard in unfair enforcement actions and accounting policies that have stifled innovation in the industry — particularly at the hands of outgoing SEC Chairman Gary Gensler. "As far as general expectations from the Trump administration, I think one of the best things to bet on is a tone change at the SEC," said Peter Van Valkenburgh, the executive director of the advocacy group Coin Center. Gensler, who is set to depart as Trump takes office, said in a recent interview with Bloomberg that he's proud of his office's actions to police the crypto industry, which he said is "rife with bad actors."

Trump also promised that as president he'll make sure the U.S. government stockpiles bitcoin, much like it already does with gold. At the bitcoin conference earlier this summer, Trump said it the U.S. government would keep, rather than auction off, the billions of dollars in bitcoin it has seized through law enforcement actions.

Crypto advocates have posted a draft executive order online that would establish a "Strategic Bitcoin Reserve" as a "permanent national asset" that would be administered by the Treasury Department through its Exchange Stabilization Fund. The draft order calls for the Treasury Depart-



ment to eventually hold at least \$21 billion in bitcoin. Republican Sen. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming previously proposed legislation mandating the U.S. government stockpile bitcoin, which advocates said would help diversify government holdings and hedge against financial risks. Critics say bitcoin's volatility make it a poor reserve. Creating such a stockpile would also be a "giant step in the direction of bitcoin becoming normalized, becoming legitimized in the eyes of people who don't yet see it as legitimate," said Zack Shapiro, an attorney who is head of policy at the Bitcoin Policy Institute. At the bitcoin conference earlier this year, Trump received loud cheers when he reiterated a promise to commute the life sentence of Ross Ulbricht, the convicted founder of the drug-selling website Silk Road that used crypto for payments. Ulbricht's case has energised some crypto advocates and Libertarian activists, who believe government investigators overreached in building their case against Silk Road.

Ceasefire will not begin until Hamas provides hostage list: Netanyahu warns Gaza

GNS News Agency, Jan 24

Gaza Strip: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said early on Sunday that the ceasefire in Gaza will not begin until Israel has received a list of the hostages set to be released from Hamas. He reiterated the warning in a statement barely an hour before the ceasefire was set to begin at 8:30 a.m. local time. Hamas blamed the delay in handing over the names on "technical field reasons." It said in a statement that it is committed to the ceasefire deal announced last week. The exchange raised doubts about whether the ceasefire would begin as planned. Hamas is expected to release three hostages later on Sunday in exchange for scores of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, the first step in a long process aimed at winding down the 15-month war.

The 42-day first phase of the ceasefire should see a total of 33 hostages returned from Gaza and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees released. Israeli forces should pull back into a buffer zone inside Gaza, and many displaced Palestinians should be able to return home. The devastated territory should also see a surge in humanitarian aid. This is just the second ceasefire in the war, longer and more consequential than the weeklong pause over a year ago, with the potential to end the fighting for good. Negotiations on the far more difficult second phase of this ceasefire should begin in just over two weeks. Major questions remain, including whether the war will resume after the six-week first phase and how the rest of the nearly 100 hostages in Gaza will be freed. Israel's Cabinet approved the ceasefire early on Saturday in a rare session during the Jewish Sabbath, more than two days after mediators announced the deal. The warring sides were under pressure from both the outgoing Biden administration and President-elect Donald Trump to achieve a deal before the US presidential inauguration on Monday. The toll of the war has been immense, and new details on its scope will now emerge. Over 46,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on southern Israel that sparked the war killed over 1,200. Hundreds of Israeli soldiers have died. Some 90% of Gaza's population has been displaced. The United Nations says the health system, road network and other vital infrastructure have been badly damaged.

TikTok goes dark in U.S.; app removed from prominent app stores

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TikTok's app was removed from prominent app stores on Saturday (January 18, 2025) just before a federal law that would have banned the popular social media platform was scheduled to go into effect. By 10:50 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, the app was not found on Apple and Google's app stores, which are prohibited from offering the platform under a law that required TikTok's China-based parent company, ByteDance, to sell the platform or face a U.S. ban. When users opened the TikTok app on Saturday evening, they encountered a pop-up message from the company that prevented them from scrolling on videos. "A law banning TikTok has been enacted in the U.S.," the message said. "Unfortunately that means you can't use TikTok for now."

TikTok warned users in the United States late Saturday (January 18, 2025) that the app would soon become "temporarily unavailable" as a law banning it in the country was set to take effect — though President-elect Donald Trump said he was considering a reprieve. "We regret that a US law banning TikTok will take effect on January 19 and force us to make our services temporarily unavailable," read a notification to US users who opened the app Saturday night. "We're working to restore our service in the US as soon as possible, and we appreciate your support. Please stay tuned," the message added. After months of legal tussles, the U.S. Supreme Court on Friday (January 17) upheld a law that would ban the popular video-sharing platform in the name of national security, unless its Chinese owners reach a deal to sell it to non-Chinese buyers by Sunday. Only months after overwhelmingly backing the law, lawmakers and officials were now fretting about the ban, with all eyes on whether Trump can swoop in and find a way to save the app.

From teenage dancers to grandmothers sharing cooking tips, TikTok has been embraced for its ability to transform ordinary users into global celebrities when a video goes viral. It also has a fan in Mr. Trump, who has credited the app with connecting him to younger voters, contributing to his election victory in November. After discussing TikTok with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Mr. Trump told NBC News on Saturday (January 18) that he could activate a 90-day reprieve after he reclaims the Oval Office. "I think that would be, certainly, an option that we look at. The 90-day extension is something that will be most likely done, because it's appropriate," he said, ahead of Monday's inauguration. "If I decide to do that, I'll probably announce it on Monday." The law allows a 90-day delay if the White House can show progress toward a viable deal, but TikTok owner ByteDance has flatly refused any sale. The administration of outgoing President Joe Biden has said it will leave the matter to Trump, and White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre qualified TikTok's latest statements as a "stunt." After the court defeat, TikTok CEO Shou Chew appealed to Trump, thanking him for his "commitment to work with us to find a solution." Trump "truly understands our platform," he added.

TikTok has been lobbying furiously to thwart the law's implementation, with Chew set to attend Trump's inauguration on Monday. The law requires Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their app stores, blocking new downloads. The companies could face penalties of up to \$5,000 per user who can access the app.

Oracle, which hosts TikTok's servers, would also be legally obligated to enforce the ban. None of the companies responded to requests for comment on Saturday. Offers for TikTokA last-minute proposal made Saturday by the highly-valued start-up Perplexity AI offered a merger with the US subsidiary of TikTok, a source with knowledge of the deal told AFP. That deal could allow parent company ByteDance a possible solution without selling off the app entirely.

The plan, first reported by U.S. broadcaster CNBC, would create a new joint venture combining the assets of



U.S. TikTok and Perplexity AI, which Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has backed. The proposal did not include a price for the transaction, but the source estimated it would be at least \$50 billion. Frank McCourt, the former Los Angeles Dodgers owner, has also offered to purchase TikTok's U.S. activity and said he's "ready to work with the company and President Trump to complete a deal." Canadian investor Kevin O'Leary, who is involved in that offer, told Fox News that ByteDance was offered \$20 billion for TikTok's U.S. operation. He acknowledged the legal uncertainty over the case, with it remaining an open question whether an executive order by Mr. Trump to halt the ban would override the law. "Congress wrote this law to be virtually president-proof," warned Adam Kovacevich, chief executive of industry trade group Chamber of Progress.

Sarah Kreps, a professor of government and law at Cornell University, said that "if an executive order conflicts with an existing law, the law takes precedence, and the order can be struck down by the courts." If TikTok is forced into a shutdown, its U.S.-based rivals Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts would benefit. Thousands of worried TikTok users have protectively turned to Xiaohongshu ("Little Red Book"), a Chinese social media network similar to Instagram. Nicknamed "Red Note" by its American users, it was the most downloaded app on the U.S. Apple Store this week.

Scientists discover new superconductor material for wider use

Tokyo: Researchers from Tokyo Metropolitan University have discovered a new superconducting material which can be more widely deployed in society. They combined iron, nickel, and zirconium, to create a new transition metal zirconide with different ratios of iron to nickel. While both iron zirconide and nickel zirconide are not superconducting, the newly prepared mixtures are, exhibiting a "dome-shaped" phase diagram typical of so-called "unconventional superconductors," a promising avenue for developing high temperature superconducting materials, according to the study published in the Journal of Alloys and Compounds.

Superconductors already play an active role in cutting-edge technologies, from superconducting magnets in medical devices and maglev systems to superconducting cables for power transmission. However, they generally rely on cooling to temperatures of around four Kelvin, a key roadblock in wider deployment of the technology. Scientists are on the lookout for materials which can show zero resistivity at higher temperatures, particularly the 77 Kelvin threshold at which liquid nitrogen can be used to cool the materials instead of liquid helium. Now, a team of researchers led by Associate Professor Yoshikazu Mizuguchi from Tokyo Metropolitan University have conceived a new superconducting material containing a magnetic element. For the first time, they showed that a polycrystalline alloy of iron, nickel,

‘Slowing nominal growth major headwind; front-loading capex, easing monetary conditions critical for reviving economy’



India Budget Restoring the pace of execution and deployment of capital expenditure will be critical for reviving growth, writes Rahul Bajoria. In India, the process of budgeting perhaps takes up much more focus and energy than what it does in most other economies. This unusual focus on the budget is understandable, since it was through the budgets in the nineties that major industrial and financial reforms would get announced, and rather than being just an accounting process, the annual announcement is now almost synonymous with a “state of the economy” address that the government presents, as we approach the new fiscal year.

The expectations are no different this time. The budget for the financial year 2025-2026 is being awaited, as the economy appears to have hit a rut, while global headwinds are rising. To be sure, government finances have been well managed, and are expected to reach a stable level post pandemic. Indeed, the 9.2% fiscal deficit recorded during the pandemic year is fading from memory, and the government which had laid down an ambitious target to achieve the glide path of fiscal deficit to 4.5% of GDP by FY26 is homing in on the target. This fiscal marksmanship has come while improving the quality of spending and strengthening the social security net despite multiple shocks. On the face of it, the ability to consolidate deficits while keeping growth and welfare considerations in mind is commendable and needs to be appreciated and acknowledged. Still, there are risks ahead. As mentioned above, the cyclical state of the economy appears weak, and the government needs to manage the need for fiscal consolidation, while ensuring steady growth. One reason for the economic slowdown has been the lower pace of capital spending than what was budgeted, and while this slower pace puts the fiscal finances in good order, it does produce a negative impact on growth.

Restoring the pace of execution and deployment of capital expenditure will be critical for reviving growth. Indeed, the government can take a leaf out of its second term, where a significant highlight of its fiscal management was the surge in capital expenditure, which increased to 3.2% of GDP in FY24. We believe the government would be keen

to restore this spending mix, and restart the spending momentum, as it pushes for greater infrastructure investments. As such, the government could consider front-loading capex to the first half of FY26 to ensure better planning, and with the revenue expenditure to capital expenditure ratio expected to go up from 3.7x to 4.0x in FY25 but fall to 3.25x in FY26, indicating a renewed focus on capex. A major headwind comes in the form of slowing nominal growth. Indeed, just prior to the pandemic, the slowdown was causing fiscal headaches, and the return of sub-10% nominal GDP growth prints in consecutive years can do the same. In Q3 (July-September) 2024, nominal GDP growth slowed to a fifteen-quarter low of 8% annual growth, and if not addressed, this slowdown could have major implications for wage growth, tax buoyancy and debt consolidation going forward. At 9.7%, the first advance estimate for FY25 is below the 10.5% nominal GDP growth that was factored into the July'24 budget. We believe to revive nominal growth along with real GDP growth, one needs to see both public capex spending and monetary conditions ease in coming quarters, which could improve the outlook for growth in FY2026. We continue to project GDP growth to be around 6.5% YoY in FY2025, with risks skewed to the downside, but expect a recovery to 7.0% YoY, contingent on conditions turning more supportive of both fiscal and monetary policy. If monetary policy remains entangled in dealing with a policy trilemma, then the heavy lifting of supporting growth will need to be done by fiscal policy.

Beyond the cyclical challenges, the bigger question remains – where do we go on fiscal management post the 4.5% of GDP deficit target?

Prior to the pandemic, the government had discussed a potential shift in the fiscal objectives away from deficits to debt, which may be restored, and can have several implications. While there will be an implied need for further fiscal consolidation, the expenditure mix and the pace of economic growth would also be key for this new approach to be successful. We believe the government is considering adopting a debt-driven fiscal framework, rather than one anchored on fiscal deficits, to approach the next stage of its medium-term fiscal framework. As such, the primary deficit could become the de-facto operational parameter rather than the fiscal deficit as the government seeks to move away from debt financed consumption. However, it would also mean that the need to balance monetary conditions, which anchor borrowing costs, nominal growth which drives revenues and the denominator of debt, and fiscal prudence which reduces primary deficits, would be critical for the success of the new framework, which in the medium term can create fiscal space for the next crisis, as and when it arises.

In calibrated move, RBI loosens grip, lets rupee depreciate against US dollar

In what appears to be a shift in strategy, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has seemingly relaxed its control over the rupee, allowing it to depreciate against the US dollar over the past month. The apparent change in stance marks a departure from the RBI's previous defence mechanisms, which were more rigid. In fact, it had tightly managed the rupee's movement to prevent sharp depreciation since September 2024 till about a month ago. The rupee, which was moving in the range of 84-85 for quite some time, logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the January 13 session 66 paise down at its historic low of 86.70 against the US dollar. Since November 1, 2024, the rupee has depreciated by 2.6 per cent.

“The RBI's new approach is a prudent one. If you bind the rupee to a very tight range, you also end up spending a lot of energy and resources. I think by letting the rupee go a wider range seems to be a good idea,” an analyst noted. However, market experts believe it's too early to attribute this change to the new RBI Governor, Sanjay Malhotra, who took charge on December 11. “The RBI, as an institution, was aligned with former Governor Shaktikanta Das's views on currency management, and suddenly changing that strategy isn't easy,” said a money market analyst. The rupee's fall in the last a few weeks has led to the conclusion in the market that the RBI tried something and they probably had anticipated that holding it beyond a point makes no sense. “I would say that there is a change in the RBI's strategy for sure but I wouldn't give it to the new governor,” he said.

The depreciation came at a time when Malhotra had been involved in a series of meetings with officials to get a grip of the functioning of the central bank. Rupee traders have been keen to assess the new RBI Governor's view on the currency since he assumed office last month. “Recent rupee price action points to a higher tolerance for a weaker exchange rate, demonstrated in the -2.1 per cent fall in the rupee vs dollar in Q4 of FY24, compared to nearly flat Q1-Q3. The weakening bias continues into the new year, with overvaluation of the broad real effective exchange rate (REER) also weighing on exchange rate (Nov REER was at a record high),” said Radhika Rao, Senior Economist and Executive Director, DBS Bank.

“We had a situation where the RBI was fully supporting the rupee. However, in the last one month, it has reduced, which has led to the rupee depreciation,” said an analyst from a leading securities firm. Since the dollar index has strengthened significantly, the RBI may have thought that some amount of rupee depreciation to align with dollar strength may not be bad. So, they allowed the rupee to depreciate to the levels closer to 86.5 in the recent period, he said. Jump in forward dollar sales, fall in forex kitty. The RBI had made dollar sales of \$49.18 billion in the forward market and \$9.27 billion in the spot market as of October 2024. When compared to this, the RBI made spot purchases of \$13.24 billion and forward sales of just \$541 million in April 2024. The RBI sells dollars when the dollar strengthens and the rupee declines, and vice versa. It uses the foreign exchange kitty to manage the rupee movement. Dollar sales in the forward market, which won't impact forex reserves, could have gone up further in November and December, but figures are yet to be released by the RBI.

The RBI did not respond to the mail from The Indian Express about its intervention in the currency market and the impact of rupee depreciation. India's foreign exchange reserves plummeted by \$79 billion since September 2024 to \$625.87 billion as of January 10, this year. This decline was mainly attributed to dollar sales to prevent the rupee fall and capital outflows, mainly withdrawals of over Rs 1,43,000 crore by foreign investors since October 2024. Had the RBI not sold forward dollars, forex kitty would have



fallen by another \$50-75 billion. The rupee is the only currency which has not depreciated much while all other currencies have depreciated against the dollar. Strong intervention presence since Q4 of FY24 has led to a drain in domestic liquidity, pushing the balance to a deficit (accentuated by seasonal drivers), notwithstanding the 50 basis points cut in the cash reserve ratio as well as bond purchases by the RBI. This position had also become unsustainable as a rapid appreciation in the dollar magnified the misalignment, increasing the need to ease grip on the rupee, Rao said.

Compared to a nearly flat Re-\$ exchange rate till November, the rupee price action in the last 4-5 weeks points to a higher tolerance for a weaker exchange rate. From fully supporting the rupee, RBI's intervention has reduced leading to a depreciation. The liquidity in the system is in deficit. When the RBI intervenes in the market, it sells dollars and buys rupee. If the RBI is buying rupee, it's taking more rupee out of the system, resulting in a liquidity deficit. The liquidity deficit is hampering money markets, which means the cost of money becomes very expensive even when interest rates are going higher. The RBI would not be desirous of that. While the projection for inflation for Q4 of the RBI is 4.5 per cent, the present depreciation in the rupee will be an additional concern as this can lead to higher imported inflation especially on oil products, said Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. The future course of the rupee depends upon whether the dollar remains here or goes higher or its scales back. The event which is going to be looked at closely is Donald Trump taking over as the US President seat on January 20, and how he delivers on the election promises he had made in terms of immigration, tax and tariffs. There's an expectation that the currency can fall to 87 against the US dollar in March this year. Assuming the nature of announcements is as strong as Trump had promised, the dollar will strengthen significantly.

Apple suspends error-prone AI-generated news alerts in beta iPhone software

CUPERTINO: Apple is suspending an error-prone feature that used artificial intelligence to deliver bogus news alerts to some iPhone owners. The decision was disclosed as part of a test version for the next software release, iOS 18.3. The beta version is only available to a relatively small group of iPhone users and developers, but the same features are usually released in an update available to all users several weeks after the testing begins. In the beta update, Apple said it is disabling the AI-generated feature for news and entertainment while it tries to fix the issue causing the technology to fabricate information — a problem often described as “hallucinations” within the industry.

What happens to the body when you begin your day with fermented foods for 2 weeks straight?



From Anushka Sharma to Shahid Kapoor, Bollywood celebrities seem to love having idlis for breakfast. Besides being gut-friendly, these spongy cakes also support the immune system. Their secret? They are fermented! Curious to find out how fermented food benefit us when consumed during breakfast for a couple weeks straight, indianexpress.com spoke to a health expert. Deepalakshmi, registered dietitian at The Cleft and Craniofacial Centre and Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Chennai revealed that fermented foods are a rich source of probiotics that improve gut health by enhancing digestion, boosting nutrient absorption, and strengthening immunity. When consumed for 2 weeks straight for breakfast every morning, she shared that they may also reduce inflammation and support mental health through the gut-brain connection. Health benefits Deepalakshmi shared that fermented foods not only enhance the diversity of gut microbiota, which plays a crucial role in digestion and nutrient absorption, but regular consumption can lead to better

bowel movements, reduced bloating, and a strengthened immune system. Additionally, the anti-inflammatory properties of fermented foods may help improve overall health, while their influence on the gut-brain connection can positively impact mood and mental well-being.

Are there health risks involved?

While fermented foods provide numerous health benefits, Deepalakshmi added that they can pose certain risks if not consumed mindfully. “Many fermented foods, such as miso and sauerkraut, are high in sodium, which can contribute to elevated blood pressure if consumed in excess. People new to probiotics might experience digestive discomfort, including bloating or gas, as their gut adjusts,” she mentioned. Additionally, allergies or intolerances, particularly to dairy-based options like yogurt, can be a concern. The dietitian also added that improper fermentation processes can lead to contamination and foodborne illnesses, making it essential to choose high-quality or homemade fermented foods prepared under safe conditions. Moderation and proper preparation are key to minimising these risks.

What kinds of fermented foods can you include in breakfast?

For breakfast, fermented foods offer a range of nutritious and versatile options. Yogurt or kefir, rich in probiotics, can be paired with fruits, nuts, or seeds for a wholesome start to the day. Traditional choices like idli or dosa, made from fermented rice and lentils, are both delicious and gut-friendly. Miso soup provides a savory twist and is an excellent addition for boosting gut health. Fermented pickles or sauerkraut can add a tangy flavor when used sparingly as toppings, while sourdough bread serves as a nutritious base for avocado toast or egg sandwiches.

Hidden health risk of having your hair washed

Going to the hairdresser is often considered a relaxing, pampering experience, but a rare condition known as beauty parlor stroke syndrome (BPSS) can, for a small number of people, make a shampoo at the hairdresser's a serious health threat. How could a trip to the hairdresser turn into a health emergency? Research suggests that sitting at an awkward angle at the backwash basins used for hair washing in many salons can cause neck pain, injury and — on very rare occasions — even a life-threatening stroke.

BPSS was first identified in 1993 by American Neurologist, Michael Weintraub, who found that some of his patients had developed severe stroke-related symptoms after having their hair shampooed during a visit to a hairdresser. A stroke is a brain attack caused by a sudden reduction in blood flow to the brain. It's usually caused by a blockage from a blood clot — or the tearing and bursting of a major blood vessel in the brain — leading to a reduction of oxygen, glucose and nutrients that damages and kills brain cells. During the shampooing process, clients are usually asked to sit down and hang their head back over the edge of the washbasin. Research suggests that overextending the head and neck over the rigid rim of the sink is the primary cause of BPSS. The unusual neck position, neck rotation or sudden jerking movements during vigorous shampooing can cause the backbones of the higher spinal column around the neck area to push against one of the major blood vessels that supply blood to the back and bottom of the brain. Some cases of BPSS have also been caused by bone spurs — tiny bone fragments from lumps on the spine — that can either compress or tear the artery next to them.

Strokes are often associated with older people and those with medical issues such as high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol — but young, healthy people can have strokes too. While research suggests BPSS is most likely to occur in women over 50 — and previous history of narrowing or thinning of blood vessels and arthritis of the spinal column in the neck are particular risk factors — it could happen to anyone regardless of age or medical history. A 2016 Swiss study found only ten instances of



BPSS during 2002-2013 so, although BPSS is much rarer than conventional stroke, it's still important to be aware of the symptoms.

So, what should you look out for? Signs of BPSS include headache, lightheadedness, dizziness, blurred or narrowed vision, nausea, vomiting, pain in the neck and some paralysis on one side of the body — some patients also report a near loss of consciousness. Studies suggest that these symptoms may be delayed, making it difficult for doctors to diagnose BPSS rather than a conventional stroke. Precautions

If you're worried about BPSS or experience pain and discomfort when using a backwash sink, ask to lean forward over the sink rather than extending your head backwards over the rim of the basin. If it is not possible to avoid a backwash at the salon, ask for neck support during hair washing. The speed at which the hair is washed, how long it takes and any force or jerking movement to the head and neck while washing all contribute to the risk. Request a gentle wash, try not to stay in position at the backwash longer than you have to and inform your hairdresser if you experience any discomfort during washing. Hairdresser shampooing is a generally safe and enjoyable activity for most people. For the most part, going to the hairdresser is important for mental health, self-esteem and confidence. So let's not throw in the hair towel just yet — use it as a neck support while we're being pampered instead.

How can ‘pendulum lifestyle’ help Gen Z achieve work-life balance?



For Generation Z — those born between 1997 and 2012 — and others navigating a fast-paced life, maintaining mental wellbeing, physical health, and overall life satisfaction requires a balance between intense work periods and equally significant moments of recovery. Enter the “pendulum lifestyle,” a concept designed to help strike harmony between professional and personal life. Rima Bhandekar, senior psychologist at Mpower Helpline, Aditya Birla Education Trust, said that the pendulum lifestyle metaphorically represents the continuous swing between two extremes — work and life, productivity and rest, or busyness and relaxation. Much like a pendulum that moves back and forth with consistency and balance, this approach encourages individuals to integrate both effort and ease into their daily routines.

What is Pendulum Lifestyle?

This lifestyle helps Gen Z shift away from an all-or-nothing mindset and embrace the idea that both productivity and leisure are essential for a fulfilling life. This results in clearer decision-making, a more resilient mindset, and improved overall wellbeing. “Gen Z often feels pressured to invest extra time in learning, chasing new achievements, and proving their success. However, continuous hustle without adequate breaks is unsustainable. Rest is just as important as work,” said Bhandekar. According to Bhandekar, taking meaningful breaks, engaging in activities beyond work, and nurturing personal fulfillment are highly recommended. Making time for self-care, exercise, hobbies, and quality moments with loved ones can significantly contribute to emotional wellbeing and overall life satisfaction.

“The pendulum lifestyle helps prevent physical and mental health issues associated with overwork, such as burnout, chronic anxiety and stress. By incorporating both

intense productivity and intentional relaxation, Gen Z can build sustainable habits that support their well-being for years to come,” she said. By adopting a pendulum lifestyle, Gen Z can mindfully embrace the rhythm of work and rest, leading to sustainable progress without compromising their health. “Sometimes, individuals find it difficult to come out of the rut of excessive focus on work, and may not know where to start. At such times, you can take help from an expert who will help you identify which part of life you need to swing and how to maintain momentum,” she said.

STT Global Data Centres signs MoU with Telangana government to invest Rs 3,500 crore

HYDERABAD: STT Global Data Centres India Private Limited (STT GDC India) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Telangana government to establish a data centre campus at Meerkanpet, Mucherla in Hyderabad with an investment of up to Rs 3,500 crore.

The company currently operates a data centre at HITEC City, Hyderabad, and the new campus will further solidify its presence in the State. The upcoming state-of-the-art AI ready data centre campus will feature cutting-edge technologies with targeted capacity of up to 100 MW.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu, Bruno Lopez, Group CEO of ST Telemedia Global Data Centres (STT GDC), at the STT GDC office in Singapore.

Bruno Lopez, president and Group Chief Executive Officer, ST Telemedia Global Data Centres, said, “This collaboration demonstrates our common goal of promoting economic expansion, generating employment, and constructing a sustainable digital future.”

STT GDC India's expansion investment in Telangana is part of its broader vision to achieve a design capacity of 1 GW across India in the next decade, with a decadal investment outlook of approximately USD 3.2 billion.

Kartik Aaryan on breaking records with Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3 and his journey from Gwalior to Mumbai



Kartik, it has been your year. That amazing transformation for Chandu Champion, so much love for Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. And then you got an engineering degree too. So what was the reaction at home to your degree? I think my mom and dad were more excited than me. But this has been a crazy year for me. I have really enjoyed working in Chandu Champion and then Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. The characters in both films were poles apart. These are defining moments in my filmography. And then, of course, getting a degree. I am from DY Patil College in Navi Mumbai. Going as a guest to my college and receiving my degree in front of the students, it all came full circle.

You came to Mumbai to study engineering but your dream was always Bollywood. So, how many auditions and how many rejections did you face?

Countless. For two to three years, I was giving auditions, listening to rejections. Eventually, I got to know about the audition for what became my first film—Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA (2011). I am so lucky that my first opportunity was that film.

How did you deal with rejections and pick yourself up the next day and go for another audition?

I got used to it. I became shameless. After a point, you become numb. But you have to show up. You need a little self-belief. When everyone is doubting you, I think you are the only one who can actually save yourself from that doubt. Even after the biggest rejection, I used to think, what can be worse than this? And I used to feel I would only be going up from here. I have always believed in manifestation. I used to write what I wanted. Everything was written in my notebook. I think somewhere down the line everything started happening. Let's jump right into the year you have had—Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. One of my favourite cinematic moments of the year is your extremely empathetic portrayal as the transgender prince at a time of hyper-masculine heroes. We see you dancing to Mere Dholna, which is amazing. It was the emotional quotient of the film and there was also a twist. Nobody expects it. The version of my Dholna which was sung by Sonu Nigam has become a rage. People have connected with it, with their lives, their childhood, their struggles. That climax gave the film a lot of gravitas. That moment was new for me too. I was dancing for the first time.

What's your take on box-office numbers? How important are they?

They are very important. I mean this is a business

Aaman Devgan, Rasha Thadani's film continues its downward spiral, earns less than Rs 3 cr

Azaad box office collection day 2: Following a disappointing Rs 1.5 crore opening, the Aaman Devgan and Rasha Thadani-starrer saw its earnings dip by over 10 per cent on Saturday. Azaad box office collection day 2: The Aaman Devgan and Rasha Thadani-starrer also features Ajay Devgn in a key role.

Azaad box office collection day 2: It seems Bollywood's struggle to recover from the slump it has been facing since last year is far from over, as even two major recent releases — actor-director Kangana Ranaut's Emergency and Abhishek Kapoor's Azaad — have opened to dismal box-office figures. Following a disappointing Rs 1.5 crore opening in the domestic market, Azaad saw its earnings dip by over 10 per cent on Saturday, rubbing salt into the wound of the historical drama. Azaad, which marked the acting debut of Aaman Devgan, nephew of Ajay Devgn, and Rasha Thadani, daughter of Raveena Tandon, registered an India nett collection of just Rs 1.34 crore on Saturday, according to early estimates by industry tracker Sacnilk. This brings the film's total domestic nett to a mere Rs 2.84 crore.

During the day, the film struggled to attract audiences to theatres, recording an overall occupancy rate of only 8.90 per cent in the Hindi market. The morning shows saw a meagre 5.34 per cent occupancy and the numbers barely improved throughout the day, with the afternoon screenings registering 9.22 per cent and the evening and night shows recording 9.30 per cent and 11.72 per cent, respectively. Also starring Ajay Devgn, Diana Penty, Mohit

Ram Charan-starrer number of shows, earns just Rs 2.65 crore

Game Changer box office collection day 9: Ram Charan-starrer Game Changer has not been showing any improvement since its release. In a week's time, the film's shows reduced down to as less as 1400 against 8000 shows in the initial days across India. Day 9 saw further reduction of 35 shows. On its second Saturday, the movie earned Rs 2.65 crore, about Rs 10 lakh less than its second Friday collection, which was Rs 2.75 crore. Game Changer's total stands at Rs 123.05 crore India nett, according to industry tracker Sacnilk. The film witnessed an overall occupancy of 23.08% in the Telugu language with about 572 shows. In the Tamil language, the film witnessed an overall occupancy of 22.11% with 151 shows and in Hindi, the film witnessed an occupancy of 9.07% with 603 shows. Game Changer, directed by S Shankar, was in the making for nearly four years after it was first announced in 2021. The movie also stars Kiara Advani in the lead role and features Ram Charan in dual roles. Reportedly made on a budget of Rs 400 crore, the film opened to mixed reviews on January 10. The movie has met with the same fate as Baby John which exited theatres with in the first week of its release due to poor performance.

Director S Shankar had earlier addressed the box-of-

module. You are putting in money and you want profits for everyone associated with the film, not just for actors but also for producers and directors, distributors, and exhibitors. Only if your film makes money can you put money in your next film. Tell us about your journey in Bollywood. You talked about taking auditions but there would have been insiders who would have got a dream launch without giving any audition. So, did you feel that disparity? And does the playing field level at any point?

No, it doesn't level. But it's been so many years in the industry that it doesn't matter. I can't say everyone gets equal opportunities. I too have felt like maybe I should have gotten the opportunity rather than someone who is from the (film) families. So, it happens but it's not their fault. But I think it is wrong when you compare two actors and their journeys because the journey of an outsider is very different from that of an insider. Moving on to your personal life, you have a very impressive car collection. You have a McLaren GT, you have a BMW 5 Series, a Lamborghini Urus, a Mini Cooper and sports bikes. When do you get the time to drive? After midnight. I love cars. The Lamborghini Urus is my favourite.

And does your mom allow you to drive sports bikes?

She said no, so I stopped buying bikes. As a celebrity every moment of your life is there before the world. Does that make you vulnerable? I am also asking this in context of the attack on Saif Ali Khan in his home. It is scary and sad. It puts everyone in a vulnerable state. We are not able to hide from the paps, they know where we are going, what we are doing. It's a little extreme but they (paps) are doing this for a living and it is a symbiotic relationship between paps, media, actors. So, there is no solution for this yet. But I hope that it doesn't compromise the safety of people.

What's on your agenda for 2025-26?

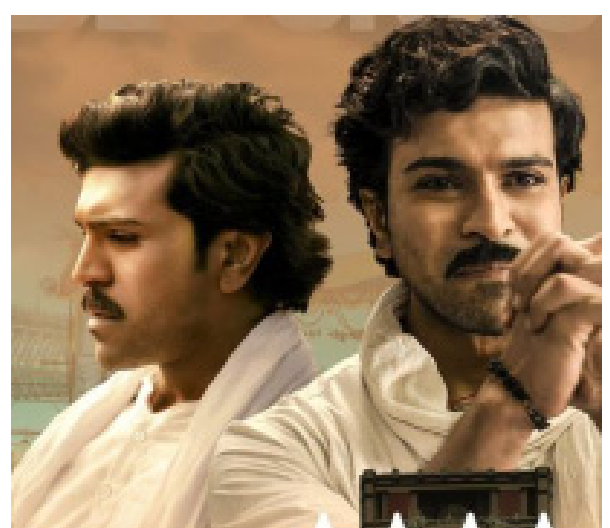
Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, that's the next one. It is being produced by Namah Pictures and Dharma Productions. I am also doing a film with Anurag Basu sir.

Story Behind The Picture Oh! What should I say about this? I think this is a love-hate relationship. This photo represents that. This is the moment when we signed our first film (Dostana 2). In 2021, reports claimed Kartik and Karan had a bitter fallout, leading to the actor's exit from the film). Now I am doing a film with him (Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri). We are working together again and, I hope, he and I will complete it this time (laughs).

This photo is the one which gave me Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA. This was the only solo photo I had. It felt like a portfolio to me. It was taken at home. I had other photos which were with my friends. In auditions, they would ask for photos or videos and I had these group photos only so I would crop them—someone's hand would be there, someone's head. This was a solo photo and because of this one, I was called for the Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA audition. Kartik Aaryan with Shah Rukh Khan Kartik Aaryan with Shah Rukh Khan. I remember this was at a party where I met Shah Rukh sir. I had met him earlier too but this was the first time that I got a photo taken with him. This was my fanboy moment. When I first came to Mumbai from Gwalior, I went to Bandra and stood outside Mannat like many others. It was a Sunday and he (Shah Rukh Khan) came out and waved. I felt so lucky that I had seen him on my first visit. There was a huge crowd and soon there was a lathi-charge. I ran away and got saved. I remember all this vividly.



Malik, Piyush Mishra and Natasha Rastogi in key roles, Azaad marks Abhishek Kapoor's return to direction after a four-year hiatus since Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui (2021), featuring Ayushmann Khurrana and Vaani Kapoor in the lead roles. Known for launching newcomers like Sushant Singh Rajput in Kai Po Che (2013) and Sara Ali Khan in Kedarnath (2018), Kapoor is unlikely to be able to replicate that success for Aaman and Rasha, particularly given the film's massive budget. His previous directorials include Aryan (2006), Rock On!! (2008) and Fitoor (2016). In her review of the movie, SCREEN's Shubhra Gupta wrote, "Why are such films still being made in 2025? And is Abhishek Kapoor, who made the terrific 'Kai Po Che' and 'Rock On', really the director of this mothballed exercise?"



formance of Game Changer. In an interview with Behindwoods TV, Shankar said: "No filmmaker is ever satisfied with their film. I definitely feel like the film could have done better."

Abhinaya speaks out on controversy over portrayal of rape scene in Pani; opens up about challenges of playing her role in the Joju George movie: 'In other industries...'



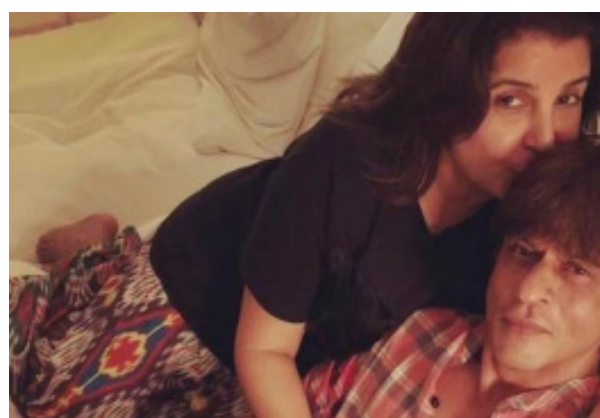
Making a mark in cinema is no easy task. Among the countless aspirants who dream of entering the industry, only a few get the chance to start a career; even fewer manage to stand out and secure more opportunities and only a select few go on to enjoy a long and successful career. Hence, to have been around for 18 years in the industry, completing 59 films, and earning a name, respect and the love of audiences is no small feat; but Abhinaya has achieved all these and is ready to scale even greater heights. As she basks in the success of her latest Malayalam film Pani, which recently premiered on SonyLIV after a successful theatrical run, Abhinaya is nothing short of ecstatic. In an exclusive conversation with SCREEN, she talks about her experience working on Pani, helmed by actor Joju George in his debut as a director, the criticism the film received over its portrayal of a rape scene, her acting journey so far, what lies ahead on her path, and more.

Why Pani?

Reflecting on what made her say yes to playing the character Gowri in Pani, Abhinaya says, "I liked its script very much. Gowri is a very impactful character and I felt it would be a great breakthrough in my career. Also, this is Joju sir's directorial debut, which added to my excitement." Discussing the challenges of portraying Gowri, she notes, "Acting in Malayalam films is quite different from working in Tamil, Telugu or Kannada because we have to perform differently. In other industries, your expressions must be really loud, but in Malayalam, they mostly prefer natural and subtle acting. Luckily, Joju sir supported and guided me very well during the making of Pani. Whenever he felt like I was going overboard, he would tell me, 'Abhinaya, you have to lower your expressions and be very natural. Your expressions need to be very subtle. It's a very calm and composed character.'" An actor who has defied her hearing and speech impairments and worked across multiple languages, including Hindi, Abhinaya also offers insights into her process: "First, my elder brother reads the scripts and gives me feedback, suggesting whether I should take on a project or not. Once I commit to a movie, I work to understand my character, how it should be performed and the director's expectations. Then, I take help from the respective assistant directors who help me practise the dialogues. If I have lengthy dialogues, then I take around 2-3 days before the shoot to practice all the lines and to perfect the lip sync. If there are fewer or no dialogues, then I won't need to practice that much. It also depends on the language; I understand Telugu and Tamil better, but Malayalam is very difficult for me." Cinema Anatomy | Marco: Unni Mukundan's gorefest is one of the silliest Malayalam films, failing to bury its flaws beneath the bloodshed On the controversial rape scene in Pani

Although Abhinaya received much praise for her performance in Pani, the film, post theatrical release, became embroiled in controversy due to a 'threatening' phone call Joju made to a netizen who criticised the portrayal of a rape scene in the film on social media. The netizen argued that the scene was "handled in an immature and objectifying manner." During her conversation with us, Abhinaya — who appeared in that scene as the survivor — broke her silence on the matter and shared her perspective on the backlash. When asked if she felt the scene was portrayed in a distasteful way, Abhinaya responds, "I would say it's entirely the director's choice. Joju sir is a highly experienced actor who has worked in many languages and collaborated with other expert directors as well. It's all about the director's choice and I have nothing more to add to that. It's his creativity and how he wants to portray things in his film. The

'Shah Rukh Khan gifts me a car every time we make a film,' says Farah Khan; jokes she is ready to re-collaborate with him



side of work. She previously shared that when she was trying to get pregnant, she faced several lows and through this time, SRK was by her side. "One day, in the middle of the day, I got a call from the doctor, and she said it's not happened this time. We were shooting a comic scene, and Shah Rukh knew something was wrong, because I was going to cry. So, he called for a break and took me into his van, where I've sobbed for one hour," she shared with Nova IVF Fertility's YouTube channel, and added that when she eventually gave birth to her triplets, Shah Rukh gifted her a special pram from Harrod's.

Farah Khan and Shah Rukh Khan have maintained a cordial working relationship for more than three decades. For many years, Farah choreographed some of Shah Rukh's most popular songs, and when she decided to venture into direction, Shah Rukh starred in and even produced her first film, Main Hoon Na. Since then, the duo have worked on Om Shanti Om and Happy New Year. But Farah hasn't made a film in more than a decade. Farah said that she is willing to return to the director's chair, and said that Shah Rukh gifts her a car every time they work together.

Appearing on Archana Puran Singh's vlog, Farah said that the "most expensive gift" that she has ever received from a star is a car. "Shah Rukh gifts me cars after every film," she said. When Archana suggested that she should make the next one soon, Farah said, "Yes, I want to. It's been a while, and I want a new car also." In 2014, after Happy New Year, Shah Rukh gave Farah a Mercedes SUV. He had also gifted her a Mercedes after Om Shanti Om, and a Hyundai Terracan after Main Hoon Na.

Farah and Shah Rukh share a close friendship out-

director's word is final. "While Abhinaya has made a remarkable impact across multiple film industries over the years, her first breakthrough role came with the Tamil action drama Naadodigal (2009), helmed by actor-filmmaker Samuthirakani. Her outstanding performance not only earned her several awards but also led to opportunities to reprise her role in the film's Telugu and Kannada remakes — the Ravi Teja-led Sambho Siva Sambho (2010) and the Puneeth Rajkumar-starrer Hudugaru (2011), respectively. Abhinaya, however, admits she never imagined her life would unfold this way 15 years later. "I still can't believe I received all these opportunities, fame and above all, the love I get today. It all feels like a dream. I'm so grateful to each and every one of you, and I especially want to thank my appa, amma, my brothers and the Almighty. Also, all my fans who have truly loved, supported and encouraged me over the years."

Calling Naadodigal and her character Pavithra her favourite film and performance, Abhinaya says, "The team was really amazing. I still remember the shooting days — it was all fun and an incredible experience for a beginner like me. The cherry on top was that the movie became a blockbuster hit. The schedules were well-planned and the team was thoroughly prepared; they knew exactly what they wanted from each actor. The entire team, including the technical crew, was perfect in that film." When asked what she would say to her younger self — the Abhinaya enjoying the love and recognition for her performance in Naadodigal — if she were to meet her today, the thespian said she would first remind herself of how incredibly fortunate she was to work with Samuthirakani and Sasikumar, an exceptional opportunity for someone just starting out. "Also, I would tell her to keep up the hard work and continue to select good movies. People still wonder if I am actually hearing and speech impaired. They often approach me and ask how I practice my dialogues and perfect my lip-sync."

Although Abhinaya received much praise for her performance in Pani, the film, post theatrical release, became embroiled in controversy. Abhinaya is an actor who has defied her hearing and speech impairments and worked across multiple languages, including Hindi. (Credit: Instagram/@abhinaya_official) Abhinaya calls Naadodigal and her character Pavithra her favourite film and performance. Abhinaya has been around for 18 years in the industry and completed 59 films so far. (Credit: Instagram/@abhinaya_official)

'Hope to have the opportunity to work with Rajamouli'

Ask her about her favourite actors and Abhinaya's list begins with her Pani director-cum-co-star. "Joju sir has always been one of my favourite actors. I had really wanted to meet him for a long time and it felt like a dream come true when I finally did and got the chance to play his on-screen partner. The joy was even greater because Pani also marked his directorial debut. He's such a fun, loving and kind-hearted person. Tovino Thomas is another one of my favourite actors. I truly enjoy watching his films — he has a special charm." When asked if there are any directors she'd love to work with, Abhinaya named SS Rajamouli, the renowned filmmaker behind Baahubali and RRR (2022). "I am a huge fan of all his films and I sincerely hope to get an opportunity to work in his movies." "Despite always being in the public eye, Abhinaya has never missed a chance to shower love on her family, especially her father, Anand, and her late mother, Hemalatha. Reflecting on the most valuable life lessons she learned from her parents, she shares, "Appa and Amma always taught me to respect and treat everyone equally. They encouraged me to ignore negativity, stay focused on my goals and keep moving forward. They also instilled in me the importance of working diligently, being perfect and staying punctual so that I wouldn't have room or time for negative thoughts." Abhinaya has never missed a chance to shower love on her family, especially her father, Anand, and her late mother, Hemalatha. Abhinaya with her father Anand and her mother (late) Hemalatha. When asked which of her upcoming projects she's most excited about and eager for the audience to see, she reveals that she has several films in different languages lined up. "The shoot for a Tamil film will begin this month. One Telugu film is expected to start in February, while another Telugu movie is currently in post-production. There's also a Malayalam film, though its schedule hasn't been finalised yet, and a Kannada film is also awaiting its turn to begin shooting," Abhinaya signs off.

Mumbai: From asking what 'Jai Shri Ram' means to giving a tongue-in-cheek shout-out to cricketer Jasprit Bumrah, Coldplay's first concert in India in nine years was nothing short of a cultural celebration where the band's frontman Chris Martin captivated the audience with his humour and curiosity. There were plenty of unforgettable moments that resonated deeply with fans at Navi Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium where Coldplay kick-started their 'Music of the Spheres World Tour' in India. For two hours at the packed stadium, Martin belted out chartbuster tracks like "Paradise", "Viva La Vida", "Adventure of a Lifetime", "Yellow", "Fix You", and "A Sky Full of Stars", among others. One of the evening's most stand moments came when Martin noticed a fan holding a placard that read "Jai Shri Ram." Curious, he uttered the phrase, igniting thunderous cheers from the crowd. He then said, "What does Jai Shri Ram mean? Must be something good." Martin's innocent inquiry about the meaning of the phrase only heightened the audience's excitement.

Coldplay's concert marks celebration of music, culture

Mumbai: From asking what 'Jai Shri Ram' means to giving a tongue-in-cheek shout-out to cricketer Jasprit Bumrah, Coldplay's first concert in India in nine years was nothing short of a cultural celebration where the band's frontman Chris Martin captivated the audience with his humour and curiosity. There were plenty of unforgettable moments that resonated deeply with fans at Navi Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium where Coldplay kick-started their 'Music of the Spheres World Tour' in India. For two hours at the packed stadium, Martin belted out chartbuster tracks like "Paradise", "Viva La Vida", "Adventure of a Lifetime", "Yellow", "Fix You", and "A Sky Full of Stars", among others. One of the evening's most stand moments came when Martin noticed a fan holding a placard that read "Jai Shri Ram." Curious, he uttered the phrase, igniting thunderous cheers from the crowd. He then said, "What does Jai Shri Ram mean? Must be something good." Martin's innocent inquiry about the meaning of the phrase only heightened the audience's excitement.

A 22-year-old's journey from collecting scrap to stacking medals



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

the family called a thatched roof propped up on bamboo stilts home for years. Then, they arrived in Velapur, where Ramji was admitted to the local school. Despite falling in love with kho kho here, his life still revolved around lifeless cardboard.

Velapur, best known for its intricately carved black stone temples, is the last pit stop before the end of the annual Pandharpur waari (yatra on foot). Once a year, tired pilgrims rest in the village grounds. It was in these usually empty grounds that the son of the scrap collectors spent hours perfecting kho kho — a village tradition that sees nearly 200 people practice everyday. While the ground has a makeshift 400-metre track, senior player Rahul Savant brought bright neon cones to the village from the big city. After that, Rahul and Ramji went about honing their skills during practice. Spotted at a senior nationals' event and fast-tracked within Maharashtra, Ramji was picked by the Chennai Quick Guns franchise. Overnight, he became a kho kho sensation for millions due to his defensive dashes. Ramji Kashyap kho kho player Before he started playing kho kho professionally, Ramji's daily tasks involved stacking packaging material collected as scrap. "He always had the physicality, the body language and the speed for this game," says coach Somanath Bansode, adding that he was left impressed by Ramji's relentlessness to improve his stamina and consistency in a quiet sport.

At the World Cup, Ramji draws wondrous gasps over his back dodges, sky dives (forward leaps), pole dives (at the edge) and checks. While he's speeding full throttle one moment, he brakes suddenly the next. Playing kho kho on the mat puts added strain on the calves and hamstrings, and ups the risk of ligament tears if you aren't accustomed to it. Velapur does not have any mats. "We train him specially before mat tournaments, where running is never as free-flowing as on the mud, on which he runs with elastic limbs." On the mat, running has to be stiff or the ankle is gone," the coach explains. An ankle tear put Ramji out of action for close to a year. During that time, the whole village helped feed him and did rehab along with him. This, even as Ramji defied his parents' insistence on quitting the sport and returning to stacking cardboards, because their daily income hinged on it. Before he found niche stardom, there were times when he had no money to buy shoes. The team would pool in money for him at such times.

"Collecting bhangar is not the sort of extreme poverty people understand. He also lived on the village periphery, farther from the ground than others. When scouts saw him dodge and dive, they were floored and couldn't imagine his other life," coach Bansode says. Ask Ramji how he flings himself during the sky dives and back dodges, and he says, "I'm not scared because I train to fall without getting hurt." This very quality has helped him land a job with Central Railway in Mumbai. And for putting the accent of "ultimate/extreme" in the sport visually, Ramji has landed the nickname 'Rambo'. "He will dodge, he will dive, but nobody can catch him," the coach says of the elusive elastico human form that's lighting up the World Cup.

Hikaru Nakamura showers praise on World Champion Gukesh for showing great resilience against Anish Giri



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

American grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura lauded World Champion D Gukesh for his steely resilience against Anish Giri in the first round of the Tata Steel chess tournament. World Champion Gukesh defeated hometown hero Anish Giri, who had handed his 18-year-old opponent a get-out-of-jail-free card. Gukesh, who won the world championship last month on a similar blunder from his opponent Ding Liren, is not one to refuse gifts across the board. "It's really really really a heartbreaker for Anish. On the flip side

the coin Gukesh did defend very well," Nakamura said on his Youtube channel. "Sure Gukesh blundered with h3, but he did defend resiliently under time pressure. So you have to give him a lot of credit for putting Anish to the test.

"Unfortunately for Anish, he wasn't up to the test. The world champion gets a win in his first classical game since his epic victory over Ding Liren in Singapore a couple of months ago. Exciting start to the tournament," he added. The 18-year-old from Chennai only landed in the Dutch city of Wijk aan Zee for the tournament on Saturday morning after receiving the prestigious Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award from President Droupadi Murmu on Friday evening. "Gukesh was in India to receive one of the highest civilian awards from the government just yesterday and today he flew into the game and arrived three hours ahead of the game being played and let's jump right into the action," said Nakamura. Gukesh spent a lot of the middle game of the match scrambling for time and trying to get out of trouble as Anish kept building up his advantage on the board. "Gukesh was probably a little bit tired probably a little bit jetlag. Now for Anish he is someone who traditionally has done very well in this tournament but at times he has struggled outside of this event."

Coach Vimal Kumar deserves more credit, he's been a rock solid guide for star players



GNS News Agency, Jan 24

"Who is Vimal Kumar...?" a throwaway casual, callous remark had made its way into the perpetual cesspit that is Twitter. It originated from the predictably ignorant spew-springs far away from either Bangalore, Hyderabad or Kerala, where the seasoned badminton coach hails from, and where the game has many that understand excellence. The scribbled ignorance wasn't remarkable. But you had to wonder if a mere 10 years — 9 in August of 2024 actually — had been all that long, that the country had forgotten who guided Saina Nehwal to India's first-ever World Championship final in 2015. Or its first All England final, after 14 years. But even shorter memories failed the deliberately disrespecting ones. For Vimal Kumar had been sitting right there in the coach's chair, when Lakshya Sen too made All England finals in 2022. A tall figure, forever threatening to leap forward and show his player, how they needed to adjust to shuttle lengths of opponents, the coach ought to have been easily recognisable. Tall, but not called 'towering', because his players didn't go on to win those titles.

The wrangling prior to Paris, was petty. Like all such snarky, mousey snickerings before a big Games, tend to be. It questioned why a certain number of badminton coaches deserved an accommodation allocation in the Games Village. Even a celebrated name like Prakash Padukone was put on this 'why' list of litanies. The 'Vimal who?' disdain, wasn't far behind, even if he was the original coach who took Lakshya Sen right up to an unprecedented semifinals. With various sporting federations staking claim on precious temporary real estate for support staff during the Paris Games, this was a routine ruckus. Still, India's Thomas Cup championship, where he was coaching, had only been two seasons ago. Even if you forgot that it was the same figure, who took a punt on fielding Saina Nehwal in a Commonwealth Games crucial team tie as national coach, back in 2006 and launched the catapult for the teen and took Indian badminton into the next orbit. Forgotten figure for some

Vimal Kumar tends to be the forgotten figure when popcorn crunchers pit Pullela Gopichand (by extension, Hyderabad) against Prakash Padukone (by extension, Bangalore). He's no side-figure or assistant either, but the guiding coach, a player-maker in his own right, even if he has helmed day-to-day coaching at the Padukone centre. It was him that Saina Nehwal approached trying to sort out her World Championship quarterfinals voodoo. A silver and bronze, no mean achievements at 25 and 27 followed. The rivalry for undivided attention of the coach, with PV Sindhu, might've put her on that train to Bangalore. But it was Vimal Kumar who plotted her resurgence, channeling her ambition, to wrest those elusive medals. Sen was spotted by Padukone. But driving his career — keeping him sharp and deeply in love with badminton from pre-teens to a very challenging junior transition and a World Championship bronze, an All England final, CWG title and Thomas Cup lead singles, was entirely mapped out by Vimal. There wasn't any dearth of funds, but cracking the Top 10 needs core badminton expertise — devising strategies and getting your athlete to execute — and money alone couldn't buy all that brain-work.

All those Lakshya Sen reflex defenses that scream "talent", all those on-the-line smashes that seem effortless, it's thousands of hours of hard work, with the 60+ coach literally standing there sparring with the youngster and making him buy into the power of countless repetitions on path to perfection. It's been years of micro-managing a moody teen's emotional ups and downs, and starting from scratch patiently after every injury that felled Sen for long periods. And the coach never lost his sense of humour, or bluntness nor proportion. Brutally honest in his assessments of his players when they lost, there was never mollycoddling or pampering over their mistakes. Perhaps the largest dependency when Sen couldn't nail the Paris Olympics bronze against Lee Zii Jia, would've befallen Vimal Kumar who had worked many invisible hours on putting Sen's game

together. For someone who treasures tradition of the All England, travelled there every summer for years, and gazed for hours watching squash legend Jansher Khan train at Birmingham where the two sports shared an arena and coinciding competitions, Vimal set store on insane work rate in training for racquet sports.

Still, he has always believed the game is played with skills and brains, and stuck to his guns on a rather unpopular philosophy: that a player should think independently, on their feet, and not need a coach for outsourced plotting. It doesn't stop him from spilling forth from his chair desperately issuing instructions in the big matches. But if Sen and Saina grew a semblance of improvised thinking of their own, it was because Vimal made it very clear, they would not be spoon-fed always. For both these success stories, there are a dozen others Vimal couldn't push to extend their potentials — stopping a player from over-training is as tough as pushing them those 10 minutes extra beyond exhaustion thresholds. And taking Saina to World No 1 had its flipside in her not quite managing to beat Carolina Marin in two important finals, and the 2016 Rio injury devastation. But if you wanted planning on how to win a tournament steeped in elite expertise, where broad contours of tactics and minutiae alike, were carefully spelt out, there were Indians you could count on two fingers. Vimal Kumar remains invested in Lakshya Sen's future forays, and remains a totem figure that the star blindly trusts. If Gopichand nurtures a dream of finding his All E successor, there is an equally determined coach in Bangalore who has been on the brink of success, but copped two very lopsided finals at Birmingham. It's 45 years of a ringside view for him since Padukone won in 1980. Forever in his shadow he might've been, but Sen's 4th place at Paris, sure strengthened his resolve to get back onto the court. And try once more.

Taller height might be an advantage on tennis court

Joondalup: We're nearing the halfway point of this year's Australian Open and players like the United States' Reilly Opelka (ranked 170th in the world) and France's Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard (ranked 30th) captured plenty of attention despite early-round exits.

These two players caught the eye of the tennis world for not only their towering height (standing 2.11 metres and 2m respectively) but their thunderous serves. Players of this height don't just stand out in the players' lounge — they enjoy a significant advantage on court. But why exactly does being tall help create those blistering serves? The answer lies in some fascinating physics and biomechanics. The connection between height and serving power isn't just something we imagine — analyses of Grand Slam tennis players show our eyes aren't deceiving us. The fastest server of all time might be considered relatively short — Australia's Sam Groth stands "only" 1.93m — but served an ace at a blazing 263.4 kilometres per hour during an ATP Challenger event in Busan in 2012. The rest of the top five fastest servers in men's tennis history, and eight of the top ten, all stood at more than 2m tall. In women's tennis, the findings also hold true, with Spain's Ingrida Garcia Perez (1.88m) holding the record at 220km/h. And four of the top five fastest were at least 1.82cm — Sabine Lisicki (Germany) is the shortest at a still above average height of 1.78cm. The physics behind the power So what makes height such an advantage for serving? Among many factors, three are critical. First, taller players generally have longer arms, which act like speed amplifiers. In physics terms, the speed of your hand (and therefore the racquet) is approximately equal to the length of your arm multiplied by how fast you rotate it, as shown in the figure below. Longer arms equal faster racquet speeds. Of course, you might imagine that longer arms would be heavier and therefore harder to move quickly. While that's true for legs (which is why most of the world's fastest sprinters aren't super tall), arms are relatively light.

Robin Uthappa continues to be critical of Virat Kohli: 'His leadership style was more exclusive than inclusive'

GNS News Agency, Jan 24



Former Indian cricketer Robin Uthappa has been critical of Virat Kohli's captaincy. In his recent interview with Lallantop, he blamed Kohli for Yuvraj Singh's abrupt career ending and also claimed that Kohli was the reason behind Ambati Rayudu getting axed from the 2019 World Cup squad. Since the statements made in the interview Uthappa has been criticised by fans. Despite the criticism, Uthappa stood his ground. "I feel like Virat's leadership style was perhaps more exclusive than inclusive. You feel something else, no worries. This is my opinion, and you're entitled to yours, and I respect yours, and you'll respect mine. I will move on; that's how it should be," Uthappa said on his YouTube channel.

ister memorable Test match victories both home and away. He has won 40 Test matches as captain for India which is more than anyone and on the contrary with him at the helm India was out in the group stages of the 2021 T20 World Cup in UAE, which is a rarity for the Men In Blue in modern times. Uthappa also clarified that it was Kohli the captain he had issues against but not the batter. "I was speaking to a style of leadership rather than a person or a human being. I have always spoken highly about Virat as a player. I think he's one of the greatest ODI batters in the world and I think I've said that on record if I can remember correctly that I think he's one of the greatest white players to have ever played the game."

"I think we're more and more living in a world where we're less acceptable or less accepting of people's opinions. And we should have a conversation about that. I don't think it's necessarily healthy to live in a world where just because you don't agree with someone, you have to cancel them or you have to spew hate and venom at them. There's nothing wrong with somebody having their own opinion," he added.

While India under the captaincy of Kohli had their fair share of troubles in white-ball cricket but did manage to reg-

'Jasprit Bumrah wants to come and play backstage':

Chris Martin during Coldplay's Mumbai concert



Bumrah took a total of 32 wickets across 5 Tests in Australia, became the fourth-fastest player to get 200 Test wickets in terms of balls bowled. He also was the first bowler in history to take 200 Test wickets at an average below 20.

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Jasprit Bumrah and Chris Martin (left) Team India pacer Jasprit Bumrah celebrates a wicket; British band Coldplay's Chris Martin performs in Mumbai. Coldplay's frontman Chris Martin gave a shout-out to Indian crick-

eter Jasprit Bumrah during Coldplay's concert in Mumbai. In the middle of the concert, Chris Martin said he will have to stop his concert as Bumrah wants to bowl at him. "Hold on, we have to finish the show because Jasprit Bumrah wants to come and play backstage," he said. "He says he needs to bowl at me now." Martin was then seen chanting the name of Bumrah. He further said: "We'll ask him to wait 15 minutes." Bumrah, who has been picked for India's Champions Trophy squad has had a great series against Australia. Bumrah took a total of 32 wickets across 5 Tests in Australia, became the fourth-fastest player to get 200 Test wickets in terms of balls bowled. He also was the first bowler in history to take 200 Test wickets at an average below 20. Bumrah could not bowl in the crucial 5th and final test at Sydney after he suffered from back spasms on Day 2 which led to him leaving the ground to undergo scans. Meanwhile, the speedster is likely to be featured in the group stage of next month's Champions Trophy. The selection committee chief Ajit Garkar said it would be 'nicer' if the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) explained the nature of Bumrah's injury, which forced him out of action on the final day of the fifth Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy earlier this month. "I know he was asked to off-load for five weeks, which is early first week of February if I am not wrong," Agarkar said. "And we will probably find out a bit more around that time. With regards to what his medical condition is, I am sure the BCCI might just put something out from the physio himself. It's better if the medical department explains what exactly is wrong with him."