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Four held in Hyderabad for software job fraud

Hyderabad: The Task Force (North) team along with the local police caught four persons on charges of cheating 13 job aspirants promising jobs in reputed software companies to the tune of Rs 26.2 lakh in Marredpally on Tuesday. They issued fake offer letters in the name of companies. Officials seized cash of Rs 5.6 lakh, mobile phones and other material, altogether worth Rs 6 lakh from them. The arrested gang members are identified as G Pavan Kumar from Begumpet, B Revanth from Old Safilguda, B Rajiv Reddy from Palnadu in Andhra Pradesh and S Sudheer from Amberpet.

'Symbol of optimism', PM Modi invites industries to invest in Odisha

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Bhubaneswar: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday invited industry leaders to invest in 'outstanding' Odisha as it is the right and opportune time for investment in Eastern Indian state. In his address during the inauguration of the two-day Utkarsh Odisha-Make in Odisha conclave-2025, the flagship Global Investment Summit hosted by the Odisha government, in Bhubaneswar, PM Modi on Tuesday said, "This is the right time to invest in Odisha. In this journey of development for Odisha, your investment in Odisha will take you to new heights of success. This is Modi's guarantee." He further added that India is on a path of development driven by the aspirations of crores of people and Odisha represents this aspiration of India.



endless possibilities for eco-tourism and adventure tourism. The PM said that Eastern India is the growth engine of the country's development and Odisha has a significant part in it. Highlighting the glorious maritime legacy of the state, PM Modi also said that Odisha has always been the gateway of India for trade with Southeast Asian countries. "Odisha used to be an important centre in South Eastern Asian trade and the ports were a gateway to India," stated PM Modi. He highlighted that the people of Odisha have resolved to build a prosperous state, and the Centre was providing all possible support to achieve this goal. The Prime Minister further emphasized that Odisha plays a significant role in building a developed India.

India Inc. pegs GDP growth at 6.5-6.9 pc for 2025-26: FICCI pre-Budget survey

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

New Delhi: India Inc. is optimistic about the growth prospects of the economy and wants the Union government's thrust on capital expenditure (Capex) to continue in the Union Budget 2025-26, according to a survey released by apex business chamber FICCI on Tuesday. According to the survey results, about 64 per cent participants expressed optimism regarding India's growth prospects ahead of the Union Budget. Nearly 60 per cent of participants projected a GDP growth rate between 6.5 and 6.9 per cent for 2025-26. Though the numbers mark a moderation from the high growth of over 8.0 per cent witnessed in 2023-24 – it is in sync with persistent headwinds on account of external factors. Majority of respondents highlighted the need for sustaining public Capex, with 68 per cent calling for a thrust on Capex to sustain the growth momentum. At least a 15 per cent increase in Capex allocation for FY 2025-26 is being looked forward to by members of the Indian industry. Additionally, over half of the respondents emphasised the importance of reforms to further enhance the Ease of Doing Business. Reforms pertaining to factors of production – particularly with respect to areas like land acquisition, labour regulations, and power supply – remain important.



of the direct tax structure. A relook at the slabs and the tax rates is warranted as this could leave more money in the hands of people and spur consumption demand in the economy. Respondents also called for a strong policy push on simplifying the tax regime, incentivising the development of green technologies/renewables and EVs, and easing compliances through digitisation. On the taxation front, providing tax certainty, addressing custom duty inversion, and rationalisation of TDS provisions were highlighted as important themes by the participants. The participants also showed support for an amnesty scheme under customs, with 54 per cent favouring its introduction to enable swift resolution of disputes. The sectoral focus for the upcoming Union Budget was clear, with participants identifying infrastructure, manufacturing (particularly Industry 4.0), and agriculture/rural development as critical areas for policy attention. Nearly 40 per cent of the respondents stressed the continued need to support MSMEs, given the pivotal role of the sector in driving employment creation. Targeted measures for MSMEs ensuring streamlined credit access, and support for adoption of new technology and sustainability measures were called for.

Jasprit Bumrah named ICC men's cricketer of 2024; wins Sir Garfield Sobers Award



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Tuesday (January 28, 2025) won the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC men's Cricketer of the Year after delivering "a masterclass in skill, precision, and relentless consistency" across formats in 2024. The 31-year-old was adjudged the ICC's Test Cricketer of the Year on Monday (January 27, 2025) and was also named in the Test Team of the Year. "Jasprit Bumrah has been honoured with the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year at the ICC Awards, recognising his extraordinary 2024, in which he dominated opponents in the longest as well as the shortest format of the game," the ICC said.

Bumrah played a key role across formats for India as he became the fifth winner of the award from the country after Rahul Dravid (2004), Sachin Tendulkar (2010), Ravichandran Ashwin (2016) and Virat Kohli (2017, 2018). "The pacer's brilliance was reflected in his ICC Test Bowling Rankings, where he crossed the elusive 900-point

mark, ending the year with a record-breaking 907 points – the highest for any Indian bowler in history," the governing body stated in its tribute.

India lodges 'strong protest' over Sri Lankan Navy firing at Indian fishermen

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

India lodged a "strong protest" over Indian fishermen suffering "serious injuries" in a firing incident by the Sri Lankan Navy, when its patrol team sought to apprehend the fishermen on charges of illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters in the early hours of Tuesday (January 28, 2025).

The Ministry of External Affairs said it summoned the Acting High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in New Delhi and lodged a strong protest over the incident. "Our High Commission in Colombo has also raised the matter with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sri Lankan government," the MEA said in a statement.

According to the MEA, two out of the 13 fishermen who were on board the fishing vessel suffered "serious injuries" and are currently receiving treatment at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. Three other fishermen sustained minor injuries.

Telangana NRI among 15 killed in Saudi road mishap

Dubai: Fifteen workers, including nine Indians, among them one from Telangana, were killed in a road mishap in Saudi Arabia on Monday.

The man from Telangana was identified as Kapeli Ramesh (32) hailing from Metpali mandal in Jagtial district. The workers were travelling in a bus to their worksite in the southern port city of Jizan when their bus collided with a trailer according to Indian community workers. The bus was carrying 26 workers. Among the 15 who were killed, nine were Indians, and the remaining six included three each from Nepal and Ghana.

'Ma ke Naam ek Ped' campaign in Telangana soon, says CM Revanth Reddy

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Hyderabad: Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy announced that the State government was coming up with a new tree planting initiative 'Ma ke Naam ek Ped', as part of which each student would have to plant a sapling in their mother's name in their schools and ensure its survival. This initiative would help in growing lakhs of trees across the State. All the modalities and guidelines would be announced shortly, he said after formally inaugurating Experium, an immersive park at Proddatur near Chilkur temple on Tuesday. Tollywood star Chiranjeevi and other elected representatives were also present.

Stating that Vikarabad region would be developed as an ecotourism destination, the Chief Minister complimented R Ramdev Rao for developing the park in the region and paving for ecotourism development. The State government was coming up with a Tourism Policy, including eco-tourism in a big way. The sprawling 150-acre Experium ecotourism park established by Ramdev Rao would not only aid in generating revenues for him but also get recognition for the State as well, the Chief Minister said. "The park that we are witnessing today is only 30 percent developed and in another year or so, it will emerge as a beautiful tourist destination," Revanth Reddy said. The State government was also making plans to promote cultivation of commercial crops. When such parks were established, there would be scope for purchasing saplings raised by farmers, he said. Telangana was raising saplings in nurseries but they



were being raised for six months to one year. After plantations, the survival rate of the saplings was ranging between 20 to 30 percent, he said, adding that instructions would be issued to Tourism and Forest Ministers to use saplings that were raised for two to three years to ensure their survival. Chief Minister gets confused between leprosy, TB patients. Explaining the significance of the Vikarabad forests to Chiranjeevi, Revanth Reddy said in the past, leprosy patients used to be treated at Vikarabad as the region was replete with medicinal plants. Due to the fresh air, the leprosy patients used to get cured within two to three months, he said. As the Chief Minister was continuing to stress about leprosy patient treatment in the region, Chevella MLA Kale Yadaiah went up to him and corrected him, saying it was tuberculosis patients who were treated there.

BRS leaders file complaint against Revanth Reddy over Formula-E race cancellation

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Hyderabad: Turning the tables in the ongoing investigation into the Formula-E race case, the BRS leaders on Tuesday filed a complaint against Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, holding him accountable for alleged losses caused due to the cancellation of the Formula-E event. They stated that the ill-advised actions of Revanth Reddy disrupted the State's plans to boost industrial growth, create jobs, and also boost economic growth. BRS leaders RS Praveen Kumar, MLA Mutha Gopal, MLC Naveen Kumar Reddy, and others filed a complaint with the Narsingi police against the Chief Minister in this regard. The complaint includes detailed information about the alleged repercussions of the cancellation.

They called for an in-depth investigation into the matter, urging the police to summon the Chief Minister for questioning. Speaking to media persons, Praveen Kumar stated that the previous BRS government had meticulously planned to increase State revenue, attract investments, and create jobs by setting up the e-Mobility Valley. The Formula-E event was a key part of this vision, he said. He charged Revanth Reddy of criminal breach of trust as per Section 316 BNS and violation of the oath of office which he took on December 6, 2023, wherein he promised that he would rule the State as per the constitution, not by affection or ill-will. "Because of his premature termination of the Formula-E agreement and subsequent vengeful witch-hunt, Telangana lost the precious e-Mobility Valley which would have created thousands of jobs. This project would have become a jewel in the crown of the nation," he said. The BRS leader complained that Revanth Reddy unilaterally can-



celled the Formula-E race which resulted in significant losses, including the derailment of the E-Mobility Valley project and thousands of job opportunities.

"As a concerned and tax-paying citizen of the State, I have filed a complaint at the Narsingi Police Station, demanding that Revanth Reddy be named as an accused in the Formula-E case. I also requested the police to investigate what led the Chief Minister to cancel the agreement which resulted in my tax money becoming a dead investment," he said, hoping that there would be a fair investigation. He wondered what was the difference between the Kite Festival recently organised by the Tourism department in Hyderabad where the State government also spent money to host representatives from 14 countries in the event and the Formula-E race held in Hyderabad. "Both were government-sponsored events aimed to promote the image of the capital and the State. How come one becomes right and the other wrong?" he asked.

PM Modi applauds Coldplay tour, says 'India has massive scope for live concerts'

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Ahmedabad: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised the Coldplay band's successful India tour and emphasized the country's vast potential for live music events. Coldplay's recent performances in India created a buzz, with their two sold-out concerts in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The British band's electrifying 'Music of the Spheres' World Tour culminated with their Republic Day concert on January 26 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. Adding to the excitement, the event was live-streamed on Disney+ Hotstar, attracting millions of viewers across India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking at the Utkarsh Odisha – Make in Odisha Conclave 2025, on Tuesday praised Coldplay's concerts, emphasizing India's massive potential for live entertainment. "You must have seen fabulous pictures of Coldplay's concerts organised in Mumbai and Ahmedabad. It shows that India has a massive scope for live concerts. Big artists from around the world are attracted towards India," said PM Modi. "I expect the state and the private sector to focus on needed infrastructure and skills," he added. The Narendra Modi Stadium, known as the world's largest cricket venue, became the epicentre of Coldplay's performances, which were lauded not only by the audience but also by the band itself. Frontman Chris Martin called it "the best stadium in the whole wide world," cementing its status as a premier venue for global events. Coldplay's live-streamed concert on January 26 attracted an impressive 8.3 million viewers, accumulating a staggering 165 million minutes of watch time, according to reports. The virtual broadcast allowed fans from across the country to experience the concert in real time, further expanding the band's reach in India. Chris Martin had a special message for the crowd in Ahmedabad, "It's so good to be back in India. You have one of the most vibrant cultures we've ever seen. This is one of our favourite

places to play." As for the live stream, he acknowledged the global nature of the concert, saying, "It's amazing that we're not just playing for you here but for everyone watching on Disney+ Hotstar. You're all part of this concert, no matter where you are." The economic impact of Coldplay's concerts on India is already being felt. Analysts highlighted the emerging potential of India's live music and entertainment industry. According to their analysis, the sector could generate Rs 6,000-8,000 crore in spending. The announcement of Coldplay's concerts alone could have driven an increase in private consumption demand, with spending in the last two to three months alone ranging from Rs 1,600-2,000 crore.

Meerpet murder case: Accused took nine hours to kill and dispose wife's body

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Hyderabad: It took nearly nine long hours for Guru Murthy, the ex-serviceman, to chop the body of his wife Venkata Madhavi (35) into pieces and then dispose off, in their house in Jillelaguda in Meerpet. Announcing Guru Murthy's arrest in the murder case, Rachakonda Police Commissioner G Sudheer Babu on Tuesday said it was the most gruesome murder case he had seen in his service. The suspect had no remorse on his act. The Commissioner said Guru Murthy returned home with his wife after leaving their two children at his in-laws' house on January 15.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Punjab's plight

Punjab is sinking deeper into the fiscal mire. Every political party that has ruled the state during the past two decades must take its due share of the blame for making things reach such a pass. The writing was right there on the wall when the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) tabled a damning audit report on the debt-ridden state's finances in the Assembly in September last year. The report flagged a worrying trend — expenditure growing at a much faster rate compared to revenue receipts. Now, in another embarrassment on the financial front, Punjab has finished last among 18 major states on the NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index (FHI).

The state has turned out to be a laggard on key subsidies such as quality of expenditure and fiscal prudence. In simple terms, Punjab is not spending enough to boost development, for which a marked improvement in infrastructure and social services is a must. This has adverse implications for the state's long-term economic growth as well as its potential as an investment destination. The indiscriminate rollout of subsidies and freebies has brought the state exchequer to its knees. According to the CAG report, subsidies constituted 11-18 per cent of the revenue expenditure during 2018-23. Successive governments have shied away from discontinuing or rationalising subsidies for an obvious reason — the fear of a backlash from the farming community, which is a major vote bank. The AAP government's 'zero bill' guarantee for electricity consumers has not been matched by all-out efforts aimed at revenue mobilisation. There are just two years to go for the Assembly elections. In its bid to woo voters and regain power, the ruling party will be tempted to fiscal discipline the go-by. This is a vicious cycle that is stifling Punjab's growth. The least that can be done is to find out how top performers like Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Goa have got it right.

Foxconn hiring row: National Human Rights Commission faults probe of Foxconn hiring, orders new inquiry



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has admonished Labour Dept. officials for failure to adequately investigate evidence of employment discrimination at Foxconn, which makes Apple iPhones, and told them to re-examine the matter, documents show. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in June, ordered the Union and Tamil Nadu State Dept. officials to probe Foxconn's hiring practices, after a Reuters investigation found the manufacturer excluded married women from iPhone assembly jobs at its southern India plant. Foxconn relaxed the ban during high-production periods, Reuters found.

The iPhone factory is a flagship foreign investment in India, crucial to Apple and Foxconn's plans to grow manufacturing in the country, as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aim of rivaling China in electronics production. Labour officials visited the Foxconn plant in July and questioned executives about employment practices, but did not make their findings public. Reuters this month reviewed NHRC case files related to the probe after the news agency sought the records under Right to Information laws. The details have not been previously reported. NHRC's dissatisfaction with government officials. An undated NHRC case status document shows Tamil Nadu Labour officials telling the commission on July 5 that 6.7% of the 33,360 women working at the Foxconn plant were married, without specifying whether they were on the assembly line. They said women employed at the factory came from six districts, "which makes it clear that a large number of female employees have been hired by the company...without any discrimination." The investigators told the commission that they had interviewed 21 married women at the factory, who said they faced no discrimination over wages and promotions, according to the document. In response, the NHRC told the Labour officials in November that they did not appear to have scrutinised Foxconn hiring documents, nor addressed the core issue of discrimination against married women in recruitment. The officials had relied on current employees' testimony and "filed their reports in a routine/casual manner", according to the case details. "The presence of [a] certain number of female employees at present does not answer the question [of] whether the company had actually discriminated against the married women at the time of recruitment," the NHRC said, noting the Labour officials were "apparently silent in this regard". "The commission has no hesitation in stating that the authorities concerned have failed to identify and understand the core issue." Neither the State nor the Union Labour Departments responded to Reuters requests for comment about the NHRC's assessment. In calling for the investigations in June, government said the Equal Remuneration Act stipulates that there should be no discrimination in the recruitment of men and women. Apple and Foxconn also did not respond to questions about the correspondence. Both companies have previously said that Foxconn hires married women in India. The NHRC is a statutory body with powers akin to a civil court. It can investigate human rights violations, summon officials and recommend remedial actions, including compensation payments. Last year, the NHRC asked the Union Labour Department to look into reports of harsh working conditions at an Amazon warehouse near New Delhi. Amazon subsequently said it conducted an investigation and took remedial action. In the Foxconn case, the NHRC files show the agency conveyed its dissatisfaction to government officials on November 19, 2024, and ordered them to re-examine the matter by carrying out "a thorough investigation" within four weeks. The NHRC in its January 10, 2025, response to Reuters said it could not provide further information as the case was ongoing. Reuters' investigation into Foxconn's hiring practices was based on interviews with current and former executives, recruitment agents and job candidates.

Govt. trying to outsource moon meal scheme, says association



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

The State government has been attempting to outsource noon-meal scheme by employing workers with a monthly honorarium of 3,000 as against the present special time-scale pay, according to Tamil Nadu Noon-Meal Workers' Association. Around 500 noon meal scheme workers went on a hunger strike on the Virudhunagar Collectorate premises pressing for a charter of demands, including filling increasing number of vacancies of organiser, cook, and assistants.

"The last time recruitment was made in the noon meal

scheme was in 2017. Since then several workers have retired and the vacancies have not been filled," said association's Virudhunagar district secretary A. Suthanthira Clara. She said the workers who were under special time-scale pay have been demanding to include them in the regular time-scale pay. With an intention to subvert their demand, the government has been recruiting noon meal workers with a monthly honorarium of 3,000. "A regular employee will get about ₹7,000 a month along with other benefits, including health insurance and medical allowance. Besides, they will get increment. But with ₹3,000 fixed wages, the workers will not get other benefits," she added. With some 500 vacancies of organiser, cook and assistant lying vacant in Virudhunagar district, the workers had to shoulder the burden of more than two noon-meal centres. The government has stipulated that all three posts of organiser, cook, and assistant should be deployed in centres with more than 300 children. "But, several centres are functioning with just a cook or an organiser," she pointed out.

The noon-meal workers were being given a fixed pension of ₹2,000 a month, which the association wanted to be raised. Similarly, while women in government departments were given maternity leave of one year, those working in the noon meal scheme were given only six months of maternity leave.

Saudi crown prince says kingdom intends to invest \$600 billion in U.S. during call with Trump



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Saudi Arabia's crown prince said on Thursday (January 23, 2025) the kingdom wants to invest \$600 billion in the United States over the next four years, comments that came after President Donald Trump earlier put a price tag on returning to the kingdom as his first foreign trip. Mr. Trump's 2017 trip to Saudi Arabia upended a tradition of U.S. presidents first heading to the United Kingdom as their first trip abroad. It also underscored his administration's close ties to the rulers of the oil-rich Gulf states as his eponymous real estate company has pursued deals across the region as well. The comments from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, reported early on Thursday (January 23, 2025) by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, came in a phone call with Trump. Saudi Arabia's dependence on U.S.-made weapons and defense systems. "The crown prince affirmed the kingdom's intention to broaden its investments and trade with the United States over the next four years, in the amount of \$600 billion, and potentially beyond that," the report said. The readout did not elaborate on where those investments and trade could be placed. The U.S. in recent years has increasingly pulled away from relying on Saudi oil exports, which once was the bedrock of their relationship for decades. Saudi sovereign wealth funds have taken large stakes in American businesses while also

looking at sports as well.

Saudi Arabia does, however, rely predominantly on U.S.-made weapons and defense systems, which could be a part of the investment. There was no immediate readout from the White House on the call. It also wasn't immediately clear if Trump's call with the crown prince was his first with a foreign leader since re-entering the White House. However, it was the first reported abroad. The crown prince, the de facto ruler of the oil-rich kingdom, also spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio early Thursday. On Monday after his inauguration, Mr. Trump talked about possibly heading to the kingdom again as his first foreign trip, like he did in 2017.

"The first foreign trip typically has been with the U.K. but ... I did it with Saudi Arabia last time because they agreed to buy \$450 billion worth of our products," Mr. Trump told journalists in the Oval Office. "If Saudi Arabia wanted to buy another \$450 billion or \$500 — we'll up it for all the inflation — I think I'd probably go." The 2017 visit to the kingdom set in motion a yearslong boycott of Qatar by four Arab nations, including the kingdom.

Mr. Trump maintained close relations with Saudi Arabia, even after Prince Mohammed was implicated in the 2018 killing and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. The kingdom also had been talking for years with the Biden administration about a wider deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for U.S. defense protections and other support. The \$600 billion pledge, which dwarves the gross domestic product of many nations, also comes as the kingdom faces budgetary pressures of its own. Global oil prices remain depressed years after the height of the coronavirus pandemic, affecting the kingdom's revenues. Meanwhile, Prince Mohammed also wants to continue his \$500 billion project at NEOM, a new city in Saudi Arabia's western desert on the Red Sea. It also will need to build tens of billions of dollars' worth of new stadiums and infrastructure ahead of it hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

NMC proposal to allow non-medical graduates to teach some subjects draws criticism



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

The National Medical Commission (NMC), in its recent draft "Teachers Eligibility Qualifications (TEQ) in Medical Institutions Regulations", has retained a two-year-old provision allowing non-medical graduates with M.Sc and Ph.D degrees to teach medical students anatomy, biochemistry, and physiology during a transitional period. The draft, released on January 17, notes that the qualifications to teach anatomy include M.Sc (Medical Anatomy) with Ph.D in Medical Anatomy; for biochemistry, M.Sc (Medical Biochemistry) with Ph.D in Medical Biochemistry; and for physiology, M.Sc (Medical Physiology) with Ph.D in Medical Physiology.

"The above qualifications should have been granted by the NMC recognised/accredited medical college/institute as regular in-campus courses in the subjects concerned," said the NMC in its draft guidelines. The draft has included non-medical faculty as eligible for Senior Resident, Assistant Professor, and higher positions in anatomy, biochemistry, and physiology subjects during a transitional period. While doctors have expressed their displeasure about the move, the Congress party on Monday (January 20, 2025) hit out at the Central government and said the NMC was set up with great expectations that quality medical education would expand but some of the moves taken by it were "baffling".

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Monday (January 20, 2025), in his post on X, said, "First, the Modi gov. lowers the cut-off percentiles for admission to post-graduate medical courses through NEET-PG. Now it relaxes norms for recruitment of faculty by medical colleges. The National Medical Commission was set up in Sept 2020 by an Act of Parliament with great expectations that quality medical education would expand. Some of the moves taken by it, however, are baffling."

The Commission, while maintaining that the move is aimed at addressing the shortage of faculties in medical colleges, has now asked stakeholders for their feedback within a week. Lakshya Mittal, president of United Doctors Front, stated that this move undermines the foundation of

medical education, which directly impacts the quality of healthcare delivery in our country. He said that the decision to permit non-medical practitioners to teach critical pre-clinical subjects such as anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry in medical colleges was deeply concerning.

"While we recognise the need to address the shortage of qualified MD faculty, this should only be a temporary measure, strictly limited to scenarios where no MD candidate is available. The transition period must be explicitly defined, ensuring it serves as a stopgap rather than a permanent compromise. Furthermore, non-medical practitioners should neither be appointed as permanent faculty nor engaged on a contractual basis for these roles," he said. Doctors have also warned that private medical colleges may exploit the decision, using it as a loophole to sidestep the need for qualified medical educators and noted that these actions could degrade the quality of education and training provided to future doctors.

Physicians have urged the Health Ministry to focus on strengthening existing medical colleges, enhancing infrastructure, and ensuring adequate resources before expanding or creating new institutions. "Teaching of core subjects like anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry by unqualified personnel risks compromising the foundational knowledge of medical graduates and the skills of future surgeons and clinicians, ultimately jeopardising patient safety. We appeal to the NMC to reconsider this decision in the best interest of medical education and healthcare quality in India," said Dr. Mittal.

A pushback against online abuse

On January 6, the actor lodged a police complaint against 30 people for allegedly posting derogatory remarks beneath one of her posts on social media. The next day, she filed a complaint against businessman Bobby Chemmanur, calling him the "leader" of "social media hoologans". The actor alleged that he had harassed her with sexual remarks on social media but also off it, during the inaugural function of one of his jewellery stores. After she objected to the remarks and refused to attend the inauguration of other outlets of the Chemmanur Group, she received obscene comments from several accounts. It seemed to her like a targeted attack. The police pressed non-bailable charges against Mr. Chemmanur and arrested him from his tea estate in Wayanad within two days of the actor filing the complaint. The arrest was dramatic. A group of young men claiming to be Mr. Chemmanur's fans attempted to stop the police vehicle, alleging that the businessman was being unfairly targeted, after a local court denied his bail application and sent him to judicial custody for 14 days. The police also arrested a 60-year-old man, who was one of the 30 people who allegedly abused the actor online. As

AWS to invest \$8.3 billion in Mumbai to build cloud infrastructure



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Amazon Web Services (AWS) has announced that they will be investing \$8.3 billion into cloud infrastructure in the Mumbai region in Maharashtra, to expand the cloud computing capacity in the country. The investment is expected to bring in more than 81,200 jobs in the data centre supply chain in India by 2030, AWS has claimed. This is a part of the \$12.7 billion investment that AWS had promised earlier in May 2023. AWS has already invested above \$3.7 billion to develop cloud infrastructure in Maharashtra between 2016 and 2022.

The memorandum of understanding between the Maharashtra government and AWS was signed at the World Economic Forum in Davos. "As we fulfill our vision of becoming a global capital for data centers, this collaboration will not only bolster our state's technological infrastructure, but also create new opportunities for innovation, economic growth, and job creation. We are committed to fostering a conducive environment for such transformative investments and driving Maharashtra's digital future forward," said Devendra Fadnis, chief minister of Maharashtra. "At AWS, we see tremendous potential for India's digital economy to thrive for years to come with the growing demand for cloud and artificial intelligence. This is why we plan to invest \$8.3 billion into cloud infrastructure in Maharashtra by 2030," says David Zapolsky, Senior Vice President of Global Public Policy and General Counsel at Amazon. The Mumbai region was AWS' first cloud infrastructure region in India, launched in 2016. Tech companies have been aggressively expanding their cloud infrastructure to meet computing demands of artificial intelligence. Last month, AWS announced an investment of \$1.2 billion investment for cloud in Italy. Then, a couple of weeks ago, AWS said it would spend at least \$1 billion in Georgia to boost AI infrastructure.

Saif Ali Khan stabbing case suspect says 'I am not a culprit'



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

"I am not the culprit, boss... I am going home" was the concise response of Akash Kanojia to a volley of questions directed at him and a Mumbai Police team escorting him in Chhattisgarh's Durg on Sunday (January 19, 2025). Mr. Kanojia, 31, was identified as a 'suspect' by the Railway Protection Force in actor Saif Ali Khan stabbing case on Saturday, hours before the Mumbai Police made an arrest in the case.

Even as a police officer said he was 'just a suspect' and was released after inquiry, journalists surrounding the Mumbai Police team accompanying Mr. Kanojia raised questions about the 'identification' exercise. Mr. Kanojia's photos along with the news had gone viral by the time the news of the alleged attacker — Mohammad Sharif Islam Shehzad, a Bangladeshi national who had illegally entered India and changed his name to Bijoy Das — poured in. "There was no mistake..." said a member of the Mumbai Police team, in response to a question on the identification. "You people [journalists] made it go viral. We will do our authentic job. If we feel someone is a suspect, we will question him. There wasn't just one team, teams were sent across India," he said.

He added that Mr. Kanojia would be dropped at the railway station and was free to go wherever he wished. Earlier on Saturday, RPF officers had said Mr. Kanojia was detained from the Mumbai LTT-Kolkata Shalimar Jnaneshwari Express at Durg station after a tip-off was received from the Mumbai Police that he was a suspect in the Saif Ali Khan case and that the metropolitan police officers had confirmed him as a suspect too. The verbal police statements were followed by a press release shared by the South-East Central Zone of the Railway documenting the same.

While the Kerala High Court granted bail to Mr. Chemmanur, it made him apologise for his theatrics which involved a reported refusal to sign the bail bond. The actor's decision to legally take on harassers on social media is laudable. Over the last few years, there has been a growing number of instances of targeted online harassment against women in various fields, especially politicians, journalists, and celebrities. While the worst attacks are invariably launched against opinionated women, sometimes all it takes is the posting of a photograph to attract abuse. The complainant wrote that cruel comments, sexual innuendos, and a planned campaign by certain social media profiles are enough to take lives these days. Many people, including celebrities facing serious allegations, religious and business groups, and political parties seeking to silence those raising uncomfortable questions, have weaponised online armies to push their detractors into submission.

Internet suspended in 12 villages in Haryana's Ambala



The Haryana government has suspended internet services in 12 villages in Ambala district in light of the 'Dilli Chalo' agitation resuming on Saturday as protesting farmers plan to make another attempt to march towards the national capital from the Shambhu border. Internet services in Dangdehri, Lohgarh, Manakpur, Dadiyana, Bari Ghel, Choti Ghel, Lharsa, Kalu Majra, Devi Nagar (Hira Nagar, Naresh Vihar), Saddopur, Sultanpur and Kakru villages will

remain suspended from 6 am Saturday till midnight on December 17. Banking and mobile recharge services will remain functional, officials said.

Dr Sumita Misra, Haryana Additional Chief Secretary (Home), issued the orders after the police made a request saying that there was an "apprehension of tension, annoyance, agitation, damage of public and private property and disturbance of public peace and tranquillity in the area of district Ambala in view of the call for Delhi-Kooch (march) given by certain farmer organisations". The order further stated that internet services would be suspended to "stop the spread of misinformation and rumours through various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter etc. on mobile phones and SMS, for facilitation and mobilisation of mobs of agitators and demonstrators who can cause serious loss of life and damage to public and private properties by indulging in arson or vandalism and other types of violent activities". Farmers, under the banner of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM, non-political), are taking part in the 'Dilli Chalo' agitation over several pending demands, including the legal guarantee of a minimum support price for crops.

Community outreach, targeting 'big fish' – how Haryana declared 40% of its villages 'drug free'

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

It's 10 am, and the open gym in the village of Sultanpur in Haryana's Raipur Rani, is full of young men working out in the late morning sun. Exercise is a good way to keep the youth "away from the drug habit and geared towards sports", its sarpanch Naseem tells The Indian Express while sitting outside a local warehouse with other village elders. The village of Sultanpur, which has a population of 1,200 people – mostly Muslims and Gujjars – is one of 3,114 that the Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau has declared drug free. According to government records, 42 percent of Haryana's 7,536 villages have been declared drug free in the last one year – a feat that authorities and village residents attribute to combination of strict policing and community outreach. Besides this, 695 municipal urban wards too have been declared drug free.

"It's due to the vigilance of the village elders, awareness campaigns run by the state police force and literacy rate of the village (approximately 71 percent) that contributed towards the village becoming completely drug free," Naseem tells The Indian Express. "We discourage people from keeping alcohol even at weddings." According to the officials, the last two years have seen the police focus on seizing commercial quantities of drugs. Data from a recent Quality Council of India (QCI) report commissioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) shows that Haryana recorded a 40 percent increase in commercial quantity narcotic seizures in 2024, up to 411 from January to November 30 this year compared to 295 over the same period last year. Meanwhile, data from the Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau (HSNCB) shows that the highest commercial quantity seizures have come from Sirsa, Ambala, and Kurukshetra, followed by Gurugram and Faridabad. The Quality Council of India (QCI) report also highlighted Haryana's success in tracking and dismantling drug networks through four measures – crackdown on traffickers, reduction in small-quantity cases, forensic fast-tracking and the Namak-Lota-Abhiyan.

According to the report, this year 63 repeat drug traffickers were detained under The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988. In addition, there had been a 15 percent drop in small-quantity seizures – that is, drugs below 5 grams that are considered non-commercial quantities. Besides, the police are encouraging offenders to voluntarily renounce drugs through the police's Namak-Lota-Abhiyan or the salt-bowl pledge – a vow that offenders take before their families and the village elders to give up drug use. Additionally, the state's forensic science laboratories are now processing commercial quantity cases within 15 days, which has also helped in expedite trials, the report says.

According to Panchkula's Deputy Commissioner of Police Himadree Kaushik, the state took a two-pronged approach – starting village outreach and launching a crackdown on "the big fish". "We increased our focus on villages, organised several awareness campaigns, took the addicts to rehabilitation centres and launched a crackdown on big-fish. The title of 'drug free' gives village residents a sense of pride," she said. To help combat the drug problem, the HSNCB has organised sports in 2,080 villages this year and saw 2.22 lakh participants. "As part of the rehabilitation of drug-offenders, police have identified 7,523 drug addicts and referred them to 99 deaddiction centres for treatment. So far, over 4,188 individuals were treated in government



facilities while 2974 sought help in private rehabilitation centres," a senior officer t.haryana drug control Sultanpur village sarpanch Naseem said that exercise is a good way to keep the youth away from the drug habit. (Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh) According to ACP (Panchkula) Surender Singh, village elders are "the first responders".

"Their continuous liaison and rapport with us help us quickly identify 'the bad elements', or those who are prone to getting into the drugs-trade or addiction, due to which we can get into action quickly and prevent the menace from spreading," he said. The programmes have also resulted in higher conviction rate: data shows that conviction under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, has gone up to 54 percent from January to November in 2024 from 49 percent over the same period in 2023. According to senior police officers, this conviction rate is "quite impressive, considering the complicated and meticulous investigation procedures that are required to be followed in NDPS Act cases". Senior officials claim that efficient judicial processes play a critical role in the fight against drugs. "Eight fast-track courts have been notified for NDPS cases, and their full operationalisation is expected to significantly enhance trial speed. This will build on the progress already made, ensuring swifter and more effective justice in drug-related cases. Also, unlike other states, where focus is on putting small-time drug users behind the bars, Haryana Police's focus is to catch the big fish, break the supply chain and reform the addicts. It is because the addict will become a peddler, who will further become a big fish. If they are reformed at the initial stage, the chances of reformation are much higher," Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau (HSNCB) Director General OP Singh said. According to DGP Shatrueet Kapur, the approach is "beyond enforcement and is about empowering communities, engaging our youth, and offering pathways to recovery for those affected". "Our enforcement strategy is focused and relentless. By targeting large-scale traffickers, detaining habitual offenders under the PIT-NDPS Act, and leveraging fast-tracked forensic support, we are dismantling drug networks at every level. Haryana Police is committed to ensuring that no drug trafficker operates with impunity in our state," he said. In the village of Mirzapur in Sirsa district, sarpanch Gurmel Singh believes the approach has worked. "Now, almost all those who had earlier got into the drugs have reformed. Women are being made aware of how to keep their children away from drugs. Younger children are taken in vans to nearby sports stadiums so that they can focus more on physical and mental activities," he said. In the village of Rehna in Raipur Rani, village sarpanch Sehreena's husband Kamil agrees. "Till a few years ago, we were worried due to the increased influence of drugs in our area, but today we can proudly say that we are completely drug free," he said.

Delhi L-G ordered crackdown on immigrants: 2 Bangladeshi immigrants arrested for overstaying in Capital



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Days after the Delhi L-G Secretariat ordered a crackdown on illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, two nationals from the country have been arrested from the Hazrat Nizamuddin area for staying in India without valid documents, according to Ravi Kumar Singh, Deputy Commis-

sioner of Police (Southeast Delhi), two Bangladesh nationals identified as Abdul Ahad (22) and Mohammad Azizul (32) were arrested on December 10 and 12, respectively.

He explained that 916 individuals have been verified in Southeast Delhi so far, of which eight illegal immigrants, including six Bangladeshis, have been detained by the district police. "The two men were found to have overstayed in India illegally and were produced before the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) for deportation proceedings," said the officer, adding that several teams have been formed to carry out the verifications.

During questioning, the DCP added, Ahad, who works as a labourer and hails from Bangladesh's Sylhet, admitted to entering India on December 6 with help from a Bangladesh agent to find work. "Dhaka resident Azizul revealed that he had entered India in 2004 through the Petrapole-Benapole border in West Bengal and had been residing here ever since," he stated. DCP Singh added that the police teams have noticed that the landlords were not aware about the mandatory provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946.

A test of wills: Who is Rohit Bal's 'successor'?

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

In a simmering battle over who should own the brand and assets of iconic fashion designer Rohit Bal, who died on November 1 following heart-related complications, his brother Rajiv Bal and his friend of 22 years Lalit Tehlan are crossing swords over the designer's purported will. Refusing to confirm or deny if the designer had left a will bequeathing all he had to him as immediate family, step brother Rajiv Bal says, "I have no comments on a will. Lalit Tehlan has claimed he has a document. Nobody has seen it yet. Let him present it before everybody and then we will seek legal recourse. As far as I am concerned, he is a stranger to the family. I continue to be a director of Rohit Bal Designs Private Limited. Our creative heads are continuing their business as it always was. We are busy getting orders this wedding season," Rajiv Bal told The Indian Express. He also refused to share if Rohit Bal had discussed the future of his business with him in his last days. Tehlan says Rohit Bal owned 99 per cent of Rohit Bal Designs Private Limited and since a company needs at least two directors, one per cent of stake was given to Rajiv Bal. He's claiming his right as successor to the brand and assets that include two floors in Defence Colony, a factory in Noida, some land, artworks and artefacts. Sources say the land value itself is valued at no less than Rs 100 crore.

Rajiv Bal also dismissed the claims of Tehlan as founder of one of the sub-brands of Rohit Bal Fashion, Alexander Jeans. "The label is Alexander Jeans by Rohit Bal and Tehlan has nothing to do with it," he reiterates. However, Tehlan says he is ready to show every evidence required. "It's not like he has left everything to one person. He also protected some of his weavers, who have been with him for 45 years, provisioning handsome amounts for them so that they are taken care of," he adds. As to whether he can call himself founder of the Alexander Jeans label, Tehlan says, "I got Alexander Jeans for Rohit Bal Fashion and was part of all business discussions. So when the Reliance group wanted to invest in it, Gudda said since I had got the account, I could grow it. But he was very particular about not letting corporates take over his core brand." On charges that he was not the right inheritor of Bal's legacy, he says, "I was a 17-year-old boxer in Shahpur Jat who had no idea about fashion. Rohit Bal spotted me, turned me into his model and assured my parents that he would look out for me. Do you think I will ever forget that? Over the last two decades, I have worked with him and have understood the fashion industry. There are no friends or foes here. But I understand Gudda's vision and would never sell his work out. In fact, now that he has gone, I am ready to do anything to carry the brand legacy forward. Rajivji has experience in fashion exports and I do not mind working with him and synergising strengths."

Countering allegations that he would be nobody without Bal's support, Tehlan says, "I had the Michel Adam franchise in India, managed a talent agency of 300 to 400 models, did shoots for Jabong and Myntra (fashion portals). I did these independent of Gudda, so it's not like I cannot fend for myself." Tehlan is vociferous that Rohit Bal's will is



foolproof and was made by the designer himself in sound mental health in the presence of witnesses though he doesn't want to mention the date it was sealed. His lawyer Gurmukh Choudhri says the document, which has the signature of Bal and witnesses, "appears to be valid." Although Tehlan has claimed he has photographic evidence of the signing, his lawyer has not seen it yet. Rajiv Bal is grateful that Sunil Sethi, the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) chief, informed him about Tehlan having a will. "He told me he had been named its executor though he, too, was not aware of it. I trust Sunil and let's see the document first," he says. Sethi says at no point in his discussions with Rohit Bal was there talk of business and legacy despite the frail nature of his health. "I have been creatively associated with Rohit Bal for over 20 years now and yes I have been privy to his creative vision. That's how his last show, Kaynaat, was conceived. Our discussion was around his unfulfilled dream of having an elaborate crafts and fashion showcase on the Dal Lake. But we never spoke about the future of his business or his family and friends," he adds. "I was informed about me being the executor of the will by Tehlan and his lawyer. I immediately called Rajiv. I have not yet seen the will because of some personal emergency but I must say, Tehlan and his lawyer have been only too willing to show it to me. If Rohit had indeed intended me to be executor of the will, then I am committed to following the due process of law and honouring his wish. To begin with, if both sides have what they claim to have, these should be probated (a legal process that confirms the validity of a will and gives the executor the authority to manage the deceased person's assets) first. Only then can we sit with family, friends and witnesses and go by what the court says on the matter. So till I see the will, there cannot be next steps for resolution," he says. As of now, Choudhri says it will be in the best interest of all stakeholders to sit across the table and discuss legacy. "Going to the courts will be a long and arduous process because if a will is disputed, the court will first investigate its authenticity. Then a receiver will be overseeing the running of the company in the interim. If both parties produce a will each and both are legally valid, then the will with the later date will decide the successor. Usually, this could take years," he says. And as such disputed legacies have shown the brand value diminishes over time, till there are no takers. The question is whether all stakeholders can agree on building brand value rather than eroding it.

Kalyan Banerjee, Owaisi other Opposition members suspended from Waqf Bill panel after protests

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Opposition members of the parliamentary panel on the Waqf Amendment Bill were suspended for a day on Friday after protests and allegations that Chairman Jagdambika Pal rushed through the proceedings.

The members who were suspended include Kalyan Banerjee, Mohammad Jawed, A Raja, Asaduddin Owaisi, Naseer Hussain, Mohibullah, Mohamed Abdullah, Arvind Sawant, Nadeem-ul Haque and Imran Masood. The motion to suspend the opposition members was moved by BJP's Nishikant Dubey and passed by the committee.

Aparajita Sarangi from the BJP criticised the opposition's conduct as "disruptive," saying they had continuously disrupted the meeting and used unparliamentary language against Jagdambika Pal. The parliamentary committee meeting began on a contentious note, with opposition members arguing they were not given enough time to review the proposed changes



to the draft legislation.

The committee's internal discussions became heated before inviting Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the chief cleric of Jamia Masjid Srinagar, with opposition leaders accusing the BJP of fast-tracking the Waqf Amendment Bill for political reasons ahead of the Delhi elections. The meeting was briefly adjourned due to heated arguments. After the break, the Mirwaiz-led delegation appeared before the Committee when proceedings resumed, a brief statement issued by Mutahida

Majlis-E-Ulema (MMU), headed by the Mirwaiz, said the delegation would convey strong reservations on certain provisions of the bill that stands to have far-reaching implications for the management and autonomy of Waqf properties and the welfare of the Muslims, especially the underprivileged. Trinamool Congress member Kalyan Banerjee and Congress member Naseer Hussain angrily walked out of the meeting. Speaking to reporters, they criticised the committee's actions, calling the proceedings a "farce."

The members also requested that the meeting scheduled for January 27, where the proposed amendments were to be examined clause-by-clause, be postponed to either January 30 or 31. The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on August 8, 2024, after being introduced in the Lok Sabha by Union minority affairs minister Kiren Rijju. The bill seeks to amend the Waqf Act, 1995, to address existing problems and improve the regulation and management of waqf properties.

Donald Trump begins crackdown on 'illegal immigrant criminals'; 538 arrested, hundreds deported

US authorities arrested 38 illegal migrants and deported hundreds in a large operation following Trump's second inauguration. US authorities have arrested 38 illegal migrants and deported hundreds in a mass operation after President Donald Trump took office for the second time this week, according to his press secretary. In a post on social media platform X, Karoline Leavitt, Trump's press secretary said, "The Trump Administration arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals including a suspected terrorist, four members of the Tren de Aragua gang, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors."

She added that hundreds of "illegal immigrant criminals" had been deported via military aircraft. "The largest massive deportation operation in history is well underway. Promises made. Promises kept," she said in another post. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) also confirmed the arrests and said that 373 detainees (criminal non-citizens) had been lodged in jail.

The move comes after Donald Trump signed a slew of executive orders on his first day of office that were aimed at tightening border security and facilitating the deportation of undocumented immigrants in the country. Raids were also conducted in Newark, New Jersey, which is designated as a 'sanctuary city', where not only undocumented immigrants but legal residents were also detained. The city's mayor Ras Baraka condemned the action and said, "Newark will not stand by idly while people are being unlawfully



terrorized. Trump's anti-immigration orders President Trump brought an end to a policy that restricts ICE agents from arresting undocumented people in houses of worship, schools and hospitals, among many others orders passed on his first day in office.

Trump said that his cabinet "shall take appropriate action to repel, repatriate or remove any alien engaged in the invasion," referring to migrants crossing borders illegally. Framing illegal immigration as a national security crisis, Trump has also allowed for military service members to act as immigration and border enforcement officers as part of his mass deportation program. He has also ordered the suspension of the US Refugee Admission Program.

Karnataka's Centres of Excellence to Boost Skill Development and Innovation



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

To shape higher education in line with current market needs, the government of Karnataka has decided to set up Centres of Excellence at a cost of about ₹2,500 crore in seven to eight places in the State. These government centers come on the heels of CE's being set up in various private and government colleges by companies such as Bajaj and Toyota and focusing on skill development.

The State Cabinet has approved a World Bank loan for this project, and the government has submitted a detailed project report to the bank. A World Bank team visited the state on January 17, 2025 and discussed with the officials in this regard. The centers are related to engineering, polytechnic and humanities courses like arts, science and commerce with an aim to provide effective skills to the students. "Instead of implementing skill development in the internship model, it will be implemented as part of the curriculum from the first semester itself as per the needs of the industries," says Karnataka Minister of Higher Education Dr. M. C. Sudhakar.

"Instead of implementing skill development in the internship model, it will be implemented as part of the curriculum from the first semester itself as per the needs of the industries," says Karnataka Minister of Higher Education Dr. M. C. Sudhakar. | Photo credit: Murali Kumar K/ The Hindu A meeting was held with experts prof. S. Shadagopan, Madan Padke, staff of Microsoft and others top most multi national companies (NMCs) headed by Dr. M. C. Sudhakar, Minister for Higher Education. And, the government has constituted an expert committee headed by the Principal Secretary of the Higher Education Department to study the feasibility of the project and submit a report. "A World Bank team visited the state and inspected it and held detailed discussions on the project. The loan provided by the World Bank needs the approval of the Union government, which is expected to be come soon. Then, the CE's will be established in a phased manner over a period of four years. Of the total ₹2,500 crore, the State government will provide about ₹750 crore. The remaining amount will be in the form of a loan," said Minister Sudhakar.

Why these centers? In Karnataka, with close to 250 colleges, 44 universities and 25,000 start-ups, every year about 45 to 50 thousand students complete their engineering degrees and enter the job market. In addition, every year, lakhs of graduates of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc), Arts, Commerce and other humanities courses graduate. How skilled and employable they are is a big question, say experts. Engineering branches like Civil, Mechanical and others are becoming less attractive to students for these reasons. Many institutions are closing down these courses. The government's aim is to make these courses more relevant and attractive to students by beefing up the skilling component and boosting employability.

"Skill development will be given high priority. The cen-

Shun caste and focus on staff welfare, railways tells trade unions

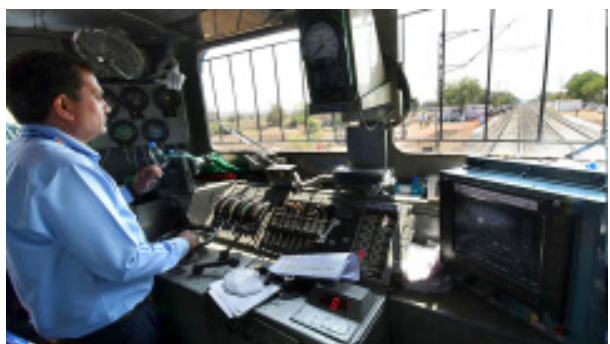
GNS News Agency, Jan 28

The Indian Railways, one of the largest employers of the Government of India with over 12 lakh employees, has directed the newly elected trade unions to keep divisive tactics such as caste, creed etc away and focus on the overall welfare of staff. According recognition to two trade unions — the All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) and the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) — for a period of five years after the nationwide secret ballot elections held in the first week of December last year, the railways laid down certain conditions for them to follow.

The federations were told to refrain from encouraging divisive tactics based on any distinction of caste, creed, category, regions or railways. The overall interest of all categories of non-gazetted employees (Group 'C' and erst-while Group 'D') of railways should be kept uppermost. Issuing the guidelines based on various court orders and provisions under the Indian Railway Establishment Manual, the Railway Board in a communication sent to the general secretaries of both the federations said the recognition would be withdrawn or suspended if there was violation of any of the conditions. The railways said only a railway employee or "honourably" retired railway employee could hold any position in the federations. The Railway Board should be given regularly the copies of rules of the federa-

ters will be established to benefit polytechnic, engineering and humanities students. The curriculum will be implemented on the basis of skill development to be applicable to all students across the state. A credit system will be introduced. Instead of implementing skill development in the internship model, it will be implemented as part of the curriculum from the first semester itself as per the needs of the industries," the minister said. "Skill training will be made a part of the semesters. Free hostel facility will also be provided to the students in these centers. Start-ups can use students for their programs," he explained. Further, he stated that all courses, including technical and non-technical, will be made more attractive by focusing on skilling. Entrepreneurship, critical thinking, proficiency in English, critical thinking, analysis etc., are some of other courses that will be taught. "In these centers, 60% of space will be used by the government. The remaining 20% will be allocated to private firms and the remaining 20% for start-ups. Industries and start-ups can install their technology and machinery here. This will facilitate students to get real-time training," Sudhakar said.

Centers of excellence in engineering colleges Meanwhile, many private engineering colleges in the state have started CE's in collaboration with private companies. Bajaj is supporting a CE for Mechanical and Electronics Engineering at PES Institute Technology (PESIT), Bengaluru. A CE in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research and Business Solutions has been established in RV College of Engineering, Bengaluru. There are 17 engineering colleges in the state and Toyota has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to set up a CE for Automobile branch in 11 colleges. Six have already come up including in the Government Engineering College in Ramanagara, related to Innova Diesel and Electric hybrid engine. Other projects are in progress. Prof. Nagarjuna Sadineni, Pro-Vice Chancellor of PESIT and Director of the Bajaj-supported CE, said, "In India, there is so much demand for engineers but not many are fully trained. As a part of our Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), we established a CE at PESIT. With the aim of providing practical knowledge to the candidates, we created 13 labs and one classroom in the center. In the first batch we trained a total of 60 candidates, for which students are selected from tier 3 cities. We offered six months residential programme to them. We invested more than ₹25 crore for the equipment in this CE. These are actual equipment used in industries like automobile and aerospace and others, spanning the range from basic electronics and basic mechanical to advanced robotics and process control equipment. In six months, the students completely changed their profile after skilling and got jobs. All these candidates got deep manufacturing related jobs." Responding to this, Minister Sudhakar said, "An expert committee has been constituted to establish CE's related to other branches of engineering including Civil, Mechanical, AI, Robotics and others." Discussion on center of production in the meeting with industrial experts headed by Minister Sudhakar, some suggested starting Centers of Production instead of CE's to boost employability. The students study and only see the equipment in CE's. But they cannot use it to gain practical knowledge. CPs can offer that. Speaking to The Hindu, Prasanna H., Director of Department of Technical Education, recalled an earlier experience with service centers at the Government Sri Krishnarajendra Silver Jubilee Technological Institute (SKSJT) where government vehicles were serviced. Fully-fledged garages were run. Also, Printing Technology Engineering students used to be engaged in printing of government work there. "If students are given the opportunity to do things practically, it would be possible to create industrial-ready human resources," he said. Responding to this, Minister Sudhakar said, "The government's objective is to provide practical knowledge to the students in the CE's. Therefore, experts will study and submit a report on how practical skills can be imparted to the students in the CE's. The government will take further action based on the report."



tions and amendments, if any.

Asking federations not to maintain any political funds, the railways urged them to use their influence to "prevent illegal action calculated to interfere with the working of the railway." The federations have several constituent trade unions affiliated to them. Just before the elections, the railways said the constituent trade unions should have collectively got at least 15% of the valid votes polled on all Indian Railways basis. It was also announced that the constituent trade unions should have got recognition in at least six of the total 17 Zonal Railways.

Now you have to shell out more for climbing Everest

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Kathmandu: Nepal has sharply increased permit fees for climbing Mount Everest by 36 per cent and also introduced a slew of measures aimed at controlling garbage pollution on the world's tallest peak, officials said. Under the revised mountaineering regulations, the royalty fee for foreigners climbing Everest from the normal south route in the spring season (March-May) has been raised to \$15,000 from the current \$11,000 per person. The autumn season (September-November) climbing fee has increased from \$5,500 to \$7,500. At the same time, the permit cost per individual for the winter (December-February) and monsoon (June-August) seasons has risen from \$2,750 to \$3,750. A Cabinet decision to this effect has already been made, though the official announcement is yet to come, said Arati Neupane, Director of the Tourism Board. The new fees for climbing the 8848.86-metre peak will come into effect from September 1, 2025, she added. The revised regulations,

approved by the Cabinet will become effective once it is published in the Nepal Gazette. However, the royalty for Nepali climbers wishing to climb Everest will be increased by double from current Rs 75,000 to Rs 150,000 for autumn, she said. The last royalty fee revision was made on January 1, 2015, when the government switched from a group-based system to a uniform fee of \$11,000 per climber for the spring season from the normal route. Climbing permits, previously valid for 75 days, will now be limited to 55 days. The reduced validity is aimed at streamlining climbing activities, the Kathmandu Post reported. "Bookings already confirmed for the spring 2025 expedition will not be affected by this change," said Indu Ghimire, a joint secretary at the Tourism Ministry. According to Ghimire, the regulations have focused on garbage management, social security for high-altitude workers, and boosting government revenue.

Why has Kerala begun survival swimming training for schoolchildren?



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

For the first time in the country, a World Health Organization-led initiative to impart survival swimming training to children in order to reduce drowning deaths, is taking off in Kerala. Over the past five years, at least 1,000-1,200 persons have died every year in Kerala by drowning, young children and adolescents constituting a significant percentage of this number. The hazards of drowning have always been high in the State which has a number of natural water bodies, such as ponds, canals, pools and rivers, apart from a long coast line. Kerala also reports a good number of drowning deaths due to accidents — boats capsizing or children being washed away in swift waters while attempting to cross these, especially during monsoons.

Though the Kerala General Education department has had plans since 2018 to include swimming as part of the school curriculum from primary classes, by constructing mini-swimming pools in schools or using local pools to train children in swimming, it never materialised because of logistics issues, funds shortage and safety issues associated with using natural pools. Apart from a few local initiatives in some panchayats and summer swimming coaching classes, no plans to teach swimming to children as part of necessary life skills have ever taken off in the State, though child deaths due to drowning continue unabated in the State.

What the project involves The project, "Turning the tide on drowning" - a school SwimSafe (survival swim training for children) programme, is being piloted in two schools in the capital district by the George Institute for Global Health (India), a WHO Collaborating Centre on Injury Prevention, Trauma Care and Head Injury, with the cooperation of the State General Education Department. According to the WHO estimates, there were 55,000 drownings in India in 2021, with children and young people (0 to 17 age group) constituting 22% of these deaths. Teaching swimming and water safety skills to school-age children in the 6-14 year age group is a strategy recommended by the WHO and proven to have reduced drowning incidence in many low-income countries like Bangladesh. Teaching swimming to children without appropriate safety measures can be dangerous and hence under SwimSafe, children (who do not have asthma, heart conditions, epilepsy or disabilities) are taught in clean, clear, shallow water with highly visible boundaries. Swimming is taught as one component of a formal programme, which includes water safety and safe rescue and knowledge and attitudes to water.

Piloted in two schools "The SwimSafe initiative is being piloted in two schools, the Government UPS at Ambalathara and Poojappura. We plan to give swim les-

sons to a total of 300-350 children from both schools, with each child getting two one-hour sessions every week for six weeks. We have already selected four swimming instructors from the community and formally trained them according to our guidelines. We plan to maintain a teacher-student ratio of 1:6," says Gloria Benny, George Institute, who is coordinating the SwimSafe programme in schools. "We initially thought of using the local pools, fencing off a portion, reducing the depth and making it safe for children to enter. However, because of the scare over amoebic meningoencephalitis, this idea was dropped. We will now be using portable pools (the dimensions being 31 ft x 14 ft x 4.33 ft), so that there are no unknowns and no possibilities of endangering children. We also need not take them out of the school premises, which is another huge advantage," Ms. Benny says. Portable pools to be used

The portable pools which can be assembled and dismantled for use in another location, are not just convenient and cost-effective, they resolve the problem of identifying a safe local pool to train children in. Portable pools have been used with remarkable success in Vietnam for the SwimSafe programme. SwimSafe teaches children the important precautions they should follow when entering water and the water environment awareness they should have when dealing with unfamiliar water bodies.

They are taught three breathing skills (put face in water, submerge and blow bubbles, hold breath and exhale in submerged position); 10 swimming skills (walking in water, floating in water with and without support, push-glide-kick etc), two survival competencies (swim 25 metres using any recognisable stroke and to float for 30 seconds). They are also taught three basic rescue techniques — rescuing another with a pole, rescuing others using pole and rope from the edge of a pond and rescuing others by throwing floating objects. SwimSafe initiatives in Bangladesh, Thailand and Vietnam have demonstrated the potential of training in swimming and water survival skills can be an important public health intervention, WHO says. It has provided robust evidence that children who are able to swim 25 metres and tread water for 30 seconds have lower fatal drowning rates in low- and middle income countries. "It is true that many young children may not achieve this skill level within the six weeks time frame but the basic swimming skills can always be improved. What is more important is the core knowledge and survival skills training that they receive on how they can keep themselves safe in water — like staying afloat if they fall accidentally into a water body," Ms. Benny says.

Trainers' teaching was conducted by expert swimmers from the Royal Life Saving Society of UK | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement She says that the trainers' training, which was done by expert swimmers from the Royal Life Saving Society of U.K., had turned out to be a refreshing experience for the swimming instructors here, most of who were not aware of the different methods to train children or the survival skills. RLSS trainers demonstrated the many ways in which a child can be taught to swim — not all children are comfortable with the face-down-and-breathing style in water. They are taught to float and to swim face up. Also, children are to be taught how to come up with face above water and float, if at all they fall accidentally into water. Apart from the swimming coaches, two teachers from the schools who had basic swimming skills were also out through RLSS training

Palestinian official says hundreds leave Jenin as Israel presses raid

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

A Palestinian official said hundreds of people began leaving their homes in a flashpoint area of the occupied West Bank on Thursday (January 23, 2025) as Israeli forces pressed a deadly operation. The Israeli military launched the raid in the Jenin area, a hotbed of Palestinian militancy, days into a ceasefire in the war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the objective of the operation, dubbed "Iron Wall", is to "eradicate terrorism" in the area. He linked the operation to a broader strategy of countering Iran "wherever it sends its arms — in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen" and the West Bank. The Israeli government has accused Iran, which supports armed groups across the Middle East, including Hamas in Gaza, of attempting to funnel weapons and funds to militants in the occupied Palestinian territory. "Hundreds of camp residents have begun leaving after the Israeli army, using loudspeakers on drones and military vehicles, ordered them to evacuate the camp," Jenin Governor Kamal Abu al-Rub told AFP. The Israeli Army said it was "unaware of any evacuation orders for residents in Jenin as of now". Since it began on Tuesday (January 21, 2025), the operation has killed at least 12 Palestinians and wounded 40 more, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. "There are dozens of camp residents who have begun to leave," Jenin resident Salim Saadi said. "The army is in front of my house. They could enter at any moment."

Israeli forces have also detained several Palestinians from the Jenin area, with an AFP photographer seeing a row of blindfolded men in white jumpsuits being transported out of the West Bank. Palestinians had already begun fleeing the Jenin area on foot on Wednesday (January 22, 2025), with AFP TV images showing a group of men, women and children making their way down a muddy road, the sound of drones buzzing above them clearly audible. The Israeli military said on Thursday (January 23, 2025) it killed two Palestinian militants near Jenin during the night, accusing them of having killed three Israelis.

In a statement, the military said that Israeli troops found the two militants barricaded in a house in the village of Burqin. "After an exchange of fire, they were eliminated by the forces," it said, adding one soldier was wounded in the firefight. The two men were wanted for the killing of three Israelis and the wounding of six others in a January 6 attack on a bus in the West Bank. The Palestinian Health Ministry later confirmed the two deaths. Violence has surged across the occupied West Bank since the Gaza war erupted on October 7, 2023, with Hamas's attack on southern Israel. According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 850 Palestinians, including many militants, in the West Bank since the Israel-Hamas war began. During the same period, at least 29 Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations in the territory, according to Israeli official figures.

The Jenin raid began after a truce took effect in Gaza on Sunday (January 19, 2025), halting 15 months of war between Israel and Hamas. The October 2023 attack, the deadliest in Israel's history, resulted in the deaths of 1,210 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Militants also took 251 people hostage, 91 of



whom remain in Gaza, including 34 the military has said are dead.

The attack sparked a devastating war in Gaza that has killed more than 47,200 people, the majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the United Nations considers reliable. Under the terms of the truce, Gaza militants handed over three Israeli women they had been holding since 2023, in exchange for the release of around 90 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. During first phase of the ceasefire, which is intended to last 42 days, Israeli forces are withdrawing from densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire followed months of fruitless negotiations mediated by Qatar, the United States and Egypt.

Organs of brain dead man from Nalgonda donated under Jeevandan

Hyderabad: Relatives of a 62-year-old farmer Bantu Anjaiah from Manikyyalagudem, Kattangur (M), Nalgonda, who was declared as brain dead by the attending team of doctors, have decided to donate the organs of the deceased under State-run Jeevandan initiative for needy patients.

In the early hours of January 14, Bantu Anjaiah, while riding his bicycle collided with an unknown vehicle and received grievous injuries. He was immediately shifted to a hospital, where he was declared as brain dead on January 22. The deceased farmer's wife Rukamma gave consent to donate his liver, 2 kidneys, and 2 corneas, overall 5 organs, to the needy patients under Jeevandan organ donation program. On the occasion, the Jeevandan extended gratitude to the family members of the brain dead farmer who decided to donate his organs for a noble cause.



Firefighters bat down wildfires in Los Angeles; more than 50,000 under evacuation orders, warnings



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Firefighters fought to maintain the upper hand on a huge and rapidly moving wildfire that swept through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles and resulted in more than 50,000 people being put under evacuation orders or warnings. The Hughes Fire broke out late Wednesday morning (January 22, 2025) and in less than a day had charred nearly 41 sqkm (16 square miles) of trees and brush near Lake Castaic, a popular recreation area about 64 km (40 miles) from the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that are burning for a third week. Though the region was under a red flag warning for critical fire risk, winds were not as fast as they had been when those fires broke out, allowing for firefighting aircraft to dump tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant on the latest blaze. By Wednesday night (January 22, 2025), about 14% of the Hughes Fire had been contained. "A different situation today" "The situation that we're in today is very different from the situation we were in 16 days ago," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said. "This fire had a robust response today, and as you can see behind us, the responders are doing great work to try to contain this fire," Joe Tyler, director of Cal Fire, said at a Wednesday (January 22, 2025) evening press conference. "Certainly, we are not out of the woods yet."

Red flag warnings were extended through 10 a.m. on Friday (January 24, 2025) in Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Officials remained concerned that the Palisades and Eaton fires could break their containment lines as firefighters continue watching for hot spots. More than 31,000 people have been ordered to evacuate, and another 23,000 are under evacuation warnings, LA County Sheriff Robert Luna said. LA County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said the fire remains difficult to contain but firefighters are getting the upper hand. "Parts of Interstate 5 that had been closed will shortly be reopened," Mr. Luna said.

A 48km (30-mile) stretch of the major north-south artery had been closed for emergency vehicles and moving equipment. Crews on the ground and in water-dropping aircraft tried to prevent the wind-driven fire from moving across the interstate and toward Castaic. Mr. Marrone said that because winds were not as strong as they were two weeks ago, aircraft crews were able to drop tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant on the south side of the fire, where the flames were moving. "More than 4,000 firefighters were assigned to the fire," he said. Winds in the area were gusting at 42 mph (67 kph) in the afternoon. They had reached

as high as 65 mph (105 KPH) in some mountain pockets by Wednesday night, according David Roth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. Kayla Amara drove to Castaic's Stonegate neighborhood to collect items from the home of a friend who had rushed to pick up her daughter at preschool. As Amara was packing the car, she learned the fire had exploded in size and decided to hose down the property. "Other people are hosing down their houses, too. I hope there's a house here to return to," Amara said as police cars raced through the streets and flames engulfed trees on a hillside in the distance. Amara, a nurse who lives in nearby Valencia, said she's been on edge for weeks as major blazes devastated Southern California. "It's been stressful with those other fires, but now that this one is close to home it's just super stressful," she said. Los Angeles officials prepare for potential rain

To the south, Los Angeles officials began to prepare for potential rain even as some residents were allowed to return to the charred Pacific Palisades and Altadena areas. Gusty weather was expected to last through Thursday (January 23, 2025) and precipitation was possible starting Saturday, according to the National Weather Service. "Rains are in the forecast and the threat of mud and debris flow in our fire-impacted communities is real," Supervisor Kathryn Barger said during a Wednesday (January 22, 2025) morning news conference. Fire crews were filling sandbags for communities while county workers installed barriers and cleared drainage pipes and basins.

Red flag warnings for critical fire risk were extended through 10 a.m. Friday (January 24, 2025) in LA and Ventura counties. Officials remained concerned that the Palisades and Eaton fires could break their containment lines as firefighters continue watching for hot spots. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass warned that winds could carry ash and advised Angelenos to visit the city's website to learn how to protect themselves from toxic air during the latest Santa Ana wind event. LA County public health director Barbara Ferrer cautioned that the ash could contain heavy metals, arsenic and other harmful materials. "Even a brief exposure can potentially cause skin irritation and lead to more serious problems," Mr. Ferrer said Wednesday (January 22, 2025), asking people to wear protective gear while cleaning up. The low humidity, bone-dry vegetation and strong winds came as firefighters continued battling the Palisades and Eaton fires, which have killed at least 28 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out January 7. Containment of the Palisades Fire reached 70% and the Eaton Fire was at 95%. Mr. Luna said Wednesday (January 22, 2025) that his department was still investigating 22 active missing person reports in both fire zones. "All of those reported missing are adults," he said. The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is investigating the causes of the fires but has not released any findings. Several lawsuits have been filed by people who lost their homes in the Eaton Fire, alleging Southern California Edison's equipment sparked the blaze. On Tuesday (January 21, 2025), a judge overseeing one of the lawsuits ordered the utility to produce data from circuits in the area where the fire started.

Walmart announces strategic pilots with India-based startups



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

America's mega retail chain Walmart has announced strategic pilots with India-based startups to provide solutions for its U.S. supply chain and sourcing operations. "Tech innovation is what drives real-world solutions to move forward a globally resilient supply chain. By collaborating with global innovators, we're leveraging fresh ideas to build a more resilient supply network," said Kyle Carlyle, Vice President of Sourcing Innovation & Surety of Supply, at Walmart. The three startups selected for pilot programmes include Pune-based KBCols Sciences, Chennai-based GreenPod Labs, and Bengaluru-based Cropin, a media release said, adding that these companies participated in the Walmart Growth Summit last year. Solutions from each will help drive innovation at scale across Walmart's supply chains, the release said.

The pilot programmes will test solutions that augment the availability of better and more fresh products for Walmart's consumers in the U.S. and around the world, reduce product waste, and create sustainable alternatives for intermediate products used in manufacturing processes such as synthetic textile dyes to reduce environmental impact, the media release said. "As a people-led, tech-pow-

ered company, we are always looking for new ways to innovate. These three brands demonstrate our innovation goals across both the food and textile industry," Carlyle said. KBCols Sciences, based in Pune, India, manufactures non-GMO natural dyes by fermenting microbes from agricultural waste across India. These natural dyes can be used for various textiles, promoting more efficient manufacturing by reducing water and energy usage in the dyeing process. As a more sustainable alternative to synthetic dyes, this innovation paves the way for more regenerative methods in mass-produced clothing. The pilot will evaluate KBCol's dyes and their properties, testing them on woven materials and jersey cotton, Walmart said. GreenPod Labs, a Chennai-based company, produces small sachets filled with plant extracts that activate the natural defence mechanisms of fruits and vegetables, slowing down ripening and mimicking the state when it is still on the vine. This extends travel times in the supply chain, enabling produce to stay fresh longer.

"This innovation has the potential to unlock new sourcing geographies for Walmart, enable cost-effective shipping, and improve quality & freshness for customers. In collaboration with UC Davis, Walmart will pilot GreenPod sachets to evaluate their effectiveness," it said. Cropin, based in Bengaluru, offers an AI-driven AgTech platform that provides valuable insights into crop yields, enhancing productivity, optimising resource use, and ensuring consistent harvest quality. The pilot will test this technology on the produce supply chains to gain a deeper understanding of yield estimations, crop health, and seasonal transition timing. "Improved data accuracy can help Walmart source perishable commodities more effectively, potentially improving quality and availability for customers while reducing waste. This pilot launch is in collaboration with Walmart Global Tech's Sparkubate programme, empowering startup innovators to scale their ideas and tackle the most pressing challenges in retail," the company said.

What is the status of the Smart Cities Mission? | Explained

The story so far: Almost a decade has passed since the Indian government announced the concept of "smart cities" as the new lighthouses of urbanisation. The June 2015 announcement of 100 smart cities aimed to create models of urban development. However, these lighthouses of urbanity have now been relegated to the annals of India's urbanisation history.

What went wrong with smart cities?

The smart cities initiative was based on the Internet of Things (IoT), a framework that works well in advanced capitalist countries where basic utilities are already in place. In contrast, in India, where basic services are still out of reach for many, "smart cities" essentially mean providing fundamental amenities to residents. The plan included two key components — pan-city proposals which includes IT-enabled services like mobility and waste management; and Area-Based Development (ABD) which was restricted to specific zones within a city, focusing on retrofitting, redevelopment, and greenfield projects. Additionally, governance of these projects bypassed local governments, relying instead on Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) registered under the Companies Act, and managed like private companies. City councils were excluded, based on the assumption that private company-like structures could deliver better results.

What happened in Shimla?

Shimla was not included in the initial list of smart cities. However, after legal challenges posed by Shimla in the Himachal Pradesh High Court, Shimla was also granted the smart city tag. Shimla's smart city plan adhered to guidelines, including pan-city initiatives and ABD projects. The city had proposed a mix of retrofit and redevelopment projects within ABD. The retrofit project had targeted improving city wide pedestrian crossings, vehicular mobility on circular roads, and three transport corridors in addition to underground ducting and parking provision. Additional features were also added that included eco-adventure tourism, and water security through storm water and spring water management. A total of 244 acres of land was supposed to be retrofitted. Redevelopment projects focused



on Lower Bazar, Ganj Bazar, and Krishnanagar. The aim was to replace dilapidated, unsafe buildings with modern, resilient, earthquake-safe structures that could boost tourism. The total estimated investment for Shimla was ₹2,906 crore, with funding sources as follows — ₹897.80 crore from Public-Private Partnerships (PPP); ₹101.77 crore through municipal bonds; ₹205.57 crore from external borrowings; and ₹348.49 crore from State and Union government schemes, and the rest from other sources. However, as of now, according to the Smart City dashboard, only ₹707 crore (24% of the original budget) has been spent: ₹53 crore on completed projects and ₹654 crore on ongoing ones. The proposed PPP contribution has not yet materialised.

What has been the outcome?

None of the funds have been utilised for the redevelopment of the Lower Bazar, Middle Bazar, or Krishnanagar. Traffic congestion has worsened, and despite initial plans, non-motorised mobility remains neglected. Instead, funds were spent on flower pots worth ₹2 crore. Moreover, large, visually intrusive structures were erected for escalators that remain non-operational, obstructing Shimla's iconic valley views. As the Smart City Mission approaches its final chapter, the lessons are glaringly evident. Projects devoid of meaningful urban governance and public involvement, are bound to fail. With no ownership or accountability, the smart city vision has faded into oblivion.

South Korea's Yoon defends his martial law decree in his first public appearance since his arrest

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

South Korea's impeached President denied Tuesday (January 21, 2025) that he ordered the military to drag lawmakers out of the National Assembly to prevent them from voting to reject his martial law decree last month, as he appeared for the first time before the Constitutional Court that will determine his fate. Yoon Suk Yeol's presence at the court was his first public appearance since becoming South Korea's first sitting president to be detained over his short-lived declaration of martial law, which plunged the country into political turmoil.

After abruptly imposing martial law on Dec. 3, Mr. Yoon sent troops and police officers to encircle the National Assembly, but enough lawmakers managed to enter to vote unanimously to reject his decree, forcing Yoon's Cabinet to lift the measure early the following morning. Mr. Yoon, a conservative, has since argued that his dispatch of troops was not meant to block the assembly but instead was a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which has used its legislative majority to obstruct Yoon's agenda, undermine his budget bill and impeach some of his top officials. In his announcement of martial law, Mr. Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" that was bogging down government affairs, and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces." The commanders of military units sent to the assembly have disagreed with Mr. Yoon's stance. Kwak Jong-keun, commander of a special forces unit, told an assembly hearing that Yoon had called him directly and asked that his troops "quickly destroy the door and drag out the lawmakers who are inside." Kwak said he didn't carry out the order.

Asked by acting Constitutional Court chief justice Moon Hyungbae whether he ordered the commanders to pull out the lawmakers, Yoon replied that he didn't do so. Mr. Yoon said the lawmakers could have gathered somewhere later to overturn the decree. He also argued that there would have been a popular backlash if he had tried to physically pre-

vent an assembly vote. "If I had obstructed [the vote], I think I wouldn't have been able to handle the consequences," Mr. Yoon said. Asked by Moon about reports that he gave a memo on establishing an emergency legislative body to a top official before imposing martial law, Yoon said he didn't do so. Whether Yoon plotted to launch such a body would help explain his true intentions for martial law.

The assembly impeached Mr. Yoon on Dec. 14, suspending his presidential powers. The Constitutional Court has until June to determine whether to formally dismiss him as president or reinstate him. Observers say a court ruling is expected to come sooner. Separately, law enforcement authorities are investigating whether Yoon and others committed rebellion, abuse of power and other crimes in connection with the martial law decree. By law, the leader of a rebellion can face life in prison or the death penalty. Mr. Yoon earlier ignored several requests to appear for questioning and remained in his presidential residence in Seoul, though his defense minister, police chief and several top military commanders had already been arrested over their roles in the enforcement of martial law. He was eventually detained on Jan. 15 when authorities mobilized hundreds of police and investigators near his residence. While South Korean presidents have wide-ranging immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. Mr. Yoon's martial law decree has rattled South Korea's diplomatic activities and financial markets and hurt its international image as a vibrant democracy. Yoon's subsequent defiance and the opposition's push to oust him have also intensified South Korea's already-serious internal divide. After a Seoul district court on Sunday approved a formal arrest warrant to extend Yoon's detention, dozens of his supporters stormed the court building, destroying windows, doors and other property. They also attacked police officers with bricks, steel pipes and other objects. The violence left 17 police officers injured, and police said they detained 46 protesters.

Saudi crown prince says kingdom intends to invest \$600 billion in U.S. during call with Trump

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Saudi Arabia's crown prince said on Thursday (January 23, 2025) the kingdom wants to invest \$600 billion in the United States over the next four years, comments that came after President Donald Trump earlier put a price tag on returning to the kingdom as his first foreign trip. Mr. Trump's 2017 trip to Saudi Arabia opened a tradition of U.S. presidents first heading to the United Kingdom as their first trip abroad. It also underscored his administration's close ties to the rulers of the oil-rich Gulf states as his eponymous real estate company has pursued deals across the region as well.

The comments from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, reported early on Thursday (January 23, 2025) by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, came in a phone call with Trump. Saudi Arabia's dependence on U.S.-made weapons and defense systems "The crown prince affirmed the kingdom's intention to broaden its investments and trade with the United States over the next four years, in the amount of \$600 billion, and potentially beyond that," the report said.

The readout did not elaborate on where those investments and trade could be placed. The U.S. in recent years has increasingly pulled away from relying on Saudi oil exports, which once was the bedrock of their relationship for decades. Saudi sovereign wealth funds have taken large stakes in American businesses while also looking at sports as well. Saudi Arabia does, however, rely predominantly on U.S.-made weapons and defense systems, which could be a part of the investment. There was no immediate readout from the White House on the call. It also wasn't immediately clear if Trump's call with the crown prince was his first with a foreign leader since re-entering the White House. However, it was the first reported abroad. The crown prince, the de facto ruler of the oil-rich kingdom, also spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio early Thursday. On Monday after his inauguration, Mr. Trump talked about possibly heading to the kingdom again as his first foreign trip, like he did in 2017.

South Korea investigators transfer Yoon's case to prosecutors for indictment

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

South Korea's anti-corruption agency that is leading a criminal investigation into impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived declaration of martial law said on Thursday (January 23, 2025) it will transfer the case to the prosecutors' office for an indictment. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO), which does not have authority to prosecute the President, would request that prosecutors indict Mr. Yoon over allegations he was the ringleader of an insurrection, for abuse of his authority and obstructing others from exercising their rights, it said in a statement. Mr. Yoon has been incarcerated since last week as the investigators examined his attempt to impose martial law on December 3, a move that shocked the nation and beyond even though it was overturned within hours by Parliament. The CIO was launched in 2021 as an independent anti-graft agency to investigate high-ranking officials including the president and their family members and has led a joint team involving police and the Defence Ministry, while prosecutors carry out their own probe. But with limited



"The first foreign trip typically has been with the U.K. but ... I did it with Saudi Arabia last time because they agreed to buy \$450 billion worth of our products," Mr. Trump told journalists in the Oval Office. "If Saudi Arabia wanted to buy another \$450 billion or \$500 — we'll up it for all the inflation — I think I'd probably go." The 2017 visit to the kingdom set in motion a yearslong boycott of Qatar by four Arab nations, including the kingdom. Mr. Trump maintained close relations with Saudi Arabia, even after Prince Mohammed was implicated in the 2018 killing and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. The kingdom also had been talking for years with the Biden administration about a wider deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for U.S. defense protections and other support. The \$600 billion pledge, which dwarves the gross domestic product of many nations, also comes as the kingdom faces budgetary pressures of its own. Global oil prices remain depressed years after the height of the coronavirus pandemic, affecting the kingdom's revenues. Meanwhile, Prince Mohammed also wants to continue his \$500 billion project at NEOM, a new city in Saudi Arabia's western desert on the Red Sea. It also will need to build tens of billions of dollars' worth of new stadiums and infrastructure ahead of it hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup.



investigating and prosecuting rights, the CIO does not have authority to prosecute the President and must refer any case to the prosecutors' office for further action. Mr. Yoon's lawyers have repeatedly said the CIO has no authority to handle his case as the law stipulates a wide-ranging list of high-ranking officials and violations it can investigate, but has no mention of insurrection.

US sanctions' impact on Russian oil trade showing, Indian refiners seek more oil from Middle East



companies, among others involved in the Russian oil sector and trade. The sanctions were announced by the outgoing Joe Biden administration in the US at a time when Indian refiners were beginning to seek Russian oil cargoes for March delivery. These sanctions are the latest in the list of actions the Western powers have taken to curtail Russia's revenue from oil exports, which they claim is helping Moscow fund its war in Ukraine. According to the US Department of the Treasury, the latest action substantially increases the sanctions risks associated with the Russian oil trade. A large number of the now sanctioned vessels have been delivering oil to India and China. Indian refiners are now primarily looking at their traditional suppliers in West Asia to increase oil purchases and meet the shortfall in Russian oil, industry officials and trade sources indicated. They are looking to increase supplies under long-term contracts, apart from seeking additional cargoes from the spot market from Middle Eastern suppliers. They are also understood to be in the market for more oil from Africa and the US.

From being a marginal oil supplier to India prior to the war in Ukraine, Russia is now India's biggest supplier of crude, thanks to Moscow offering oil at significant discount after the West started shunning Russian oil. In 2024, Russian oil accounted for nearly 38 per cent of India's total oil imports, per tanker data.

Prior to the Russia-Ukraine war, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were India's top three source markets for crude oil. They are currently at the second, third, and fourth spot, respectively, in the list of India's top oil suppliers. India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its requirement. According to sources in the Indian government, the country's refiners will refuse oil deliveries on the sanctioned vessels, except for the cargoes booked before January 10, which can be delivered using these vessels till March 12. This wind-down period has been provided by the US to enable the existing contracts for Russian oil to be fulfilled. Although India itself is not part of the sanctions regime against Russia, like most other countries, New Delhi has generally followed a policy of not falling foul of US sanctions due to fear of secondary sanctions. While the India-Russia oil trade is unlikely to be seriously impacted during this wind-down period, beyond that, industry insiders expect a hit to Russian oil supplies to India in the near term.

Supercharge Your Office Efficiency with HP's LaserJet Tank MFP 2606sdw Duplex Printers

Whether running a business, working from home, or managing family tasks, the selection of an ideal printer is essential for a seamless workflow. A reliable printer not only helps you stay organized and save time but also reduces stress. A great printing partner helps you deliver high-quality prints, is cost-effective, and works seamlessly without interruption. HP leads in duplex laser printing, providing advanced solutions designed for both business and home use. With its extensive range of LaserJet high-speed duplex printers, HP meets diverse printing needs. From commercial print shops and corporate offices to government agencies and home environments, it is a top choice for professionals, students, and families. Let's explore how to find your ideal printing partner that offers reliability and cost-effectiveness, and why adopting the HP LaserJet Tank MFP 2606sdw Duplex Printers can be a smart choice for meeting all your needs:

Offering affordable printing with automatic duplexing, HP enables businesses to save on operational costs while improving efficiency. Delivering high-quality, economical prints, HP is empowering businesses to thrive and meet diverse needs, from printing product catalogues to flyers. HP LaserJet Tank MFP 2606sdw Duplex Printer delivers exceptional quality and productivity with minimal intervention without any hassle of flipping that paper while printing on both sides, all at a fraction of the cost. The economical printing cost and its capacity to deliver duplex printing offer businesses to generate revenue or make the workflow smoother. Reliable Performance to Boost Your Productivity: Businesses need printers that provide reliable performance and minimize downtime to ensure a seamless workflow and boost overall productivity for users to focus on their tasks without the frustration of dealing with constant paper jams, low toner warnings, or technical issues. It allows them to complete their work on time, whether it's printing reports, invoices, or assignments.

HP LaserJet Tank MFP 2606sdw Duplex Printer allows the users to reload toner in less than 15 seconds and come with 5,000 pages of pre-filled Original HP Toner which delivers up to five times more toner page yield for higher efficiency and is equipped with a built-in 50,000-page imaging drum, ensuring long-lasting, high-quality prints with minimal maintenance. Speed and Security in Every Print

HP LaserJet Tank MFP 2606sdw Duplex Printer helps you tackle everyday tasks easily. With fast two-sided printing, a 40-page Auto Document Feeder, and self-resetting Wi-Fi, it keeps your work moving smoothly. Along with this, the HP Smart App makes scanning simple, printing up to



22 pages per minute (A4) to keep you on schedule. It comes with built-in HP Wolf security and a 17% smaller design, offering both protection and space-saving, making it a great fit for busy spaces or shop owners who are too busy printing files, and documents for students/office requirements and others.

Keeping sustainability in mind, switching to duplex printing businesses can reduce paper waste, which has a direct positive impact on the environment. This printer significantly reduces waste by up to 90% through the innovative Toner Reload Kit and helps to minimize its carbon footprint, by having a cartridge-free design to enhance the environmental responsibility. HP LaserJet Tank MFP 2606sdw Duplex Printer come with an Energy Star certification and carry the EPEAT Silver designation. So, whether it's a school or any business looking to be more sustainable, the printer helps them make a difference while still delivering high-quality prints.

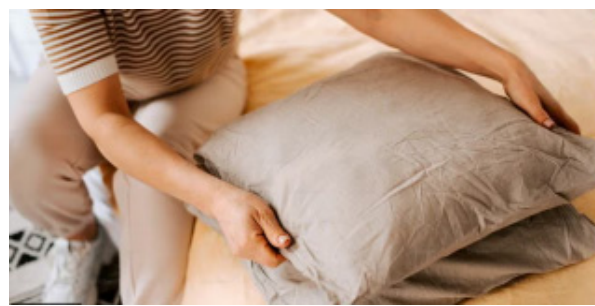
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Tech news outlet The Information first reported on an OpenAI data centre project called Stargate in March 2024, indicating that it's been in the works long before Trump announced it. Another company — Crusoe Energy Systems — announced in July it was building a large and "specially designed AI data center" at the northwest edge of Abilene, Texas, at a site run by energy technology company Lancium. Crusoe and Lancium said in a joint statement at the time that the project was "supported by a multibillion-dollar investment" but didn't disclose its backers. Abilene Mayor Weldon Hurt said construction began about nine months ago but "we didn't know it was going to be quite this big. We thought it was going to be about a third of this size." Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison said the Abilene project is the first of about 10 data centre buildings currently being built and that number could expand to 20. Missing from Trump's press conference on Jan 21 was Microsoft, which has long supported OpenAI with billions of dollars in investments and enabling its data centres to be used to build the models behind ChatGPT and other generative AI tools. Microsoft said this week it is also investing in the Stargate project but put out a statement noting that its OpenAI partnership will "evolve" in a way that enables OpenAI "to build additional capacity, primarily for research and training of models."

Hyderabad: The feud between the two tech billionaires Elon Musk and Sam Altman that started on OpenAI's board has reignited. This time the two are exchanging barbs over the Stargate artificial intelligence infrastructure project, backed by President Donald Trump. "The largest AI infrastructure project in history with an investment of \$500 billion" was announced by Trump on Jan 21. Sam Altman of OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, along with Oracle's Larry Ellison and SoftBank's Masayoshi Son have come together for this project. The initial investment will be \$100 billion. But the Tesla CEO, a close Trump adviser, questioned the value of the investment hours later. "They don't actually have the money," Musk wrote on his social media platform X. "SoftBank has well under \$10B secured. I have that on good authority." Altman responded to say Musk was "wrong, as you surely know" and inviting Musk to come visit the first site in Texas that is already under construction.

Musk and Sam Altman co-founded OpenAI as a non-profit in 2015 but difference cropped up after Musk exited OpenAI's board in 2018. Last year, Musk sued Altman and other OpenAI cofounders, accusing them of abandoning the startup's original mission to develop AI for the benefit of humanity. It claimed OpenAI's partnership with Microsoft "flipped the narrative" of the company's original mission.

This is what happens when you keep a pillow between your legs while sleeping



Using a pillow between your legs while sleeping can offer significant health benefits by promoting proper spinal alignment and reducing strain on the lower back and hips. But how? When you sleep on your side, the top leg tends to move forward and rest on the mattress, which can twist the pelvis and lower spine. "This misalignment can place undue pressure on the lumbar region, surrounding muscles, and connective tissues," said Dr RR Dutta, HOD, internal medicine, Paras Health, Gurugram.

He explained that placing a pillow between your legs supports the natural curvature of the spine by keeping your hips, pelvis, and knees adequately aligned. "This reduces muscle tension and prevents conditions like sciatica, where nerve compression in the lower back causes radiating pain down the legs. Additionally, this sleeping position improves joint health by reducing direct contact between the knees, minimising wear and tear on the cartilage. It can also enhance blood circulation in the lower body by relieving pres-

sure points and promoting better venous return," said Dr Dutta. While direct studies on this practice are limited, related research supports its benefits. "Studies in The Spine Journal and The Journal of Vascular Surgery highlight the importance of proper sleeping posture and leg elevation for spinal health and improved venous return," said Dr Deepak Kumar Maharana, senior consultant, Vascular and Endo Vascular Surgeon, Gleneagles Hospital, Lakdi Ka Pul, Hyderabad.

For individuals with chronic conditions such as arthritis, herniated discs, or hip pain, Dr Dutta mentioned that this simple adjustment can contribute to pain relief, improved posture, and better sleep quality. "Over time, such practices can help reduce the risk of chronic pain and musculoskeletal imbalances, making it a highly recommended practice for side sleepers and those seeking optimal spinal health," said Dr Dutta.

Why follow this practice?

Spinal alignment: The pillow keeps your hips, pelvis, and lower back aligned, reducing strain on muscles and joints. This prevents stiffness or pain and is especially helpful for lower back issues and sciatica. Reduced joint pressure: By separating your knees, the pillow minimises friction and pressure on the knees and ankles, benefiting individuals with arthritis or joint discomfort. Improved circulation: Elevating and aligning the legs enhances blood flow by preventing compression of lower body veins. "For varicose veins specifically, the pillow helps alleviate venous pressure, reduces swelling, and promotes better blood flow, easing discomfort during sleep," said Dr Maharana.

Neena Gupta says family wasn't allowed to carry 2.5-month-old granddaughter on flight as ticket mentioned 'child': 'Who the hell knows 'infant' in India?'

Actor Neena Gupta recently faced an inconvenience while travelling with family, including 2.5-month-old granddaughter Matarra. "We were travelling to Goa along with my granddaughter, Masaba's daughter, who is 2.5 months old. Nowadays, you need to book a ticket for little kids below two years. You don't get a seat but are charged a little with a proper ticket. You have to show documents like birth certificates, etc. On our way back, we flew a different airline — Air India. When we went to the counter, they told us, 'Sorry ma'am, aapki choti bacchi nahi ja sakti' (Your granddaughter can't travel). They said children below two years are called infants as per the system," recalled Neena, 65.

She also said that despite a ticket mentioning "child, age, along with the birth certificate," the family wasn't allowed to check in and was made to wait before being told to cancel the ticket and book a fresh one with "infant" mentioned. "What is the problem? Who the hell knows infant in India? We say baccha na— chota ya bada (we say baccha, whether the kid is an infant or older). How many people would know this differentiation?" she asked, adding that the video was made in public interest. "They made us wait for 15-20 minutes. We had to cancel the ticket and buy a new ticket with infant mentioned. That is when we could check in. This video is to just warn young mothers to be careful when travelling with a small kid which could be a problem," she said.

What do airline policies say?

According to Dhairyashil Vandekar, an aviation expert and analyst, as per rules, children below two years of age are treated as infants for air travel. "They are normally carried in the lap by the parents, and no separate seat is allotted to them as they need constant care and attention from the parent. The infants are charged a fixed amount — less than the adult fare or some discount, as a fee for travel,"

Chef Vikas Khanna opens up about living with clubfoot: 'He can't even walk properly, how is he ever going to run and make it in life'

Chef Vikas Khanna's journey to success is truly inspirational, especially considering the challenges he faced as a child. In an interview with CBS News, he mentioned, "I was born with a disability which is known as clubfoot. So, it means that your feet are inclined inward." This affected his ability to walk properly and raised questions about whether he will be able to achieve anything in his life. "People said, 'he can't even walk properly, how is he ever going to run and make it in life?' My mom said, 'Don't worry about him, he's here to fly.' I think it was her faith in me which kept me moving and walking forward, there was no other reason for me (sic)."

He added that his sister also played a big role in protecting him. "My sister became like the warrior. In school nobody would dare to bully me, but it was amazing that it was all the pain, what I had, for not being equal to everyone else... I put that energy into cooking with my grandmom, just to help her." Despite these early struggles, Khanna has become one of the most renowned chefs globally, proving that determination can overcome even the toughest obstacles. His story highlights how physical disabilities affect personal development and the role of medical interventions in supporting individuals through their challenges. Dr Narayan Swamy, director paediatrician at Athreya Hospital, tells indianexpress.com, "Clubfoot, or congenital talipes equinovarus (CTEV), is a deformity where the foot is twisted inward and downward, affecting approximately 1 in 1,000 live births globally. Early treatment is critical to correct the deformity and ensure normal mobility."

Primary treatment options According to Dr Swamy, some primary treatment options available for children born with clubfoot are:

Ponsetti Method: This is the most widely used and effective non-surgical treatment for clubfoot. It involves gentle manipulation of the foot followed by the application of a series of casts to gradually reposition the foot. Once the desired alignment is achieved, a small surgical procedure called tenotomy (to lengthen the Achilles tendon) may be performed, followed by bracing to maintain the correction. French Functional Method: This involves daily stretching, mobilisation, and taping of the foot. It requires significant parental involvement and frequent physiotherapy sessions but is another effective non-surgical option. Surgical Interventions: For severe or neglected cases, surgery may be required to correct the deformity. Procedures can in-



said Vandekar. According to Vandekar, airlines may provide infant bassinets free of cost, subject to availability. "They can be requested at the time of booking or when checking in at the airport," said Vandekar. Children above two and below 12 are given child tickets for air travel. "A separate seat is also allotted to children travelling on a child ticket. In some airlines, child tickets are discounted by 20-35 per cent of the adult fare while some do not offer any discount," said Vandekar. Vandekar noted that a child ticket cannot be used for infants on flights because an infant is a baby under two who typically travels on an adult's lap without a separate seat. "Child ticket is for a young person above two years of age and needs their seat on the flight. Hence, booking a child ticket for an infant would be incorrect and could lead to issues at check-in due to age etc and verification requirements. It is important for passengers to follow the rules in their interest," said Vandekar. It is thus crucial that passengers, when travelling with infants or children, are well informed of the regulations and check their travel documents to be in order. They must also ensure advance requests are made by them wherever necessary, said Vandekar.



In an interview with CBS News, he mentioned, "I was born with a disability which is known as clubfoot. So, it means that your feet are inclined inward." This affected his ability to walk properly and raised questions about whether he will be able to achieve anything in his life.

olve soft tissue release, tendon transfer, or even bone realignment. While effective, surgical methods may increase the risk of stiffness and arthritis in the long term. How do early interventions for clubfoot affect a child's physical and psychological development?

Timely correction not only prevents long-term disability but also positively impacts their overall development, says Dr Swamy. He further elaborates on how it can help:

Physical Development: Early treatment allows children to develop normal walking patterns, engage in physical activities, and build muscle strength. Delayed interventions, on the other hand, can result in limping, pain, and limited mobility. Psychological Development: Physical challenges in childhood can affect self-esteem and social interactions. By addressing the deformity early, children can grow up feeling confident in their abilities. Studies have shown that children treated for clubfoot early often adapt seamlessly and experience minimal social stigma. Parental Support: Early treatment also alleviates the emotional burden on parents, fostering a supportive environment that encourages the child's growth and well-being.

Allu Arjun film stands strong despite new releases, crosses Rs 1230 crore mark in India



Pushpa 2 box office collection day 49: Pushpa 2 is just 10 days away from completing its two months run in theatres. Having released on December 5, the film is still successfully running across the country with about 1000

shows. Despite the release of new movies like Baby John, Game Changer, Azaad, and Emergency, Pushpa 2 is going strong in theatres. On its 7th Sunday, Pushpa 2: The Rule recorded an earning of Rs 1.5 crore. The film earned Rs 65 lakh on its seventh Monday and Tuesday, respectively and on Wednesday, the movie collected Rs 50 lakh. Pushpa 2's grand total stands at Rs 1230.05 crore India net, according to estimates by Sacnilk.

The film, which is a massive hit in the Hindi belt, witnessed an occupancy of 9.22 percent on Wednesday with about 131 shows in Mumbai and 217 shows in Delhi. Films that released after Pushpa 2 like Game Changer and Baby John didn't have any impact on the Allu Arjun starrer. The movie, also starring Rashmika Mandanna and Fahadh Faasil in important roles, had earned Rs 1831 crore worldwide in 32 days, according to the last figures shared by the makers. Pushpa: The Rule is the sequel to the 2021 film Pushpa: The Rise. The film will have a third installment, according to the makers.

Sonu Nigam dismisses AR Rahman's songs in Yuvvraaj, calls the album 'bekaar': 'I won't be able to praise a bad song'

Singer Sonu Nigam and music composer AR Rahman have had a long and successful work relationship. In a recent interview, when Sonu was asked about their collaboration in the film Yuvvraaj, starring Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif, the singer dismissed the songs by saying that the entire album was "bekaar (bad)". In a chat with O2 India, Sonu was asked about the song "Shano Shano" from Yuvvraaj and he said, "That song is pretty average. It wasn't such a good song. Let's not talk about it. I won't be able to lie. I won't be able to praise a bad song." He was then asked about the other two songs that he recorded for the same album and he said, "Voh bhool jaiye aap. Iske saare gaane bekaar the. (Just forget about it. All the songs were bad.)"

Subhash Ghai, who directed Yuvvraaj, previously told ANI that AR Rahman's Oscar-winning song "Jai Ho" was originally made for his film but he did not use it. "That 'Jai Ho' song was made for Yuvvraaj. We recorded it but after recording, I felt that it won't work for us in that situation. Rahman gave the song to that (Slumdog Millionaire) film. It is his composition." Ghai also told The Times of India that the song was originally going to be filmed on Zayed Khan but felt that the number was "slightly too soft and subtle for the aggressive character." The song was sung by Sukhwinder Singh with lyrics by Gulzar and became an



international sensation after it appeared in Slumdog Millionaire. AR Rahman won two Oscars for his work on Slumdog Millionaire. He won Best Original Song for "Jai Ho" and Best Original Score at the 81st Academy Awards.

Blake Lively's team responds to Justin Baldoni's video from the sets of It Ends With Us: 'Every moment of this was improvised with no discussion or consent in advance'



On December 20, Blake Lively filed a complaint against her It Ends With Us co-star Justin Baldoni, claiming he invaded her privacy by "entering her makeup trailer uninvited while she was undressed," among other things. She then formally filed a lawsuit in New York federal court against Baldoni, his publicist, and Wayfarer Studios for "retaliating against her for reporting sexual harassment". The legal drama continued when Baldoni filed a lawsuit against Lively and her husband Ryan Reynolds for "falsely" accusing him of sexual harassment. Baldoni's team then released a 10-minute video from the film, claiming it was all part of a movie scene and was shot with mutual respect and professionalism.

The statement read: "Justin Baldoni and his lawyer

may hope that this latest stunt will get ahead of the damaging evidence against him, but the video itself is damning. Every frame of the released footage corroborates, to the letter, what Ms Lively described in Paragraph 48 of her complaint. The video shows Mr Baldoni repeatedly leaning in toward Ms Lively, attempting to kiss her, kissing her forehead, rubbing his face and mouth against her neck, flicking her lip with his thumb, caressing her, telling her how good she smells, and talking with her out of character."

It further read, "Every moment of this was improvised by Mr Baldoni with no discussion or consent in advance, and no intimacy coordinator present. They will recognise her attempts at levity to try to deflect the unwanted touching. No woman should have to take defensive measures to avoid being touched by their employer without their consent. This matter is in active litigation in federal court. Releasing this video to the media, rather than presenting it as evidence in court, is another example of an unethical attempt to manipulate the public. It is also a continuation of their harassment and retaliatory campaign." The video in question shows Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni dancing in a bar, where they are seen exchanging some conversation between shots. It Ends With Us, based on the 2016 novel by writer Colleen Hoover, stars Blake and Baldoni in the lead roles. It is currently streaming on Netflix.

Ravi Kishan says wife 'locked him up' in Bigg Boss because she thought he was 'going crazy'



Ravi Kishan first got national fame after he appeared in the first season of Bigg Boss as his catchphrase 'Zindagi jhandwa fir bhi ghamandwa' caught on. 19 years later, Ravi has now said that it was his wife's idea to 'lock him up' on the show because he was starting to get very arrogant about his success. In a recent interview, Ravi said his wife believed he was 'going crazy' so she decided to send him on the show.

Talking to YouTube channel Camera7, Ravi Kishan was asked if he ever got arrogant about his success and the actor recalled this phase of his life. "That's when my wife took me to Bigg Boss and locked me up there. She thought he is going crazy. At that time, I had too much money. I used to work in three shifts in those days. I was working in 17 films at the same time. I would sleep in my car and only sleep when I was travelling from one set to another. At one point, I was shooting for five films in the same studio," he said.

Ravi said that because he had spent so many years just looking for work, he wanted to make the most out of the opportunity that he was finally getting. "I didn't have work, didn't have money so when I got it, I didn't want to lose it," he said and added, "So somewhere, I was starting to get arrogant. That's when my wife locked me in Bigg Boss for three months. That's where everyone started liking me and they were not even eliminating me. When I got out of there, it felt like three years had passed." Ravi said that in Bigg Boss, one day feels like a week and since he had a lot of time and no distractions, he spent a lot of time with his thoughts. "I got some clarity there about love, relationships and I came out as a sorted person."

Why Malayalam cinema reported Rs 700 cr loss in 2024: Surging production costs, escalating actors' fees, emphasis on star power

While most film industries in the country faced a significant decline in box office collections in 2024 compared to the previous year — and those that grew saw only modest gains — Malayalam cinema witnessed exceptional growth of over 100 per cent, as per a recent Ormax report. The industry also doubled its box office share from 5 per cent in 2023 to 10 per cent in 2024, surpassing the Rs 1,000 crore GBOC milestone for the first time. Its footfalls, meanwhile, surged by 88 per cent, rising from 6.7 crore in 2023 to 12.6 crore in 2024. Despite these achievements, Malayalam cinema recorded losses amounting to Rs 650-700 crore in 2024, with only 26 out of the 204 films (199 new ones and five remastered old movies) which hit the

Dia Mirza's Thursday throwback features Shah Rukh Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Lara Dutta



It was a good year to be a beauty queen in 2000. That year, Dia Mirza, Priyanka Chopra and Lara Dutta were among the same. After winning the title of Miss Asia Pacific International (2000), Dia also won at Femina Miss Asia Pacific International 2000, while Lara Dutta won the Femina Miss India contest of 2000, went on to win the international pageant of Miss Universe while Priyanka Chopra became Miss World. Dia took to Instagram to share some rare photos from the 25 years old Femina Miss India Contest days and they were certainly a visual treat for fans. Dia also remembered how Shah Rukh Khan, Juhi Chawla, Malaika Arora and Rahul Khanna, among others, were a part of the journey. Dia Mirza shared three images where the first frame features Sushmita Sen, Aishwarya Rai, Priyanka Chopra, Lara Dutta, Yukta Mookhey, Diana Hayden and Dia from the Miss India contest in 2000. The next image featured Priyanka Chopra, Lara Dutta and Dia Mirza; Dia can be seen planting a kiss on Lara's cheeks.

Sharing the photos, Dia wrote, "Throwing it back to the beginning of a new millennium. 15th of January 2000. The Femina Miss India Contest was a truly grand spectacle! We had the most amazing women participating from across the country. Each of them has gone on to create their own unique story. We had the most iconic judges —

Shahrukh Khan, Juhi Chawla, Anjali Ela Menon, Carolina Harera, Marcus Swarovski, Pritish Nandy, Mohammed Azharuddin and Waheeda Rehman." Dia added, "The beautiful Malaika Arora and Rahul Khanna hosted the event. A spectacular set was designed by Omung Kumar. Hemant Trivedi and Nayanika Chatterjee mentored us and choreographed the show. Bharat And Doris Godambe did our hair and make up. Pradeep Guha and Satya Saran ensured each of us received the training necessary to help us shine in our individual light. All the previous winners descended on stage and made our winning moments even more special."

"The photoshoot with Shahrukh Khan right after our win happened backstage. What a moment of wonderment for a completely awestruck Hyderabad who grew up adoring him with all my heart! The cover shot is evidence, added Dia. The actor also shared the final questions posed to her. "If you were the policeman in the garden of Eden, who would punish for the first sin. Adam, Eve or the serpent?" Dia shared, "My answer was unusual, I have no idea how I even thought of it with a one minute timer ticking loudly as we framed our responses and wrote them down. I think I said, "I would not punish any of them. For if they had not sinned, we would not be on this Earth today." She also added, "What answer would you have given?" Concluding her post, the actor wrote, "Time flies. Each of us has evolved and found our own way of making sense of our time on Earth. We have lost some people who were a part of this life changing moment.. but their influence and impact has surely shaped our lives. It's been 25 years since this paradigm shift. And I am grateful for it. @larabhupathi @priyankachopra I love and admire you both. We went on to make history that year by winning all 3 international titles. #GirlsCan #ThursdayThrowback #Winners #WomenSupportingWomen #RiseUp." As soon as Dia shared this post, many reactions started to flood in the comment section. Sophie Choudry wrote, "Love this Dee... Remember reading about all 3 of you while sitting in London.. thinking what stunning, incredible women!! And having no idea what a special part of my life you and a few others from that time would be?????" Actor Sharleen Sethi wrote, "Such gorgeous and remarkable women????"

Akshay Kumar says history books needs to be corrected: 'We read about Akbar or Aurangzeb but not about our own heroes'

In the past few years, Akshay Kumar has starred in various biopics. It all began back in 2018 when he played Lakshmi Kant Chauhan in the movie Pad Man. He then starred in biopics like Gold (2018), Kesari (2019), Samrat Prithviraj (2022), Mission Raniganj (2023), Sarfira (2024), and now Sky Force, which is scheduled to release on January 24.

Sky Force too is based on true stories. It will follow the story of India's retaliatory attack on the Sargodha airbase of Pakistan in the Indo-Pakistani air war of 1965. The movie will star Akshay in the role of Wing Commander KO Ajuha (inspired by real-life hero OP Taneja) and debutant Veer Pahariya as T Vijaya (inspired by Ajjamada Boppayya Devayya). While some of these biopics worked for the actor, others flopped massively. Yet he continues to do such roles. Now, Akshay has shared why he chooses to do these films.

In an interview with CNN-News18 Showsha, Akshay Kumar shared he takes up films which should have ideally been part of school text books. He said, "There are so many things which are not there in the books. I intentionally play roles which are not a part of our books. I want to do this. They are all unknown heroes. People do not know anything about them because nobody goes deep. I go for these kinds of roles." The actor further complained about children's history books. He said, "A lot of things there need to be corrected. We read about Akbar or Aurangzeb but do not read



about our own heroes. They need to be mentioned. There are so many stories from the Army. So many people have been honoured with the Param Veer Chakra. I think history needs to be corrected and these kinds of leaders should be brought in and told to our generation." Sky Force, directed by Sandeep Kewani and Abhishek Anil Kapoor, also stars Sara Ali Khan and Nimrat Kaur. Stree 2 producer Dinesh Vijan is backing the film under his banner Maddock Films.

Namita Thapar accuses Shark Tank India pitchers of 'inflating numbers', calls them out for 'integrity issue'



Three founders from Maharashtra pitched their company Ezo on the latest episode of Shark Tank India, which featured Anupam Mittal, Namita Thapar, Ritesh Agarwal, Kunal Bahl and Aman Gupta on the panel of 'sharks'. While

they initially explained that their objective is to reduce skimming in very small businesses, it was eventually revealed that they have simply created a POS solution, where shopkeepers can keep a tab of their sales. Anupam was shocked to learn that they misrepresented the fundamental concept of their business, but this wasn't the only detail that would shock him.

The founders said that they sell their billing machine to shopkeepers, and then earn revenue through a subscription model. They also admitted that it hasn't been long enough for them to even test if people are renewing their subscriptions. They said that they are projecting revenue of Rs 30 crore this year, which left the 'sharks' wondering how. After some back and forth about financials, Anupam and the others discovered that the founders were employing an unethical form of accounting. Namita explained the difference between cash accounting and accrual accounting, and said, "Accrual accounting paints a more accurate picture of a business, and is always the preferred method."

Malayalam cinema's performance in 2024 as commendable, as it produced films that helped raise the profile of the industry nationally, Film Employees Federation of Kerala (FEFKA) general secretary and filmmaker B Unnikrishnan said, "However, our success rate still stands between 10-12%. The highest our industry has ever achieved is 14.5%, with the average mostly remaining around 14%." Mentioning that while theatres in Kerala were heavily dependent on films from other languages in 2022 and 2023, Film Exhibitors United Organisation of Kerala (FEUOK) president K Vijayakumar pointed out Malayalam cinema saved them this time. "By contrast, in 2024, most other-language films failed to make an impact in the Kerala market," the theatre owners' union chief said.

Indecisive Rohit Sharma falls for 3 on return to domestic cricket



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

India captain Rohit Sharma's return to domestic cricket after a decade lasted just 28 minutes, his half-hearted attempt at playing a pull shot resulting in a leading when facing Jammu and Kashmir fast bowler Umar Nazir. He had made just 3 off 19 balls when he was caught at mid-off by Paras Dogra. Earlier, Rohit played out a

maiden over from Nazir. Spectators at the MCA-BKC Ground welcomed Rohit with the slogan 'Mumbai ka Raja-Rohit Sharma' but in the middle the fan favourite in these parts of the world struggled as his feet didn't move well. Rohit's last appearance for the Mumbai team was in 2015 against Uttar Pradesh. He had a series of poor scores during India's tour of Australia; 3, 9, 10, 3, 6 runs, in four Test matches. He then decided to opt out for the last Test against Australia in Sydney.

Meanwhile, in-form Test opener Yashasvi Jaiswal innings lasted just eight balls and was trapped LBW by an incoming delivery from Auqib Nabi for just 4 runs. Test No.3 Shubman Gill too didn't make his outing for Punjab count as he scored just 11 runs against Karnataka with the team reeling at 14 for 4. The BCCI had reiterated last week that contracted Indian cricketers must play domestic cricket when not on national duty. Virat Kohli, also struggling to find form despite a century in the first Test in Australia, has been included in the Delhi squad for the game against Railways from January 30. Mumbai were in a spot of bother as captain Ajinkya Rahane was also back in the pavilion after Nazir bowled him for just 12.

'We could not cope': Pep Guardiola admits Manchester City's Champions League elimination a possibility after 4-2 loss to PSG

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Pep Guardiola Manchester City Manchester City's head coach Pep Guardiola reacts during a Champions League opening phase soccer match between Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City at the Parc des Princes in Paris. Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said that the club getting eliminated from the revamped league stage of the Champions League was very much a possibility after the English side threw away a 2-0 lead against Paris Saint Germain (PSG), only to lose 4-2. This puts City at 25th in the table which is an elimination spot with the teams ending the first stage of the league in the 25-36 positions set to be home without even a Europa spot. In order for City to sneak into the play-offs, they will need to win the final match against Club Brugge while also hoping that the other results go their way.

"We have the last chance at home to Brugge and hopefully we can qualify. It could happen, if we don't win we don't deserve it. It's always a difficult tie, this is the reality, we haven't got enough points and we have to accept it. We have to do what we have to do," Guardiola said. "We could not cope. When one team is better I have no problem accepting it. Now we prepare for Chelsea and the final match against Club Brugge. We need to beat them. This is what we have to do, survive and try to



move forward. I know the players are trying and they have doubts but when a team is better you have to accept it," he added. In the match, PSG clawed back from two goals down to stun Manchester City 4-2 in the Champions League on Wednesday and leave the English club outside the playoff places and in danger of elimination. Goals from PSG's Ousmane Dembele, Bradley Barcola, Joao Neves and Goncalo Ramos turned the match on its head after City had taken a 2-0 lead early in the six-goal second half. Substitute Jack Grealish and Erling Haaland struck in the 50th and 53rd minutes for City, but home fans braving torrential rain at Parc des Princes were treated to a brilliant comeback.

Manchester City sign Omar Marmoush from Eintracht Frankfurt in bid to revive fortunes

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Omar Marmoush transfer to Manchester City Marmoush was the second-highest goal-scorer in the German Bundesliga this season with 15 strikes from 17 matches, second only to Bayern Munich's Harry Kane. Defending English Premier League (EPL) champions Manchester City on Thursday announced the signing of Egypt forward Omar Marmoush from Eintracht Frankfurt for 70 million euros (\$73 million). The player is City's third signing in the January transfer window after they snapped up defenders Abdou Diallo from Lens and Vitor Reis from Palmeiras for a combined \$77 million. Marmoush was the second-highest goal-scorer in the German Bundesliga this season with 15 strikes from 17 matches, second only to Bayern Munich's Harry Kane. Frankfurt had signed Marmoush on a free transfer in 2023 from Wolfsburg, where he only scored five goals the season before. He can play in wide roles and has generally done so for Egypt's national team, but less successfully than in a central role. He has six goals and three assists in 35 games for his country. However, it's not clear where he would fit in the City starting XI with manager Pep Guardiola preferring to use just a single forward which Erling Haaland has already nailed on.

City, meanwhile, have been struggling for form this season with their latest meltdown coming against Paris Saint Germain on Thursday when they failed to capitalize on a 2



goal lead to lose the match 4-2. Jack Grealish and Erling Haaland scored for City while Ousmane Dembele, Bradley Barcola, Joao Neves and Goncalo Ramos were on the scoresheet for PSG. This latest debacle leaves City on the brink in the revamped league stage of Europe's top club tournament with the Guardiola-coached side languishing at 25th which is an elimination spot. They have a last match against Club Brugge, winning which might let them book a place in the play-offs if all other results go their way. Not only is City struggling in the Champions League, the team is in fifth place in its Premier League title defense — 12 points behind leader Liverpool having played one game more.

You need a backup pacer: Irfan Pathan says Mohammed Siraj should have been included in Champions Trophy squad

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Mohammed Siraj India's Mohammed Siraj appeals unsuccessfully for the wicket of Australia's Steve Smith during play on day two of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP) Former India player Irfan Pathan rued the lack of the team's pace bowling options in the Champions Trophy squad, saying that Mohammed Siraj could have been included in the team due to Jasprit Bumrah's fitness concerns.

"You need a backup pacer. Siraj could have been a good option. In Dubai, playing four spinners isn't viable. With Bumrah and Shami returning from injuries, it won't be easy for them straight away. A pacer like Siraj would have filled that gap. That said, we hope the selectors' choices perform well, and we should back them," he added. Bumrah had suffered a back niggle in the five-match Test series in Australia and could not bowl in the second innings of the fifth Test in Sydney. Pacer Mohammed Shami is expected to lead India's pace attack in the tournament and is currently with the Indian team playing the white ball series against England at home. However, the bowler who was heavily tipped to return to action for India in the 1st T20I against England at Kolkata on Wednesday, did not make it to the playing XI in his team's win against the Three Lions. "When you've been such a seasoned campaigner and are among India's top 10 bowlers, you understand your body's limits



Former India player Irfan Pathan rued the lack of the team's pace bowling options in the Champions Trophy squad, saying that Mohammed Siraj could have been included in the team due to Jasprit Bumrah's fitness concerns.

well," said Irfan about Shami's exclusion.

"Shami always provides honest feedback to the team management, and decisions are made through mutual communication. Recovery at the highest level takes time, especially after playing consistently. I believe he and the team management will make the right call at the right time," he added.

Ranji Trophy's umpiring quality under scanner after Maharashtra batter Ankit Bawne's controversial dismissal and ban for dissent



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

The umpiring quality in the Ranji Trophy has been under scrutiny after a recent incident with Maharashtra batter Ankit Bawne who has been handed a one-match ban for showing dissent. The decision has been communicated to the side ahead of their sixth round of Ranji Trophy fixture against Baroda. Bawne was involved in a controversial dismissal in the fifth round when he was given out to a catch by Services' player Shubam Rohilla at slip for a ball bumped before going into the hands. Bawne stood his ground and refused to walk back

as the game was halted for 15 minutes. Match referee Amit Sharma and Maharashtra coach Sulakshan Kulkarni had to intervene to calm down the matters. "Players are subject to fines and reprimand, what about proper assessment of umpires," Kulkarni had said as quoted by ESPNcricinfo. "Why do the same erring umpires continue to officiate and play spoilsport? When there are blunders of this nature, the anger is justified." Umpires are a concern

Speaking to The Indian Express former player Manoj Tiwary did flag the issue, "Umpiring for me is the main concern. With all due respect, but the standard of umpiring is poor in domestic cricket." "The BCCI should think about how they can improve umpiring. It is not about one or two seasons but I have been witnessing this for a number of years now. There are big mistakes but there are some childish mistakes as well," Tiwary added. "If a player has to go through dope tests, it should be extended to domestic umpires. Many times I have seen umpires walking out to the middle while still nursing a hangover. The umpires have looked sleepy. How can he function properly in such a situation? Tiwary questioned. "I asked, 'Sir kya liye tha kal raat mein?' (Sir, what did you drink last night?). The reply was: 'I prefer whisky on the rocks.'" And they laugh. BCCI should get the hearing and eyesight of every umpire checked before the start of each season," Tiwary further added.

Feyenoord fans banned from Champions League match in Lille due to violence fears

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Feyenoord FILE - Fans of Feyenoord light flares during the Europa League Group F soccer match between Sturm Graz and Feyenoord at the Merkur Arena in Graz, Austria. Feyenoord supporters have been banned by French authorities from traveling to Lille for next week's final Champions League group game between the two clubs. In an order published Wednesday, France's interior ministry said there was a "real and serious risk of confrontation" between fans of the two teams. Lille hosts Feyenoord on Jan. 29 at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy.

The French authorities said Feyenoord's travels are often marred by "public order disturbances due to the violent behavior of certain supporters or individuals claiming to be supporters of this team," and they cited several examples of fan violence. Justifying its decision, the ministry added that 3,600 fans — 500 of whom were identified as being dangerous — had planned to travel to Lille, although only 2,600 seats had been allocated to the Dutch club. "Of the 1,000 supporters who have nevertheless planned to travel without a stadium admission ticket, it is feared that some will try to force their way into the stadium," it said. Later Wednesday, Feyenoord's match against Bayern Munich was stopped for seven minutes after kickoff because of poor visibility from clouds of smoke after fans lit flares and



fireworks behind one of the goals. In May 2022, there were violent clashes in France between Marseille and Feyenoord fans outside the Stade Velodrome stadium before the return leg of their Europa Conference League semifinal. One video showed a Marseille supporter apparently unconscious on the ground as he was helped by fellow fans, while another showed two groups charging at each other shortly before kickoff just outside the stadium. Around 400 Feyenoord hooligans were present around the city's seaport and there were also clashes the night before the game and after the match. There were also violent clashes in Lille city center when the club played Bulgarian side Levski Sofia in the Europa League in 2010.

Arshdeep Singh surpasses Yuzvendra Chahal to become India's leading wicket-taker in T20Is

GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Indian left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh has become a reliable all-phase bowler for India in T20 cricket. He can swing and seam the new ball both against the left-handers and right-handers, possesses the ability to deliver some lethal yorkers and tricky slower ones in the end, and also with some clever tactics and other wily variations he possesses the skills to create the inroads through middle overs. In the first T20I against England in Kolkata, Arshdeep's second wicket of Ben Duckett helped him go past Yuzvendra Chahal (96 wickets) to become the highest wicket-taker for India in T20Is. Highest wicket-takers for India. The penultimate over was delivered by him, and he drastically at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in June, Arshdeep was a strong pillar of the bowling line-up, and aided immensely in India's Final win raised South Africa's run rate by conced-



ing just four runs, leaving South Africa with 16 runs to win. He also got the early wicket of Aiden Markram, and removed a well-set Quinton de Kock.

Lewis Hamilton says driving a Ferrari F1 car for first time was 'exciting and special'



GNS News Agency, Jan 28

Hamilton British driver Lewis Hamilton waves to fans as he steers a Ferrari Formula One SF-23 at the Ferrari private test track, in Fiorano Modenese, Italy. Lewis Hamilton drove a Ferrari Formula 1 car for the first time Wednesday and described it as "one of the best feelings of my life." Hamilton was behind the wheel of a 2023-specification Ferrari SF-23 bearing his racing number, 44, at the team's Fiorano test track and wore a new helmet design in yellow with a prominent Prancing Horse logo. The 40-year-old British driver set out for his first lap at 9:16 a.m. local time in light fog and twice waved to a crowd of around 1,000 spectators, who had gathered on a nearby bridge despite the cold and wet weather.

"When I started the car up and drove through that garage door, I had the biggest smile on my face," Hamilton said of his first drive in a Ferrari since joining the Italian team for the 2025 season. "It reminded me of the very first time I tested a Formula 1 car, it was such an exciting and special moment, and here I am, almost 20 years later, feeling those emotions all over again." Part-way through the day, Hamilton headed over to fans who had waited for hours

in the wet conditions since early morning for a glimpse of him behind the wheel. Wearing a jacket in Ferrari red, he waved, gave a thumbs-up gesture and put a hand to his heart. Hamilton's mother was among his family members on hand for the occasion.

"I've been lucky enough to have many firsts in my career, from the first test to the first race, podium, win and championship, so I wasn't sure how many more firsts I had but driving a Scuderia Ferrari HP car for the first time this morning, was one of the best feelings of my life," Hamilton said. Hamilton has shaken up F1 with his move to Ferrari after 12 years with Mercedes, where he won six of his seven world titles. There was excitement Wednesday from one of Italy's biggest sports stars, too. After reaching the semifinals at the Australian Open, top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner was asked by an Italian reporter if he had seen anything on social media about Hamilton's Ferrari debut.

"It's still pretty strange to see him in red," Sinner said, "but it'll be a great season." Hamilton, who arrived Monday at Ferrari's Maranello headquarters for his first day at work with the new team, has said he's fulfilling a childhood dream. "I already knew from the outside how passionate the Ferrari family is, from everyone in the team to the tifosi (fans)," he said. "But to now witness it firsthand as a Ferrari driver has been awe-inspiring. That passion runs through their veins and you can't help but be energized by it." F1 tightly restricts teams from testing current-specification cars but the rules are more loose for older cars like the SF-23 that Hamilton drove Wednesday. The F1 regulations for 2025 allow Hamilton to drive up to 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) over four days in older F1 cars under the "testing of previous cars" rule. The SF-23 is the most recent Ferrari that's eligible. Pre-season testing for the new season's cars is from Feb. 26 through 28 in Bahrain.