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Cops raid shops selling Chinese manja in Hyderabad, book cases

Hyderabad: In the last 20 days, Mangalhat police raided several shops and booked 18 cases against 22 persons for selling Chinese manja. A total of 1,094 bobbins which were made with synthetic material were also seized. The police have conducted special drives on the shops selling Chinese manja and booked cases. The kite sellers were warned on being made directly responsible and cases booked against them if anyone gets injured with Chinese manja.

"All the field officers went heavily on kite sellers who were selling Chinese manja and booked cases. We also held a coordination meeting with the local residents and issued an advisory," said a senior police official from the South-West zone.

Manu Bhaker, Gukesh among four athletes to get Khel Ratna award



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

The quartet of shooter Manu Bhaker, World Chess Champion D. Gukesh, men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and para-athlete Praveen Kumar were on Thursday (January 2, 2025) named recipients of this year's Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award — the country's highest sporting honour.

22-year-old Manu Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events in August. In the same Games, Harmanpreet led the Indian hockey team

to its second consecutive bronze medal. 18-year-old Gukesh, on the other hand, became the youngest ever World champion while also helping the Indian team win a historic gold in the Chess Olympiad last year. 18-year-old Gukesh became the youngest ever World Chess Champion. The fourth recipient will be para high-jumper Praveen, who was crowned the T64 champion in the Paris Paralympics. The T64 classification is for athletes who have one or both legs missing below the knee and rely on a prosthetic leg for running. "The awardees will receive their awards from the President of India at a specially organised function at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 17th January, 2025 [Friday] at 1100 hours," the Sports Ministry said in a press release.

Bharat Jodo Yatra to public outreach initiatives: Rahul's newsletter sums up his 2024 exploits

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday released a newsletter, in an apparent attempt to maximise his reach to the people and impress upon them with his exploits in 2024. The newsletter summarises Rahul's efforts as well as accomplishments in 2024, his endeavours in connecting with the electorate and also how he cornered the Centre on matters of public issues. Sharing the newsletter, the Congress MP wrote, "Know my views on my speech on the Constitution and Manusmriti in Parliament and the developments related to it. Read along about my recent visit to the vegetable market and other activities."

The eight-page newsletter showcases his heartfelt tribute to former Prime Minister Mammohan Singh, his arguments and assertions on the "battle between Manusmriti and Constitution" and also a recollection of the memorable moments from his Bharat Jodo Yatra. "In 2024, Rahul Gandhi visited 25 states undertaking a yatra of over 6,600 km. He held more than 260 group interactions, addressed more than 200 public rallies and attended over 40 party events. He gave 15 speeches in Parliament and addressed 17 press conferences," it said. It also shows the Congress MP visiting people during times of crisis including soaring inflation, expressing solidarity with families of the Hathras rape victim and many others. Rahul's address during the Congress' Belgaum session in Karnataka's Belagavi has also been documented.

A special focus has been laid on his Bharat Jodo Yatra,



which the party credits for its spectacular performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Congress party which had just 52 MPs earlier, saw its numbers swelling to almost double at 99 in the 2024 elections. The newsletter also has details of his Parliament speech, including his inaugural address as LoP, where he hit out at BJP over its "politics of hatred" while championing the cause of non-violence. The Congress MP has also urged the readers and netizens to subscribe to his WhatsApp channel. Notably, the political space in today's world is getting increasingly driven by social media and digital communication and every party including the national ones as well as regional satraps are exploiting it to accentuate their appeal and amplify their reach to the masses.

BRS MLA KP Vivekananda criticises CM Revanth Reddy over policy u-turns



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Hyderabad: BRS MLA KP Vivekananda criticised Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for failing to follow the developmental roadmap established by former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao, particularly in the expansion of Hyderabad Metro Rail and other key sectors. He charged Revanth Reddy with pursuing regressive policies and frequent u-turns over his decisions, hindering Telangana's progress. Speaking during a press conference at Telangana Bhavan on Thursday,

Vivekananda stated that the Congress government's decision to extend the Metro corridor to Medchal and Shamirpet vindicates the groundwork laid by the Chandrashekhara Rao government. He questioned the delay in starting Metro expansion projects and demanded clarity on timelines. "It is not correct to claim that work will begin only with assistance from the Centre. If the government fails to start these projects, the BRS will launch a fight on behalf of the people," he said. Vivekananda said the BRS government had approved the third phase of the Hyderabad Metro Rail for expansion up to Medchal and Shamirpet before the last Assembly elections, including appointing a consultant. However, Revanth Reddy canceled these projects upon taking power, in an attempt to erase the progress achieved during Chandrashekhara Rao's tenure. "The cancellation of the Raidurg-Shamshabad Metro route is a blow to the nearly 10 lakh IT employees who reside on this corridor," he said. The MLA criticised the lack of progress on the elevated corridor project from Paradise junction to Military Dairy Farm road, for which Revanth Reddy laid the foundation about a year ago. "Revanth's decisions are driven by ego, not development. Telangana would have been on a path of progress had K Chandrashekhara Rao's initiatives been continued. Revanth Reddy is cancelling Chandrashekhara Rao's projects only to take a u-turn and resume them to publicise them as his initiatives," he added.

Unauthorised manufacture of drugs detected in Sangareddy, two crore worth medicines seized

Hyderabad: The Telangana State Drugs Control Administration (DCA) raided a pharmaceutical unit Akron Formulations India in Bollaram locality of Sangareddy and found that the unit was manufacturing drugs without any permission. The authorities have seized such drugs whose market value is estimated to be around Rs. 2 crore.

DCA director general VB Kamalasan Reddy said the raiding teams found that the unit was manufacturing ointments and creams, including Asperflex Cream Topical Analgesic Cream, Medpura and different varieties of Ammonium lactate cream and lotions manufactured for Akron Pharma, Fairfield, New Jersey, United States.

PM Modi to inaugurate DU's East Campus, other projects in Delhi tomorrow

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

New Delhi: Apart from inaugurating the East Campus of Delhi University, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will gift projects worth thousands of crores of rupees to the national capital on Friday, said Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva. Sachdeva said that PM Modi will lay the foundation stone for the West Delhi Campus of Delhi University at Dwarka as well as for a new campus at Roshanpura, Najafgarh, and allot 1,675 flats to residents of slum areas in Ashok Vihar. The World Trade Centre at Narouji Nagar will also be inaugurated by PM Modi, who will also lay the foundation stone for the new CBSE Office Complex in Sector 23, Dwarka.

Sachdeva added that in the fourth phase of the Metro, the PM will lay the foundation stone for the Rithala-Narela-Kundli corridor and an extension of the Magenta Line between Janakpuri and Krishna Park. PM Modi will also lay the foundation for the Central Ayurvedic Research Institute building in Rohini and unveil a project to alleviate traffic congestion, with a focus on the New Ashok Nagar to Sahibabad route of the Namoo Bharat train. Sachdeva said India has made unprecedented progress in the last 10 years, and today the entire world acknowledges and salutes the leadership of PM Modi.

He highlighted that the Central government has es-



established a network of expressways in Delhi, including the Urban Extension Road (UER) 2, Dwarka Expressway, Meerut Expressway, Eastern-Western Peripheral Expressway, and the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. He also remarked that over 2 lakh people visited Kartavya Path on the very first day of the New Year Day, a testimony to the city's dynamic infrastructure. The Delhi BJP President pointed out key infrastructural landmarks and achievements under PM Modi are the PM Museum, Yashobhooni, Bharat Mandapam (which hosted the successful G20 Summit), Pragati Maidan Tunnel, and the grand Dr. Ambedkar National Memorial constructed on Alipur Road.

Mamata accuses BSF of allowing infiltration to destabilize Bengal; border guards reject claims

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday (January 2, 2025) accused the Border Security Force (BSF) of facilitating infiltration from Bangladesh as part of a central government "blueprint" to destabilize the state, a charge the BSF denied, asserting it diligently guards the country's boundary. Speaking at an administrative review meeting at the state secretariat, Ms. Banerjee alleged that the BSF was allowing "infiltrators" to enter through areas like Islampur, Sitai, and Chopra. "We have information that the BSF is letting infiltrators enter India through various border areas. This is a deliberate attempt to destabilize the state. There is a deep-rooted conspiracy involving the central government," she said. Ms. Banerjee said she could sense a "blueprint of the Centre" behind this attitude of the BSF. "Goons are entering India. I want peace on both sides of the border. We have a good relationship with neighbouring Bangladesh," she said.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo further alleged that women were being tortured by the BSF. "They (BSF) torture women, but why haven't you protested?" she asked officials present at the meeting. Ms. Banerjee emphasised that border security was not the responsibility of the State. "The guarding of borders is not in our hands. It's the BSF's duty. The Trinamool Congress doesn't guard the border. When people enter, where are they going? The DMs have information on where they are going," she said. A senior BSF official in the eastern region dismissed the allegations, emphasising that the border guarding force was performing its duties with utmost sincerity.

"The BSF has maintained a 24/7 vigil along the border. We are diligently performing our responsibilities to ensure the safety and security of the borders," the official told PTI on condition of anonymity. Accusing the Centre of blaming the TMC unfairly for the infiltration issue, Ms. Banerjee said, "If someone thinks to destabilize the state and blame



it on the Trinamool Congress, I will say it is not the TMC's fault, as border areas are controlled by the BSF. Some media channels are spreading this misinformation for TRPs." The CM also raised concerns about the cessation of information sharing related to international arrivals. "Granting visas is not in the state's jurisdiction; it is handled by the central government. We used to get the list of people taking flights to come here, but now that has been stopped. So, we don't know who is entering Bengal through international arrivals," she stated. BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar called Ms. Banerjee's claims baseless and accused her of attempting to shield her party's shortcomings.

"The Chief Minister has reached the height of delusion. Despite not providing land for border outposts, she blames the BSF and even her own administration's officials for infiltration. Her accusations are aimed at deflecting from her party's failures," Mr. Majumdar said in a post on X. Bangladesh-style attacks on Hindus are occurring in several parts of West Bengal. This time a group of miscreants attacked and looted Hindus without provocation at Babhania village in Lohapunji under Dalkhola Police Station in Uttar Dinajpur district.

Lalu Yadav signals willingness to reunite with Nitish Kumar; Tejashwi differs



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Patna: The political atmosphere in Bihar has intensified following RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav expressing willingness to reconcile with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who was a part of the mahagathbandhan at one time. When asked if his door was open for the Bihar Chief Minister, Lalu responded on

Wednesday night, "My door is always open. Nitish Kumar should also keep his door open."

On whether he would forgive Nitish Kumar if he returned, Lalu stated, "Forgiving has been my job. If he comes back, I will forgive him without any problem. Everyone will work together." These comments hint at the possibility of a re-

jected the idea of aligning with Nitish Kumar. Hours after Wednesday night, Tejashwi Yadav reiterated his earlier stance during the swearing-in ceremony of Bihar's new Governor on Thursday.

Tejashwi had earlier said, "Our door is closed for Nitish Kumar forever. We do not need him." Tejashwi added, "There is nothing left in Nitish now. The people of Bihar trust me, and this time we will form the government on our own." This indicates Tejashwi's confidence in his growing political clout and his belief that the RJD no longer requires Nitish Kumar's support. The contrasting views of Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav highlight a divide within the RJD. While Lalu, a seasoned politician, sees the strategic importance of Nitish Kumar, Tejashwi appears determined to carve out his own path, believing that the people's trust in him is sufficient to win the elections.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

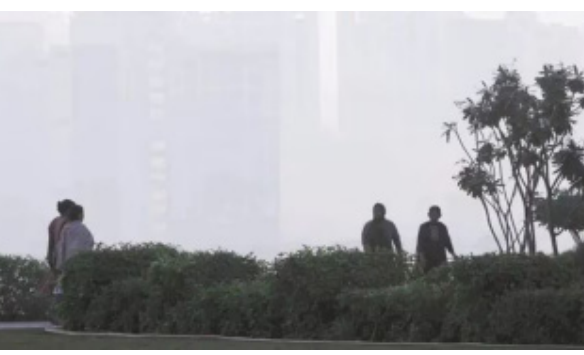
Apology not enough

MANIPUR Chief Minister N Biren Singh's apology for the ethnic violence that has ravaged the state since May 2023 is too little, too late. Over 250 lives have been lost, thousands displaced and women brutalised in unimaginable ways. Singh's acknowledgment of the tragedy cannot erase his culpability; his inaction and partisanship make him a war criminal. Under Singh's watch, Manipur spilled into chaos, with armed militias terrorising communities. His failure to control the militias, prevent the widespread use of looted weapons and ensure the safety of all communities makes his apology appear more like a strategic ploy than a sincere effort to heal a fractured society. Women have been weaponised in this conflict. The horrifying sexual violence against Kuki-Zomi women, such as the ordeal of Reina Haokip, highlights the war waged on women's bodies. The victims carry psychological scars that no apology can heal.

The statistics he presented — declining incidents of firing and arrests made — are cold comfort to those who have lost loved ones or seen their homes burned. The wounds inflicted by drone bombings, mob attacks and communal targeting cannot be erased by words alone. The displacement of over 50,000 people is a testament to the state's inability to provide security and dignity to its citizens.

Allegations of bias against the Kuki-Zo community have further eroded any trust in his leadership. His apology is a transparent attempt to deflect blame rather than take responsibility. Singh's tenure has been marked by complicity and incompetence, rendering him incapable of fostering peace or reconciliation. Calls for his resignation are justified; accountability is non-negotiable. Manipur needs a leadership overhaul and a political solution grounded in justice, equality and genuine dialogue. Singh must face the consequences of his failures.

Mumbai sees light drizzle as air quality worsens



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Mumbai witnesses drizzle as air quality worsens. According to Kamble, the city is likely to see yet another dip in temperatures during the New Year Eve amid forecasts of a western disturbance. Certain pockets of Mumbai experienced unseasonal showers on Saturday, while the minimum temperatures saw a significant spike to 21 degree Celsius. However, the city continued to grapple with a burgeoning air quality index (AQI) with the overall air quality soaring to 170 (moderate) on Saturday morning. The worst air quality was logged in Worli, which at 308, languished under 'very poor' category.

At least seven stations recorded 'poor' air quality as the AQI breached the 200-mark during the morning hours. After Worli, the worst AQI was logged in Mazgaon (254), followed by Borivali East (252), Colaba (246) and Malad West (219). In the intervening night of Friday and Saturday, several pockets of South Mumbai as well as suburbs were taken by surprise as light drizzle swept the city.

Data furnished by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) showed that while the Santacruz observatory recorded a minimum temperature of 21 degrees, which is nearly 4 degrees above the normal, the Colaba coastal station registered 21.6 degrees on the mercury scales. Sunil Kamble, director of IMD Mumbai, told The Indian Express that the showers, albeit short-lived, were a result of the interaction of wind phenomenon.

"Owing to the interaction of winds in the upper air, we had already issued yellow and orange alerts in several districts of the state. It was this phenomenon that brought Mumbai showers during the night. However, no more rain is on cards for the city. Meanwhile, in the other regions of the state too, we have issued a yellow alert for the day (Saturday), after which the rain will subside and stop subsequently," explained Kamble. According to Kamble, the city is likely to see yet another dip in temperatures during the New Year Eve amid forecasts of a western disturbance. "Once the western disturbance passes, we will receive northerly winds, which are likely to bring down the temperatures in the city around December 31st and January 1." Data furnished by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reflected that none of the city's stations recorded 'poor' or 'satisfactory' air, which encompasses the 0-100 category. PM2.5 was amongst the most prominent pollutants across the city.

Hyderabad cops arrest three-member robbery gang, booty seized

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Hyderabad: The Kulsumpura police on Saturday arrested a three-member robbery gang involved in about half-a-dozen cases of robberies and chain snatchings across the city. Police officials seized a country made pistol, two live rounds, two knives, one knuckle puncher, 11 mobile phones and two bikes from their possession. The arrested were identified as Syed Abdul Hassan, an auto-rickshaw driver from Rajendranagar, Syed Taleb Ali, a painter from Yakutpura, and Saif Ali Mirza, a contract worker from electricity board from Chintalmet. The gang was previously involved in cases registered at Charminar, Bahadurpura, Rajendranagar, Falaknuma, SR Nagar, Mahankali, Punjagutta, Humayun Nagar, Jeedimetla, Jagadgirigutta, Gachibowli, Mirchowk, Balanagar, Mirchowk, Malkajigiri and Nallakunta. According to the police officials, the gang targeted pedestrians and motorists on secluded roads and robbed them by threatening with lethal weapons. They dispose the stolen material and share the money among themselves.

'Banglar Bari' scheme: West Bengal to introduce toll-free number to prevent corruption, favouritism



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

West Bengal Government will launch a toll-free number next week for the beneficiaries of the 'Banglar Bari' scheme that was recently inaugurated by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to provide houses for the poor. According to government sources, the toll free number - 18008899451 - is meant for the beneficiaries to lodge complaints or any grievances related to the scheme so that 'Banglar Bari' scheme is free from favouritism and corruption. The government has decided to launch this app as the state government has a 'zero tolerance' policy to any form of corruption, said a source. Under the scheme, each eligible family will get ₹1.20 lakh to construct a house, of which ₹60,000 will be disbursed as the first instalment. However, benefi-

ciaries in some areas of Jangalmahal and Darjeeling Hills will get 1.30 lakh. The state government launched the 'Banglar Bari' scheme on December 17 after the Centre stopped funds to the West Bengal government under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). Sources stated that the Panchayat Department has given instructions that block-level officers will be monitoring the process of the houses under the 'Banglar Bari' scheme. Further, block level officers will be visiting each house under the scheme for physical inspection. In the first phase more than 8 lakh beneficiaries out of 12 lakh have received the first instalment from the state government. The remaining will receive the instalments by the coming week, the source said. Another 18 lakh beneficiaries will be given 'Banglar Bari' scheme's benefit in 2025, it said. The total expenditure of the scheme will be approximately of Rs 14,773 crore and the government had prepared a list of 28 lakh eligible beneficiaries.

Previously, the Centre used to provide 60 per cent of the funds under the PMAY, while the state shared 40 per cent. It stopped releasing funds to the state in 2022 following allegations of financial irregularities. It was alleged that the scheme was only being provided to those close to the ruling party. Earlier this year, protests broke out in Purulia, West Burdwan, Hooghly, South 24 Parganas and Birbhum districts over allegations that the names of those who were close to the ruling party were found in the list of beneficiaries while those of the deserving people were dropped.

Delhi L-G V K Saxena orders inquiry against Mahila Samman scheme; 'ready to go back to prison, won't let schemes get stalled' declares Kejriwal

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena has ordered a high-level inquiry into the AAP Delhi government's proposed Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana, officials from his secretariat said Saturday - a move which the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleged was aimed at preventing its implementation in the capital at the BJP and Union Home Minister Amit Shah's behest. Reacting to the development, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, in a post on X, alleged that the BJP was "freaked out" following the announcement of the scheme in addition to the proposed Sanjeevani Yojana since it had realised that it was "losing the polls". Based on a representation from former East Delhi Congress MP and the party's proposed opponent against former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi Assembly constituency, Sandeep Dikshit, Saxena also issued instructions to investigate the alleged presence of intelligence officials from Punjab outside Dikshit's residence with the objective of "intimidating" him and the alleged transfer of cash, in crores, from various parts of Punjab to Delhi with the Delhi Assembly elections around the corner.

"This has reference to representation dated 25.12.2024 received from Sh. Sandeep Dikshit... he has alleged that the Chief Minister of Delhi and Sh Arvind Kejriwal have been announcing that Delhi Government is going to give every female in Delhi (above the age of 18 years) an amount of Rs 1000 per month... if AAP is elected back in 2025 Vidhan Sabha elections, they will raise the amount to Rs 2100..." the communication from Saxena to Chief Secretary Dharmendra and Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora stated. "...Dikshit has requested that in view of the clarification submitted by the Women and Child Development (WCD) department... it is clear that this is a fraud being perpetrated by the AAP and has requested to institute a high-level inquiry in the matter," it added.

Noting that the Delhi government's WCD department had clarified that it will launch a digital portal for the collection of forms as and when the scheme is notified and advised people not to fill forms being given by "unauthorised" persons, the L-G asked the chief secretary to get an inquiry conducted in the matter, especially in regard to the collection of details, through the divisional commissioner. The police commissioner was asked to direct field officers to take action as per law against those who are "breaching the privacy of gullible citizens" by collecting their personal details "in garb of giving benefits" and against private individuals organising camps for "fraudulent enrolment" in government schemes. Saxena also asked the chief secretary to bring the matter to the knowledge of the Election Commission of India given that such "canvassing is happening on the eve of elections". The L-G also flagged "serious allegations that intelligence personnel from Punjab Government" have been "visiting" Dikshit's house and their vehicles are often found parked outside his residence "at the behest of Sh. Arvind Kejriwal to curb the democratic process and free and fair election." Noting that the allegations were "grave" and with the impending elections around the corner, the L-G said it was imperative that prospective



candidates were "not intimidated and discouraged from participating in the democratic process". Ordering an inquiry into the matter, the L-G asked for a comprehensive report from the Delhi Police commissioner within three days.

In regard to Dikshit's allegations that the AAP government in Punjab was "transferring cash (in crores) from various locations in Punjab to Delhi", the L-G requested DGP Punjab and the governments of Haryana and Rajasthan to be vigilant about "private cars from Punjab with Punjab Police escorts" being sent to Delhi through their states. "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has noted that the elections to Delhi Legislative Assembly are likely to be conducted shortly and (the possibility of using such illegal money in the ensuing election to influence the voters of Delhi cannot be ruled out," the communication to the Delhi chief secretary and police commissioner stated.

The use of "money power" in elections, Saxena also noted, was not only an offence under Sections 170 and 171 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, but also an impediment to free and fair elections. "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has desired that Commissioner of Police shall take immediate necessary action of checking such vehicles at the border and also sensitize the DGP of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan," it stated adding that the chief secretary may bring this matter to the knowledge of the Chief Electoral office, Delhi, to remain vigilant in the matter in the coming days. Reacting to the development, Kejriwal told reporters, "They want to stall the implementation of the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana and the Sanjeevani scheme in Delhi... the BJP is contesting the Delhi polls not to serve you but to stop these schemes." "Today the BJP has made its intentions clear - if you vote for them, they will stall these schemes, free power, water, education, mohalla clinics in the city... they are not coming to give you anything but to snatch everything else that you have been getting," he further alleged. Declaring that he would ensure that both the schemes were implemented in Delhi, the former Delhi CM said, "I will get this Rs 2,100 scheme implemented, come what may; if you trust Kejriwal, get your registrations done in both the schemes, let's see what they do... I want to appeal to the two crore people of Delhi: on one side there are the people and on the other the dirty politics of the BJP... I will go back to jail if it comes to that but I will not allow these schemes to be stalled."

Beed sarpanch murder: Manoj Jarange-Patil urges CM Fadnavis to act, says 'otherwise you will have to repent'



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Chief minister saheb, you should keep in mind... You should not support those involved in the sarpanch's murder otherwise you will have to repent," Jarange-Patil said speaking to reporters in Beed. Jarange-Patil arrived in Beed on Saturday morning to participate in the 'Akrosh Morcha' organised to demand the arrest of the accused in the case. Jarange-Patil arrived in Beed on Saturday morning to participate in the 'Akrosh Morcha' organised to demand the arrest of the accused in the case. Ahead of a protest march in Maharashtra's Beed on Saturday over the demand that the killers of Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh be arrested, Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil on Friday warned Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis that he would have to repent if he did not take a strong stand in the case. "Chief minister saheb, you should keep in mind... You should not support those involved in the sarpanch's murder otherwise you will

have to repent," Jarange-Patil said speaking to reporters in Beed.

Jarange-Patil arrived in Beed on Saturday morning to participate in the 'Akrosh Morcha' organised to demand the arrest of the accused in the case. "If the chief minister fails to arrest the real culprits, we will organise marches across the state," he warned. "We are hoping the state government will hear the voices of the people and wake up. If the government refuses to wake up, we will have to force it to wake up... We will not sit quietly till we get justice in this matter. Be it the ruling parties or the Opposition parties, no one should play politics in this matter," Jarange-Patil said. Deshmukh was kidnapped in broad daylight on December 9, pushed into a Scorpio, and allegedly assaulted for around three hours before he succumbed. His body was dumped on a road near his village. Deshmukh's murder rocked the Winter Assembly session, with Opposition MLAs staging protests demanding the arrest of the accused. Even leaders of the ruling dispensation pointed fingers at Walmik Karad, alleged to be a close associate of Maharashtra's Food and Civil Supplies Minister Dhananjay Munde. Jarange-Patil said Fadnavis and the state deputy chief ministers should not take the incident lightly. "Some people are resorting to goondaism, some are brandishing guns, police are behaving arrogantly. The chief minister should not back such people... if he does, he will have to repent. Whoever is involved in the murder, be it an MLA or a minister, put him in jail. Even 19 days later, the culprits are scot-free. Does this mean the CM is backing them?" Jarange-Patil asked.

Moderate rain snowfall likely in Shimla, 7 Himachal districts; efforts on to restore power outages, 136 roads closed



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Shimla Snowfall is occurring in the Dhauladhar mountain in Dharamshala, Rohtang Pass, Jalori Pass, Atal Tunnel, Sissu, Koksar, Lahaul, Bharmour, Dalhousie, Pangi, Churah, and Kihar mountains. The Shimla district administration has urged motorists to avoid driving during early morning and late evening hours and blocked several roads in rural areas even as the weather department has forecast moderate rainfall and snowfall in the district over the next 24 hours and low visibility in urban areas. The India Meteorological department has also issued a similar alert for seven more districts of Himachal Pradesh, including Kullu, Mandi, Chamba, Kangra, Sirmour, Lahaul & Spiti, and Kinnaur.

However, as heavy snowfall and rain continues in high-altitude regions of Himachal, the administration has closed 136 roads across the state, including three national highways. Although roads within Shimla city are open for all types of vehicles, 28 roads in rural areas remain blocked. The Atal Tunnel Rohtang, connecting Manali to Lahaul & Spiti Valley, has been closed to traffic following snowfall in Solang Valley and nearby areas and tourists are prohibited from travelling beyond Solang. The state also witnessed power outages in several areas in the past 24 hours as 65 transformers went offline, disrupting 18 water supply schemes. Shimla The Atal Tunnel Rohtang, connecting Manali to Lahaul & Spiti Valley, has been closed to traffic following snowfall in Solang Valley and nearby areas.

In Shimla district, where power supply remains disrupted in many areas, particularly around Longwood, officials stated that efforts are underway to restore at least 15 electricity lines. Snowfall is occurring in the Dhauladhar mountain in Dharamshala, Rohtang Pass, Jalori Pass, Atal Tunnel, Sissu, Koksar, Lahaul, Bharmour, Dalhousie, Pangi, Churah, and Kihar mountains. The police said that over 1,500 vehicles are stranded between Solang Valley and Palchan, and rescue operations are underway. The IMD also forecast a cold wave-like situation for the next 12 hours in the districts of Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Una, Kangra, Kullu, Mandi, Sirmour and Solan.

Those in the tourism and hospitality sector, however, said that the extreme weather conditions have not affected the industry. "The occupancy in the hotels throughout the state has been going between 60 and 89 per cent these days. All thanks to the snowfall in the high altitude areas in the state. During weekdays we experienced around 60 per cent occupancy which goes up to 89 per cent during weekend days," Mohinder Seth, President Himachal Pradesh Tourism Stakeholders' Association. Among the roads in Shimla that have been closed are the Deha-Chopal road and the Rohru-Chanshal-Dodra road, which is blocked near Sungri.

Why this year's December rain in Delhi is unusual: 101-year-old record broken



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Delhi has not seen as much rain on a December day as it saw in the 24 hours between Friday and Saturday in 101 years, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The city received 41.2 mm of rain between 8.30 am on Friday and 8.30 am on Saturday. This is the highest rain seen in Delhi in 24 hours in December since 1923, when 75.7 mm of rain was recorded on December 3.

December this year has also seen the most amount of rain since 1997 when 71.8 mm of rain was seen in the month. In the grips of the interaction between an active western disturbance and a cyclonic circulation, the whole of north and central India saw maximum temperatures rising as rain was recorded across the region. While rain in December is not unusual, it is usually light. As per IMD data, Delhi usually sees 8 mm of rain during the month over half a day. The rain in the city over the past 24 hours is over five times that.

"The interaction between a very active western disturbance and a cyclonic circulation on the east, along with a few other factors, has brought about this unusual weather. November and December are the two driest months in Delhi. During these months, it is usually a western disturbance that brings rain to the capital. It is the different weather systems clashing that lead to heavy downpours," an IMD scientist said. "Another western disturbance is expected around January 1, but that may not bring rain," he added. The minimum temperature, recorded early Saturday morning, was 12.7 degrees Celsius at the Safdarjung weather station. This was 5.9 degrees above normal.

While the IMD had issued an 'orange' alert on Friday, with hail being forecast in isolated places late at night, the activity reduced by Saturday morning. There is no significant rain alert in Delhi for the coming week. Saturday morning, meanwhile, saw the air quality index (AQI) improve to moderate from very poor on Friday. At 1 pm, the AQI was recorded as 137. This is both because of the rain and a slight increase in wind speed.

Mumbai man loses lakhs of rupees after being abducted, coerced into shooting semi-nude video; 2 held



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Two men were arrested in Mumbai on Friday for allegedly abducting a 27-year-old man, making semi-nude videos of him and extorting lakhs from him. The police said the incident was a revenge crime as the main accused had lost his job earlier this year after the victim complained about his unruly behaviour. The police identified the accused as Agnal S Gomes and Aditya Rajshree Badekar, saying that Gomes and the complainant were former colleagues. "Gomes and the 27-year-old complainant worked together at a call centre. Gomes was in a managerial role and had temper issues. He forced people to work under his conditions and this led the victim to file a formal complaint with the management against Gomes," a police officer said.

Gomes was subsequently terminated from service in April. According to the police, Gomes wanted revenge and

started monitoring the complainant's movements. His friend Badekar often accompanied him, the police added. "Early on Thursday, the 27-year-old was returning home from work. After he was dropped off by the cab, Badekar initially approached him, following which the two brutally assaulted the complainant," Senior Police Inspector Shailendra Nagarkar of Malvani police station said. "They later took him to the call centre in Andheri to show the employees there that he was taking revenge," Nagarkar added. The two accused later took him to an isolated location, confined him for over 12 hours, and forced him to shoot a semi-nude video, the police said. They even made him hold a packet of ganja (marijuana) and claim that he had been selling drugs, the police added.

"Gomes and Badekar later checked his bank balance and withdrew Rs 60,000 after which they downloaded a loan app onto his mobile phone and took out a loan of around Rs 7.5 lakh, from which they escaped with Rs 2.5 lakh," said Nagarkar. However, the police are still trying to determine the exact amount extorted from the 27-year-old. The accused threatened that they would release the video on social media if he filed a police complaint and dropped the man off near his residence in Malad. After consulting his friends and relatives, the man approached the Malvani police and a case of extortion and criminal intimidation was registered. Following this, teams were sent to different locations, and the two accused were arrested. "The two accused were arrested on Friday and we are trying to determine whether anyone else is involved in the case," Nagarkar said.

'Sports diplomacy': When India vs Pak semi-final clash at Mohali gave Manmohan Singh chance to host Pakistan PM

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Former prime minister Manmohan Singh's special connection with the Tricity was not just limited to Punjab University (PU), where he had taught in the 1950s and 1960s. Apart from giving him a home to Singh in Chandigarh's Sector 11, the region also became a place where he hosted his Pakistan counterpart Yousuf Raza Gillani in 2011 when India and Pakistan played against each other at a semi-final match of the cricket world cup. The former prime minister had extended an invitation to Gillani to watch the second semi-final match at the iconic IS Bindra PCA International Stadium in Mohali. It was a match which India won by 29 runs to book their place in the final, which they eventually won too.

"It was an honour for PCA to host Indian PM Manmohan Singh along with the Pakistan PM Yousuf Raza Gillani. Manmohan Singh ji had reached out to then Pakistan PM a week prior to the marquee match and we are glad that PCA Stadium Mohali played its part in Singh's vision for peace in the region. Whenever there would be talk of sports diplomacy, the image of PM Manmohan Singh and Pakistan PM Gillani shaking hands with Indian and Pakistan teams at Mohali stadium will be one of the most remembered moments in world sports," recalled Brigadier (Retd) GS Sandhu, who was then Punjab Cricket Association's CEO. Manmohan With Singh extending an invite to his Pakistan counterpart days before the semi-final, Sandhu, 84, remembers how PCA prepared for the iconic meeting. With the International Cricket Council (ICC) allocating the second semi-final to the 1994-built Mohali stadium, the possibility of India and Pakistan playing the semi-final only emerged when India finished second in their group behind South Africa and Pakistan topped their group.

With Singh extending an invite to his Pakistan counterpart days before the semi-final, Sandhu, 84, remembers how PCA prepared for the iconic meeting. "One day prior to the semi-final, there were heavy rains. While different security agencies along with police teams had carried out the necessary security arrangements, we at PCA including IS



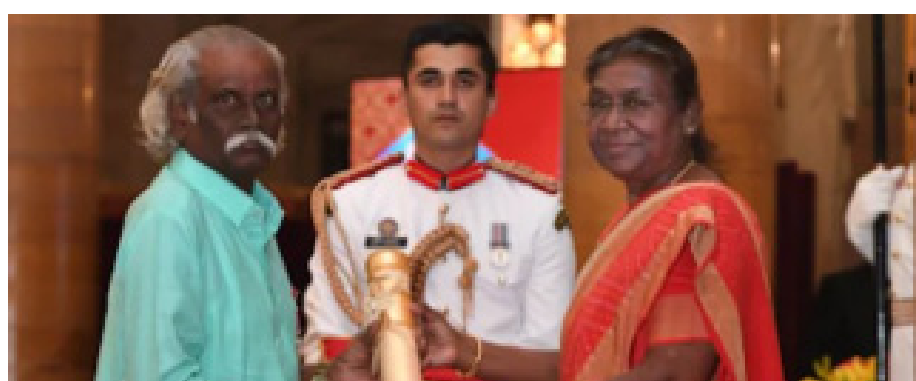
Bindra, MP Pandove and GS Walia wanted to ensure that all arrangements at the stadium were in place. Both the PMs apart from then UPA chairman Sonia Gandhi watched the match from the VVIP box on the second floor along with family members of Pakistan PM and other members of delegation," said Sandhu, who is also former vice-president of Indian Hockey Federation and was also the chairman of Army Sports Control Board before he retired from Indian Army. Prior to the match, Singh and Gillani also shook hands with Indian captain M S Dhoni and Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi at the ground before the toss. Gillani's wife Fauzia too had accompanied him apart from members of Gillani's cabinet and then Pakistan high commissioner Shahid Malik during the visit. The former prime minister also hosted the Pakistan delegation for the official dinner in the evening at the stadium. Sonia Gandhi, Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar, Union agriculture minister and ICC chief Sharad Pawar, Punjab governor Shivraj Patil along with Punjab CM Parkash Singh Badal and Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda were present at the dinner. "Manmohan Singh ji and Gillani enjoyed the match from the box glass façade. Later the official dinner happened at the stadium clubhouse. Post the talks, Manmohan Singh ji thanked the PCA officials and made sure that he conveyed his thanks to all the officials through Mr IS Bindra. He also met PCA officials. It remains one of our special memories," added Sandhu.

From Karnataka's Chikkaballapur to US, how Munivenkatappa put thamate on global playlist

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

In the quiet village of Pindipapanahalli in Karnataka's Chikkaballapur district, the rhythmic beats of the thamate have echoed for decades, symbolizing the stories of culture, resilience and identity. These beats, crafted by the skilled hands of Nadoja Pindipapanahalli Munivenkatappa, 75, have not only preserved a fading folk tradition but also brought a deeply rooted art form into limelight. Known widely as the 'Father of Thamate', Munivenkatappa has dedicated his life to protecting and promoting the legacy of his hand drum for the past 60 years. The Padma awardee began his journey with the thamate at the age of 16, under the tutelage of his father, Papanna.

Over the decades, he became a pivotal figure in preserving and promoting this traditional percussion instrument, which holds deep roots in the Old Mysuru region. The instrument is a hand drum made of goat hide stretched over a circular frame bound with an iron ring. Traditionally, it is played by certain communities during funerals, village festivals and announcements. "Initially, I did not like the thamate. I grew up watching my father and my brother play the in-



strument. But I never had a liking for it. But after my father's death, I had to inherit the family culture. That's how my journey began," said Munivenkatappa. Munivenkatappa's big break came unexpectedly in the 1970s. It was during a temple fair in Devaramallur village in Sidlaghatta taluk, a performance by the young artist caught the attention of HL Nage Gowda, a renowned Kannada folklorist. Impressed by his performance, Gowda took Munivenkatappa under his wing, introducing him to larger audiences across Karnataka.

That moment changed everything. It wasn't just about playing the thamate anymore — it was about representing my community and sharing our art with the world," said Munivenkatappa. Following his first break, Munivenkatappa became

the poster boy of folk art. From performing in cultural festivals to folk exhibitions and state events, the audience were all ears to his thamate beats. While his journey has been inspiring, it hasn't been without challenges. Munivenkatappa, had to deal with the social stigma surrounding thamate players, often linked to lower-caste communities. "This has been a constant battle in my life. There were times when people wouldn't even let us play in certain spaces," he recalls. Additionally, his life has also been marred by financial struggles. Folk artists like him often earn modest incomes, relying on sporadic performances to make ends meet. In fact, he has also taken his thamate to countries like Japan and USA. "It was an exhilarating experience to play the thamate in rich countries like Japan and America. But despite all economic strength,

the people there still groove to my ordinary thamate. Therefore, I see music as a tool that treats everyone equally," he says. Over the years, he has also mentored dozens of students in an effort to preserve folk art amid the domination of modern music. In 2016, acknowledging his contributions, the Karnataka state government allotted a Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) site to Munivenkatappa under the G-category (persons in public life) in Kempegowda Layout. However, due to financial constraints, he was unable to pay the required Rs 5 lakh for registration within the stipulated three-year period, managing to pay only Rs 26,000. Consequently in January 2023, BDA cancelled the site allotment. Despite social and financial setbacks, Munivenkatappa still has his hands around the instrument only to keep the folk art alive.

In a world more interconnected than ever, India's Defence ecosystem poised to play pivotal role



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

In today's international scenario, no country can ever say that they are not connected to or concerned about what is happening elsewhere. This is because of the ramifications of levels of involvement of the number of seen and unseen players, state and non-state actors and tangible and intangible factors at play across the world.

India amidst complex geopolitical conflicts and technological threats whatever happens across the globe, especially in the proximity of India is of concern to India. There are countries where India has political, defence and diplomatic interests and also the economic and trade interests. Any development in these countries and in their proximity, is of concern to India. This also applies to countries and regions where India is aiming to build or strengthen its interests. At the same time, the countries whose interests lie in India — ultimately it is a two-way street — are of concern to us. These include countries where there are large populations of Indians — whether they have migrated temporarily or permanently. India's interests in those countries become significantly sensitive in terms of safety and security. All these interests need to be seen in the light of strategic developments in a world which has redefined the term connectivity.

To elaborate on the complexity, take for example the erstwhile Soviet Union and the position it held before 1991. Even after the dissolution, India's interests lie very close to Russia because of the old defence ties, diplomatic ties, including those in the UN, and the trade ties. Now look at these complex ties in the light of present geopolitical conflict and the technological advancements in the world. This makes us understand how India has to engage on multiple fronts with multiple players in the evolving dynamics of world order. Physical distances are irrelevant today because of technology, the complex media ecosystem, and the cyber domain. This means our economies are connected, our markets are connected and our people are connected, more than ever before. The Covid pandemic taught this to us the hard way. However, this pandemic also showed how the world is now looking up to India. Our country supplied vaccines, medicines and other aid to 87 countries in the world, including the US. No other country has done this. Whenever there is a calamity or a disaster, India's help is sought. India stands as the largest provider of the security forces to the United Nations Peacekeeping operations. The world believes in the unbiasedness and professional standards and also the capacities and capabilities of the Indian forces. The task is now to build on this trust and further strengthen our ties.

Role of India's defence ecosystem in a world more interconnected than ever Military diplomacy is increasingly important to international relations in a more and more interconnected world. Many times military diplomacy makes

conventional diplomatic channels function. Take the example of India-China ties. The multiple meetings of Army contingents from both sides is always the starting point of talks. There have also been cases that harsh military actions were the call of the time for normal channels of diplomacy to take its course. Various Air Force exercises that India participates in across the country, the Naval exercises like that of the Quad Navies (Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) are excellent examples of how military diplomacy will be increasingly instrumental. India and Indian forces are set to play a major role in the security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The armed forces, in particular, and the overall defence ecosystem will have a crucial role to play as the warfare of today are spread beyond the conventional land, air and sea and into the cyber space and information domains. The warfares of the future will be hybrid of these domains and the recent global developments are a case in point. Protection of satellites, critical data and software centres from cyber threat, protection of assets such as under-sea cables will remain as crucial as protecting land, air and sea domains. Armed forces and defence ecosystem are extensively preparing for this. The agencies like the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Defence industries will have a much bigger role to play in these scenarios.

Pune's growing role in Defence diplomacy, defence industrial ecosystem Pune's historic and current role as a key centre of military affairs does need any explanation. However, over the past few years, India has hosted several key events that are crucial to defence diplomacy. Pune has hosted India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave and the 10-day Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX 2023), which saw participation of 25 countries from the African continent. The Foreign Training Node at Aundh, Pune, has hosted several key joint military exercises in the recent past. Now there scope to expand the extent of these exercises, bring in more strategic partners. Several military training institutes in Pune continue to train an increasingly higher number of armed forces officers from friendly foreign countries who remain lifelong flag bearers of India's friendship in their respective countries.

At the same time, Pune has seen a phenomenal growth of defence industrial ecosystem, which includes defence products and services providers of all sizes. These businesses and their supply footprint has expanded in numbers and size. This growth has been fuelled by India's policies like Make In India, Atmanirbhar Bharat and positive indigenisation lists published from time to time. This industrial ecosystem will have a much bigger role to play in coming years, not just domestically but from the point view of exports too. The coming year crucial for Pune On January 15 in 2025 Pune will host the prestigious Army Day Parade. This event will not only celebrate Pune's military history but will also boost Pune's position as a key strategic location and a major defence industrial hub. Once we delve past the ceremonial relevance of the event, we can see that this brings great opportunities for defence and defence industrial establishments in Pune, and all these entities need to build further on that. Pune is also slated to witness a historic moment in 2025 when the first batch of the 19 women cadets of the National Defence Academy will pass out from the hallowed portals of the tri-services institute. This will mark a great moment for the women in the armed forces. At the same time, it also calls for more efforts to make our forces more gender sensitive and gender neutral.

Across UP, a 'Looteri Dulhan' gang conned unsuspecting brides and grooms for years. Until one woman filed a complaint



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

delhi scam Deputy Commissioner of Police, Greater Noida, Shakti Mohan Avasthy, said: "Those arrested have been identified as Pradeep Bhardwaj (32); Aamir Hafiz (25); Santosh (35); and Malt Devi (50)." Men and women creating fake profiles on matrimonial sites and dating apps, asking potential victims for cash by promising to marry them, and then vanishing with the money — the institution of marriage is no stranger to such scams. A similar such scam by a gang of four had been playing out in Greater Noida for years. Their MO was simple. Step one was to find women who were struggling to get married and lure them. Step two was to find a man struggling to get married. Step three involved 'matchmaking'. Step four was the 'vanishing' act. After the wedding, the 'bride' would 'return home for a ritual' — with the wedding finery — and vanish. On Thursday, the Greater Noida Police busted the gang, which they have nicknamed 'Looteri Dulhan', and arrested four people, including a woman, for allegedly duping men and women on the pretext of marriage.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Greater Noida, Shakti Mohan Avasthy, said: "Those arrested have been identified as Pradeep Bhardwaj (32); Aamir Hafiz (25); Santosh (35); and Malt Devi (50)." Avasthy said Pradeep, the mastermind, is a resident of Bulandshahr while the others hail from Aligarh. According to police, the accused would lure innocent women under the pretext of marriage. Police said Malt Devi would often pose either as the bride's mother or aunt and the men as other relatives. The DCP told The Indian Express that they targeted those who had crossed the "acceptable" age of marriage and were looking for a partner: "They would hire 'mediators' to pose as relatives and approach a potential groom's family and elicit information. Once matters were settled, the wedding, complete with all rituals, would take place. Seven days later, on the day of 'Vidai' — a ceremony where the married woman comes back to her parent's house for a final farewell — the 'bride' would similarly be taken 'home', along with her jewellery — and never return." He said the gang has been operating since 2015 and "we have found cases against them in Bulandshahr and Aligarh". Their jig was up after a woman from Greater Noida's Surajpur got tricked into getting married and lodged a complaint. "They tried to target a woman from Surajpur by

deliberately luring her with marriage and getting her to join the gang. But with the intelligence and promptness of the surveillance team and police, the woman was recovered and the gang members were arrested," said police. "We do not know the exact number of people that have been duped but we have found four cases registered against the gang in several cities of Uttar Pradesh," said Avasthy. The DCP added, "We have also learnt that the wives of Pradeep and Aamir are major members of this gang and had been arrested earlier as well. Efforts are being made by the police team to nab them."

Dip in crime in 2024 cheers Mancherial police

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Mancherial: Crimes were declined in this year when compared to offences reported in previous year, cheering police officials. According to annual crime data provided by police, the district saw a total of 4,455 crimes from January 1 to December 29, as against 5,115 offences in corresponding period, showing a decline by 15 percent. However, certain crimes such as burglaries and deaths due to road accidents have gone up in this year.

The district recorded seven burglaries in 2024 when compared to three in 2023. It witnessed 101 burglaries by night in this year as against 96 burglaries reported in previous year. It saw 123 deaths of humans caused by road accidents in this year when compared to 115 fatalities in 2023. It registered 41 rapes in 2024 as against 27 sexual offences against women in 2023. Similarly, the district witnessed a rise in kidnaps with registering 55 offences in 2024 as against 45 in 2023. It recorded road mishaps resulting in injuries to 258 persons in this year as against 207 persons in previous year. It saw 371 cheatings in this year when compared to 372 offences reported in the corresponding period.

Meanwhile, missing cases dropped down in the district in 2024. A total of 273 missing cases were reported in this year as against 318 cases in previous year. The district recorded 22 murders in 2024 as compared to 24 in 2023. It registered 19 day house burglaries as against 24 offences in this year in the corresponding period.

Deputy Commissioner of Police A Bhaskar said that efforts were being taken to control crime rate in the district by taking a slew of measures and with the help of the public. He stated that CCTV-based surveillance was being stepped up, besides improving patrolling to curb various offences. He stated that steps were being taken to ensure culprits were punished.

Destination US: Classroom Culture in the U.S.



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Hyderabad: Studying in the United States is often perceived as an aspirational opportunity, not only because of the plenitude of the courses and universities available but also because of the additional learning opportunities that emerge from the classroom culture there. An American classroom culture incorporates wide-ranging practices that shape the learning environment for students and educators — both in-state and international. It is influenced by various factors, including diversity, teaching practices, school policies, community contexts, integration of cultural content into the curriculum, etc., that make the experience especially rewarding and conducive to growth. Here are some examples of the key elements that characterise it: **Course Selection:** Choosing courses in the United States offers flexibility and a variety of subject options to explore diverse interests. Students can combine core subjects like economics or biology with electives such as photography or environmental science. For example, a business major might take creative writing to enhance communication skills or coding classes to stay competitive in today's tech-driven world. Students are encouraged to begin by reviewing degree requirements to choose courses and credits. Students are assigned academic advisors to seek guidance to align choices with career goals and consider transferable credits. **Diversity and Inclusion:**

U.S. classrooms reflect a blend of ethnicities, languages, and cultural backgrounds as international students increasingly pursue education in the United States. This diversity enriches the learning environment by offering varied perspectives. Professors often incorporate students' cultural references into lessons—for example, discussing global literature or comparing international economic systems—ensuring the content resonates with everyone. This

fosters cross-cultural understanding, broadens perspectives, and prepares students for success in a globalized world. **Teaching Style:** Interactive and activity-based teaching styles dominate U.S. classrooms. Educators often use student-driven activities to help bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications. Collaborative group projects are a common feature, enabling students to build interpersonal, negotiation, and leadership skills.

For example, students might work together on a science experiment or simulate a business pitch in a marketing class, tackling real-world challenges while enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork abilities. **Approachability of Educators:** Teachers in the United States are highly approachable, often encouraging students to seek guidance beyond class and offering "office hours" for one-on-one support. Whether discussing academic questions or broader topics, such as career advice, students can use these office hours to seek additional mentorship. For example, a student curious about climate change might receive personalized book recommendations or project mentorship. Most professors are also highly responsive to emails and answer course-related questions. During the first day of class, professors usually highlight the best modes of communication to reach out to them and stay in touch beyond the classroom. **Integration of Technology:** Technology integration in U.S. classrooms revolutionizes education by enabling interactive, personalized learning. Technology is seamlessly woven into U.S. education with tools like interactive whiteboards, learning management systems, and virtual labs. For instance, students might use software to submit assignments or collaborate on group projects using technical tools. This integration supports personalized and flexible learning. Technological tools also provide access and aid to students with disabilities and impairments. **Grading and Feedback:**

U.S. classrooms prioritize continuous assessment and constructive feedback. Students are evaluated through quizzes, participation, and projects rather than solely through final exams. In some cases, on group projects, students can provide feedback to their classmates through peer evaluation, thereby fostering greater accountability. Feedback focuses on improvement, such as suggesting more detailed analysis in essays or creative approaches to problem-solving. This approach ensures that students thrive in a dynamic and supportive learning environment, preparing them for academic and professional success. Students can contact the EducationUSA center for more information before embarking on their journey as international students.

In one year, Panchayats in Telangana have witnessed contrasting situations

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Hyderabad: In one year, many panchayats are witnessing contrasting situations in the State. Till 2023 end, the gram panchayats in Telangana were reaping awards at national level for their services and provision of basic amenities in the villages. And, during the last one year, former Sarpanches have been staging protests demanding the State government to clear pending bills and panchayats were struggling to take up basic works. The BRS government had launched the Palle Pragathi programme in 2018. Since then a whopping Rs. 13,528 crore were spent towards taking up different development programmes. Every gram panchayat in the State was equipped with a tractor, tanker and trolley for taking up different works.

As part of the programme, nurseries were set up, segregation of dry and wet waste and manufacturing of vermicompost through waste was taken up, Palle Prakruthi Vanams and crematoriums were also established in the villages. All these initiatives aided in comprehensive development of villages and special focus was laid on hygiene. The Palle Pragathi programme helped in reaping a rich haul of awards for the State. In 2022, as many as 19 villages had bagged the national panchayat awards in the annual awards announced by the union Ministry of Rural Development. In the National Panchayat Awards 2024, only Chillipalli gram panchayat won the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar from the State. Congress government launches Swacchadnam – Pachhadanam

The Congress government had sidelined the Palle Pragathi programme and launched the "Swacchadnam – Pachhadanam" programme. Further, the term of Sarpanches ended in January this year. Since February Special Officers have been appointed by the government and entrusted with the task of gram panchayats functions. But, the conditions in villages have changed a lot. According to an office bearer of Telangana Sarpanches Association Joint Action Committee, many panchayats were finding it difficult to execute basic works, including sanitation, watering to saplings, besides payment of salaries to staff. Since last one year, the former Sarpanches have been staging



protests demanding the State government to clear the pending bills. One such protest was staged on Friday and as a symbolic gesture, representations were submitted to Mahatma Gandhi statues across the State by the former Sarpanches.

They argue that while the government was clearing bills worth crores of contractors, their pending bills of about Rs.700 crore were being delayed. The pending bills of former sarpanches triggered heated arguments between the Congress and BRS members in the Assembly recently. Former Minister Harish Rao had raised the issue in the Assembly and Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Minister D Anasuya replied that as on November 1, 2024, the total pending bills amounted to Rs.691.93 crore. She even blamed the BRS government for the pending bills and charged that the past government failed to clear them. Countering her charges, former Minister T Harish Rao reminded that the BRS government had paid Rs.275 crore every month to panchayats. Had the Congress government continued the practice, there would not have been any pending bills, he said.

Further, the former Minister had specifically asked the PRRD Minister as to when the pending bills would be cleared. In reply, the Minister had said that they would be cleared at the earliest. In protest against the government's failure to clear bills and poor response, the BRS members had even walked out of the Assembly.

'Reckless investigation': Karnataka HC quashes case over wedding invite with 'Vote for Modi' message

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Karnatakaa flying squad team for the Lok Sabha elections had registered a complaint against two people over a wedding invitation card dated March 1 that bore the message "Voting Narendra Modi is the gift for my wedding". The Karnataka High Court has quashed a case filed against two people for printing a wedding invitation with a message urging people to vote in favour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the crime "is recklessly registered, so is the charge sheet, on a reckless investigation". The observations were made by Justice M Nagaprasanna in a December 17 order. The full judgment was recently made available.

On April 19 this year, a flying squad team for the Lok Sabha elections had registered a complaint against two people over a wedding invitation card dated March 1 that bore the message "Voting Narendra Modi is the gift for my wedding". The case had been registered under Section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, which places certain restrictions on printing of materials such as election pamphlets and posters. The counsel for the petitioners argued that on the date of printing the card, the Lok Sabha elections were yet to be notified and therefore, the slogan could not be an offence under Section 127A of the Act. Justice Nagaprasanna observed that the section dealt with restrictions on election pamphlets etc which did not bear the names and addresses of printers and publishers. "The soul of the provision is printing and publishing any election pamphlet or a poster, which obviously is during an elec-



tion," he elaborated.

Taking into account this fact along with the definitions of terms such as pamphlet and poster, the bench observed, "How a wedding invitation card is projected to become an election pamphlet by the complainant or even the police who conducted investigation to file a charge sheet is understandable. Even otherwise, the admitted date of notification of calendar of events by the Election Commission of India is on 16-03-2024. If the 1st petitioner who is wanting to get married describes the greatest gift to him is voting for Narendra Modi yet again, long before the notification of calendar of events, it is preposterous, to say the least, as to how the crime itself could have been registered and upon that, investigation by the police and filing of the charge sheet. The crime is recklessly registered, so is the charge sheet, on a reckless investigation."

Punjab's good samaritans who left a lasting impact on countless lives in 2024



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

"Ek Bihari sab pe Bhaari" is a favourite saying of Lt Col Sadhu Singh Sohi (Retd), a proud former officer of the Bihar Regiment. This pride also reflects in the letterhead of his NGO, the Ex-Servicemen Grievances Cell, which provides crucial support to veterans, widows, and their families for pension and disability benefits. Every Friday, Sohi and his dedicated team set up a makeshift office on roadside benches opposite the Mohali CSD Canteen. Regardless of the weather, they listen to the grievances of veterans struggling with military and pension authorities.

Punjab At 80, Sohi continues his relentless efforts, liaising with service headquarters and the Directorate of Veteran Affairs to amend policies and ensure support for those in need. With over 2,300 members and a core team of 20 volunteers, the NGO works pro bono. In the past 23 years, they've secured pensions for over 400 veterans, widows, and dependents, disability pensions for 75 veterans, family pensions for 45 widows, and financial support for six dependent daughters. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they facilitated hospital admissions for 9,734 patients across India. At 80, Sohi continues his relentless efforts, liaising with service headquarters and the Directorate of Veteran Affairs to amend policies and ensure support for those in need. The friend of farmers

For the farmers of Punjab and Haryana, Devinder Sharma is a "most trusted ally." Whenever complex policies or laws arise, farmer bodies turn to Sharma, confident he can represent their perspective effectively. A distinguished food and trade policy analyst, Sharma holds a Master's degree in plant breeding and genetics. "I am here to give a voice to the farming community," he often says. Backed by well-researched arguments and examples from across India and the world, Sharma counters criticism directed at farmers. Punjab Sharma was appointed as one of its members, reinforcing his role as a trusted voice for farmers. Be it the issues of stubble burning or farm debt, Sharma consistently highlights the challenges farmers face and advocates for solutions. He insists that agriculture, the largest sector of livelihood in India, deserves at least 50% of the central government's annual budget. Sharma also champions a legal framework for Minimum Support Price (MSP), ensuring no private player can buy crops below the mandated rate.

In September, the Supreme Court formed a "neutral high-powered committee," chaired by retired Punjab and Haryana High Court judge Justice Nawab Singh, to address the challenges faced by the farming community in the region. Sharma was appointed as one of its members, reinforcing his role as a trusted voice for farmers. Even ten years after retiring as the national badminton coach, 70-year-old Surinder Mahajan continues to dedicate himself to training young players at Chandigarh's Sector-38 Sports Complex. Every day, he arrives at 4 pm—sometimes even at 5:45 am—to oversee rigorous training sessions on the ten badminton courts. Chandigarh Punjab Undeterred, Mahajan began training players voluntarily, and his dedication paid off as many went on to win medals at national and international levels.

"Coaching is my life, and badminton is my passion," Mahajan says. Despite retiring from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) in 2014, he couldn't stop coaching. He later joined the Chandigarh Sports Department but had to leave at 65 due to policy limitations. Undeterred, Mahajan began training players voluntarily, and his dedication paid off as many went on to win medals at national and international levels. Recognising his contributions, the Badminton Association of India entrusted him with training grassroots-level coaches nationwide through annual crash courses. Mahajan also serves as the general secretary of the Chandigarh Badminton Association. On a mission against the dump

Dayal Krishan was a child when his father, Pishauri Lal, a fireman with the UT fire department, settled in Daddumajra. In those days, it was a scenic village with a lovely pond where filmmakers would come to shoot. Dayal still remembers spending hours watching the shooting of Ishq Nibhana, a Punjabi film that starred Satish Kaul. It was also one of those places that attracted people from all walks of life. As a result, there was a row of temples. "There was a Hanuman temple, one dedicated to Ravi Das ji, another to Kabir ji. Then there was a Buddhist temple, a mosque, and a gurdwara."

One day, all these were turned to rubble as the UT authorities descended on the site, and the City Beautiful began to dump its waste here. Dayal Krishan has witnessed Daddumajra's descent into hellish living conditions up close. He recalls his father, Pishauri Lal, first raising an alarm when fires began smouldering across the lake in a crater where some people had started dumping waste. "It was at a distance from our house, but my father used to fret about it. He would say that methane gas was being emitted there. I remember seeing a man actually cooking after digging a small pit." His father would go around educating people about the hazards of poor air quality. "Both my parents were very proactive. I remember once they built a log bridge during the monsoon when the shortcut that people used got flooded." In those days, Dayal found their activism very irritating. However, the bad air took a toll on the family. His mother died of asthma, and his father of tuberculosis. Dayal Krishan, who worked as a video editor for almost a decade, found himself highlighting the perils of the dumping ground. "I left my job at City Cable because people would mock me for my focus on this issue." Dayal, who has recently set up a photo studio, hasn't stopped working on it. His mission is simple: "I want to make Daddumajra livable again. Is that too much to ask for? The peon who starts before dawn Most people assume the Punjab and Haryana High Court begins its day at 10 am, but for Dhanesh Kumar, a 40-year-old peon in Courtroom 69, the day starts much earlier. Kumar, who has been working at the court since 2012, arrives at 6 am to prepare the courtroom for proceedings. Residing in Chandigarh's Sector 33, Kumar cleans the courtroom, arranges files, and ensures water is available for the judge,

who begins his day at 7 am. His duties continue until the court adjourns for the day. "Waking up early has significantly improved my health," Kumar shares. Since starting his early morning routine three years ago, he has noticed improvements in his fitness and management of diabetes and other health issues. "I feel more energised and better prepared to tackle the day." The sister who demands dignity and safety

In the wake of the horrific rape and murder of a young doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Institute, which ignited nationwide protests, PGI has submitted a detailed report to the Government of India recommending urgent measures to safeguard healthcare professionals. At the forefront of this call for change is Manjanik Kaur, President of the PGI Nursing Union, who has voiced the long-ignored concerns of nurses. "A woman was raped and murdered at her workplace—this is both shameful and terrifying. Women aren't even safe at work," she said, demanding fundamental facilities like proper changing rooms, washrooms, and nighttime security for nursing staff. Kaur highlighted alarming gaps in infrastructure, such as poorly lit areas, inadequate staff lifts, and the absence of security in private wards. She also urged a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory behaviour and women support staff for night shifts in sensitive departments. Her message is clear: dignity and safety for healthcare workers can no longer be compromised. Serving science Professor Jitendra Kumar Sahu, a pediatric neurologist at PGI, Chandigarh, has been awarded the prestigious Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar: Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar for 2024 in Medicine. This national honour, conferred by the Government of India, recognises exceptional research contributions by scientists under 45. Serving as PGI faculty since 2011, Prof Sahu specialises in childhood epilepsy, particularly infantile spasms.

He and his team have extensively studied the genetic landscape of infantile epilepsy and have developed an in-house genetic testing. Prof Sahu also debunks common myths such as that seizures are caused by the DPT vaccination. Bridging the gaps Established in 1952 for a population of around five lakh, GMSH-16 has grown into a vital district hospital, now catering to referrals from across the region with an OPD footfall of about 3,000 daily. Under the leadership of Dr Suman Singh, Director, Health Services, Chandigarh, the focus has been on enhancing patient care services, infrastructure, and amenities to bridge the gap between government and private hospitals. This year saw upgrades in various areas, including the Emergency department, gynaecology private rooms, and wards. Dr Singh prioritised patient comfort with simple yet impactful measures like oxygen supply to every bed, pull-in curtains for privacy, separate entry and exit points, modern toilets, and tech-enabled queue management. Punjab A budget of six crore rupees has also been proposed to recruit doctors and staff to restart evening OPDs, benefiting the city's working class.

"We operate as a district hospital but function like a medical college. My dream is to introduce super-specialty services here, starting with cardiology, nephrology, and neurology. A proposal for a super-specialty block has been sent," said Dr Singh. A budget of six crore rupees has also been proposed to recruit doctors and staff to restart evening OPDs, benefiting the city's working class. The hospital's Emergency unit is equipped to handle increasing cases around the clock. To reduce waiting times for diagnostic tests like CT scans, ultrasounds, and MRIs, Dr Singh is actively exploring the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. The success of the MRI scan centre, introduced under PPP last year, has encouraged similar initiatives. The facility, available 24x7, charges half the cost of private centres.

The hospital has floated a tender for a Cath Lab under the PPP mode to offer specialised services and reduce patient burden on other hospitals. "We are among the few facilities in the city where X-rays are available even on Sundays. The goal is to ensure quality care with regular upgrades," said Dr Singh. "For the New Year, the dream is to get approval for a new 200-bed, state-of-the-art hospital for Chandigarh," she shared. Shine on, we say. Gareebon Ka Don

He likes to be called 'Gareebon Ka Don'. Pascal Daniel, born in Bengaluru and living in Chandigarh for the past 53 years, loves teaching maths while helping the underprivileged. Pascal says his journey in charity began in 2019 when he and some others set up an NGO called Mohali Helpers. The pandemic tested their resolve, but they persevered thanks to the generosity of their students. Pascal, who has been teaching at St Stephen's School for 34 years, says his former students need just a little prod to open their purse strings. "I post the details of the kind of help needed on Facebook, and the response is almost instantaneous." Punjab One of Pascal's most memorable cases was the surgery of a four-year-old child with a hole in the heart.

Over time, his reputation as a helping hand has grown, leading to a steady stream of people seeking his assistance. The requests range from providing ration to families in distress to funding medical procedures. One of Pascal's most memorable cases was the surgery of a four-year-old child with a hole in the heart. The operation was complicated and required urgent attention. Pascal appealed to his students, who responded generously, enabling the child to undergo surgery at a leading private hospital in Mohali. As Pascal says, "Where there is need, there are funds." His name is Dharam Dev Prajapati, but his customers know him as Montu. The slightly built young man, who works in Sector 27, is a saviour for scores of students and others who flock to his tiny boutique—a space that barely accommodates his sewing machine in a corridor. A native of a village in Lakhimpur Kheri, Montu learned tailoring after dropping out of school in Class V. His father, a chowkidar, sent him to Chandigarh in 2012, and ever since, the city has been his home. Montu pays Rs 6,000 a month to rent the spot where he works, but his modest charges surprise his customers, who ensure he makes a decent living. "Ninety percent of customers are good; 10 percent fight over every paisa," he says. Now married and a father to a young son, Montu remains grateful. "Guzara ho jata hai, sab theek hai." Each one teach one Seema Gupta loves teaching, a passion that led her to social work in 2007. A resident of Baltana, she was appalled to see the children of her maid and dholi wasting their time idly. "I urged their parents to enrol them in school, but they said they had no documents," she recalls. Seema approached the then district education officer and found a school in Jagatpura where the owners agreed to admit the children for a discounted fee of Rs 100 per month. One enrolment led to another, and today Seema is helping over 100 underprivileged students get an education. Her efforts have created a cycle of goodwill. She finds sponsors in unlikely groups, such as a couple's kitty group. "I don't take money from people. I ask them to pay the school fees directly or cover expenses like books and uniforms. Sometimes, I encourage them to give their time," she says. Seema has now rented a hall where she and her friends teach students from 3 to 5 pm. "Some of the older students who have passed out also return to teach," she adds.

Israeli airstrikes hit a Yemen airport as a jet with hundreds onboard was landing



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's main airport as a civilian Airbus 320 with hundreds of passengers on board was landing and a U.N. delegation was waiting to leave, the U.N.'s top humanitarian official in Yemen said on Friday (December 27, 2024). Julien Harneis told U.N. reporters that the most frightening thing about the two airstrikes on Thursday (December 26, 2024) wasn't their effect on him and about 15 others in the VIP lounge at the international airport in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, including the head of the U.N. World Health Organization.

Rather, it was the destruction of the airport control tower as a Yemenia Airways plane was taxiing in after touching down. "Fortunately, that plane was able to land safely and the passengers were able to disembark, but it could have been far, far worse," said Harneis, who was with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in the lounge. He said one airstrike landed approximately 300 meters (330 yards) south of the VIP lounge and another about 300 meters to the north around 4:45 p.m., while about five members of the U.N. team were outside the building. "Not only obviously did we have zero indication of any potential airstrikes, but we cannot remember the last time there were airstrikes in Sanaa during daylight hours," Harneis said in a video news conference from Sanaa. The U.N. said at least three people were killed and dozens injured in the strike. Among the injured was a crew member from the U.N. Humanitarian Air Service, which was about to fly the U.N. delegation of some 20 people out of Sanaa. He suffered a serious leg injury from shrapnel and lost a lot of blood, Harneis said. Immediately after the airstrikes, Harneis said, U.N. security officials moved the delegation out of the VIP building and into five armored cars where they waited for approximately 40 minutes to ascertain what happened and help the injured crew member. He was taken to a hospital in Sanaa and underwent four hours of surgery while the rest of the delegation spent the night in a U.N. compound, Harneis said. The U.N. plane with Tedros and the

U.N. team, including the injured crew member, was able to depart for Jordan on Friday afternoon — without an operating control tower.

The United Nations said the injured crew member was taken to a hospital in Jordan, and Tedros was heading back to Geneva, where WHO is based, U.N. delegation at the Sanaa airport Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who control Sanaa and much of the country's north, have gone after Israel since it started attacking Gaza following the Oct. 7, 2023 attacks by Gaza's Hamas militants on southern Israel. The Houthis have attacked ships in the Red Sea, disrupting one of the world's main maritime routes, and recently stepped up missile and drone attacks on Israel. Early Saturday, the Israeli Air Force reported intercepting yet another missile from Yemen, as sirens woke Israelis around Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Israel has escalated its response. The Israeli army said it wasn't aware that the WHO chief or U.N. delegation were at the Sanaa airport on Thursday. Israel said it bombed the airport because it is used by the Houthis and Iran. Harneis responded, stressing that the airport is civilian, not military, and is used for transporting U.N. and other humanitarian workers, and for one civilian flight — Yemenia to and from Amman, Jordan. The flight operates as a result of an international agreement, and thousands of Yemenis have used the flight to get advanced medical treatment abroad, he said.

Yemen is the Arab world's poorest nation and has been engulfed in a 10-year civil war between the Houthi rebels, who control Sanaa and much of the country's north, and the internationally recognized government forces in the south. Tedros was in the country to discuss its worsening humanitarian crisis and to seek the release of about 50 people detained by the Houthis since June from the U.N., nongovernmental organizations and civil society. Harneis said 18 million Yemenis — about half the country's population — need humanitarian assistance this year, and the U.N. expects the number to increase to 19 million next year because of the worsening economy. In addition to airstrikes on the Sanaa airport, Israel has been attacking the country's key port of Hodeida, in western Yemen. Harneis said Yemen relies on imports through Hodeida for 80% of its food and more than 90% of its medical supplies to the north. A recent Israeli airstrike destroyed two tugboats and is estimated to have reduced the harbor's capacity by 50%, the U.N. official said, while damage from Thursday's airstrikes hasn't been assessed yet. As for the detainees, Harneis said he joined the WHO chief at meetings with the Houthi prime minister, foreign minister and a member of the group's Supreme Political Council. He said they received commitments on the detainees' possible release and a pathway to it, and on conditions under which they are being held.

Marginalised by caste, marginalised in education

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Atul Kumar, the son of a daily wage worker and from the Scheduled Caste community, lost his seat at IIT Dhanbad after he was unable to pay the seat booking fee of ₹17,500 that was required to secure his admission. His case gained widespread attention on social media, prompting the Supreme Court of India to intervene by exercising its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to grant him admission. There are many and similar cases like Atul's, but which never draw media attention or receive justice, leaving many deserving students without opportunities due to financial constraints and systemic inequalities. The rise in tuition fees

The struggles that Dalit students face echo the challenges of pre-Independence India when they were barred from enrolling in educational institutions because of their caste. While these historical restrictions were overt, the situation now is more insidious. Under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan", the Government of India has been pushing for self-reliance in institutions, leading to a significant increase in fees in many government colleges and universities such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), the Indian Institutes of Management, the central universities, and the National Law University. For instance, in 2016, the IIT council's standing committee agreed to increase the undergraduate tuition fees by 200%. This meant a fee increase from ₹90,000 to ₹3 lakh a year.

In response to the criticism regarding the fee increase, the committee set up by the government asserted that students from marginalised communities would benefit from the Vidyakshmi scheme, which offers interest-free scholarships. However, while this initiative aims to provide support, it remains insufficient to fully address the financial challenges faced by these students, especially as fees continue to rise. The hike in fees that was implemented in seven IITs including increased tuition fees; IIM-Lucknow hiked it by nearly 30%, IIM-Ahmedabad and IIM-Shillong by 5%, IIM Lucknow by 29.6%, IIM-Calcutta by 17.3%, IIM-Kozhikode by 23.1%, IIM-Ranchi by 19% and IIM-Tiruchirappalli by 20%. IIT-Delhi increased tuition fees for full-time M.Tech students in the semester in 2022-23. The total academic fee is now ₹53,100, which does not include hostel fees. This is a 100% increase from last year's fee of ₹26,450.

The frequent hikes in fees have made it increasingly difficult for students from the marginalised communities to afford higher education or even pursue studies through loans. With rising costs in the Indian education system, many students from the marginalised communities are unable to even consider enrolling in prestigious institutions such as the IITs and the IIMs despite securing competitive ranks. As a result, while some students manage to cope with the financial burden, there are others who are overwhelmed by the stress and the inequality in academic institutions. This pressure, exacerbated by the high cost of education, has a human angle too. In 2021, data showed that over the past seven years, 122 students from the IITs and the IIMs had ended their lives, many due to the financial strain of rising fees and the anxiety of securing employment. The issue of dropouts

Another harsh reality is that many students who manage to enrol themselves in prestigious institutions eventually drop out due to their inability to afford rising education fees. The Human Resources Development Ministry reported that 2,461 students dropped out of IITs in just two years (2017 and 2018). Last year, this issue was raised in the Lok Sabha, revealing that over the past five years, more than 13,500 students from the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) had dropped out of courses in the central universities, the IITs and the IIMs. Government data showed that in the central universities, 4,596 students from the Other Backward Classes, 2,424 SC students, and 2,622 ST students dropped out during this period. In the IITs, 2,066 OBC stu-



dents, 1,068 SC students, and 408 ST students left. Similarly, the IIMs saw 163 OBC, 188 SC, and 91 ST students drop out over the past five years. These numbers highlight the significant challenges faced by marginalised communities in accessing and sustaining higher education in India.

One of the key reasons behind the poor economic conditions of the Dalit community is that their identity in India is still largely defined by caste. Dalits continue to be denied the opportunity to perform work that is on a par with others in society. This has not only left them economically marginalised but also socially vulnerable. Dalits in India are considered an oppressed and discriminated class, often labelled as "untouchable". Historically, this stigmatisation has meant that Dalits have been denied access to education. The term "untouchables" also refers to those who have been forced into the most undesirable and degrading jobs. A recent survey in 29 States on urban sewer and septic tank workers revealed that 92% of these workers belong to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). A 2019 report by former Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal revealed that 95% of faculty positions in IITs were held by individuals from upper caste backgrounds, with only 5% allocated to SC, ST, and OBC categories, despite these groups representing 70%-80% of India's population. An RTI filed by IIT-Bombay students further exposed the disparities, showing that 24 departments had no SC faculty, 15 lacked ST representation, and nine had no OBC faculty. These statistics highlight the deep-rooted caste-based inequalities that persist in both employment and education.

The barriers still exist After Independence, with provisions in the Constitution and welfare mechanisms, Dalit school enrolment rates have improved over time. However, Dalit children continue to face significant barriers in education, including poverty, social discrimination, and caste-based prejudice. Dalit students are often judged based on their clothes, language, and other markers, making it difficult for them to integrate with their upper caste peers.

In many cases, caste-based remarks and discrimination wound these students, leading to social isolation. Some students succumb to the emotional toll of this prejudice — there are cases such as a woman postgraduate medical student in a medical college in Maharashtra and two students from IIT Bombay and IIT Delhi that are painful reminders of this reality. These incidents underscore the persistent shadow of casteism and harassment over the aspirations of many Dalit students. This troubling situation raises a critical question: how can these prestigious institutions effectively address this issue and foster a safe, inclusive environment for all students? The unfortunate incidents of student suicides point to the immense pressure students face in the education system. Many students are burdened by their families' expectations that completing a degree will solve their economic problems. But unemployment in India is also high. An RTI filed in 2024 about IIT placements showed that approximately 8,000 students (38%) across 23 IIT campuses remained unplaced this year. For students from the marginalised communities, this struggle is even more pronounced, as their caste identity often doubles the challenges they face in securing jobs.

Israeli soldiers burn a hospital in Gaza



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Israeli soldiers stormed and burned a hospital in isolated northern Gaza after forcibly removing staff and patients on Friday, Health Ministry officials said. The Israeli military said the hospital was being used by Hamas fighters as a base, although it did not provide evidence. Gaza's Health Ministry said Israeli troops set fires in several parts of Kamal Adwan Hospital, including the lab and surgery department. Israel's military said there was only a small fire in an empty hospital building, and was unaware of any Israeli gunfire causing the blaze.

Kamal Adwan Hospital has been hit multiple times over the past three months by Israeli troops waging an offensive against Hamas fighters in surrounding neighborhoods, according to staff. The ministry said a strike on the hospital a day earlier killed five medical staff. Israel's military said it was conducting operations against Hamas infrastructure and militants in the area and had ordered people out of the hospital, but said it had not entered the complex as of Friday night. It repeated claims that Hamas militants operate inside Kamal Adwan but provided no evidence. Hospital officials have denied that. The Health Ministry said troops forced medical personnel and patients to assemble in the yard and remove their clothes. Some were led to an unknown location, while some patients were sent to the nearby Indonesian Hospital, which was knocked out of operation after an Israel raid this week. Israeli troops during raids frequently carry out mass detentions, stripping men to their underwear for questioning in what the military says is a security measure as they search for Hamas fighters.

The Associated Press doesn't have access to Kamal Adwan, but armed plainclothes members of the Hamas-led police forces have been seen in other hospitals, maintaining security but also controlling access to parts of the facilities. The Health Ministry said Israeli troops also set fires in several parts of Kamal Adwan, including the lab and surgery department. It said 25 patients and 60 health workers remained in the hospital. The account could not be independently confirmed, and attempts to reach hospital staff were unsuccessful. "Fire is ablaze everywhere in the hospital," an unidentified staff member said in an audio message posted on social media accounts of hospital director Hossam Abu Safiya. The staffer said some evacuated patients had been unhooked from oxygen. "There are currently patients who could die at any moment," she said. Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesman, denied the accusations. "While IDF troops were not in the hospital, a

small fire broke out in an empty building inside the hospital that is under control," he said Friday night. He said a preliminary investigation found "no connection" between military activity and the fire. The Israeli military heavily restricts the movements of Palestinians in Gaza and has barred foreign journalists from entering the territory throughout the war, making it difficult to verify information. "These actions put the lives of all of these people in even more danger than what they faced before," U.N. spokesperson Stephanie Tremblay told journalists, and noted colleagues' reports of "significant damage" to the hospital. It should be protected as international law requires, she added. Since October, Israel's offensive has virtually sealed off the northern Gaza areas of Jabaliya, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia and leveled large parts of them. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were forced out but thousands are believed to remain in the area, where Kamal Adwan and two other hospitals are located. Troops raided Kamal Adwan in October, and on Tuesday troops stormed and evacuated the Indonesian Hospital. The area has been cut off from food and other aid for months, raising fears of famine. The United Nations says Israeli troops allowed just four humanitarian deliveries to the area from Dec. 1 to Dec. 23. The Israeli rights group Physicians for Human Rights-Israel this week petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice, seeking a halt to military attacks on Kamal Adwan. It warned that forcibly evacuating the hospital would "abandon thousands of residents in northern Gaza." Before the latest deaths Thursday, the group documented five other staffers killed by Israeli fire since October.

Israel launched its campaign in Gaza vowing to destroy Hamas after the group's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others. Around 100 Israelis remain captive in Gaza, around a third believed to be dead. Israel's nearly 15-month-old campaign of bombardment and offensives has devastated the territory's health sector. A year ago, it carried out raids on hospitals in northern Gaza, including Kamal Adwan, Indonesian and al-Awda Hospital, saying they served as bases for Hamas, though it presented little evidence. Israel's campaign has killed more than 45,400 Palestinians, more than half women and children, and wounded more than 108,000 others, according to the Health Ministry. Its count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. More than 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians have been driven from their homes, most now sheltering in sprawling tent camps in south and central Gaza. Children and adults, many barefoot, huddled Friday on the cold sand in tents whose plastic and cloth sheets whipped in the wind. Overnight temperatures can dip into the 40s Fahrenheit (below 10 Celsius), and sea spray from the Mediterranean can dampen tents just steps away. "I swear to God, their mother and I cover ourselves with one blanket and we cover (their five children) with three blankets that we got from neighbors. Sea waters drowned everything that was ours," said Muhammad al-Sous, displaced from Beit Lahia in the north. The children collect plastic bottles to make fires, and pile under the blankets when their only set of clothes is washed and dried in the wind. At least three babies in Gaza have died from exposure to cold in recent days, doctors there have said, and the Health Ministry said an adult — a nurse who worked at the European Hospital — also died this week.

Health officials say Israeli forces detain director of north Gaza hospital

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Gaza health officials said on Saturday (December 28, 2024) that Israeli forces detained the director of a hospital in the north, which the World Health Organization said was put out of service by an Israeli raid. "The occupation forces have taken dozens of the medical staff from Kamal Adwan Hospital to a detention centre for interrogation, including the director, Hossam Abu Safiyeh," the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said in a statement. The Gaza civil defence agency also reported that Abu Safiyeh had been detained, adding that the agency's director for the north, Ahmed Hassan al-Kahlout was among those held. "The occupation has completely destroyed the medical, humanitarian, and civil defence systems in the north, rendering them useless," Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency, told AFP. On Friday, the Israeli military said it had launched an operation in the area of Kamal Adwan Hospital, alleging the facility was a "key stronghold for terrorist organisations". This morning's raid on Kamal Adwan Hospital has put this last major health facility in North Gaza out of service. Initial reports indicate that some key departments were severely burnt and destroyed during the raid. Palestinian mili-



tant group Hamas denied its militants were present in the hospital, and charged that Israeli forces had stormed the facility on Friday. The World Health Organization, meanwhile, said the Israeli military operation had put the hospital out of service. "This morning's raid on Kamal Adwan Hospital has put this last major health facility in north Gaza out of service. Initial reports indicate that some key departments were severely burnt and destroyed during the raid," the WHO said in a statement on X.

China defends plan to build world's largest dam over Brahmaputra River in Tibet; says will not affect lower reaches

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

China on Friday (December 27, 2024) defended its plan to build the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet, saying the project will not "negatively affect" lower riparian states and that safety issues have been addressed through decades of studies. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning played down apprehensions about the massive project to dam the Brahmaputra river, which is called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet. The project estimated to cost around \$137 billion is located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region, along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently. Ms. Mao said China carried out in-depth studies for decades and took safeguard measures. China has always been responsible for the development of cross-border rivers, Ms. Mao told a media briefing here in response to a question on the concerns related to the dam. She said the hydropower development there has been studied in depth for decades, and safeguard measures have been taken to ensure the project's security and ecological environment protection. "The project will not negatively affect the lower reaches," she said referring to the concerns in India and Bangladesh which are the lower riparian states. "China will continue to maintain communication with countries at the lower reaches through existing channels and step up cooperation on disaster prevention and relief for the benefit of the people by the river," she said. She said China's hydropower development in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo river aims to speed up the development of clean energy and respond to climate change and extreme hydrological disasters. China on Wednesday approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project, on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in India and Bangladesh. The hydropower

project will be built in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo river, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra, an official statement here said. The dam will be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra river makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh. Ms. Mao said China's hydropower development in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo river aims to speed up the development of clean energy and respond to climate change and extreme hydrological disasters. The total investment in the dam could exceed one trillion yuan (\$137 billion), which would dwarf any other single infrastructure project on the planet, including China's own Three Gorges Dam which is regarded as the largest in the world, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Thursday. China has already operationalised the \$1.5 billion Zam Hydropower Station, the largest in Tibet in 2015. The Brahmaputra dam was part of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 adopted by Plenum, a key policy body of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2020. Concerns arose in India as the dam besides empowering China to control the water flow could enable Beijing to release large amounts of water flooding border areas in times of hostilities because of its size and scale. India too is building a dam over Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh. India and China established the Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) in 2006 to discuss various issues related to trans-border rivers under which China provides India with hydrological information on the Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers during the flood seasons. Data sharing of trans-border rivers figured in the talks between India, China Special Representatives (SRs) for border questions which National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held here on December 18.

Delhi HC dismisses PIL challenging Patent Chief's appointment



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

The All India Patent Officers Welfare Association (AIPOWA) had moved the court seeking quashing of Pandit's appointment on the grounds that the recommendation by a Search Committee did not comply with the "mandate of law" The Delhi High Court has dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) challenging the appointment of Unnat

Pandit as the Controller General of Patents, Designs and TradeMarks. "It is noted that the present writ petition has been filed as a Public Interest Litigation involving a service matter. In the given circumstances, we do not consider it apposite to entertain the present petition any further. The same is accordingly closed," a bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru said in an order dated December 18.

The All India Patent Officers Welfare Association (AIPOWA) had moved the court seeking quashing of Pandit's appointment on the grounds that the recommendation by a Search Committee did not comply with the "mandate of law" and that the process of appointment was arbitrary. The HC order cited guidelines of the Supreme Court that bar admitting PIL on certain categories, including "service matters and those pertaining to pension and gratuity." The petitioners had argued that Unnat Pandit's appointment was ineligible as he did not meet the requirement of a minimum of five Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) necessary for deputation to the post of Controller General of Patents, Designs and TradeMarks.

Food spending rises in rural areas, gap with urban centres shrinks

REVERSING A DECLINING trend from over a decade, the share of food in monthly expenditure of households in rural as well as urban areas went up in 2023-24, according to the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 fact sheet released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Friday. This probably reflects the impact of higher food prices; given that the figures are in nominal terms, the share of food in the consumption basket of rural households went up to 47.04 per cent in 2023-24 from 46.38 per cent in 2022-23, while that for urban households inched higher to 39.68 per cent in 2023-24 from 39.17 per cent in the previous year.

The HCES data also showed that the difference in average monthly consumption expenditure between rural and urban households narrowed further to 69.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 71.2 per cent in 2022-23, and 83.9 per cent 11 years ago in 2011-12, which implies that rural consumption spending continued to rise more than urban consumption spending over the last one year. "The urban-rural gap in MPCE has declined to 71 per cent in 2022-23 from 84 per cent in 2011-12. It has further come down to 70 per cent in 2023-24 that confirms sustained momentum of consumption growth in rural areas," the Ministry said in a statement.

Rural average monthly consumption spending per person increased to Rs 4,122 in 2023-24, an increase of 9.3 per cent from Rs 3,773 in 2022-23. It had stood at Rs 1,430 in 2011-12. This increase in rural spending over the one-year period was higher than the urban average monthly consumption expenditure per person at Rs 6,996 which increased from Rs 6,459 in 2022-23. The urban average monthly consumption expenditure per person had stood at Rs 2,630 per person in 2011-12. This seems to suggest that the pace of spending is more in rural India compared with the urban population, which seems to be cutting down on its consumption. A closer look at the fractile data reveals that the top 5 per cent of the rural and urban population saw a decrease in consumption spending in 2023-24, even as all other segments of the population, including the bottom 5 per cent, registered an increase in spending. Experts pointed out that this is in contrast to evidence from other datasets that show a rise in spending by top segment, especially on premium goods. "Every fractile class has shown an increase in consumption except the top fractiles which is opposite to the trend being seen in other datasets," an economist, who did not wish to be named, said. Former Chief Statistician of India Pronab Sen said the deviant trend in the top fractiles may be a result of the change in methodology. "The household consumption surveys were earlier done once every five years but after the change in methodology, the back-to-back surveys were conducted to see if the revised methodology is stable. The change in methodology needs to be validated, otherwise it may show results which are not explainable," he said. "It's also possible that while conducting the survey, the respondent is not the same during subsequent visits and it is no longer the same category of the people from whom you were getting responses," he told The Indian Express.

The monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of the top 5 per cent of the rural and urban population stood at Rs 10,137 and Rs 20,310, respectively, in 2023-24 lower than Rs 10,501 and Rs 20,824 in 2022-23. The MPCE of bottom 5 per cent for rural and urban population increased to Rs 1,677 and Rs 2,376, respectively, in 2023-24 from Rs 1,373 and Rs 2,001 in 2022-23. In fact, the increase in average monthly per person spending in percentage terms was the highest in 2023-24 for bottom 20 per cent in rural and urban areas at Rs 6,276 (19.2 per cent increase from 2022-23)



and Rs 9,156 (18 per cent increase), respectively. Top 20 per cent saw an increase in monthly spending of just 1.5 per cent to Rs 22,829 for rural areas and 1.1 per cent rise to Rs 43,266 for urban areas. Including the imputed values of items received free of cost through various social welfare programmes, the average monthly consumption expenditure per person was Rs 4,247 and Rs 7,078, respectively, for rural and urban areas as against Rs 3,860 and Rs 6,521 in 2022-23. The fact sheet did not give fractile data for imputed consumption as was released in the earlier round. Officials said details will be given in the full report that is slated to be released early next year.

A closer look at the data reveals that the top 5 per cent of the rural and urban population saw a decrease in consumption spending in 2023-24, even as all other segments of the population, including the bottom 5 per cent, registered an increase in spending. The Survey report, however, pointed out that consumption inequality, both in rural and urban areas, has declined compared with 2022-23. The Gini coefficient declined to 0.237 in 2023-24 from 0.266 in 2022-23 for rural areas and to 0.284 in 2023-24 from 0.314 in 2022-23 for urban areas. Among food items, the share of cereals went up to 4.99 per cent in 2023-24 from 4.91 per cent in 2022-23 for rural households, while that for urban households went up to 3.76 per cent from 3.64 per cent. The share of egg fish and meat in total MPCE inched higher to 4.92 per cent and 3.56 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively, in 2023-24 from 4.91 per cent and 3.57 per cent. Beverages, refreshments and processed food continued to have the highest share of expenditure in 2023-24 at 9.84 per cent and 11.09 per cent in the consumption basket of rural and urban households, respectively, compared with 9.62 per cent and 10.64 per cent in 2022-23.

The share of expenditure on non-food items stood at 52.96 per cent and 60.32 per cent in rural and urban households, respectively, in 2023-24 as against 53.62 per cent and 60.83 per cent in 2022-23. Consumption expenditure on non-food items in rural India was driven by conveyance, medical expenses, clothing, bedding and footwear. In urban India, the spending on non-food items was mainly on account of conveyance, miscellaneous goods and entertainment, durable goods and rent.

State-wise data also showed a divergent trend between consumption patterns of high spending by western and northern states and lower spending by eastern and central states of India. For instance, the average spending per person was lower than the national average in rural and urban areas of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh in 2023-24. States of Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh showed per capita spending higher than the national average. Rajasthan stood out as it showed consumption spending lower than national average for urban areas but a higher-than-national average spending for rural areas.

Current account deficit narrows to \$11.2 bn in Q2: RBI

Private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, increased to \$31.9 billion in the second quarter of the current fiscal from \$28.1 billion in the year-ago period.

The country's current account deficit (CAD) moderated marginally to \$11.2 billion, or 1.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), in July-September 2024 quarter from \$11.3 billion, or 1.3 per cent of GDP, in the same period of the previous fiscal. During April-September period (H1 FY2024-25), the current account deficit was \$21.4 billion (1.2 per cent of GDP) as compared with \$20.2 billion (1.2 per cent of GDP) in H1 of 2023-24, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data showed on Friday.

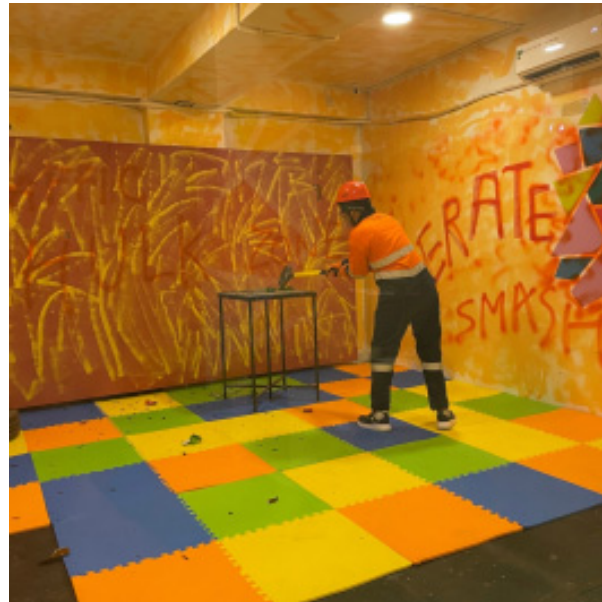
The current account deficit is the difference between exports and imports of goods and services. It is a key indicator of the country's external sector. In the second quarter of the current fiscal, merchandise trade deficit increased to \$75.3 billion from \$64.5 billion in the same period of FY2023-24. Net services receipts rose to \$44.5 billion in Q2 FY2024-25 from \$39.9 billion a year ago. Services exports have increased on a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis across major categories such as computer services, business services, travel services and transportation services. Private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, increased to \$31.9 billion in the second quarter of the current fiscal from \$28.1 billion in the year-ago period.



Net foreign direct investment recorded an outflow of \$2.2 billion in the reporting quarter as compared with an outflow of \$0.8 billion in the corresponding period of 2023-24. Net inflows under foreign portfolio investment (FPI) surged to \$19.9 billion in Q2 2024-25 from US\$ 4.9 billion in Q2:2023-24.

In April-September 2024, net FPI inflows stood at \$20.8 billion as compared to net inflows of \$20.7 billion a year ago. Non-resident deposits (NRI deposits) recorded net inflows of \$6.2 billion in the second quarter of the current fiscal, higher than \$3.2 billion a year ago, the RBI data showed. In Q2 FY2024-25, there was an accretion of \$18.6 billion to the foreign exchange reserves (on a balance of payment basis), higher than \$2.5 billion in Q2 FY 2023-24.

How rage rooms are redefining anger and stress relief in India



After a grueling week at work, juggling demanding deadlines and personal challenges, Karnam Gupta, 29, a reputation manager, felt he was at his breaking point. "It was one of those times when you literally feel like breaking something," he told indianexpress.com. On a friend's recommendation, he booked a session at a rage room—a space designed to let people unleash frustrations by smashing objects to smithereens. As Gupta picked up a baseball bat and swung at a bottle, he felt a twinge of fear. But with each swing, the act became less about destruction and more about release, about reclaiming a sense of peace. "There was a point where I started to feel the stress lowering and my mind calming down," he said.

What Gupta experienced is a growing trend in India in 2024. Rage rooms—also called smash rooms—are emerging as an unconventional outlet for anger and stress. The concept, already popular in countries like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Japan, has found its footing in India in recent years, particularly as conversations around mental health gained momentum. The idea is simple yet cathartic: don protective gear, choose from an array of breakable objects—from plates to electronic devices—and channel your anger, stress, or anxiety into smashing them, all in a controlled environment. Rage rooms stand out because they combine physical release with emotional catharsis, creating an experience that feels as much like therapy as entertainment. But can rage rooms offer a lasting solution, or are they just a fleeting urban fad? To understand more, indianexpress.com spoke to people who have used rage rooms, along with mental health experts and rage room business owners. Personal experiences

For some, like Arjun Tyagi, rage rooms provide an immediate and active form of stress relief. "Meditation or yoga requires time and patience, but I needed something more physical and instant," said Tyagi, an account manager. Will rage rooms become a lasting feature of India's urban landscape, or will they fade as a fleeting fad? Will rage rooms become a lasting feature of India's urban landscape, or will they fade as a fleeting fad? (Source: Rage Room, Maniaroom Adventures Pvt. Ltd.) "The idea of breaking things in a controlled environment sounded unique and liberating," he said. The moment he started breaking objects, Tyagi felt a wave of release. "Smashing things allowed me to physically vent emotions I didn't even realise I was holding onto—stress, anger, and frustration. Afterward, I felt lighter, calmer, and surprisingly more clear-headed. It was like a weight had been lifted, even if only temporarily," he said. Content creator and food blogger Vrunda Pansuriya, 20, however, found her experience less transformative. Intrigued after seeing Mumbai-based influencers talk about rage rooms, she decided to try it out. "Mentally, I didn't feel much relief, but it was definitely fun to do once," she said.

Do rage rooms offer mental health benefits?

Neha M Krishna, marketing head at Rage Room, Maniaroom Adventures Pvt. Ltd., told indianexpress.com, "Usually, people who come to a rage room either want to experience it once just for the thrill or because they are angry, frustrated, or stressed and want to let it out for a while. It actually helps." Sonal Khangarot, licensed rehabilitation counselor and psychotherapist at The Answer Room, shed light on how rage rooms or anger rooms offer "immediate

Varun Dhawan criticised for claiming drinking black coffee first thing in the morning ruins gut health; actor responds

Explore the debate surrounding black coffee and gut health sparked by Varun Dhawan's recent comments (Source: Varun Dhawan/Instagram) Explore the debate surrounding black coffee and gut health sparked by Varun Dhawan's recent comments While promoting his upcoming film Baby John, Varun Dhawan sparked a discussion about black coffee and gut health. During his appearance on Ranveer Allahbadia's podcast, the actor revealed he stopped drinking black coffee on an empty stomach due to personal gut health issues.

"See, if you get up in the morning and start with only black coffee, even if you don't have gut trouble, you will start having," Varun stated. This remark drew criticism from 'longevity biohacker' Prashant Desai, who shared his differing opinion on Instagram. Prashant countered Varun's statement, saying: "C'mon Varun, really? This is so not true. I have been having black coffee for 15 years now after waking up on an empty stomach. No issues whatsoever."

He emphasised that gut health varies between individuals. "Everyone's gut is different, like your fingerprint. To say everyone will have gut issues is not true. Varun Dhawan may have had acidity, and so be it. Food is personal," he added. Varun responded graciously, saying: "That's totally true; it didn't work for me. I'm glad it hasn't affected you, and you are healthy and super fit. I did say it's not one size fits all if you hear ahead. I'm glad you can use me as an example to educate people, sir, but please give me some tips also—always happy to learn from an expert." (sic) varun dhawan black coffee Prashant countered Varun's statement, saying: "C'mon Varun, really? This is so not true. I have been having black coffee for 15 years now after waking up, on an empty stomach. No issues whatsoever." Dr Kiran Soni, Head of the Department of Nutrition & Health at Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida, says that drinking black coffee on an empty stomach can increase stomach acid production, potentially leading to discomfort such as:

However, she agreed these effects are not universal

physical release" of pent-up emotions, "providing a safe and controlled environment for individuals to channel their anger and stress." "Unlike traditional therapeutic methods such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), mindfulness, or emotional regulation techniques, rage rooms do not address the root cause of the emotional distress," she said. Neha Cadabam, senior psychologist at Cadabams Mindtalk, said, "Anger and stress often result in physical tension, such as tightened muscles or increased heart rate. Engaging in physical activity, such as smashing objects, releases this built-up tension. Research in the Journal of Sports Sciences highlights how physical exertion can lower cortisol levels and trigger the release of endorphins, creating a temporary calming effect." She also said that breaking objects can serve as a metaphor for "breaking free" from emotional burdens or frustrations. This symbolic act provides a sense of control and empowerment, which is often lacking in stressful situations. Where are the materials for rage rooms sourced from? Where are the materials for rage rooms sourced from? Rage rooms provide a safe space to express anger without fear of judgment or real-world consequences. This allows individuals to explore their emotions without harming themselves or others.

Atul Malikram, owner of Cafe Bhadaas, Indore, brought the rage room concept to India in 2017 after discovering its popularity in Australia and Germany. Drawing from his own childhood habit of breaking things to vent anger, Malikram wanted to offer a safer, structured outlet. At his cafe, Malikram sources items like broken laptops, computers, crockery, and furniture from scrap dealers, with costs depending on the item. "Customers can smash these items in specialised rooms equipped with helmets, safety gear, and supervision to ensure a secure experience. The venue also features a soundproof, dark room inspired by Australian stress-relief practices, allowing visitors to scream and vent in private," he said. Breakable items are sourced through regular vendors, Krishna said, and the inventory is replenished multiple times a month to maintain quality. "The safety measures are robust with strict rules and regular replacement of gear, resulting in minimal injuries," she said. According to her, Rage Room mostly attracts Gen Z and corporate groups. She also said they have introduced breakup therapy and sessions to help de-stress after toxic workplace experiences.

Despite the appeal, running a rage room comes with challenges. Malikram noted the high costs of inventory, rent, and replacing safety gear. Some also dismiss the concept as frivolous, arguing that traditional outlets like exercise or meditation are more effective. Rage rooms provide a safe space to express anger without fear of judgment or real-world consequences. Rage rooms provide a safe space to express anger without fear of judgment or real-world consequences. (Source: Rage Room, Maniaroom Adventures Pvt. Ltd.) Drawbacks of using rage rooms as an outlet for emotional release Rage rooms offer a unique mix of fun and catharsis, but experts stressed they're no substitute for addressing deeper emotional issues. Cadabam said, "Rage rooms address the symptom (anger) rather than its cause. Using them exclusively might lead to avoidance of deeper emotional or psychological issues that require introspection and professional help." Khangarot pointed out how rage rooms may normalise destructive behaviour as a response to stress, which could lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms over time. "While it offers immediate release, it can inadvertently reinforce aggressive tendencies. If an individual relies solely on emotional outlets, they risk neglecting the emotional work required for healing," she said. Tyagi's personal experience proves this. While the rage room gave him an intense physical outlet to expel his emotions, according to him, the relief, while satisfying, "didn't offer the long-term balance I get from mindfulness or regular exercise; it works best as a quick fix." Cadabam also said that over-reliance on rage rooms can create a dependency, "where individuals feel unable to cope without engaging in such activities." The future Malikram believes the concept has immense potential but acknowledges the need to evolve. After the pandemic disrupted operations, he temporarily closed his rage room to renovate and introduce fresh ideas. He plans to relaunch in January 2025 with new activities to reignite interest. Krishna, meanwhile, said there has been significant growth in 2024, and that they expanded their offerings to include neon paint rooms and activities for younger participants under parental supervision. Looking ahead, her team plans nationwide expansion and franchise development in 2025.



"See, if you get up in the morning and start with only black coffee, even if you don't have gut trouble, you will start having," Varun stated.

and vary based on individual gut sensitivity. It can benefit liver health when consumed in moderation; drinking it on an empty stomach might aggravate gastritis or acid reflux in sensitive individuals.

Who Should Avoid Black Coffee on an Empty Stomach? People with the following conditions should avoid black coffee first thing in the morning:

Additionally, pregnant women, individuals with heart conditions, and those sensitive to caffeine should limit their coffee intake, Dr Soni said. Key Takeaways: Personal Sensitivity: People's tolerance to black coffee varies, so listen to your body. Avoid on an Empty Stomach: To minimise risks, pair coffee with a meal or drink it later in the day. Moderation is Key: One cup of black coffee daily can support liver health but should be consumed mindfully. Consulting a healthcare professional and understanding your body's unique needs is the best way to approach dietary choices.

'It was horrible to work with Bipasha Basu and Karan Singh Grover, they demanded separate rooms': Mika recalls producing web series against Akshay Kumar's advice



Back in 2020, singer Mika Singh produced a series titled Dangerous. Mika wanted to play it safe with his first project, which is why he chose a script written by Raaz filmmaker Vikram Bhatt. As he didn't want to take any risks, he hired Bhatt's entire team to work on the project. To keep the budget in line, he cast actor Karan Singh Grover and for the female lead, the singer wanted to launch a newcomer, until Karan's wife, Bipasha Basu, insisted on starring in the series alongside him. For Mika Singh, it was the "most horrible" experience of his career, forcing him to quit film production altogether.

In an interview on the KADAK YouTube channel, the singer said, "I wanted to cast Karan Singh Grover and a newcomer girl so that the project remains under budget, and we make something nice, but Bipasha Basu jumped into it and was like, 'We can both be part of this series'. They didn't exceed the budget, but the experience was horrible." Mika Singh shared that the couple created a lot of issues and extended a three-month shoot to six months, wasting a lot of his money. "I took a team of 50 to London for a month-long schedule. However, it was extended to two months. Karan and Bipasha created a lot of drama. They were a married couple, so I booked a single room for them. But, they were like, 'No, we need our separate rooms.' I didn't understand the logic. They then demanded to moved

to a different hotel. We did that as well."

He added, "Later, when we were shooting a stunt scene, Karan Singh Grover fractured his leg. They even created issues while dubbing the film. They were giving excuses that they have sore throats and other things. I couldn't understand the drama, especially when they were paid for their work."

Mika shared the couple even refused to do a kissing scene despite signing a contract which clearly mentioned that there was a kissing scene in the script. "They are husband and wife, and yet they created drama around kissing each other on screen," said the singer. He added, "These stars fall on the feet of big producers like Dharma Productions and Yash Raj Films and keep praising them for even the tiniest roles, but their attitude changes when it comes to smaller producers. Aren't we also spending money?" The singer said this experience forced him to give up on producing films altogether. He said, "I have now decided to never produce a film and I advise the same to others. And if at all they consider to make films, please give an opportunity to newcomers." In the same interview, Mika mentioned how Salman Khan and Akshay Kumar advised him against producing the project. He shared, "Akshay Kumar warned me about producing a film. We met at an event. He said, 'I heard you are making a film', I said, 'Yes, I am, I am producing it'. He said, 'Have you gone crazy? You have achieved so much in life, why do you want to go knocking at the vans of actors reminding them their shot is ready? Please don't invest your money. You will lose it all.'" Similarly, Salman Khan advised the singer to star in his own film. "Salman said, 'It is okay if you want to produce a film, but at least star in it. You are more famous than the people you have cast in your film.' But, I didn't listen to him either. I just wanted to remain a producer and give good music to the film. I put so much money and the series didn't work. Now, I regret not starring in my own project. At least, I would have made the songs work if nothing else," shared Mika. Karan Singh Grover and Bipasha Basu met on the sets of Alone in 2015. They married in 2016. In 2022, the couple welcomed their first child, a daughter, Devi.

Mohanlal reveals Jeethu Joseph spent years pitching Drishyam script to various other actors before bringing it to him; shares latest update on Drishyam 3

Mohanlal recently admitted he hasn't watched any of the Drishyam remakes in full, not even the ones featuring Ajay Devgn and Kamal Haasan. Mohanlal, Meena, Ansiba Hassan and Esther Anil in director Jeethu Joseph's Drishyam.

Though 11 years have passed since its release, director Jeethu Joseph's Drishyam remains a benchmark in the crime-thriller genre. The first Malayalam film to gross more than Rs 50 crore worldwide, Drishyam reshaped the trajectory of Malayalam cinema, helping it garner international recognition. The film was also remade in numerous Indian and foreign languages, and an official English remake is also in the pipeline. Featuring Mohanlal, Meena, Asha Sarath, Ansiba Hassan, Esther Anil and Siddique in key roles, its sequel Drishyam 2 premiered in 2021 to widespread acclaim, much like its predecessor. Malayalam superstar Mohanlal recently spoke fondly about the movie and the future of the Drishyam franchise. "Jeethu had Drishyam's script ready at least five years before we shot the film (first part). He approached many people with that script, but it didn't work out as they weren't convinced. Antony Perumbavoor of Aashirvad Cinemas (who eventually produced the movie) informed me and asked if I could listen to it. When I heard it, I felt it was unbelievable script-wise," he shared during a chat with Suhasini Maniratnam for Galatta Tamil. "How does a film become a hit? It's when there's something in it that you can take back home after watching, be it a song or a scene. In Drishyam, the key point was love for the family."

"When we planned Drishyam 2 six years later, Covid hit," he recalled, explaining how they had to forego a theatrical debut due to the pandemic and opted for a direct-to-OTT release. However, this decision proved beneficial for the movie, as it opened to worldwide acclaim, with people from various parts of the globe watching it online, propelling the Malayalam film industry to greater heights. "People all over the world watched Drishyam. I was shooting in Gujarat recently and many Gujarati people on the flight spoke to



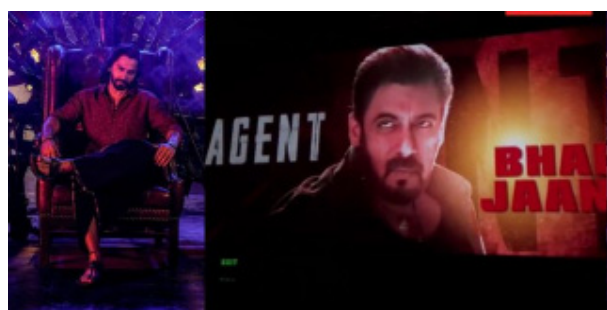
me about the movie. It brought Malayalam cinema pan-Indian recognition. Now, we are trying to come out with Drishyam 3," he revealed, hinting at the franchise's future. Both Drishyam and its sequel were remade into several languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, with Ajay Devgn, Kamal Haasan, Venkatesh and Ravichandran reprising the role originally played by Mohanlal. Interestingly, the original version also received international remakes, including Dharmayuddhaya (2017) in Sinhala and Sheep Without a Shepherd (2019) in Mandarin Chinese. Plans are also underway to remake the movie in English, Korean, and Spanish. However, Mohanlal admitted he hasn't watched any of these remakes in full, not even featuring Kamal. "I haven't watched any remake of Drishyam, not even Kamal's or Ajay's. I've seen parts of all these movies, but not entirely," he confessed.

Baby John movie Twitter review: Salman Khan's entry scene steals the spotlight in Varun Dhawan-starrer

Baby John movie Twitter review: Varun Dhawan's film, Baby John, has finally hit the big screen today. Despite it being the first theatre release for the actor since Bhediya, it seems like another star has managed to steal the spotlight. Internet is obsessed with Salman Khan's cameo in the action drama and evidently quiet impressed in the way the superstar has been introduced in the film. Social media platform, X is filled with praises for the megastar along with appreciation for Varun Dhawan. As the film had its special screening on Christmas eve, several visuals of Salman's massy entry has surfaced online. Sharing a glimpse of the actor's cameo in the Varun Dhawan-starrer, a user wrote, "One of the best entry scene for Salman Khan! The cinema will turn into stadium!"

Another user wrote, "Atlee truly knows how to showcase a megastar like Salman Khan on the big screen. What an incredible cameo performance." "Only south directors know how to present superstar like Salman Khan", wrote a fan. Salman Khan's cameo has also increased the curiosity among fans for his upcoming film Sikandar, directed by South filmmaker AR Murugadoss. The teaser for the film is said to be out on the actor's birthday on December 27. The film also stars actress Rashmika Mandanna in the lead role.

According to the makers, Salman Khan agreed to do a cameo in the film in less than ten seconds. In an interview with Pinkvilla, Atlee shared, "It was just an initial discussion between me and Murad (Khetani) sir. I told him, 'Sir, towards the end, I need a cameo... should we ask Salman sir?' He said, 'okay'. Next day, he calls me in the morning, and says, 'Salman has agreed to do a cameo.' I was shocked. I was like, 'I was just discussing with you, I don't



have any such scene prepared for it. Let me work on it." Murad Khetani, who was also part of the conversation, added, "I didn't have to convince him (Salman Khan). I was just having a conversation with him over a call. During our chat, I simply asked, 'Bhai, we wanted to do a scene with you in Baby John'. He was like, 'Done, let me know when I have to come for it.' The conversation didn't go beyond ten seconds."

There have also been reports that Atlee is all set to join hands with Salman Khan for a new project. The official announcement will most likely be made on the actor's birthday on Friday. Varun Dhawan's film, presented by Atlee, is directed by Kalees. The film also stars Kerthy Suresh and Wamiqa Gabbi in the lead roles. According to Sacnilk, the film sold about one lakh twenty six thousand tickets in advance bookings in India, earning around Rs 3.52 crore gross. With block seats, the film has said to be earned Rs 5.09 crore in advance bookings.

Shark Tank's Aman Gupta tells all about 'extremely egotistic' movie star who projects himself as 'humble' in the public: 'Our brand ambassador'



Entrepreneur Aman Gupta, the co-founder of Boat, recently shared an unpleasant experience that he had with one of his brand ambassadors, who, he said, is commonly known to be a very sweet person. Aman appeared on a podcast along with his fellow 'shark' Anupam Mittal to promote the upcoming season of Shark Tank India, which debuts on January 6. In the conversation, Aman said that certain people have mastered the art of humility, while in reality, they're quite arrogant. Appearing on Dostcast, Aman said, "We had this actor as our brand ambassador. He was an extremely egotistic man. In the news, I had always heard good things about him. People only wrote that he is 'sweet', 'nice', 'kind', and 'humble'... They often mentioned his good

behaviour with the paps and his fans, they also wrote that 'he travels in economy class', but his attitude was the extreme opposite when he worked with us. This experience taught me that people today have mastered the art of being humble."

He added, "However, Indians are pretty smart. One day or the other, they will get to know the reality. They do understand the difference between a genuine person and a pretentious person. They quickly understand which hero has ego, attitude, style and rizz." Aman didn't, however, reveal the name of the actor. Previously, a similar incident happened when former 'shark' Ashneer Grover recalled working with Salman Khan. He said at an event, "In the finance world, your business completely runs on trust. For me to gain overnight trust, I had to do something big, so I thought of making Salman Khan my brand ambassador. When we approached his team, they quoted Rs 7.5 crore. I made all the calculations, and asked the actor to charge less. He then agreed to do it for Rs 4.5 crore. After a point, his manager told me, 'Sir, are you here to buy bhindi? Why are you bargaining so much?' I said I don't have that kind of money." Ashneer had also claimed that he was forbidden from taking a picture with Salman. Later, they met on the stage of Bigg Boss 18, where Salman Khan questioned him. He said, "I heard you talking about me. You said, 'We have signed him for this much'. You also gave wrong figures." To which, Ashneer replied, "The decision to make you brand ambassador was one of the smartest moves I made." Salman Khan quickly responded, "You didn't have the same attitude earlier."

Mohanlal reveals why he and Mammooty aren't insecure about doing films together, unlike Bollywood stars reluctant to do 'two-hero' projects

The veteran Malayalam star Mohanlal opened up about his close relationship with his contemporary, the equally illustrious Mammooty. He said that they've known each other since before they became stars, and that their children grew up together. They don't feel a sense of competition with each other, and that's why they've done so many films together. Mohanlal was asked about this in the context of Hindi movie stars being hesitant about doing 'two-hero' films.

In an interview with Galatta India, when Mohanlal was asked what makes him and Mammooty different from the Bollywood stars who refuse to share the screen with each other, he said, "We started a film last month also. There is nothing called stardom. We had the chance of doing a film with grey characters; doing 55 films together, it's not a small number. In the Malayalam industry, to accommodate these two stars is not easy, that is why he's doing his films and I'm doing my films."

He continued, "We're in touch. Our families are in touch. Our children grew up together. We don't have any competition. Not only with Mammooty, but with any other actor." In a recent interview with Suhasini Maniratnam, she recalled how surprised her husband was to see Mammooty treating Mohanlal's son like his own. "Mani once went to Mammooty's house (then in Chennai) to narrate a story. While they were talking, a boy came near them and



Mammooty picked up a stick and chased him away. When Mani asked who it was, Mammooty replied, 'It's Pranav, Mohanlal's son.' Mani was shocked to see Mammooty treating Pranav like his own son." Suhasini shared during an interview with Mohanlal on Galatta Tamil. Mohanlal and Mammooty are set to reunite after 16 long years in a high-profile new film tentatively titled MMMM, directed by Mahesh Narayanan and also featuring Fahadh Faasil and Nayanthara. Mohanlal recently made his directorial debut, the big-budget 3D film Barroz, which has been under-performing at the box office after debuting on Christmas Day.

Anupam Kher calls Hansal Mehta out for criticising The Accidental Prime Minister despite getting paid for working on it: 'You were there for 35 days'



After the death of former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, many took to their social media accounts to pay their last respects. Journalist Vir Sanghvi described The Accidental Prime Minister, a biopic about Dr Singh, as "full of lies" and one of the "worst Hindi movies". His tweet caught the attention of filmmaker Hansal Mehta, who reposted it by writing, "+100". This didn't go down well with the film's lead, Anupam Kher, who said the filmmaker had no right to criticise the movie as he himself served as a creative director on it. This sparked a war of words between them. After exchanging words on X, they have shared their opinions in interviews with Hindustan Times.

Maintaining his stand, Hansal Mehta said, "I stand by my successes as I do my failures. I own up to my mistakes as much as I do any other choices I have made in my life. But to self-reflect, to introspect and to admit in hindsight that I have erred is my prerogative." He further added that there are times in a person's career where they carry out professional duties even when they are not in control of the work assigned to them. "By self-reflection I hope to make lesser errors of judgement in the future," said the Buckingham Murders filmmaker. Hansal, however, said that he respects Anupam Kher and it was only the politician's death that prompted him to express regret about his participation in the film. He said, "I think what irked Mr Kher was my agreement with another senior journalist's criticism of

the film. That might have been ill timed and deemed unnecessary but it reiterated some of my sentiments. Mr Kher is a senior and I will not resort to any mud-slinging towards him, his name calling or his opinions. I might have differences with him but the process of working with him was made pleasant because of his affable nature and commitment. Having said that I have often been self-critical and that is who I am. It helps me evolve and move forward. Nothing or nobody can stop that." Anupam Kher reacted to Hansal's statement and told the publication, "We can go on and on about it. He can reply, I can reply. Point is that you are a Creative Director on this film and you were there for 35 days, you are professionally paid for it and then whether the ship sinks or doesn't sink, you cannot abandon the ship. You own up your work." The actor added that Hansal Mehta was the one who congratulated him and the team including Akshaye Khanna and filmmaker Vijay Gutte. The actor further shared that he could have avoided sharing his opinion altogether, but he felt it was his duty to stand up for the film and own it up. On December 27, Vir Sanghvi took to his X handle and wrote, "If you want to remember the lies that were told about Manmohan Singh you should rewatch The Accidental Prime Minister. It is not only one of the worst Hindi movies ever made but is an example of how media was used to tarnish the name of a good man."

The day Australians forgot how to boo: Nitish Reddy's 'very, very special' ton unites bickering, cricket-mad nations



"Tension, Tension, Tension!" That's how Nitish Kumar Reddy's joyously-tearful father, Mutyala, described the moments to Adam Gilchrist when his son was one short of a most-memorable maiden Test hundred as rain clouds hovered over the MCG and the last man in Mohammad Siraj joined him in the middle. Siraj had to face either three balls or take a single possibly off the first before Nitish could come back on strike. Tension is a perfect emotion to not just describe the state of Nitish's family but that of all the cricket fans glued to the television watching a 21-year-old pull off something special. Gilchrist, too, would be intimate with that emotion though from the other side as has been at the receiving end of another Telugu-speaking cricketer, VVS Laxman, a few times – in India and in Australia. Simon Katich, another Australian cricketer, was visibly moved and would mutter 'very very special – like Laxman' a few times aloud at the broadcast centre.

It was a day of happy tears at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the most hallowed cricketing venue in Australia. The father would bawl beyond the boundary, the eyes of the mother and sister too were moist, and around them adult men and women were shedding tears. In the commentary box, Ravi Shastri's eyes went moist. How could one not get emotional? Right in the end, when he was on 99, the match situation, where Australia were still well ahead (India ended the day at 358 for 9, 116 runs behind Australia), didn't matter. The game and the fact that the series was on line didn't matter. Just that one run mattered. Nothing else. It was about a young man who has been India's find of the tour and earned the respect and admiration from tough fans of a sun-baked country who have continuously booed Mohammad Siraj through the series and who had booed Virat Kohli on Thursday when he came to bat as well as after being dismissed. The Reddy family has been a bundle of emotions today. Witness the magical moment as they embrace Nitish after he wowed the world with his extraordinary maiden Test century at the MCG. The same Australians were clapping, shouting, and willing the young Indian on. It was quite surreal. It was a celebration of the sport in some ways – a young batsman, who has gone about his game with great poise and character, was on the verge of something special. And the Australians, too, had recognised it, cottoned on to the moment. Sometimes, sport can transcend boundaries, borders, and make adults go weak in the knees. Later at a pub near the ground, a usual post-MCG haunt 'Mountain View', a few Aussies actually raised a toast, saying "to your young Indian fella, you should be so proud mate. For a moment there, we forgot it was Siraj with the bat and were hoping that he too would survive – just for the young Reddy!" Pride would eventually descend on the Indians at the MCG and also beyond it, for more special reasons. For Reddy-gaaru. "Have you noticed that Telugu-speaking cricketers have a great record and relationship with Australia? VVS Laxman, Mohammad Azharuddin, and now on that list joins Nitish Kumar Reddy!" an emotional 73-year-old Gopal Tangirala, founding chairperson of Australia Telugu Community and Cultural Centre, tells. Or even Shivali Yadav, born and brought up in Hyderabad, whose 52 of 102 Test wickets came against Australia. "Nitish seems to have the same sort of composure, talent, personality, and a friendliness about him – just like Laxman. I have met Azhar and also Laxman a few times. Just like Laxman, Nitish Reddy has been a thorn in Australia's flesh all series, hasn't he?!" Tangirala adds. There are at least 22,000 Telugu-speaking

families in the state of Victoria, where Melbourne is located, according to Tangirala. "I would say over 50,000 people easily. Nitish's gutsy performance makes us all proud, not just us, all of India! Not a surprise his parents were in tears, we all were!"

But as the father said, the preceding moments were of full "tension". When Siraj was beaten off the first ball he faced from Pat Cummins, who had replaced Nathan Lyon, after recognising that he had to be the bad guy, the kill-joy. And he tried his best. Siraj poked at the first ball and it almost tore away a slice of the bat. And the cries of 'ooooohhhh' rang out at the MCG, which has seen the most controversial Bodyline series that, in some ways, created the barracking culture of Aussies against the opponents. But this time the aural cry sounded like relief that there was no wood on the leather.

Until the moment Washington Sundar fell for an equally-important 50, the mood was different for it had seemed it would be a cruise through to the hundred. The Aussies were still hollering for a wicket and a large section of Indians were almost seemingly convinced that the two youngsters were going to cruise. A hush fell around the large section of a record third-day crowd of 83,073 when Sundar fell. Last time more people turned up for Day 3 at MCG was when Don Bradman, the greatest batsman to have played the game, was batting on 56 overnight at end of Day 2 in the Ashes Test of January 1937. He of course hit a big hundred the next day. But now the record crowd was not sure as Cummins – apart from one day at Perth when Kohli and, incidentally, Reddy were blasting his attack – hadn't let one moment drift by and was hustling down to stub out the joy out of Indians. Unsurprisingly, he took down Bumrah. Siraj walked in and even the Aussie fans, it seemed, had forgotten that they had to 'dislike' him.

Dark clouds hung around MCG. Cummins hurled a bouncer and Siraj ducked quickly. The Australian captain smiled, the crowd let out a thunderous applause. Reddy clapped, walked down the track to say something. Siraj didn't budge. Travis Head was at short-leg, the young pup Sam Konstas was at silly point. The slip cordon was packed. Cummins took a moment at the top of the run-up and charged in again with that unique run-up of his, with both feet almost threading the same spot in a crooked way. MCG was exploding and holding its breath at the same time, if that's possible. But it was that kind of day. In the past, in Chennai, Siraj had held his ground memorably to let R Ashwin hit a special hundred in Chennai. Now, he wanted to do it for Reddy. And he leaned forward to defend a length delivery as compactly as he ever did and held his pose, head bent that would have made Sunil Gavaskar, who had earlier in the day lashed out against Rishabh Pant for a false shot, proud. Konstas plucked the ball and threatened to throw down the stumps. Siraj didn't even look up. The crowd that has booed him constantly ever since his battle against Head cheered – presumably for his survival. The moment was getting absolutely surreal. On the third ball of next over from the hometown cult hero Scott Boland, who didn't bowl a single loose ball all day, Nitish Kumar Reddy smashed it on the up and over to the sightscreen and calmly ran across to the other side. All around him, the Indians and Australians were losing their heads. His family too. Not him, though. He quietly bent down on his right knee, took his time to prop the helmet atop the bat, and pointed his finger towards the sky. Siraj, who had run across excitedly, recognised that the moment was of the younger partner, and waited patiently before enveloping him with the warmest hug one can imagine – a hug that not just Telugu-speaking people, not just Indians, but even the Australians seemed to want to do. A hug of joy. Sometimes, just sometimes, cricket can make everyone involved shed a tear. It was that kind of a day at the ground that's lovingly shortened by the locals as just 'G'. The day Australians forgot how to boo, and extended their arms wide to hug and celebrate a 21-year old Indian kid at their most-prized cricketing venue: Reddy-Gaaru's G.

Dogged Nitish Reddy, Washington Sundar lead fight back but India not out of trouble yet

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

India vs Australia Boxing Day Test Nitish Washington India's Nitish Kumar Reddy, left, celebrates his fifty runs with his partner Mohammed Siraj during play on the third day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia, Sunil Gavaskar was angry. "Stupid, stupid, stupid!" Rishabh Pant had just missed a lap-scoop and hit on his midriff by Scott Boland when he tried again next ball. But the swifter off the edge was caught at the third man, who didn't have to move an inch. Gavaskar was on ABC radio and even suggested Pant should be walking off to the Australian dressing room.

To be fair to Pant, right through the series whenever India have been in a crisis when he came to bat – and that's nearly every time, he hasn't gone for anything outlandish. He has actually tried defending and grinding out – against his character but couldn't survive for any meaningful length of time. He has a way of walking into a defensive prod – landing on his front heel, never a great sign of balance, and pushing his bat out only for the angle to take the edge. And he has been taken out in that fashion in a few innings now. The same thing happened on Day 3, too, a couple of times before he decided to try his own method. It didn't work, and he had to trudge off, head down, at the same time Gavaskar was enraged on air.

Pant's jailbreak attempt might be understood but in general this Indian team hasn't shown the patience and character to play the situation; instead, even when out of touch, they have tried to impose themselves. Virat Kohli has got out chasing a wide ball on one occasion, and being loose outside off in other times. Shubman Gill has been a touch loose at least couple of times, yielding the advantage in Adelaide's first innings, and being part of a collapse in Brisbane. Yashasvi Jaiswal hasn't been able to curb his impetuosity when new to the crease on a couple of occasions, so much so that Gavaskar had suggested KL Rahul should take strike just to guard against that urge. Rohit Sharma has looked like an imposter, playing from memory almost. Only Nitish Reddy and KL Rahul have really tried to play the game situation, and Ravindra Jadeja in the little chances he has got, and unsurprisingly have met success. And so it continued on Day 3 of the Boxing Day Test. Pant combusted and Jadeja, who was trying his best

to drop anchor, couldn't survive Nathan Lyon. The Australian offspinner might not be anywhere close to his pomp – that front knee doesn't kick up as high as it used to do in the loading-up position, a sign of ageing perhaps, but the brain is still ticking strongly. A short while into the morning, Lyon's tick to him was pretty clear: try to trap him lbw with the one that skids on with the arm, with the angle from round the stumps. On at least a couple of times Jadeja just about escaped as the balls that hit the pad were either sliding down leg side or he had just about managed to stab them away with the bat. But the danger was clear and present – and Lyon got one to sneak through quicker than the bat could come down and straighter than previous times. The score read 221 for 7, and India were now gasping to save the follow-on mark even.

That's when Washington Sundar joined Nitish Reddy. Sundar had talked on Friday evening about how it was "amazing" that the team management had trusted him to replace Shubman Gill. Now, he had to amaze with his skills and temperament and he proved more than adequate. Sundar played the game-situation rather well. He was in strife initially as Pat Cummins peppered him with short balls with close-in catchers and also in the deep square-leg and fine-leg. He couldn't hook or defend without risk. Unlike some batsmen, Sundar seems to find it difficult to sway away or duck; he chose to hop and stub the ball down, and managed to clear waiting palms nearby. But he hung on resolutely and slowly things eased up. Reddy, of course, was playing at a different level, leading the battle to the Australians. Just when Sundar had faced his 161st delivery, 15 run-less balls after he had got to his 50, and the same number of deliveries as Reddy who was on 97 at that point, he got a lovely over-spun bouncing turner from Lyon that he couldn't help but stab to Steve Smith at slip. India were 348 for 8 then and the focus shifted to whether Reddy could get the three runs for a very special hundred at the MCG. He did. But even as all the emotional focus, understandably, has been on his hundred, it has to be said that India's position in the Test is still not safe. India still trail by 116 runs and Australia will undoubtedly push for a declaration at some stage on the fourth evening before trying to bowl out India on a pitch that can throw up some variable bounce. Reddy might have fished out one of the most memorable hundreds by an Indian, but India are still not out of the water yet.

'Could have got him out 6-7 times in the first two overs': Jasprit Bumrah on duel with Sam Konstas



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Jasprit Bumrah vs Sam Konstas IND vs AUS India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates the wicket of Australia's Mitchell Marsh during play on the first day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024. (AP Photo/Asanka Brendon Ratnayake) Jasprit Bumrah who was on the receiving end of some unconventional shots from debutant Sam Konstas which included 2 sixes, said

that he felt that in the initial stages he could have dismissed the Aussie 6-7 times in the first couple of overs. "Interesting batsman (Konstas) as well and I always felt I was in the game, I never felt I am far away from a wicket. Initially I felt I could have got him out 6-7 times in the first two overs but that's how cricket goes, some days it pays off, it looks good, some days if it doesn't you might be criticising the same person," Bumrah said in an interaction with Channel 7. The pacer, who has taken 24 wickets in the ongoing series, also said that playing in Australia always seemed to bring out the best in him.

"It always brings the best in you. I came here on my first Test tour in 2018, I made my ODI debut here in 2016 as well, so it brings out a lot of challenges because the wickets are very flat, the Kookaburra ball does a bit with the new ball and then doesn't do anything," he said. "So your accuracy is tested, the weather sometimes can test your fitness, your patience, so everything is tested. So once you come out on top after that it really leaves you in a good space and you can become a better cricketer." Bumrah added. In the 4th Test at Melbourne, Bumrah has taken 4 wickets for 99 runs, accounting for the scalps of Usman Khawaja, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh and Nathan Lyon.

'I also believe in Siraj bhai': Nitish Reddy posts tribute to pacer for helping him reach maiden ton

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Nitish Reddy paid a tribute to Mohammed Siraj who was the last man standing when the Andhra batter reached his maiden century in the 3rd day of the India vs Australia 4th Test at the Melbourne. Reddy was on the non-striker's end at 99 when Siraj came to bat with India on 350/9 with the crowd collectively holding their breaths to see if the bowler could survive the three remaining balls in Pat Cummins over. Siraj ultimately did his part and kept Cummins at bay before Reddy regained strike in the next over and played a picture-perfect straight drive off Scott Boland to reach the milestone. "I also believe in Siraj bhai," Reddy posted on his social media handles, drawing inspirations from Siraj's own viral interview after the 2024 T20 World Cup where he said "I only believe in Jassi bhai," praising Jasprit Bumrah's performance.

Entering at number 8 for India at 191 for six, in their first-innings pursuit of Australia's 474, Nitish led a remarkable counter for India with the help of a record 127-run stand for the eighth wicket with Washington Sundar. The 22-year-old Andhra reached his century off 171 deliveries shortly



before bad light forced early stumps on Day 3. Nitish became the third-youngest Indian after Sachin Tendulkar and Rishabh Pant to smash a Test hundred in Australia. The century was only Nitish's second First-Class hundred, having struck a Ranji Trophy century against Bihar earlier this year. Nitish walked back to the pavillion at stumps with racy applause from a packed MCG crowd with his family in attendance. His teammates also lined up on the boundary line and received him with a standing ovation.

Nitish Reddy meets family in emotional video after bringing up century vs Australia



GNS News Agency, Jan 2

After scoring a sensational century on Saturday which brought India back from the brink of disaster in the 4th Test against Australia, Nitish Reddy met his parents and shared some emotional moments. Nitish shared long hugs with his mother, father and sister in a video shared by the BCCI. "Nitish played really well today. I am very proud. We have struggled a lot. We are thankful to the Indian team," Nitish's father Mutyalu Reddy said. "It hasn't

been an easy journey for him. All I could say is that we are very proud and very happy. He said it and he did it," Nitish's sister Tejaswi said. Reddy's unbeaten 105 took India to 358 for nine, still 116 runs short of Australia's first innings score of 474 as rain brought an early end to the third day's play.

With the flat MCG deck not offering much to the bowlers, saving the Test match shouldn't be a big deal for India. Reddy, easily India's 'find of the series', played a pivotal role in visitors' fightback. Reddy's combative spirit and the invaluable 127-run stand he shared with Washington Sundar (50 off 162 balls) proved to be the turning point for the hosts. Reddy's innings was termed as one of greatest Test knocks by the legendary Sunil Gavaskar given the situation as India were in a precarious position after Rishabh Pant's dismissal courtesy a rash shot had left India tottering at 191 for six. A picture-perfect straight drive off Scott Boland was the moment of the series for India as Reddy balanced his helmet with the bat and took a knee, expressing his gratitude towards the Indian dug-out which gave him a standing ovation. The 21-year-old struck the 'Pushpa' pose after completing his fifty and aced the dramatic 'Bahubali' pose to celebrate the century.

'Impressed me from the first Test itself': Sachin Tendulkar lauds Nitish Kumar Reddy's hundred in Boxing Day Test

GNS News Agency, Jan 2

Nitish Kumar Reddy followed Sachin Tendulkar as one of India's youngest centurions in Australia. (AP) Nitish Kumar Reddy followed Sachin Tendulkar as one of India's youngest centurions in Australia. Batting legend Sachin Tendulkar on Saturday hailed all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy's maiden Test hundred for India in the Boxing Day Test against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Entering at number 8 for India at 191 for six, in their first-innings pursuit of Australia's 474, Nitish led a remarkable counter for India with the help of a record 127-run stand for the eighth wicket with Washington Sundar. The 22-year-old Andhra reached his century off 171 deliveries shortly before bad light forced early stumps on Day 3. Nitish incidentally became the third-youngest Indian after Tendulkar and Rishabh Pant to smash a Test hundred in



Australia. Tendulkar, who leads the all-time Test batting charts, lauded Nitish's temperament and highlighted the Andhra all-rounder's performance throughout the series. "A knock to remember by Nitish. He has impressed me right from the 1st Test and his composure and temperament have been on display right through," Tendulkar wrote on X. A knock to remember by Nitish. He has impressed me right from the 1st Test

and his composure and temperament have been on display right through. Today he took it a notch higher to play a crucial innings in this series. Wonderfully and ably supported by @Sundarwashi5 as well. "Today he took it a notch higher to play a crucial innings in this series. Wonderfully and ably supported by Sundar as well. Well played!" added Tendulkar. Nitish, who made his debut in the first Test, chummed in crucial cameos before converting his maiden half-century into a

hundred in Melbourne. Nitish also became India's second-highest scorer in the series, with 284* runs in six innings. The century was only Nitish's second First-Class hundred, having struck a Ranji Trophy century against Bihar earlier this year. Nitish walked back to the pavillion at stumps with racy applause from a packed MCG crowd with his family in attendance. His teammates also lined up on the boundary line and received him with a standing ovation.