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Allu Arjun gets conditional nod to meet Sri Tej at KIMS

Hyderabad: Actor Allu Arjun has received permission from Ramgopalpet police, albeit with certain conditions, to visit Sri Tej, the 9-year-old youngster who is undergoing treatment at Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), Secunderabad, after getting injured in the premier show of Pushpa-2 at Sandhya theatre.

The Ramgopalpet police listed certain conditions including going to the hospital with prior information to the police and not publicising his visit to avoid causing law and order disturbances. In case he neglects their advice, he would be held responsible for anything that goes wrong, the police said.

Special programme for qualified nurses to work in Austria

Hyderabad: Telangana Overseas Manpower Company Limited (TOMCOM), a registered recruitment agency under the Department of Labour, Employment, Training and Factories, is organising a special programme to conduct interviews on January 16 for nurses with German B1-level qualification, followed by placement as a staff nurse to work in Austria, a press release said.

Candidates in the age group of 22 to 36 years, with a qualification of B.Sc. Nursing or GNM and B1 qualified (German language) are eligible to apply for this programme.

Eight jawans of District Reserve Guards killed after Naxals blow up vehicle in Bijapur



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Eight jawans of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and a civilian driver were killed after Naxals blew up their vehicle with a powerful improvised explosive device (IED) in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Monday (January 6, 2025), police said. This was the biggest strike by Maoists on security forces in the state in the last two years and the first assault in 2025. Maoists detonated the IED near Ambeli village under Kutru police station area at around 2.15 p.m. when DRG personnel from Dantewada district were returning in their Scorpio vehicle after an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said. All eight DRG jawans travelling in the SUV and the driver of the vehicle were killed on the spot, the official added. The DRG is a unit of the state police and its personnel are mostly recruited from local tribal population and also from surrendered Naxalites. Reinforcement was rushed to the spot and the bodies of the deceased were being evacuated, he said. A search operation has been launched in the area by security forces, the IPS officer informed. These DRG personnel were involved in an anti-Naxalite operation carried out for three days on the borders of Narayanpur, Dantewada and Bijapur districts by joint teams of security personnel, the IG said. Five Naxalites were killed in the three-day-long operation and one DRG head constable also lost his life, he said. After the operation, DRG personnel from Dantewada were returning to their base in the vehicle when the attack occurred in Kutru area, Sundarraj added. The blast site is around 400 km from State capital Raipur. Visuals from the spot showed a huge crater, more than 10-feet deep, splitting the concrete road after the blast.

Prime Minister Modi Virtually Inaugurates Charlapalli Railway Terminal in Hyd

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Hyderabad: Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the Charlapalli Railway Terminal, an advanced facility constructed with state-of-the-art amenities at a cost of ₹413 crore. The event was attended virtually by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, while Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan and Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy were present on-site.

The Charlapalli Railway Terminal is expected to significantly enhance passenger services in the region, offering world-class infrastructure to meet growing



transportation demands. The terminal includes modern facilities, ensuring convenience and accessibility for travelers. Addressing the event, PM Modi highlighted the government's commitment to infrastructure devel-

opment, emphasizing the importance of modernizing railway networks to boost regional connectivity and economic growth. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, in his remarks, praised the collaborative efforts between

the state and central governments in bringing the project to fruition.

Union Minister Kishan Reddy noted that the new terminal aligns with the broader vision of creating a more efficient and passenger-friendly railway system. The Charlapalli terminal is set to ease congestion at existing railway stations in Hyderabad and cater to the increasing number of passengers in the city. The project stands as a testament to the government's focus on enhancing public transport infrastructure, aiming to make rail travel more comfortable and accessible for the people of Telangana.

PM Modi inaugurates, lays foundation stones for key railway projects across India

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of multiple railway projects through video conferencing, further strengthening India's railway infrastructure. Union Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Manjhi, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu also attended the virtual event. Among the key projects, PM Modi inaugurated the new Jammu Railway Division, marking a significant step towards enhanced connectivity in the region. He also inaugurated the Charlapalli New Terminal Station in Telangana and laid the foundation stone of the Rayagada Railway Division Building of the East Coast Railway.

Addressing the event, the Prime Minister highlighted the strides India is making in connectivity, referring to his recent experience with the Namo Bharat train in Delhi-NCR and the expansion of Delhi Metro projects. "This is a significant achievement. The metro network in India has now crossed over 1,000 kilometres," he said. Calling it a "big day for India's new age connectivity," PM Modi stressed the collective progress of the nation, stating that the projects reflect the mantra of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" and the resolution of a "Viksit Bharat". He congratulated the people of the nation on the launch of these transformative projects. The Prime Minister noted the transformation in Indian Railways over the past decade, stressing visible changes in infrastructure, services, and connectivity. "The development of Indian Railways is crucial for achieving the resolution of a Viksit Bharat," he said.

He elaborated on four focus areas for railway development: modernisation of infrastructure, enhanced facilities for commuters, improved connectivity across the country, and employment generation. "Today's event embodies this vision, contributing significantly to making Indian Railways



a modern 21st-century transportation system," he added. Highlighting high-speed trains such as Vande Bharat, Amrit Bharat, and Namo Bharat, PM Modi said these services have become benchmarks for Indian Railways. He noted that Vande Bharat trains are operational on over 50 routes, with 136 services running at speeds of 180 km per hour, easing travel for millions. "The time is not far when the first bullet train will also run in India," he said. The Prime Minister shared that the electrification of railway lines has increased from 35 per cent in 2014 to near-total electrification today. He also noted the construction of over 30,000 kilometres of new tracks and numerous bridges to prevent accidents in the past decade. "The 'Kayakalp' campaign has brought remarkable changes to Indian Railways. With the promotion of 'Make in India,' modern coaches are being developed for metro and railway services, and railway stations are being redeveloped with solar panels and 'One Station One Product' stalls, creating millions of job opportunities," he said. Discussing the Gati Shakti National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity, the Prime Minister highlighted its role in boosting India's logistics and trade. He also appreciated projects in Jammu and Kashmir, including the Chinnar Bridge, the world's tallest railway arch bridge, and the Anji Khad Bridge, the country's first cable-stayed railway bridge.

Formula-E race case: KTR appears before ACB in Hyderabad



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Hyderabad: After being summoned by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) for questioning in connection with the Formula-E race case, BRS working president KT Rama Rao appeared before the ACB on Monday and submitted his version in writing to the officials. After submitting his version, he left the ACB office and reached the party headquarters at Telangana Bhavan. Earlier, as per the ACB directions, the BRS working president turned up at the ACB office along with his lawyer.

In the notice served to Rama Rao, the ACB wanted him to share all information, including documents. However, the ACB did not clearly mention in the notice about the information being sought from him nor what documents were required, he said. "The ACB has not listed out the documents it required or the information pertaining to different aspects in the notice," he said. A case was registered against the BRS working president on December 18 and the same was challenged in the High Court. On December 31, after extensive arguments, the High Court had reserved the judge-

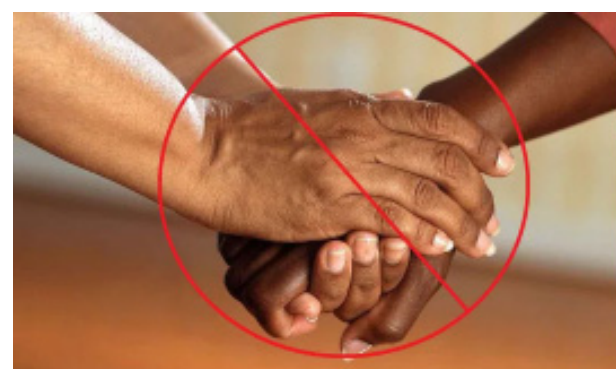
ment, prohibiting any arrest before the verdict was pronounced. "Even as the matter is sub judice and the High Court is expected to announce its judgement, the ACB served me a notice asking to appear for questioning on Monday and I obliged," Rama Rao said.

BRS stages protests across erstwhile Karimnagar over Rythu Bharosa

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Karimnagar: BRS leaders and workers staged demonstrations across the erstwhile Karimnagar district on Monday, demanding the State government to provide the promised Rs.15,000 assistance under Rythu Bharosa. Based on BRS working president KT Rama Rao's call for a State-wide protest, party activists staged demonstrations in different places of Karimnagar, Peddapalli, Jagtial and Rajanna-Sircilla districts. Agitating workers raised slogans against Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and the Congress government. They alleged that Revanth Reddy, who promised to provide Rs 15000 per acre, betrayed the farming community now by offering only Rs 12000. The true color of the Congress party was exposed once again. Terming all promises made to the people before elections by the Congress leaders as false, they demanded that both AICC leader Rahul Gandhi and Revanth Reddy, who went back on their promise of Rs 15000 Rythu Bharosa, should apologize to farmers. Karimnagar Mayor Y Sunil Rao, BRS district president GV Ramakrishna Rao.,

IMA Hyderabad issues advisory, says 'Namaskaram Muddhu-Handshake Vaddhu'



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Hyderabad: The Indian Medical Association (IMA), Hyderabad, Banjara Hills branch has come out with a catchy phrase 'Namaskaram Muddhu-Handshake Vaddhu', which means embrace the habit of greeting people with folded hands instead of hand shake, to combat the rise on seasonal flu cases and the threat of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Hyderabad. We have observed a rise in seasonal flu like symptoms primarily affecting the elderly and children in during this winter in Hyderabad. At present, respiratory ailments are under control but caution is advised. There is a need for collective vigilance and taking preventive measures at individual level, said president, IMA, Hyderabad, Banjara Hills, Dr Prabhu Kumar Challagali. Dr Prabhu Kumar urged people to stay informed, vigilant and healthy, which will go a long way in ensuring a safe winter. Precautions: • Cover your mouth and nose with a handkerchief or tissue when sneezing or coughing. • Wash hands frequently with soap/ hand sanitizer. • Avoid crowded places and maintain physical distance. • Drink plenty of water, eat nutritious food, and ensure proper ventilation. • Stay home if unwell and rest. • Avoid self-medication; consult a doctor if symptoms persist. • Don't ignore flu-like symptoms, especially in children and the elderly.

Bhatti pays visit to BC & SC hostels



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Bibinagar: Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka visited Gurukul BC and SC Girls Welfare Hostels in Bibinagar in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district on Sunday to assess the living conditions of students.

He inspected the facilities, shared meals with students, and interacted to understand their challenges. The Deputy CM was warmly welcomed by MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy, Additional Collectors Gangadhar and Veerareddy, and hostel students. However, a large crowd of party workers caused chaos, prompting Bhatti to briefly leave. After normalcy was restored, he returned and resumed his visit.

The Deputy CM inspected food supplies, vegetables, groceries, and health check-up records. During lunch with students, he enquired about the quality of food and asked if the increased diet charges had improved their meals. Students expressed satisfaction, stating that they now enjoy good meals with chicken and mutton served thrice weekly. However, they raised concerns about restrictions on snacks brought by parents, which are sent to orphanages instead. Bhatti assured them of addressing the issue. The SC hostel staff highlighted salary disparities, stating that while BC hostel staff receive Rs 15,000, they are paid only Rs 6,000. Bhatti promised to address the matter.

Simultaneous elections a way to solve economic problems: Piyush Goyal

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Simultaneous elections are the only way to economic problems said Union Minister of Commerce and Industry while speaking at a membership drive during his visit to his constituency North Mumbai on Sunday (January 5, 2025)

"This reform is the need of the hour and has the blessings of the people of India. It will eliminate economic losses caused by frequent elections and ensure uninterrupted development" Mr. Goyal said at the event.

Speaking about the measures of the NDA government he said that skilling, job creation and inclusive development were important for job creation. He appealed citizens in North Mumbai to join the party, in the run up to the local body elections that are tentatively scheduled to be held in April 2025.

U.S. taking steps to clear hurdles for civil nuclear partnership with Indian firms: Jake Sullivan



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

He said the formal paperwork for this will be done soon. The move will allow India access restricted technology in the US. Washington and New Delhi have been discussing the supply of U.S. nuclear reactors to energy-hungry India since the mid-2000s. But a longstanding obstacle has been the need to bring Indian liability rules in line with global norms which require the costs of any accident to be channelled to the operator rather than the maker of a nuclear power plant. The deal was signed by then President George W. Bush in 2007, a major step toward allowing the United States to sell civilian nuclear technology to India. Mr. Sullivan is on a visit to India two weeks ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the US. Washington expects the impact of Chinese upstream dams, artificial intelligence, space, military licensing and Chinese economic overcapacity to be discussed while Mr. Sullivan is in New Delhi, a U.S. official said on Saturday. The two countries agreed in 2019 to build six U.S. nuclear power plants in India. India's stringent nuclear compensation laws have previously hurt deals with foreign power plant builders, subsequently deferring India's target to add 20,000 MW of nuclear power from 2020 to 2030.

Two confirmed HMPV cases in Karnataka

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Hyderabad: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Monday in a statement said that the two cases of HMPV in Karnataka were identified through routine surveillance for multiple respiratory viral pathogens, as part of ICMR's ongoing efforts to monitor respiratory illnesses across the country. The first case is a 3-month-old female infant, who was diagnosed with HMPV after being admitted to Baptist Hospital, Bengaluru with a history of bronchopneumonia. She has since been discharged. The second case is an 8-month-old male infant, who tested positive for HMPV on January 3, 2025, after being admitted to Baptist Hospital, Bengaluru, with a history of bronchopneumonia.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Parental approval

THE digital age has revolutionised childhood, with social media becoming an integral part of how young people connect and communicate. Yet, this evolution brings significant risks that demand urgent action. India's draft rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) mandating consent of parents/guardians for minors to open social media accounts are a commendable step in safeguarding children. Globally, similar regulations are already in place. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires parental consent for users under 16, while the US Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) enforces stringent rules for users under 13. These measures aim to protect minors from cyberbullying, exploitation and privacy violations. The issues have also been addressed in India's draft rules. The urgency of these guardrails is underscored by alarming statistics: 58 per cent of teenagers globally are daily users of platforms like TikTok, with significant exposure to harmful content. In 2023, a Delhi man exploited Snapchat to blackmail over 700 women, highlighting vulnerabilities in unregulated digital spaces. Similarly, a UK teenager's tragic suicide after Instagram-fueled bullying reveals the psychological impact of unchecked social media exposure. India's proposed rules make social media companies accountable for verifying parental consent through robust measures, empowering the guardians to guide their wards' online interactions. To refine these rules, additional measures like AI-driven age verification, digital literacy workshops and transparent complaint mechanisms are essential. Regular audits, stakeholder feedback and alignment with global standards will further enhance the framework. By adopting these rules, India contributes to a global effort to create a safer online environment for children. In a world where digital engagement is unavoidable, prioritising the safety.

Cheap politics, says Delhi L-G as Atishi alleges order issued to demolish places of worship



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

An order linked to religious structures in Delhi emerged as the latest flashpoint between Chief Minister Atishi and Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday. As Atishi, while citing the order by the Religious Committee dated November 22, wrote to the L-G that the demolition of places of worship could hurt sentiments across communities, the L-G secretariat hit back saying that CM is playing "cheap politics". "It has been brought to my attention that the Religious Committee ordered the demolition of numerous religious structures all across Delhi, in a meeting dated 22.11.2024... Until last year, all decisions of the Religious Committee would be sent to you, via the Chief Minister and the Minister (Home), Delhi," the CM said.

"...In an order issued last year, your office stated that demolition of religious structures is a matter related to public order, and does not fall under the purview of the elected government and will be directly under the purview of the L-G. Since then the work of the Religious Committee has been directly monitored by you," she added.

Claiming the Committee decided to demolish multiple structures across the city following the L-G's approval, she further said, "The demolition of these structures would hurt the religious sentiments of these communities... On behalf of the people of Delhi, I would like to request you to not demolish any of these temples and places of worship..." In response, Saxena's office said, "Neither are any temples, mosques, churches or any other place of worship being demolished nor has any file to this effect come..." (The) CM is playing cheap politics to divert attention from her and her predecessor CM's failures... "Officials said that the L-G has issued strict instructions to the Police to maintain extra vigil against forces who may indulge in deliberate vandalism for political benefits." "His instructions are being strictly followed, as was witnessed during the Christmas celebrations that did not see any untoward incident," said the officials.

It's just empty benches and classrooms in 2,097 Telangana schools

Hyderabad: It's just empty benches and classrooms in over 2,000 schools, highlighting a harsh reality of school education in the State. This has come to the fore in the latest Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) plus report, which has been released by the Ministry of Education.

As per the UDISE plus report for 2023-24, a total of 2,097 schools are devoid of a single student, highlighting the grim situation of School Education in the State. In fact, Telangana achieved the distinction of standing third State in the country with a high number of schools with zero enrolments after 3,254 West Bengal and 2,167 Rajasthan schools. Despite zero enrolments, the Telangana schools continued to have 2,000 teachers on the rolls. Another mind-boggling data that has come to limelight was 5,985 schools with a total of 88,429 student strength had single teachers. The State was home to 42,901 schools with a total strength of 72,93,644 students and 3,41,460 teachers under all managements during the academic year 2023-24. Further, the enrollment in the government-run schools has come down from 33,03,699 in 2021-22 to 30,09,212 in 2022-23 to 27,79,713 in the academic year 2023-24.

How AAP govt's financial health had changed in 10 years



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The Delhi government under the AAP, since it came to power in 2015, has remained revenue surplus – a feat not achieved by other states. The government has achieved this despite spending massively on healthcare, education and subsidies. In its very first Budget, AAP had doubled the expenditure on education and increased spending on healthcare by 45%. When the party first held the reins of Delhi as a majority government in 2015, the budgeted outlay (2015-16) was Rs 37,750 crore. Each year, the Budget grew by nearly Rs 5,000 crore (compared to an annual increase of Rs 1.5 thousand crore in the five years preceding AAP's rule). In its latest Budget, the AAP government has announced an outlay of Rs 76,000 crore. On health and education, the AAP nearly dedicates 40% of its Budget – among the highest in the country.

While the debt to Gross domestic product (GDP) ratio in India is 27.5% on an average, for Delhi, it is just 3.9% – among the lowest in the country. Delhi's inflation-adjusted GDP rose from Rs 4.28 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 6.26 lakh crore in 2022-2023, up by 150%. The term 'Delhi Model' came into being when AAP government's fiscal and financial health remained intact despite its spending on healthcare, education and subsidies. However, cracks are now beginning to show. In October, for instance, AAP sparred with BJP when the latter pointed out that the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi was likely to face its first revenue deficit in 2024-25. The second controversy arose when AAP sought to borrow Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) for 2024-25, with just a few months left for Assembly elections and the Finance Department internally objected to the same. The department also flagged that if AAP's Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (giving women non-taxpayers dole of Rs 1,000 every month) is implemented, government expenditure on subsidies, which is 15% of the total Budget now, will go up to 20%. Currently, the three major subsidies on which the government spends money are – free bus travel for women (around Rs 440 crore), 100% electricity waiver up to 200 units and 50% from 201 units to 400 units (Rs 3,600 crore) and a water subsidy that provides up to 20,000 litres free everyday (Rs 500 crore). Amid these controversies surrounding the financial health of the government, the AAP has promised free healthcare for its senior citizens and raised the monthly allowance for women to Rs 2,100 if it returns to power. Here's how Delhi government's financial

health has changed over the last 10 years. Increased reliance on NSSF loans, grants-in-aid from Centre from 2016-17 to 2021-22, NSSF loans received by the Delhi government rose from Rs 2,896 crore to almost Rs 11,000 crore. In fact, the figure crossed Rs 10,000 crore thrice – from 2019-20 to 2021-22. In 2022-23, the Delhi government borrowed just Rs 3,721 crore. In 2023-24, no money was borrowed but this year again, the government sought Rs 10,000 crore from NSSF.

From Rs 5,588 crore in 2019-20, the capital receipts grew to Rs 15,996 crore – owing to the NSSF loan and a Rs 5,865 crore GST (Goods and Services Tax) compensation. The year after that, the Delhi government received Rs 6,192 crore as GST compensation. The capital expenditure has doubled in just five years, thanks to these two components. Before GST was implemented, the main source of tax revenue for the Delhi government was VAT (value added tax), which made up for 70% of tax revenues. Today, it accounts for just 12%-14%. In 2015-16, VAT worth Rs 20,245 thousand crore was received – a figure that the GST collections were able to surpass only in 2021-22 (above Rs 22,000 crore). Another trend is the increasing reliance on grants-in-aid from the Centre. While over 90% of the tax revenue that the Delhi government raised in the last 10 years has been its own, grants from the Union government have risen rapidly as a percentage of the NCT's GDP. In 2014-15, grants-in-aid from the Centre accounted for 0.47% of GDP. While it was 0.78% in 2015-16, the figure was 0.46% in 2016-17, 0.32% in 2017-18, and 0.78% in 2018-19, respectively. Things started changing in 2019-20 when grants-in-aid from the Centre accounted for 1.22% of GDP. In 2020-21, the figure was 1.54%.

The following year, it was 0.96%. Falling revenue surplus/Revenue surplus was 1.23% as a percentage of GDP in 2014-15. The next year, it shot up to 1.56%. Ever since, it has been on a downward trajectory and is likely to reach negative territory for the first time. While Delhi was 0.85% revenue surplus in 2016-17, the figure was 0.72% in 2017-18, 0.85% in 2018-19 and 0.95% in 2019-20, respectively. In 2020-21, it was 0.19% of the GDP – the lowest under the AAP. It bounced back partially the next year to 0.37%. At the same time, the revenue expenditure of the government doubled in eight years – from around Rs 23,500 crore in 2014-15 to over Rs 46,000 crore in 2021-22.

AAP's ability to mobilise revenue has taken a hit over the last 10 years, as is evident by its falling tax revenues as a percentage of its GDP. In 2014-15, tax revenue made up 5.38% of Delhi's GDP. The figure hovered from 5.05% to 5.49% till 2017-18. In 2018-19, it dropped to below 5% (4.96%) for the first time. Its downward trajectory continued in the following years. In 2020-21, it dropped to 3.95% recovering the next year to 4.54% – still a percentage point lower than 2014-15 and around 2 percentage points lower than the Indian average of 6.27%. Slightly over Rs 26,600 crore of own tax revenue was mobilised in 2014-15. This number grew gradually to Rs 40,018 crore by 2021-22 – a rise of Rs 1,916 crore on average annually, compared to an annual increase of Rs 5,000 crore in the Budget size.

Student groups object as SPPU mandates 8-day notice for protests on campus



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Student groups, including the ABVP and the NSUI, have objected to a circular issued by the Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) on Monday stating that permission for meetings, sit-ins, protests, or similar programmes must be obtained from the university administration at least eight days in advance. The circular, signed by SPPU's officiating registrar Dr Jyoti Bhakare, applies to protests organised at Pune University and its sub-centres in Ahilyanagar and Nashik. Any event held without permission will invite action, it said.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Tuesday held a protest at the main building of the university campus demanding that the circular be withdrawn. It also demanded that the eight-day notice period be reduced to 24 hours. "Savitribai Phule Pune University administration

is putting pressure on the students and trying to curb the programmes, activities, meetings and agitations of student organisations," the group said in a statement. Rahul Sasane, president of the University Student Struggle Action Committee, said it is the constitutional right of student organisations and political parties to hold agitations or meetings on student issues. "We publicly oppose and condemn the action if the university administration is working to stifle the freedom of expression of students by imposing oppressive conditions. Last year, the highest number of cases were recorded against students and student representatives. Do the university administration and the officiating registrar want to ruin the careers of students," he asked.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Bhushan Ranbhare, president of the Pune unit of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), said, "If we have to protest against some fee hike or multiple exams being scheduled at the same time, how can we give an eight-day notice? The university should not act in an authoritarian manner." Explaining the University's reasoning behind issuing the circular, officiating registrar Dr Bhakare told "The resolution was passed by the Management Council because many elements that were not at all associated with the university were creating disturbances on the premises. So it is the duty of the university authorities to maintain law and order." "Secondly, the eight-day period was mentioned because it is necessary to understand the root cause behind any protest. The eight-day period allows the administration to study the matter, discuss it with those who want to protest, and then work to solve the problem accordingly," she added.

Bengaluru police arrest tattoo artist, seize drugs worth Rs 2 crore



Acting on credible leads, CCB's Anti-Narcotics Wing raided his flat and seized contraband worth Rs 2 crore, including 3.5 grams of hydro ganja, 40 LSD strips, 130 grams of charas, and 2.3 grams of MDMA.

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The Bengaluru police arrested a tattoo artist for allegedly selling narcotics disguised as cookies, and seized con-

traband worth Rs 2 crore from his house. The Bengaluru's Central Crime Branch (CCB) arrested Rakshith Ramesh Melappanavar, a Davanagere native living in Chokkananahalli, Northeast Bengaluru, last week. Bengaluru City police commissioner B Dayananda announced the arrest on Tuesday. Acting on credible leads, CCB's Anti-Narcotics Wing raided his flat and seized contraband worth Rs 2 crore, including 3.5 grams of hydro ganja, 40 LSD strips, 130 grams of charas, and 2.3 grams of MDMA. During their investigation, the police found Melappanavar's involvement in a drug network operated by a prime suspect who works from another state. The two men allegedly imported hydro ganja, compressed into biscuits, from Thailand and Malaysia. These narcotics, disguised as cookies, were shipped via sea routes. The prime suspect handled orders and payments using foreign contacts, and Melappanavar stored and distributed the drugs.

The police suspect Melappanavar stockpiled the contraband in preparation for increased demand during New Year celebrations. He was planning to leave for New Year celebrations in Goa when the police raided his residence. He also leveraged his tattoo business, offering doorstep services to expand his consumer base, the police said. The narcotics were also sourced domestically from Goa, Himachal Pradesh, and Telangana. Investigators said Melappanavar was still learning the trade under his accomplice's guidance. A Bengaluru court has remanded Melappanavar in police custody and the police have launched a search to look for his associate.

Cheap politics, says Delhi L-G as Atishi alleges order issued to demolish places of worship



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

An order linked to religious structures in Delhi emerged as the latest flashpoint between Chief Minister Atishi and Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday. As Atishi, while citing the order by the Religious Committee dated November 22, wrote to the L-G that the demolition of places of worship could hurt sentiments across communities, the L-G secretariat hit back saying that CM is playing "cheap politics". "It has been brought to my attention that the Religious Committee ordered the demolition of numerous religious structures all across Delhi, in a meeting dated 22.11.2024... Until last year, all decisions of the Religious Committee would be sent to you, via the Chief Minister and the Minister (Home), Delhi," the CM said. "...In an order issued last year, your office stated that demolition of religious structures is a matter related to public order, and does not fall under the purview of the elected government and will be directly under the purview of the L-G. Since then the work of the Religious Committee has been directly monitored by you," she added.

Claiming the Committee decided to demolish multiple structures across the city following the L-G's approval, she further said, "The demolition of these structures would hurt the religious sentiments of these communities... On behalf of the people of Delhi, I would like to request you to not demolish any of these temples and places of worship..." In response, Saxena's office said, "Neither are any temples, mosques, churches or any other place of worship being demolished nor has any file to this effect come..." (The) CM is playing cheap politics to divert attention from her and her predecessor CM's failures... "Officials said that the L-G has issued strict instructions to the Police to maintain extra vigil against forces who may indulge in deliberate vandalism for political benefits." "His instructions are being strictly followed, as was witnessed during the Christmas celebrations that did not see any untoward incident," said the officials.

Curfew imposed in village in Maharashtra's Jalgaon after clashes between 2 groups



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The clashes began at around 9.30 pm and several shops were set on fire and vehicles were damaged. The clashes began at around 9.30 pm on Tuesday and several shops were set on fire and vehicles were damaged. A 24-hour curfew was imposed in Paladhi village in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district early on Wednesday morning, hours after a clash between two groups belonging to different communities led to arson and vandalism in the area.

"Curfew was imposed as a preventive measure. The situation is peaceful and under control," Ayush Prasad, District Collector, told The Indian Express. The clashes began at around 9.30 pm on Tuesday and several shops were set on fire and vehicles were damaged. "The clash between the two groups started after a sort of road rage incident. A violent mob tried to set shops on fire and damage vehicles. The police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Some people suffered minor injuries in the clashes," Prasad said.

The 24-hour curfew was imposed at 3 am Wednesday. "As of now, the situation is peaceful and nothing untoward has been reported this morning," Prasad added. The collector said that on Wednesday afternoon, the administration will hold a peace committee meeting to resolve any dispute between the two groups.

Delhi police seize Rs 1 crore-worth Alprazolam tablets, arrest 4 men of drug cartel

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The Delhi Police have arrested four people of a drug cartel operating in Delhi and National Capital Region and seized Alprazolam tablets, a psychotropic drug, worth Rs 1 crore, officials said on Tuesday.

The Crime Branch wing seized 2 lakh tablets, weighing 30 kilograms, from two locations – near Sonia Vihar and a godown in Uttar Pradesh's Loni.

Apoorva Gupta, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch), said the police arrested two men on November 28, based on a tip-off from Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) regarding a drug shipment. "A team under the supervision of ACP Anil Sharma and led by Inspector Praveen Rathi intercepted two motorcycles at 30 Feet Road near Pushpanjali Estate and arrested the two individuals – Laxman, 32, and Pankaj, 18, who were found with 27 kilograms of Alprazolam concealed in boxes," the officer said. DCP Gupta further said that based on their closure, an additional 2.4 kilogram of the banned drug was recovered from a godown in Uttar Pradesh's Loni. The police arrested godown owner, Ankit Shukla, on December 16 from Belya village in UP's Gonda.

Political rival claims TMC panchayat chief in Malda ‘illegal Bangladeshi immigrant’, Calcutta HC seeks report



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

bangladeshi immigrant Bhaduri while speaking with The Indian Express alleged that Lovely Khatun's real name is Nasia Sheikh, and she is allegedly a Bangladeshi immigrant who entered India illegally. The Calcutta High Court in Malda district over allegations citing that TMC-led Rashidabad Gram Panchayat chief is a Bangladeshi immigrant who entered the country illegally. A petition was filed in the Calcutta High Court in 2024, by Rehana Sultana, a resident of Chanchal, who contested the Gram Panchayat elections in 2022, but lost the election to Lovely Khatun.

"Rehana Sultana, who filed the petition, had contested as a TMC candidate, but had lost to Lovely Khatun who had contested as a candidate from the Congress and Left alliance. After Khatun won the election then within a month or two she joined the TMC," said Sultana's counsel Amlan Bhaduri while speaking with The Indian Express

alleged that Lovely Khatun's real name is Nasia Sheikh, and she is allegedly a Bangladeshi immigrant who entered India illegally without a passport. He further alleged that in 2015 an Aadhaar card was issued in Khatun's name and in 2018 a birth certificate was issued, but all with fake documents. "We had gone to the local police station and to the local administration, but no action was taken, thus we moved to Calcutta High Court in 2024," Bhaduri said. "Lovely Khatun has forged documents such as her Aadhaar card, voter card and even OBC status to establish her eligibility for elections. We also came to know from locals that Khatun had gone to a neighbouring village and asked a man to impersonate her father. Everyone knows that her father's name is not Shiekh Mustafa but Jamil Biswas, even in the National Population Register there is no mention of Lovely in Sheikh Mustafa's family," Bhaduri told. The counsel further raised questions on how Khatun was able to contest elections when she's not an Indian citizen. Meanwhile, Lovely Khatun did not respond to calls by The Express. This comes at a time when seven people have been arrested for allegedly making passports with forged documents for Bangladesh nationals, who had illegally entered the country. Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Kumar, recently, said, "We have written to the MEA requesting them to strengthen the passport verification system. We have proposed a new system where the district intelligence branch (DIB), local police stations, and senior officers will have a more significant role. In the letter, we have also expressed our concerns about the distribution of passports through post offices. All the agencies must collaborate to address these vulnerabilities. We aim to strengthen the system to prevent misuse."

Delhi sees record-peak power demand as temperatures dip

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

peak power demand While the peak power demand in the month of December last year was 4,884 MW, it was 4,964 MW for the same period in 2022. In a fresh high for Delhi, the peak power demand in the city crossed 5,000 MW during December. The plummeting temperatures in the city are said to be linked to the surge in the demand. As per the State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC), the apex body that ensures integrated operation of the power system in Delhi, the Capital clocked a power demand of 5,213 MW on Tuesday morning after registering a demand of 5,046 MW the day before. Officials said that forecasts from SLDC also indicate that Delhi's peak power demand this winter could surpass 6,300 MW, setting a new seasonal high. While the peak power demand in the month of December last year was 4,884 MW, it was 4,964 MW for the same period in 2022. The winter months in the Capital are expected to follow the record-breaking summer trend. "During the summer this year, Delhi witnessed an unprecedented peak power demand of 8,656 MW. In winters, this is the first time that the peak demand has passed the 5,000 MW-mark in December..." said officials. Officials said that key discoms — BRPL (BSES Rajdhani Power Limited) and BYPL (BSES Yamuna Power Limited) — successfully met this season's highest peak demand of 2,194 MW and 1,038 MW in their respective areas.

"Last winter, the peak demand had hit 5,816 MW, setting a record for the Capital. Among the BRPL and BYPL areas, peaks previously hit 2,529 MW and 1,210 MW, respectively. This winter, the figures are projected to exceed 2,600 MW for BRPL and 1,240 MW for BYPL," said an official. BSES officials also said that they are focusing on strategic power planning, precise demand forecasting, and



maintaining a robust distribution network to meet the requirements. "To deliver reliable power supply year-round, BSES discoms are set to ensure consistent power availability for more than 50 lakh consumers covering two crore residents in South, West, East and Central Delhi during the coming winter months," said officials. Further, the officials said that the BSES has secured over 2,000 MW of renewable energy. This green power mix includes 840 MW of solar power, 546 MW of hydropower, 500 MW of wind energy, 40 MW of waste-to-energy, and over 180 MW from rooftop solar installations across Delhi's neighbourhoods. "With this diverse mix, up to 53% of BSES peak winter power demand — expected to exceed 3,900 MW — will be met through green energy. Further, if demand unexpectedly spikes, BSES is prepared to secure short-term power from the exchange," said officials. In a statement, Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata PowerDDL) said it has "successfully met this winter season's peak power demand of 1646 MW today, the highest till date".

How AAP govt's financial health had changed in 10 years

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The Delhi government under the AAP, since it came to power in 2015, has remained revenue surplus — a feat not achieved by other states. The government has achieved this despite spending massively on healthcare, education and subsidies. In its very first Budget, AAP had doubled the expenditure on education and increased spending on healthcare by 45%. When the party first held the reins of Delhi as a majority government in 2015, the budgeted outlay (2015-16) was Rs 37,750 crore. Each year, the Budget grew by nearly Rs 5,000 crore (compared to an annual increase of Rs 1.5 thousand crore in the five years preceding AAP's rule). In its latest Budget, the AAP government has announced an outlay of Rs 76,000 crore. On health and education, the AAP nearly dedicates 40% of its Budget — among the highest in the country.

While the debt to Gross domestic product (GDP) ratio in India is 27.5% on an average, for Delhi, it is just 3.9% — among the lowest in the country. Delhi's inflation-adjusted GDP rose from Rs 4.28 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 6.26 lakh crore in 2022-23, up by 150%. The term 'Delhi Model' came into being when AAP government's fiscal and financial health remained intact despite its spending on healthcare, education and subsidies. However, cracks are now beginning to show.

In October, for instance, AAP sparred with BJP when the latter pointed out that the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi was likely to face its first revenue deficit in 2024-25. The second controversy arose when AAP sought to borrow Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) for 2024-25, with just a few months left for Assembly elections and the Finance Department internally objected to the same. The department also flagged that if AAP's Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (giving women non-taxpayers dole of Rs 1,000 every month) is implemented, government expenditure on subsidies, which is 15% of the total Budget now, will go up to 20%. Currently, the three major subsidies on which the government spends money are — free bus travel for women (around Rs 440 crore), 100% electricity waiver up to 200 units and 50% from 201 units to 400 units (Rs 3,600 crore) and a water subsidy that provides up to 20,000 litres free everyday (Rs 500 crore).

Amid these controversies surrounding the financial health of the government, the AAP has promised free healthcare for its senior citizens and raised the monthly allowance for women to Rs 2,100 if it returns to power. Here's how Delhi government's financial health has changed over the last 10 years. Increased reliance on NSSF loans, grants-in-aid from Centre. From 2016-17 to 2021-22, NSSF loans received by the Delhi government rose from Rs 2,896 crore to almost Rs 11,000 crore. In fact, the figure crossed Rs 10,000 crore thrice — from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

In 2022-23, the Delhi government borrowed just Rs



3,721 crore. In 2023-24, no money was borrowed but this year again, the government sought Rs 10,000 crore from NSSF. From Rs 5,588 crore in 2019-20, the capital receipts grew to Rs 15,996 crore — owing to the NSSF loan and a Rs 5,865 crore GST (Goods and Services Tax) compensation. The year after that, the Delhi government received Rs 6,192 crore as GST compensation. The capital expenditure has doubled in just five years, thanks to these two components. Before GST was implemented, the main source of tax revenue for the Delhi government was VAT (value added tax), which made up for 70% of tax revenues. Today, it accounts for just 12%-14%. In 2015-16, VAT worth Rs 20,245 thousand crore was received — a figure that the GST collections were able to surpass only in 2021-22 (above Rs 22,000 crore). Another trend is the increasing reliance on grants-in-aid from the Centre. While over 90% of the tax revenue that the Delhi government raised in the last 10 years has been its own, grants from the Union government have risen rapidly as a percentage of the NCT's GDP. In 2014-15, grants-in-aid from the Centre accounted for 0.47% of GDP. While it was 0.78% in 2015-16, the figure was 0.46% in 2016-17, 0.32% in 2017-18, and 0.78% in 2018-19, respectively. Things started changing in 2019-20 when grants-in-aid from the Centre accounted for 1.22% of GDP. In 2020-21, the figure was 1.54%. The following year, it was 0.96%.

Revenue surplus was 1.23% as a percentage of GDP in 2014-15. The next year, it shot up to 1.56%. Ever since, it has been on a downward trajectory and is likely to reach negative territory for the first time. While Delhi was 0.85% revenue surplus in 2016-17, the figure was 0.72% in 2017-18, 0.85% in 2018-19 and 0.95% in 2019-20, respectively. In 2020-21, it was 0.19% of the GDP — the lowest under the AAP. It bounced back partially the next year to 0.37%. At the same time, the revenue expenditure of the government doubled in eight years — from around Rs 23,500 crore in 2014-15 to over Rs 46,000 crore in 2021-22. AAP's ability to mobilise revenue has taken a hit over the last 10 years, as is evident by its falling tax revenues as a percentage of its GDP. In 2014-15, tax revenue made up 5.38% of Delhi's GDP. The figure hovered from 5.05% to 5.49% till 2017-18. In 2018-19, it dropped to below 5% (4.96%) for the first time.

To enhance emergency care at sea, AIIMS-Delhi & Coast Guard sign MoU



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

With an aim to enhance emergency care capabilities at sea, the All India Institute Of Medical Science (AIIMS) in Delhi is set to provide training to the Indian Coast Guard personnel for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). A memorandum of understanding (MoU) has been signed between AIIMS Delhi with the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) to equip the personnel with critical life-saving skills. CPR refers to chest compressions that keep the blood flowing to

essential organs when the heart is not working properly. Immediate CPR is believed to double or triple the chances of survival after cardiac arrest. The agreement was signed by Surgeon Commodore Sanjay Dutta on behalf of the Indian Coast Guard and Dr Shailendra Kumar, AIIMS Coordinator, Comprehensive Resuscitation Training Centre. "This collaboration represents a milestone in bolstering medical readiness within the Indian Coast Guard. AIIMS Delhi will offer structured and advanced training to Coast Guard medical officers, ensuring they are well-prepared to handle medical emergencies in operationally challenging environments," said Surgeon Commodore Sanjay Dutta. "It's very important because that is the first thing we do if there are instances of drowning. So the staff deployed in the sea should know how to give cardiac compressions just to get some time till the medical help arrives," Dr Shailendra Kumar, Professor, Department of Anaesthesiology, said. "Everyone should know how to give chest compression because last-minute YouTube video or theoretical knowledge won't help, so training is important," said Dr Kumar.

Cop killed for rebuking public drinking, chargesheet filed

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The Delhi Police has submitted before the Tis Hazari court a 400-page chargesheet detailing how an on-duty constable was killed in September allegedly for rebuking two people for drinking on the road in Outer Delhi's Nangloi. Constable Sandeep Malik (30) was performing his night duty in civil clothes on September 29 when he was killed. Two men, Dharmender and Rajnish, have been arrested for the murder. According to the chargesheet, submitted on December 27, the incident took place around 2.15 am. Malik noticed Dharmender (39) and Rajnish (25) consuming alcohol inside a vehicle on the road and confronted them. An argument ensued, escalating into a violent altercation. The chargesheet said the driver rammed his car into Malik's motorcycle, dragging it for approximately 10 m. The impact caused Malik to suffer critical head injuries. Fellow officers rushed him to the hospital, but doctors declared him brought dead. Footage captured on CCTV cameras aided the investigation. The Delhi Police has named Dharmender and Rajnish as the primary accused, while two others, Jitender and Manoj Shareman, have been charged with harboring the offenders. The vehicle used in the crime belonged to Dharmender's friend, Amit, whose testimony forms a part of the chargesheet. The probe has



revealed that the accused were known to Malik, as he was a resident of the same locality at Veena Enclave in Nangloi. A native of Haryana's Rohtak, Malik lived with two other police constables in a rented accommodation, police said.

The accused were booked under sections 221 (obstructing public servant in discharge of his public functions), 132 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 103 (murder), 249 (harbouring offender) and 3(5)(acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

FIR lodged against former Maharajganj DM, other officials over 2019 house demolition

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

FIR lodged against former Maharajganj DM, other officials over 2019 house demolition Apart from the DM, the persons named included an Additional DM, Additional SP, engineers, private contractors, inspectors, and sub-inspectors. The UP Police registered an FIR against several officials in connection with the demolition of a house in Maharajganj district in 2019, allegedly without prior notice, for the purpose of road widening. Officials booked in the case include then Maharajganj DM Amarnath Upadhyay as well as engineers and police personnel. This comes over a month after the Supreme Court criticised the "high-handed" approach of UP authorities in demolishing the house. In its directions on November 6, the SC told authorities to pay Rs 25 lakh compensation to the house owner. The court had also directed UP's Chief Secretary to conduct an inquiry against officers and contractors responsible for the demolitions and to initiate disciplinary action against them.

According to police, complainant Manoj Tibrewal Akash alleged that then DM of Maharajganj, Amarnath Upadhyay, acted with malicious intent and, as part of a larger conspiracy, demolished his house and shop on September 13, 2019, without issuing any notice or providing compensation. Akash alleged that the action was taken in retaliation against a complaint he had filed earlier, highlighting irregularities in the construction of a 21-km stretch of NH-730, police said. The case was lodged at the Kotwali police station in Maharajganj Monday evening against 26



named and several unidentified persons. Apart from the DM, the persons named included an Additional DM, Additional SP, engineers, private contractors, inspectors, and sub-inspectors. Maharajganj SP Somendra Meena said no arrests have been made so far. He also said the investigation would be transferred to the UP Police's Crime Branch, as directed by the court. The then DM Upadhyay is currently posted as Special Secretary in the UP Empowerment of Persons With Disabilities Department. Akash, said, "The Supreme Court on November 6 directed an inquiry and disciplinary action against officials within a month. When the government failed to take action, I sent an email to Chief Secretary stating I would file a contempt plea. On Monday evening, the case was filed. I will wait for action and if no action is taken in 90 days, I will move the SC to transfer the probe to CBI."

Last five accused get 3 years in jail after 23 yrs



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

A Special CBI Judge has sentenced the last five of the 16 accused in the 2001 Telgi bogus stamp scam to three years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 50,000 each. The five — Falguni Babu Patel, Kishore Kumar Purshottam Patel, Prashant Nangappa Patil, Amzad Ali and Shaikh Zakir Hussain — were found guilty of criminal conspiracy, forgery of stamps, cheating, as well as forgery and making or possessing forged documents in the alleged scam of circulating counterfeit stamps. The convicts were licensed and unlicensed vendors who knowingly utilised/sold forged stamp papers, court fee stamps, and share transfer stamps of various denominations in Ahmedabad and Surat. The scam, which was uncovered in 2001, was originally investigated by Gandhinagar Zone of CID Crime of Gujarat Police, before it was transferred to the CBI. The prime accused, Abdul Karim Telgi, who belonged to Belgaum in Karnataka, was accused in multiple cases, and died in October 2017. The fraudulent activities were discovered during a raid on stamp vendors in Surat and Ahmedabad where authorities seized a large number of bogus stamps. The operation was traced to two offices operating under the names 'Saguru Services' and 'Sahay Services'. Of the 16 accused, two passed away during the course of the trial, while nine

others were convicted earlier. Five accused, namely Shabbir Ahmed Sheikh, Shivaji, Khalid Ahmed, Vijay Solanki and Jacob Chako, were sentenced to five years imprisonment and a fine of Rs 25,000 each in August 2008. In March 2009, two other accused — Sadiq Ibrahim Hudli and AKL Telgi — were sentenced to 7 years in jail and a fine of Rs 35,000 each, while Sidharth alias Sidhu was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment and a fine of Rs 30,000. The court sentenced Raju Nayak to 2 years imprisonment in August 2010.

Man gets 60 years jail in for raping three minor girls

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Jagtial: A Fast Track Special Court here on Tuesday sentenced a 59-year-old man, Shivaratri Muttaiah, to 60 years of rigorous imprisonment on charges of raping three minor girls, with each crime getting 20 years each.

The sentences will run concurrently, which means he will have to be behind bars for 20 years. The court also directed him to pay a compensation of Rs 2 lakh each to the three girls.

After the horrific rape, the Gollapalli police registered the case against Sattaiah under the POCSO Act and produced him before court. While the then SI Naresht registered the case, DSPs Venkataswamy and Raghuchander investigated and produced evidence before the court.

Delivering the final judgment on Tuesday, the fast track special court sentenced 20 years of rigorous imprisonment as well as a fine of Rs 1000 in each case. Apart from this, the court also directed Muttaiah to pay Rs 2 lakh each as compensation to each of the victims.

Are former Prime Ministers mandated memorials? | Explained



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The story so far: Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh passed away on December 26. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) declared seven days of State mourning and announced a state funeral for the dignitary. Mr. Singh was cremated at the Nigambodh Ghat in central Delhi, a first for any former PM. The Congress party said it was an "insult" that a separate place was not allocated by the government for the funeral of the former PM. The Congress party demanded that a memorial be built at the designated place where the cremation took place.

Is there a rule related to memorials?

While guidelines exist for State funerals, there is no specific rule or government order regarding allocation of space for memorials for former PMs. According to constitutional expert P.D.T Achary, there was a departure in the case of Mr. Singh. "As far as I know, there is no such rule. The convention is that former PMs have been cremated at designated places and in this case there is a departure. They cremated him at a place where anybody can be cremated even a common man. In our country though everyone is equal before the law, in society, a former PM has a status and especially a person like Manmohan Singh who was also globally respected," Mr. Achary said.

What has been the trend in the past?

Except PM Vishwanath Pratap Singh, all other former PMs have memorials dedicated to them, majorly in Delhi and other parts of the country. P. V. Narasimha Rao got a

memorial in his name at Ekta Sthal in Delhi in 2015, 10 years after his death in 2004. In Delhi, the samadhi of Jawaharlal Nehru is known as Shanti Vana, Lal Bahadur Shastri's memorial is known as Vijay Ghat, that of Charan Singh's is Kisan Ghat, Indira Gandhi's memorial is at Shakti Sthal, and Rajiv Gandhi's memorial is known as Vir Bhumi. In 2013, due to paucity of space, the Congress government decided that all memorials will be built at Smriti Sthal.

Who maintains the memorials?

According to a reply furnished by the Culture Ministry on December 11, 2012 in Lok Sabha, the memorials of various personalities are maintained by the respective State Governments and local municipalities. "However, the Central Government through the Ministry of Urban Development is looking after the upkeep and maintenance of the Samadhis adjacent to Rajghat, New Delhi, Morarji Desai's Samadhi at Abhay Ghat at Ahmedabad and the Rajiv Gandhi Memorial at Sriperumbudur (Tamil Nadu)," the reply stated.

What is the Congress's demand?

On December 27, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting the Union Government to identify a designated place where the last rites of the departed leader could be held and a memorial built thereafter. Despite the request, the cremation was held at Nigambodh Ghat on December 28. Following an uproar, the MHA released a press statement on December 27 at 11.45 pm. It stated that the government received a request to allocate space for a memorial for the former Prime Minister. "Immediately after the Cabinet meeting, Home Minister Amit Shah communicated to Congress President Kharge and the family of Late Dr Manmohan Singh that the Government will allocate space for the memorial. In the meanwhile cremation and other formalities can happen because a Trust has to be formed and space has to be allocated to it," the statement said. Till December 30, the memorial for Mr. Singh had not been announced. Atal Bihari Vajpayee who passed on August 16, 2018 was cremated at Smriti Sthal, and a memorial came up at the same place within 45 days. The memorial was funded by the "Atal Smriti Nyas Society". It was built at a total cost of 10.51 crore which was borne entirely by the society.

UGC's biannual admission policy: Benefits and implementation



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India's recent directive that allows universities to admit students twice annually — in June and December — marks a significant shift in the nation's higher education framework. This progressive policy aligns with global best practices, catering to the evolving needs of students while offering substantial advantages to recruiters. By fostering greater flexibility and accessibility, this initiative seeks to enhance the responsiveness of India's academic institutions to contemporary demands. The twin-admissions-a-year initiative meets a demand that industry recruiters have been making for over decades, especially from the 2008-09 worldwide economic slowdown.

Enhanced accessibility and flexibility: Introducing a biannual admission cycle offers students additional opportunities to enrol in higher education programs. Those unable to secure admission in the June intake due to unforeseen personal, financial, or academic constraints can now avail themselves of the December intake. This mechanism mitigates the adverse impact of missed deadlines, ensuring that students do not lose an entire academic year. Losing an entire year also means a student could suffer social stigma (of a failed candidate) or mental strain. Global synchronization of academic calendars: Aligning India's academic calendar with international standards facilitates smoother transitions for students aspiring to pursue education abroad. It also simplifies participation in exchange programs and collaborative degree initiatives with global institutions. With foreign universities coming into India to set up campus, starting with GIFT City, Gujarat, this policy move is key to two admissions a year. Opportunities for non-traditional students: The December admission window provides an invaluable opportunity for individuals seeking to return to education after a hiatus or for those contemplating a career shift. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for professionals aiming to upskill or reskill in response to changing industry demands. Relief for competitive examination candidates: Students preparing for competitive exams such as NEET, JEE, or UPSC often face considerable uncertainty regarding their results and career trajectories. The availability of two admission windows empowers them to make well-informed choices without forfeiting valuable time or "drop year". Personalised learning trajectories: The flexibility afforded by the biannual system encourages the adoption of modular and stackable degree structures. For instance, students may take a semester-long break to gain practical experience or undertake internships, rejoining their academic pursuits during the next cycle.

Benefits for recruiters: A continuous talent supply: While business demand is all through the year, supply happened only once a year, which disadvantaged companies across industries. For recruiters, the biannual admission framework ensures a consistent flow of graduates entering the workforce throughout the year. This is particularly advantageous for industries with secular hiring requirements or project-based talent demands.

Improved workforce readiness: The staggered graduation timelines allow organizations to align talent acquisition strategies with business cycles. Companies with fiscal year-end demands, for example, may benefit significantly from graduates available in December, while others with summer-specific needs might prefer June graduates. Refined recruitment strategies: The dual admission system facilitates targeted campus recruitment efforts, enabling companies to engage with diverse cohorts of students and select candidates best suited to their specific requirements, through customized recruitment drives. Expanded internship opportunities: With overlapping academic schedules, businesses can design internship programs that align seamlessly with the academic calendar. This arrangement ensures that students gain valuable practical exposure, while organizations build a talent pipeline of pre-trained professionals. Challenges and mitigation strategies: While the biannual admission cycle offers numerous benefits, its successful implementation necessitates addressing certain challenges. Harmonization of academic calendars: Universities must synchronize academic schedules to accommodate two cohorts without compromising educational quality. Leveraging technology and meticulous planning will be crucial in achieving this objective. Efficient resource allocation: Academic and administrative staff may experience increased workloads due to overlapping admissions, teaching responsibilities, and evaluations. Institutions can address this challenge by employing additional personnel and adopting digital solutions. And better utilization of lab and other infrastructure can happen, which can be efficient calendarization.

Industry awareness: It is essential to ensure that recruiters are adequately informed about the revised academic timelines. Collaborative efforts between universities and industries will be instrumental in fostering awareness and alignment. Most institutions have a sanctioned intake for different programs. Now they need to figure out how they can divide their intake among the two cycles. They will need to approach policy and standard-setting bodies for clarity on whether the intake numbers need to be also split or whether they could take more than the sanctioned strength to meet the new demands that could ensue the policy decision. Calibrated execution: Every which way, the UGC's decision to introduce a biannual admission policy, seems to be a forward-thinking initiative poised to democratize access to higher education and enhance employability. It also addresses long-standing challenges in India's higher education system. However, it is always the execution that needs to be calibrated. A robust implementation of the decision across the nation requires active collaboration among policy makers, academic heads, administrators and state-level higher education departments. Only then the new framework's potential can catalyse a more inclusive, dynamic, and future-ready education ecosystem.

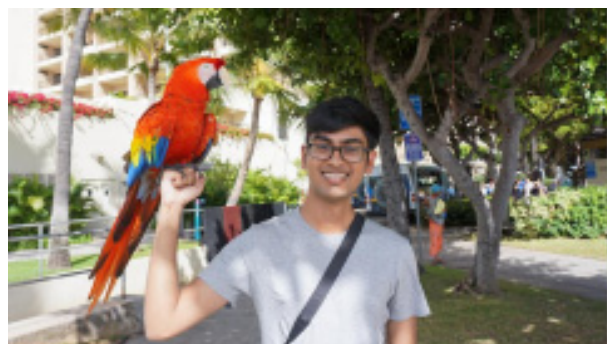
Suchir Balaji's mother alleges 'murder', demands FBI investigation into OpenAI whistleblower's death

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

The mother of Suchir Balaji, a 26-year-old former OpenAI researcher who was found dead after accusing the company of violating copyright laws, alleged that her son was "murdered" and demanded an FBI investigation into the matter. Poornima Rao, the mother of Suchir Balaji, claimed that her son's death was a "cold-blooded murder declared by authorities as suicide." She also mentioned that a private autopsy report differed from the initial police report. Additionally, she stated that her son's apartment had been "ransacked," and there were signs of a struggle in the bathroom that suggested he had been hit.

"We hired private investigator and did second autopsy to throw light on cause of death. Private autopsy doesn't confirm the cause of death stated by police. Suchir's apartment was ransacked, sign of struggle in the bathroom and looks like someone hit him in bathroom based on blood spots. It's a cold blooded murder declared by authorities as suicide. Lobbying in San Francisco city doesn't stop us from getting justices. We demand FBI investigation." Poornima Rao wrote on X. Elon Musk responded to the post of Suchir Balaji's mother, saying "This doesn't seem like a suicide."

Suchir Balaji was found dead in his apartment in San Francisco, months after accusing OpenAI of violating laws while developing ChatGPT, Fox News reported. His death was ruled a suicide after the San Francisco Police Department found no evidence of 'foul play'. On October 24, before his death, Suchir Balaji expressed his skepticism about the "fair use" of generative artificial intelligence products. "I recently participated in a NYT story about fair use and generative AI, and why I'm skeptical 'fair use' would be a plausible defense for a lot of generative AI products," he wrote on X. "To give some context: I was at OpenAI for nearly 4



years and worked on ChatGPT for the last 1.5 of them. I initially didn't know much about copyright, fair use, etc. but became curious after seeing all the lawsuits filed against GenAI companies."

"When I tried to understand the issue better, I eventually came to the conclusion that fair use seems like a pretty implausible defense for a lot of generative AI products, for the basic reason that they can create substitutes that compete with the data they're trained on. I've written up the more detailed reasons for why I believe this in my post. Obviously, I'm not a lawyer, but I still feel like it's important for even non-lawyers to understand the law -- both the letter of it, and also why it's actually there in the first place," he added. Suchir Balaji also raised concerns about the company breaking copyright laws in an interview with The New York Times. He was named in a copyright lawsuit filed against the company by The New York Times, which alleged that Microsoft and OpenAI used millions of published articles to inform their technology and began competing with the outlet as a result, Fox News reported.

Manipur accounted for 77% of violent incidents in the northeast in 2023, says MHA

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Manipur accounted for 77% of violent incidents that took place in northeastern India in 2023, according to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) annual report for 2023-24. There were 243 violent incidents reported in the northeast in 2023, of which 187 were in Manipur. The Union government released ₹247.26 crore to Manipur in 2023 to operate relief camps and rehabilitate people affected by the State's "law and order crisis." The MHA report published on Monday said that the rise in violent incidents in Manipur was due to the prevailing ethnic strife between Meitei and Kuki communities in the State, and the resultant increase in casualties among both civilians and security personnel in comparison to 2022.

Rising violence: In comparison to the 187 incidents reported in 2023, which resulted in the deaths of 35 civilians and seven security personnel, there were 137 insurgency-related incidents registered in the State in 2022, in which five civilians and one security force personnel lost their lives. According to the MHA's data for 2024, until November 30, 203 violent incidents have been reported, which led to three security personnel being killed, and 28 civilian deaths. The counter-insurgency operations in 2023 also resulted in 33 insurgents being killed, while 184 insurgents were arrested, and 49 weapons recovered. Another 80 members of insurgent outfits surrendered, with 31 weapons, the report said. On November 29, 2023, the MHA and the Manipur government signed a peace agreement with one of the factions of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the oldest armed Valley-based Meitei insurgent group. The group advocates for the secession of Manipur and largely operates from Myanmar.

Central deployment: Since ethnic violence erupted in the State on May 3, 2023, more than 250 people have been killed. In just the first three months, between May 3 and July 30, 2023, as many as 3,023 First Information Reports (FIR) pertaining to rape, sexual offences against women, murder, loot, and arson were registered in the State. "The violence resulted in numerous casualties, injuries, and incidents of arson," the MHA said. Though the issue of violence primarily relates to the maintenance of public order which is under the domain of the State, the Union govern-



ment took a series of immediate and sustained actions to handle the situation, it said. "Immediate action was initiated by engaging with top officials of Manipur, progressively deploying additional companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) and Army/Assam Rifles columns, deploying helicopters and drones, and implementing a unified command system," the MHA said. On June 4, 2023, the Union government appointed a Commission of Inquiry headed by a retired High Court Chief Justice, to inquire into the causes and spread of the violence. "Through this inquiry, the sequence of events leading to and all the facts relating to such large-scale violence will be brought out besides identifying those responsible for the violence," the MHA said.

Traffic violators paid fines of Rs.535 crore in Telangana in 2024

Hyderabad: As many as 1,57,65,552 cases of various kinds of violations of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act (MV Act) were reported in the State during the year (up to December 15). Penalties to the tune of Rs. 535 crore was collected from the violators during the year. However, this was slightly less than last year. Last year, 1,57,68,339 cases were reported and a fine of Rs. 540.91 crore was collected. As for cases registered in the capital along with Cyberabad and Rachakonda commissionerates, two thirds of the total cases in Telangana were within the jurisdiction of these three commissionerates.

States and the danger of poorly manufactured drugs



Over the last few years, there have been a number of incidents across India involving not of standard quality (NSQ) drugs, the most recent being the deaths of five young mothers in Ballari district, Karnataka, allegedly due to contaminated drugs manufactured by a pharmaceutical company in West Bengal. Due to the unique nature of India's Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, the pharmaceutical company located in West Bengal can sell its drugs in all States across the country, despite being licensed and inspected only by drug inspectors in the State where its manufacturing facility is located. Since each State is responsible for licensing and inspecting pharmaceutical manufacturing units located within its territory, it means that there is little that States such as Karnataka can do to stop poorly manufactured drugs from other States flooding their pharmacies. Data supports this assertion. Out of the 894 samples randomly tested by our State drug laboratories over the last three years, an overwhelming 601 samples that failed testing were from manufacturers located in States other than Karnataka.

Information sharing is a way out

The only regulatory tool at the disposal of my department to deal with these NSQ drugs manufactured outside Karnataka is to prosecute the pharmaceutical company. But criminal prosecutions take a very long time. During the pendency of the trial, there is nothing that we in Karnataka can do to stop the pharmaceutical company from continuing to manufacture and sell its drugs within Karnataka. As in the law, only the drug inspectors in the home States of these pharmaceutical companies can take steps to cancel or suspend their manufacturing licences. Given this reality of drug regulatory laws in India, it is imperative that we think of solutions to improve the situation urgently. A simple and cost-effective measure, which may help improve the quality of drugs across the country, is to promote greater information sharing between the drug control departments of State governments and various public procurement agencies. Currently, there is no way for drug inspectors of the Karnataka Drugs Control Department or the Karnataka State Medical Supplies Corporation Ltd. (KSMSCL) to verify the antecedents of pharmaceutical manufacturers located outside our State. For example, it would be of great help if all central and State drug testing laboratories made available their test results in a centralised database. This would enable a drug inspector or a procurement official in Karnataka or any other State to track the number of times a pharmaceutical company's drugs have failed testing across the country in any government laboratory. It will become easier for drug inspectors to adopt a risk-based approach while making enforcement and procurement decisions.

Have a centralised database: Similarly, it would be very

helpful if all State drug inspectors made available inspection reports and licensing information for all manufacturers in their respective States in one centralised database. By making available this information in a single database, it will become easier for procurement agencies such as the KSMSCL to verify the antecedents of pharmaceutical companies before purchasing drugs from them and avoid scenarios such as the recent scandal in Maharashtra where dubious suppliers sold spurious antibiotics to a public hospital. Such a database will also help procurement officers to understand the quality of inspections across States and prioritise manufacturers from States with a reputation for conducting more rigorous inspections of their manufacturing units. In the absence of such a verifiable database, most procurement agencies have to just take the word of pharmaceutical companies submitting tenders. The KSMSCL does not have an independent way to validate the claims of pharmaceutical companies located outside Karnataka when making public procurement decisions. This impacts public health. Apart from inspection and test reports, it would also help if the Union Ministry of Health could create a central register which records all pharmaceutical manufacturers blacklisted by different procurement agencies for supplying NSQ drugs. This would be very helpful in weeding out the bad players from the market and improving the quality of drugs available in public hospitals. Most tenders require pharmaceutical companies to disclose if they have been blacklisted by any entity. But, currently, there is no way for procurement officers to verify the authenticity of this information independently. States and legal powers: A third simple reform is to equip individual States with the legal powers to block manufacturers from outside the State to continue selling drugs within their State, while they are under investigation for the sale of drugs that may have caused deaths or other serious adverse events to patients within the State. State drug controllers should have the power to bar pharmaceutical manufacturers, located out of State, from selling their drugs within their State until the manufacturer is able to demonstrate that it has rectified the problems that led to the manufacture of NSQ drugs. However, since the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is central legislation, there is little that an individual State such as Karnataka can do to amend the law or its enforcement in other states. The initiative for legislative reform must come from the Union Health Ministry. Karnataka will be happy to support any reforms that will help improve the quality of drugs in Karnataka and across the country.

Hyderabad Task Force nabs drug peddler with cocaine, MDMA

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad Commissioner's Task Force caught a drug peddler on Tuesday and seized 30 grams of cocaine and six grams MDMA drug from him. The man who is a resident of Banjara Hills was caught by the Task Force during vehicle checking at Masab Tank in the evening. The police said that the man brought the drug to sell at a higher rate on the eve of New Year. Hyderabad task force nabs drug peddler: Seizes MDMA and mobile phones: The man along with the drugs was handed over to Masab Tank police station for further action.

Amnesty International says genocide being committed against Palestinians in Gaza, Israel rejects accusation



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Amnesty International accused Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip during its war with Hamas, saying it has sought to deliberately destroy Palestinians by mounting deadly attacks, demolishing vital infrastructure and preventing the delivery of food, medicine and other aid. The human rights group released a report Thursday (December 5, 2024) in the Middle East that said such actions could not be justified by Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack into Israel, which ignited the war, or the presence of militants in civilian areas. Amnesty said the United States and other allies of Israel could be complicit in genocide, and called on them to halt arms shipments. "Our damning findings must serve as a wake-up call to the international community: this is genocide. It must stop now," Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said in the report. Israel, which was founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, has adamantly rejected genocide allegations against it as an antisemitic "blood libel." It is challenging such allegations at the International Court of Justice, and it has rejected the International Criminal Court's accusations that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister committed war crimes in Gaza. "The deplorable and fanatical organisation Amnesty International has once again produced a fabricated report that is entirely false and based on lies," Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Israel accused Hamas, which has vowed to annihilate Israel, of carrying out a genocidal massacre in the attack that triggered the war, and said it is defending itself in accordance with international law.

Amnesty's report adds an influential voice to a growing list of players that have accused Israel of committing genocide — which would put it in the company of some of the deadliest conflicts of the past 80 years, including Cambodia, Sudan and Rwanda. The accusations have largely come from human rights groups and allies of the Palestinians. But last month, Pope Francis called for an investigation to determine if Israeli actions amounted to genocide, and Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who has signaled readiness to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, accused it of committing genocide. Israel says it is at war with Hamas, not the people of Gaza. And key allies, including the U.S. and Germany, have also pushed back against the genocide allegations. But Amnesty accused Israel of violating the 1951 Genocide Convention through acts it says are intended to bring about the physical destruction of Gaza's Palestinian population by exposing them to "a slow, calculated death." Amnesty said it analyzed the overall pattern of Israel's conduct in Gaza between October 7, 2023 and early July. It noted that there is no casualty threshold in proving the international crime of genocide, which is defined by the United Nations as acts intended to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

To establish intent, Amnesty said it reviewed over 100 statements by Israeli government and military officials and others since the start of the war that "dehumanized Palestinians, called for or justified genocidal acts or other crimes against them." Israeli officials have previously said that such statements were taken out of context or referred to their stated goal of destroying Hamas, not Palestinian civilians. Israel says it goes to great lengths to protect civil-

ians and comply with international law - including ordering civilians to evacuate areas ahead of airstrikes and ground offensives. It also says it has facilitated the deliveries of large quantities of food and humanitarian supplies - a claim that is disputed by the U.N. and aid organizations working inside Gaza. On Sunday, a former top Israeli general and defense minister accused the government of ethnic cleansing in northern Gaza, where the army has sealed off the towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya and the Jabaliya refugee camp and allowed almost no humanitarian aid to enter.

Amnesty said it found that Israel "deliberately inflicted conditions of life on Palestinians in Gaza intended to lead, over time, to their destruction." Those actions included the destruction of homes, farms, hospitals and water facilities; mass evacuation orders; and the restriction of humanitarian aid and other essential services. It also analyzed 15 airstrikes from the start of the war until April that killed at least 334 civilians, including 141 children, and wounded hundreds of other people. It said it found no evidence that any of the strikes were directed at military objectives. It said one of the strikes destroyed the Abdelal family home in the southern city of Rafah on April 20, killing three generations of Palestinians, including 16 children, while they were sleeping. An Associated Press investigation identified at least 60 families in which at least 25 members had been killed. Amnesty has previously angered Israel by joining other major rights groups in accusing it of the international crime of apartheid, saying that for decades it has systematically denied Palestinians basic rights in the territories under its control. Israel has also denied those allegations. Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, lack of aid on UN. Israel says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because the militants fight in dense, residential areas and have built tunnels and other militant infrastructure near homes, schools and mosques. It blames the lack of humanitarian aid on United Nations agencies, accusing them of not delivering hundreds of truckloads of aid that have been allowed in. The U.N. says it is often too dangerous to retrieve and deliver the aid. It blames Israel as the occupying power for the breakdown of law and order — which has enabled armed groups to steal aid convoys — while also accusing it of heavily restricting movement within the territory.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostages, including children and older adults. Some 100 captives are still held inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Israel's retaliatory military campaign has killed more than 44,500 people, according to Gaza health officials, whose count doesn't distinguish between civilians and fighters, though they say more than half the dead are women and children. The offensive is among the deadliest and most destructive since World War II, and has destroyed vast areas of the besieged coastal territory. It has displaced some 90% of the population of 2.3 million, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands of people have crammed into squalid tent camps with little in the way of food, water or toilets. Aid groups say the population is at risk of disease and malnutrition, especially as winter sets in. Experts have warned of famine in northern Gaza, which Israel has almost completely sealed off since launching a major military operation there in early October. Hamas militants have repeatedly regrouped there and in other areas, and the group has faced no major internal challenge to its rule.

Amnesty says the U.S. needs to press for an end to the war. The United States, which has provided crucial military aid to Israel and shielded it from international criticism, has repeatedly appealed to Israel to facilitate more aid, with limited results. The Biden administration said in May that Israel's use of U.S.-provided weapons in Gaza at times likely violated international humanitarian law but that the evidence was incomplete. Ms. Callamard urged the United States, Germany and other countries supplying arms to Israel to pressure Netanyahu to end the war.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te says Taiwan and the U.S. territory Guam should defend freedom in region



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Taiwan and Guam should work together to defend freedom and democracy in the region, Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said on Thursday (December 5, 2024) on a visit to the American territory. Guam was Mr. Lai's second U.S. stop on an ongoing tour of the Pacific Islands, following a visit to Hawaii last weekend. China's authoritarian Government claims Taiwan as its territory and says the self-governing island must come under its control at some point in the future. Mr. Lai, in a speech to Guam's legislature, emphasized the shared values and strategic importance of Taiwan and Guam in the Indo-Pacific region. "Let us together

become the crucial force in defending freedom, and democracy in the first Island chain," he said, referring to a string of Islands off the Asian continent that includes Japan, Taiwan and part of the Philippines.

The legislature passed a resolution welcoming Mr. Lai and extending appreciation for Taiwan's "significant contributions to Guam's economy and community", Speaker Therese Terlaje said. Mr. Lai called for deeper cooperation with Guam, highlighting aquaculture, hydroponic agriculture, construction projects, and alternative energy as potential areas of partnership. China, which considers Taiwan a renegade Province, opposes any official interaction between the Island's Government and the United States. The U.S. is the main overseas supplier of arms for Taiwan's defense, and has naval and air force bases on Guam. Earlier this week, China's Foreign Ministry said it "strongly condemned" the U.S. support for Mr. Lai's visit to Hawaii and had lodged a complaint with the U.S. Mr. Lai arrived in Guam on Wednesday (December 4, 2024) night after visits to the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu. He was scheduled to fly to Palau, the final stop on his trip. The three Pacific Island countries are among 12 Governments that recognize Taiwan diplomatically. The rest of the world, including the U.S., have official ties with the Chinese Government in Beijing.

Sake, Japan's traditional alcoholic brew, finds spot on UNESCO's cultural heritage list

Luque: Sake, a smooth rice wine, is perhaps more Japanese than the world-famous sushi. It is brewed in centuries-old mountaintop warehouses, savoured in the country's pub-like izakayas, poured during weddings and served slightly chilled for special toasts. The traditional alcoholic brew that plays a crucial role in Japan's culinary traditions was enshrined on Wednesday by UNESCO on its list of the "intangible cultural heritage of humanity". At a meeting in Luque, Paraguay, members of UNESCO's committee for safeguarding humanity's cultural heritage voted to recognise 45 cultural practices and products around the world, including Brazilian white cheese, Caribbean cassava bread and Palestinian olive oil soap. Unlike UNESCO's World Heritage List, which includes sites considered im-

portant to humanity such as the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, the Intangible Cultural Heritage designation names products and practices of different cultures that are deserving of recognition. A Japanese delegation welcomed the announcement in Luque. "Sake is considered a divine gift and is essential for social and cultural events in Japan," Takehiro Kano, the Japanese ambassador to UNESCO, said. The basic ingredients of sake are few: rice, water, yeast and koji, a rice mold, which breaks down the starches into fermentable sugars like malting does in beer production. The whole two-monthlong process of steaming, stirring, fermenting and pressing can be gruelling. The rice — which yields tremendous marketing power as part of Japan's broader cultural identity — is key to the alcoholic brew.

Trump's defense pick Pete Hegseth faces deepening scrutiny in Senate



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for Defense Secretary, spent a second day on Capitol Hill, meeting privately with Republican senators amid rising questions about his ability to effectively lead the Pentagon. Mr. Hegseth told reporters Tuesday that he was planning to sit down with senators, even with those potentially skeptical of his nomination. "We're going to meet with every senator that wants to meet with us, across the board," said Mr. Hegseth as he went from office to office. "And we welcome their advice as we go through the advice and counsel process."

Mr. Trump tapped the Fox News co-host, a former Army National Guard major and combat veteran who deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan, as his Secretary of Defense, typically among the first Cabinet posts to be considered by the U.S. Senate for confirmation. But Mr. Hegseth is running into questions amid a sexual assault allegation, which he has denied, and other emerging reports about his work conduct and history. GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham said some of the reports are "disturbing." "I want to make sure that every young woman that joins the military feels respected and welcomed," Ms. Graham told CBS News. The South Carolina lawmaker told the AP later that he doesn't know whether to believe the allegations, and Mr. Hegseth "has a chance to say that's true or not true." Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said he's seen the reports. "I'll get the chance to talk to him, and I'm sure he'll address them," he said. "But my view is, have the hearing." Before he was tapped to serve as a weekend host of "Fox & Friends," Mr. Hegseth served at two veterans advocacy groups, Concerned Veterans for America and Veterans For Freedom. In new allegations this week, the New Yorker cited what it described as a whistleblower report and other documents about his time leading CVA that alleged multiple incidents of alcohol intoxication at work events, inappropriate behavior around female staffers and financial mismanagement. NBC News reported that several unnamed current and former Fox employees who worked with Mr. Hegseth said his drinking habits raised concerns, including some who said he would show up smelling of alcohol. The Associated Press spoke to four people who had either worked at CVA or were familiar with Hegseth's time there who insisted on anonymity because they were not allowed to speak to the media or had signed nondisclosure agreements. While the group's all-day conferences could run late and often wind up at a nearby bar, three of the four said they had not seen Mr. Hegseth intoxicated at events.

One person who had been connected to CVA told the

Refugees from Sudan's civil war reel under acute hunger and malnutrition

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

For months, Aziza Abraham fled from one village in Sudan to the next as people were slaughtered. Yet the killing of relatives and her husband's disappearance aren't what forced the 23-year-old to leave the country for good. It was hunger, she said. "We don't have anything to eat because of the war," Abraham said, cradling her 1-year-old daughter under the sheet where she now shelters, days after crossing into Chad.

The war in Sudan has created vast hunger, including famine. It has pushed people off their farms. Food in the markets is sparse, prices have spiked and aid groups say they're struggling to reach the most vulnerable as warring parties limit access. Some 24,000 people have been killed and millions displaced during the war that erupted in April 2023, sparked by tensions between the military and a powerful paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces. Global experts confirmed famine in the Zamzam displacement camp in July. They warn that some 25 million people — more than half of Sudan's population — are expected to face acute hunger this year. "People are starving to death at the moment ... It's man-made. It's these men with guns and power who deny women and children food," Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council, told The Associated Press. Warring parties on both sides are blocking assistance and delaying authorization for aid groups, he said. Between May and September, there were seven malnutrition-related deaths among children in one hospital at a displacement site in Chad run by Doctors Without Borders, known by its French acronym MSF. Such deaths can be from disease in hunger-



weakened bodies. In September, MSF was forced to stop caring for 5,000 malnourished children in North Darfur for several weeks, citing repeated, deliberate obstructions and blockades. U.S. President Joe Biden has called on both sides to allow unhindered access and stop killing civilians. But the fighting shows no signs of slowing. More than 2,600 people were killed across the country in October, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, which called it the bloodiest month of the war. Violence is intensifying around North Darfur's capital, El Fasher, the only capital in the vast western Darfur region that the RSF doesn't hold. Darfur has experienced some of the war's worst atrocities, and the International Criminal Court prosecutor has said there are grounds to believe both sides may be committing war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. Abraham escaped her village in West Darfur and sought refuge for more than a year in nearby towns with friends and relatives. Her husband had left home to find work before the war, and she hasn't heard from him since. She struggled to eat and feed their daughter. Unable to farm, she cut wood and sold it in Chad, traveling eight hours by don-

key there and back every few days, earning enough to buy grain. But after a few months the wood ran out, forcing her to leave for good. Others who have fled to Chad described food prices spiking three-fold and stocks dwindling in the market. There were no vegetables, just grains and nuts. Awatif Adam came to Chad in October. Her husband wasn't making enough transporting people with his donkey cart, and it was too risky to farm, she said. Her 6-year-old twin girls and 3-year-old son lost weight and were always hungry. "My children were saying all the time, 'Mom, give us food,'" she said. Their cries drove her to leave. As more people stream into Chad, aid groups worry about supporting them. Some 700,000 Sudanese have entered since the war began. Many live in squalid refugee camps or shelter at the border in makeshift displacement sites. And the number of arrivals at the Adre crossing between August and October jumped from 6,100 to 14,800, according to government and U.N. data., though it was not clear whether some people entered multiple times. Earlier this year, the World Food Program cut rations by roughly half in Chad, citing a lack of funding. While there's now enough money to return

AP, however, that some employees had raised concerns about Mr. Hegseth's alcohol use but said that his departure from the group was more connected to growing ideological differences between him and the network of conservative nonprofits funded by billionaire donors Charles Koch and his late brother, David Koch. Mr. Trump is drawing from the ranks of loyalists to fill his administration and to Cabinet positions, often stunning Washington with unusual choices that are provocative and testing the senators who will be asked to confirm them under the chamber's advise and consent role. An early pick, Matt Gaetz, the former congressman from Florida, abruptly withdrew from consideration when it became clear that Senate support was crumbling. Mr. Gaetz, who had been investigated but never charged in a federal sex trafficking probe, faced a House Ethics investigation over sexual misconduct. Mr. Trump's choices can only afford to lose a few detractors in the Senate, where it takes majority approval to be confirmed. Republicans will have a 53-seat majority in the new year, meaning four GOP votes could sink a nominee, if all Democrats are opposed. Republican senators have been weighing their options. If confirmed, Mr. Hegseth would not only be part of critical command and control of the nation's nuclear weapons, he would be sixth in the line of succession to the presidency. It's a position that ages its occupants and demands constant response, due to the number of middle-of-the-night contingencies that can occur when U.S. service members are put in harm's way. There have been private discussions among senators about the allegations and how to approach the situation, according to one person granted anonymity to discuss the private conversations. During a closed-door meeting with about a dozen senators late Monday evening, none asked Mr. Hegseth about the allegations against him. You know what? The American people care about restoring our military," said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, after the meeting. He decried as "shameful" the criticism of Mr. Hegseth. While Republican senators are reluctant to raise questions publicly — and several dismissed the reports outright — many of them indicated he could face tough questions in a confirmation hearing. That's what the process is for," said Utah Rep. John Curtis, an incoming freshman senator. Questions about Hegseth and other nominees are "why a background check is important, why a committee investigation is critical," said Maine Sen. Susan Collins. Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville said after meeting Monday with Hegseth that he is very supportive of the nomination. But Tuberville said of the allegations: "If it's to a certain degree, people aren't going to vote to confirm him." Mr. Hegseth, 44, was a co-host of Fox News Channel's "Fox and Friends Weekend" and had been a contributor with the network since 2014. He developed a friendship with Trump, who made regular appearances on the show.

Mr. Hegseth served in the Army National Guard from 2002 to 2021, deploying to Iraq in 2005 and Afghanistan in 2011 and earning two Bronze Stars. He lacks senior military and national security experience and would oversee global crises ranging from Europe to the Middle East. A woman told police that she was sexually assaulted in 2017 by Hegseth after he took her phone, blocked the door to a California hotel room and refused to let her leave, according to a detailed investigative report recently made public. Mr. Hegseth told police at the time that the encounter had been consensual and has denied any wrongdoing.

to full rations until the start of next year, more arrivals will strain the system and more hunger will result if funding doesn't keep pace, said Ramazani Karabaye, head of the World Food Program's operations in Adre. During an AP visit to Adre in October, some people who fled Sudan at the start of the war said they were still struggling. Khadiga Omer Adam said she doesn't have enough aid or money to eat regularly, which has complicated breastfeeding her already malnourished daughter, Salma Issa. The 35-year-old gave birth during the war's initial days, delivering alone in West Darfur. It was too dangerous for a midwife to reach her. Adam had clutched the baby as she fled through villages, begging for food. More than a year later, she sat on a hospital bed holding a bag of fluid above her daughter, who was fed through a tube in her nose. "I have confidence in the doctors ... I believe she'll improve, I don't think she'll die," she said. The MSF-run clinic in the Aboutengue camp admitted more than 340 cases of severely malnourished children in August and September. Staff fear that number could rise. The arid climate in Chad south of the Sahara Desert means it's hard to farm, and there's little food variety, health workers said.

Spike in cocaine, contraband cigarettes, and currency seizures: India's anti-smuggling agency



Seizures of drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine, contraband cigarettes, and illicit foreign currency by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) have seen a sharp rise over the past year. According to DRI's latest Smuggling in India report, the agency conducted 47 cocaine seizures worth Rs 975 crore in FY24—more than double the number recorded in the previous financial year. The quantity of cocaine smuggled into India, primarily through airports, increased by 9 per cent to 107 kg during the same period. Methamphetamine smuggling has also spiked, especially in northeastern states like Assam and Mizoram, according to DRI's latest bulletin. While FY24 recorded meth seizures of 136 kg, the first half of FY25 alone saw 123 kg confiscated in 11 cases.

The bulletin highlights that free trade warehousing zones in West Asia, particularly in Dubai, are becoming major transit hubs for contraband cigarette smuggling from Southeast Asia to India. The first half of FY25 saw cigarette seizures climb by 19 per cent, reaching 3.95 crore sticks, compared to 3.31 crore sticks during the same period in FY24. Illicit foreign currency seizures have also surged. DRI officials seized Rs 13.8 crore in foreign currency during the first half of FY25, surpassing the Rs 12.4 crore confiscated in all of FY24. Additionally, the agency uncovered a Rs 576 crore trade-based money laundering (TBML) racket. The scheme involved importing cheap electrical goods and cosmetics at inflated prices to channel foreign exchange out of the country. Dip in gold seizures

In FY24, DRI seized 1,319 kg of smuggled gold, slightly lower than over 1,450 kg confiscated in FY23. Land routes, particularly from Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Nepal, con-

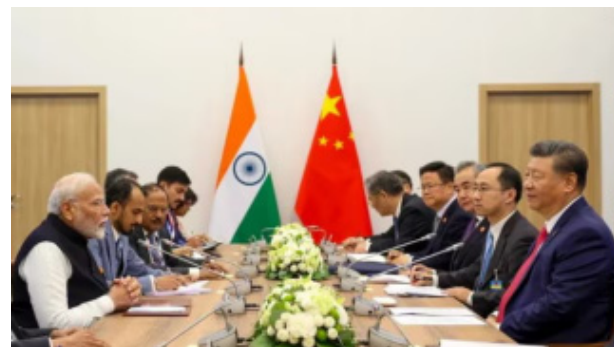
tributed to 55 per cent of the seizures while air routes, increasingly from certain African and Central Asian countries, contributed to 36 per cent. "Gold smuggling in India has evolved with smuggling syndicates now employing 'mules' with diverse profiles, including foreign nationals and families, alongside insiders. Smuggling syndicates even leverage international departure gates, where airport workers and other staff collude in smuggling gold from transit passengers," the report said. In a major heist in July, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) seized 108 kg of gold being smuggled on mules by two porters in eastern Ladakh. The investigation was handed over to DRI "given the wider ramifications", which has led to the arrest of ten people involved in the smuggling. Lower heroin and ganja seizures "In recent years, India has witnessed a marked increase in the availability and use of a wide range of narcotic substances," the report said. "Comparison of narcotics seizures over the past five years indicates an increasing trend for cocaine, while both heroin and ganja have shown a decreasing trend in terms of quantity," it added. In FY24, DRI booked 109 cases involving 8,224 kg of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. This included 107 kg of cocaine (Rs 975 crore), 49 kg of heroin (Rs 365 crore), 236 kg of mephedrone (Rs 357 crore), and 136 kg of methamphetamine (Rs 275 crore). Seizures of contraband cigarettes stood at 9.1 crore sticks in FY24 valued at Rs 179 crore. The majority of the smuggling was through sea routes. "Apart from the Myanmar-India border, the smuggling syndicates based in South East Asia and the Middle East carry out major operations through sea route. Free Trade Warehousing Zones in the Middle East are emerging as a major transit point from where cigarette-concealed consignments are shipped to India. Though illicit cigarettes are reportedly manufactured in certain South East Asian countries, it appears that the consignments are initially shipped to Dubai from southeast Asia and then re-routed to India," the bulletin noted. Wildlife smuggling In five operations, DRI seized 53.5 kg of elephant tusks in FY24. Other wildlife items seized across the country include leopard skins, live pangolins, pangolin scales, parakeets, live peacocks, peacock feathers, and Indian turtles. The Wildlife Protection Act was amended in 2023 to authorize customs officers under Section 50(1)(c) to seize illegally traded wildlife within the country, effective from April 1, 2023. "The rivers in India's Gangetic plain teem with life including many indigenous species of turtles. In a major crackdown, DRI conducted a series of operations and rescued 643 turtles," the bulletin said.

India has seen limited success in capturing 'China Plus One' opportunity: NITI Aayog

India China The report further stated that ongoing trade fragmentation stems from strict export control measures imposed by the US on Chinese goods to limit China's growth and technological progress. A new NITI Aayog report released Wednesday highlights that India has seen "limited success so far" in capturing the 'China Plus One' strategy adopted by multinational companies looking to de-risk their supply chains. However, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam suggested that trade policies under US President-elect Donald Trump could result in a potential economic boom for India, driven by significant trade diversion in global trade. "Whatever Trump has announced so far, which is likely to come up... there are opportunities. We are the man at first slip. The ball is coming in our direction. Whether we hold the catch or drop it is for us to decide. There will be huge disruption, and if we prepare for it, there will be a massive boom due to trade diversion," Subrahmanyam said in response to a question during the press briefing on Trump's tariff threats.

The former commerce secretary added that the US is India's largest trading partner and emphasised that India-US relations extend beyond trade, being deeply rooted in geopolitical and cultural dimensions. Meanwhile, the 'Trade Watch' report said that other countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia, have become bigger beneficiaries of the 'China Plus One' strategy. Factors such as cheaper labour, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs, and proactiveness in signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have been crucial in helping these countries expand their export shares.

The report further stated that ongoing trade fragmentation stems from strict export control measures imposed by the US on Chinese goods to limit China's growth and



technological progress. While China remains India's leading competitor across most export commodities, countries like Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa generally trail India in most categories. However, Malaysia and Thailand outperform India in select sectors, such as electrical machinery. For India, the iron and steel industry, representing 23.5 per cent of its EU exports, faces the highest exposure under the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the report said. Indian firms could incur tariffs of 20-35 per cent, leading to higher costs, reduced competitiveness, and lower demand in the EU market, it said. Compliance costs are also expected to rise due to the requirement for detailed emissions reporting," the report highlighted. "Several studies assessing the EU's CBAM identify African and Asian countries as the most vulnerable to its effects. CBAM, aimed at preventing carbon leakage, will apply to high-risk imports such as cement, iron and steel, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity, and hydrogen starting in January 2026. It mandates the purchase of CBAM certificates, reflecting the carbon emissions linked to these goods," the report added.

'Railway was the first sector where sanctions were imposed... None of our projects stopped even for a week': Russia's TMH CEO Kirill Lipa

Transmashholding (TMH), the largest manufacturer of locomotives and rail equipment in Russia, said that the company investments in India would facilitate the supply of high-value engineering products from India to Russia and could go a long way in balancing the Indo-Russia trade deficit. The company also said that it is looking to manufacture other rolling stocks, besides the Vande Bharat coaches that it may start producing by 2025. Last year, the Indian Railways signed a contract with Kinet Railway Solutions Limited, an Indo-Russia joint venture that entails a major shareholding by TMH, for supply of 1,920 Vande Bharat Sleeper coaches. The production was expected to begin by the end of this year, but in May, Indian Railways sought to redesign coaches by adding more toilets and a pantry car in each carriage. This has been cited as a reason for delays in the delivery schedule. Kirill Lipa, CEO of TMH, spoke to The Indian Express at his Eremova Street office in Moscow. Edited excerpts:

What TMH can offer to India and Vande Bharat trains?

When I present TMH to anybody in the world, I say that in order to understand who we are, let's first look at the map of Russia. You have to fly around nine hours to go from one end to another. Russia, in terms of Railways, is the most advanced country in the world. Because usage of the network is intense. We are among the top five companies that are dedicated to the Railway sector. GRR of China is the largest rolling-stock manufacturer. Then there are European companies Alstom, General Electric, Siemens, and us. We are 100 per cent privately owned. We produce everything related to Railway infrastructure. Underground metros, on-the-ground trams, EMUs, DMUs, passenger coaches, locomotives, freight wagons. Whatever we do is being developed locally by our TMH engineering team. History and historical traditions are very important for this. What is the current status of Vande Bharat trains contract?

We have taken over the Latur factory in Maharashtra (the Marathwada Rail Coach Factory of the Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd). The plan was to start it (production) this year, but due to the changes sought by Indian Railways, we need to redesign the coach. It will take several months. But anyhow, we will do it next year. I cannot say exactly which month we will be able to start the production. I was very positively surprised that the contract with Indian Railways was signed two weeks after the announcement of sanctions against our company in the United States. I had a discussion with the Indian officials and they said that they will act according to the interest of the country...

What are the challenges given the changes being sought?

The significant changes sought involve the design of coaches. From the outside, it seems that an additional lavatory is not an issue, the problem emanates from the engineering point. You need to change the whole layout of the coach like windows, seats etc. We designed it according to the contract. The pantry is another issue. In some way, the whole train set will be redesigned. We have insisted on certain compensation for the redevelopment of the product because it takes time and finance. If you look into the tender, our offer was 14 per cent less than the second bidder. To my understanding, even if we increase the price by certain numbers, we will not exceed the next bidder. So in any way, we are not exceeding the ceiling.

Did you seek any assistance from the Russian government?

Yes, we raised this issue in the last intergovernmental meeting between India and Russia in New Delhi, in the presence of India's foreign minister S Jaishankar and First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Denis Manturov. We raised them in the right manner. We are not creating any pressure, but we need a very clear explanation on the matter.

A closer look at childhood fears and how to overcome them



From shutting your eyes atop a Ferris wheel to clinging to someone in the dark or panicking at the sight of clowns, childhood fears often follow people into adulthood. Recently, Bollywood veteran Manisha Koirala shared her experience of confronting her childhood fear of cycling. In an Instagram post, she recounted how her friend Sarosh Pradhan helped her conquer this fear after years of avoidance. "I finally conquered my fear of cycling in traffic today! After 2 years off the saddle, I was nervous, but a good friend Sarosh Pradhan nudged me and kept insisting I need to overcome fear," Koirala wrote in her Instagram caption. Psychologist Ashutosh Tiwari from MindGlass Well-Being Private Limited said fear is a healthy, inborn instinct essential for survival of mankind, triggering the fight-or-flight response in dangerous situations. According to him, cycling-related fears were common among 90s kids. "In those days, children learned to balance bicycles through trial and error, often witnessing injuries in the process. This contributed to the anxiety around cycling," Tiwari said.

What causes childhood fears?

Psychologist Komel Chadha said that when a child feels insecure, it can overshadow their need for affection. "Anything perceived as different or capable of disrupting their sense of security can trigger fear," she explained. According to her, since children's cognitive faculties are still developing, it makes them more prone to misinterpret situations and focus on negatives. Dr Rahul Chandok, senior consultant and head of psychiatry at Artemis Lite NFC, New Delhi, said that childhood fears can stem from a variety of sources including developmental milestones, temperament, traumatic experiences or modeling others. "As children grow, they encounter new experiences and concepts that can be overwhelming or frightening. For example, the fear of the dark is often linked to a child's developing imagination and the inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Some children are naturally more anxious or cautious than others. This can make them more prone to developing fears," he said. Dr Ambarish Ghosh, consultant psychiatrist at CMRI, said that trauma—such as abuse, neglect, bullying, or parental separation—can leave lasting emotional scars, creating fears that persist into adulthood. "Manipulative or overly strict parenting can also instill irrational fears and trust issues in children," he said.

How are they different from irrational fears, phobias,

'Adult acne is the worst': Kusha Kapila on how strength training became her secret to clearer skin

Digital creator and actor Kusha Kapila recently opened up about her struggles with adult acne and how strength training has become an unexpected ally in managing her skin health.

In a podcast hosted by Mira Kapoor, she said, "Strength training helps with my acne. If I do not work out for two weeks, I have a new pimple." She continued, "Adult acne is the worst but when I was 29 I had this acne which I had no idea where it was coming from... until I found out that it was my hormones and PCOS (sic)." When asked if she had a cult favourite, she shared that while dealing with persistent breakouts can be frustrating, the "sweat glow" from regular workouts gives her skin a renewed vitality when other remedies fall short. "My cult favourite is just working out... when nothing works just that sweat glow is the best glow." Acne, especially in adulthood, can stem from a variety of factors, including hormones, stress, and lifestyle choices. While skincare routines and medical treatments are common solutions, could exercise like strength training offer additional benefits?

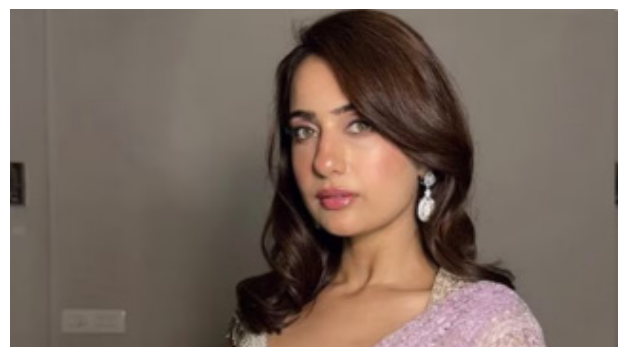
Dr Swetha Sridhar, consultant dermatologist and assistant professor at Lady Curzon and Bowring Hospital, tells indianexpress.com, "Hormonal imbalance is a major cause of adult acne, and exercise plays a pivotal role in regulating these hormones. High cortisol levels from chronic stress can trigger increased sebum production, leading to acne. Strength training reduces cortisol levels, helping to stabilise sebum production." Insulin resistance can contribute to acne by increasing androgen activity, she says, which stimulates oil glands. Strength training enhances insulin sensitivity, reducing androgen spikes and preventing acne flare-ups. Exercise boosts endorphins, the 'feel-good' hormones, which reduce stress and its negative impact on the skin. "For women, hormonal fluctuations during menstrual cycles often cause breakouts. Regular exercise helps regulate oestrogen and progesterone levels, mitigating these effects," stresses Dr Sridhar. "A study published in The Journal of Clinical and Aesthetic Dermatology found that individuals engaging in consistent exercise had better skin elasticity and fewer inflammatory markers, which are common in acne. Strength training's ability to regulate these factors makes it particularly effective for promoting clear skin," says

and perceived fears?

Jasmine Arora, clinical psychologist consultant at Artemis Hospitals, explained the key distinctions between childhood fears, irrational fears, phobias, and perceived fears: Childhood fears: These are often temporary and related to normal developmental processes. They may not meet the diagnostic criteria for a phobia. Irrational fears: These are fears that are disproportionate to the actual threat posed by a situation or object. They may be based on unrealistic beliefs or distorted thinking patterns. Phobias: These are persistent, excessive, and unreasonable fears of specific objects or situations. They significantly interfere with daily life and can cause significant distress. Perceived fears: These are fears that are based on a person's subjective interpretation of a situation. They may not be objectively justified but still cause significant anxiety. Fear Claustrophobia is a result of a common childhood fear of enclosed spaces.

What are some effective ways for people to overcome their childhood fears?

Dr Chandok said that it is possible to treat childhood fears in adulthood. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is a common approach that helps individuals identify and challenge negative thoughts and behaviours associated with their fears. Exposure therapy, another effective technique, involves gradually exposing individuals to the feared stimulus in a controlled setting. "In some cases, medication may be used in conjunction with therapy to manage anxiety and fear symptoms. However, medication is typically not a standalone treatment and should be used under the guidance of a mental health professional," he said. Dr Ghosh said that these fears, if not addressed during childhood, can resurface in adulthood due to psychological regression, where unresolved emotions from early years return. Therapies such as psychotherapy and regression therapy allow individuals to revisit and process their childhood experiences, identifying the root causes of their fears. Psychotherapy provides tools to reframe traumatic memories, while regression therapy guides individuals to confront and release their pain. He also said that overcoming childhood fears requires a combination of parental involvement during childhood and therapeutic intervention if these fears persist into adulthood. Parents and caregivers play a pivotal role in helping children navigate their fears. It is essential for parents to provide consistent emotional support and observe changes in their child's behavior. "Signs such as a fear of specific individuals, avoidance behaviours, difficulty concentrating, or social withdrawal may indicate underlying fears or phobias. Open communication and reassurance can help children feel safe, while professional counselling sessions can address the root causes of their fears," he said. Dr Chandok stressed the importance of acknowledging your child's fears and providing support. Gradual, controlled exposure to the feared situation, coupled with positive reinforcement, can build confidence and reduce anxiety. Modeling healthy ways of coping with fears also teaches children resilience. Arora recommended building a strong support system and adopting coping mechanisms to manage lingering fears. With the right therapeutic approaches, adults can overcome anxiety, panic attacks, and nightmares linked to childhood fears.



Dr Sridhar. While sweating is beneficial, neglecting post-workout hygiene can worsen acne by trapping bacteria and oil on the skin. While sweating is beneficial, neglecting post-workout hygiene can worsen acne by trapping bacteria and oil on the skin.

Can sweating during workouts truly benefit the skin?

Dr Sridhar explains, "Sweating during workouts can have both benefits and drawbacks for skin health, especially for individuals prone to acne. Sweat opens up pores and flushes out impurities like dead skin cells, dirt, and excess sebum that can clog pores and lead to breakouts." "Sweat carries dermcidin, she adds, a natural antimicrobial peptide that helps fight acne-causing bacteria on the skin's surface. -Pre-Workout Preparation: Remove makeup or heavy skincare products before exercising to prevent pore blockage. Use a gentle, non-comedogenic cleanser to prep the skin. -Post-Workout Cleansing: Wash your face immediately after exercising to remove sweat, oil, and bacteria. Use a mild cleanser with salicylic acid for acne-prone skin. -Avoid Touching Your Face: Gym equipment is a breeding ground for bacteria. Wiping sweat with dirty hands can introduce more irritants to the skin. -Breathable Clothing: Wear moisture-wicking fabrics to reduce sweat buildup and prevent body acne. -Hydration: Drink plenty of water to replenish lost fluids and maintain skin hydration. "While sweating is beneficial, neglecting post-workout hygiene can worsen acne by trapping bacteria and oil on the skin," cautions Dr Sridhar.

IIT-Delhi researchers develop AI platform to promote healthy ageing

New Delhi: A team of researchers from Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Delhi (IIIT-Delhi) has developed an artificial intelligence (AI)-based platform that can transform the search for molecules promoting healthy ageing. Published in the journal Nature Aging, the research represents a significant step forward in understanding and addressing the biological mechanisms of ageing. The AI platform — AgeXtend — is a multimodal geroprotector prediction platform that leverages bioactivity data from known geroprotectors to identify new molecules with the potential to slow ageing. The platform encompasses advanced AI modules capable of predicting geroprotective potential, evaluating toxicity, and identifying target proteins and mechanisms of action. This comprehensive approach ensures both accuracy and safety in the discovery process. "AgeXtend bridges the gap between artificial intel-

ligence and biology, enabling us to not only predict potential anti-ageing molecules but also understand how they work," said Dr. Gaurav Ahuja, senior researcher and co-author of the study. The research demonstrated AgeXtend's remarkable ability to identify the longevity-enhancing effects of well-known compounds such as metformin and taurine, even when these molecules were excluded from the training data. AgeXtend further screened approximately 1.1 billion compounds, uncovering numerous promising candidates that were validated through rigorous experiments on yeast, Caenorhabditis elegans, and human cell models. "This platform has immense potential to unlock new pathways for therapeutic interventions in aging and age-related diseases," Ahuja said. The study also explored natural metabolites from the human microbiome and their role in regulating cellular senescence.

Anurag Kashyap opens up about why Kennedy wasn't released, says he has lost the energy to fight: 'Five of my films are lying unreleased'



directive given to them is to up the share prices, generate profits, cost recovery... That's all there is. Nobody is interested in films. It doesn't matter if Kennedy went to Cannes; it doesn't matter if it had such a massive reception at festivals. Forget outside India, they've seen the reception in India, but where is the film?" Anurag Kashyap said that the film industry is crippled by a fear of taking chances. "They don't understand anything. They can't even make a Pushpa. They cannot, because they don't have the brains to make a film. They don't understand what filmmaking is. Pushpa can only be made by Sukumar. In the South, they invest in filmmakers and empower them to make films. Here, everyone is trying to create a universe. Do they understand their own universe, and how minuscule they are in it? That's the ego. When you create a universe, you think you're God."

Anurag said that he has learned to detach himself from unreleased projects. "I've detached myself from Kennedy, because I don't want it to become like Black Friday. I will not let anything pull me down again in life..." Asked if there's any bitterness, Anurag said, "No, I feel disappointed, but that's how it is. I'm very disgusted by some people, but let them be. I've had my fights, but you can't fight a wall. I don't have the energy..." Previously, in an interview with The Washington Post, Anurag Kashyap had opened up about Netflix's last-minute decision to cancel his series adaptation of Maximum City. He said that the cancellation had a huge impact on him emotionally, pushing him into a prolonged state of depression. He also shared that this was the time he suffered two heart attacks, and took solace in alcohol. The director said, "Maximum City was where all my energy went. I was heartbroken. I totally lost it."

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap opened up about why his film Kennedy still hasn't been released, despite premiering at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival. He said that as many as five of his projects are currently in limbo, and that he has detached himself from Kennedy in particular. In an interview, Anurag expressed his desire to move out of Mumbai, because he is 'disgusted' by what he's seeing around him. He also said that it would be impossible to produce some of the movies which made him famous in today's ecosystem, which values profits over creativity.

In an interview with The Hollywood Reporter India, Anurag said, "I have made five films that are lying unreleased. Where is Kennedy? And whose hands is Kennedy in? It's in the hands of some people who've never made films before. People who made Kennedy in the studio are all gone. And now, the people who are there, the

Vidya Balan at 46: Redefining stardom with unmatched talent and purpose



Today, Bollywood actress Vidya Balan celebrates another year of her life, and we can't help but marvel at her unwavering spirit and unrelenting passion for her craft. With a career spanning over two decades, Vidya has proven time and again why she is the female star Bollywood deserves. One of the key takeaways from Vidya's body of work over the years is her unapologetic attitude towards the industry's flaws. Her opinions and reactions to various issues in the industry have proved time and again why she is the Bollywood star who is here to stay. In an Expresso event last year, when she was asked for her take on nepotism, she had boldly stated, "Nepotism or no nepotism, I am here. Kisi ki baap ki industry nahi hai, nahi toh har baap ka beta, har baap ki beti successful hote (The film industry does not belong to anyone's father, else every star kid would be successful)." This quote encapsulates her determination to succeed despite the odds, and her refusal to let the industry's nepotistic tendencies hold her back.

But what makes Vidya Balan truly special is her ability to voice the concerns and observations of the Indian woman. At times, she gives words to the unspoken struggles and emotions of women across the country, making her a relatable and endearing figure to audiences everywhere. Whether it's speaking out against body shaming or advocating for women's empowerment, Vidya's words carry weight and resonance. Vidya is also known for working on her own terms, never compromising on her values and principles. She has consistently chosen roles that challenge her as an actress and push the boundaries of storytelling in Indian cinema. From her breakout role in Parineeta to her critically acclaimed performances in The Dirty Picture, Kahaani, and the latest Bhooh Bhalaiyaa 3, Vidya has proven that she is an actress who refuses to be typecast or conform to industry expectations.

However, Vidya Balan's journey has not been without its challenges. She has been open about her struggles with body shaming, revealing that she once went six months without looking at herself in the mirror because she felt ugly.

Mouni Roy takes a tumble after New Years party, falls on the pavement; Disha Patani helps her back up.

The year 2025 started on a trippy note for actor Mouni Roy. The Brahmastra actor was celebrating New Years with her husband Suraj Nambiar and good friend Disha Patani, and while leaving the party, she stumbled and fell on the pavement. A paparazzi video shows Mouni Roy tripping and falling on the pavement while she walks toward her car. The accident left many onlookers shocked.

Mouni's husband Suraj and friend Disha Patani helped her up, and held her while they left the venue. Mouni appeared to laugh it off. Seeing the video, many fans expressed concern



over her well-being. One of them wrote on Instagram, "Hope she is okay." Another one commented, "Hope she is fine." The incident occurred in **Bandra, where Mouni**

But instead of letting those experiences break her, she has used them as a lesson to spread kindness and empathy. She told Hindustan Times, "If you want to reject someone, do that, but always be kind with your words because words have the power to be really very damaging or nurturing." This self-awareness and compassion make her a true role model for young women everywhere. As a woman who has achieved financial independence through her craft, Vidya is a shining example of empowerment and has always advocated that women should be enabled to pursue their passions and reap the rewards of their hard work. She believes that financial independence is a key factor in women's empowerment, and her own experiences are a testament to this. "I feel very blessed. The only dream I ever had was to be an actor and I am living my dream. And, I am receiving money, receiving so much love, fame, glory, so much love... I love it, I thrive on it," she exudes, her words reflecting her joy and gratitude for the opportunities she has received. By sharing her own story of success, Vidya inspires other women to chase their dreams and strive for financial independence, promoting a message of empowerment and self-sufficiency.

Being one of the most sought-after female actors of Bollywood, Vidya is not one to rest on her laurels. She recognises the need for reinvention in the female-led space, and is eager to take on new challenges. She told SCREEN in an earlier interview, "I think it's time for us to take ourselves less seriously in the female-led space and to have more fun. There is a need for reinvention in that space at the moment. But I am very glad to have done Bhooh Bhalaiyaa 3 and I think I want to do all kinds of films." This willingness to experiment and push boundaries is what makes Vidya a true trailblazer in the industry. As we celebrate Vidya Balan's birthday today, let us take a page out of her book and emulate her courage, resilience, and kindness. Here's to many more years of Vidya ruling the silver screen with her talent, charm, and unwavering dedication to her craft!

Suraj, and Disha were celebrating New Year's Eve. The couple was surrounded by the paparazzi as they left the premises. Some fans speculated if Mouni fell after being pushed by the crowd. After the fall, Mouni's husband Suraj was seen clearing the path as they walked towards their car. Mouni Roy is best known for her television roles.

Anurag Kashyap dejected by Shankar comparing Game Changer to Instagram Reels: 'Filmmakers were chefs, now they are caterers'



Reportedly, Shankar recently commented on the audience's perceived diminishing attention spans, revealing that Game Changer has been crafted to reflect this shift. Ace filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has now stepped forward expressing his view on a comment Shankar reportedly made during the event.

After the colossal failure of his latest film Indian 2, featuring Kamal Haasan in the lead role, renowned filmmaker S Shankar is gearing up for a comeback with his much-anticipated Ram Charan-starrer Game Changer, which will hit the screens on January 10. Prior to the movie's worldwide premiere, the makers had organised a pre-release event in Dallas a few days ago. The event was attended by both Charan and Shankar. Meanwhile, filmmaker Anurag

Kashyap has now stepped forward expressing his view on a comment Shankar reportedly made during the event.

At the Dallas gathering, Shankar purportedly commented on the audience's perceived diminishing attention spans, revealing that Game Changer has been crafted to reflect this shift, likening its structure to a series of Reels pieced together. Reacting to this, Kashyap noted that filmmakers today are moving away from being creators to becoming mere caterers. "I was recently reading this statement by Shankar sir saying 'Today's audience's (attention) span has become very short. They watch Reels. So, we have kept that in mind while doing Game Changer.' I don't know what that means and we'll only know when we see the film. A lot of filmmakers are talking in this language like, 'My film is just like Reels put together because that's what the audience wants to watch.' Filmmakers who, at one point, were like chefs for me, creating things, are becoming caterers," he pointed out during a chat with The Hollywood Reporter India.

Watch Game Changer teaser here: "The moment you start thinking in terms of what the audience wants, that's when the decline begins. The audience is not a one-organ person; it's a massive sea of people. I still go by the old dictum of what filmmakers used to say, 'audience will see what we put on screen with conviction, passion and love.' That's how you create a new thing. If you're trying to guess what audience wants to watch, then you are literally destroying yourself... limiting yourself," he added. Also starring Kiara Advani, Anjali, Samuthirakani, SJ Suryah, Srikanth and Sunil in key roles, Game Changer marks Shankar's first directorial in Telugu in his 32-year career. The film's cinematography is handled by Tirru, with editing by Shameer Muhammed and Antony Ruben, and music composed by S Thaman. Game Changer's story line is contributed by Karthik Subbaraj and its story has been written by Vivek, with dialogues crafted by Sai Madhav Burra. While Avinash Kolla, Rama Krishna and Monika are the art directors, Anbariv has choreographed the action sequences.

Seema Sajdeh calls Shalini Passi 'chaalbaaz' for taking indirect dig at her veneers: 'If I behaved like her, my children would call me crazy'

Shalini Passi emerged as the highlight of the third season of the Netflix show Fabulous Lives vs Bollywood Wives. Her life mantras and eccentric fashion sense inspired conversation even after the show's launch last year. In one episode, when the cast members travelled to Mauritius, Shalini was seen sipping her champagne through a straw, which prompted Seema Sajdeh to instinctively call her an "ajeeb aurat".

Later, talking to the camera, Shalini Passi seemed to dig at Seema, saying, "Unlike a lot of my friends, I don't have veneers. These are my real teeth. I'd like them to remain like this for the next 100 years." The same clip was recently shown to Seema Sajdeh in an interview with Jarp. After watching the clip, Seema said, "I have two veneers in the front, so what? I can't possibly come with chipped teeth. I only use a straw when I put lipstick because I hate touch ups." Later, when it was suggested that Shalini's comment might have been directed at her, Seema said, "Was it pointed at me?" After taking a pause, she shared, "Let it be, I own it up. I have it (veneers)." She added, "Shalini would never say a thing before us, but she would drop bombs at these Q&A scenes."

Seema continued, "She is a sweet girl. I have fun with her, and I know she has become a sensation. Good for her. She lives in Delhi and I live in Mumbai, but whenever we get to see each other, we like it. She is very sweet. I have known her for many years. I had met her at several parties. But this side of her was a revelation on the show. We had no clue about this." When asked if she and Shalini have any



similarities, Seema quickly said, "I only imagine my children's reaction. Imagine if mumma wore a gown and ran into the ocean'. My children will call me crazy." In the same interview, Seema played a game where she had to give movie titles to her fellow cast members. She called Maheep Kapoor 'Sholay', Neelam Kapoor 'Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham'. When asked to name Shalini Passi, she said with a laugh, "Chaalbaaz". Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives gave a glimpse of the lives of Bollywood divas Maheep Kapoor (wife of Sanjay Kapoor), Bhavana Panday (Ananya Panday's mother), actress Neelam Kothari and Seema Sajdeh (previously married to Sohail Khan) in the first two seasons. In the third season, the show introduced three new faces from Delhi: Shalini Passi, Ranbir Kapoor's sister Riddhima Sahni, and Kalyani Chawla.

Salman Khan's Sikandar, Hrithik Roshan's War 2, Vijay's Thalpathy 69, Alia Bhatt's Alpha, and more

The previous year didn't quite live up to the blockbuster magic of 2023. Hindi films, in 2024, struggled to replicate what monster hits like Jawan, Gadar 2, and Animal did in 2023. Arguably, the only bright spot in 2024 was Rajkumar Rao and Shradha Kapoor's Stree 2, which emerged as the highest-grossing Hindi film of the year. Expectations were high for Deepika Padukone and Hrithik Roshan's Fighter, but the film vanished from audiences' minds as quickly as a supersonic jet. The much-hyped Diwali box office clash between Kartik Aaryan's Bhooh Bhalaiyaa 3 and Ajay Devgn's Singham Again split their profits, with neither achieving towering success.

But, there's always hope. The upcoming year is poised to deliver a diverse array of films, with action-packed narratives taking centre stage. Let's dive into some of the most anticipated films in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam cinema, and mark your calendars for the ones you shouldn't miss! Initially slated for 2024, Kangana Ranaut's Emergency faced multiple delays and challenges in obtaining certification from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). In the film, Kangana steps into the shoes of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It is now scheduled for release on January 17, 2025. Beyond acting, Kangana has also written, directed, and co-produced this political drama. Sunny Deol's Lahore 1947 has gotten fans excited. The film reunites him with director Rajkumar Santoshi, with whom he has delivered hits like Ghayal, Ghatak, and Damini. Bankrolled by Aamir Khan, Lahore 1947 is set in the Partition era. While the makers were targeting a Republic Day release, the film is expected to hit theatres in August 2025. Sunny Deol continues his cinematic journey collaborating with Telugu filmmaker Gopichand Malineni, who is making his Hindi directorial debut. The film, also featuring Randeep Hooda, Suniel Shetty, and Armaan Kohli, is slated for an April 2025 release.

While Akshay Kumar delivered powerful cameos in Stree 2 and Singham Again, his lead ventures—Khel Khel Mein, Sarfira, and Bade Miyan Chote Miyan—bombed at the box office. The actor now aims to revive his successful run at the box office with the patriotic action drama Sky Force, a familiar turf for him. Directed by Abhishek Anil Kapur and Sandeep Kewlani, the film also stars Nimrat Kaur,



Sara Ali Khan, and Veer Pahariya. It is set to release ahead of Republic Day. Chhaava! Vicky Kaushal's commanding presence as Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj in the teaser of Chhaava didn't give you goosebumps, we don't know what will! Alongside Vicky, the film stars Akshaye Khanna as the ruthless Aurangzeb and Rashmika Mandanna as Yesubai Bhonsale. Directed by Laxman Utekar, Chhaava will be released on February 14, 2025. Sikandar Salman Khan's upcoming film Sikandar is already making waves. Its teaser, released on Monday, amassed an incredible 48 million views within 24 hours, becoming one of the most-watched teasers in recent times. Directed by AR Murugadoss, this action flick returns Salman to his familiar ground and features Rashmika Mandanna as the female lead. The film is slated for an Eid 2025 release. Housefull 5 Staying true to its title, Tarun Mansukhani's Housefull 5 is packed with an ensemble cast. Apart from Akshay Kumar, the film stars Jacqueline Fernandez, Riteish Deshmukh, Jackie Shroff, Abhishek Bachchan, Nana Patekar, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Fardeen Khan, Chunky Panday, and others. The film is scheduled to release in June 2025. War 2 After the underwhelming response to Fighter in 2024, Hrithik Roshan is set to return with the patriotic action thriller War 2 in 2025. With the franchise's brand value and it being a part of YRF's Spy Universe, War 2 has the potential to be a blockbuster. J.R. NTR joins Hrithik in a lead role, doubling the film's chances of success.

Gautam Gambhir wanted Cheteshwar Pujara in BGT squad, was turned down by selectors



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Cheteshwar Pujara Gautam Gambhir India vs Australia BGT Pujara, a player who has represented India in over 100 Tests, has been out of the national set up since the 2023 World Test Championship final at the Kia Oval where India lost to Australia. With the Indian team sinking further into the quagmire after losing the 4th Test of the Border Gavaskar Trophy, it has been learnt that head coach Gautam Gambhir wanted veteran batter Cheteshwar Pujara in the team only for the suggestion to be shot down by the selectors.

The Indian Express' Sriram Veera, Devendra Pandey and Venkata Krishna B reported on Wednesday that after the Melbourne loss, the India dressing room has descended into chaos with Gambhir having had enough of the recent subpar performances, delivering a brutal assessment of the players. Pujara, a player who has represented India in over

100 Tests, has been out of the national set up since the 2023 World Test Championship final at the Kia Oval where India lost to Australia. The batter could only manage 14 and 27 runs in the two innings of that match as the Aussies walked away with the trophy.

However, with most of the Indian top order failing to spark to life in the ongoing series, a player like Pujara, who has 993 runs from 11 games at an average of 47.28 in Australia, might have made a difference. It has been learnt that even after India won the 1st Test in Perth, Gambhir still talked about the 36-year-old Saurashtra batter. Pujara was the leading run-getter in the 2018-19 series with 521 runs off 1258 balls and was once again the backbone of Indian batting three years later when he accumulated 271 runs off 928 balls, helping India win both series. Even opposition bowler Josh Hazlewood had praised the batter's gritty performances before the start of the Border Gavaskar Trophy, saying he was glad that the Saurashtra batter was not playing in the 2024/25 series. "I am happy that Cheteshwar Pujara is not here. He is someone who bats time and spends a lot of time at the crease and makes you earn his wicket every time. Has done well in Australia on previous tours. I mean there are always first-class young players coming into the team," the pacer had said in November. In October, Pujara slammed his 25th Ranji Trophy hundred and converted it into his 18th First Class double hundred in the second round for Saurashtra against Chattisgarh in Rajkot. With the feat, he is only behind Don Bradman (37), Wally Hammond (36) and Patsy Hendren (22) on the illustrious list of batters with the most First Class double centuries.

Indian team's Test captaincy: Senior cricketer throws his hat in ring, projects himself as 'interim captain'

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

With Rohit Sharma's form and captaincy status both under heavy scrutiny in the ongoing Border Gavaskar Trophy, it has been learnt there have been noticeable fissures in the team with a senior player ready to project himself as an interim option. Sriram Veera, Devendra Pandey and Venkata Krishna B reported on Wednesday that after the Melbourne loss, the India dressing room has descended into chaos with head coach Gautam Gambhir having had enough of the recent subpar performances, delivering a brutal assessment of the players.

With Rohit missing the 1st Test at Perth, there were some players, all eyeing the captain's spot, who were claiming openly that they would have to do something special on the tour. The aforementioned senior member who harbours a desire to be the interim captain, is actively portraying himself as 'Mr Fix-It' and it has been learnt that he isn't convinced that the young guns are ready to take over leadership roles. Rohit, meanwhile, has come under harsh criticism over his recent performances with the Mumbai batter scoring just 3, 6, 10, 3, and 9 in his 5 innings Down Under.

Before that, he had scored just 42 runs in four innings against Bangladesh and 91 runs across three games against New Zealand, with both series at home. After he joined the squad after the 1st Test at Perth, Rohit did not want to change the winning formula so he let KL Rahul re-



tain the opener's role along with Yashasvi Jaiswal and moved himself to No. 6. But the decision did not bear fruit as he struggled for runs in this position in the 2nd and 3rd Test at Adelaide and Brisbane respectively. He would return back to the top of the order for the 4th Test but his rough patch continued there as well with former India player Irfan Pathan stating Rohit wouldn't be in the team if he wasn't the captain. "A player who has made about 20,000 runs — yet the way Rohit is struggling now, it seems his form is not supporting him at all. What's happening now is that he is the captain, so he is playing. If he were not the captain, he might not be playing right now. You would have had a set team," Pathan said. It has been learnt that Rohit may take a call about his future after the current tour.

Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Injured Mitchell Starc skips nets, Mitch Marsh's spot for Sydney Test under scanner

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Heading into the Border-Gavaskar Trophy finale on Friday, Australia are contemplating changes to the Melbourne Test-winning team with the spots of Mitch Marsh — enduring poor form — and, crucially, Mitchell Starc — nursing an injury — under scrutiny. According to the Sydney Morning Herald, Australia head coach Andrew McDonald conceded that Marsh 'hasn't been scoring as many runs as selectors would like against India' and Beau Webster, who is in the squad, could be given a look-in. The report also added that McDonald was confident that Sean Abbott or Jhye Richardson could step up if Mitchell Starc was to be ruled out of the SCG Test due to injury. After beating India in Melbourne to go 2-1 up in the series, Australia reached Sydney on Tuesday and had a training session on Wednesday, where Starc did not bowl in the nets. The pacer, however, said he 'expected to play on Friday'.

The report quoted a team spokesperson saying that the injury 'is more a case of general soreness that tended to get better the more Starc got into his spells.' "Clearly Starc is carrying something of some description," McDonald said. "Other than that, it looks as though we got through pretty unscathed." EXPRESS EXCLUSIVE: Gautam Gambhir cracks whip on Team India's chaotic dressing room: 'Bahut ho gaya', The Indian Express reports

Whether McDonald makes changes to a winning com-



bination remains to be seen but he acknowledged Marsh hasn't been in a good form. "He's in a good [head] space," McDonald was quoted as saying by the daily. "Would you like better performances? There's no doubt about that. Over four Test matches, he hasn't been able to deliver at the level he would like and we would like. He's up and about, though. We just won a Test match." Marsh, batting at No. 6, has scores of 4, 0, 5, 2, 9 in the last five innings. The Sydney Morning Herald reported all-rounder Beau Webster is 'raring to go if given a Baggy Green after impressive performances at Sheffield Shield level.' "He is the only player alongside Garry Sobers in Sheffield Shield history to make more than 900 runs and take 30 wickets in a season," the report added.

'India may have lost grip on Border Gavaskar Trophy': Ravi Shastri, adds 'two seniors and a youngster' under scrutiny



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Former India coach Ravi Shastri has said 'poor shot selection on either side of the middle session' on Day 5 of the Boxing Day Test may have cost India the Border Gavaskar Trophy. Without taking any names, Shastri also said the dismissals 'involving two senior players and a

youngster' will be 'scrutinised' and added 'it doesn't help when one of it involved the captain who is struggling'. Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant have been criticised for their performances in the fourth Test, which India lost to hand Australia a 2-1 advantage going into the final Test of the series. The Sydney Test begins on Friday, January 3. Gautam Gambhir cracks whip on Team India's chaotic dressing room: 'Bahut ho gaya', Writing for The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, Shastri said: "...it was amazing to see the Indian crowds having travelled from all parts of the globe to come experience Test cricket at its best at the 'G. Unfortunately for them, some poor shot selection on either side of the middle session on the final day cost India the game. And probably has ensured that India may have lost their grip on the Border Gavaskar Trophy with one Test to go." Senior Team India cricketer, who harbours a desire to be the interim captain, is actively portraying himself as 'Mr Fix-It'.

Rain, turning pitch and Shubman Gill's return dominate talks ahead of New Year's Test in Sydney



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Much of Sydney's garbage, after the revelry on New Year's Eve, won't be picked up by the city council on New Year's Day. The collection of bins outside homes is postponed by a day. The party-road debris is swept up, but everything else needs to wait. A somewhat apt metaphor for where India find themselves in the series. Much of the deep cleansing has to wait, tough calls on retirements have to wait, bold moves on handling transition have to wait; they just have to pick up the debris in the here-and-now, and front up for the last Test. They can still return home victorious with the Border-Gavaskar Trophy if they win at Sydney — a 2-2 result will help them retain the trophy as they are the current holders. Australia find themselves in the city with a sense of strangeness as far as the last Test in a home series against India is concerned.

In the 2018 series against India, they had lost the penultimate Test at Melbourne and were trailing by 1-2 when they hobbled to Sydney where Cheteshwar Pujara pulped them further. In 2021, they couldn't separate R Ashwin, suffering from a back injury, and Hanuma Vihari, hobbling with a leg injury, as India drew that penultimate Test and then won the final one at the Gabba. This time, Australia are ahead 2-1 as they enter the final Test. Unsurprisingly, the weather is the topic of discussion in Sydney. Rains are expected on Day 4 and Day 5, and if the forecast holds up, a draw can loom rather quickly. Hence, that final frenetic session in Melbourne has turned even more significant: Australia were more desperate for a win, India weren't that stubborn in taking out a draw, that could have allowed them to hold one hand on the BGT. For a while now, the Sydney Test's preamble has been about the weather. Once, it used to be about how much spin it would take — the SCG is the driest and most spin-friendly track in Australia. In recent years, regular rain has sullied that pitch talk. In Perth, it was about how fast and bouncy it was. In Adelaide, it was about how much the pink ball would seam around. In Brisbane, it was about the Gabba's track though ironically the weather intervened there. In Melbourne, it was about the 'G's re-

newal of pitches in the last two years which had changed it to a result-track. At SCG, ideally, it should be about the dryness of the track and spin, but rain talk has surfaced. Hopefully, the elements stay away to ensure the grand finish that this dramatic series deservingly needs. But if it does intervene, then Indians have only to blame themselves for that final-day implosion at the MCG.

Sun shone brightly, though, on the new year's day at the SCG. It's Glenn McGrath's Pink Test of course, that had started in 2009 after the passing of his wife Jane to cancer. On Wednesday, the legend was at the SCG with his team, all in pink. He would speak about how he is a "fan" of Jasprit Bumrah. A few weeks earlier, on ABC Radio, he had shared the work he had done with the younger Bumrah during a stint at the MRF pace academy and his suggestion to remove an element from the action. "He had good pace, but his action was completely different — short run-up, came in, was bowling quick, but he had a massive jump out, and then he'd bowl," McGrath had recalled. "I suggested it would be better if he went straight through the crease, but he couldn't do it. So he played like that. Then he had a problem with his knee. He sort of blew his knee out, whatever damage he did to it. When he came back, I think he had to train himself to go straight through the crease. I am not taking any credit whatsoever for that. But he had to train himself to go straight through the crease — and he is a handful." Will Shubman Gill return? But India can't win just with Bumrah running through straight and running through the Aussies, as he has been doing almost on his own on occasions. India need their batsmen not to implode. The head coach Gambhir, as revealed by this newspaper, has had a strong talk with the team and told them that they now have to follow his decisions. But what are they going to be, apart from playing the situation? Will it be the same playing XI, with two spinners and Shubman Gill sitting out again?

Considering the dryness of the track here in general, weather notwithstanding, two spinners do make sense. Slightly ironic how India might be playing two spinners in the last two Tests, just after the exit of R Ashwin. It's been that kind of tour, though. For Gill to play, one of the two biggies needs to sit out — the captain or Virat Kohli. An exclamation mark at the end of the last sentence, coloured in crimson red would be apt for that situation. And it would also fit as a one-character description of this India tour: a strange, chaotic, splintered campaign, but still a chance for the rainbow of the BGT at the end. Which India would turn up at the SCG?

'He is the best bowler I have ever seen live':

Darren Lehmann showers praise on Jasprit Bumrah

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Darren Lehmann Jasprit Bumrah IND vs AUS India's Jasprit Bumrah holds up the ball as he leaves the field after taking the five wickets during play on the last day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia, Former Australia player Darren Lehmann showered praise on Jasprit Bumrah, equating the pacer's impact in the ongoing Border Gavaskar series with bowling greats of yesteryears. "I presume he (Bumrah) is the next captain when Rohit finishes. He did a really good job in Perth. He is the best bowler I have ever seen live. I have seen Wasim Akram, Glenn McGrath and all but I have not seen a bowler have impact like him in a single series like Jasprit Bumrah has since Mitchell Johnson in 2013-14 Ashes win," Lehmann said to PTI.



"This is very similar as Bumrah already has 30 wickets. He has been outstanding to watch. He will do well when he gets a chance to lead India," he added. Bumrah has been the standout performer in an under-fire Indian lineup, having already notched up 30 wickets in the ongoing series against Australia. The ex-Australia coach also said that even after Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli call it a day, Indian cricket

will still be in good hands. "Look whenever they decide to give it away and whatever happens in next few days they have been great players for India over a long period of time," he said. "Now actually we see younger players starting to step up for India and play well at next level. There is so much depth in Indian cricket I won't worry too much. Whenever these two guys decide to retire, there are so many talented youngsters that Indian cricket will be in good stead," the former 2-time World Cup winner added.

Gautam Gambhir cracks whip on Team India's chaotic dressing room: 'Bahut ho gaya'

SHORTLY AFTER India lost seven wickets in 20.4 overs and handed the Melbourne Test to Australia, head coach Gautam Gambhir had some stern words for the entire squad in the dressing room on Monday. "Bahut ho gaya (I've had enough)," the former India opener is learnt to have said, not holding back in his assessment of the team. Though Gambhir didn't take names, the gist of his speech was about how the players were doing their own thing in the name of "natural game", instead of playing according to the situation.

Gambhir, who took over as coach on July 9, is learnt to have talked about how he had let the team do what it wanted for the "last six months" but would now "decide" how they would play. In a veiled warning to players to toe the line, he is learnt to have said that going ahead, those who don't abide by his pre-decided team strategy would be given a "thank you". With the team trailing 1-2 in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy and qualification for the World Test Championship final looking tough, Gambhir has drawn the line. Clearly, he has had enough.

Sources said Gambhir addressed the conflict between intent and team interest. He told the players that instead of executing the "plans discussed", they were doing their own thing. He discussed how the batters had been underperforming for a while now, since the home series against Bangladesh in September. Virat Kohli went chasing a wide ball in the last over before lunch on the final day of the Melbourne Test, putting the team on the back foot. Rishabh Pant was dismissed playing a lap shot off a pacer in the first innings and pulling a short ball from part-time spinner Travis Head down the throat of long-on in the second, to trigger a stunning collapse. Captain Rohit Sharma, struggling for touch and form, fell playing an across-the-line shot in the second innings. And Yashasvi Jaiswal went for a pull shot despite the field set for it late in the evening, finally sinking Team India at Melbourne.

Multiple sources in Indian cricket have said the atmosphere in the dressing room is far from ideal. There has been some tension in the camp for a while now, in fact, since before the first Test in Australia. It's learnt that Gambhir had pressed for the inclusion of Cheteshwar Pujara, the out-of-favour Test specialist with 100 matches behind him, but the selectors shot it down. Even after the Perth Test

that India won, Gambhir was still talking about Pujara, it's learnt.

When a team is in a transitional phase, as Team India is at the moment, the rising ambitions and aspirations of individuals can often be a handicap for the squad. It didn't help that Rohit, the designated captain, wasn't there for the early part of the tour, only landing in the middle of the first Test. By then, it's learnt, there were at least a couple of players — all nursing captaincy ambitions — who were openly claiming that it would be up to them for India to do something special on this tour. It is believed that Rohit may take a call about his future after the current tour. A senior player has been taking a rather active interest in portraying himself as "Mr Fix-It". Those in the know say he isn't convinced that the young guns are ready to take over leadership roles, and is ready to project himself as an interim option. While there may not be an open rift, the chaotic incohesiveness in the unit cannot be denied. Also, there has been a centralisation in decision-making. It is learnt that when Gambhir made the move to bring in Harshit Rana and Washington Sundar for the first Test, it wasn't a unanimous decision. These selections may have been questioned, but haven't really misfired. There have been slip-ups too, as evidenced in the non-selection of Akash Deep for the pink-ball Test. He was not only more suited, but Rana's fitness for long spells has also been a concern. It hasn't helped that Rohit has been struggling for form. He is a captain who usually spends hours on pre-game planning, chatting with bowling and batting groups, and with individuals, but hasn't been able to extend himself in that manner on this tour, it's learnt. This is the person who took time out after the toss at a T20 World Cup final to explain to Sanju Samson why he wasn't picked. That gracious act had stunned the player himself. Until this series, Rohit had been putting himself out there for others. There are also whispers around the Indian tour party about the locus standi of the support staff that Gambhir has hand-picked. During the tour, Indian cricket's leading voice, Sunil Gavaskar, has raised this issue publicly. "For batting... What is the role of Abhishek Nayar in the team? Is he a batting coach or an assistant coach? Gambhir has scored a lot more runs, so if he can step in and guide the players on how to bat and what approach is to be taken, we can probably perform better."