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Pope Francis appoints Bishop Udumala Bala as Archbishop of Visakhapatnam

Hyderabad: Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Udumala Bala, currently serving as the Bishop of Warangal, as the new Archbishop of Visakhapatnam. The announcement was made on Saturday, marking a significant transition in the leadership of the Archdiocese.

Born on June 18, 1954 in Ghanpur, Telangana, Bishop Udumala Bala was ordained a priest on February 20, 1979. He holds a Doctorate in Moral Theology from the Alphonsian Academy in Rome. Throughout his priesthood, he served in various pastoral and administrative roles within the Diocese of Warangal.

Girl student ends life after mother denies mobile phone in Asifabad

Kumram Bheem Asifabad: A Class X girl student died, allegedly by suicide, after her mother refused to give her a mobile phone for preparing a project in Koutala mandal centre on Saturday night.

Koutala Sub-Inspector N Madhukar said the Bommakanti Spurthi (17), a student of a private school in Koutala mandal headquarters died by suicide. Spurthi was reportedly depressed when her mother denied her a mobile phone for downloading study material online. She ended her life when none was present.

Sadanandam, the father of the girl lodged a complaint with the police. A case was registered. Investigations are on.

CM Revanth Reddy Pays Tribute to Baba Amte on His Death Anniversary

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy paid tribute to renowned social reformer Muralidhar Devdas Amte, popularly known as Baba Amte, on his death anniversary. Honoring the legacy of the humanitarian, the Chief Minister highlighted Baba Amte's tireless efforts in serving leprosy patients at Anandwan Ashram. He praised Amte's dedication to uplifting marginalized communities and his commitment to social justice. Revanth Reddy also recalled Baba Amte's close association with Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle. He emphasized that Amte remained devoted to Gandhian principles throughout his life, striving for the welfare of the underprivileged.



Dreams of Sahib Singh Verma will now be fulfilled: Parvesh Verma

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

New Delhi: BJP's winning candidate from the New Delhi Assembly constituency, Parvesh Verma, received a grand welcome in his native village, Mundka, on Sunday. Following his victory over AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal by over 3,000 votes in the Delhi Assembly elections, Verma is now being hailed as the "giant slayer" of Delhi politics. He visited the Dada Bhairav Temple to offer prayers and will later pay respects at the memorial of his father, former Delhi Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma, in Ghevra village. Speaking to reporters, Verma credited the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his electoral success. "The Bharatiya Janata Party and PM Modi gave me the opportunity to contest elections from New Delhi. All the seats have gone to the BJP. I thank the entire Delhi for making the BJP win," he said. Emphasising the party's commitment to development, he added, "This government will work for rural Delhi and the entire city, including all colonies. The dreams of our leader Sahib Singh Verma, which remained incomplete, will now be fulfilled." Highlighting future plans, Verma stated, "We will carry forward PM Modi's vision. There are many challenges in Delhi, and a lot of work needs to be done. My village has always been my strength."



We will make Delhi a capital that we can all be proud of. Verma, a two-time Member of Parliament from West Delhi, comes from a strong political lineage. His father, Sahib Singh Verma, served as Delhi's Chief Minister, and his uncle, Azad Singh, has held key municipal positions. Sahib Singh Verma was also one of the only three BJP Chief Ministers Delhi has had. His victory over Kejriwal marks a major shift in Delhi politics, further strengthening the BJP's presence in the national Capital.

KTR raises alarm over declining groundwater levels in Telangana



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao has raised concern over the sharp decline in groundwater lev-

els across Telangana, attributing it to the negligence of the Congress government. He stated that within just four months, the groundwater level had dropped by two metres, affecting 32 of 33 districts in the State. In a post on X, Rama Rao said during former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao's tenure, Telangana witnessed the highest groundwater rise in the country, with even seasonal drylands turning into water-rich zones. In contrast, he said, paddy fields were now drying up under the Congress rule.

The BRS working president blamed the alleged mismanagement of irrigation projects, particularly the neglect of the Kaleshwaram, Palamuru-Rangareddy lift irrigation schemes, for the crisis. He charged the Congress government with prioritising political vendetta over the welfare of farmers, leading to severe water shortage in agricultural areas. Urging people to take note of the worsening situation, he called on Telangana to stand up and protect its hard-earned irrigation progress.

Twelve Maoists, two police personnel killed in exchange of fire in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Kothagudem: In a massive operation against naxals, as many as 12 Maoists and two security personnel were killed in an exchange of fire in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh on Sunday. Two security personnel were also injured in the exchange of fire that took place in Indravati National Park in the district. Bodies of 12 uniformed Maoists have been recovered so far from the encounter site, police said.

The condition of both the injured jawans was out of

danger and they were being treated in a hospital. Additional forces have been sent for reinforcement. Search operations are continuing in the area. Heavy arms and ammunition were recovered from the spot. Bastar range Inspector General of Police, Sundarraj P told the media that based on information about the presence of Maoists in the area, search operations were launched. Intermit- tent firing has been going on since morning. Bijapur District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) and Bastar Fighters have been taking part in the operation. Over 35 Maoists have been killed in encounters in the past couple of months.

It might be noted that eight Maoists were gunned down by the security forces in an anti-Naxal operation in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on February 1 while a naxal was killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Feb 3. As many as 12 Maoists were killed in a massive encounter in Bijapur district on January 16 while top leaders escaped. 16 Maoists were killed in a joint operation in Gariaband district of Chhattisgarh along the Odisha borders on January 21 by the CRPF, Special Operations Group SOG of Odisha and Chhattisgarh police.

Atishi resigns as Delhi Chief Minister

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Sunday (February 9, 2025) met Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena and submitted her resignation to him at the Delhi Secretariat. L-G Saxena received the resignation and asked her to continue in her position till the formation of the new government. Even though Ms. Atishi retained her seat in Kalkaji, defeating Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Ramesh Bidhuri by 3,521 votes, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) lost the Delhi Assembly election getting just 22 seats against BJP's mighty 48. The result of the Delhi Assembly election that was held on Wednesday (February 5, 2025) was declared on Saturday (February 8, 2025) by the Election Commission of India (ECI). In a gazette notification dated February 7, Delhi L-G Saxena dissolved the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the National Capital. The order was made public today. The notification said, "In exercise of the power conferred upon me by sub-section (2)(b) of section 6 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, I, Vinai Kumar Saxena, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, hereby dissolve the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi with effect from 08th February, 2025."

Contesting in the Kalkaji constituency, Ms. Atishi se-



cured 52,154 votes, against Mr. Bidhuri's 48,633 votes. Congress' Alka Lamba got 4,392 votes. Although the BJP emerged victorious in 48 seats and the AAP securing only 22 constituencies, the vote share percentage of the parties stood at 45.56% and 43.57%, respectively. The Congress party failed to win a single seat for the third time in a row, with most of its candidates losing their deposit. The winning BJP is yet to declare their Chief Minister. The party asked for votes in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the election campaign, without announcing a CM face.

Telangana BJP pumped up after Delhi results, claims it will sweep MLC elections



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

HYDERABAD: After the Delhi Assembly elections outcome, the Telangana BJP unit is all pumped up and is

claiming that it would emerge victorious in the three MLC elections to be held here shortly. Union Minister and BJP State president G. Kishan Reddy said that in the future, the BJP would win the elections in Telangana and Karnataka. People in Telangana were keen to extend support to BJP, he told the party leaders here on Saturday. In the MLC elections and ensuing local bodies, the BJP would prove its might. The Congress government in the State had deceived all sections with guarantees and failed miserably in implementing the promises, he said. Union Minister Bandi Sanjay also said that after Delhi, the BJP would form a government in Telangana. The foundation for this would be laid from performing well in the MLC elections, followed by local bodies, he said, adding that the party was confident that people would support the BJP candidates in the MLC elections.

Harish Rao blames Revanth Reddy for real estate crisis in Telangana

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Hyderabad: Former Minister and senior BRS MLA T Harish Rao blamed Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy for the deteriorating real estate sector in Telangana, citing a series of suicides linked to financial distress. He pointed to the recent deaths of Kompally real estate businessman Venugopal Reddy and Adibhatla-based Narasimha Goud, stating that the crisis was spreading rapidly, leaving families devastated.

Reacting to the realtors' suicides, Harish Rao charged the Congress government with stalling Hyderabad's growth, calling its poor governance a major obstacle to the city's real estate progress. He criticised the administration for ignoring warnings from multiple survey agencies that have indicated a downturn in the sector over the past year and a half. Blaming policy missteps on projects such as HYDRAA demolitions, Musi Riverfront Development, Pharma City cancellation, and Hyderabad Metro line changes, he stated that these decisions have directly impacted investors and businesses. He suggested that Revanth Reddy, who has a background in real estate, to acknowledge the crisis and



take corrective action before Telangana's decade-long progress is reversed. Harish Rao also demanded immediate financial support for the bereaved family of Narasimha Goud, emphasising the urgent need for government intervention to prevent further tragedies.

BRS delegation meets Chief Secretary, pushes for 42 per cent quota for BCs



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

HYDERABAD: A delegation of Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MLAs, MLCs and former Ministers submitted a representation to Chief Secretary A. Santhi Kumari demanding implementation of 42 per cent reservation to BCs in local body elections and wanted the elections to

be conducted only after fulfilling the promise made to the community. It has been 14 months since the Congress government came to power but the Kamareddy Declaration was yet to be implemented. The Planning Department conducted the Socio, Economic, Educational, Employment, Political and Caste Survey in an unscientific manner, depriving the rightful share of the BCs, they said in the representation. Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Madhusudhana Chary slammed that the Congress government was not committed towards the welfare and development of the BCs. If it was committed, a re-survey should be conducted and implement the reservations to the BCs as was being done in Tamil Nadu, he said at the Secretariat media point on Saturday.

Former Minister V. Srinivas Goud said after having failed in fulfilling the guarantees assured to the people, the Congress government was ruining all sectors in the State. Farmers, builders and weavers were committing suicides, and the poor were struggling to make both the ends meet, he said.

Wrong to send illegal immigrants in shackles: Union Minister Athawale

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale has said it was wrong to deport illegal immigrants from America to India in shackles and the U.S. government should have avoided such a treatment. The Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment made the comments on Saturday (February 8, 2025) during a press conference, where he also shared details of the Union Budget. On the treatment of undocumented immigrants who were deported from the U.S. to India earlier this week, Mr. Athawale said it was wrong to send them in shackles. A U.S. military aircraft carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed in Amritsar on February 5.

It was the first such batch of Indians deported by the Donald Trump administration as part of a crackdown against illegal immigrants. Some of the deportees claimed their hands and legs were cuffed throughout the journey and they were unshackled only after landing in Amritsar. "The U.S. government should have avoided such treatment," Mr. Athawale, who heads the Republican Party Of India (A), said adding the issue would be discussed during the PM's visit to the U.S. next week. India on Friday (February 8, 2025) said it has registered concerns with the U.S. over the deportation of illegal immigrants in shackles and conveyed that this kind of treatment could have been avoided.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Glaring disconnect

THE National Education Policy (NEP) lays stress on interactive teaching and learning instead of rote memorisation so that the knowledge acquired in the classroom can be applied to real-life situations. The focus is supposed to be on preparing the student to face the world with confidence. How much progress has been made on this front in recent years? A study co-authored by Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo shows that being good at mathematics on the go, as witnessed in Indian kids working in the marketplace, does not often translate into classroom arithmetic, and vice versa. Simply put, there is a big gap between intuitive and formal styles of learning that needs to be bridged by fine-tuning the curriculum.

Mastering mathematics is a challenge for school-children from low-income backgrounds worldwide, and India is no exception. Poverty and deprivation force millions of families across the country to make their kids — mostly those who have never been to school — do odd jobs, such as working as street vendors. According to the study, such children can do complex calculations in seconds, and that too unaided, but find it hard to deal with simpler abstract maths taught in schools. Their schoolgoing peers excel at academic maths but fail at basic real-world calculations. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 shows that arithmetic levels of children in the age group of 6-14 years have improved in government as well as private schools. This is a good sign, but it is no less important to encourage kids to go beyond textbooks and hone their skills in practical calculations. Such an approach can go a long way in ensuring successful implementation of the NEP. It can also help in improving the students' employability and competency by making them street-smart rather than mere book-worms or exam warriors.

1948 | The first full budget of free India

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

"From August 15, 1947, the chains of our bondage have been broken and we are free to translate our dreams into reality. The plans are there, but we find that our freedom was born in an era so fluid and fast-changing that any pre-determined step other than the next became obsolete before it could be taken. We feel like the pilgrim who drags his weary limbs finally to the mountain top, only to find higher peaks stretching before his eyes."

So spoke R.K Shanmukham Chetty (alternatively spelled Chettiar), the first Finance Minister of free India, as he presented the newly independent nation's first full budget to the Indian Parliament on February 28, 1948, channeling the vision of the Nehru-led Congress government. This budget was also the first after the partition that seared the land, and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. It was cautious, yet struck a hopeful note for the future of newly-independent India.

With revenue at Rs. 230.52 crore, on the basis of existing taxation, and the expenditure at Rs. 257.37 crore, Mr. Chetty estimated a deficit of Rs. 26.85 crore for the year 1948-49. The aim of the budget proposed by him then, was to bring down the deficit to one crore rupees. The Budget provided for a defence expenditure of Rs. 121 crore, and set aside Rs. 165 crore for development schemes. This included Rs. 30 crore in grants and Rs. 34 crore in loans to the Provinces, while a provision of Rs. 20 crore was made for food subsidies. "Our financial position...is good and if Pakistan proved a reliable debtor, it might even be better," Mr Chetty announced, as he introduced the Budget in the Indian Parliament.

In 1948, India had just attained freedom and was negotiating its place in a world newly scarred by the second World War. The country was reeling from the effects of Partition and ironing out financial arrangements with its new neighbour Pakistan. The interim budget had been announced in November 1947, soon after the nation "had been shaken to its very foundations by the great Punjab tragedy," as Mr. Chetty described it. "Thousands of our people had been brutally butchered, and millions of innocent men, women and children driven out of their ancestral homes and forced to make a dusty, deadly trek in search of a new home. Our crying concern then was to dress the wounds of uprooted humanity, and to mobilise all our financial resources to set aright an unhinged economy." Right as the time approached to announce the first full budget however, suddenly calamity struck again in the form of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948. The world too was limping back slowly after a devastating war. "The third year after war finds the world still in the meshes of those economic maladjustments which are the inevitable aftermath of total war—the nemesis that inexorably pursues the victor and the vanquished alike," Mr. Chetty noted.

On a regional level, it was not merely India dealing with the after-effects of a prolonged colonial rule. As the Finance Minister noted, there was "serious economic dislocation in many Asian countries owing to violent internal struggles or fight for freedom from foreign domination." Rising prices, inflation and reduced production, sometimes even lower than pre-war production, posed a global quandary, while there was also increased food insecurity. The standards of living of many across the world and India were quite low in this post-war period.

Before the war, India's balance of trade was in her favour, with a surplus of export over imports. This became even more favourable during the war years due to restrictions on imports due to war-time conditions and "large payments which accrued to her on account of supplies and services to the allied nations and the Defence Expenditure Plan." Circumstances changed post the war though, and India was left with a substantial adverse balance in external payments. This was both to the renewed buying of necessities and material in the post war period, as well as increased foodgrain procurement. In 1946-47, the amount spent on importing food grains was Rs. 89 crore, along with a further Rs. 15 crore for the import of supplementary food articles. The estimates for 1947-48 had been pegged at Rs. 110 crore.

A final settlement was reached between Pakistan and India following the Partition, with the two nations dividing outstanding debt between them. Pakistan was to commence its first repayment only in 1952. "In addition to the Rs 75 crore given to her out of the cash balance of the undivided Government it has also been agreed that India would make available to Pakistan a further sum of Rs. 6 crore for meeting the expenditure on the setting up of Ordnance factories and similar special institutions required by her," The Hindu's report detailing the budget speech stated.

Fadnavis-Shinde 'discord' has hit Maharashtra's progress, claims Sanjay Raut



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday (February 2, 2025) claimed the "strained relation" between Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde was hindering the State's progress. In his weekly column Rokhthok in the Shiv Sena (UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamna', Mr. Raut further claimed Mr. Shinde was yet to come to terms with the fact that he was not reinstated as Chief Minister after the November 2024 Assembly polls and was desperately trying to regain the position, which Mr. Fadnavis fully understands.

In the last year's Assembly elections, the Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, Shinde's Shiv Sena and the NCP led by Ajit Pawar, won 230 of the 288 seats in the state. "Our Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and the BJP-backed Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde have almost no real communication anymore, which has turned into a source of entertainment for the public," the Rajya Sabha member charged. Mr. Raut claimed this ongoing "discord" has affected the Maharashtra government's functioning.

"Despite having a majority, the administration remains paralysed. Those who rise through treachery often fall by it. The attacks on Shinde have begun, and Maharashtra has been left in a state of uncertainty and disorder," he said. Mr. Raut also claimed that Mr. Shinde's control over his political turf Thane was being systematically undermined by the BJP. The appointment of BJP minister Ganesh Naik as the guardian minister of neighbouring Palghar district is reportedly part of this strategy, he charged. "Naik was already a minister in the first Shiv Sena-BJP government when Shinde was just a municipal councillor. He will not take orders from Shinde," Raut wrote in his column. Notably, Naik last week said he wants the saffron party to flourish in Thane, indicating there could be a tussle between the two allies. Naik had also said he would be holding public grievance meetings in

BJP's Dhas alleges fraudulent withdrawals during Munde's tenure as Beed guardian minister



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Suresh Dhas ignited a political firestorm on Thursday (January 30, 2025), accusing Maharashtra Cabinet Minister Dhananjay Munde of overseeing a ₹73.36 crore fraudulent fund withdrawal during his tenure as Beed's guardian minister. The allegations, which include claims that 500 locals "slipped into coma" amid the unfolding scandal, prompted Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar to demand a formal written complaint to trigger an investigation. Mr. Dhas, the BJP legislator from Ashti, escalated his charges at a district planning meeting, alleging that massive sums had been siphoned through "bogus bills" and unexecuted projects under Mr. Munde's watch in 2021-2022. "Deputy CM Pawar has directed me to submit documented evidence, which I provided Wednesday. A written complaint will follow," Mr. Dhas told reporters, brandishing files he claims expose corruption in Parli and

Thane too, triggering speculation that the BJP was preparing to challenge the dominance of Shinde's party in the area. According to Mr. Raut, Mr. Shinde's role in the government has diminished significantly. He is often absent from crucial cabinet meetings, and when he does attend, he is noticeably late. "On January 30, he arrived two-and-a-half-hours late for a District Planning Committee meeting at the World Trade Centre," he claimed. Mr. Raut alleged that Shinde feels betrayed by the BJP leadership.

Quoting a senior MLA from the Shiv Sena, Raut claimed Union Home Minister Amit Shah had assured Shinde that the 2024 Assembly elections would be fought under his leadership and that he would continue as CM. Encouraged by the promise, Shinde is believed to have spent enormous amounts of money during the campaign. However, when the time came, Shah allegedly did not keep his word, leading Shinde to feel deceived and politically cornered, Raut claimed quoting the legislator. Mr. Raut said the MLA also told him that Mr. Shinde now suspects his phone calls are being monitored and that central agencies are tracking his movements. "An MLA told me that Shinde is convinced that surveillance is being conducted on him and his associates," the Sena (UBT) leader claimed. A senior BJP minister recently dismissed the reports of tensions, stating there were no "major differences" between Mr. Fadnavis and Mr. Shinde. However, Mr. Raut countered that argument, pointing out that similar claims were made before the Shiv Sena split (in June 2022). "What happened after that is something the entire country witnessed," he said. Mr. Raut further claimed that many MLAs in Shinde's faction were now "uneasy", with some contemplating switching over to the BJP under Fadnavis' leadership, while others wanting a return to the Thackeray-led Sena (UBT). But the fear of central agencies has left them hesitant to act, he added. "Shinde's leadership is no longer secure," Raut further claimed, alleging that even the BJP was working against him. The RSS has deployed its own people as personal assistants to ministers from both the Shinde and Ajit Pawar (NCP) camps to monitor their activities and curb corruption, he charged. Unlike Shinde, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar is in a much more stable position, Mr. Raut said. "Ajit Pawar understands his limitations and has built a stronger working relationship with Fadnavis," he said. Mr. Pawar joined hands with the BJP to avoid action by the Enforcement Directorate (in some cases), to recover attached assets of Rs 1,000 crore and gain the deputy CM's post as an additional benefit, Mr. Raut claimed. Unlike Mr. Shinde, Mr. Pawar has no aspirations of becoming Chief Minister and is content with a "politically safer" position, he added.

Ambajogai tehsils.

The MLA alleged ₹37.70 crore was withdrawn without any work done, while another ₹73.36 crore was funnelled via fraudulent invoices between December 2021 and March 2022. He singled out executive engineers from the Zilla Parishad and Public Works Department (PWD), accusing them of colluding in a "modus operandi" to divert funds. Notably, Mr. Dhas questioned the mysterious disappearance of Sanjay Munde, a deputy engineer allegedly promoted unlawfully to oversee transactions. Mr. Dhas linked the financial scandal to public health. "At least 500 people in Beed have slipped into coma since I exposed this," he said. While not elaborating on causation, the claim amplifies pressure on Mr. Munde, already embroiled in a separate political crisis following the murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh. Mr. Munde's close aide, Walmik Karad, was recently arrested in an extortion case tied to the killing. Mr. Munde, a Nationalist Congress Party-Ajit Pawar (NCP-AP) leader, has denied all allegations, terming them "baseless". The Opposition, however, has demanded his ouster from the Cabinet. Mr. Dhas said he would pursue the matter, stating he would formally alert Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and PWD officials, adding, "The issues of Deshmukh's murder and Sanjay Munde's role won't be ignored." Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar (NCP-SP) MP Supriya Sule on Thursday criticised the Maharashtra government for its handling of the investigation into the murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, questioning why one of the prime accused remained at large 51 days after the crime. Ms. Sule said she planned to raise the issue in Parliament and would seek a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah to apprise him of the deteriorating law and order situation in the State. "We, as [part of] MVA (Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance), will be highlighting all these issues...extortion, corruption...in Parliament during the Budget session. I will also seek an appointment with (Union Home Minister) Amit Shah and apprise him of the current situation of the State," Ms. Sule said.

Officers with Ardh Kumbh experience entrusted with Maha Kumbh crowd management post stampede



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The Uttar Pradesh government has deployed two senior IAS officers, who were part of the team that successfully conducted the 2019 Ardh Kumbh, to oversee the smooth conduct of the Maha Kumbh Mela in the wake of the recent stampede that left at least 30 pilgrims dead. "Ashish Goyal and Bhanu Chandra Goswami have hands-on experience in administration in Prayagraj, including a deep insight into crowd management and inter-agency coordination during the 2019 Ardh Kumbh," an official said. They have joined Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand, forming a trio that was part of the mega fair six years ago, he said.

According to the official, the state government called Mr. Goswami and Mr. Goyal from Lucknow to Prayagraj to ensure the smooth organisation of the upcoming Basant Panchami (Amrit Snan), one of the key bathing days of the

festival on February 3. "The duo played a crucial role in the seamless execution of the last Kumbh and has assumed their responsibilities," he added. Deputy Inspector General of Uttar Pradesh Police (Retd) K.P. Singh, who led the police arrangements during the previous Kumbh, praised the deployment of experienced officers for the event. "This will help ensure the smooth conduct of the upcoming Amrit Snan," he told PTI. A 1995-batch IAS officer, Mr. Goyal brings extensive administrative experience, particularly in Prayagraj, where he has served multiple times in key positions. He has a BTech in Electrical Engineering, an MA in Economics, and a PhD. He first served as the district magistrate and collector of Prayagraj (then Allahabad) from March 2007 to April 2008.

During this period, he also briefly held the charge of vice chairman of the Allahabad Development Authority. He was later posted as special secretary in the Rural Development Department of the UP government in Lucknow. Goyal returned to Prayagraj in 2015 as the inspector general of Stamp and Registration, before being appointed divisional commissioner in 2017 — a post he held until March 2020. After a three-year stint as joint secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development in Delhi, he returned from central deputation to Uttar Pradesh in 2023 as chairman of the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited. Mr. Goswami is a 2009-batch IAS officer and a graduate of Sanskrit. Born in 1984, he also held crucial roles in Prayagraj, first as the vice chairman of the Allahabad Development Authority from May 2017 to February 2019, and later as the district magistrate from 2019 to 2021.

Bihar appears to have got bonanza, why Andhra Pradesh so cruelly ignored, asks Jairam Ramesh



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Taking a swipe at the Modi government over its budget announcements, the Congress on Saturday (February 1, 2025) said Bihar appears to have got a bonanza and asked why the other pillar of the NDA, Andhra Pradesh, has been so "cruelly ignored". Bihar remained in focus in the presentation of the Union Budget for the fiscal 2025-26 with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman making several announcements for the State, including setting up of a Makhana Board, financial support for western Kosi canal and support for enhancing capacity of IIT Patna. Presenting her record eighth Union Budget in the Lok Sabha, the Finance Minister also announced that the Centre will establish a National Institute of Food Technology, entrepreneurship and management in Bihar and also facilitate greenfield airports there to meet the future needs of the State. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said Bihar appears to have got a bonanza of announcements. "It is natural since elections are due there later in the year. But why is (has) the other pillar of the NDA, namely Andhra Pradesh, been so cruelly ignored?" Mr. Ramesh said on X in an apparent reference to BJP allies JD(U) from Bihar and TDP from Andhra Pradesh. Bihar appears to have got a bonanza of announcements. It is natural since elections are due there later in the year. But why is the other pillar of the NDA, namely Andhra Pradesh, been so cruelly ignored? The Congress leader also hit out at the government over announcements related to nutritional support programmes like Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0. "The Finance Minister has announced the revision of cost norms in Saksham anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 — after many years of turning down this demand. The FM has however not extended this announcement to - inclusion of breakfast in schools; provision of a glass of milk, as is done in Karnataka through the Ksheera Bhagya Scheme; upward revision in honorarium given to Anganwadi workers," he said. "The Union Education and WCD Ministries themselves have been pushing for these proposals for years, only to be turned down by the Finance Ministry. What kind of investment in people is the Finance Minister envisioning without these basic provisions?" Mr. Ramesh said. Ms. Sitharaman announced that cost norms for nutritional support programmes like Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 will be enhanced in the Union Budget 2025-26. She said Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 programmes provide nutritional support to over 8 crore children, 1 crore pregnant and lactating women, and 20 lakh adolescent girls in aspirational districts and the northeast region.

Justin Baldoni launches website to share his side in Blake Lively legal battle



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The legal fight between Justin Baldoni and Blake Lively has taken a new turn as Baldoni has launched a website to share his side of the dispute, linking to legal documents and a timeline of events related to their ongoing lawsuit, according to People. The website, titled Lawsuit Info, was made public on February 1. It includes a 168-page timeline of messages, emails, and other communications, some of which were earlier unseen. The move follows Lively's lawsuit against Baldoni and Wayfarer Studios in December 2024, where she accused them of sexual harassment and retaliation. Baldoni has denied these allegations and countersued Lively, her husband Ryan Reynolds, and their publicist Leslie Sloane, alleging defamation and extortion. Among the newly publicised messages is an alleged text from Lively discussing a scene rewrite in April 2023. She allegedly wrote, "if you knew me (in person) longer you'd have a sense of how flirty and yummy the ball busting will play. It's my love language. Spicy and playfully bold, never with teeth." Another message from February 2023 allegedly shows Reynolds texting Baldoni, "I'm excited for you to work together. I'm excited for Blake to crack open her creative piggy bank with someone as dynamic as you. This is gonna be INCREDIBLE. ... I happen to adore you, Justin." Lively's team has pushed back against Baldoni's online strategy, calling it an attempt to sway public opinion. They have requested a gag order to keep the case within the legal system, arguing that the leaked information could influence a future jury. Baldoni's team, however, claims Lively started the media attention by allegedly sharing her initial complaint with The New York Times. Lively's team has pushed back against Baldoni's online strategy, calling it an attempt to sway public opinion. They have requested a gag order to keep the case within the legal system, arguing that the leaked information could influence a future jury. Baldoni's team, however, claims Lively started the media attention by allegedly sharing her initial complaint with The New York Times. A pre-trial conference is set for February 3, with the full trial scheduled for March 2026.

How to get missing name added in voter's list as deadline ends



enrolled can apply for enrolment by filing Form-6 along with supporting documents. In case voters want to make changes or do some modification in their voter list such as name change, shifting of address, correction entries in existing electoral roll, issue of replacement of EPIC without correction, they will have to file Form-8 with supportive documents. The forms are available on the national voters portal. Officials said that voters cannot have a name in the electoral roll in more than one constituency or in any constituency more than once. It is a punishable offence u/s 17 & 18 of the Representation of People Act, 1950. In case any elector has multiple entries at different locations or holding multiple Voter ID Cards, he/she shall apply in Form-7 for deletion of such multiple entries. Forms can be filed online at ECI's Voters' Portal <https://voters.eci.gov.in> or Voter Helpline App / Saksham App (Divyang) or offline at the Voter Centre also. Or Visit <https://electoralsearch.eci.gov.in>. The Election Commission has also launched a 'Voter Helpline' for searching the name and other electoral services and 'Saksham' mobile app for persons with disabilities.

Further, Delhi CEO Vaz also informed that during the ongoing Special Summary Revision (SSR) 2025, approximately 2.25 lakh Forms (6, 7, and 8) have been received to date. Vaz highlighted that as part of the pre-revision activities, Booth Level Officers (BLOs) conducted House-to-House (H2H) verification in Delhi from August 20 to identify unenrolled voters, prospective electors who will turn 18 by October 1, 2025, and entries requiring deletion, such as those for deceased or permanently shifted voters. She said that cases of multiple entries and family splits were also identified during the extensive verification drive. The BLOs collected approximately 1.62 lakh Forms (6, 7, and 8) to address additions, deletions, and corrections in the electoral roll, Vaz added. The CEO also said that 123 new polling stations have been added, following the removal of 53 polling station locations as they were damaged or demolished buildings, resulting in a net increase of 70 polling station locations, ensuring better accessibility for voters across Delhi. After completion of pre-revision activities, draft publication was done on October 10 and the published electoral roll was displayed at all polling stations of NCT of Delhi, all 70 voter centres of NCT Delhi and also on the Election Commission website.

Farm leaders say no dialogue with Punjab govt till Dallewal 'released'



Farmers protesting at the Khanauri border point Wednesday said they will not engage in any dialogue with the Punjab government till Samyukta Kisan Korchha (non-political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal was released and brought back to the protest site. A Punjab Police team in the wee hours of Tuesday picked Dallewal (70) from a temporary hut at Khanauri and took him to Dayanand Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) in Ludhiana for a check-up, hours before he was to begin a fast unto death in support of farmers' various demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP. Since then Dallewal has remained admitted to the DMCH under heavy security, with his son claiming that police were not allowing anyone to meet or talk to the farmer leader.

Deputy Inspector General (Patiala Range) Mandeep Singh Sidhu and Senior Superintendent of Police Dr Nanak Singh Wednesday met a group of farmer leaders at the Khanauri border point. Sidhu said, "It was like an ice-breaking exercise. We listened to their (farmers') concerns and will convey their demands to the right quarters". The DIG didn't say speak about Dallewal even as he had Tuesday said that the administration was concerned about the age and health of the farmer leader, who is also a prostrate cancer patient, in the wake of his fast-unto-death call. Addressing the media after the meeting, farmer leader Kaka Singh Kotda asked the AAP government to clarify its stand on the forcible removal of Dallewal from the protest site. "We have asked them (police officials) to release Pradhanji (Dallewal). Send him to the protest site. Until he comes here, there will

be no further discussion," said Kotda, who is also the general secretary of BKU (Ekta Sidhupur), the union that Dallewal heads. Kotda said the police officials have said that they will discuss their demand with the senior officials. Another farmer leader Gurinder Singh Bhangu said that Dallewal was in the "custody" of the state government and the police were not allowing anyone to meet him. Those denied permission include Faridkot MP Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa who reached DMCH Tuesday evening but wasn't allowed to meet him. "The police team at the spot told me that they have got orders from higher ups not to allow anyone to meet Dallewal," Khalsa told the Indian Express.

Dallewal's son Gurbinder Pal Singh, told the Indian Express that they had sent a person, one Balpreet Singh from Fatehgarh Sahib, Tuesday evening to handover some Ayurvedic medicines that his father takes. "Even he has been detained in the hospital and is with my father as of now. My father talked to me using Balpreet's phone, which the Punjab Police later took in its custody," claimed Gurbinder. Earlier in the day, Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said they were not aware of Dallewal's condition. "What is his condition? Nobody is making it clear," he said. Pandher said the state government has not yet given any clarification regarding the forcible removal of Dallewal from Khanauri border point. "The Punjab chief minister should tell people of the state about yesterday's incident (taking away Dallewal) and why it was done," he said, adding that the state government remained unsuccessful in its attempt to "fail" their agitation by taking away Dallewal. Pandher said Sukhjith Singh Hardojhande, president of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, is sitting on a fast unto death in place of Dallewal. "Sukhjith's fast unto death enters the second day," he said, asking people to reach the Khanauri border point in large numbers. Farmer leaders had earlier claimed that Dallewal was observing a hunger strike in the Ludhiana hospital, saying he was not having anything. Pandher raised apprehension that police may force feed Dallewal. Pandher also said they will see whether MPs raise the issues of giving a legal guarantee to MSP on crops, farm debt waiver in the ongoing Parliament session. Farmers are demanding from the Centre to hold talks with them within 10 days to resolve their issues. They said that the union government has not held any talks with them regarding their issues since February 18.

Stolen PAN card used on gaming site: Karnataka HC stays police probe against online gaming firm

The Karnataka High Court has stayed an investigation by the Bengaluru police against an online gaming site over the use of a stolen PAN identity card for gaming. The court passed the order on November 26 on the grounds that it was the gaming firm, Winzo Games, that alerted the victim about his PAN identity featuring among hundreds of stolen PAN IDs posted on the internet.



The Bengaluru Central CEN police station had registered a case of identity theft and cheating under the Information Technology Act and the Indian Penal Code against Winzo Games in July based on the complaint of a Bengaluru resident. The 38-year-old man filed the police complaint against Winzo Games, Real 11 Fantasy Sports, and Scribd.com on July 4, stating that his PAN card had been leaked on the internet as part of a document with 500 PAN IDs on scribd.com and that the card details were used by unidentified people for gaming on Winzo and Real 11 Fantasy Sports. Winzo Games approached the Karnataka HC in October this year seeking the quashing of the criminal investigation launched against the firm for the alleged usage of the stolen PAN ID for gaming on the site by unidentified persons. The HC stayed the probe against the online gaming company on November 26. "The complaint is filed against accused No.1 (user of stolen IDs), who is said to

be involved in such PAN theft and using them in the gaming platform of the petitioner. The petitioner finds it out and communicates the same to the complainant to register a complaint as it is a serious matter. It is then the impugned crime is registered," the HC has observed. "By doing so, the petitioner (Winzo Games) who cautioned the complainant is also dragged into the web of crime for the offences under Section 420 of the IPC and Sections 66(c) and (d) of the Information Technology Act, 2000..." the High Court observed. The HC has ordered an interim stay on all proceedings in the case, including investigation, till January 2025.

BJP's first list to be out soon; former MPs, state unit presidents in the fray

GNS News Agency, Feb 9 The BJP has begun finalising its candidates for the Delhi Assembly elections next year and is likely to release its first list of 35 to 40 names in early December, according to party sources. While the entire list is likely to include "several young leaders" compared to its picks from the 2020 Assembly elections, its choice for the New Delhi Assembly constituency is likely to be the "most high-profile" among candidates for the city's 70 constituencies, sources said.



Party insiders said the finalisation of names had picked up with discussions around them led by Baijyant Panda, the BJP in-charge for Delhi, the state leadership led by state unit president Virendra Sachdeva, and the local unit of the RSS. "Two former Delhi MPs and a senior NDMC [New Delhi Municipal Council] member are in the contention for the New Delhi seat represented by AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal as well as the Greater Kailash seat which AAP minister Saurabh Bharadwaj represents," an insider said. "Former mayors, presidents of the BJP's Delhi unit and ex-NDMC members are being considered for other seats which AAP ministers or senior leaders represent as current MLAs. The first list is likely to be out before December 15," the insider added. According to sources, former MPs Parvath Verma, Meenakshi Lekhi and Ramesh Bidhuri, former NDMC chairperson Satish Upadhyay, and ex-mayor Arti Mehra are among the names being discussed as po-

tential candidates. "After the names have been finalised, they will be discussed in the state election committee, then the core committee — which has a mix of local and national leadership from the BJP and RSS — and then finally the Central Election Committee chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," a source said. "Several young faces will also be part of the list which will be announced relatively early this time to give such candidates time to prepare and have a strong campaign," the source added. The Aam Aadmi Party had released its first list of 11 candidates for the Delhi Assembly polls last week, picking six leaders recently inducted from the BJP and the Congress.

As temperatures drop, Hyderabad witnesses rise in seasonal ailments

Hyderabad: With temperatures dropping significantly, physicians are reporting a surge in seasonal ailments, especially upper respiratory tract infections, in Hyderabad. Most of the surge is related to cases of influenza, upper respiratory tract infections, lung diseases and viral fevers in Hyderabad. There is also a significant rise in cases of allergies, as winters are known to trigger allergies. Based on the data available with Allergy and Asthma Network of India (AANI), winters are known to cause 40 per cent rise in cases of allergies. Doctors are also reporting a significant rise in bouts of Asthma among patients who already were diagnosed with the ailment. "During winters, up to 80 per cent of allergic reactions are caused due to house dust mite and moulds. Essentially, during winter airways of the lungs tighten, resulting in more aggressive unpredictable Asthmatic attacks," says CEO of AANI and allergy

specialist, Dr. Vyakaranam Nageshwar. Family Physician and Diabetologist, Apollo Clinic Nizampet, Dr. Soujanya Manthripagada, in a press release said that she has noticed a rise in respiratory tract infections among patients. "In the past few weeks, the number of cases has risen significantly. About 40-50% of patients are visiting with respiratory symptoms. Upper and Lower respiratory tract infections, Acute exacerbations of Bronchial asthma and COPD have also been observed. Circulation of respiratory pathogens is leading to more people becoming sick requiring Hospitalizations." Dr. Manthripagada has said that amongst the most common complaints in patients, cold, cough, fever and shortness of breath were reported. "Patients less than 16 years old and the elderly especially with comorbidities like diabetes and chronic diseases are complaining about these issues.

Karnataka HC refuses bail to Sri Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank founder in multi-crore fraud case

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Karnataka Karnataka In this bail petition, Ramakrishna's counsel had argued on the basis of Section 479(1) of the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that deals with the maximum period for undertrial detention. The Karnataka High Court has refused to grant bail to K Ramakrishna, founder of the Sri Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank in Basavanagudi, for the third time in a money laundering case regarding the misappropriation of hundreds of crores of rupees. The order was passed on November 23 by a bench comprising Justice H P Sandesh and was made available recently. Ramakrishna was arrested in 2022 for his alleged role in the fraud of Rs 1,553 crore involving the creation of fictitious documents and persons to disburse loans. It was also alleged that out of this, a sum of Rs 928 crore had been disbursed to 24 people. The latest attempt for bail was rejected on an appeal by the Supreme Court. The Indian Express had previously reported on the scale of the alleged fraud.



In this bail petition, Ramakrishna's counsel had argued on the basis of Section 479(1) of the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that deals with the maximum period for undertrial detention. It was argued that despite a detention of two years and seven months, the trial had not yet commenced. The counsel of opposite party argued against the bail based on the scale of the alleged fraud, while also pointing out that there were two cases under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Hence since there were different

trials, that section of the BNSS would not be applicable, the lawyer said. The bench observed that when the offences are different as well as when more cases are registered against the petitioner, he cannot invoke the provision under Section 479 of BNSS seeking relief on the ground of one-third punishment. "The court has to take note of the gravity of the offence and multiple cases against the petitioner and more than Rs 1,544 crore fraud has been committed, that too this petitioner being a founder chairman of the said bank," the bench said. The court pointed out that when one is facing an inquiry or trial in more than one offence or in multiple cases pending against a person, then the court cannot grant bail to that individual under Section 479 of BNSS. "It is important to note that the second proviso to Section 479(1) of BNSS empowers the court to order the continued detention of a person for a period longer than one half of the period. All the provisions have to be read 9

Punjab HC asks DGP to ensure FIRs are filed promptly: 'Complaints kept pending to extort money'

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the DGP (Punjab) to ensure that the FIRs are registered without any delay. (File Image)The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the DGP (Punjab) to ensure that the FIRs are registered without any delay. Noting that "in majority of the cases, the police officials either hold inquiry in every complaint received in police stations or keep the complaint pending for several days, just to extort money from the poor and innocent victims of crimes in the state of Punjab", the Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the DGP (Punjab) to ensure that the FIRs are registered without any delay.



The directions were issued by a bench of Justice N S Shekhawat while hearing a petition filed by one Jaswant Singh, seeking protection of his life & liberty and action against the accused who had beaten him up mercilessly. While the incident with the petitioner took place on September 25, 2024, the FIR against the accused was registered only on November 22, 2024. On previous hearing, the high court had directed Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) and DGP, Punjab, to ensure that in all the cases, where cognisable offences are made out, the FIRs are registered promptly, in view of the judgment passed by the Supreme Court in Lalita Kumari versus Government of UP and others (2013). When the matter came up for hearing on Monday, the state counsel told the high court that an FIR No. 0237 dated November 22, 2024, has been registered at Ajnala police station against the accused in the present case. Even SHO, Ajnala police station, submitted in the court that 10 complaints received from various complainants are pending for the last more than 15 days and 20 complaints are pending at the police station for the last two weeks. Justice Shekhawat noted that it appears that the complaints are kept pending at various police stations in Punjab and the mandate of the Supreme Court is not being followed strictly. On earlier occasions also, this court had taken serious view of the matter and had directed the DGP, Punjab, to issue instructions to all the police officials in Punjab to ensure that the FIRs are promptly registered in the cases where a cognisable offence is made out, apparently from the perusal of the complaint itself, said the high court. "However, in majority of the cases, the police officials either hold inquiry in every complaint received in police stations or keep the complaint pending for several days, just

to extort money from the poor and innocent victims of crimes in the State of Punjab. Even in the present case, the occurrence had taken place on September 25, 2024, where a person was seriously injured and the FIR was registered on November 22, 2024," noted the high court. Thus summoning the SSP concerned that he should remain personally present in the court on the next date of hearing and apprise about the status of the complaints that are pending in all police stations under his jurisdiction, the high court again directed the Punjab police chief to ensure that in all cases, where complaints are received with regard to commission of cognisable offences, "the FIRs are registered immediately, without any delay, on any pretext".

Hyderabad gears up for HCL Cyclothon for the third time

Hyderabad: HCL Group organized two cycling events in Hyderabad as a precursor to the highly anticipated HCL Cyclothon, scheduled for December 15. These events aimed to celebrate the spirit of fitness, environmental sustainability, and the city's rich heritage. Hyderabad was chosen as the host for HCL Cyclothon due to its thriving cycling culture and its commitment to fostering cycling-friendly infrastructure, including extensive dedicated cycling tracks, a press release said. Cyclists enthusiastically participated in the #ChangeYourGear Rides, that started from multiple locations including Peddlers Point in Gachibowli, HBC Station near Sanjeevaiah Park, Necklace Road, and The Bike Affair in Kondapur.

Zuckerberg dines with Trump at Mar-a-Lago to talk about the incoming administration



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Donald Trump dined with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg at the president-elect's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, bringing together the Facebook founder and the former president who was once banned from that social network. Stephen Miller, who has been appointed deputy chief of staff for Trump's second term, said Zuckerberg, like other business leaders, wants to support Trump's economic plans. The tech CEO has been seeking to change his company's perception on the right following a rocky relationship with Trump.

"Mark, obviously, he has his own interest, and he has his own company and he has his own agenda," Mr. Miller said in an interview on Fox News about the meeting. "But he's made clear that he wants to support the national renewal of America under Trump's leadership." A spokesper-

son for Meta confirmed that Mr. Zuckerberg and Mr. Trump met on Wednesday, saying he was invited for dinner with the president-elect and other members of his team to talk about the incoming administration. Mr. Trump was kicked off Facebook following the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. The company restored his account in early 2023. During the 2024 campaign, Mr. Zuckerberg did not endorse a candidate for president. Mr. Zuckerberg has since taken a more positive stance toward Trump. Earlier this year, he praised Trump's response to his first assassination attempt, calling it "badass." Mr. Zuckerberg also complained that senior Biden administration officials pressured Facebook to "censor" some COVID-19 content during the pandemic. Still, Mr. Trump in recent months had continued to attack Mr. Zuckerberg publicly. In July, he posted a message on his own social network Truth Social threatening to send election fraudsters to prison in part by citing a nickname he used for the Meta CEO. "ZUCKERBUCKS, be careful!" Mr. Trump wrote. The Thanksgiving eve visit also comes as tech mogul Elon Musk has become more influential in Trump's Make America Great Again movement, contributing an estimated \$200 million through his political action committee to help elect Trump. Musk is the billionaire owner of the X social network, a competitor to Meta. Mr. Musk has spent considerable time at Mar-a-Lago since the election, and Mr. Trump selected him to lead an outside advisory panel known as the "Department of Government Efficiency" to identify waste with Vivek Ramaswamy, a venture capitalist and former GOP presidential candidate.

Attacks on minorities in Bangladesh: Indian-American body urges Biden, Trump to intervene

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

An influential Indian-American organisation has urged U.S. President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump to call on the government of Bangladesh to protect the minority Hindu community in the country. In separate letters to Biden and Trump, the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS) on Wednesday (November 27, 2024) expressed grave concern over the escalating human rights violations against religious minorities in Bangladesh and the recent arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari. Bangladesh's minority Hindus have faced over 200 attacks, including those on their temples, since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5, according to the FIIDS.

Das was arrested on Monday in a sedition case and later denied bail by a court, triggering protests by community members in various locations, including the capital Dhaka and the port city of Chattogram. He was a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and was recently expelled. Calling for an independent inquiry into the violence against minorities, Khanderao Kand, President and Chief of Policy and Strategy, FIIDS requested Biden to urge Bangladesh Chief Adviser Yunus Mohammed to release Das, provide protection to minority communities and publicly commit to upholding secular principles. "Bangladesh's progress as a democratic and inclusive society depends on safeguarding the rights of all its citizens, including its most vulnerable populations. We trust that your leadership will champion these values and help restore hope for those who continue to face oppression and displacement," he said. In his letter to Trump, Kand said, "As the incoming leader of the free world, you have the unique opportunity to prioritise the protection of vulnerable communities and reinforce America's commitment to religious freedom and human rights." He urged Trump to appeal to the interim government to ensure Das' release, safeguard ISKCON's operations and protect minority communities from further violence and encourage Bangladesh to reaffirm its secular constitution and hold free and fair elections to restore democratic governance.



"I strongly condemn Bangladesh for its atrocities against minorities, the arrest of a Hindu monk and its shocking attempt to ban the humanitarian religious minority organisation, ISKCON, while ignoring jihadi extremist organisations," Kand told PTI. "Bangladesh is rapidly descending into a radicalised Islamic state, all under the watch of the US, the State Department, and the UN who must act now to restore democracy and protect minorities. I request not only President Biden but would urge President Trump and his transition team to give priority to restoration of peace and protect minorities in Bangladesh," he said. Instead of taking action against radical Islamist groups, the Bangladesh government has shockingly labelled ISKCON, a globally respected humanitarian organisation, a "religious fundamentalist organisation," Kand said. This baseless accusation, spearheaded by the attorney general, comes alongside a petition to ban ISKCON, which has fed millions worldwide, promoted interfaith harmony, and provided critical humanitarian aid in Bangladesh during disasters. Such a move undermines global religious tolerance and human rights, he said. In a social media post, popular African-American singer Mary Millben condemned the attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh. "The imprisonment of Chinmoy Krishna Das and the continued attacks against Hindus and other minorities by extremists in Bangladesh must be addressed now by world leaders. We must preserve religious freedom, and the safety of all people of faith globally," she said.

Investors return to new-look Middle East, but Trump causes some concern

LONDON/JERUSALEM, GNS News Agency, Feb 9 A historic shake-up of the Middle East is starting to draw international investors, warming to the prospects of relative peace and economic recovery after so much turmoil. President Donald Trump's proposal that the U.S. takeover Gaza may have thrown a curveball into the mix, but the fragile ceasefire there, Bashar al-Assad's ouster from Syria, a weakened Iran and a new government in Lebanon have fed hopes of a reset. Egypt, the region's most populous country and a key negotiator in the recent peace talks, has just managed its first dollar debt sale in four years. Not too long ago it was facing economic meltdown.

Investors have started buying up Israel's bonds again, and those of Lebanon, betting that Beirut can finally start fixing its intertwined political, economic and financial crises. "The last few months have very much reshaped the region and set in play a very different dynamic in a best-case scenario," Charlie Robertson, a veteran emerging market analyst at FIM Partners, said. The question is whether Trump's plan for Gaza inflames tensions again, he added. Trump's call to "clean out" Gaza and create a "Riviera of the Middle East" in the enclave was met with international condemnation. Credit rating agency S&P Global has signalled it will remove Israel's downgrade warning if the ceasefire lasts. It acknowledges the complexities, but it is a welcome possibility as Israel readies its first major debt sale since the truce was signed. Share dropped from 15% to below 9%, debt load has risen from 540 bln to almost 720 bln.

Michael Fertik, a U.S. venture capitalist and CEO of artificial intelligence firm Modelcode.ai, said the easing of tensions had contributed to his decision to open an Israeli subsidiary. He is eager to hire skilled local software programmers, but geopolitics have been a factor too. "With Trump in the White House, no one doubts the United States has Israel's back in a fight," he said, explaining how it provided predictability even if the war re-ignites. Having largely stayed away when Israel ramped up spending on the war, bond investors are also starting to come back, central bank data shows. Economy Minister Nir Barkat told Reuters in an interview last month that he will be seeking a more generous spending package focusing on "bold economic growth."

The snag for stock investors though, is that Israel was one of the best performing markets in the world in the 18 months after the October 7, 2023 attacks. Since the ceasefire - which has coincided with a sizable U.S. tech selloff - it has been in retreat. "During 2024, I think we learned that the market is not really afraid of the war but rather the

internal political conflict and tensions," said Sabina Levy, head of research at Leader Capital Markets in Tel Aviv. And if the ceasefire buckles? "It is reasonable to assume a negative reaction." MSC's Israel stocks index is now up 45% from where it was at the time of the Oct. 7 2023 attacks by Hamas. Some investors have already reacted badly to Trump's surprise Gaza move. Yerlan Syzdykov, head of emerging markets at Europe's biggest asset manager Amundi, said his firm had bought up Egypt's bonds after the ceasefire deal, but Trump's plan - which foresees Cairo and Jordan accepting 2 million Palestinian refugees - has changed that. Both countries have balked at Trump's idea but the risk is, Syzdykov explained, that the U.S. president uses Egypt's reliance on bilateral and IMF support to try to strong arm the country given its recent brush with a full-blown economic crisis. Reducing the attacks by Yemen's Houthi fighters on ships in the Red Sea also remains crucial. The country lost \$7 billion - more than 60% - of its Suez Canal revenues last year as shippers diverted around Africa rather than risk ambush. "Markets are unlikely to like the idea of Egypt losing such (bilateral and multilateral) support, and we are taking a more cautious stance to see how these negotiations will unfold," Syzdykov said.

Others expect the rebuilding of bombed homes and infrastructure in Syria and elsewhere to be an opportunity for Turkey's heavyweight construction firms. Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, has said it could take 10 to 15 years to rebuild Gaza. The World Bank, meanwhile, puts Lebanon's damage at \$8.5 billion, roughly 35% of its GDP. Beirut's default-stricken bonds more than doubled in price when it became clear in September that Hezbollah's grip in Lebanon was being weakened and have continued to rise on hopes the country's crisis is addressed. Bonds soared after Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah was killed in late September. Lebanon's new President Michel Aoun's first state visit will be to Saudi Arabia, a country seen as a potential key supporter, and one that likely sees this as an opportunity to further remove Lebanon from Iran's sphere of influence. Bondholders say there have been preliminary contacts with the new authorities too. "Lebanon could be a big story in 2025 if we make progress towards a debt restructuring," Magda Branet, head of emerging markets fixed income at AXA Investment Managers, said. "It is not going to be easy" though she added, given the country's track record, the \$45 billion of debt that needs reworking and that Lebanese savers could see some of their money seized by the government as part of the plan. Marc Jones is a senior global markets correspondent based in London with a focus on economics, central banks.

Landscape fires account for 2.5 million deaths from air pollution in India: Lancet



Between October and December, India's northern plains are choked by air pollution arising from cool temperature, vehicular emissions and burning of farm stubble. At least 2.5 million people in India have died on account of health issues arising from air pollution caused by so-called landscape fires (such as those caused by the burning of farm stubble) between 2000 and 2019, according to a study published by Lancet. The study added that the world saw at least 30 million deaths in the same period attributable to health issues arising from landscape fires, with at least 90% of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries, with the highest burdens in China, India, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, and Nigeria. China, according to the study, saw a little over 2.81 million deaths.

Landscape fires are fires that occur in natural and cultural landscapes, including both wildfires and human-planned fires. Between October and December, India's northern plains are choked by air pollution arising from cooler temperatures (a phenomenon called inversion), vehicular emissions, and, also, the burning of farm stubble, especially in Punjab. While these fires can result in direct fatalities, the majority of deaths associated with them stem from the air pollution they generate, which contributes to long-term health issues such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. For instance, according to the study, there were

221 direct deaths reported globally in 2018. However, the health risks from landscape fires are much greater, as landscape fire-sourced (LFS) air pollution (particularly fine particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 µm or less [PM2.5] and ozone [O3]) often travels hundreds and even thousands of kilometres away from the source and affects much larger populations than the flames and heat do, according to the authors.

The authors claimed the study is the largest and most comprehensive assessment to date of the health risks associated with air pollution from landscape fires. It found an increasing number of global cardiovascular deaths associated with pollution from landscape fires with approximately 450,000 deaths per year attributed to cardiovascular disease, and 220,000 deaths attributable to respiratory disease. The total number of deaths attributable to air pollution from landscape fires in India rose from 117781 a year in the decade between 2000 and 2009 to 137711 a year in the decade between 2010 and 2019, according to the study. The researchers said they calculated country-specific population-weighted average daily and annual fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and surface ozone (O3) arising from landscape fires during 2000 -19 from a validated dataset. Annual mortality, population, and socio-demographic data for each country or territory were extracted from the Global Burden of Diseases Study 2019. These data were used to estimate country-specific annual deaths attributable to LFS air pollution using standard algorithms. The authors also concluded that "immediate climate actions to limit the magnitude of climate change" could help with a modelling study suggesting that 60-80% of the increase in landscape fires by 2100 could be avoided if the global mean temperature increase could be limited to 2.0°C or 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels. "Air pollution is a major health hazard, impacting almost all vital organs adversely upon prolonged exposure. Even short-term exposure leads to several health conditions such as sore throat, aggravated asthma, watery eyes etc," said Dr GC Khilnani, former head of Pulmonology and sleep medicine department, Aiiims.

SC calls for reforms to empower elected female representatives

GNS News Agency, Feb 9 The Supreme Court has underscored the urgent need for reform in governance structures to empower elected female representatives and safeguard their autonomy. In a scathing critique of the regressive mindset entrenched in administrative systems, the Supreme Court has underscored the urgent need for reform in governance structures to empower elected female representatives and safeguard their autonomy.

Highlighting how women in leadership roles are often subjected to systemic discrimination and treated as subordinates to bureaucrats, a bench of justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan called for introspection and significant structural changes to promote gender equality in governance. Delivering a judgment reinstating a young woman sarpanch in Chhattisgarh, the court noted that the bureaucratic machinery often undermines women in elected positions, disregarding their democratic mandate and imposing undue accountability upon them. The judgment, delivered on November 19, was released on Wednesday. The judgment focussed on the entrenched gender bias within governance systems that disproportionately affects female leaders, particularly those in rural and remote areas. Women in leadership roles are frequently subjected to selective accountability, discriminatory practices, and systemic harassment, discouraging their participation in governance. In a particularly strong rebuke, the court held: "There is a recurring pattern of similar cases, where administrative authorities and village panchayat members collude to exact vendettas against female sarpanches. Such instances highlight a systemic issue of prejudice and discrimination. The removal of an elected female representative, especially in rural and remote areas, is frequently treated as a casual matter, wherein disregarding principles of natural justice and democratic processes is treated as a time-honoured tradition."

This pervasive bias, the Court noted, reflects a failure of governance structures to adapt to the aspirations of a modern, progressive democracy. "It is disheartening that despite our nation's aspirations to become an economic powerhouse, these incidents of discrimination against women in governance continue unabated, bearing striking similarities across geographically distant regions. Such practices normalise regressive attitudes and must be met with serious introspection and reform," asserted the bench. Underscoring the broader need for systemic change, the court called upon administrative authorities to act as enablers of women's empowerment rather than obstacles to their leadership. "Administrative authorities, being custodians of actual powers, should lead by example, making efforts to promote women's empowerment and support female-led initiatives in rural and remote areas. Instead of adopting regressive attitudes that discourage women in elected positions, they must foster an environment that encourages their participation and leadership in governance," it noted.

By adopting an inclusive and supportive approach, the bench emphasised, governance systems can create a level playing field for women leaders, ensuring that their voices are not stifled by bureaucratic overreach or societal



prejudice. The bench further expressed concern over what it termed a "colonial mindset," where elected representatives are equated with appointed public servants, eroding the very essence of grassroots democracy.

It pointed out that the bureaucratic apparatus frequently imposes itself on elected representatives, undermining their authority and autonomy. This is particularly pronounced in cases involving women leaders, who are systematically marginalized and subjected to unfair treatment. "The administrative authorities, with their colonial mindset, have regrettably failed yet again to recognize the fundamental distinction between an elected public representative and a selected public servant. Elected representatives like the appellant are often treated as subordinate to bureaucrats, compelled to comply with directives that serve to encroach upon their autonomy and impinge their accountability," the court maintained. Such practices, the bench emphasised, distort the democratic process, reducing the credibility and influence of those elected to represent the public. "This misconceived and self-styled supervisory power is asserted with an intention to equate elected representatives with public servants holding civil posts, completely disregarding the democratic legitimacy conferred by election," it noted. The judgment came in the case of a 27-year-old woman sarpanch from Sajbahar Gram Panchayat in Chhattisgarh, who was removed from office under what the court termed as baseless and discriminatory allegations. The sarpanch, elected in 2020 with a significant mandate, had undertaken several development projects aimed at improving infrastructure and economic self-sufficiency in her village. Despite her commitment, she faced systemic hurdles, including delayed issuance of work orders and subsequent accusations of delays in project execution. Bureaucrats, allegedly in collusion with panchayat members, initiated proceedings that culminated in her removal, lamented the court, adding she was also denied the opportunity to defend herself, violating the principles of natural justice. "This appears to be a classic case of administrative imperiousness, where the authorities penalized a young, dedicated sarpanch for baseless and unwarranted reasons. Rather than supporting her developmental initiatives, they sought to undermine her credibility and obstruct her work," the court said. It quashed the orders for her removal, reinstating her as sarpanch and awarding ₹1 lakh as compensation for the harassment she faced. It also directed the state government to initiate action against the erring officials responsible for her ordeal.

Earth bids farewell to its temporary 'mini moon'

Florida: Planet Earth is parting company with an asteroid that's been tagging along as a "mini moon" for the past two months. The harmless space rock will peel away on Monday, overcome by the stronger tug of the sun's gravity. But it will zip closer for a quick visit in January. NASA will use a radar antenna to observe the 33-foot (10-meter) asteroid then. That should deepen scientists' understanding of the object known as 2024 PT5, quite possibly a boulder that was blasted off the moon by an impacting, crater-forming asteroid.

While not technically a moon — NASA stresses it was never captured by Earth's gravity and fully in orbit — it's "an interesting object" worthy of study.

The astrophysicist brothers who identified the asteroid's "mini moon behavior," Raul and Carlos de la Fuente Marcos of Complutense University of Madrid, have collaborated with telescopes in the Canary Islands for hundreds of observations so far. Currently more than 2 million miles (3.5 million kilometers) away, the object is too small



and faint to see without a powerful telescope. It will pass as close as 1.1 million miles (1.8 million kilometers) of Earth in January, maintaining a safe distance before it zooms farther into the solar system while orbiting the sun, not to return until 2055. That's almost five times farther than the moon.

Counter-terrorism: Pakistan, China hold military-level talks



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Military officials of Pakistan and China held talks on counter-terrorism and regional security amid unease following the recent attacks on Chinese nationals. "General Zhang Youxia, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) China and one of China's two top military leaders, is visiting Pakistan along with a high-level delegation," according to a military statement. General Zhang held a one-on-one meeting with Army Chief Gen Asim Munir on Wednesday (November 27, 2024), followed by the delegation-level discussions. According to the statement, the engagements focussed on "matters of mutual interest, regional security dynamics, measures for regional stability and enhancing bilateral defence cooperation." General Zhang spoke about Pakistan's ongoing counter-terrorism efforts, which remain a key topic of discussion between the two countries owing to the rising frequency of attacks targeting Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. Newspaper Dawn reported that there have been media reports that Beijing is seeking a more proactive role in ensuring the safety of its citizens in Pakistan, but the Foreign Office has emphasised that counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries is based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. "Under the regional stability head, the two sides

exchanged views about the Indian role in the region and the developments in Afghanistan, particularly the presence of terrorist groups," Dawn added. The CMC vice-chairman's visit follows a trip by Gen Li Qiaoming, commander of the People's Liberation Army Ground Forces, to Pakistan in late August. Additionally, more than 300 Chinese troops arrived in Pakistan to take part in the joint China-Pakistan anti-terrorism exercise, Warrior-VIII, amid escalating militant attacks in the country. The opening ceremony for the drills was held on Wednesday (November 27, 2024), a report posted on the Chinese Defence Ministry's official website said. Running until mid-December, the drills aim to enhance joint counter-terrorism operational capabilities. During the talks on Wednesday (November 27, 2024), General Munir highlighted the resilience of Pakistan-China relations, noting their ability to withstand shifts in international and regional dynamics. He expressed gratitude for China's unwavering support for Pakistan. "General Zhang, in turn, praised Pakistan's dedication to the strategic partnership and reaffirmed China's commitment to strengthening the enduring bilateral relationship," the statement added. 82 killed in three days of Pakistan sectarian violence. The two generals last met in Beijing in April 2023, where General Zhang pledged to deepen and expand practical cooperation, elevate military-to-military ties, and jointly safeguard the common interests of both countries while promoting regional peace and stability, reported Dawn. The ties between Pakistan and China have come under strain as Chinese nationals have frequently come under attack from terrorists and separatist groups in different parts of the country. The talks and the drills follow this week's attack when at least 50 persons were killed and 20 injured when militants ambushed three vehicles in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Thursday. China investigates defence minister for corruption: report. The attacks involving suicide bombers have been taking place despite Pakistan deploying more than 30,000 security personnel to guard Chinese citizens in the country. Last month, two Chinese engineers were among those killed in a suicide bomb attack near Karachi airport drawing a strong reaction from the Chinese government over the security of their citizens in Pakistan. Separatist groups have targeted Chinese nationals working in Pakistan on several private projects and also those under the aegis of the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Canada is already examining tariffs on certain U.S. items following Trump's tariff threat

Canada is already examining possible retaliatory tariffs on certain items from the United States should President-elect Donald Trump follow through on his threat to impose sweeping tariffs on Canadian products, a senior official said Wednesday (November 27, 2024). Mr. Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on products from Canada and Mexico if the countries don't stop what he called the flow of drugs and migrants across southern and northern borders. He said he would impose a 25% tax on all products entering the U.S. from Canada and Mexico as one of his first executive orders. But Mr. Trump posted Wednesday evening on Truth Social that he had a "wonderful conversation" with new Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum. "Mexico will stop people from going to our Southern Border, effective immediately. THIS WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARD STOPPING THE ILLEGAL INVASION OF THE USA. Thank you!!!" Mr. Trump posted.

It wasn't immediately clear if that frees Mexico from the tariff threat. "She has agreed to stop Migration through Mexico, and into the United States, effectively closing our Southern Border. We also talked about what can be done to stop the massive drug inflow into the United States, and also, U.S. consumption of these drugs," Mr. Trump added. In Canada, a government official said Canada is preparing for every eventuality and has started thinking about what items to target with tariffs in retaliation. The official stressed no decision has been made. The person spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly.

When Mr. Trump imposed higher tariffs during his first term in office, other countries responded with retaliatory tariffs of their own. Canada, for instance, announced billions of new duties in 2018 against the U.S. in a tit-for-tat response to new taxes on Canadian steel and aluminum.

Many of the U.S. products were chosen for their political rather than economic impact. For example, Canada imports \$3 million worth of yogurt from the U.S. annually and most comes from one plant in Wisconsin, home state of then-House Speaker Paul Ryan. That product was hit with a 10% duty. Another product on the list was whiskey, which comes from Tennessee and Kentucky, the latter of which is the home state of then-Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell. Mr. Trump made the threat Monday while railing against an influx of illegal migrants, even though the numbers at Canadian border pale in comparison to the southern border. The U.S. Border Patrol made 56,530 arrests at the Mexican border in October alone — and 23,721 arrests at the Canadian one between October 2023 and September 2024. Canadian officials say lumping Canada in with Mexico is unfair but say they are happy to provide more resources and work with the Trump administration to lower the numbers from Canada. The Canadians are also wor-



ried about an influx north of migrants if Trump follows through with his plan for mass deportations.

Mr. Trump also railed about fentanyl from Mexico and Canada, even though seizures from the Canadian border pale in comparison to the Mexican border. U.S. customs agents seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border last fiscal year, compared with 21,100 pounds at the Mexican border. Canadian officials argue their country is not the problem and that tariffs will have severe implications for both countries.

Canada is the top export destination for 36 U.S. states. Nearly \$3.6 billion Canadian (US\$2.7 billion) worth of goods and services cross the border each day. About 60% of U.S. crude oil imports are from Canada, and 85% of U.S. electricity imports are from Canada. Canada is also the largest foreign supplier of steel, aluminum and uranium to the U.S. and has 34 critical minerals and metals that the Pentagon is eager for and investing in for national security. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau held an emergency virtual meeting on Wednesday with the leaders of Canada's provinces. He stressed they need to present a united front. "Our country is facing a significant challenge," Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said. "Now is really a moment for us not to squabble amongst ourselves." The provincial premiers want Mr. Trudeau to negotiate a bilateral trade deal with the United States that excludes Mexico. Ms. Sheinbaum, Mexico's President, said earlier Wednesday that her administration is already working up a list of possible retaliatory tariffs "if the situation comes to that." She later said she talked to Mr. Trump and had "an excellent conversation." "We discussed Mexico's strategy on migration issues, and I told him the caravans are not reaching the northern (U.S.) border, because Mexico is taking care of them," Ms. Sheinbaum wrote in her social media accounts. "We also talked about reinforcing cooperation on security issues, within the framework of our sovereignty, and the campaign we are carrying out to prevent fentanyl consumption," she wrote.

Taiwan holds air defence drill ahead of President's Pacific trip

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Taiwan's military held an early morning air defence drill on Thursday (November 28, 2024) to test its response and engagement procedures, ahead of a trip by President Lai Ching-te at the end of the week to the Pacific that will include U.S. stopovers. China is likely to launch military drills in the coming days near Taiwan, using Mr. Lai's upcoming trip to the Pacific and scheduled U.S. transit as a pretext, according to assessments by Taiwan and regional security officials. China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and says Mr. Lai is a "separatist". Mr. Lai says only Taiwan's people can decide their future and has repeatedly offered talks with Beijing that have been rebuffed. Taiwan's air force command said in a statement that made no mention of Mr. Lai's overseas trip that for a two-hour period starting from 5 a.m. (2100 GMT Wednesday) aircraft, ships and missile systems were involved in an "overall air defence battle plan exercise". The drill was to "strengthen the overall effectiveness of air defence operations and to test the response and engagement procedures of the air defence forces", it added. "In the face of changes in the enemy situation, we will continue to enhance defence

resilience through various practical training to anticipate potential threats and challenges and ensure air defence security," the command said. The Defence Ministry told Reuters separately that it was a regular drill carried out quarterly. Reuters correspondents in the northern Taipei suburbs reported seeing and hearing fighter jets in the skies as dawn broke. China has carried out two rounds of major war games around Taiwan so far this year, and on a daily basis flies aircraft and sends ships into the skies and waters around Taiwan. Taiwan has also complained of Chinese balloons flying near the island in what the government says is a pattern of harassment by Beijing. On Thursday, the Ministry said the previous day it had spotted two Chinese balloons flying out at sea to the north of Taiwan, at distances of 60 nautical miles (111 km) and 88 nautical miles (163 km) from the port city of Keelung. Mr. Lai will leave on Saturday (November 30, 2024). A formal announcement of his U.S. stopovers could come as soon as Friday (November 29, 2024), according to sources. Late Wednesday (November 27, 2024), the presidential office said that if China were to use Mr. Lai's trip as an excuse to launch military exercises, "it would be a blatant provocation of the status quo of peace and stability in the region".

Application for a warrant of arrest filed in ICC for Myanmar Acting President Min Aung Hlaing

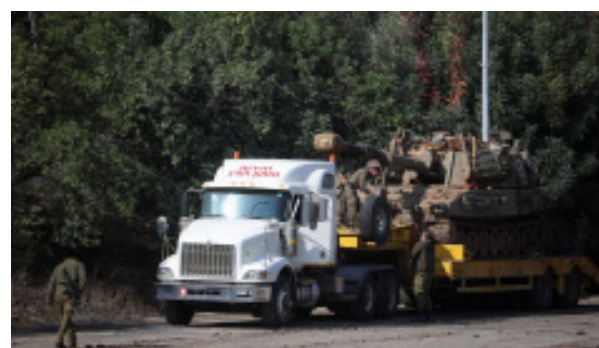


GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The International Criminal Court has reached the conclusion after an "extensive, independent and impartial investigation" that Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the Acting President of Myanmar is criminally responsible for "crimes against humanity" against the Rohingya community of Rakhine. Based on its finding ICC Prosecutor's office has filed an "application for a warrant of arrest" before the Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court, a statement from the ICC declared on Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

"After an extensive, independent and impartial investigation, my office has concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Senior General and Acting President Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Defence Services, bears criminal responsibility for the crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya, committed in Myanmar and in part in Bangladesh," declared a statement from the ICC on Wednesday, November 27, 2024. This is the first time that the Acting President Min Aung Hlaing has drawn such sharp and definite observations from the International Criminal Court since the beginning of the Rohingya crisis. ICC said the application "draws upon a wide variety of evidence from numerous sources such as witness testimonies, including from a number of insider witnesses, documentary evidence and authenticated scientific, photographic and video materials." Myanmar's Ethnic Armed Organisations and the rebel National Unity Government have held a round of meetings in New Delhi earlier this month as internal conflict has created difficult humanitarian situation for most the provinces and regions. The Rohingya crisis started in the monsoon of 2017 with the eviction of more than a million Rohingya citizens of Myanmar who were forced to seek refuge across the boundary in Bangladesh's Chittagong.

Making sense of the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to launch a military invasion of Lebanon on October 1 — Israel's fourth invasion of the neighbouring country — he said his main objective was to let the over 60,000 northern Israelis, who were displaced by Hezbollah rockets, return to their homes. Almost two months later, he accepted a ceasefire with Hezbollah, agreeing to withdraw all Israeli troops to the south of the Lebanese border. The future of the displaced residents remains uncertain. Hezbollah still possesses thousands of drones and rockets and the capability to fire them. Then why did Mr. Netanyahu accept the ceasefire?

Let's first look at the ceasefire deal, which was mediated by the U.S. and France. According to the agreement, Hezbollah would withdraw its troops and weapons to the north of the Litani River, and Israel would withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Army would be deployed in the south, between the Litani and the Israeli border, to monitor and enforce the ceasefire. The withdrawals would take 60 days. Israel says if Hezbollah violates the terms of the agreement or tries to rearm itself, it reserves the right to resume fighting. The displaced residents of both southern Lebanon and northern Israel should be allowed to gradually return to their homes, as per the agreement. Three reasons Mr. Netanyahu gave three reasons, explaining the rationale behind the ceasefire. He believes a ceasefire with Hezbollah would allow Israel to focus more on Iran, Israel's main regional rival; two, Israel can focus on resupplying its own forces who are increasingly facing the fatigue of the two-front war (in Lebanon and Gaza) and three, Israel can isolate Hamas in the ongoing war in Gaza. Israel's leaders, including its newly appointed Defence Minister Israel Katz, say Hezbollah is not the same organisation it used to be. Two months of intense bombing and ground attacks have destroyed much of its capabilities, they argue. But the reality is much more complicated.

To be sure, Israel has dealt heavy blows to Hezbollah. First, the pager and walkie-talkie explosions across Leba-

non hit Hezbollah's rank and file. Then Israel carried out massive bombings decapitating Hezbollah's senior leadership. Several top commanders, including the charismatic Hassan Nasrallah, who had led Hezbollah for three decades, were killed. The south Beirut Shia neighbourhood of Dahiye, a Hezbollah stronghold, was subjected to massive bombings. So were the villages in south Lebanon, closer to the Israeli border. Israel also forced Hezbollah to decouple Lebanon from Gaza. The Shia militant group started firing rockets into Israel in October 2023, days after Israel launched its retaliatory war on Gaza following Hamas's October 7 attack, declaring "solidarity with the Palestinians". Hassan Nasrallah, the former Hezbollah chief killed by Israel, had said in the past that Hezbollah would declare a ceasefire only if Israel declared a ceasefire in Gaza. But today, Hezbollah declared a ceasefire in return for Israel's ceasefire and withdrawal from Lebanon. Israel's war on Gaza continues, and the ceasefire is a climb-down for Hezbollah. Yet, Israel failed to meet its declared objectives in Lebanon. Mr. Netanyahu had earlier said Israel would continue fighting against Hezbollah until its objectives were met. But on December 24, a few days before the ceasefire was announced, Hezbollah had fired more than 250 rockets into Israel. Israeli troops did not make much territorial gains in southern Lebanon even after two months of fighting. Worse, they failed miserably in destroying or deterring Hezbollah's rocket capabilities. The high-security locations hit by Hezbollah rockets and drones included a private residence of Prime Minister Netanyahu and a military base in Binyamina. Israel was also taking heavy casualties in Lebanon. In October alone, Israel lost some 35 soldiers in southern Lebanon. So unlike in Gaza, where the remainder of Hamas is operating like a loose insurgency from the ruins of the strip, Israel was facing intense heat in Lebanon. The Biden administration, which fully backed Israel's war on Gaza, had also heaped up pressure on Israel over Lebanon.

When the Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006 came to an end, the UN Security Council Resolution 1701 demanded a full withdrawal of the Israeli troops from Lebanon and Hezbollah from the south. It had also demanded the deployment of the Lebanese army in the south and called for the disarmament of Hezbollah. The latest ceasefire agreement is rooted in Resolution 1701. Israel withdrew in 2006, but Hezbollah only grew stronger, by stockpiling more weapons, deepening its presence in the south and building itself as a powerful political and social actor in Lebanon's fractious polity. Today, Hezbollah has been weakened, but is far from being defeated. Expecting the Lebanese army, which is an inferior fighting force to Hezbollah, to enforce the ceasefire would be myopic, given the past experiences. Mr. Netanyahu might try to sell the ceasefire as a victory for Israel. But facts on the ground offer a different picture.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vows to further develop nuclear forces

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

SEOUL, Feb 9 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un criticised trilateral military cooperation among the United States, Japan and South Korea for raising tensions in the region and vowed countermeasures, including the further development of nuclear forces. Kim said U.S. deployments of nuclear strategic assets, war exercises and military cooperation with Japan and South Korea were inviting military imbalance in the region and raising a grave challenge to the security environment, state media KCNA reported on Sunday.

"The DPRK does not want unnecessary tension of the regional situation but will take sustained countermeasures to ensure the regional military balance," Kim said during a visit to the defence ministry on Saturday to commemorate the founding day of its Army. DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name. U.S. President Donald Trump, after a meeting on Friday with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, said he would have



Kim said U.S. deployments of nuclear strategic assets, war exercises and military cooperation with Japan and South Korea were inviting military imbalance in the region and raising a grave challenge to the security environment, state media KCNA reported

relations with North Korea, as they expressed concern over its nuclear program. But during the visit, Kim "clarified once again the unshakable policy of more highly developing the nuclear forces," according to the report. On Russia's war with Ukraine, Kim said: "The army and people of the DPRK will invariably support and encourage the just cause of the Russian army and people to defend their sovereignty,

security and territorial integrity in keeping with the spirit of the treaty on the comprehensive strategic partnership between the DPRK and Russia." Last month, South Korea said it suspected North Korea of preparing to send more troops to Russia, in addition to about 11,000 soldiers who had been dispatched for the three-year-long war. In a separate commentary released later on Sunday, North Korea's

KCNA again criticised South Korea's military activity with the United States this year and warned that aggressive actions would be met by undesirable consequences. "Anyone could easily guess how we would take the fact that they carried out war exercises that were more intense than ever before at a time when diplomacy schedules were being cancelled due to political turmoil," KCNA said.

Air India tops up its mega 470-aircraft order with another 100 Airbus jets



air india aircraft orderUnder government control, Air India faced significant financial stress, which did not allow the airline to meaningfully expand or modernise its fleet. In what may be seen as the Tata group's growing confidence and ambition in India's high-potential aviation sector, Air India has topped up its \$70-billion order for 470 aircraft placed last year with another 100 Airbus jets, taking the cumulative order size to 570 planes. New aircraft orders are critical to Air India's fleet expansion and modernisation plan, which the airline embarked upon after the Tata group acquired it from the government in January 2022.

Air India's 470-plane order with both major aircraft manufacturers Airbus and Boeing also included options to acquire up to 370 additional aircraft. In large aircraft orders, purchase options allow carriers to buy additional planes in future at a previously agreed-upon price and schedule. The airline did not divulge financial details of the latest 100-aircraft order. The 100 new Airbus aircraft ordered by Air India include 10 wide-body A350 planes and 90 narrow-body A320 family jets, including the A321neo. The 470-aircraft order, the world's largest aircraft order at the time of its announcement in February 2023, was made up of 250 Airbus planes and 220 Boeing planes. With the latest top-up, Airbus now makes up for 350 of the 570 planes that will be deployed by Air India and its no-frills arm Air India Express.

"With India's passenger growth outpacing the rest of the world, its significantly improving infrastructure and an aspirational young population increasingly going global, we see a clear case for Air India to expand its future fleet beyond the firm orders of the 470 aircraft placed last year.

New income-tax bill gets Cabinet nod; to be tabled in Parliament next week

The Union Cabinet on Friday cleared the new income-tax bill that is proposed to replace the existing six-decade old Income-tax Act, sources said. The new income-tax bill is now likely to be introduced in Parliament on Monday, they said. The new income-tax bill is aimed to make the language and implementation of the income tax legislation simpler for taxpayers. On Thursday, Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey had said that the new income-tax bill will not have long sentences, provisos and explanations and will mark a different way of engagement with citizens, with no aim to put any new tax burden.

The Bill will include the recent changes in income tax rates, slabs and TDS (Tax Deducted at Source) provisions will also be reflected in it, he had said. While presenting the Union Budget for 2025-26 on February 1, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had stated that a new income tax legislation will be introduced by the government next week in the ongoing Budget session of the Parliament. In her Budget speech, Sitharaman had said that the government had earlier ushered in Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita replacing Bharatiya Danda Sanhita. "I am happy to inform this August House and the country that the new income-tax bill will carry forward the same spirit of 'Nyaya'. The new bill will be clear and direct in text with close to half of the present law, in terms of both chapters and words. It will be simple to understand for taxpayers and tax administration, leading to tax

Expect durable recovery in private investment following rate cut, tax relief: FM Sitharaman

A durable recovery is expected in private investment as the signs of a pickup in consumption-driven cycle are already visible on the back of the government's income tax relief and the repo rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said after the post-Budget RBI Board meeting on Saturday. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra echoed the Finance Minister's sentiment by stating that the repo rate cut delivered by the central bank should boost consumption. Many in the private sector are already looking at reviewing capacity utilisation, as per anecdotal inputs, Sitharaman said. "The orders for fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) for the period April-June are already getting booked and the industry is clearly seeing the signs of a possible recovery of consumption. And, as a result, many of them are looking at reviewing their capacity utilisation itself. From these limited anecdotal inputs that you're getting, you can safely see that the triggers for a consumption-driven cycle are very clearly being felt by those who have to make the investment decisions. So, I see it as a positive sign with yesterday's (Friday's) decision of the RBI (of a repo rate cut), I am sure together things can move in alignment and in the required traction that we need in this course," she said.

Referring to the recent fiscal and monetary policy measures, Sitharaman said whether it is growth or inflation, both the policies are like "two tyres of a car" and by working together and in coordination, the economy will gain. "Whether it's inflation or growth, particularly plugs for growth, it is appropriate for the RBI and the government to have coordination on this. Neither of them encroaches on each other's territory, I don't think that has existed in the last 10 years and I don't see that existing even in the future. There has been good coordination between the RBI and the government...in the coming days also, the RBI and the government will work in a well-coordinated fashion keeping our growth impulses in mind," Sitharaman said.

Malhotra said the RBI is alert to all pressures on inflation and the impact of rupee depreciation on imported inflation. "As per our calculations and estimates, a 5 per cent depreciation in the Indian rupee leads to about 30-35 basis points of inflation. That has been kept in mind (in RBI's February monetary policy). We'll be watchful on that account," he said. The RBI Governor said that most of the depreciation in the rupee is driven by the "global uncertainties, and the Trump-related tariff announcements". "Hopefully, that should settle down and that will help us in the downward movement of inflation," he said. The Indian rupee has hit record lows over the last few days going past the level of

These additional 100 Airbus aircraft will help to position Air India on the path to greater growth and contribute to our mission of building Air India into a world-class airline that connects India to every corner of the world," said Tata Sons Chairman Natarajan Chandrasekaran, who is also the chairman of Air India. Under government control, Air India faced significant financial stress, which did not allow the airline to meaningfully expand or even modernise its fleet. The Tata group wants to transform the airline into a carrier of global repute by significantly expanding its fleet and network and sprucing up the product offering. These large aircraft orders are set to play a pivotal role in that journey.

Air India has so far received six aircraft—all A350s—from its Airbus order, and the airline's order book now at 344 planes. Of the 250 Airbus aircraft ordered by Air India last year, 40 were A350s, while the remaining 210 were A320 family jets. Of the 220 Boeing aircraft ordered by Air India, 35 737 MAX jets have already been delivered. Air India on Monday also announced it has selected Airbus' Flight Hour Services-Component (FHS-C) to support the maintenance requirements of its growing A350 fleet. The new materials and maintenance contract will help Air India to optimise the reliability and performance of its A350 fleet, with comprehensive engineering services and integrated component services including on-site stock at Delhi provided by Airbus. Over the past couple of years, Indian airlines—Air India, IndiGo, and Akasa Air—grabbed global attention by placing orders for hundreds of new aircraft. A few months after Air India announced its 470-aircraft order, India's largest airline IndiGo wrested the title of placing the world's largest commercial aircraft order from Air India by ordering 500 Airbus A320 family planes. Then in April this year, IndiGo placed an order for 30 A350 aircraft. In January this year, Akasa Air placed a firm order for 150 Boeing 737 MAX family planes, taking its total order size for the aircraft to 226. In all, Indian airlines are now estimated to have nearly 1,300 aircraft on order. These are likely to be delivered till the mid-2030s. India is the world's third-largest aviation market and is also among the fastest-growing major aviation markets globally. As compared to large mature aviation markets, the penetration of air travel in India is still insignificant, reflecting massive growth potential in the years to come.



certainty and reduced litigation," she had said. In October last year, the Income Tax department had announced the formation of an internal committee to review the Income-tax Act and invited public inputs and suggestions on four key areas — simplification of language, litigation reduction, compliance reduction, and obsolete provisions. It had then received around 6,500 inputs and suggestions from the public. Before this, the government has attempted to simplify the Income-tax Act several times. In 2018, a task force was formed to draft a new direct tax law that submitted its report in 2019. Direct Taxes Code (DTC) was earlier proposed by the UPA I government, a draft Bill was put up in August 2009 and it was tabled in Parliament in 2010. The Bill, after review by the Standing Committee, was then revised twice, in 2012 and 2014, but lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.



87 against the dollar due to foreign fund outflows and a stronger US dollar. Globally, there have also been concerns around an escalating tariff war between major economies, with the US, under its new President Donald Trump, detailing its intent to impose higher tariffs on three of its largest trading partners — Canada, Mexico and China. While Canada and Mexico have got a month's breather, China has retaliated with its own set of tariff measures against the US on February 4. Sitharaman pointed out that India's move to rejig its import tariffs on key items in the Budget was not a "knee-jerk response" to the recent tariff measures undertaken by Trump, adding that the rationalisation of customs duties has been in the works since the last two years. "These kinds of steps have been happening since the last two years, so whatever steps were announced in the Budget in terms of BCD (basic customs duty), its regulations and rationalising, is not in any knee-jerk fashion to any development globally. This is an ongoing process. We want to make India a lot more investment friendly, trade friendly and at the same time balance it with Atmanirbhar Bharat," she said.

However, the government will provide tariff protection to certain industries, especially MSMEs in the manufacturing sector. She also clarified that protection through anti-dumping duties will be limited to exceptional situations. "...so that the protection does not become a perpetual protection," she said. When asked about the absence of deep liquidity infusion measures in the latest monetary policy, Malhotra listed out several steps taken by the RBI to support transient as well as durable liquidity. He further said going forward, the RBI will be "very very watchful, alert, and very nimble and agile in whatever are the requirements of the banking system to provide liquidity, both transient, overnight, as well as more durable liquidity." The deficit in the banking system liquidity had widened to over Rs 3 lakh crore last month.

Decoding Shalini Passi's remedy for restful sleep: 'It is very good'



In every interview, Shalini Passi shares something new about herself. This time, she has opened up about her lifestyle, including her sleep routine and a remedy she swears by. Stating that she ensures to sleep for eight hours a night, Passi said: "Not by the clock. Sometimes, I do wake up abruptly from sleep owing to some work. Having said that, I am sure to finish off my work for the next day and then go to sleep. I keep my planning minimum and keep maximum execution in the morning." The 49-year-old informed that she swears by nutmeg or jaiphal for good sleep. "Grind nutmeg and take half a

teaspoon of it in warm water. It is very good," she told Curly Tales, adding that chamomile tea is "also good, aDr Ushakiran Sisodia, registered dietician and clinical nutritionist, Nanavati Max Super Speciality Hospital, Mumbai, shared that adding herbal ingredients to tea can benefit those looking to improve their sleep quality. "Many individuals are turning towards natural remedies to alleviate sleeplessness caused by work pressures and other stressors," said Dr Sisodia. According to celebrity nutritionist Shikha Gupta, there is an increased focus on foods high in melatonin to get better sleep. However, sleep is also caused by deficiencies like potassium, magnesium, vitamin C, and calcium, along with high-stress levels, i.e., high cortisol. "This is an unknown factor that most people ignore," said Gupta. Dr Sisodia noted that nutmeg, known for its nutty and slightly sweet taste, relieves anxiety-related sleeplessness. "It should be used in moderation as it can be somewhat intense and may not suit individuals sensitive to spicy flavours," said Dr Sisodia. Experts urge healthy lifestyles that include frequent exercise and a balanced diet to stay safe, handle stress, and sleep well. "Deep breathing exercises and other mindfulness and relaxation methods may also be helpful," shared Gupta.

'We are hardly married': Javed Akhtar's take on relationships highlights how bonds can thrive outside conventional frameworks

Appearing on Barkha Dutt's Mojo Story, Akhtar, who is married to actor Shabana Azmi, was asked about the dynamics of their long-standing relationship, to which he replied, "Actually, we are hardly married. We are friends. My only qualification for a good marriage is this: are you friends or are you not? Shaadi-waadi toh bekaar kaam hai (The concept of marriage is nonsense). It's a centuries old tradition, it's a stone that has been rolled down mountains for centuries. And as it was coming down the hill, it has collected a lot of moss, a lot of garbage and muck..." Akhtar stated that bonds can thrive outside conventional frameworks, and for those who feel marriage isn't for them, cohabitation, companionship, and civil unions are increasingly being explored as viable alternatives.

These structures challenge traditional notions of relationships and open up possibilities for building connections on mutual respect and shared values without legal or societal bindings. But how do such arrangements affect emotional and psychological well-being? We turned to a psychologist to shed light on this evolving dynamic. Gurleen Baruah, existential psychotherapist at That Culture Thing, tells indianexpress.com, "The impact of non-traditional relationship structures like cohabitation, companionship, or civil unions on emotional security and long-term relationship satisfaction truly depends on the individuals involved. For some, marriage — with its traditions, societal recognition, and legal framework — provides a sense of security and stability. These individuals may feel anchored by the structure and commitment marriage represents."

However, she adds that it's important to recognise that marriage is a societal construct, and not everyone aligns with its conventional framework. "Adults who consciously decide not to marry or to form relationships outside traditional norms—such as cohabitation or companionship—are making choices based on what resonates with their values and priorities." Ultimately, what matters is the mutual agreement and understanding between the people in the relationship. For couples, the first step is to have an honest conversation about what they truly want from their relationship. For couples, the first step is to have an honest conversation about what they truly want from their relationship. Psychological factors couples should consider before deciding to opt out of marriage in favour of such alternatives Baruah suggests that when couples consider opting out of marriage and choosing alternatives like cohabitation, companionship,



or civil unions, "the first step is to have an honest conversation about what they truly want from their relationship." It's important to explore how they both view the idea of partnership and why the conventional framework of marriage might not feel like the right fit.

Discussing what they value most in their relationship is equally important. Do they prioritise autonomy, equality, or flexibility over the societal recognition marriage provides? Are they comfortable navigating a relationship without the formal "security" that marriage often symbolises? While some thrive in the freedom of non-traditional arrangements, others may realise that the lack of structure makes them feel uneasy or insecure.

Baruah states, "From an anthropological perspective, marriage has always been a reflection of cultural, economic, and social needs. Historically, it wasn't about love but about alliances and stability. In today's world, where individualism and personal fulfillment have become central, it's natural for some to rethink these traditional structures. But even in redefining partnerships, couples still interact with societal norms, whether they choose to embrace or resist them." Ultimately, she mentions, the decision to step away from marriage is deeply personal. It's not about rejecting marriage for the sake of it but crafting a relationship that feels authentic and meaningful for the people involved. "At the heart of it all is connection, and whether that comes with a marriage license or not depends entirely on the individuals in the relationship."

Try identifying which shape is 'bouba' and 'kiki' by looking at the picture

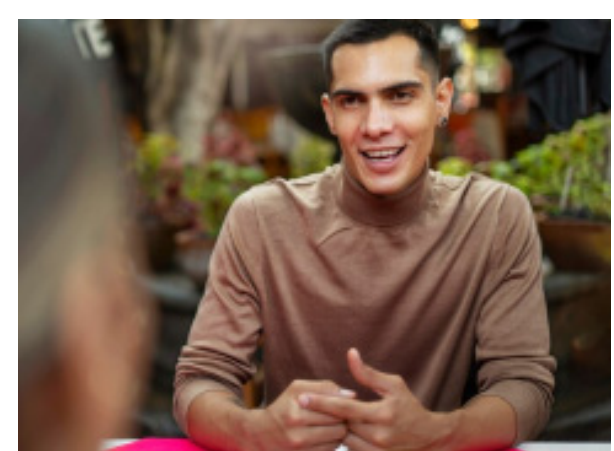
Have you ever wondered why certain shapes seem to pair naturally with specific sounds? This intuitive association is at the heart of 'the bouba-kiki effect,' a psychological phenomenon that suggests humans have an innate tendency to link round shapes with softer sounds like "bouba" and angular shapes with sharper sounds like "kiki." First documented in the 1920s and later explored in modern studies, this effect challenges the traditional idea that language and sounds are entirely arbitrary. What's particularly fascinating is how this effect appears to be universal across cultures, languages, and even age groups, hinting at a deeper cognitive connection between sound and visual perception.

But what does this phenomenon reveal about the way humans process information, and how could it influence professional areas? Dr Arun Kumar, consultant psychiatrist at Cadabams Hospitals, tells indianexpress.com, "The bouba-kiki effect highlights how our senses — specifically vision and hearing — interact to form coherent interpretations of the world. The soft, rounded phonemes in 'bouba' align with the visual perception of curves, while the sharp consonants in 'kiki' resonate with angular shapes."

He adds, "This effect suggests that language is not arbitrary but rooted in sensory experiences. The way we produce sounds involves physical sensations (e.g., rounded lips for 'bouba') that align with visual patterns, shaping our perception." According to research published in Psychological Science, Dr Kumar states, this phenomenon may explain how humans develop abstract linguistic symbols. Early humans likely relied on such sensory associations to assign meaning to words, which evolved into structured languages.

How universal is this phenomenon?

The bouba-kiki effect is largely universal, transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries. "Studies conducted across diverse populations have consistently shown that most individuals intuitively associate 'bouba' with rounded shapes and 'kiki' with angular shapes," notes Dr Kumar. According to him, "Research published in PNAS found that speakers of languages as diverse as Tamil, English, and Himba (a Namibian language) exhibit similar sound-shape associations. The effect has been observed in young children, indicating that this association is intuitive rather than learned. Even infants as young as four months display a preference for congruent sound-shape pairings,



"Despite these nuances, the overwhelming consistency across cultures suggests the bouba-kiki effect is deeply rooted in universal cognitive processes," he remarks.

as shown in studies in Developmental Science. "Cultures with strong symbolic traditions, such as specific shapes linked to sacred sounds, might show deviations in their responses to the bouba-kiki test. Cultures with strong symbolic traditions, such as specific shapes linked to sacred sounds, might show deviations in their responses to the bouba-kiki test. (Source: Freepik)

Cultural and linguistic influences While the effect is robust, Dr Kumar highlights the slight variations that can arise due to cultural or linguistic differences. Language Phonetics: Languages with unique sound inventories may shape subtle biases. For instance, a language without sharp consonants may influence its speakers' associations with angular shapes. Symbolism and Context: Cultures with strong symbolic traditions, such as specific shapes linked to sacred sounds, might show deviations in their responses to the bouba-kiki test. "Despite these nuances, the overwhelming consistency across cultures suggests the bouba-kiki effect is deeply rooted in universal cognitive processes," he remarks.

Ahead of legal battle, Justin Baldoni launches website containing all information related to his complaint against Blake Lively, Ryan Reynolds



The website features two public documents, already filed in court. While the first is Justin Baldoni's amended \$400 million complaint against Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds, the second is a 168-page document outlining a "timeline of relevant events". Actors Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni in It Ends With Us.

Days before the legal battle between actors Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni was set to begin, a website has surfaced online containing documents related to the case. The dispute stems from Lively's complaint against her It Ends With Us co-star Baldoni, accusing him of sexual harassment and orchestrating a smear campaign against her after she reported the incident. Baldoni had, in response, filed a defamation lawsuit against Lively. The website was launched by Baldoni's legal team and currently features two public documents that have already been filed in court. While the first is the actor-director's amended \$400 million com-

plaint against Lively and her husband and actor Ryan Reynolds, the second is a 168-page document outlining a "timeline of relevant events", submitted as an additional exhibit to the Baldoni's complaint. "The decision to amend our lawsuit was a logical next step due to the overwhelming amount of new proof that has come to light," the media house quoted Baldoni's lead attorney Bryan Freedman as saying. His team also maintained that they have "nothing to hide".

In December 2024, Blake Lively filed a complaint accusing Justin Baldoni of invading her privacy, alleging he entered her makeup trailer uninvited while she was "undressed", among other claims. She then formally filed a lawsuit in New York federal court against him, his publicist and the movie's production company Wayfarer Studios, alleging retaliation for reporting sexual harassment. Baldoni denied the allegations, claiming that Lively and Reynolds sought to damage his reputation and that she had assumed control over the film's creative direction. ICYMI | Sudesh Lehi says he's illiterate, made shoes and sold vegetables for a living: "When Archana Puran Singh laughed at me, I made many houses" A few days before launching the website, Baldoni's team had also released a 10-minute video from It Ends With Us, maintaining that it depicted a scripted scene filmed professionally and with mutual respect. Lively's team, however, countered that the footage corroborated her allegations. "The video shows Mr Baldoni repeatedly leaning in toward Ms Lively, attempting to kiss her, kissing her forehead, rubbing his face and mouth against her neck, flicking her lip with his thumb, caressing her, telling her how good she smells, and talking with her out of character. Every moment of this was improvised by Mr Baldoni with no discussion or consent in advance, and no intimacy coordinator present," her team said in a statement.

Ashneer Grover says Salman Khan took 'faltu ka panga' on Bigg Boss 18: 'Abey naam nahi jaanta toh..'

Former Shark Tank India judge and entrepreneur Ashneer Grover graced Salman Khan-hosted reality show Bigg Boss Season 18 during a Weekend Ka Vaar episode in November 2024. During their interaction on the show, Salman called out Ashneer for statements he had made about him in the past. Recently, the entrepreneur spoke about his appearance on Bigg Boss 18 and hit back at Salman, accusing him of unnecessarily picking a fight and creating drama.

At an event in NIT Kurukshetra, Ashneer said, "Faltu ka panga leke apna competition khada kiya usne. Main toh shanti se gaya tha jab mereko bulaya. Ab drama create karna ke liye aap kisiko bol do, arey main toh aapse mila hi nahi. I don't even know your name. Abey naam nahi jaanta toh bulaaya kyun tha? (He created unnecessary competition by picking a fight. I had gone peacefully when I was called. And now, to create drama, he's telling everyone, 'Oh, I never even met you. I don't even know your name.' If you didn't know my name, then why did you call me?)"

Denying Salman Khan's claim that he never met Ashneer Grover before, the entrepreneur said, "Aur ek baat main bata deta hun. Tum agar meri company ke brand ambassador toh aisa nahi ho sakti ki tum merese bina mile brand ambassador ban gaye. Mai bhi kamino ki tarah hi company chalata tha. Everything had to go through me. (And let me tell you one more thing. If you are the brand ambassador of my company, it wouldn't have been possible for you to become the brand ambassador without meeting me. I ran my company like a ruthless person. Everything had to go through me.)" For the unversed, during a podcast, Ashneer claimed that he met Salman during a sponsored ad shoot. As per Ashneer, Salman's manager told him then that the superstar wouldn't take a photo with him. On Bigg Boss 18, Salman Khan confronted Ashneer



Grover about the same and said in Hindi, "Meeting was not held with you but with your team. Maybe you were also present there. We have not had any discussions. I saw what you said. You presented that we befooled you. This is wrong. Those numbers were wrong." Salman replied, "The way you are talking, you did not have the same attitude in that video. I do not feel bad about anything but it is not right to give a wrong impression about anyone. I just got to know that you are coming here. I did not know your name also. Since I had seen your video, I recognized your face. I think you should be careful about how you present yourself."

Superman co-creator Joseph Shuster's estate sues Warner Bros over film's copyright



Superman co-creator Joseph Shuster's estate sues Warner Bros over film's copyright Washington The new Superman movie stars David Corenswet as the iconic superhero. The estate of Joseph Shuster, co-creator of Superman, has filed a lawsuit against Warner Bros. Discovery and DC Comics, Deadline reported.

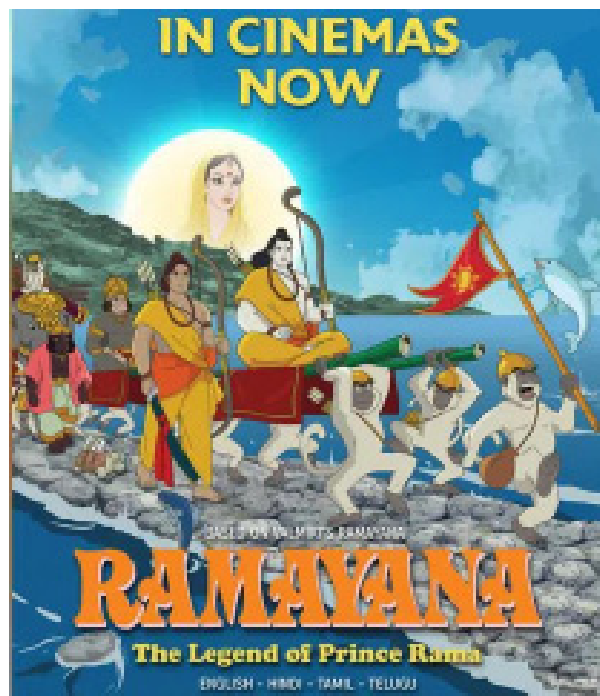
The lawsuit claims that the studio does not have the rights to release the upcoming Superman movie in certain territories. Mark Warren Peary, the executor of Shuster's estate, filed the case in a New York federal court earlier this week. According to Deadline, the lawsuit seeks damages and an injunction to stop WBD from distributing Superman-related content in Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia. It argues that Shuster's foreign copyright rights to Superman reverted to his estate years ago. As per the publication, a WBD spokesperson responded to the lawsuit, saying, "We fundamentally disagree with the merits of the lawsuit and will vigorously defend our rights." The lawsuit explains that under copyright laws in Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Australia, a creator's rights automatically return to their estate 25 years after their death. Since Joseph Shuster passed away in 1992, his copyright in these countries reverted to his estate in 2017 (and in 2021 for Canada). The new Superman movie, which stars David

Corenswet as the iconic superhero, is set to release on July 11, this year. It also features Rachel Brosnahan as Lois Lane, Nicholas Hoult as Lex Luthor, and Maria Gabriela de Faria as The Engineer. Earlier in January, director James Gunn dropped a new teaser of the highly anticipated film that featured additional footage including the super fight and new looks of the character Lex Luthor played by Nicholas Hoult.

Ahead of legal battle, Justin Baldoni launches website containing all information related to his complaint against Blake Lively, Ryan Reynolds

Days before the legal battle between actors Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni was set to begin, a website has surfaced online containing documents related to the case. The dispute stems from Lively's complaint against her It Ends With Us co-star Baldoni, accusing him of sexual harassment and orchestrating a smear campaign against her after she reported the incident. Baldoni had, in response, filed a defamation lawsuit against Lively. The website was launched by Baldoni's legal team and currently features two public documents that have already been filed in court. While the first is the actor-director's amended \$400 million complaint against Lively and her husband and actor Ryan Reynolds, the second is a 168-page document outlining a "timeline of relevant events", submitted as an additional exhibit to the Baldoni's complaint. "The decision to amend our lawsuit was a logical next step due to the overwhelming amount of new proof that has come to light," the media house quoted Baldoni's lead attorney Bryan Freedman as saying. His team also maintained that they have "nothing to hide". In December 2024, Blake Lively filed a complaint accusing Justin Baldoni of invading her privacy, alleging he entered her makeup trailer uninvited while she was "undressed", among other claims. She then formally filed a lawsuit in New York federal court against him, his publicist and the movie's production company Wayfarer Studios.

'Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama' earns recognition in Parliament



Mumbai: "Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama" has received a significant milestone with official recognition in the Indian Parliament. In honour of this achievement, a special screening of the animated film will take place on February 15th, with Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla gracing the event. The screening promises to be a momentous

occasion, celebrating the film's cultural and artistic significance and celebrates the strong cultural ties between India and Japan. The initiative, spearheaded by the Parliament of India, follows a special mention of the movie by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his "Mann Ki Baat" address. The screening, to be attended by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, aims to deepen the understanding and appreciation of this legendary epic among citizens of all generations. It also seeks to promote the timeless values of the Ramayana, which align with the core principles of Indian tradition and spirituality.

Speaking about the same, Arjun Aggarwal, co-founder of Geek Pictures, expressed his gratitude, saying, "We are deeply honoured by this gesture from the Parliament of India. It is a privilege to see our work being recognized at such a prestigious level. This screening is not just a showcase of a film but a celebration of our rich heritage and the timeless story of the Ramayana, which continues to inspire and guide us." The screening is scheduled to take place at the Parliament of India on the 15th of February, and it will be attended by members of both houses & special invitees from the cultural sectors, highlighting the collaborative nature of the film's production. Directed by Koichi Sasaki, Ram Mohan, and Yugo Sako, Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama first premiered in 1993. The movie was showcased at the 24th International Film Festival of India and had a brief television airing. The updated Hindi voice cast features Yudhvir Dahiya as Rama, Sonal Kaushal as Sita, Uplaksh Kochhar as Lakshmana, and Rajesh Jolly as Ravana. In contrast, the original Hindi dub featured iconic voices such as Arun Govil as Rama, Namrata Sawhney as Sita, Amrish Puri as Ravana, and Shatrughan Sinha as the narrator.

Mamta Kulkarni reveals she did semi-nude photoshoot due to lack of 'sexual consciousness': 'I was shown a picture of Demi Moore'

After renouncing worldly life and taking sanyas during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 by joining the Kinnar Akhara, former actor Mamta Kulkarni recently sat down for an interview. During the conversation, Mamta opened up about her controversial semi-nude photoshoot in the 90s and spoke about the iconic item number "Koi Jaye To Le Aaye" from Ghatak. In an interview with Aap Ki Adalat, Mamta shared that she featured on the Stardust magazine cover without perceiving it as obscene, as she was just in 9th standard at the time. She said, "I was then studying in ninth standard. I was shown a picture of Demi Moore by the Stardust people, which I did not find to be obscene. I also gave this statement at the time that, 'I am still a virgin' and people couldn't digest that because according to them, people do anything to enter Bollywood. People might do that and they might enter Bollywood for money but it wasn't the case with me. My father was a transport commissioner for 35 years. Since I did not know anything about sex, I didn't know what was nudity about. If you are not sexually conscious, you won't relate nudity to obscenity."

Mamta Kulkarni was also asked about the bold lyrics in some of the songs she performed. Responding to this, she said, "As Madhuri Dixit or anyone else, as dancers we don't hear the lyrics or lines. Our sole focus is on our dance steps. I didn't pay attention to lyrics." Mamta also explained why she agreed to feature in the iconic item song "Koi Jaye To Le Aaye" from Sunny Deol and Rajkumar Santoshi's Ghatak. The former actor revealed that she had just returned from a world tour with Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan before shooting the song. As a result, while perform-



ing, she felt as though she was on stage. "The director Raj Kumar Santoshi requested me to do it. The movie was lying canned for seven years because of its heroine Meenakshi Seshadri, who got married and the film wasn't getting buyers. I went through my dance number as if I was doing a stage show, in which I was good at," she said. While Mamta Kulkarni's association with the Kinnar Akhara made headlines, the organisation recently removed her from the position of Mahamandaleswar just days after it was announced. Rishi Ajay Das, the founder of Kinnar Akhara, shared the decision was taken after growing concerns over tensions within the religious organisation.

Mathew Thomas, Arjun Ashokan and gang promise a wild comedy of chaos



Bromance trailer: What does one do when a case that starts with their brother going missing quickly drags them into a tangled mess of troubles, with no easy way out? Well, that's exactly where Bintu (Mathew Thomas) finds himself. Not only has his brother Shinto (Shyam Mohan) gone missing, but he vanished leaving behind a trail of problems, sending the lives of everyone around him on a rollercoaster ride. This sets the stage for director Arun D Jose's upcoming film Bromance which, the trailer suggests, will be a wild comedy of chaos.

The 147-second trailer begins with Bintu arriving in Kochi after Shinto's disappearance and gradually uncovering new details about his brother, including that Shinto had a girlfriend, Aishwarya (Mahima Nambiar). With help from Shinto's friend Shabeer (Arjun Ashokan), Bintu embarks on a mission to get to the bottom of things, while pulling Aishwarya too into the mess. But once they enter the ground, things start spiralling out of control quickly, drawing more people into the case — including some you definitely wouldn't want to mess with.

The trio soon brings on board ethical hacker Hariharasudhan (Sangeeth Prathap) as well, pushing the investigation forward. Meanwhile, he leads them to the doorstep of Courier Babu (Kalabhavan Shajohn), suggesting that he may be connected to Shinto's disappearance. The situation takes another chaotic turn when the notorious Kodava gang, led by a character played by Bharath Bopanna, and a cop played by Binu Pappu enter the scene. Interestingly, the trailer is divided into several chapters: The Missing Bro, The Ex-Girlfriend, The Hacker, Courier Goon and Kodava Gang. With its ending evoking memories of director Priyadarshan's classic screwball comedy Vettam (2004), Bromance promises to deliver non-stop entertainment. Bankrolled by Ashiq Usman, Bromance's screenplay and dialogue have been penned by Raveesh Nath and Thomas P Sebastian. Akhil George handles the cinematography, with music composed by Govind Vasantha, editing by Chaman Chakko and production design by Nimesh M Thanoor. Bromance is Arun's third directorial venture, after Jo and Jo and Journey of Love 18+. The film is set to hit the screens on February 14.

