

INDIAN CHRONICLE

7 February, 2025 | Friday | Volume No:10 | Issue No: 308 Pages: 8+8

www.indianchronicle.com

Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State)

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Sighting of tigress sparks panic among villagers in Telangana's Mancherial

Mancherial: A tigress that continued to roam around Dubbagudem village for the last three days was sighted at a farm on the outskirts of Varipet on Thursday, triggering panic among locals. Forest officials said the tigress might have drifted towards Varipet village located around 5 km from Dubbagudem. The pugmarks of the tigress, which killed a wild boar, were spotted on the village outskirts. It might consume the kill's meat before entering nearby forests. It was sighted directly by the officials while resting at a canal near Dubbagudem village on Tuesday. The officials further said awareness was being created among villagers over the presence of the tigress.

CLP Meeting Concludes, Discusses Leaders Crossing Party Line

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Hyderabad: The Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting concluded in Hyderabad, where leaders discussed concerns over members crossing the party line. The meeting focused on addressing internal dissent and maintaining party discipline. Senior leaders emphasized that any leader opposing party decisions would face strict action. They urged members to adhere to party policies and resolve any doubts or concerns through internal discussions instead of making public statements. The leadership stressed the importance of unity and warned against actions that could harm the party's interests. The meeting also reinforced the need for collective decision-making and internal dialogue to address differences.



Zomato to change parent company name as 'Eternal'

New Delhi: Food-tech giant Zomato on Thursday officially changed the company's name to Eternal, following an approval from its board. In a stock exchange filing, the online food aggregator said that when it acquired Blinkit, it started using 'Eternal' (instead of Zomato) internally to distinguish between the company and the brand/app. "We also thought that we would publicly rename the company to Eternal, the day something beyond Zomato became a significant driver of our future. Today, with Blinkit, I feel we are there," said Deependra Goyal, Co-founder of Zomato. The group CEO added that "we would like to rename Zomato Ltd., the company (not the brand/app), to Eternal Ltd." Despite the name change, the Zomato app will continue to operate under its existing name.

Country got an alternate model of 'Nation First' after 2014: PM Modi tears into Cong

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday tore into the Congress over decades of its 'misrule', highlighting how the countrymen suffered because of its 'misplaced' priorities and policies, stating that it was only after 2014 that the nation got an alternate model of growth bringing fresh hope and optimism. Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in Rajya Sabha, PM Modi compared Congress' 'family first' governance to BJP's 'nation first' policy and elaborated how the 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' model has brought phenomenal change in the lives of common people.



"Expecting a model similar to 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' from the Congress would be a farce," PM Modi said in a mocking reference to the Gandhis and the Congress party. "This is out of their thinking, out of their understanding, and they also don't have a roadmap for inclusive growth. The whole family has become so involved that 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' is not possible for them," PM Modi remarked. PM Modi further stated that lies, corruption, dynastic politics and appeasement took centre-stage in the Congress' model of growth. "For them, 'Family First' remained top priority but the BJP model believes in 'Nation First' policy. It forms the cornerstone of BJP governance and reflects in all our policies," PM Modi said in the Upper House. Lambasting the past Congress regimes for the country's laggardness and backwardness, he said that for five-six decades after Independence, there was no alterna-

tive to Congress regime.

"It was after 2014 that an alternative model emerged under the BJP government," PM Modi said, adding that the BJP's governance was based on 'Santushtikaran' while theirs (Congress) relied and banked upon appeasement politics. "Allocating resources to a few and depriving the rest of the opportunity was their idea of growth. During elections, they used to brag about it and win the support of those deprived communities by promising the same," the Prime Minister said. PM Modi stressed that his government has been working on optimum utilisation of the nation's resources and workforce. "Our policies are not for the select few but for all sections of the country and also work in a time-bound manner," PM Modi remarked.

Telangana gears up for local body elections; 42 per cent BC quota depends on political parties

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Hyderabad: The countdown for local body elections in Telangana has begun, with the State government expediting preparations to conduct Panchayat Raj elections. However, the implementation of 42 per cent reservations for the Backward Classes (BCs), will now solely depend on the discretion of the political parties, as it requires constitutional amendment which is a prerogative of the BJP-led Central government.

Official sources indicate that the notification for Mandal Parishad (MPTC) and Zilla Parishad (ZPTC) elections is expected within a week to ten days, followed by Gram Panchayat polls. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, while tabling the Social, Economic, Employment, Education, Political, and Caste Census Survey 2024 report in the Assembly on Tuesday, kept the onus of implementing 42 per cent reservation for Backward Classes (BCs) in the State. Further, the Assembly passed a resolution merely urging the Centre to conduct a nationwide caste census, stopping short of demanding an increase in reservation beyond the Supreme Court-mandated 50 per cent

cap. Unless the Centre gives a green light and brings a Constitutional amendment, the 42 per cent quota for BCs remains a far-fetched dream. Much to their dismay, the upcoming local body polls will be held with the old reservations. In light of these developments, political parties might implement the 42 per cent quota for BCs in ticket allocations especially, for the MPTC and ZPTC elections. The same cannot be possible for gram panchayat elections which are contested independently.

According to official sources, the State Election Commission (SEC) will release the election schedule by mid-February, aiming to complete the process before the Class X board exams begin on March 21. The MPTC and ZPTC elections, which will be held on party symbols, are expected to be wrapped up within two weeks, while Gram Panchayat polls, conducted on a non-party basis, will be spread over two-three phases.

Just like in 2018, the elections will be conducted using ballot papers, with tenders already floated for printing. Some districts have completed tenders and are ready for ballot printing. Additionally, ward-wise voter lists have been finalised after corrections, ensuring accuracy. The SEC has mobilised resources at the field level, with nodal officers appointed to oversee ballot box management, training, transport, expenditure monitoring, media coordination, and grievance redressal. A teleconference led by SEC Secretary Ashok Kumar reviewed logistical aspects, including polling station identification, voter count verification, appointment of Returning Officers (ROs), and staff training. The SEC has instructed collectors to dispatch 10 election officers per district for training in Hyderabad, which commenced on Wednesday. These trainers will later train polling staff at the district level. With election dates nearing, Congress and BRS have ramped up their political strategies. The ruling

Congress to conduct two public meetings this month end in State



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

HYDERABAD: After Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) supreme K Chandrashekhara Rao announced that the party would conduct a massive public meeting this month, the Congress has decided to organise two public meetings at Suryapet and Medak by this month-end. The meeting at Suryapet would be on the successful completion of the caste survey and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi would be chief guest. Likewise, another meeting would be at Medak on the SC categorisation and AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge would be participating in the meeting, TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud said. He also said that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and other leaders were flying to New Delhi on Thursday evening to extend invitations to the party's senior leaders for the two public meetings. The Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting was conducted for over 5.5 hours at MCRHRD on Thursday. Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka gave a presentation on the financial situation of the State to the participants.

Speaking to media persons after the meeting, the TPCC president defended the party MLAs having dinner meetings. "There is nothing wrong in MLAs having dinner meetings. All their apprehensions have been cleared to a majority extent at the CLP meeting. The MLAs have been briefed about the department-wise expenditure being done by the government," Mahesh Kumar Goud said. Admitting that MLAs had raised a few issues in their respective constituencies, the TPCC president said they had sought funds for different development works. There was nothing much to read into the meeting, he stressed. Regarding Congress MLC Teenmaar Mallanna's comments against the party, especially dubbing the caste survey fake, the TPCC president said the disciplinary committee would handle the issue. Interestingly, the MLC and the 10 turncoat MLAs did not attend the CLP meeting. On the turncoat MLAs issue, the TPCC president said it was a legal issue and the legal department was handling the matter.

Stating that there was no discussion on Cabinet expansion and filling of nominated posts, Goud said the entire discussion was centered on strengthening the party and preparations for elections to local bodies. There was discussion on strategies to be adopted for these elections. Instructions were issued to the party leaders to promote the government welfare and development programmes among the people, particularly caste survey and SC categorisation, he said. The Congress government had completed the caste survey and an official document was placed before the people through the Assembly. Without knowing facts, the opposition parties were misleading BC organisations and leaders and this would be countered effectively by the Congress party, he added.

'Handcuffed deportees': Haryana Congress MPs slam BJP-led Centre, call episode 'insult' to India



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Congress MP Deepender Singh Hooda among others at a protest over the deportation of Indian immigrants from the US, at Parliament House complex during the Budget session. (Source: PTI) Congress MP Deepender Singh Hooda among others at a protest over the deportation of Indian immigrants from the US, at Parliament House complex during the Budget session. Haryana Congress Members of Parliament (MPs) Thursday termed the handcuffing of Indian nationals deported in a US Air Force aircraft an insult to the entire country. Among 104 Indians recently deported for illegally entering the US, 33 are from Haryana. Rohtak Lok Sabha MP Deepender Hooda was part of the INDIA bloc group that protested in the Parliament House complex. Congress Rajya Sabha MP Randeep Surjewala, too, questioned the government in the House.

"Sending back Indian citizens in handcuffs, shackled in military planes is an insult to every Indian and India. The US government is humiliatingly deporting Indian citizens on the basis of illegal documents, handcuffing them, and shackling them in military planes.

These youths went there by selling their land and property in search of employment, putting their lives at risk. But now they are facing economic ruin and social displacement. The BJP government has been repeatedly claiming that the President of America is a friend of PM Narendra Modi, but as soon as he became the President of America, the PM's same friend forcibly deported a large number of Indians in such a humiliating manner," Hooda said. Hooda demanded that "the prime minister should immediately talk to the US government so that Indians living in America for years are not expelled in a humiliating manner. Apart from this, the

central government should hold diplomatic talks with the US to provide legal aid for Indians facing deportation... A legal aid cell should be set up to help the affected families."

The Congress MP said he had raised the issue of youths going abroad without a visa in the Budget session of Parliament last year, but Kirti Vardhan Singh, Minister of State, External Affairs, had shrugged off the responsibility and said the government was not responsible if people going abroad adopted other means.

"If the government had taken my words seriously that day, then we would not have to see this day today," Hooda added.

AP Cabinet approves reservations for BCs in nominated posts

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Andhra Pradesh Cabinet has approved a 34 per cent reservation for Backward Classes (BCs) in nominated positions. This decision marks a significant move towards enhancing representation for BCs in various sectors.

Additionally, the Cabinet has resolved to create policies aimed at bolstering entrepreneurs from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), BCs, and women. Key changes to the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) policy were also rubber-stamped during today's meeting, with the coalition government pledging to provide special concessions for these groups across various sectors, including electricity.

Further discussions included a proposal to regularize unobjectionable lands, as well as structures within the Gajuwaka revenue village limits in Visakhapatnam, covering areas up to a thousand yards. Another significant topic addressed was the proposed amendment to the Pattadar Pass Book Act, with discussions aimed at ensuring more equitable land rights. Lastly, the Cabinet endorsed the AP Knowledge Society Capacity Building initiative, setting the stage for comprehensive advancements in knowledge and skill development by 2025.

Union government's cess and surcharge collections increase sparking concerns over Telangana's revenue losses



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Hyderabad: Over the past decade, the Union government's cess and surcharge collections, which are not shared with States, have witnessed a dramatic rise, leading to significant revenue losses for State. Data reveals that these levies, which stood at around Rs 1.08 lakh crore in 2013-14, have surged to a staggering Rs 5.56 lakh crore by 2025-26.

Thus, the percentage of cess and surcharge collections in gross tax revenue have increased from 6.53 per cent in 2013-14 to 10.97 per cent by 2025-26. This sharp increase has sparked concerns among States, which rely on shared tax revenues to fund critical development projects and public services. Taking to X, former Finance Minister and BRS MLA T Harish Rao argued that the growing reliance on cess and surcharge, which remain outside the divisible tax pool, undermines the principles of fiscal federalism and leaves States financially strained. This trend has led to substantial revenue losses for the States, wid-

ening the imbalance between the Centre and the States" he posted, suggesting for a reevaluation of the revenue-sharing mechanism to ensure equitable distribution of resources.

Telangana Inter students get flexibility for rescheduling practical exams

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Hyderabad: In a move aimed at providing flexibility to students facing unforeseen situations, the Telangana Board of Intermediate Education (TG BIE) announced that those who failed to turn up for the ongoing practical exams can seek rescheduling. However, such students must present a genuine and valid reason. The new initiative will offer students an opportunity to reschedule their practical examinations if they face personal emergencies, health issues or other valid circumstances that prevent them from attending the examination. The practical exams are being conducted in four spells with the first concluding on Friday. The second spell is scheduled from February 8-12 and the third from February 13-17, while the fourth will be held from February 18-22. To initiate the process, students must submit their application to the district examination committee. Based on the request, the committee going case-by-case will provide a new slot in the given four spells of exams.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

India's smart play with Defence Budget

The Union Budget has allocated a relatively larger share — Rs 6.8 lakh crore — to defence compared with the previous Budget. Modi 3.0 continues to increase its efforts towards procuring advanced defence equipment and matching China's rapid infrastructure push along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Now, the question arises whether India is really on the right track to level its defence capability with that of China's.

We also need to understand through a defence comparison whether India, standing in front of two nuclear powers, China and Pakistan, really has enough defence allocation to tackle the Sino-Pakistan's combined aggression at LAC and LoC if it ever happens in the future.

China's increasing defence budget and rapid modernisation of its military power on a global scale, coupled with its significant push towards infrastructure development along the LAC, suggests that India should not remain complacent. This cautiousness is especially pertinent considering that both countries signed a disengagement agreement last October. However, given China's rising hostility towards Taiwan and its numerous military drills in the South China Sea, as well as along the LAC near Ladakh, it would be unwise for India to have blind trust in China.

China's current defence budget is 1.7% — \$236 billion — of its GDP, while India's recent allocation is 1.9% — \$78 billion — of its GDP. Although the defence ministry saw a 9.53% increase this year from the previous year, there is still a huge gap in defence funding compared to China and the US. It can also be argued that the government cannot ignore the reality that the nature of warfare is rapidly changing in modern times.

Delhi's gender budget: its decline and impact



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

There are 71 lakh women voters in Delhi, which is nearly half of the total electorate. Further, women have a high turnout rate as well. So, it is no surprise that all contesting parties provide incentives tailored towards women. These incentives then come to light through the budget. Over the last decade, the overall budget for Delhi has increased from 271 billion to 760 billion. But, how much of this budget is reserved for women?

Overall, the gender budget of Delhi has witnessed a seven-fold increase from 10 billion in 2011-12 to 71 billion in 2024-25 (Figure 1). While providing financial assistance to women and child development is essential to reduce the gender gap, it is equally important to invest in other components like, education and health. Investments in education have multiplier effects and lead to long term benefits by generating a highly literate and skilled workforce for the country. Education of women, particularly, can bridge the gender gap in employment and achieve wage parity. What is needed is not freebies but concrete steps that can enable systematic growth in the economic and social empowerment of women.

The neglect towards the education of women by Delhi is concerning. The spending on women's education in the gender budget stood at ₹2 billion in 2011-12, which increased to ₹18 billion in 2024-25. This budget reached its peak in 2017-18 touching ₹24 billion. Since then, the budget allocated for women's education has steadily declined. For the last five years, the education budget has reported a negative growth, with exceptions for 2019-20 and 2023-24 (Figure 2). Another surprising fact is that the education budget made up 54% of the gender budget in 2017-18, but steadily declined to a mere 27% in 2024-25 (Figure 3). Concerningly, there was a massive decline of 9% in the education budget in just the past one year. The decrease is not just in the share, but also in the amount allocated to education (see figure 1), indicating that cash transfers and freebies have become the focus of gender budgets.

Priority for women's education and technical training are major pillars for sustainable long-term growth. A lack of investment in the education sector can have negative spillovers into the labour market. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, 2023-24), compared to the national average of 45.2%, Delhi's female labour force participation stands at 21%, the lowest in India. While most people in Delhi hold regular salaried jobs according to PLFS (2023-24), most women are working as house helps or cleaners, and men as shopkeepers or salespeople. Clearly, women are working in the lowest end of the skill spectrum. These jobs offer poor pay and low standard of living. Thus, low investments in female education lead to a relatively smaller female workforce, lower skill levels and low paying jobs. Secondly, the lack of a skilled women workforce can also lead to high gender inequalities in the labour force. As of 2023-24, the gender gap in labour force participation for Delhi stands at 51.6 percentage points. Moreover, the gender gap in top roles — legislators, senior managers, and CEOs — is stark, with 94% of these positions being held by men. Women are also under-represented in high skilled jobs, such as technicians and associate professionals. Only 3.8% of the female labour force are in these jobs compared to 10.34% of the male labour force. This points to the fact that investments in education are needed to bridge the gap in the high skilled workforce.

Third, the lack of technical and professional education of women has led to the concentration of women in certain fields. Most women professionals are in the teaching and health sector. It is crucial, therefore, to promote technical education training and professional courses among women to close the gender gaps in various sectors. Cash transfers are necessary for relief but for empowerment of women, education and training are of utmost importance. Improving the budget for women's education would greatly reduce the gap in the long run.

States-led panels to draft comprehensive social security plan for workers



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

The two-day Chintan Shivir of the Labour Ministers and Secretaries of Union and State governments, which concluded on Thursday (January 30, 2025), has decided to form three committees comprising five States each to develop a sustainable model for comprehensive social security coverage for workers. The committees will submit their reports in March. The meeting also elaborately discussed the implementation of various clauses under the new four Labour Codes. The proposed shift from labour inspector to labour inspector-cum-facilitator model was one of the major labour reforms discussed in the meeting. "The overall objective of this reform is to reduce the compliance burden and promote ease of doing business, along with ensuring decent working conditions, equal opportunities at work and improved employee-employer relationships," the Union Labour Ministry said in a release after the meeting. The shift is part of the Code on Industries.

Women's organisations seek focus on increasing female workforce participation in Union budget

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Women's organisations and civil society members feel that increasing female workforce participation through employment-linked incentives, flexible work hours, and providing supportive infrastructure, including work site creches, should be a priority of the government in the upcoming Union budget. Even as the women's groups lauded the increase in the 'gender budget' component of the previous budget, as well as special schemes, including the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Namoo Drone Didi for financial empowerment for women, they said the unique needs of women and girls, particularly in skilling and livelihoods, as well as investments in the care economy, should be addressed.

"The increased gender budget allocation, reaching ₹3 lakh crore in FY25, reflects a strong commitment to women's welfare. Looking forward, we need to focus on enhancing women's workforce participation through employment-linked incentives and flexible work policies," Ritvika Naidu, director, Prabhu Naidu Private Limited, an organisation working with rural women in Maharashtra. She said that supporting infrastructure, including workplace creches, improved public transport, and equal pay initiatives, can enable women to thrive. As of 2023, the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India was 32.7%. This is the percentage of women aged 15 years and older who are economically active. The organisations also spoke of the need for focus on the quality of jobs available for women, and the need for skilling.

While increase in 'gender budgeting' reflects a growing recognition of the importance of mainstreaming of women-led development, there is a need to address the unique requirements of women and girls, particularly in skilling and livelihoods, Sowjanya Kanuri, director, ACT For Women, which works on increasing women's workforce participation, said. "Even as female labour force participation rises, it is a pivotal moment for the 2025-26 budget to

Why did the Supreme Court clear the decks for appointment of ad-hoc judges to High Courts? | Explained



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

The story so far: To address the growing backlog of criminal cases, the Supreme Court on January 30, 2025, allowed High Courts to appoint retired judges on an ad-hoc basis, provided they hear only criminal appeals as part of a Bench led by a sitting judge. A Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant relaxed a rule set in Lok Prahari Through Its General Secretary S.N. Shukla IAS (Retd.) v. Union of India (2021), which had limited such appointments to High Courts where judicial vacancies exceeded 20% of the sanctioned strength.

How are ad-hoc judges appointed?

Article 224-A, introduced by the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 1963, allows the appointment of retired judges to High Courts on an ad-hoc basis. Such appointments require the consent of both the retired judge and the President of India. These judges receive allowances as determined by the President's order and exercise the same jurisdiction, powers, and privileges as a sitting High Court judge. The detailed procedure for such appointments is outlined in the 1998 Memorandum of Procedure (MoP), formulated following the Supreme Court's ruling in Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (1993), which established the collegium system for judicial appointments. As per the MoP, once a retired judge consents to the appointment, the Chief Justice of the High Court submits the judge's name and the proposed tenure to the State's Chief Minister. The Chief Minister then forwards the recommendation to the Governor, who relays it to the Union Minister of Law and Justice. The Union Law Minister consults the CJI for advice, after which the recommendation is sent to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then advises the President, and once the President approves, the appointment is finalised. Finally, the Chief Minister issues the formal notification in the Gazette of India.

When can such appointments be made?

The meeting, chaired by Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, was the last of the six regional workshops and several other consultations held over the past year with all 36 States and Union Territories on the implementation of the four Labour Codes and the expansion of social security coverage. "Three Committees comprising five States each were formed. Building on the discussions during the workshop, these Committees will hold consultations and develop a sustainable model for comprehensive social security coverage for workers, to be presented in March 2025," the government said. The meeting specifically discussed the welfare of construction workers. The Hindu had reported recently that the welfare boards for construction workers of various States have not yet used the cess worth ₹70,744.16 crore they collected from the employers for the welfare of the workers. Dr. Mandaviya emphasised developing sustainable social security models for these workers. "States showcased the progress made in utilising building and other construction workers cess funds in giving social security coverage, besides developing education and skill development institutions for children of building and construction workers. Innovative ways of utilising these resources for providing various social welfare initiatives like pension were widely deliberated," the Ministry's release added. The Ministry told the participants in the meeting that it is designing a dedicated Social Security and Welfare Scheme for gig and platform workers. "Modalities of funding, data collection, and administration of the Scheme were discussed and States were urged to prioritise the sharing of data of unorganised workers, with a focus on gig and platform workers and support in their registration on eShram on mission mode," the release added.



focus on the quality of women's jobs and ensure that they are able to access decent and dignified employment, particularly through investments in the care economy," Ms. Kanuri said. Neera Nundy, partner and co-founder of Dasra India, expressed optimism that the budget would provide favourable policies and enhanced tax incentives in the upcoming Union budget to unlock greater domestic capital from families, individuals, and corporates. Kalpana Ajayan, regional head, South Asia, Women's World Banking, said programmes such as 'Lakshpati Didi', 'PM SVANidhi' and 'MUDRA Yojana' were steadily empowering rural and low-income women to participate in the financial ecosystem. "However, their true impact hinges on rigorous monitoring and evaluation, assessing their effectiveness in advancing women's empowerment across various facets, while contributing to broader macroeconomic gains," she added. "In our work in credit, with partners like SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India), CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises), and NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), we see women are responsible borrowers, aspire to larger loans and tailored products, making them a key segment for focused investment," Ms. Ajayan said.

Rare congenital anomaly of 'foetus in foetu' seen in Maharashtra's Buldhana district



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

A rare 'foetus in foetu' case came to light in Maharashtra's Buldhana district, where a foetus-like mass was located within the body of an eight-month-old foetus, the Buldhana medical official said on Friday, January 31, 2025.

During a regular sonographic assessment of a 32-year-old pregnant woman at the Buldhana District Women's Hospital, the rare congenital anomaly was detected. "In medical terms, we call it 'foetus in foetu'. It is a foetus-like mass developed within the body of the foetus. It is a developmental abnormality; however, it does not pose a danger to the mother's life. The chances of the baby survival after delivery though, are usually not good," said Buldhana District Civil Surgeon, Bhagwat Bhusari, adding: "We have to wait and watch. Post delivery, a paediatric surgeon will perform the surgery". Dr. Bhusari pointed out that the cause of the condition is difficult to ascertain but this may have happened due to a genetic mutation. "The two possible scenarios are: when an underdeveloped twin form attaches to the host twin's body in the womb, or when a teratoma, a tumour that comprises various tissues, such as skin, bone, and hair, and commonly found in newborns is formed," he said. Doctors detected the unusual growth in the baby when the woman came to the hospital for her routine check-up at 35 weeks of pregnancy. The doctor saw a few bones and a foetus-like structure growing in the baby's abdomen and identified it as a case of 'foetus in foetu' and confirmed the diagnosis after the second opinion by radiologist Shrutu Thorat. 'Foetus in Foetu' cases are rare, estimated to occur in about one in 5 lakh pregnancies. Only 100 to 200 cases have been reported worldwide, with India only having reported 10 to 15 such cases, doctors said.

How will the govt. produce the required fuel ethanol? | Explained



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

The story so far: Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said that India will achieve its target of 20% ethanol blending of petrol in the next two months, at least a year ahead of what was originally planned. This would entail the production of nearly 1,100 crore litres of fuel ethanol in one year.

Where will this come from?

The 1,100 crore litres of fuel ethanol will come from sugar and high grade molasses, Food Corporation of India (FCI) rice, broken rice, and maize. India's ethanol distillery capacity has ramped up to 1,600 crore litres, driven by a range of government incentives and the promise of a stable, lucrative market. Sugar is expected to provide some 400 crore litres this ethanol year, according to Deepak Ballani, director general of Indian Sugar and Bio-energy Manufacturers Association. India had closing sugar stocks of around 80 lakh tonnes in October 2024. The projected sugar production for next year is around 315 lakh tonnes out of which 40 lakh tonnes will go to fuel ethanol. Mr. Ballani said that ethanol for non-fuel uses will come from low grade molasses called C Heavy that don't go into sugar production.

The government recently decided to reduce the price of FCI rice to distilleries from ₹28 to ₹22.5 per kg. The government handout states that some 110 crore litres of ethanol will be produced from FCI rice this ethanol year. This means almost 400 crore litres of fuel ethanol should come from maize. For context, India was producing little or no ethanol from maize until 2020. Besides pure-play grain-based distilleries coming up, some sugar distilleries have modified to dual-feed so in the off-season they can use other feedstock (maize) to produce ethanol.

India's maize production is just about enough for traditional needs such as for the poultry sector, livestock feed, starch production and some 10% for human consumption. As the government had imposed curbs on allowing sugar and high quality molasses for ethanol production, maize imports started ramping up in April 2024. From April to June, approx. ₹100 crore worth of maize was imported while, for 2023-24, maize imports were approx. \$33 million. Ministry of Commerce figures show that a total of \$188 million worth of maize was imported from April to November 2024.

The promise of a steady, lucrative ethanol market has meanwhile goaded many farmers to take to maize cultivation across India. The major maize producing States are Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. For the 2024-25 ethanol year, maize output would be some 42 million tonnes out of which nine million can go towards producing the 350 to 400 crore litres of ethanol. H. S. Jat, director ICAR Indian Institute of Maize Research, Ludhiana, said. Citing good prospects for kharif this year, he said importing maize will not be necessary. Since 2020-21, when ethanol production was almost all sugar-based, maize production had increased by nearly six million tonnes in three years, for potential ethanol use.

As things stand now, maize is cultivated in 10% more area at a higher yield, says Mr. Jat who also expects some diversion from traditional maize uses since supplying to ethanol is more lucrative for farmers. On whether that won't disrupt the market, Mr. Jat says DDGS (Distiller's Dried Grains with Solubles), a byproduct of ethanol, can be used for poultry.

Akal Takht's 7-member panel meets for first time, puts SAD(B) in a fix over membership drive



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

In a development that will put the Shiromani Akali Dal (B) in a tight spot, the seven-member committee formed by the Sri Akal Takht Sahib last year to start a membership drive as part of the party's reorganisation met for the first time on Tuesday and asked if the party wanted it to begin the process. "The seven-member committee was formed by the Akal Takht to start the membership drive for SAD (B). Does SAD (B) want to start the drive through the seven-member committee as ordered by Akal Takht?" Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee president Harjinder Singh Dhami, who presided over the meeting, asked. Dhami added that the committee had decided to invite Balwinder Singh Bhunder, the working president of SAD (B), to the next meeting on February 11 at Bahadurgarh, Patiala, to discuss the issue.

Raj Pannu: A teacher, politician and a proud Albertan

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Raj Pannu, a distinguished Punjabi-Canadian academic and politician, passed away in Edmonton on January 30 at the age of 91. A three-time MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona and former leader of the Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP), Pannu was also a Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Alberta. His contributions to education, politics, and community service have left an enduring mark on Alberta. Born in Punjab, India, in 1934, Raj Pannu moved to Canada in 1962 with his wife, Swinder. After a brief period teaching high school in Whitecourt, he pursued graduate studies at the University of Alberta, earning a doctorate in Sociology in 1973. He taught at York University before returning to the University of Alberta in 1969, where he remained a faculty member for 27 years.

Pannu was known for his unwavering belief that education should serve the public good. His tenure at the University of Alberta shaped generations of students, and his academic work focused on social justice, policy studies, and community development. Even after retirement in 1996, he continued his intellectual and community involvement, receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the university in 2018. Pannu entered Alberta politics in 1997, winning the Edmonton-Strathcona seat for the NDP. He quickly gained respect for his principled stance on public issues and was elected party leader in 2000. As the first South Asian-Canadian to lead a major political party in Alberta, he played a key role in diversifying the province's political landscape. During his time in office, Pannu was a fierce advocate for public healthcare and education, standing firmly against the government's push for privatization. His passionate speeches in the Legislature and public protests made him one of the most respected voices in Alberta poli-

The much-delayed meeting of the seven-member committee at Bahadurgarh in Patiala comes days after the SAD (B) began its membership drive last month. At the time, SAD (B) had claimed that it had persuaded Sri Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Ragbir Singh to let the party's working committee manage the membership drive. However, the Jathedar had urged the party to implement the religious body's December 2 edict and ensure that the drive was conducted by the seven-member panel. The committee is yet to be incorporated by the party due to potential legal challenges if a religious body's directive is applied to a political party. "Today's meeting has been held in a good environment. All have given their suggestions. Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar had directed on December 2 to all the factions to end their ego and sit together. I want to say that all leaders of Akali Dal should come together in these difficult times. All the leaders are welcome. All should become part of Akali Dal so that the community grows stronger," Dhami said after the meeting. On Tuesday, apart from Dhami, SAD (B) MLA Manpreet Singh Ayali, former MLA Gurpartap Singh Wadala, Iqbal Singh Jhunda, Santa Singh Umaidpur and former SGPC president Kirpal Singh Bhandungar attended the meeting. Satwant Kaur did not participate.

None of the six members who attended the meeting on Tuesday, except Dhami, had participated in the SAD(B)'s membership drive as they wanted the party to follow the directives of the Sri Akal Takht Sahib. Dhami attended SAD(B) meetings but did not comment on the SAD(B)'s ongoing membership drive.



tics. He served as MLA until 2008, earning recognition from the Alberta Teachers' Association for his commitment to public education. Beyond politics and academia, Pannu was deeply involved in the Edmonton community. He was a member of the Fort Edmonton Park Management Committee and an active participant in Citizens for Quality Communities. He was also a key figure in the Progressive Peoples Foundation of Edmonton (PPFE), contributing to publications on historical and social issues, including the Ghadr Movement. His leadership extended beyond policymaking—he was a mentor, guiding younger politicians and activists.

His strong ethical stance and dedication to integrity in politics set a standard for public service in Alberta. Despite his towering achievements, Pannu remained humble. He found joy in gardening, walking with his wife Swinder and their dog, Flossie, and engaging with Edmonton's cultural life. Known for his integrity, passion, and commitment, he was widely respected by colleagues and constituents alike.



is allegedly seen vandalising the property of Indian High Commission during the protest. None of these allegations, he argued, could attract provisions of the UAPA. Noting that Gaba wasn't an Indian, Judge Kumar noted that, "his attachment towards India must not be that strong and sincere if at all it is there." However, Judge Kumar cautioned that "this doesn't permit him to do things which are anti-Indian". "...no involvement in any act of violent nature has been alleged against the applicant/accused. All these factors when taken into consideration and the period of custody coupled with the age and the expected time to be taken in trial, then it appears that the trial, which has not commenced so far, would likely to take a very long time," the Judge said. "In such circumstances, when there is no mechanism available with the human race to return time to anyone then how far it would be appropriate to keep a person under custody...", he added. NIA also alleged it had found an alleged photo of Gaba with an AK 47 assault rifle in his photo gallery. "...albeit no such rifle has been recovered, nor for that matter, it can be said conclusively, that it was an AK 47 rifle or a dummy. In this era of deepfake Photoshop, etc., there can't be any certainty that what has been shown is correct. More so, it is not very uncommon that people pose for photographs with all kinds of stuff," the Judge said. The agency also said that a black car allegedly owned by Gaba had a number plate with "KHALISTAN" written on it. The symbol on the number plate was that of Khalistan and the registration number had been chosen in such a fashion which reflected his association with "Khalistan", alleged NIA. "This in itself is not enough to attribute anything, which is unlawful. Even if it is presumed that the allegations are correct, still the applicant can't be held criminally responsible for committing any offence. Such fancy numbers are permitted by the vehicle Registration Authority in the western part of the globe," Judge Kumar noted. "It, however, definitely indicates towards the mindset of the applicant vis-a-vis Khalistan. The idea of Khalistan whereas in itself is questionable. Incidentally, it may be rather, it is against, in a way, each and every nation including the country where the accused was living.

Opposing UGC's draft regulations, ministers from 7 states to attend national conclave in Bengaluru



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Higher education ministers from seven states will convene in Bengaluru Wednesday for a national-level conclave to discuss the University Grants Commission's (UGC) draft regulations on the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and governance of higher education institutions. The conclave, organised by the Karnataka government, aims to present a unified opposition to what state leaders say is an encroachment on their powers by the Centre.

Karnataka Higher Education Minister Dr M C Sudhakar, in a press release on Monday, confirmed the participation of ministers from Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the event at 10.30 am, while Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar will attend as a special invitee. Dr Sudhakar criticised the UGC's proposed regulations, calling them a "severe assault" on the autonomy of state governments in the higher education sector. "The Centre, through the UGC, is attempting to curtail the constitutional powers of states by imposing centralised policies without consultation," he alleged. The conclave will deliberate on the possible responses if the Centre refuses to review the UGC's modifications. The decisions taken at the event will be formally conveyed to both the Union government and the UGC.

"Decisions will be taken after consolidating the opinions of ministers of higher education of various states in this conclave. The agenda of the Conclave also includes measures to be adopted in the event of the Central Government not reviewing the modifications made by UGC. Hence this Conclave is being convened to discuss, deliberate and come to a common ground to voice our concerns against the regulations," Dr Sudhakar said. He added that

regional parties allied with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), including the Janata Dal (United), Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas Paswan), have also expressed dissatisfaction over the issue but have been unable to voice strong opposition due to political compulsions. "The Union Minister for Higher Education will not be attending the conclave due to the upcoming elections in New Delhi," Dr Sudhakar said.

The minister also emphasised the need to protect India's federal structure and called the Centre's unilateral approach to education governance "anti-constitutional." He stressed that the conclave seeks to build consensus among state governments and safeguard their role in shaping higher education policies. Earlier, on January 13 this year, Dr Sudhakar had written to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, raising strong objections to the draft UGC regulations 2025, particularly the provisions regarding the appointment of Vice-Chancellors.

The draft UGC guidelines, which are currently open for public consultation, propose sweeping changes to the process of appointing Vice-Chancellors. They recommend the formation of a search-cum-selection committee appointed solely by the Chancellor or Visitor, with no representation from the state government. The guidelines also vest the Chancellor/Visitor with exclusive powers to appoint Vice-Chancellors from the panel recommended by the committee. Further, they include provisions for nullifying Vice-Chancellor appointments made outside these prescribed rules. In the letter, the minister emphasised that such provisions contradict state laws governing universities, particularly concerning the tenure and reappointment of Vice-Chancellors. The letter also highlighted concerns over the inclusion of non-academicians as eligible candidates for the role of Vice-Chancellor, calling for more deliberation on the matter.

The development comes when Karnataka moved to clip the powers of the governor after it passed a Bill in December 2024 to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor of the Karnataka State Rural Development and Panchayati Raj University. The Bill is yet to receive the Governor's assent. In November 2024, the Karnataka Cabinet also decided to do the same for other state universities. The state higher education minister had said a draft Bill was in the works to amend the Karnataka State Universities Act to bring in critical administrative reforms in the 42 universities under the state government.

19-year-old man who posed as CBI officer arrested for sextortion in Delhi

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Posing as a CBI officer, a 19-year-old labourer extorted over Rs 4 lakh from a Dwaraka man after blackmailing him over a nude video call, Delhi Police said while announcing his arrest. According to the police, on August 8, 2024, the victim received a WhatsApp video call from a girl, during which she started removing her clothes, followed by him doing the same. "After five or six seconds, the complainant said, the call was cut abruptly," Ankit Singh, DCP (Dwaraka), said.

The next day, the complainant received a call from a man claiming to be Special Officer Gaurav Malhotra from the CBI. "The man claimed to be from the CBI and said that a girl whose last call had been with the complainant had died by suicide. He also sent the recording of the video call, in which the complainant was nude, along with pictures of an ambulance," DCP Singh said. According to the police, the complainant was told that the girl's family would not file a complaint if he sent Rs 4,84,500. The complainant transferred the amount to two different accounts, one in Canara Bank and the other in Punjab National Bank, they added. A



team led by Inspector Khalid Hussain, SHO (cyber police station), tracked down the accused, identified as Amit Kumar, to the Chamba area of Himachal Pradesh by following the money trail and using call detail records. He was arrested from Chamba on Monday. "The accused is a labourer and has duped people through sextortion. The investigation is underway to track down more cases he is involved in and his associates," a police officer said.

UK Indian High Commission attack: Delhi court grants bail to British national, says 'nothing could be shown he was part of conspiracy'

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

A Delhi Court recently granted bail to a UK national allegedly involved in an attack on the Indian High Commission in the United Kingdom in March 2023, noting that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) could not establish his link with the incident. While granting bail to Inderpal Singh Gaba, the court asked him to surrender his passport and not leave the country without its permission.

"However, the NIA is unable to establish any link of the applicant (Gaba) with the incident of 19.03.2023. He was neither present at the spot nor was associated with arranging anything for the demonstration and for that matter, nothing could be shown that he was part of the conspiracy to organize the demonstration on 19.03.2023 or for that matter on 22.03.2023," said Principal District and Sessions Judge Vimal Kumar Yadav of Patiala House Court in his order dated January 29. Gaba was arrested by NIA in April last year for his alleged involvement with the violence by alleged Khalistani supporters at the Indian High Commission in London during a protest on March 22, 2023. The agency filed a chargesheet against Gaba on September 5, 2024, under Indian Penal Code sections 109 (abetment), 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting with a deadly weapon), 149 (being part of an unlawful assembly), 120B (criminal conspiracy), and sections of the UAPA among others. As per NIA, Gaba, a Sikh of Afghan origin, went to London in 1995, and started a grocery store there. He ran three stores called Strawberry Local Group in Greater London, the agency claimed.

NIA said the attacks on March 19 and March 22, 2023, by alleged Khalistani supporters were found to be in retaliation to the action taken by Punjab Police against pro-Khalistani separatist Amritpal Singh on March 18, 2023. To drive home this point, the Central agency relied on audio clips allegedly shared on March 19, 2023, on a WhatsApp Group called Waris Punjab De UK. In these alleged audio clips, a person could be heard requesting the members of the group to "come at Park Avenue Gurudwara as the protest which is already scheduled, is on Wednesday (22.03.2023) which is far away". The agency also relied on statements of eyewitnesses who allegedly said some common faces were present during both protests. CCTV footage, as per NIA, pointed to the same — that the two incidents were part of a larger conspiracy.

"The nature of allegations against the applicant, if taken on its face value, then also the kind of offences, which are under the scope and ambit of the UAPA, could not be found so as to bring in the purview of Section 43 (D)(5) of UAPA," the court noted in its order. Section 43(D)(5) of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act makes it virtually impossible to get bail. Advocate Arun Khatri, who represented Gaba in Court, argued the only allegation against his client was that he was part of the protest on March 22, 2023, and that there was nothing against him except video footage in which he

Taxes on commercial units in slums, waste management fees: BMC Budget eyes new streams of revenue

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

bmc, bmc budget, mumbai, While the civic body has not revised property or water taxes, it has mooted proposals to levy new taxes and charges such as in slum areas and for Solid Waste Management services. Amid concerns over its burgeoning financial strains and mounting liabilities, revenue augmentation and rationalisation of expenditure have drawn much emphasis in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) Budget estimates for the financial year 2025-2026 which were announced on Tuesday.

While the civic body has not revised property or water taxes, it has mooted proposals to levy new taxes and charges such as in slum areas and for Solid Waste Management services. Eyeing to shore up its funds, the BMC has also taken up measures such as additional Floor-Space Index (FSI) premium and finalised Vacant Land Tenancy Policy (VLT) policy. In what could generate a whopping revenue Rs 350 crore in taxes from commercial units, the BMC, in its budget, said that it is assessing the possibility of levying property taxes on the commercial units in slums. According to the civic body, the revenue generated in this manner will be used to provide better services to slum dwellers.

Meanwhile, the BMC has also proposed to introduce user charges for Solid Waste Management (SWM) to ensure financial sustainability and smooth waste management operations. Currently, the civic body is seeking legal opinion on the implementation of the new fees, following which a decision will be taken to amend the present SWM Sanitation and Cleanliness Bylaws of 2006. Speaking to reporters, Municipal Commissioner and state-appointed Administrator Bhushan Gagrani, however, said that while the SWM charges may not be implemented this year, it is studying the feasibility of the plan which will be imposed in phases.

Gagrani added that the BMC has also received an additional revenue of Rs 70 crore as part of the additional FSI premium. He said that the state government has sanctioned a share of 50 per cent of premium recovered for additional FSI for the BMC — marking an increase from the previous 25 per cent. A total revenue of Rs 300 crore is slated to be generated in the FY 2025-2026 from this. Besides, the BMC has finalised a new 'Vacant Land Tenancy (VLT) Policy' through which various lands will be developed for public use and later converted for leasing. According to the civic body, this will generate a revenue of Rs 2,000 crore in the coming four years in the form of one-time premium. Data shows that till December 2024 the BMC has generated a revenue of Rs 28,308 crore while the civic authorities have estimated revenue earnings of Rs 40,693



crore by March 31, 2025. For FY 2025-26, the municipal corporation has estimated revenue earnings of up to Rs 43,159 crore.

Low cotton yield drives farmer to end life in Telangana's Adilabad

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Kumram Bheem Asifabad: Low cotton yield reportedly forced a farmer to end his life by consuming pesticide at Bondaguda village in Asifabad mandal Asifabad Inspector Ravinder, in a statement, said Komram Poshaiah (55) died by suicide as he was depressed by the poor cotton yield. He had attempted suicide

He was shifted to a hospital in Mancherial. He breathed his last while undergoing treatment on Tuesday. Poshaiah grew the cotton crop on his 10 acres of land. He was disheartened to register a dip in yield and consumed the pesticide when he was alone. Based on a complaint received from Naresh, Poshaiah's son, a case was registered.

At least eight farmers have died by suicide in Adilabad district from December 1 to January 25. Mailapur Narsaiah, a 55-year-old farmer, ended his life by hanging as he was depressed over his inability to repay mounting debts at Varthamannur village in Bazarhathoor mandal on January 25.

On January 23, Gode Govind Rao, 45, took the drastic step by consuming pesticide at his farm in Shamshabad village in Bela mandal. Rao grew cotton on four acres of land and took on a lease from another farmer of the village by borrowing a loan of Rs 5 lakh.

Delhi High Court issues notice to Atishi on BJP leader Praveen Shankar Kapoor's plea in defamation case



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday issued notice to Atishi in a petition filed by BJP leader Praveen Shankar Kapoor challenging the setting aside of a magistrate court's summons to the Chief Minister in his defamation complaint. On January 28, a special judge (PC Act)-CBI court of Rouse Avenue District Court set aside the magistrate court's order of May 2024 issuing summons to Atishi in the defamation case filed by Kapoor, and also dismissed the complaint.

In his plea before the Delhi High Court, seeking that the special judge's order be set aside, Kapoor said "in order to divert serious corruption issues and to project themselves as victims of political vendetta," Aam Aadmi Party leaders started levelling baseless allegations against the BJP of offering bribes to AAP leaders to switch sides. The allegations

were initially posted on X by AAP convenor and former CM Arvind Kejriwal on January 27, 2024, and were reposted by Atishi the same day. Subsequently, in a press conference held on January 27, 2024, Atishi reiterated similar allegations, and the contents of the press conference were then reposted by her the same day. Atishi held another press conference on February 2, 2024, making similar allegations.

Kapoor, in his petition, has submitted that the special judge "ventured into political adventurism akin to a political discourse by attempting to determine who is a bigger/smaller political entity, which was not at all and never be the scope of adjudication in revision proceedings". "The Ld. Special Judge did not even permit the Complainant to have a trial in order to make good his allegations... The Ld. Special Judge (MP/MLA Cases) has intermingled the allegations against Accused no.1, namely, Sh. Arvind Kejriwal and Accused no.2, namely, Ms Atishi Marlina. It is respectfully submitted that the role of the accused no.2 is greater in comparison to that of the Accused no.1. So, not challenging the summoning Order whereby Sh. Arvind Kejriwal is not summoned, cannot be of any advantage to the Accused no.2," said Kapoor. Kapoor has also pointed out that the special judge "failed to appreciate that in the press conference, the Respondent deliberately did not disclose the identity of the person who approached her". "Moreover, the details are not even disclosed to the Enquiry Officer of the Crime Branch -who had sent a notice along with a questionnaire to both the accused persons to give their following information," he said.

With a new coat of paint and roads lined with banners, Kolkata is all set to host global business summit

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Kolkata is all set to host the two-day Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) 2025 on February 5 and 6 as the West Bengal government goes all out to attract investment to the state. Sources said this is also being seen as a chance to show the business-friendly and employment-generating face of the state government ahead of Assembly elections in 2026. A tentative list of prominent guests at the summit includes Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, and business leaders like Mukesh Ambani (Reliance Industries), Sajjan Jindal (Jindal Group), Sanjeev Puri (ITC), and Jyotsna Suri (Lalit Suri Hospitality Group), among others. Delegates from more than 40 countries are also expected to attend the summit, which will be held at the Biswa Bangla Convention Centre in Kolkata. On Tuesday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will hold a Cabinet meeting to take stock of last-minute preparations for the summit. A senior official said, "Already, all roads and flyovers leading to the summit venue have been renovated and given a new coat of paint. Flex boards, banners and cut-outs have been installed along the roads."

State government officials said that no specific sector is being highlighted as a theme for this year's summit and that all important issues pertaining to industry and trade will be discussed. Some crucial policies may also be announced at the summit, a senior official of the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) said. At a Cabinet meeting on Monday, CM Banerjee instructed bureaucrats of all departments to look into last-minute preparations for BGBS.

At the summit, the Chief Minister is likely to lay the foundation stone for two major infrastructure projects in-



volving an estimated investment of around Rs 1,900 crore. These are two bridges - the Gangasagar Setu over the Muriganga river and Shilpa Setu over the Damodar river. While the former is expected to benefit the people of South 24 Parganas and pilgrims who visit the Gangasagar Mela at Sagar Island every year, the latter will benefit residents of Burdwan, Hooghly, Bankura, Purulia, and West and East Midnapore. Underlining the capacities of the state, the BGBS website says: "The state is home to largest leather complex, largest hosiery park and largest foundry park... The state also offers ready-to-invest industrial infrastructure with 200+ industrial parks/estates. It has become a cement hub of the country, with a booming housing and real estate sector. There is significant manufacturing of steel and steel products in West Bengal, (which is) contributing to exports as well. The Bengal Silicon Valley Hub has already attracted 41 IT and ITES companies on 200 acres of land, including 11 data centres. The Fintech Hub has attracted all major banks and financial institutions on 69 acres of land."

BMC allocates Rs 1,000 crore for funds-starved BEST in budget

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Tuesday allocated Rs 1,000 crore for the funds-starved Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) in its budget for the 2025-2026 financial year, pointing out that it has provided Rs 11,304.59 crore to the undertaking since 2012-13. The BEST runs nearly 3,000 buses in Mumbai, catering to lakhs of commuters daily. According to the BMC, these financial provisions are part of ongoing efforts to modernise Mumbai's transport infrastructure and improve the city's public transportation system.

"...a total provision of ₹1,000 crore is proposed in 2025-26 as a grant to BEST undertaking considering its financial position," the budget document stated. This grant will be utilised for infrastructure development, the purchase of new capital equipment, repayment of loans, and the procurement of buses on a wet lease basis. It will also cover pay revisions, day-to-day expenses, the ITMS (Intelligent Traffic Management System) project, Diwali bonuses for employees, and dues for pensioners and gratuity. Additionally, the BMC will contribute Rs 128.65 crore, its 5 per cent share towards a state government-backed project to procure and deploy 2,000 electric buses for Mumbai. The budget document also mentioned that the 15th Finance Commission has sanctioned Rs 992 crore for BEST to purchase electric buses. Of this, Rs 493.38 crore has already been received and disbursed to BEST, with the remaining Rs 498.62 crore



expected once the full amount is transferred from the commission.

The BMC budget mentioned that civic school students from classes 1 to 10 in school uniform could avail of free travel from their residence to school by BEST buses. Special bus services are also being provided through BEST for BMC students on routes where such facilities are not available, the document further mentioned. Under this scheme, 'Chalo Cards' have been distributed (up to the end of July 2024) to 19,723 students, including 14,900 primary school students and 4,823 secondary school students. A budget provision of Rs 6 crore for primary school students and Rs 2.70 crore for secondary school students has been reserved, the BMC said.

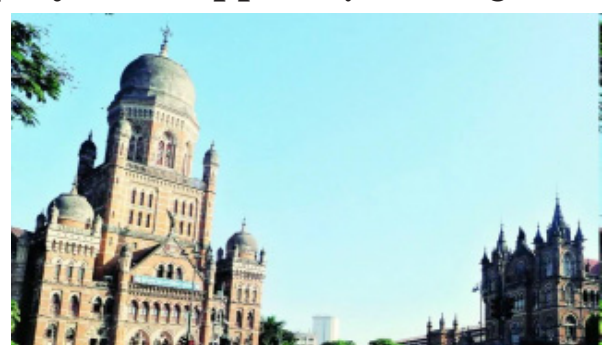
BMC Budget prioritises strengthening water supply network, revives Gargai dam project scrapped by MVA govt

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Strengthening the city's water supply infrastructure is among the key focus areas of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) civic budget for the financial year 2025-26. Water supply network projects that have been on the back-burner also found their way to the budget as part of the latest efforts.

The BMC has brought back the Gargai Dam project which was scrapped after the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government came to power in 2019. The civic body has earmarked Rs 36 crore for this project. Pushed by Devendra Fadnavis during his first stint as chief minister, the project was halted citing environmental concerns as it would entail felling 4.5 lakh trees.

"The preliminary engineering works are nearly completed with most requisite technical clearances obtained. However, permissions from the Forest Department and Wildlife Board are awaited and thereafter tender will be invited for this work," read the BMC's budget. The civic body has allocated Rs 4,000 crore for the Water Supply Project (WSP) department of which Rs 2,270 crore has been ear-



marked for constructing water conveyance tunnels. These tunnels are meant to strengthen the water supply in Mumbai city and suburbs by improving the flow of water distribution and bridging the demand-supply gap.

At present, the BMC has taken up construction of a 5.5-km long water tunnel between Amar Mahal (Chembur) and Trombay and another 9.7-km long water tunnel between Wadala and Parel.

Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology recorded over 21,000 new cases in 2024



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

The State-run Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology registered as many as 21,051 new cases in 2024. This is apart from 3.89 lakh patients who visited the institute for follow-ups last year. In 2023, of the 21,608 new cases registered in Kidwai, 12,500 were newly-diagnosed cancer cases. To highlight the significance of cancer awareness, early detection, prevention and treatment, February 4 is observed as World Cancer Day. The theme this year is 'United by Unique'. To mark the day, the institute is organising an awareness jatha starting from the Kidwai premises to Lalbagh. Based on the Population Based Cancer Registry (PCBR) data, approximately 14 lakh new cancer cases are reported annually in India. Of these, an estimated 87,850 new cases are from Karnataka. About 2.37 lakh cancer cases (including those on treatment and newly diagnosed) can be noticed at any given point of time in the

State.

In Bengaluru, of the estimated 15,603 cases registered annually, 8,723 are female cancers. Of the 6,880 male cancers reported, lung cancer continues to be the most predominant site (9.7% of the total male cancers). Lung cancer is followed by cancers of the prostate (6.9%), stomach (6.5%), and mouth (6.4%).

Among females, breast cancer is the most common constituting 31.5% of the total female cancers followed by cancer of the cervix (9.1%), ovary (6.4%), mouth (4.3%), and corpus uteri (4.2%), according to data shared by Kidwai administrator Naveen Bhat Y. "If diagnosed early and optimally treated, nearly 70% of cancers can be cured. Unfortunately, more than 50% of patients visit the cancer treating centres in an advanced stage when the survival of these patients is minimal. The best way to fight cancer is by prevention, by avoiding or reducing probable risk factors," stated an official release from the institute. The increase in incidence and pattern of cancers can be attributed to several risk factors: adoption of a Western lifestyle, tobacco consumption, which contributes to the occurrence of more than a third of cancers. Avoiding paan masala, gutkha, supari and tobacco prevents cancer of mouth, throat, food pipe and stomach. Cessation of tobacco smoking reduces chances of lung cancer, stated the release. Alcohol consumption, late marriage, lack of exercise and body hygiene, stress, consumption of junk food, preserved food like salted fish, long term use of hormone tablets, application of inorganic insecticides, pesticides and weedicides are the probable modifiable risk factors for cancers.

Sri Ramakrishna Hospital launches digital flipbooks on common cancers and free prostate screening

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Sri Ramakrishna Institute of Oncology & Research (SRIOR) marked World Cancer Day 2025 on Tuesday by launching a digital flipbooks on common cancers in English and Tamil. The event also saw the inauguration of a free month-long prostate cancer screening programme.

K. Karthikeyan, Superintendent of Police, Coimbatore District, unveiled the flipbooks along with R. Sundar, Managing Trustee, SNR Sons Charitable Trust, in the presence of Narendran, Joint Managing Trustee, SNR Sons Charitable Trust; P. Guhan, Director, SRIOR; Rajagopal, Dean, Sri Ramakrishna Hospital; K. Karthikesh, Surgical Oncologist, SRIOR; C. V. Ramkumar, CEO, SNR Sons Charitable Trust, and other dignitaries. Dr. Guhan said that the digital flipbooks offered comprehensive, easy-to-access information on common cancers such as breast, lymphoma, lung, testicular, prostate, leukemia, head and neck, stomach, ovarian, multiple myeloma, brain, cervical, pancreatic, and colorectal cancer. The flipbooks, available via a dedicated QR code and website (https://mhits.in/SRIOR/WCD_2025/index.html), are designed to replicate the experience of reading a physical book, with smooth page transitions. They provide detailed insights into each cancer type,



its causes, symptoms, treatment options, prevention strategies, and management tips. Referring to a study, he said the report indicated that one in nine Indians would develop cancer in their lifetime, hence awareness about cancer and early screening were crucial. K. Karthikeyan, SP, Coimbatore said that with the advancement in medical science and technology, there were wide range of treatments available for cancer patients. However utmost important should be given to the preventive aspect.

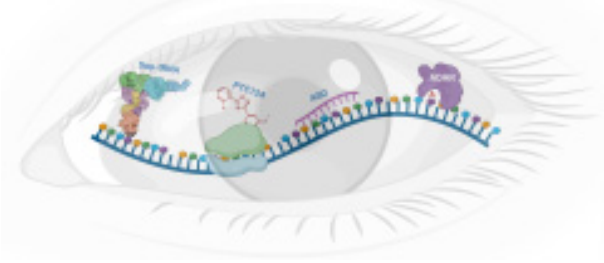
RNA therapeutics show promise but is India ready?

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Vision is crucial to navigate the world, connect with others, and perform everyday tasks. It helps us perceive colours, shapes, and movement, which are essential to learn, work, and keep safe. According to the World Health Organisation, more than 2.2 billion people worldwide experience some form of vision impairment. The causes range from cataracts and diabetic retinopathy to glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and inherited retinal diseases (IRDs).

IRDs are genetic conditions that lead to progressive vision loss, often resulting in blindness. These diseases stem from mutations in more than 300 genes responsible for the function of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. While some individuals may lose their sight shortly after birth, others experience gradual deterioration over time. In many cases, early intervention could slow down or even prevent the progression of blindness. An estimated 5.5 million people suffer from IRDs around the world, with a prevalence rate of one in 3,450. However, the situation is more critical in India. Studies have revealed significantly higher prevalence, with one in 372 individuals in rural South India, one in 930 in urban South India, and one in 750 in rural Central India affected by these conditions. In 2017, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) made a historic move by approving the first gene therapy for blindness caused by mutations in the RPE65 gene. This approval sparked hope for patients with other genetic causes of blindness. Currently, more than 50 clinical trials are exploring gene therapy as an option to treat various inherited eye disorders. In India, however, awareness among clinicians about the availability and potential of RPE65 gene therapy remains limited. While gene therapy has proven revolutionary, it is not yet a universal solution for all genetic eye diseases. This is where RNA-based therapies are poised to make a significant impact.

RNA-based precision therapeutics are emerging as a game-changer for genetic disorders, including IRDs. Unlike DNA or genome-editing therapies, RNA-based therapies offer a safer alternative as they make temporary changes that don't carry over to future generations, reducing the risk of unintended long-term effects. Recent advancements have introduced RNA-based therapies like antisense oligonucleotides (ASOs), which have already been used successfully to treat diseases such as spinal muscular atrophy and Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Medical researchers are now exploring ASO therapy for retinal conditions like Stargardt disease, Leber congenital amaurosis, and retinitis pigmentosa. Beyond ASOs, researchers are also developing more advanced RNA-based options to address IRDs. One promising approach involves RNA-editing with ADAR enzymes, which can correct specific genetic mutations at the RNA level. This method has the potential to restore protein production in retinal cells without altering the underlying DNA, offering a new way to treat retinal degenerative diseases caused by single-point mutations. Another innovative strategy is the use of suppressor tRNAs to bypass stop-codon mutations, which can prematurely halt protein synthesis in retinal cells. By enabling the production of full-length proteins, this approach could help restore proper retinal function in IRD patients, where stop-codon mutations disrupt vital protein production. Another potential small molecule RNA-based therapy is PTC124, also known



as ataluren, which is already being used to treat patients with cystic fibrosis and Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Recently, clinical trials have begun to investigate its use in treating a rare developmental eye disease called aniridia. Taken together, these options offer a more targeted, personalised treatment approach that could halt the progression of IRDs and improve patient outcomes with greater precision. India and precision therapeutics. Precision medicine is an approach that tailors treatments to an individual's genetic makeup, lifestyle, and other factors, offering a more targeted alternative to the one-size-fits-all approach of traditional options. For rare diseases like IRDs, understanding the genetic mutations prevalent in a population is essential for researchers to develop effective RNA-based therapies. Although researchers have linked more than 300 genes to IRDs, research in India has yet to fully map the genetic mutations responsible for these conditions in the local population. In fact, there is currently no large cohort study in India (i.e. involving at least 500 patients) to describe the mutation spectrum of IRDs. Such extensive studies are vital for researchers to identify the most common genetic defects that can subsequently be targeted using precision medicine. For example, the ABCA4 gene is commonly mutated in IRD patients worldwide and is a popular therapeutic target. However, we lack a clear understanding of whether it is just as prevalent in Indian populations and/or whether some other mutation is expressed more often in certain ethnic groups. India's large size and diverse population add another layer to this challenge. Genetic mutations can vary significantly across different communities, making it difficult to identify common mutations. Accurately mapping these mutations necessitates extensive, resource-intensive research across various subgroups. Additionally, there are several barriers, including a lack of awareness of the genetic basis of IRDs among the people at large and healthcare providers alike, limited availability of genetic counselling services, insufficient research funding, and restricted access to diagnostic infrastructure in rural areas. Thus, to fully unlock the potential of RNA-based therapeutics, India must prioritise genetic research with a particular emphasis on understanding the mutation profiles of people with IRDs, in collaboration with local research institutions and healthcare providers. A notable example of such a collaboration is a June 2024 study by researchers from the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, New Delhi, and the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad. The teams' findings led to the development of a precision therapy for a specific form of IRD. Expanding partnerships between global and local pharmaceutical companies, as well as research institutes, will also make these treatments more accessible to Indian patients.

Trump agrees to pause tariffs on Canada and Mexico after they pledge to boost border enforcement



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday (February 3, 2025) agreed to a 30-day pause on his tariff threats against Mexico and Canada as America's two largest trading partners took steps to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. The pauses provide a cool-down period after a tumultuous few days that put North America on the cusp of a trade war that could have crushed economic growth, caused prices to soar and ended two of the United States' most critical partnerships.

"Proposed tariffs will be paused for at least 30 days while we work together," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau posted Monday afternoon on X, saying that his government would name a fentanyl czar, list Mexican cartels as terrorist groups and launch a "Canada-U.S. Joint Strike Force to combat organized crime, fentanyl and money laundering." The White House confirmed the pause to the United States, which followed a similar move with Mexico that allows for a period of negotiations about drug smuggling and illegal immigration. There is a risk that the tariffs could still come into effect, leaving the global economy

uncertain about whether a crisis has been averted or if a possible catastrophe could still be coming in the weeks ahead. Mr. Trump on Saturday had directed 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, with another 10% tariff on Canadian oil, natural gas and electricity. He also ordered an additional 10% tax on imports from China. All of the tariffs were scheduled to start at midnight Tuesday. Canada and Mexico threatened retaliation, raising the prospects of a broader regional trade war.

The 10% tariff that Trump ordered on China was still set to go into effect, though Mr. Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the next few days. Mr. Trump's signing of tariff orders for the three nations set off alarms among investors, lawmakers, businesses and consumers. The taxes on imports, if sustained, could push up prices and sabotage growth, even as Mr. Trump has suggested they are necessary to get other nations to stop illegal immigration, prevent fentanyl smuggling and treat the United States, in his mind, with respect. Mr. Trump and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum announced the monthlong pause on increased tariffs against one another after what Trump described on social media as a "very friendly conversation," and he said he looked forward to the upcoming talks. "I look forward to participating in those negotiations, with President Sheinbaum, as we attempt to achieve a 'deal' between our two countries," the president said on social media. Mr. Trump said the talks would be headed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Secretary of Treasury Scott Bessent, Secretary of Commerce nominee Howard Lutnick and high-level representatives of Mexico. Sheinbaum said she was reinforcing the border with 10,000 members of her country's National Guard and that the U.S. government would commit "to work to stop the trafficking of high-powered weapons to Mexico."

PM Modi set to hold talks with U.S. President Trump in Washington on February 13



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to pay a two-day visit to the U.S. from February 12 to hold talks with U.S. President Donald Trump on a range of issues including trade and defence, people familiar with the matter said on Monday. As per the plan, Mr. Modi will travel to Washington D.C. after concluding his two-day visit to Paris, they said. The Prime Minister is expected to land in the American capital on the evening of February 12 and he and Mr. Trump are expected to hold the talks the next day, the people said. It would be the Prime Minister's first bilateral visit to the U.S. after Mr. Trump assumed the presidency for a second term on January 20 following his stunning electoral victory in November. Mr. Modi will be among a very handful of foreign leaders to travel to Washington D.C. on a bilateral visit within weeks after the Trump administration came to power. Agenda of Trump 2.0: What can the world expect? | In Focus podcast However, there is no official word yet on Mr. Modi's visit. Last week, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said New Delhi is working with Washington for an "early" visit of PM Modi to the U.S. The Prime Minister is

travelling to Paris to attend the Artificial Intelligence Action summit on February 10 and 11. Mr. Modi's visit to the U.S. is taking place against the backdrop of concerns in India over the U.S. President's approach on immigration and tariff. President Trump on Sunday announced imposing a 25% tariff on Canadian and Mexican imports as well as an additional 10% tax on Chinese goods. Watch: What is India's stance against illegal immigration in the U.S.?

Strengthening ties Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump, during a phone conversation on January 27, vowed to work towards a "trusted" partnership with a focus on boosting India-U.S. cooperation in areas of trade, energy and defence. Following the phone talks, the White House said Mr. Trump emphasised the importance of India increasing its procurement of U.S.-made security equipment and moving toward a fair bilateral trade relationship. "Both leaders emphasised their commitment to advance the US-India strategic partnership and the Indo-Pacific Quad partnership, with India hosting Quad Leaders for the first time later this year," it said. India has already indicated its keenness to expand its energy ties with the U.S., especially in the clean energy sector. New Delhi on Saturday announced plans to amend its nuclear liability law and set up a nuclear energy mission, a move that came ahead of Mr. Modi's trip to the U.S. Certain clauses in India's Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 have emerged as hurdles in moving forward in implementation of the historic civil nuclear deal that was firming up between the two strategic partners around 16 years back. It is learnt that India is looking at the possibility of civil nuclear cooperation with the US in the small modular reactors (SMRs). U.S.-based Holtec International is known to be one of the leading exporters of SMRs globally and the Department of Atomic Energy is learnt to be interested in having some collaboration with the American firm.

May be forced to take counter measures, no winner in trade war: China's envoy at U.N. on U.S. tariffs

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

China lashed out at the U.S. over tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump, saying Beijing "may be forced to take countermeasures" and stressed that there is "no winner in a trade war". "We are firmly opposed to this unwarranted increase and we do believe that this is in violation of the WTO (World Trade Organisation) rules," China's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Fu Cong said. Mr. Fu was addressing a press conference on Monday (February 3, 2025) as China assumed the rotating presidency of the 15-nation UN Security Council for the month of February.

In response to a question about the Trump administration imposing 10% tariffs on Chinese goods coming into the U.S., he said China is filing a complaint at the WTO and Beijing "may be forced to take countermeasures." On Saturday, the White House announced that Trump was implementing a 25% additional tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico and a 10 per cent additional tariff on imports from China. "President Trump is taking bold action to hold Mexico, Canada, and China accountable to their promises of halting illegal immigration and stopping poisonous fentanyl and other drugs from flowing into our country," the White House had said. The Chinese envoy emphasised that "there is no winner in a trade war and we do hope that the U.S. should look at its own problems, really solve... find a solution that is beneficial to itself and also to the whole world." "Frankly speaking, I don't think that raising tariffs is beneficial to the U.S. itself," Mr. Fu said. Noting that the "excuse" for raising tariffs is fentanyl, he said this is very much unwarranted.

"China is one of the countries that has the most stringent regulations on fentanyl" and on all fentanyl-related substances. "On this issue, the U.S. should approach this issue more from its own perspective. For instance, look at the demand side of fentanyl rather than shifting the blame onto others. I don't think that will be good for the US itself," he said. Under its presidency, China will hold a high-level debate on February 18 on 'Practicing multilateralism, reforming and improving global governance' which will be chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Mr. Fu said



China is extending invitations to foreign ministers of UNSC members as well as to non-members to attend the meeting. He said if U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio comes to New York for the meeting, "that will be a very good opportunity for the two foreign ministers to meet." On how the deteriorating relations between Washington and Beijing could impact work between the two countries at the UN, Fu said that the two biggest countries in the world, China and the US "have so much in common" and can cooperate.

He said that within the framework of the United Nations, there are global issues that require concerted efforts of the entire international community, and in particular countries like China and the United States, like anti-terrorism, anti-narcotics, non-proliferation and climate change. "China and the US are the two biggest financial contributors to the UN so it is only natural that our two countries have some similar concerns on how to enhance the efficiency of the Secretariat and the UN's work," he said adding that there are many things that China and the US can work together. "I do hope that despite all the rhetorics that we have heard from the American politicians, we can take a constructive, and I will emphasise, a professional approach to our work here in the United Nations because there are so many things that we can work together, and so much is at stake. If China and the US can work together and jointly, I'm sure we will be able to solve many problems and make the world a better place to live," he said.

Women seek treatment for cataract later than men, spend less on lens, finds study

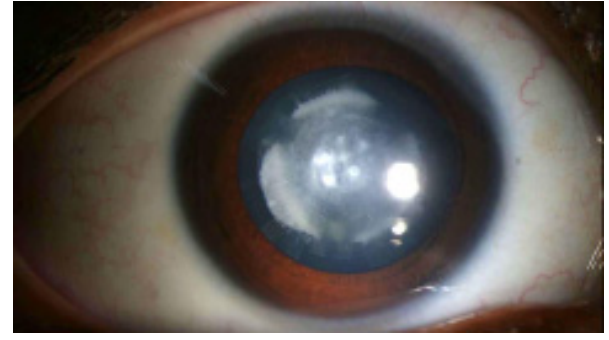
GNS News Agency, Feb 6

An analysis of the success of cataract surgeries in Tamil Nadu has found that women and girls in general, receive treatment for cataract surgeries later than men. Also, women tend to spend less money on the intraocular lens needed for the cataract surgery, as compared to men. Aravind Eye Hospitals, a premier eye care centre headquartered in Madurai, conducted a retrospective study of cataract surgeries it performed over a period of 12 years, from 2012 to 2023. The study, 'Changing patterns in cataract surgery indications, outcomes and costs, 2012-2023: a retrospective study at Aravind Eye Hospitals, India', was published in the February 2025 edition of The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia.

The hospital had performed 3.6 million cataract surgeries during the study period and found that prior to surgery, women presented with worse vision than men in all age groups and among all segments such as outreach, subsidised and paying patients. However, post-operative visual acuity outcomes steadily improved in all the segments, the follow-ups showed. The hospital performs phacoemulsification and manual small incision cataract surgeries (MSIC). The phacoemulsification procedure uses ultrasound waves to break and remove a cataractous lens while in MSIC, a small incision is made in the eye to remove the cataract. The latter method is less expensive. The hospital found that the gains were larger in this method than in phacoemulsification. Aravind Hospitals' records also found that men consistently paid 10% higher prices than women as they chose more expensive intraocular lenses.

One of the authors of the study Shivkumar Chandrashekar said: "We developed Cataract Quality Assurance (software), and from 2012 we have complete data. This has been used to analyse these trends. It also includes patients in Andhra Pradesh in Tirupati, where we started services in 2018-19." Dr. Shivkumar is the head of the cataract and IOL clinic at Aravind Hospitals, Tirunelveli. The centre performs around 50,000 surgeries, which is 10% of the total surgeries done by the hospital group. During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a blip, but in 2021 the backlog came in and by 2023 it was almost back at the normal flow prior to the pandemic, he explained.

The study period also revealed sociological changes. Surgeries supported by insurance and government assistance increased from 4.4% in 2012 to 28.7% in 2023. Spending capacity and health insurance coverage both had increased during the study period. "There are gender inequi-



ties though. The inequities are almost the same throughout the State," Dr. Shivkumar said. Also, younger people tended to delay treatment while older men were more ready for surgery. According to him the study is a fair representation of the State. "Though we cannot extrapolate it, it is a representative of the State as we do free, subsidised and paying cataract surgeries. Basically, as persons from all economic strata come to us, it is more or less representative," he added. The study period also indicated increased awareness about getting cataract surgeries done. Patients seek treatment earlier than before; postoperative vision has improved; and persons who had insurance cover increased from 5% to 28%. An earlier study done by L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad, had seen a similar pattern, when it comes to women patients. In a paper published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology in 2018, the hospital found that of 272 paediatric patients aged below five years, 109 were boys and 60 were girls.

"The ratio is nearly 1:1.8," said Ramesh Kekunnaya, one of the authors and currently the network director of technology innovation at the institute. "We see the pattern especially with children with cataract," he said, adding that papers presented in 2006 and 2022 also showed similar patterns, though the trend is slowly changing. The authors noted that the number of girls seeking medical services was only half that of boys. They cited other studies in which fewer girls were operated on and regular follow-ups for visual rehabilitation is poor compared with boys. However, Dr. Kekunnaya said there were slight improvements in the intervening years. He cited a later paper, published last year of which too he was an author. Of the 97 patients studied 50 were female, accounting for 51.6%, indicating perhaps that the disparity is slowly beginning to close.

India joins UN 'Honour Roll' of timely contributors; pays \$37.64 million for 2025 regular budget



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

India has paid USD 37.64 million dollars to the United Nations Regular Budget for 2025, joining the "honour roll" of 35 member states who have paid their regular budget as-

sessments in full and on time to the UN. According to the UN Committee on Contributions, as of January 31 2025, thirty-five member states have paid their regular budget assessments in full within the 30-day due period specified in UN financial regulations. India contributed USD 37.64 million to the 2025 United Nations Regular Budget and made the payment on January 31, 2025. Naming the countries making it to the "honour roll" of member states who have paid their regular budget assessments in full, Stephane Dujarric, Spokesperson for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said Monday (February 3, 2025) at the daily press briefing that "we thank our friends in India." India has consistently been among the countries to pay its contributions to the UN budget on time and in full. Last week, UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang, who will be visiting India February 4-8, had said in an interview with PTI that India "continues to fulfil its obligation as a member state of the UN by paying its dues in full and on time."

Man who attacked Salman Rushdie to soon go on trial

Mayville: In 2022, Salman Rushdie was about to deliver a lecture before a live audience in western New York when a man ran towards him and plunged a knife into the author's hand as he raised it in self-defence. "After that there are many blows, to my neck, to my chest, to my eye, everywhere," Rushdie recalled in a memoir that followed. "I feel my legs give way, and I fall." In the coming weeks, Rushdie is expected to return to the same New York county to recount the experience as one of the first witnesses in the trial of the man charged with wielding the knife that day, Hadi Matar.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin Tuesday. Matar, 27, of Fairview, New Jersey, has pleaded not guilty to charges of attempted murder and assault. Under different circumstances, Rushdie's book, which details his account of that day and his recovery, might offer important evidence in the Aug. 12, 2022, attack that left the 77-year-old blind in

his right eye and his hand permanently damaged. But "this isn't a back alley event that occurs unwitnessed in a dark alley," said Chautauqua County District Attorney Jason Schmidt following a pretrial hearing. "This is something that was recorded, it was witnessed live by thousands of people." Jurors will be shown video of the attack, as well as still pictures and documentation, Schmidt has said. An estimated 15 witnesses are expected to take the stand over the course of a trial that is projected to last several weeks, he said. Matar's lawyer, Nathaniel Barone, has not detailed how he plans to defend his client against the charges. He has clapped back at critics who question why Matar did not take a plea deal in light of the prosecution's case. "That's not what this is about. It's about due process," Barone said. "It's about receiving a fair trial... If someone wants to exercise those rights, they're entitled to do that." In a separate indictment.

Why Trump and Musk want to close USAID?

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Hyderabad: Since Donald Trump took office as President of the United States, the first organisation to face the axe was the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the world's largest provider of humanitarian, development and security assistance. At its Washington headquarters, a yellow police tape blocked lawmakers and hundreds of employees from accessing the lobby and computer systems. Elon Musk, the owner of Tesla and SpaceX, and now the chief ally of Trump, called it "not an apple with a worm in it, what we have is just a ball of worms." Trump echoed Musk's thoughts by saying that shutting down USAID "should have been done a long time ago."

Let's have a look at what is USAID and why Trump and Musk want to see it dead when the US foreign assistance amounts to less than 1 per cent of the US budget.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an agency of the United States government that is primarily responsible for administering foreign aid and medical care to civilians across the globe. With a budget of over \$50 billion, USAID is one of the largest official aid agencies in the world and accounts for more than half of all US foreign assistance. The supporters of USAID say US assistance in countries counters Russian and Chinese influence. China has its own "belt and road" foreign aid programme worldwide operating in many countries that the US also wants as partners. Who created USAID?

Former US President John F Kennedy created USAID at the height of the United States' 'Cold War' with the Soviet Union. He wanted a more efficient way to counter Soviet influence abroad through foreign assistance. Through USAID, Kennedy united several foreign assistance organisations and programmes under one agency. Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act and Kennedy set up USAID as an independent agency in 1961. USAID has outlived the Soviet Union, which fell in 1991.

What's going on with USAID? On his first day in office on January 20, Trump implemented a 90-day freeze on foreign assistance. Peter Marocco — a political appointee — drafted a note that shut down thousands of programmes around the world. USAID's website and its account on the X platform have been taken down. Secretary of State Marco Rubio will keep life-saving emergency programmes during the freeze. He said there will be a review of which projects make "America safer, stronger or more prosperous." Meanwhile, there is confusion over what programmes are exempted from the Trump administration's stop-work orders.

What do critics of USAID say? Republicans want the State Department to take more control of USAID's policy and funds. Democrats want USAID's autonomy and authority. Funding for United Nations agencies, including peacekeeping, human rights and refugee agencies, has been traditional targets for Republican administrations to cut. The first Trump administration moved to reduce foreign aid spending, suspending payments to various UN agencies, including the UN Population Fund and funding to the Palestinian Authority. In Trump's first term, the US pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council and its financial obligations to that body. The US is also barred from funding the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, or UNRWA. In a 2017 social media post, Mario Rubio said foreign assistance was "not charity," that the US "must make sure it is well spent" and called foreign aid "critical to our national security." In 2023, Rubio sponsored a Bill that would have required US foreign assistance agencies to include more information on what organisations were implementing the aid on the ground. Why is Musk going after USAID? Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE, has launched a sweeping effort empowered by Trump to cut trillions in government spending. USAID is one of his prime targets.

OYO plans to invest 50 mn pounds in UK to expand premium hotel portfolio



New Delhi: Travel tech unicorn OYO on Tuesday said it plans to invest 50 million pounds (Rs 539.57 crore) in the UK over the next three years, primarily to focus on expanding its premium hotel portfolio. The investment is expected to support 1,000 jobs over the next three years in the UK hospitality sector, OYO said in a statement. In a significant strategic shift, OYO is actively pursuing premiumization of its UK portfolio, by pivoting towards premium inventory acquisition, focusing on securing long-term leasehold and management contracts. The company is also in advanced stage talks with several large hotel chains and real estate companies for potential asset management transactions.

"OYO's investment in premium hotels will not only strengthen our tourism infrastructure, but back our ambitious 'Showcase Britain' initiative, helping to boost economic growth as part of our Plan for Change," said the UK Minis-

ter for Investment Baroness Poppy Gustafsson OBE in the statement. Puneet Yadav, Country Head – OYO UK said, OYO entered the UK market in 2018, leveraging a model that had proven successful in other global markets. "While we continue to cater to the budget segment, we are now focused on expanding through leasehold agreements and management contracts with premium properties. Additionally, we plan to introduce several of our popular European brands to the UK market, further diversifying our offerings and meeting evolving customer needs," Yadav stated. The investment was announced on the sidelines of the Nasscom delegation to the UK organised by The Department of Business and Trade, UK. Appreciating the role being played by tech startups in strengthening the Indo UK trade, Rajesh Nambiar, President Nasscom said, "India's tech startup ecosystem has evolved into a global force, driving innovation and economic growth beyond its borders. Proud to see tech startups like OYO strengthening trade ties between both the nations, playing a crucial role in increasing the bilateral trade from USD 42 billion to USD 50 billion and beyond". OYO has over 200 hotels mostly in the budget segment spread across 65 cities in the UK with London, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Brighton, being the main clusters. The company recently announced its plans to open over 40 premium self-operated hotels through leasehold contracts in this financial year.

It has already on-boarded 18 hotels under this model and plans to add 22 more across key cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Bristol, Cardiff, and Edinburgh. In 2024, OYO's parent company, Oravel Stays Limited, marked its entry into the UK's premium segment with the launch of SUNDAY Lansbury Heritage in Canary Wharf.

Obesity rare in rural children despite genetic susceptibility: study



A genetic study of childhood obesity in about 6,400 school-going children aged 9-18 years has found that socioeconomic status significantly modulates the inherent genetic susceptibility to obesity. Unlike in the case of adult obesity, genetic studies to understand obesity in children and adolescents are limited, particularly in non-Caucasian populations. Besides identifying the genetic variants associated with childhood obesity in the Indian population, a study undertaken by a clutch of Indian institutions led by researchers from the School of Biotechnology in JNU, Delhi has studied how socioeconomic status modifies the genetic susceptibility to obesity. The study has been accepted for publication in the journal Obesity.

The researchers performed a two-staged Genome-wide Association Study (GWAS) on 5,673 children and an independent Exome-wide Association Study (ExWAS) on 4,963 children to identify the genetic variants associated with childhood obesity. "While GWAS examines the entire genome for common genetic variants linked to a trait, often focusing on the non-coding regions, the ExWAS focuses specifically on rare variants in the protein-coding regions (exome)," explains Janaki M. Nair from JNU and the first author of the paper. "Combining the two approaches offers a more comprehensive understanding of the genetic basis of obesity." The GWAS was performed in two stages — the discovery phase on 1,510 children and the replication phase on 4,555 children. "The discovery phase involves a genome-wide scan to identify variants associated with obesity, while the replication phase validates the lead associations in the discovery phase in an independent sample set," she says.

Besides two genes known to be associated with obesity, the GWAS helped identify six novel associations in genes. Potential functional roles of the identified novel genes

were evaluated using gene-expression profiles in different human tissues, and gene-regulatory data from publicly available databases. "Most of the identified genes showed the highest expression in adipose tissue," Ms. Nair says. "Among the newly identified genetic variants, one (TCF7L2) functions as an enhancer in obesity-related tissues, while another gene (CDC5L) plays a role in regulating adipose tissue metabolism. A third gene (SNTG1) influences triglyceride levels, while the effect of another gene (MX1) is mediated through thyroid-related pathways, and two genes (IMMP2L and IPMK) impact the hunger-satiety signalling via the leptin-melanocortin pathway." Besides validating the association of known genes involved in obesity in the Indian population, the exome-wide association study identified four novel missense variants for BMI, body weight and waist-to-hip ratio. "The involvement of these identified genes in key obesity-associated pathways further strengthens the significance of our findings, highlighting their potential role in obesity and related metabolic disorders," she says.

"Since genetic factors alone do not fully explain the development of childhood obesity, we studied the role of socioeconomic status in shaping obesity. Our study revealed significant associations between school types — students from urban private schools, urban government schools and rural government schools — which is an indicator of socioeconomic status and BMI in children," says Dr. Dwaipayan Bhargava from JNU and one of the corresponding authors. "As expected, the study found that children from lower socioeconomic status showed a higher prevalence of underweight, while those from higher socioeconomic status faced a higher prevalence of obesity." While children from urban private schools consumed more processed food and led a sedentary lifestyle, rural children led an active lifestyle and lacked access to quality nutrition. The study found that socioeconomic status greatly influenced genetic susceptibility to obesity. For each genetic variant significantly linked to obesity in the study population, children were grouped by genotype and their BMI (adjusted for age and sex) compared across rural, urban government, and urban private schools. "Despite the frequency of risk genotypes and the variant effects being consistent across three categories, children from urban private schools tend to have higher BMI compared to children from urban government or rural schools," Ms. Nair says. "Even with similar genetic risks, children belonging to high SES were more likely to be obese, emphasising the powerful gene-environment interaction."

US-China trade tension escalates even as Trump pauses tariffs on Mexico, Canada. Why escalation is a global risk

In a dramatic late-night development, US President Donald Trump delayed his plans to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Mexico and Canada just hours before they were set to take effect. The trade war on North America, which had sent stock and currency markets globally into a tailspin, has now been paused for a month. However, the tariff war with China escalated as Beijing on Tuesday retaliated against the 10 per cent US tariff by announcing an investigation into Google and imposing tariffs on US products. China stated that it would probe the US tech giant for alleged antitrust violations and slapped 15 per cent levies on coal and liquefied natural gas, as well as 10 per cent on oil and agricultural equipment from the US.

The risk of further trade escalation has also increased, as Trump on Sunday said that tariffs on the European Union (EU) would be imposed "soon" as they "do not take American cars, farm products" and that they "take almost nothing" while the "US buys millions of cars, tremendous amounts of food and farm products." While Trump's tariffs have been paused, businesses have begun strategising ways to counter a tariff war, indicating heightened supply chain uncertainty. The tariff threat against the EU has escalated the risk of a global trade war, as the 27-member bloc is the world's largest customs union and trader of services and manufactured goods. The bloc is also India's second-largest export destination after the US, accounting for over \$75 billion worth of Indian exports, including pharmaceuticals, textiles, automotive parts, leather goods, and precious stones. During his first term, Trump initiated a tit-for-tat trade war with China, leading to significant trade diversion. However, US tariff threats on China did not work as intended.

"Back then, President Trump initiated a series of tariffs that led to retaliation and counter-retaliation, ultimately culminating in a trade deal with China. He called the 15 January 2020 agreement the 'Phase One Deal,' which included 'many structural changes and massive purchases' by China," said Professor of International Economics at IMD Business School, Richard Baldwin, in a blog released on Sunday. "Subsequent analyses showed that China did not meet the purchase commitments outlined in the agreement, and they certainly didn't reform structurally," he added. Meanwhile, exporters said that the current 10 per cent tariffs imposed on Chinese goods would create an opportunity for more Indian goods to enter the US market. According to an analysis by Oxford Economics, India was the fourth-largest beneficiary of the trade diversions that occurred between 2017 and 2023 after Trump launched a tariff war with China in his first term.

US inflation risk to Indian exports The US-based think tank Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE)



said that Trump's tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and China would cost the typical US household over \$1,200 a year. Notably, high inflation in the US and Europe last year dampened Indian exports of labour-intensive items such as gems and jewellery and textiles. In its report, PIIE stated that US producers competing with newly tariffed imports will raise their prices in line with import price increases, further burdening US consumers. "In general, higher prices alongside recessionary impacts from retaliation and supply chain disruption will negatively impact most US households. While Trump ran for president on a platform of lowering taxes, most Americans would see a net tax increase from his agenda so far. Both Trump and congressional Republicans have prioritised extending the tax cuts enacted in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act—tax cuts that would otherwise expire at the end of 2025—but that is not enough to cushion most," the report said.

Why does a tariff war have a domino effect?

Baldwin further stated that the 25 per cent tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports have hobbled the competitiveness of US-based manufacturers and have "tied running shoes on to the feet of US rivals in Europe and Asia." Baldwin explained that American cars are not truly made in America but are assembled there from parts produced in the US, Canada, and Mexico. With the 25 per cent tariffs on these countries, the cost of US-made cars will become less attractive to American buyers, leading to increased imports from Japan, Germany, and Korea. "About half of US imported cars come from Japan, Germany, and Korea. They have not been subjected to the 25 per cent tariffs. What do you think will happen next? Almost surely, many US buyers will switch to German, Japanese, and Korean cars that the tariffs made relatively cheaper. My guess is that the US president will view it as unfair competition that he has to counter. He could impose a 25 per cent tariff blanket on all imported cars or negotiate 'voluntary' export restrictions with Japan, Germany, and Korea," Baldwin said.

Manoj Govil: 'Focus on capex stays; to tweak capex loan conditions for states for FY26'

The government remains focussed on investment in capital formation and is hopeful of a sizable increase in overall capital expenditure, including that by states. The total outgo on capital formation—Centre's own capex and revenue grants to states—is estimated to grow by 17 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.48 lakh crore in 2025-26 (FY26), Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil. The Union government is also expected to tweak conditions in capex loans for states for the next financial year, and is working out the details, Govil said.

For FY26, the Centre has estimated its capex at Rs 11.21 lakh crore, 10 per cent higher than the revised estimate for FY25. It is, however, just around 1 per cent higher than the budget estimate for the current fiscal. The FY25 central capex had undershot the initial budget estimate due to an election-induced slowdown in spending. "One is the capex which the central government agencies do directly and another is the capex that is done by the state governments based on the revenue grants given by the Government of India, which are counted as revenue expenditure but should lead to formation of capital assets on the ground level," Govil said. "If you count both of them, then the revised estimate for this year is Rs 13.18 lakh crore and is slated to go up to Rs 15.48 lakh crore in the next financial year, which is a 17 per cent growth. So, I would say that the focus on capex has been kept," he added.

In addition to the grants to states for capital assets, the government is also working on tweaking the modalities of the interest-free loans to states for FY26. In the Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed an outlay

of Rs 1.5 lakh crore for the 50-year interest free loans to states for capex and incentives for reforms. "We still have to firm up the features of that scheme. We will also consult concerned departments in the Government of India before we finalise. But, as of now, we expect that it might have a component of untied allocation and a component of allocation tied to certain reform activities to be taken by the states, but the details are to be worked out," Govil said. The government also announced in the Budget that infrastructure-related ministries will come up with a three-year pipeline of projects that can be implemented in public-private partnership (PPP) mode.

Elaborating on the proposal, Govil said: "The idea behind this was that each department should have a shelf of projects, which they can think about and start implementing over the next three years. They should not bring the projects in one go or sporadically, but think about their sector and prepare a pipeline of projects which can be funded over the next few years." The Centre will also encourage states to undertake the same exercise and to seek support from the India Infrastructure Project Development Fund (IIPDF) to prepare PPP proposals. On the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS)—set to begin on April 1—Govil said the fiscal impact of payouts is estimated to be an additional Rs 6,250 crore for current employees and Rs 800 crore in arrears in FY26. The government is in discussions to chalk out an investment strategy for the centralised fund under the UPS. Govil said that the UPS corpus could "initially start with a more safe strategy and evolve in future." "The idea is to make the corpus a viable corpus."

Govt to employ targeted containment to stop transmission of leprosy

The Union Health Ministry is looking at a more targeted approach to containing leprosy in India after having achieved the status of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem as per the World Health Organization's (WHO) criteria of less than 1 case per 10,000 population at the national level in 2005. To contain the chronic infections caused by Mycobacterium leprae, the Central government approved of a new treatment regimen for leprosy, aiming to stop its transmission at the subnational level by 2027. It introduced a three-drug regimen for Pauci-Bacillary (PB) cases in place of a two-drug regimen for six months.

Aradhana Patnaik, additional secretary and mission director, National Health Mission, said: "The sustained work by the Central government has ensured that leprosy is now no longer a public health problem. We are currently looking at a targeted approach to tackle the disease in five states and 124 districts in India." The five states in India with the highest prevalence of leprosy are Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Odisha. The Union Health Ministry launched the National Strategic Plan (NSP) and Roadmap for Leprosy (2023-27) on January 30 2023, to achieve zero transmission of leprosy by 2027, i.e., three years ahead of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). The NSP and roadmap contain implementation strategies, year-wise targets, public health approaches, and overall technical guidance for the programme. The strategy and roadmap focuses on awareness for zero stigma and discrimination, promotion of early case detection, prevention of disease transmission by prophylaxis (leprosy post exposure prophylaxis), and the roll-out of a web-based information portal (Nikush 2.0) for reporting of leprosy cases.

"After achieving elimination status at the national level, the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) has taken a number of initiatives to encourage early case detection of patients to prevent Grade 2 Disabilities, and to ensure free-of-cost treatment of leprosy patients. There are few districts within states/UTs, where leprosy is endemic. With various interventions introduced under NLEP in the last few years, the number of new leprosy cases detected has come down to 75,394 in 2021-22 from 125,785 in 2014-15, accounting for 53.6% of global new leprosy cases," said a senior Health Ministry official. According to the WHO, leprosy predominantly affects the skin and peripheral nerves. It is diagnosed by finding at least one of the following cardi-



nal signs: definite loss of sensation in a pale or reddish skin patch, a thickened or enlarged peripheral nerve, with loss of sensation and/or weakness of the muscles supplied by that nerve, and/or microscopic detection of bacilli in a slit-skin smear. Cases of leprosy are classified into two types for treatment purposes: paucibacillary (PB) cases and multibacillary (MB) cases. If left untreated, the disease may cause progressive and permanent disabilities. The bacteria are transmitted via droplets from the nose and mouth during close and frequent contact with untreated cases. Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT) and is reported from all the six WHO regions, the majority of annual new case detections are from the South-East Asia Region. The WHO supports India's National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) to eradicate leprosy as a public health issue. The WHO also provides free multi-drug therapy (MDT) to treat leprosy in India. Globally, leprosy is a neglected tropical disease (NTD) that still occurs in more than 120 countries, with around 200,000 new cases reported every year. Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem (defined as a prevalence of less than 1 per 10,000 population as per the World Health Assembly resolution 44.9) was achieved globally in the year 2000 and in most countries by the year 2010. The reduction in the number of new cases has been gradual. As per data of 2023, Brazil, India, and Indonesia continue to report more than 10,000 new cases, while 12 other countries (Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and the United Republic of Tanzania) each reported 1000–10,000 new cases.

Ajay Seth: 'Higher revenue spending commitment constraining capex ability of some states'

Centre's capital expenditure has picked up pace this year and has risen about 4 per cent year-on-year till January. The ability to do more capex by some of the states, however, has been constrained because they have taken up a lot of revenue expenditure commitment, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth said on Monday. In an interview with Aggam Walia and Aanchal Magazine, Seth also underlined the need to bring in adaptation measures on climate change "very much into the focus", saying that some of the Budget announcements for agriculture have been a move towards that direction amid the risk of extreme weather events. Edited excerpts:

To meet the lower fiscal deficit of 4.8 per cent in FY25, fiscal spending is estimated to grow just 8 per cent in the January-March quarter as compared to over 20 per cent in the previous quarter. The fiscal deficit is expected to further go down next fiscal. Is it too much caution or do you think this is the right level of fiscal prudence?

As far as the current year is concerned, for reaching 4.8 per cent (fiscal deficit), we sit down with each ministry, assess their requirements and that exercise goes on in October and November, what their full-year requirement is going to be. There is absolutely no attempt to tell any ministry not to spend anything which has been provided in the Budget. We say that whatever you have got in the Budget that is yours, Parliament has cleared it. Thereafter, we are nobody to tell you not to spend it.



For any ministry asking for additional allocation, for that we would certainly try to have a closer look, whether those expenditures are very much needed or they can be taken in the next fiscal. Having said so, there is one big element which does not come in the public domain, but this Budget brings it out in one of the statements — schemes which are to be implemented with various state domains. There are balances available with them. So there's no point in releasing more money, unless those balances are taken care of. That also is factored in. There's enough money in the pipeline, which has already been released. Keeping that in mind, we feel that 4.8 per cent is a reasonable number.

There was no attempt to bring it down from 4.9 per cent to 4.8 per cent.

Vicky Kaushal, Akshaye Khanna refused to interact during Chhaava filming: 'They didn't even want to see each other's faces'



Vicky Kaushal recently revealed that he and Akshaye Khanna, playing Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Mughal Shahenshah Aurangzeb, did not interact personally during Chhaava's shoot. While Vicky Kaushal portrays Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, Akshaye Khanna plays Mughal Shahenshah Aurangzeb in Chhaava.

Although director Laxman Utekar's historical actioner Chhaava has been in the news ever since its trailer was unveiled, it has largely been for unfortunate reasons. However, actor Vicky Kaushal is optimistic that the film will mark a turning point in his career, giving him much-needed success. While Vicky portrays Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, Rashmika Mandanna takes on the role of Maharani Yesubai and Akshaye Khanna plays Mughal Shahenshah Aurangzeb. Heaping praise on Akshaye, Laxman dubbed him as one of the finest actors Bollywood has now. Although

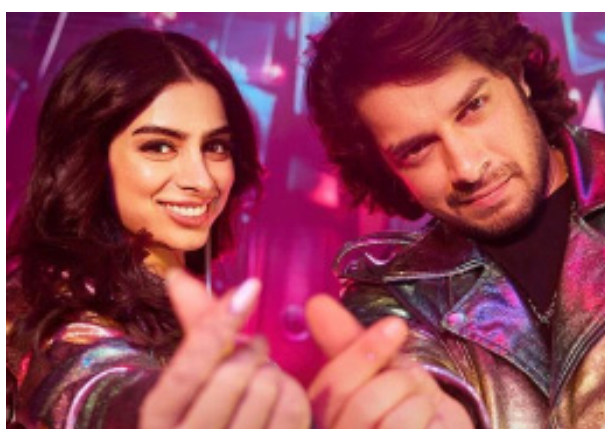
the trailer shows only a glimpse of his role, Laxman asserted that Akshaye's portrayal of Aurangzeb was nothing short of remarkable. "The way he has played Aurangzeb will leave you frightened," he said during a chat with Bollywood Hungama. "He talks very little, but communicates so much with his eyes."

Considering that Akshaye typically takes on only a few movies, the interviewer asked how Laxman managed to convince him to join the project. The director quipped that all it took was a visit to the actor's home in Alibaug. "He is a very nice person. Though he does only a few projects, whatever he does, he does wholeheartedly," Laxman added. Opening up about his experience working with Akshaye, Vicky said, "It took Aurangzeb nine years to find and get hold of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. So, a lot of the film shows his quest to find him. There are some moments together (between Vicky and Akshaye), but the film is about them thriving to (meet each other) and that will leave you waiting for that face-off to happen. The muted slowness and cunningness that he has brought into the character of Aurangzeb has blended beautifully with the roar of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj." Revealing that the two actors never met each other before filming their intense face-off, Laxman said, "The day their scene together was to be shot was the day when they met each other for the first time and that too as characters." Vicky added that they did not interact personally before the shoot. "When we were shooting that scene, we exchanged no good mornings or goodbyes or hellos. He was Aurangzeb and I was Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and we went straight into shooting the scene. There was no communication as Vicky Kaushal to Akshaye Khanna," Vicky noted. "Considering the way the scenes were, you can't do them by sitting on chairs next to each other, sipping tea and then going for the shoot when ready. So, it didn't happen organically either. I hope I get to chat with him after the movie's release, but during the shoot, we never interacted with each other," Vicky said. The director added that the two actors, in fact, refused to interact with each other. "Both of them were so immersed in their characters, they didn't even want to see each other's faces." Chhaava will hit the screens on February 14.

Junaid Khan is such a 'bad dancer', Farah Khan axed his performance in Loveyapa: 'Tujhse nahi hoga, you sit and watch Khushi Kapoor'

Videos of Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor performing the hook step of the title track from their film, Loveyapa, have sparked mixed reactions from the audience. The duo has faced trolling for their dance video, with many criticising their perceived awkwardness and lack of chemistry. Recently, in an interaction, Junaid admitted that he is a "really bad" dancer and shared how Farah Khan, who choreographed the film's song "Rehna Ko", cancelled his performance and asked him to simply sit and watch Khushi perform.

Speaking to Bharti Singh and Haarsh Limbachiya, Junaid revealed, "Farah ma'am canceled our dance. During rehearsals, her assistants taught us the steps. But when she saw me perform, she decided to keep only Khushi's dance and canceled my part. She asked me to perform in front of her, watched me, and said, 'Tujhse nahi hoga, tu chalke aa. Khushi se dance hoga, tu baithke dekh isko' (You can't dance, just walk. Khushi will dance, you just sit and watch her)." Junaid further admitted that while he loves dancing, he is simply not good at it. He recalled how he had to train extensively for a dance sequence in his debut film, Maharaj. "I had to do garba in Maharaj. I rehearsed for 10 weeks, practicing four hours daily. If you look at me in the film, I'm so thin. It's all Vaibhavi ma'am's (choreographer Vaibhavi Merchant) magic," he said. He then shared that despite his intense preparation, the film's editor cut his per-



formance and only kept wide shots to avoid focusing on his dance moves. "Shweta mam cut everything in that song, I was looking so good in it. She didn't keep one mid-shot of mine. She has only kept wide to close shoots," he added. After Loveyapa release this Friday, Junaid has another film lined up with South star Sai Pallavi. Meanwhile, Khushi Kapoor will be seen opposite Saif Ali Khan's son, Ibrahim Ali Khan, in Naadaniyaan, which is backed by Karan Johar's Dharma Productions and marks Ibrahim's acting debut.

without me @priyadarshan.official."

The buzz about Hera Pheri 3 began after Priyadarshan hinted at Hera Pheri 3 while responding to a birthday post by Akshay. Sharing a photo from the sets of Bhoot Bangla, Akshay wrote, "Happy Birthday, Priyan Sir! What better way to celebrate than by spending the day on a haunted set, surrounded by ghosts... both real and unpaid extras? Thank you for being a mentor and the only person who can make chaos look like a masterpiece. May your day be filled with fewer retakes. Wishing you a fantastic year ahead!" Reacting to Akshay's wish, Priyadarshan wrote on his Instagram Stories, "Thank you so much for your wishes, Akshay Kumar. In return I would like to give you a gift, I am willing to do Hera Pheri 3, are you ready Akshay?" He also tagged Suniel Shetty and Paresh Rawal in the story. The first part of Hera Pheri released in 2000, and its second instalment hit screens in 2006. Since then, fans have been waiting for a third part. On the work front, Priyadarshan is currently working with Akshay Kumar on the horror comedy Bhoot Bangla. The film is slated to release on April 2, 2026.

Tabu teases reunion with Priyadarshan in Hera Pheri 3: 'The cast won't be complete without me'



Director Priyadarshan has expressed his wish to make Hera Pheri 3 with Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal, and Suniel Shetty. On his birthday, the filmmaker responded to Akshay's post, stating he was willing to direct the film. Now, adding to the excitement, actor Tabu also reacted to the Sarfira actor's post and teased a reunion with the OG Hera Pheri crew. Sharing Akshay's post on her Instagram stories, Tabu wrote, "Of course, the cast won't be complete

Priyanka Chopra shares glimpses of 'shaadi wala ghar' ahead of brother Siddharth's wedding with Neelam Upadhyaya,

Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas is in Mumbai for her brother Siddharth Chopra's wedding with Neelam Upadhyaya. The actor recently shared photos and videos of their 'shaadi wala ghar' on social media. One of the photos showed Priyanka having a meal with her father-in-law, Kevin Jonas, and mother-in-law, Denise Jonas. Another picture showed Malti Marie colouring on sketchbooks. A short clip showed some people at a dance practise, while a third video showed Siddharth Chopra's fiancé, Neelam Upadhyaya, dancing with a small child.

Priyanka Chopra captioned her post, "Shaadi ka ghar (Wedding house)..!! and it begins tomorrow (red heart emoji) mere bhai ki shaad hai (it's my brother's wedding) @siddharthchopra89 with @neelamupadhyaya || Sangeet

practice to fam jams. So good to be home (three heart face emoji) my heart is full, and so is my schedule. Who said a wedding is easy? No one ... but is it fun? Absolutely! Looking forward to the next few days @drmaduakhourichopra."

Earlier, Priyanka shared a glimpse of Malti Marie admiring the view of the sea. In the picture, Malti can be seen sitting next to a glass window as she looked outside towards the beach. The toddler was dressed in a green and white outfit. The actor captioned the picture, "Mumbai with meri jaan (my love)."

On the professional front, Priyanka Chopra Jonas will reportedly be seen in SS Rajamouli's much-anticipated follow-up to RRR, opposite Mahesh Babu. She also has Citadel Season 2, The Bluff and Heads of State in the pipeline.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Black: Aamir Khan called it 'manipulative', Amitabh Bachchan didn't charge a single rupee for it, said the film was 'sufficient fee'



Indian filmmakers, or in fact, most filmmakers around the world, are known by their distinct style of filmmaking. So when a filmmaker lets go of their style, and tries to venture into the unknown, audiences take notice. A similar thing happened when Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who had already become popular after Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam and Devdas, let go of his lavish and colourful sets and made a film that limited itself to blues and blacks. His 2005 film Black, starring Rani Mukerji and Amitabh Bachchan, had no songs and was seen as an experiment catered towards a niche audience. Released 20 years ago, the film was the start of a detour for Bhansali who went off his trademark style for this, Saawariya and Guzarish.

Black was the story of a girl named Michelle (played by Ayesha Kapur and Rani Mukerji), who can't see, hear or speak. She is presented as an almost wild creature who learns to function only after she is introduced to an alcoholic teacher named Debraj (played by Bachchan). The film was just two hours long and gained a lot of critical acclaim at the time but it seems rather strange that a generation that loves to indulge in nostalgia, Black didn't get a similar play in pop culture. It is impossible to quantify love for an old film but in the age of social media, reels and videos on a film's scene, or its songs or characters, are often seen as evidence that the film continues to enjoy some kind of relevance. The film released in the same year as Bunty Aur Babli, Bluffmaster and Dus, and while all these films have found a place in pop culture, Black's only memorable bit comes via a comedy bit in Rohit Shetty's Golmaal. Is Black forgotten because it isn't worth remembering, or because it has somehow slipped from everyone's collective memory? Is Black forgotten because it isn't worth remembering, or because it has somehow slipped from everyone's collective memory?

When we enter the world of Black, we meet an 8-year-old girl who is walking around her house with a bell attached to her waist, like cattle. Her father seems to hate her because Michelle is a danger to herself and her family. In one of the early scenes, we see a dining table on fire because the parents have decided that leaving an open flame is a wise idea in a house with a visually impaired child. In another scene, we see Michelle trying to play with her newborn sister, and she ends up hurting her. The father beats

her mercilessly for almost causing an accident but fails to realise that this isn't even her fault. After watching this, you know that Michelle is not a problem that needs solving, it's the parents who need some lessons in responsibility. But Bhansali chooses to focus on Michelle and her 'challenges'. The film is trying to go for a message of determination and courage, but through most of it, it comes across as misguided toxic positivity. It was this aspect of the film that drew Aamir Khan's attention and he didn't hold back his criticism. This was the era when Aamir was quite frank about his opinions and frequently made them known via his blog. "I, without any hesitation, strongly condemn this kind of cinema no matter who is involved with the film, and that includes me if I ever have in the past, present or future made such an error of judgement," he wrote as he criticised the way young Michelle was treated in the film. He found the "glorified" ill-treatment excessively objectionable and in an interview with Mumbai Mirror, he called the film "insensitive," "disturbing" and "extremely manipulative." Apart from criticising the overall tone of the film, Aamir also criticised the art direction, and the "over the top" performances. "I couldn't make out if they were living in a house or a museum or a library or a church. The performances were over the top," he said. He didn't shy away from criticising some of the choices made at the script level and said, "An alcoholic person comes and says you have to leave her alone with me for forty days, and he slaps her around. I don't know of any parent who'd agree to that."

Amitabh defended his film but was disappointed with Aamir's observations. The film won him his second National Film Award for Best Actor. Amitabh believed in the film and his commitment was such that he did not even charge a single penny for it. He shared on his blog that being a part of "such an enterprise was sufficient fees." While Bachchan went through a transformative experience with Bhansali during the making of Black, there was another actor whose experiences were not even remotely similar. Ranbir Kapoor, who was one of his assistants on this film, had recounted his experience. "I used to be kneeling down for hours, he used to hit us, he used to abuse us... that only hardens you and prepares you for the world," he shared with PTI in 2021. Two years after Black, Ranbir made his debut in Bhansali's Saawariya. He is now collaborating the filmmaker for his next, Love And War. While Ranbir was a part of this film, Alia Bhatt was also in the running for the part of young Michelle. She was nine years old when she tried to audition but was rejected. She later shared at the Berlin Film Festival that she was "terrible" but Sanjay believed that she was going to be "a big actor someday." Years later, Alia worked with the director in Gangubai Kathiawadi. Black was a rather unique experiment in mainstream cinema made by a commercial filmmaker starring actors who, just a few months after this, were also seen in something as massy as Bunty Aur Babli. Black was celebrated for being unique and different but not many, except for Aamir perhaps, stepped back and examined what was being applauded — a calculative film where the filmmaker pushes the protagonist to appear as helpless as she can, so he can swoop in and save her. He isn't applauding her in the end, but himself.

Sassy Shark Tank India founder makes Aman Gupta blush, convinces Kunal Bahl to bend personal rules: 'I love what I do yaar'

Rubeina Karachiwalla, the founder of Ruby's Organics, pitched the cosmetics brand on the latest episode of Shark Tank India. Vineeta Singh said that she is aware of the brand, but appeared to take offence when Rubeina claimed that her products were safer to use than those produced by her competitors. While Rubeina didn't name any other brand, she said that most of them mislead customers and conceal their use of harmful ingredients. Vineeta said that the ingredient she was speaking about is normally used in extremely low quantities, and that's why it isn't mentioned.

Sensing tension, Rubeina said, "Our focus is not to demonise other brands, but to be more mindful and thoughtful about the ingredients we do use... It's more of a precautionary approach, that's it." She asked for Rs 1 crore in exchange of 2.5%, valuing Ruby's Organics at Rs 40 crore. She said that the company is targeting more than Rs 7 crore in revenue this year, and previously raised Rs 2 crore in funding at a Rs 10 crore valuation. She also insisted that she wants to create the safest products in the market, for which she charges a premium. Rubeina said that most of the ingredients that they use are certified by bodies such as ECOCERT and COSMOS, but the company itself isn't, which is why they can't publicise this on the packaging.

When Vineeta asked her why, Rubeina said, "It's very expensive, but I promise you it's a part of the plan." Aman Gupta said that he doesn't believe the company is doing as well as Rubeina claims, which made her raise her eyebrows and ask, "Why?" Aman said that she might want to consider branching out, away from her organic ingredients USP. Asked if she would be willing to do this, Rubeina said, "No. Arey I love what I do yaar," she said, adding that she has been at it for over seven years. "Tumhare liye kyu badle?"



Vineeta asked Aman, who blushed at being addressed as 'Aman ji' by Rubeina. But he backed out of the deal, as did Namita Thapar, and Ritesh Agarwal.

Vineeta backed out next, but had some advice for Rubeina. "Put an organic certificate, it's really important in India. Running a startup is a marathon, but sometimes you have to sprint. The quick commerce window won't be open forever, invest in it. Rubeina turned to Kunal Bahl, and said, "Kunal, go with your gut, you want to bet on me, I know it, I can see it. You won't regret it. I'm telling you on national television, I'm giving you my word. I'm the future Vineeta." Vineeta appreciated the compliment, and Kunal said that he really likes Rubeina as a person. He offered her Rs 1 crore for 10%, but Rubeina turned it down instantly. "I generally don't negotiate, but there's something very likeable about you. And for that reason, I can lower it to Rs 1 crore for 8%," he said, refusing to alter his offer at all. After thinking hard, Rubeina accepted the deal.

Khushi Kapoor says her self-esteem took a hit after being mocked for her looks: 'I was called certain names'

Almost a week ago, Khushi Kapoor openly admitted to undergoing cosmetic procedures and emphasized the need for actors to be transparent about such choices instead of giving people false hope. During SCREEN Live held in New Delhi today, Khushi spoke about being judged for her looks as a child and how it affected her self-esteem. She also stressed the importance of honesty when it comes to beauty enhancements, advocating that individuals should do what feels right for them.

Addressing unrealistic beauty standards and constant comparisons to her sister Janhvi Kapoor and mother Sridevi from a young age, Khushi said, "It's a vicious cycle. When I was a young girl, I was made fun of how I looked. I didn't look like my mother or sister. Your self-esteem takes a hit when you are a young child. I took a keen interest in vanity

and to look a certain way and I don't think that it is a bad thing, especially when I know these are the things people are pointing out. I am not saying that it is something that people should or shouldn't do. I haven't done the hundred things that people have said that I have done but it is a part of taking care of yourself sometimes. Skincare, fillers, I don't think these are the things a person should be scrutinised for." She added, "It is important to be honest. Whether you do something or you don't people are going to have an issue with it. I was judged when I looked a certain way when I was young and I was called certain names and when I changed how I look, people had an issue with it too. You should do what is right." Earlier, in a conversation with Curly Tales, Khushi Kapoor shared how procedures like nose jobs and lip fillers have become normalized. "I don't think it's such a big deal."

Varun Chakaravathy added to India's ODI squad for England series, Shubman Gill says



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

IND vs ENG: Varun Chakaravathy is training with India's ODI squad for the England series. (BCCI)IND vs ENG: Varun Chakaravathy is training with India's ODI squad for the England series. Varun Chakaravathy has been added to the Indian cricket team squad for the ODI series against England, Shubman Gill has revealed. The mystery spinner was spotted training with India's ODI squad for the upcoming three-match series, starting Thursday in Nagpur.

The 33-year-old tweaker could be in line for his maiden ODI call-up and debut, shortly before the Champions Trophy due to begin in Dubai in two weeks. On Tuesday, Chakaravathy was seen bowling for over an hour against the Indian batters during the training session at the VCA Stadium in Jamtha. Varun Chakaravathy was the pick of the Indian bowlers in the recent five-match T20I series that the hosts won over England by a 4-1 margin. The Tamil Nadu spinner bagged 14 wickets, including a five-for, the most by an Indian bowler in a bilateral T20I series. Despite playing only 23 List A 50-over games, Chakaravathy has

amassed 59 wickets at a 19.8 strike rate. Varun Chakaravathy was also the leading wicket-taker among spinners in the recently concluded domestic 50-over Vijay Hazare Trophy, snapping 18 wickets with a best of 5/9 and 12.16 average. While India had originally named four other spinners in their provisional Champions Trophy squad, it will be interesting to see if Chakaravathy will replace one of Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar or Kuldeep Yadav in the final squad which can be announced by the February 12 deadline. Varun Chakaravathy's statemate and former India off-spinner R Ashwin recently lauded his exploits and batted for his inclusion in India's squad for the ICC event in the UAE.

"We are all talking about whether he should have been there (Champions Trophy squad). I think there is a chance he might be there. I have a feeling he might make it. There is a chance because all teams have named only a provisional squad. So he might get picked," R Ashwin said on his YouTube channel. "But if you look at the existing squad, if a seamer goes out and Varun comes in, it will be an added spinner (five). I don't know who they would want to drop (if they think about getting Varun in). We will wait and see," Ashwin added. Ashwin said Varun Chakaravathy could be seen in action during the forthcoming three-match ODI series against England, the squad for which is the same as the originally announced Champions Trophy team. "I have a feeling that Varun might get a chance to play in the ODI series between India and England. I don't think it's an easy call to take him directly to the Champions Trophy," said Ashwin. India's updated squad for ODI series against England Rohit Sharma (C), Shubman Gill (VC), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (WK), Rishabh Pant (WK), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohd. Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakaravathy.

Arkady Dvorkovich responds to personal texts being leaked: 'Cannot deal with a partner who has such business culture'

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich has accused organisers of Freestyle Chess of leaking personal texts sent by him during the terse negotiations over the past few months. Dvorkovich told in an exclusive interview on Tuesday that messages that he had sent Jan Henric Buettner, the man behind the freestyle chess tour, were being shared with players 'within seconds' during the negotiations.

After talks between FIDE and organisers of Freestyle Chess collapsed on Monday, Buettner posted a long open letter addressed to the FIDE president where he also made public personal messages sent to him by Dvorkovich. Soon, this was followed by Magnus Carlsen sharing on X messages sent by Dvorkovich to his father to convince the world no 1 to play in the FIDE World Blitz Championship in December. Soon, Carlsen's trainer Peter Heine Nielsen also shared private messages sent to him by FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky in 2018. "The thing I understood from many sources, many people told me that Buettner is actually leaking all our communications to all players immediately. Seconds after we wrote things in our personal WhatsApp conversation. For me, that's just wrong business ethics. I cannot deal with a partner who has such a business culture, such business ethics. For me, it's a red line," Dvorkovich told "Actually, Buettner was the one who told me that our



communication should just be between us; but he was the one who was leaking messages. I was informing him whenever I wanted to communicate something to the FIDE board. But he was sending our communications to people without informing me about it. For me, it's just not proper." "Maybe leaking personal messages is a part of their business culture. It's totally against my culture. What is private, it is private. When it is public, it is public. You should get permission or you should at least tell the person that you are going to go public with what was personal. Doing this secretly is just improper business culture that I cannot accept. I cannot shake hands with people who do this."

Hans Niemann slams Magnus Carlsen, calls him 'arrogant, entitled, unaware and cowardly'

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

American GM Hans Niemann reignited an old feud with Magnus Carlsen after launching a verbal attack on the world no 1 on X. Responding to a post from Carlsen on X, Niemann attacked the Norwegian. "Arrogant, entitled, unaware, and most importantly: cowardly. Your childish ego continues to distort reality at the expense of chess. You've defeated yourself off the board, only a matter of time until you face the same fate on the board," Niemann wrote. He was responding to Carlsen's own attack on FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich, where he accused FIDE of "coercion of players, misuse of power and broken promises." After talks between FIDE and Freestyle Chess had collapsed, Carlsen had posted on X a direct attack asking the FIDE president if he would resign.

"FIDE President Dvorkovich, to convince me to play the Rapid & Blitz in New York, you wrote Dec 19th to my father: 'Just want to pass a message to you and Magnus that whatever happens between FIDE and Freestyle in terms of recognition, players will NOT be affected in any way. They can decide on their own and FIDE will not take any nega-



tive action." Carlsen continued: "You added later that day: 'I will step down if my word will be undermined by the Council.' By forcing players to sign an unacceptable waiver you have reneged on your promise. Will you resign?" Carlsen is one of the most prominent backers of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour which starts in a few days in Weissenhaus.

After T20I series loss Brendon McCullum wants England batters to be relentless against spinners

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

England's head coach Brendon McCullum has called on his players to be relentless when facing the spinners after losing the T20I series 4-1 to India. In what promised to be a closely-fought series before it began, world champions India walked away with a dominating scoreline with their spinners led by Varun Chakaravathy calling the shots right through the series. On conditions which had a good balance between bat and ball, England's batting unit was time and again rattled by the Indian spinners with middle-order batsman Harry Brook enduring a series to forget. Although England batsmen tried to be on the offensive, their tentativeness was there to see as Varun walked away with Man of the Series trophy for his 14 wickets at an average of 9.85.

"At times, we've been a touch tentative," McCullum said. "We want to keep trying to apply pressure. Particularly when they've got such a good batting lineup, you don't really have a time where you can just take time out of the game. Four or five years ago in T20 cricket it was like that,

and I think we've seen it evolve so quickly that there is no dead time now."

England's trouble against spin is nothing new. And after the first match, Brook even cited the fog in Kolkata as one of the primary challenges in picking the Indian spinners. "I think our guys are really good players of spin. We've probably not been at our best against them but credit goes to Chakaravathy and (Ravi) Bishnoi as well. I know the scoreline reads 4-1 and it's disappointing to lose the series but Rome wasn't built in a day. I think we've seen a pretty clear gameplan of how we want to play the game." Now both teams move on to the ODI leg which begins in Nagpur. With these three ODIs being the dress rehearsal to the Champions Trophy to follow in Pakistan, McCullum said England are set to include seamer Saqib Mahmood for the opening match on Thursday. Despite picking up three wickets in his first over in the Pune T20I, he was benched for the last match at Mumbai. "Saqi was outstanding in the fourth T20 and he'll play in the first ODI as well," said McCullum.

Why National Games singles champion Sathish Karunakaran trains in Kuala Lumpur



GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Shuttler K Sathish Kumar Karunakaran, 23, had all the energy to expend in his versatile pursuit of trying to win two completely different badminton events— Singles and Mixed Doubles. The ambition itself was a little extravagant, if not knackered at the top competition levels. But Sathish also wanted sparring options of players much more skilled than him for both himself and Mixed doubles partner, Aadya Variyath, who would adapt to his shape-shifting, role-swerving games.

Very few coaching centres indulged in this experiment. He knew he had to head to Malaysia – to accommodate that voracious appetite for skills. Picked for the Asian Mixed Team championship in China, starting February 11 on a maiden call-up, Sathish (Singles rank of 48, XD rank of 33), is a rare contemporary success stories, choosing to set base outside India for badminton

The National Games finalist in Mixed Doubles and champion in Singles, on Tuesday at Dehradun, has moved bag and baggage to Kuala Lumpur's second biggest facility, Asia Badminton Academy after failing to qualify in Mixed Doubles last Olympics. Aadya, 22, has followed, trying to get her Doubles career at the net, going. Coached by second-generation Malaysian, M Jivanathan Nair, Sathish and Aadya are making the most of sharing court-sparring with the country's well-known names, Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzudin, who won India Open earlier in January, and Goh Wei Shem – Tan Wee Kiong, former World No 1s. "We completely shifted to Malaysia because we get quality sparring, good feeders there. It's mostly Malaysia's 'B' team, and there's not much difference in training methods in the two countries. But I wanted to train with players who are my level or preferably higher," Sathish explains. Coach Jiva, who jokes he's "getting to know India" through his wards, being born and brought up in Malaysia, says Sathish's unique requirements of two events, has expertise and experienced coach-

ing in Malaysia. "Frankly I was surprised because the same person playing doubles and Mixed doubles is fairly common, the current World champion Seo Syeung-jae is one. But Singles and Mixed are rare. Still, we have big names like Goh and Tan who straddled both singles and doubles in their early years. So Sathish's pathway is mapped well," the coach says.

As such, Sathish doesn't train for two different events, Jiva says, but he does the typically Malaysian thing of infusing a bogging variety of both styles, in the same session. "In Mixed, his role is of the main player which has a lot of elements from singles. He trains for singles and brings those variations in mixed." The highly-touted tall player from Tamil Nadu originally, who spent few skills-sponging years in Bangalore, has a noticeably different singles game, with a lot of riffs of mid-court battles—where Malaysians are aces. "We are very focused on the 2028 Olympics but there's short-term milestones which we will know realistically in the first 8 months of 2025," the coach adds.

One other thing both shuttlers are benefiting from is recovery-science where the two top Malaysian academies are doing some cutting-edge work, as was seen in Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik picking the Olympic MD medal. "With two events, Sathish's recovery is a definite challenge with hectic schedules. But we have incredible science here, a dedicated regime and careful planning for them," Jiva says. A large part of bringing fluency to Sathish's game has been getting him to back his variations, applying them at key moments. "I'm not too happy with his confidence levels on variations which need to become muscle memory. He needs to be dynamic and adapt to the opponent. But he likes taking risks and is generally attacking. Dedicated and professional, so I like that," Jiva says. "I'm there with a full team, S&C coach, physio, and mind trainer. Focus is on improving strokes," Sathish says, of why he returned to Kuala Lumpur where he first trained for a month at 16 back in the day. The tall shuttler started out as a defensive player, who still digs slow courts (another rarity in India). "I'm getting far more attacking in Malaysia,

The struggle is a tad tougher for Aadya, who needs far more power and chutzpah at the net, though she has natural speed. "Aadya is going through a different transformation. We are pushing her out front a lot more, and asking her to increase the percentage of her role and take more responsibility especially when she's peppered with shuttles from the opposite guy," Jiva says. Malaysian female mixed doubles players tend to be more aggressive and creative. "The match personality needs to come out," Jiva says. It's where flair is fiery.

'Done no wrong': Aakash Chopra backs KL Rahul over Rishabh Pant as India's first-choice ODI wicketkeeper

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

Former India batter Aakash Chopra has said that head coach Gautam Gambhir and captain Rohit Sharma must continue backing KL Rahul, who has done "no wrong", as the first-choice wicket-keeper for the upcoming three-match ODI series against England and the Champions Trophy this month. In contention alongside Rahul is Rishabh Pant who could be favoured for his left-handedness to provide variety in the Indian top-order comprising a host of right-handers including Rohit, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli and Shreyas Iyer.

"There are two schools of thought. One is that you have all right-handers, Shubman Gill is there with Rohit Sharma, then Virat Kohli, Rahul and Hardik Pandya. So don't you want a left-hander there? People who come with that thinking are saying Rishabh Pant should be played," Chopra said on his YouTube channel. Rahul has been among the most prolific middle-order bats in ODIs over the last four years and also played a crucial role in the ODI World Cup in Pant's absence. Batting at No. 4 and 5, Rahul has amassed over 1700 runs with a 55-plus average with 13 50-plus scores. On the other hand, Pant has aggregated 808 runs in the slots in 23 innings, averaging only 35 for a solitary hundred. Who should be India's wicket keeper for the Champions Trophy: Pant or KL? – was one of the interesting questions I got on X yesterday. Have answered a few more #AskAakash questions in today's video ??Chopra has urged India to persist with Rahul who played two of the three ODIs against Sri Lanka last year



before Pant replaced him in the third ODI. "What goes in KL Rahul's favour is what wrong has he done. Just because his name is Rahul, will you keep drumming him? Will you keep getting him to do all the jobs, whether it's keeping, going down or up the order, and serving the drinks? No, that's not going to happen," he added. "He played well in the World Cup. I still remember the Australia match at Chhapauk. Then he continuously scored alright. He was criticized a lot for batting a little slow in the final, but we might not have reached where we reached if he had gotten out instead of batting slow," Chopra explained. "I am going with KL Rahul. I am going with continuity. Why would you drop someone who hasn't done anything wrong just because someone else does well? Rishabh Pant's ODI record is a work in progress. So Rahul should be the frontrunner," Chopra said.

Varun Chakaravathy added to India's ODI squad for England series, Shubman Gill says

GNS News Agency, Feb 6

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"But if you look at the existing squad, if a seamer goes out and Varun comes in, it will be an added spinner (five). I don't know who they would want to drop (if they think about getting Varun in). We will wait and see," Ashwin added. Ashwin said Varun Chakaravathy could be seen in action during the forthcoming three-match ODI series against England, the squad for which is the same as the originally announced Champions Trophy team. "I have a feeling that Varun might get a chance to play in the ODI series between India and England. I don't think it's an easy call to take him directly to the Champions Trophy," said Ashwin. India's updated squad for ODI series against England Rohit Sharma (C), Shubman Gill (VC), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (WK), Rishabh Pant (WK), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohd. Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakaravathy.