

# INDIAN CHRONICLE

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## Malaria on the Run: Telangana Registers Decline

Hyderabad: Following Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday stating that India had achieved a 97 per cent reduction in malaria cases and was on course to become malaria-free in the near future, doctors in the state said gains had been made in controlling the disease. Dr Amar Singh Nayak, additional director (malaria) at the Directorate of Public Health, said Telangana had reported 261 malaria cases last year and 270 this year. “A decade ago, malaria cases in the state were in the thousands, with the highest being nearly 14,000 in 2014,” he noted.

## River Water Dispute Set to Roil Telangana Assembly Session

Hyderabad, Dec 28

Tempers are expected to come to a boil when the Telangana Assembly convenes on Monday, against the backdrop of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy’s pungent response to BRS president K. Chandrashekar Rao questioning the Congress government on irrigation projects and river-water sharing.

The Assembly will meet on Monday and take a three-day break to reconvene next year. As per the agenda released by the Legislature secretariat, the government will table several ordinances including the one to increase the GHMC area to over 2,000 sq km with 300 wards.

On Monday the House is likely to adjourn after it takes up two condolence motions taking note of the passing of former MLAs Ramreddy Damodar Reddy from Suryapet constituency, and Konda Laxma Reddy, former MLA from Chevella constituency.

The Assembly is also expected to take up the issue of reservations for the Backward Classes community for the ensuing zilla and mandal elections, as well as the proposed legislation against hate speech which the Chief Minister had previously announced.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who arrived in the city on Sunday afternoon from New Delhi, met with some of his Cabinet colleagues and senior officers to discuss

issues related to the session. While the government is preparing to make a detailed presentation on irrigation related issues including inter-state water sharing, and the Palamuru-Rangareddy lift irrigation scheme (PRLIS), the Chief Minister is expected to explain the progress achieved in two years of the Congress government’s rule, and implementation of welfare schemes while touching upon the Congress party’s victories in the recent panchayat elections.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister was understood to have discussed the issue of 42 per cent reservations for the BC community in view of ZPTC and MPTC elections in Telangana which are expected to be held in the near future.

The Chief Minister is learnt to have assigned tasks to the ministers on explaining the government’s development plans highlighting Telangana Rising 2047 initiative which received a mammoth response in the form of over 5.7 lakh crore worth of investments in Telangana. With developments surrounding the expansion of the GHMC area, this issue too is likely to figure in the discussions.

The session is also expected to see the government introduce a Bill on hate speech, following an announcement by the Chief Minister during the Christmas celebrations organised by the government.

A meeting of the business advisory council chaired

## High Alert After Tiger, Leopard Attacks in Bhupalpally, Sircilla

Warangal. Karimnagar: Forest authorities have issued high alerts in Jayashankar Bhupalpally and Rajanna Sircilla districts following a series of tiger and leopard attacks on livestock over the weekend. A tiger killed a bull in Chityala mandal early on Sunday, while a leopard attacked sheep and goat herds in Konaraopet mandal on Saturday night. No human casualties were reported in either incident, but villagers have been advised to avoid forest fringes as officials track the predators’ movements.



The winter session of the Telangana Legislative Assembly beginning on Monday is expected to be stormy (file photo)

by the Speaker with representatives of all parties will be held on Monday during which the Speaker is expected to finalise the regular business activities of the House, key agendas, time schedules for each party.

During the day, the government is expected to take

up the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, the Telangana Municipalities (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 and a copy of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 2025.

## KCR Likely to Attend Winter Session Today

Hyderabad: The Winter Session off the Telangana Assembly is expected to turn up the political heat by quite a few notches with both the Congress and the opposition parties declaring their readiness to take on each other on several issues.

The duration of the session will be decided at a meeting of the legislature’s business advisory council that will have representation from both sides of the aisle. While the primary Opposition party, the BRS, has demanded that the session have at least 15 working days, the BJP has declared that nothing short of a 30-day session will do.

With the primary focus of the session expected to centre around issues related to irrigation projects, and inter-state river water sharing, a lot of interest has been generated with the BRS saying that its president and former chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao will attend the session on Monday.

With the Congress demanding answers from the former chief minister, who

recently charged the state government with neglecting the Palamuru Rangareddy lift irrigation scheme (PRLIS) and not doing enough for protecting the state’s share Krishna and Godavari river waters, it is expected that bulk of the heavy lifting on this front will be tasked to senior BRS leader and former irrigation minister T. Harish Rao.

The government, on its part, is said to be ready with a detailed presentation on river water sharing issues, irrigation projects including the PRLIS on which Chandrashekar Rao raised questions alleging neglect by the government. The BRS has said that it too should be provided with an opportunity for its own presentation on these subjects but it remains to be seen if it will be allowed to do so as in the past, even when the BRS was in power, the Congress was not allowed to make a counter-presentation on irrigation in the Assembly following one from the then BRS government.

Both the Congress and the BRS are expected to



stick to their stated stands of the other side being in the wrong on irrigation related issues, while the BJP which held both sides responsible for the problems, is expected to attack the other two parties on the subject.

While several other subjects, including the expansion of the GHMC area and the Telangana Rising 2047 summit, are expected to be discussed, with the Opposition pressing the government to take up matters related to farmers, and its promises to the people, it remains to be seen how many of them will actually come up for discussion as this will depend on the du-

ration of the session.

Balu Pulipaka is a journalist with over three decades of experience, and currently serves as the Political Editor at Deccan Chronicle. He has reported extensively on local, national, and international issues, earned a reputation for insightful reporting and in-depth analysis. Specializing in politics, environmental affairs, climate change, and irrigation projects, Balu’s expertise lies in crafting compelling narratives that illuminate the intersection of policy and its impact on society.

## Won’t Compromise on Security: PM Hails Op Sindoor in Mann ki Baat

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that 2025 gave India several proud moments, from national security and sports to science, culture, and heritage, leaving a strong global imprint.

Addressing the nation in his monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat, the Prime Minister said, “Operation Sindoor” became a symbol of pride for every Indian. The world clearly saw that today’s India does not compromise on its security. During ‘Operation Sindoor’, images of love and devotion towards Maa Bharati emerged from every corner of the country. People expressed their feelings in their own unique ways. The same spirit was also visible when ‘Vande Mataram’ completed 150 years.”

Calling 2025 a memorable year for sports, Modi said India’s men’s cricket team won the ICC Champions Trophy, while the women’s team lifted the World Cup for the first time. He also highlighted India’s success in the Women’s Blind T20 World Cup and achievements in the Asia Cup T20. Para-athletes, he added, proved their determination by winning several medals at world championships.

The Prime Minister said India made a major leap in science and space when astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla became the first Indian to reach the International Space Station. He also noted progress in environmental conservation, stating that the cheetah population in the country has crossed 30.

He said, “In 2025, faith, culture, and India’s unique heritage all came together. The Prayagraj Mahakumbh organised at the beginning of the year astonished the entire world. At the end of the year, the Dhawajrohan ceremony at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya filled every Indian with pride.”

“Today, we can proudly say that 2025 has given India even greater confidence. It is also true that this year we had to face natural disasters, at very many places. Now, the country is ready to move forward in 2026 with new hopes and new resolutions,” Modi said.



Highlighting the role of youth, the Prime Minister said India’s achievements in innovation and technology have impressed the world, largely due to its youth power. He announced that National Youth Day would be observed on January 12, marking Swami Vivekananda’s birth anniversary, along with a Young Leaders Dialogue. He also spoke about the Smart India Hackathon 2025, noting that students worked on over 270 real-life problems posed by more than 80 government departments, with participation from over 13 lakh students across thousands of institutions.

Modi pointed out that a few days ago, the fourth ‘Kashi Tamil Sangamam’ was held in his parliamentary constituency, Varanasi, and played an audio clip in which children of the city spoke fluently in Tamil.

“Their mother tongue is Hindi, but their love for the Tamil language inspired them to learn Tamil,” he said.

During the ‘Kashi Tamil Sangamam’ in Varanasi this year, special emphasis was placed on learning Tamil and under the theme of ‘Learn Tamil-Tamil Karakalam’, special campaigns were also run in more than 50 schools in Varanasi.

## Murmu Embarks on Submarine Sortie at Karwar Naval Base



NEW DELHI, Dec 28 President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday undertook a sortie onboard the Indian Navy’s frontline submarine INS Vaghsheer on the western seaboard.

Murmu became the second President to experience a submarine sortie. In February 2006, former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was the first to do so.

Chief of Naval Staff Dinesh K. Tripathi accompanied the President during the sortie onboard the indigenous Kalvari-class submarine, which sailed from the Karwar naval base in Karnataka. The President is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

In a social media post, the President’s Secretariat said President Murmu undertook a dived sortie onboard INS Vaghsheer and was briefed on the role of the submarine arm in India’s maritime strategy, as well as its operational capabilities and contribution to safeguarding national maritime interests.

The statement added that the President interacted with the crew and commended their dedication, commitment, and spirit of selfless service. She described the indigenous submarine as a shining example of the Indian Navy’s professional excellence, combat preparedness, and unwavering commitment to national security.

The President, dressed in a naval uniform, waved to naval personnel before entering the submarine. INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final submarine under the Project 75 Scorpene programme, was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January. Navy officials said it is among the most silent and versatile diesel-electric submarines in the world.

The submarine is designed for a wide range of missions, including anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, area surveillance, and special operations. It is equipped with wire-guided torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, and advanced sonar systems, and features modular construction to enable future upgrades such as the integration of air-independent propulsion technology.

The Indian Navy is developing the Karwar naval base as part of its long-term security strategy in the Indian Ocean region.



## EDITORIAL

You can set up a new AIIMS, but can you also replicate its empathy?

Over 12 weeks, I stayed by my father's side at AIIMS Delhi, where he was undergoing treatment for a life-threatening ailment. During those long and anxious days, I not only witnessed the exceptional care extended to him, but I also saw thousands of patients — each with their own stories of suffering and hope — being attended to with the same dedication by doctors, nurses, technicians, and countless support staff. What I experienced and observed reaffirmed my belief that AIIMS Delhi stands as one of the brightest illustrations of what a robust public health system means for a country like India. It is a living reminder that when public institutions are empowered, they become the greatest source of strength for citizens. It was probably for this reason that in the last two decades, successive governments — across party lines — have announced new AIIMS institutions with remarkable frequency. AIIMS Delhi has long symbolised excellence in public healthcare, a place where world-class treatment coexists with affordable access. Replicating this model in every region seemed not just desirable but necessary. For millions of Indians who travel thousands of kilometres to Delhi, a local AIIMS promised dignity, convenience, and life-saving care closer to home. Yet a simple truth confronts us today: The newer campuses — from Bhopal and Raipur to Gorakhpur and Bilaspur to Rishikesh and Patna — have not been able to cultivate the ethos that defined the first AIIMS. The absence is not merely academic; it is felt intimately by patients who continue to flock to Delhi because they “trust AIIMS” — meaning AIIMS Delhi.

Why has the hardware expanded while the software — the humane character of the institution — remained stubbornly unreplicable? The answers lie deep within our policy design, our priorities, and our understanding of what makes an institution great. The first AIIMS was born from a visionary imagination. It was conceptualised as an apex medical institution combining clinical excellence, research leadership, and ethical education. Its founding faculty consisted of pioneers who returned from abroad, inspired by global standards but committed to building an Indian institution with an Indian ethos. Over time, AIIMS Delhi developed a unique internal culture comprising rigorous training, high ethical expectations, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a deep sense of accountability to India's poorest patients. This culture was not built in a year or two but was shaped through decades of mentorship, institutional autonomy, continuity of leadership, and a cohesive academic community. When governments hurried to open multiple new AIIMS, they attempted to replicate the infrastructure but not the conditions that had produced the culture. Most new AIIMS struggle with shortages of faculty, nurses, technicians, and support staff. Many departments are functional only on paper. It is not unusual to see key specialties run with one or two doctors navigating impossible workloads. In overburdened and understaffed environments, compassion does not die out of intention but out of exhaustion as well. AIIMS Delhi, despite its huge patient load, still retains senior faculty, long-standing mentorship networks, and a stable system for training postgraduates. One of AIIMS Delhi's greatest strengths has been its relative autonomy, though this has also thinned in multiple ways and at multiple levels. Nevertheless, it has enjoyed the freedom to decide on academic policies, research priorities

## PSPCL transfers 17 engineers, key PSEBEA office-bearers among those shifted

The transfers came just hours after the PSEBEA objected to the amendment in the recruitment and appointment rules for the CMD post at PSPCL. The transfers came just hours after the PSEBEA objected to the amendment in the recruitment and appointment rules for the CMD post at PSPCL. The Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) management Tuesday evening issued transfer orders of 17 engineers, ranging from Deputy Chief Engineer to Senior XEN-level officers. Several key office-bearers of the Punjab State Electricity Board Engineers' Association (PSEBEA) figure in the transfer list. Notably, the transfer orders were issued just hours after the PSEBEA wrote a letter to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, objecting to the recent amendment in the recruitment and appointment rules for the post of Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD) of PSPCL.

Among those transferred is PSEBEA general secretary Ajaypal Singh Atwal, who was posted as Additional Superintending Engineer (Tech-I) to the Director (Distribution), Patiala. He has now been posted as Additional Superintending Engineer (Enforcement-cum-Enforcement & Assessment and Mobile Meter Testing Squad) at Mandi Gobindgarh. Another key office-bearer, Devinder Kumar Goyal, finance secretary of PSEBEA, has been shifted from his post as Additional Superintending Engineer (Personnel), Patiala, to Additional Superintending Engineer (Enforcement-cum-Enforcement & Assessment and Mobile Meter Testing Squad-II) at Ludhiana.

Similarly, Jatinder Garg, Senior XEN (Distribution System Division), Model Town, Patiala, has been transferred and posted as Senior XEN (Enforcement-cum-Enforcement & Assessment and Mobile Meter Testing Squad) at Sangrur. The PSEBEA, meanwhile, alleged that the transfers were aimed at targeting active members of the association. It said, however, that the ongoing agitation would continue and that all transferred engineers would join at their new places of posting in compliance with the orders. The engineers' association has been holding regular protests since November, following the suspension of Harish Sharma, Chief Engineer, Ropar and Goindwal Sahib Thermal Power Plant, and the termination of Harjeet Singh, Director (Generation). The association has termed these actions arbitrary and part of a pattern of victimisation of engineers raising technical and policy concerns.

## Rs 8 crore investment scam: Patiala police lodge FIR based on former Punjab IG Amar Chahal's note; 25 bank accounts frozen



The cyber cell of the Patiala police registered a First Information Report (FIR) late on Tuesday against unknown individuals in connection with an online fraud of Rs 8.1 crore involving retired Punjab Police inspector general (IG) Amar Singh Chahal, 67, who attempted suicide on Monday and is currently under treatment at a hospital. Chahal has undergone two surgeries and is currently said to be stable and recovering at Park Hospital in Patiala.

Palwinder Singh Cheema, Superintendent of Police (SP), Patiala, said, “An FIR has been lodged by the cyber cell invoking sections related to cheating, forgery, IT Act and other relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), as per the contents of the note written by the retired officer. The case is being investigated from multiple angles.” The FIR was filed based on a complaint filed by Chahal's wife. Before attempting suicide at his Patiala residence, the retired officer had written a two-page letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, seeking justice and action against the cyber fraudsters. He had also penned a detailed 12-page note to Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav, alleging large-scale cheating by cyber criminals posing as wealth management advisors through a WhatsApp group titled ‘F777 DBS Wealth Equity Research Group’. The cyber cell of the Patiala police registered a First Information Report (FIR) late on Tuesday against unknown individuals for allegedly cheating retired Punjab Police inspector general (IG) Amar Singh Chahal, 67, of Rs 8.1 crore through an online investment scam. Chahal, who attempted suicide on Monday, has undergone two surgeries and is currently said to be stable at Park Hospital in Patiala. Palwinder Singh Cheema, Superintendent of Police (SP), Patiala, said, “An FIR has been lodged by the cyber cell invoking sections related to cheating, forgery, IT Act and other relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), as per the contents of the note written by the retired officer. The case is being investigated from multiple angles.” The FIR was filed based on a complaint filed by Chahal's wife.

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According to police sources, at least 25 bank accounts linked to the suspected fraud have been frozen. These accounts were identified from documents provided by Chahal, which showed transactions made by several investors, including himself.

## Amritsar court junks Kanchanpreet Kaur's anticipatory bail plea



Kanchanpreet Kaur, daughter of SAD leader Sukhwinder Kaur Randhawa who unsuccessfully contested the Nov 11 bypoll, Kanchanpreet Kaur, daughter of SAD leader Sukhwinder Kaur Randhawa who unsuccessfully contested the Nov 11 bypoll for her mother. An Amritsar court Tuesday dismissed the interim anticipatory bail of Kanchanpreet Kaur, wife of alleged gangster Amritpal Singh Bath alias Harpreet and daughter of Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhwinder Kaur Randhawa. Police informed the court that Kanchanpreet was not cooperating with the investigation and had provided false information. Kanchanpreet faces four cases registered against her during the Tarn Taran by-election campaign for her mother. Akali Dal has termed these cases political vendetta. Police attempted to arrest her on November 29, but she was released following a special

## ESI beneficiary alleges injustice: Only Rs 1.86 lakh paid against Rs 5.50 lakh medical bill

The patient's father submitted a written complaint on November 14, 2025, to the Regional Director, ESIC, and the Senior Medical Officer (SMO), ESIC. The patient's father submitted a written complaint on November 14, 2025, to the Regional Director, ESIC, and the Senior Medical Officer (SMO), ESIC. An alleged case of denial of cashless treatment under the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) scheme has surfaced in Mohali, raising serious questions over compliance by empanelled hospitals. Jashanpreet Khan (IP No. 1214693790), an employee of M/s Kosmo Auto Mobiles, Mohali, suffered an employment-related injury and was admitted to Eden Critical Care Hospital, Chandigarh, an ESIC-empanelled facility, from November 5 to November 15, 2025. As an ESI beneficiary, he was fully entitled to cashless medical treatment under ESIC norms. However, it is alleged that the hospital charged the patient a medical bill amounting to Rs 5,50,396 and obtained an undertaking during treatment stating that the amount would be paid upfront and later claimed from ESIC. The patient's father reportedly informed the hospital authorities that his son was an ESI

beneficiary eligible for cashless treatment, yet the amount was still recovered — an act alleged to be a direct violation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with ESIC. Following this, the patient's father submitted a written complaint on November 14, 2025, to the Regional Director, ESIC, and the Senior Medical Officer (SMO), ESIC. Acting on the complaint, the SMO directed the hospital to refund the amount collected from the insured person. Despite these directions, the hospital allegedly failed to comply and discharged the patient without any refund. Advocate Jasbir Singh stated that the matter was later taken up again with the Regional Director and SMO, ESIC, who assured that the entire medical bill would be reimbursed. Accordingly, all bills were submitted to the SMO, ESIC office on December 5, 2025. Shockingly, on December 20, 2025, the insured person received only Rs 1,86,545 against the total bill of Rs 5,50,396, leaving a balance of Rs 3,63,851 unpaid. The aggrieved party has now urged Regional Director ESIC, Pankaj Vorha, to intervene and direct Eden Critical Care Hospital to immediately refund the pending amount.

Chahal had also mentioned a person who claimed to be the CEO of a reputed Singapore-based bank. The police are investigating whether the individual was impersonating the CEO or if the identity is genuine. Police sources added that the scam appears to involve several other investors, and further details are likely to emerge as the investigation progresses. Bank accounts identified from documents

According to police sources, at least 25 bank accounts linked to the suspected fraud have been frozen. These accounts were identified from documents provided by Chahal, which showed transactions made by several investors, including himself. “The money trail is being thoroughly examined,” sources said. In his note, Chahal stated that he had invested a total of Rs 8.1 crore, of which Rs 1 crore was his own money, while the remaining Rs 7 crore was borrowed from friends and relatives. The situation worsened in the first week of December when Chahal attempted to withdraw Rs 5 crore from his principal investment. He was allegedly told that his profit for November alone amounted to Rs 52 crore and that he would need to deposit additional amounts, including Rs 2.25 crore as service tax and tax on profits, Rs 2.20 crore as premium membership fees, and Rs 10 lakh as a bribe to expedite the fund transfer. Despite making these payments, no money was transferred to him. As per the note, Chahal got in touch with the WhatsApp group on October 28, and investigators are also focusing on how a profit of Rs 52 crore can be earned within such a short span of time. Probe to focus on phone numbers, digital footprints. Asked about the names mentioned by Chahal in his note, including individuals who allegedly advised him to invest and encouraged further deposits, the police said the investigation would focus on the phone numbers and digital footprints linked to the WhatsApp groups. “We need to verify whether the identities used were genuine or fake. This is a deep and technical investigation, and our teams are working on it,” SP Cheema said. Chahal had also mentioned a person who claimed to be the CEO of a reputed Singapore-based bank. The police are investigating whether the individual was impersonating the CEO or if the identity is genuine. Police sources added that the scam appears to involve several other investors, and further details are likely to emerge as the investigation progresses.

late-night hearing in the Tarn Taran court, directed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on November 30.

Amritsar district attorney Amritpal Singh Khaira told The Indian Express, “An FIR under Section 318(4) BNS, Section 20(1)(2), 24(B) of the Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025 was registered against Kanchanpreet Kaur at Majitha police station. During investigation... addition of offences under Sections 336(2), 336(3), 337, 338, 339, 340, 61(2) BNS and 12(1)(b) Passport Act was made. The court of Additional District & Sessions Judge, Amritsar, granted interim anticipatory bail to Kanchanpreet Kaur vide order dated 26.11.2025, and she joined the investigation with police on 28.11.2025 but did not cooperate with the investigating agency and did not provide the documents and relevant information to the investigating officer. The Amritsar court, vide order dated 23.12.2025, dismissed the anticipatory bail application of Kanchanpreet Kaur.” Sources said that in April this year, Kanchanpreet filed a divorce application in court after returning from the UAE, but the attached marriage certificate was found to be fake. During the Tarn Taran by-election campaign, Kanchanpreet alleged that Aam Aadmi Party candidate and now MLA Harmeet Singh Sandhu had “turned” her husband Amritpal Singh alias Harpreet into a gangster; she delivered speeches sympathetic to him but never publicly stated that he was her husband or she had filed a divorce application.

## From PSEB to PSPCL and PSTCL: How CMD rules in Punjab power utilities have changed since 2010

Amid strong objections from power engineers to the latest change in the recruitment and appointment process for the chairman-cum-managing director (CMD) of Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) and Punjab State Power Transmission Corporation Limited (PSTCL), a look at CMD appointments since 2010 shows a gradual dilution of the original eligibility norms framed during the unbundling of the erstwhile Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB).

The Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) handled generation, transmission and distribution of power for more than five decades. As part of reforms aligned with the Electricity Act, 2003, the state government unbundled PSEB on April 16, 2010, into PSPCL (generation and distribution) and PSTCL (transmission). In the same year, a comprehensive tripartite agreement (TPA) was signed between the Punjab government, the management, and all unions and associations of PSEB, including the Punjab State Electricity Board Engineers' Association (PSEBEA). The agreement was formally notified in May 2011.

As part of the restructuring framework, detailed qualifications, eligibility criteria and a selection procedure for the appointment of CMDs and directors of the two corporations were laid down, clearly envisaging that both entities would be headed by experienced power sector technocrats. Following the unbundling, K D Chaudhari, a senior power engineer in the organisation, was appointed as the first CMD of PSPCL and PSTCL in June 2010. Although his tenure was extended in December 2017 up to February 2019, Chaudhari resigned in March 2017, days after the Congress government came to power in Punjab. It was after his resignation that the first amendment to the CMD appointment rules was made in March 2017, allowing a principal secretary-level IAS officer to be appointed as CMD. The engineers' association pointed out that this dilution of norms was carried out after consultations with all stakeholders. Subsequently, A Venuprasad, a principal secretary-rank IAS officer, was appointed CMD of PSPCL and PSTCL and served from March 2017 to December 2018. In December 2018, the government reverted to the original spirit of the TPA by appointing Baldev Singh Sra, a technocrat from PSPCL, as CMD. He remained in the position until February 7, 2025.

Thereafter, as per the amended provisions introduced in 2017, Ajay Sinha, a principal secretary-rank IAS officer, was appointed CMD of both PSPCL and PSTCL. He served until October-end this year, when Dr Basant Garg, a secretary-rank IAS officer, was given charge of CMD of both corporations. The controversy has now resurfaced following a fresh amendment made this month, which further widens the eligibility criteria by allowing secretary-level IAS officers—serving or retired—to be appointed as CMD, without any consultation with stakeholders. Reacting strongly to the move, the PSEBEA has termed the amendment a violation of the TPA. PSEBEA president Jasvir Dhiman said the latest change represents a further dilution of qualifications and bypasses the consultative process mandated under the TPA.

Referring to Clause 5(g) of the TPA, the association said any change in the qualifications or experience prescribed for CMDs and directors can only be made after consultation and mutual understanding with the signatories to the agreement. PSEBEA general secretary Ajaypal Singh Atwal said the recent amendment violates this clause and undermines the spirit and assurances given at the time of restructuring. Demanding immediate withdrawal of the amended guidelines, the engineers' body has urged the Punjab government to appoint a regular technocrat as CMD of PSPCL at the earliest. According to the association, sustained technical leadership is crucial to address mounting operational challenges and safeguard the long-term health of Punjab's power sector. However, amid the ongoing agitation by PSEBEA, PSPCL transferred 17 members of the association late Tuesday night, including active office bearers.

## To fund son's education and husband's treatment, professor turns thief in Bengaluru; arrested

A 46-year-old professor at a private college has been arrested for allegedly stealing gold ornaments, cash, and other valuables from wedding venues by posing as a relative of the bride or groom, the police said Wednesday. The Bengaluru police announced the arrest of the woman, identified as Revathi, Tuesday. The police said they seized gold ornaments worth Rs 32 lakh from the resident of K R Puram, who worked as a Kannada professor at a private college in Bengaluru. A police officer said the woman's husband has cardiac issues, and her son's education expenses were increasing, pushing her to steal gold ornaments from wedding halls. According to officers, a person approached the Basavanagudi police station on November 25, stating that a 32-gram gold chain and an artificial collar chain had gone missing from their bag at a wedding hall in Basavanagudi. The complainant had gone to the venue on November 23 along with her mother to attend a relative's wedding. The police lodged a theft case at the Basavanagudi Police Station based on the complaint. They reviewed CCTV footage and other evidence and found that Revathi stole the jewellery. The police arrested Revathi on December 1 at her house, and took her into 12 days' custody. Seemant Kumar Singh, Commissioner, Bengaluru city police, said, “Upon interrogation, the woman confessed to having committed the theft of gold jewellery in this case. She also revealed that she had committed thefts of gold jewellery in two other marriage halls within the limits of the Basavanagudi police station.” During detailed interrogation while in custody, the accused told the police she had committed thefts in two other places in Bengaluru, as well as at wedding halls in other districts of Karnataka. “She further stated she had kept the stolen gold jewellery at her house, and that she, along with her husband, had availed a gold loan by pledging the jewellery at a bank located in Kadubeesanahalli,” Singh said. The police said they recovered 262 grams of gold jewellery worth Rs 32,00,000 from her residence and a bank in Kadubeesanahalli between December 2 and December 12.





# Indian-origin woman found dead at home, manhunt on for partner



Indian.On Saturday, December 20, at about 6.30 am, police located the missing woman deceased inside a residence. The death was subsequently classified as a homicide.Toronto Police have launched a homicide investigation after a 30-year-old woman was found dead inside a residence in the city's west end, officials said, prompting a response from the Indian High Commission in Canada.The victim has been identified as Himanshi Khurana, 30, a resident of Toronto. Police said the victim and the suspect were known to each other, a detail investigators are treating as significant. An image of Khurana has been released by police as part of the investigation.Police said they received a call reporting a missing person at around 10.41 pm on December 19, in the Strachan Avenue and Wellington Street West area. Officers began an investigation into the disappearance

of a woman from the neighbourhood.On Saturday, December 20, at about 6.30 am, police located the missing woman deceased inside a residence. The death was subsequently classified as a homicide.The suspect has been identified as Abdul Ghafoori, 32, also of Toronto. He is wanted on a Canada-wide warrant on a charge of first-degree murder. Toronto Police have released an image of the suspect and appealed to the public for assistance in locating him.“This is Toronto’s 40th homicide of 2025,” police said, adding that the investigation is being led by the Toronto Police Service Homicide and Missing Persons Unit.Reacting to the incident, the High Commission of India in Ottawa said it was in touch with Canadian authorities and offering assistance to the victim’s family. “We are deeply saddened by the tragic death of an Indian-origin woman in Toronto. The High Commission is closely coordinating with local authorities and providing all possible support to the bereaved family,” the High Commission said in a statement.Under Canadian law, first-degree murder is the most serious criminal offence. If convicted, the punishment carries a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment, with no possibility of parole for at least 25 years. Courts have no discretion to impose a lesser sentence for first-degree murder, which typically involves planning and deliberation or the killing of an intimate partner.Police have urged anyone with information related to the case to come forward. Members of the public can contact Toronto Police at 416-808-7400. Anonymous tips can also be provided through Crime Stoppers at 416-222-8477.

# ‘From jail to foreigners detention camp as suspected Bangladeshi’ – how fate hangs for this Bengal migrant worker in Tamil Nadu

For over eight months, 25-year-old Awal Sheikh has been languishing in confinement – first in a jail, and then at a detention centre for illegal foreigners, in Tamil Nadu’s Cuddalore district — miles away from his Murshidabad home in West Bengal, where his parents are leaving no stones unturned to get him back.“He is an Indian hailing from Murshidabad,” said Awal’s 72-year-old father Mozammel Haque over the phone from his village.“We have ancestral land records from 1929 and 1962, and the family’s name is in the 2002 electoral roll (of West Bengal),” he added.

According to the family members, who live at Topidanga village in the Ranitala area of Murshidabad district, Awal left for Chennai in March this year to work as a mason at a construction site in Cuddalore district.“On April 2, Awal called us to tell us that he had been picked up by the police on suspicion of being an illegal Bangladeshi,” says his father.According to the family, Awal and seven others were picked up by Bhuvanagiri police on April 2 under suspicion that they made fake Aadhaar cards and passports.After they were questioned, Awal and others were booked under the Foreigners Act and sent to judicial custody at Parangipettai Sub-Jail.

Meanwhile, the parents tried everything, from engaging a lawyer in Tamil Nadu to visiting Ranitala police station several times to even calling up the helplines of the two chief ministers — Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal, and MK Stalin of Tamil Nadu.“We reached Tamil Nadu and engaged a lawyer. He promised to get my son released on bail. We submitted all local identity documents,” Mozammel said.Mozammel Haque (70) and his wife Urmila Bibi (60) – parents of Awl – at their home in Murshidabad. (Special Arrangement) Mozammel Haque (70) and his wife Urmila Bibi (60) – parents of Awl – at their home in Murshidabad. (Special Arrangement)On June 5, in a relief for the family, Awal was granted bail by a court in Cuddalore.However, to their dismay, they found that Awal was moved to a foreigners’ detention centre in Tiruchirappalli since he was booked under the Foreigners Act.Meanwhile, police filed a chargesheet in the case against seven accused who pleaded guilty. The court sentenced them to two years in jail and a fine of Rs 10,000 each. Awal, however, pleaded not guilty and asserted that he is an Indian citizen.“Since Awal is Indian, we pleaded not guilty and submitted documents. He got bail, but since the case is still on against him under the Foreigners Act,



he was sent to a detention camp,” Awal’s lawyer L Ambruse told The Indian Express over the phone.Awal has moved the Madras High Court, seeking the quashing of the FIR under the Foreigners’ Act.

“We have provided all the documents to the High Court to prove that he is an Indian citizen and a resident of West Bengal. In the last hearing, the court sought a report from the police. However, the matter has not been listed yet. We will appeal for another hearing in the first week of the New Year after the court’s vacation,” the lawyer said.“There is nothing in the case. By mistake, Awal’s name was added with the Bangladeshis,” added Ambruse.Asif Faruk, state general secretary of Parijayi Sramik Aikya Manch (Migrant Workers Unity Forum) in West Bengal, said they are trying to help the family.“We have seen and verified all documents of Awal. They are genuine. Therefore, it is imperative that the police and administrative authorities take immediate steps to ensure a fair and impartial review of Awal Sheikh’s case. Adequate legal assistance must be provided, and all necessary legal measures should be initiated so that an innocent Indian migrant worker is not subjected to continued injustice and suffering,” Faruk said.In Murshidabad, Awal’s family is in despair. “We have spent over Rs 1.10 lakh already. We have spent on lawyer fees and our travel expenses to Tamil Nadu. We do not have any more money left,” says Sajeda, Awal’s wife.“I called up the helpline, met with the local MLA (Riaz Hussain). Everyone and everywhere I heard them saying that they were trying. But nothing has happened till date. I just want my son to return,” added Mozammel.

# Two autolifters who secretly installed GPS devices in cars to track and steal held in Delhi’s Dwarka



Delhi grand theft auto, grand theft auto, Dwarka, Dwarka grand theft auto, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsPolice have recovered three stolen cars, the Hyundai i10 used in the crime, nine number plates, an iPad and a scanning sensor from the accused. Further investigation is underway.Two alleged auto-lifters, who secretly installed GPS devices in cars that came to

their mechanic workshop for repair to track their movements for weeks before stealing them, were arrested in Dwarka’s Bindapur, police said.The arrests of accused Amir (38) and Sarwar Ali (37) followed the theft of a Hyundai i20 car, reported from Mohan Garden in Uttam Nagar on December 8. The complainant had parked her car overnight after it broke down, but found it missing the next morning.CCTV footage showed one of the accused arriving in a i10 car fleeing with the parked car. After scanning footage of nearly 300 CCTV cameras, police traced the i10 and identified Amir as its buyer. He and Sarwar were subsequently detained.During questioning, police said, the accused allegedly disclosed that whenever vehicles were brought to their workshops, they installed GPS trackers, got duplicate keys made from a key maker, and waited for an opportunity to steal the cars by tracking their location.Police have recovered three stolen cars, the Hyundai i10 used in the crime, nine number plates, an iPad and a scanning sensor from the accused. Further investigation is underway.

# Two injured as two trucks collide on Rajkori flyover along NH-48

two trucks collide on Rajkori flyover, trucks collide on Rajkori flyover, Rajkori flyover, Rajkori flyover accident, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsCCTV footage is being examined, police said, adding that further investigation is underway. Police also said appropriate legal action would be taken as per law after the enquiry is completed.Two men sustained injuries in an accident on the Rajkori flyover along NH-48 involving two trucks on Tuesday afternoon, police said.According to the police, a PCR call regarding the incident was received at Vasant Kunj South police station. At the accident site, a member of the NHAI patrolling team informed them that a truck had collided with another.One of the injured victims, identified as Amresh Yadav (22), a resi-

dent of Narela, had already been shifted to AIIMS Trauma Centre in an NHAI ambulance. The other injured person was trapped inside one of the vehicles. He was rescued with the help of the NHAI team and the Delhi Fire Services, and was later taken to AIIMS Trauma Centre in a PCR van. He was identified as Viresh, a resident of Iqbalpur in Uttar Pradesh’s Hathras district.Police said both the vehicles were removed from the spot after a rescue operation, following which normal traffic movement was restored on the busy stretch.Preliminary enquiry revealed that both trucks were travelling from Delhi towards Gurugram when the offending vehicle allegedly hit the other truck from behind.CCTV footage is being examined, police said, adding that further investigation is underway.

# DU Standing Committee sends Economics, History courses back for revision as members raise objections



University of Delhi, delhi university, Economics History courses back for revision, du courses back for revision, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsreached out to Dean of Academics, K Ratnabali, but received no response.The University of Delhi’s Standing Committee on Tuesday allegedly sent back proposed courses and revised syllabi tabled by the departments of Economics and History after objections were raised in a meeting on Monday.According to the committee members, additional elective courses for the second semester of the two-year postgraduate programme in Economics were tabled, including Course 4, titled Economics and Gender.

The members allegedly argued that these themes were not correlated with Economics, were not aligned with the course titled Economics and Gender, and were “ideologically loaded”.Monami Sinha, a member of the Standing Committee, argued that “women’s workforce participation in India is among the lowest globally,” and that “social norms, domestic violence, and concerns around safety are key factors which determine workforce participation of

women”.Despite these clarifications, the members allegedly remained adamant, following which the course was allegedly sent back for revision.Meanwhile, as the Department of History tabled its Discipline-Specific Core (DSC) and Discipline-Specific Elective (DSE) courses for the second semester, members of the National Democratic Teachers’ Front (NDTF) allegedly objected, stating that the syllabus was biased and skewed towards global history.In the case of DSC 4, titled Themes in Ancient Indian Economy and Society, it is learnt that objections were allegedly raised to the inclusion of the term “society” in the title. Members argued that since the three DSCs address the economic history of India across the ancient, medieval and modern periods, the term “society” was a misfit and that readings relating to social aspects should be removed.Sinha countered this by stating that “economy and society are analytically inseparable, particularly in historical analysis,” and that “each has enduring and mutually constitutive effects on the other”.Despite this, it is learnt that several readings were allegedly asked to be dropped, including Shireen Moosvi’s ‘Work and Gender in Mughal India’ from People, Taxation, and Trade in Mughal India — which was allegedly removed from DSC 5. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M Eaton’s ‘Slavery in South Asian History’ was also allegedly dropped from DSC 4.Denying allegations of ideological interference, Standing Committee member Harender Tiwari said, “This syllabus was prepared in haste and there was mismatch of readings with the intended contents and therefore the house requested the head to revisit the syllabus to frame it properly with appropriate readings.”

# ‘Regressive set of rules’: JNUSU ‘tears’ notice put up at Narmada Hostel restricting visitors’ access

JNUSU, Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union, Narmada Hostel, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsIn 2019, the student union had protested against curfews and dress restrictions floated by the administration. The hostel policy introduced back then included fee hike and curfew restrictions.The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students’ Union (JNUSU) on Tuesday allegedly tore down what it described as a “regressive set of rules”, pasted on the walls of the university’s Narmada Hostel, objecting to restrictions governing visitor access and gender-based segregation in hostel spaces, The Indian Express has learnt. The hostel administration, however, denied that any such notice existed.

The notice, titled “Norms Governing Hostel Life”, laid down a series of conditions regulating residency, visitor access and guest stays, it is learnt. Among the provisions highlighted by students were clauses stating: “No Non-resident visitor shall be permitted to stay in the rooms of the residents after 10.30 p.m.” and “Only men can stay as guests in a men’s hostel and only women can stay as guests in women’s hostel.”Another clause stated: “Male visitors including male students or guests shall not be allowed in girls/women hostels”, except where permitted by the mess warden in dining halls. The notice also warned of disciplinary action, including eviction, for violations, stating: “If found guilty for the 3rd time he/she will be evicted from the hostel.”

Objecting to the notice, the JNUSU said that such provisions amounted to moral policing and control over students’ personal lives. “JNUSU tore off the regressive set of rules pasted on the walls of Narmada Hostel. This kind of separation and control will not be tolerated in JNU,” the union said in a statement.The students’ union also alleged intimidation of students who opposed the rules. “JNUSU also wrote to the wardens of Narmada regarding the fact that



some students have been threatened for raising voices against these rules,” it said.Speaking to JNUSU president Aditi Mishra said the notice was not an isolated development, but part of a longer pattern.“A hostel manual was introduced several years ago by the administration, which had several restrictions, and was patriarchal. They knew that students would not agree to such rules. Time and again, a few hostels try to impose these rules as most of them now have right wing members who are acting as wardens. That’s what happened in Narmada Hostel,” Mishra said.She added that the notice had been put up only recently. “The notice was put up two-three days ago and today, the JNUSU went ahead and tore it,” Mishra said.When contacted by , Narmada Hostel warden Rahul Raj said there was “no such notice.”The university administration also said it did not receive any formal complaint. Manuradha Chaudhary, Dean of Students’ Welfare, told The Indian Express that she had “received no complaints from any students or the hostel”.In 2019, the student union had protested against curfews and dress restrictions floated by the administration. The hostel policy introduced back then included fee hike and curfew restrictions.

# ‘Inspired’ by Tamil film, how Delhi youth ran QR code fraud to divert digital payments



Teenager arrested for QR fraud, QR fraud, QR scam, Chandni Chowk, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairsPolice said mobile phones seized from the accused contained extensive digital evidence, including over 100 edited and original QR codes, chats, screenshots and financial records. Further investigation is underway, police said.A 19-year-old, allegedly inspired by a Tamil film, ran a cyber fraud by tampering with QR codes to divert digital payments made by unsuspecting customers at retail stores to his personal bank account. The accused, identified as Manish Verma, was arrested on Monday.

The arrest followed a complaint registered by a customer who had visited a boutique in Chandni Chowk on December 13 to purchase a lehenga worth Rs 2.5 lakh. According to the FIR, the complainant made two UPI payments of Rs 90,000 and Rs 50,000 by scanning QR codes put up at the shop. The shop management later informed the customer that the amount had not been credited to their official bank account, even as the customer produced screenshots which showed the transactions were successful.During the investigation, police carried out a spot inspection of the shop, examined their billing system and the digital payment process, and recorded statements of the complainant, shop owner and sales staff. A technical analysis of the UPI transaction trail revealed that the payment had been diverted to an unrelated bank account.Further financial and digital analysis traced the amount to a bank account, which was being operated from Rajasthan. Based on mobile data, bank records and other digital footprints, police identified the accused and conducted an inter-state operation, apprehending him from Chaksu in Jaipur.“During questioning, the accused admitted to his involvement in the offence

and disclosed his modus operandi of manipulating genuine merchant QR codes to divert customer payments into his own bank account. Examination of the accused’s account confirmed receipt of the money too,” said DCP (North) Raja Banthia.“The accused further disclosed that the idea of manipulating QR codes was inspired by a movie titled Vettaian. He admitted adapting the concept for real-world execution using image-editing applications and digital payment platforms,” the DCP said.Police said mobile phones seized from the accused contained extensive digital evidence, including over 100 edited and original QR codes, chats, screenshots and financial records. Further investigation is underway, police said.

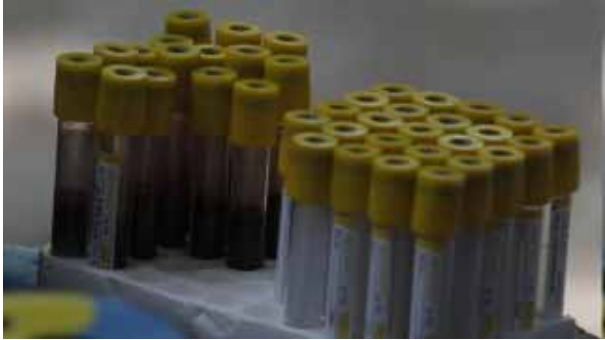
# ACB books transport official in disproportionate assets case, seizes properties

Hyderabad: The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) registered a case of assets disproportionate to known sources of income (DA case) against Mood Kishan, Deputy Transport Commissioner of Mahabubnagar district and conducted searches at multiple locations in the State on Tuesday.

During the searches, the ACB detected extensive assets, including a 50 per cent share in Lahari International Hotel in Nizamabad, ownership of a 3,000 sq yards Royaloak Furniture space, residential flats, 31 acres of agricultural and 10 acres of commercial lands in and around Nizamabad, a polyhouse and shed spread over 4,000 square feet, bank balances exceeding Rs. 1.37 crore, over one kilogram of gold ornaments, and two high-end cars.The ACB maintained that movable and immovable properties valued at Rs. 12.72 crore. Officials stated that the market value of the seized property is much higher. Searches were conducted at the officer’s residence and 11 other locations linked to his family members and associates in Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Mahabubnagar district.The ACB said further verification of additional assets is underway and the case remains under investigation.



## ‘Want 100% safe blood’: Maharashtra doctors urge NAT screening for risk-free transfusions



From the moment a child is diagnosed with thalassaemia, life becomes a cycle of relentless medical interventions: blood transfusions at least twice a month, chelation therapy to combat iron overload, and in some cases, surgeries such as splenectomy just to maintain basic health. Add to this the fear of contracting transfusion-transmitted infections such as Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B, or HIV. It is with these risks in mind that a growing number of experts in Maharashtra are calling for a decisive policy change to ensure safe blood transfusions. “Every unit of blood released from blood banks should be screened using Nucleic Amplification Test (NAT),” Dr Poornima Rao, Secretary, Indian Society of Blood Transfusion and Immunohaematology, Maharashtra chapter, told The Indian Express. “This is essential to prevent seropositivity post blood transfusion,” she added.

Dr Nita Munshi, President, Thalassaemia Society, Pune chapter, also made a strong case for NAT-screened blood transfusions for all children with thalassaemia major. “Throughout their lives, these medical challenges add profound emotional trauma on top of the already overwhelming physical, psychological, social, and financial burdens,” Dr Munshi said. “We want 100 per cent safe blood,” Ramesh Arora, Vice-President, Thalassaemia Society, added.

‘Children with thalassaemia are particularly vulnerable’

According to Dr Munshi, approximately 10,000 children are born with thalassemia major in India each year, and they require lifelong blood transfusions. The government provides these free of charge and has strength-

ened regulations for blood banks, making the risk of transfusion-transmitted infections extremely low. During the first year of life, transfusions are given once a month, gradually increasing to once every three weeks. By the age of five, children typically receive transfusions at least twice a month, with the volume of blood adjusted according to their weight. “This is a genetic disorder in which a child inherits two mutated genes, one from each parent. Children born with thalassaemia major usually develop symptoms of severe anaemia within the first year of life. Apart from chronic fatigue due to the inability to produce normal adult haemoglobin, repeated blood transfusions can lead to iron buildup in the organs. Daily medication is required to manage this excess iron and prevent complications,” she said. Dr Munshi observed that with a strict regimen of antiretroviral therapy, the HIV viral load can be effectively suppressed and highlighted one case that involved a child who was dependent on transfusions and contracted HIV at the age of nine. “Testing revealed the viral load in the blood, but with a disciplined medication routine and careful management, the child was able to lead a near-normal life. He is 35 and doing well,” she noted. However, there are tragic cases where patients can succumb to secondary infections, she said. “Children with thalassaemia have weakened immune systems and are particularly vulnerable to secondary infections such as tuberculosis or fungal diseases. Managing these conditions often increases the pill burden, with daily medications rising from two to six tablets to address iron overload. HIV infection can further complicate matters by lowering platelet counts and causing anaemia,” Dr Munshi pointed out. NAT screening at blood banks can reduce HIV transmission by shortening the window period, Dr I S Gilada, President Emeritus, AIDS Society of India, told The Indian Express.

Experts say that while India has achieved over 45 per cent decline in annual new HIV infections since the early 2000s, mandatory screening of all donated blood should be ensured. “It is crucial to ensure mandatory screening of all donated blood, strengthen regulation of blood banks and reduce transfusion-related transmission,” Dr Gilada said, adding that it will also prevent the Jharkhand-like scenario where five children with thalassemia were infected with HIV due to contaminated blood from Chaibasa Sadar Hospital. sAnuradha Mascarenhas is a journalist with

## 10 ways of seeing: How a group exhibition in Pune sheds light on the reflections of emerging, established artists



One of the paintings on display is motivated by the shloka, Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya, to understand “a woman’s inner strength and her aspiration to rise beyond the darkness of limitation into the light of self-realisation”. Pune’s Vesavar Art Gallery is doing its second annual Year-End Art Showcase 2025, where 10 artists, from up-and-coming names to those whose signatures have made a mark, reveal the shapes of the future. Pune’s Vesavar Art Gallery is doing its second annual Year-End Art Showcase 2025, where 10 artists, from up-and-coming names to those whose signatures have made a mark, reveal the shapes of the future. (Express Photo)

As 2025 draws to a close, it is difficult not to gaze back and then turn our eyes forward. Pune’s Vesavar Art Gallery is doing this with its second annual Year-End Art Showcase 2025, where 10 artists, from up-and-coming names to those whose signatures have made a mark, reveal the shapes of the future. The collection is a melange of styles — from glass to acrylic, and subjects, from nature to women to the self. “I am encouraged by the dedication and hard work that young artists are putting into their art to find their own styles. Established artists, too, are relentlessly pursuing their truth, creating works that are powerful and thought-provoking,” says Pranali Harpude, founder of the gallery, with Kavita Bhandari. The two have curated the show, which will extend till December 31. short article insert Walk around the gallery, and you are faced with the power of intense self-reflection and spiritual thoughts. Yash Divakar Chawardol’s experience of the layers within, which he realised during Vipassana Meditation, shapes his abstract works. Priyanka Sawant is motivated by the shloka, Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya (Lead me from darkness to light), to understand “a woman’s inner strength and her aspiration to rise beyond the darkness of limitation into the light of self-realisation, empowerment, and freedom. It symbolises the eternal quest for knowledge, truth, and liberation from fear and constraint”. Smita Marathe’s colourful art speaks of “a single spark in the meaningless, dark void” at the beginning, when even time did not exist. “This is the same gleam we seek in our lives, the quiet hope that arises in moments of chaos,” she says. The collection is a melange of styles - - from glass to acrylic, and subjects, from nature to women to the self. The collection is a melange of styles — from glass to acrylic, and subjects, from nature to women to the self. Shravni Dagade’s paintings reflect the quest for peace of mind as she takes up an empty, white canvas and begins to play with colours. According to her, the different angles and shapes depict a variety of emotions, “the colours represent my extremes and the textures offer glimpses of who I am”. Santosh Shirsat, who has studied himself as the focus of his paintings for more than 20 years, presents the face. “The shape of the face remains the same, and the ‘self’ in it is reduced. The face is not my own or that of a particular society, but only a human face, trying to express various emotions, such as sadness, compassion, fear, anxiety, anger, and lust...” he says. Mohammed Sadikot’s works in the exhibition are a part of a new series, in which the lines between the human body and the vegetal world are undefined and shifting. The figures in his works are distorted, so that hips could be mounds of earth and ribs can

be mistaken for ridges on a bark, while the arms and legs are root-like stilts. It is the artist’s way of telling the viewers to “show down and reconsider harmony”. 10 artists, from up-and-coming names to those whose signatures have made a mark, reveal the shapes of the future 10 artists, from up-and-coming names to those whose signatures have made a mark, reveal the shapes of the future (Manoj Darekar makes us look at the cityscape and the outdoors under a blue sky as if through the wires of a cage. Rupesh Pawar, who comes from a farming background, works with oil but aims to give his works a quality of lightness and transparency. “I avoid rigid formats and work on uncut handmade paper to let each painting grow organically,” he says. It is fitting that one of the captivating works has faces of glass. These are by Narendrasingh Bais, who has mastered working with glass for over 25 years. Taking inspirations from nature and regular life, he dives into memory, heritage, and identity, creating a dialogue between craftsmanship and storytelling. “Glass is more than a material, it is a living language that captures time and the humavarn experience in its most authentic form,” says the artist’s conceptual note. Saikat Bakshi, a well-known artist and author, conveys the idea of being trapped, of the false notion of free will and freedom in today’s world. Bakshi’s painting, ‘Moments Die, Memories Don’t’, captures the irony that the dead moments stay confined in the form of fossilised memories. “We never escape the prison of our memories even if the moments disappear,” he says. The other conceptual art piece, ‘Trapped’, depicts the illusion of a blue sky through the open window, while the upper section of the opening reminds us of the stifling reality that the image of the sky is just a sticker pasted on a solid brick wall.

## With wins in 3 wards, Kejriwal says public's trust returning to AAP

AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj in a press conference, meanwhile, hit out at Chief Minister Reka Gupta and alleged she failed her first test after being in power for nine months. AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj in a press conference, meanwhile, hit out at Chief Minister Reka Gupta and alleged she failed her first test after being in power for nine months. Following the MCD bypolls results, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal Wednesday said public trust is once again returning to the party.

“In this corporation by-election... the Aam Aadmi Party fielded its dedicated workers in the electoral arena, and the people of Delhi have made it clear through their mandate that public support for Delhi is continuously strengthening towards the AAP. In just 10 months, the public’s trust is once again rapidly returning towards the Aam Aadmi Party. Delhi is very soon returning towards positive politics and good works,” he wrote on X.

Of the 12 wards that went to polls, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 7 seats, AAP bagged 3 seats, while Congress and the All India Front Bloc won one seat each. AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj in a press conference, meanwhile, hit out at Chief Minister Reka Gupta and alleged she failed her first test after being in power for nine months. “This MCD election was a test of CM Rekha Gupta’s political existence. To save herself and the party, she went multiple times to every ward,” he alleged. “Delhi will soon get a new Chief Minister,” he added. Bharadwaj also accused the BJP of manipulating the final vote count in the Ashok Vihar ward. “Even a day before the election, she [Rekha Gupta] went to the Ashok Vihar ward and distributed free cylinders. The official election website showed that AAP had won the seat with a margin of 179 votes, but in the end, BJP won,” he claimed. According to the vote count, up to the ninth round, the AAP candidate was leading by 422 votes, closely followed by the BJP. However, in the final round, BJP won with a margin of 405 votes.

## Send Shiv Sena MLA Santosh Bangar to jail, says Supriya Sule after video shows him instructing woman in polling booth



Nationalist Congress Party (SP) Lok Sabha MP Supriya Sule Wednesday urged Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to jail Shiv Sena MLA Santosh Bangar within 24 hours. Bangar has been accused of violating election rules by entering a polling booth in the Hingoli district and guiding a woman voter when she came to cast her vote in the local body polls Tuesday. “The CM should take action against Santosh Bangar for violating the election norms within 24 hours. He was seen directing a woman on how to vote. Bangar should be sent to jail,” said Sule in New Delhi.

The Baramati MP said those in power have been found violating the norms. “They have been violating election norms brazenly. I don’t know which rules all these violations fall under. This is not Maharashtra’s culture, but those in power are blatantly indulging in inappropriate

## Man kills friend after argument by hitting him with a cleaning mop in Thane

mumbai policeThe Vartak Nagar police in Thane identified the victim as Bhanu Pratap Singh, 45, a resident of Chincholi Bunder in Mumbai’s Malad West, and his friend as Raj Kumar Yadav, who works as a driver for Kedar Joshi, owner of the bungalow. A 28-year-old man allegedly beat his friend to death with a cleaning mop over an argument while both were consuming alcohol at a bungalow in Yeoor, Thane, on Tuesday. The police detained the man after his friend’s body was found in the backyard of the bungalow on Wednesday morning.

The Vartak Nagar police in Thane identified the victim as Bhanu Pratap Singh, 45, a resident of Chincholi Bunder in Mumbai’s Malad West, and his friend as Raj Kumar Yadav, who works as a driver for Kedar Joshi, owner of the bungalow. short article insert According to the police, Singh and Yadav, both natives of Uttar Pradesh and childhood friends, went to Yeoor and drank alcohol in an open place on the premises of the bungalow on Tuesday night. They had an argument, during which Singh allegedly abused Yadav and his daughter, which annoyed him, and the argument turned into a fight. Joshi and his family were not there.

“In a fit of rage, Yadav picked up a cleaning mop and started hitting Singh on his head and other parts of his body till he died,” said Pravin Mane, Senior Inspector,

## Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis launches work for India’s first urban tunnel project: ‘Historic day for Mumbai’



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Wednesday kicked off work on the ambitious Orange Gate to Marine Drive Urban Tunnel Project with the formal launch of the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM). The country’s first urban tunnel project aims to ease Mumbai’s traffic congestion and enhance connectivity, particularly for citizens travelling from South Mumbai to the Navi Mumbai International Airport. Fadnavis said that while the Eastern Freeway allows citizens to reach South Mumbai from the eastern suburbs in 20-25 minutes, the subsequent traffic congestion adds another 30 to 45 minutes to the journey. Furthermore, residents of the western suburbs and South Mumbai have to take a long and arduous route to reach the new Navi Mumbai Airport. “The Orange Gate tunnel was conceived as the solution to this problem,” he said. Fadnavis said that they initially considered building a flyover, but it was deemed impossible due to space constraints and the area’s massive traffic volume.

Terming it an “engineering marvel” and highlighting the project’s technical complexity, the chief minister stated that the tunnel will pass beneath approximately 700 properties, century-old heritage buildings, and the Western and Central Railway lines. It will be 50 metres below the operational Metro Line 3. The project targets completion by December 2028, with the implementing agency aiming to finish the work six months earlier. The work has been entrusted to Larsen and Toubro (L&T).

“Once the Worli-Sewri Sea Link opens next year and the Coastal Road connection is established, people from the western suburbs will have two options to reach the Navi Mumbai Airport. This project will save thousands of hours for thousands of people, making today a historic day for Mumbai’s transport,” the chief minister added. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde stated that the Orange Gate–Marine Drive tunnel will be a major relief for Mumbai’s traffic. “Just as projects like Metro 3, Metro 2A, and Metro 7 have provided relief to the city, this underground tunnel will also transform the face of the transport system,” Shinde said. At a glance The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) is undertaking the construction of this underground road at a cost of around Rs 8,056 crore.\* The Eastern and

things,” she said. Sule said she entered politics to serve the people, not to indulge in such a violation of the rules. “Such a scenario is disturbing. I have not entered politics for personal gain but to serve the people. But what I am noticing is very painful,” she said.

The Hingoli police Tuesday filed an FIR against Bangar for allegedly compromising election secrecy. Reacting to the FIR filed against Bangar, Fadnavis said such behaviour damaged the credibility of the electoral process. “I think at least people’s representatives should show respect to democracy. They should think about how they are behaving during elections and what message they are sending among the people,” he said. The alleged violation of the norm took place at a polling booth in the Kalamnuri area of the Hingoli district. In a viral video, Bangar is seen instructing a woman voter on how to vote. He allegedly directed the woman voter to press a specific button. He has also been accused of sloganeering and using his mobile phone. The Hingoli election officials said the FIR was filed following a thorough investigation into the violations. The collectorate announced that a report will be submitted to the State Election Commission. Voting took place in 246 municipal councils and 42 nagar panchayats as part of the first phase of Maharashtra local body elections Tuesday. The counting will be held on December 21 after polling in some municipal councils and nagar panchayats has been postponed to December 20.



Vartak Nagar police station. Yadav allegedly dumped Singh’s body behind the bungalow and fled from there. After locals found the body and informed the police in the morning, an accidental death report was filed. During further investigation, it was confirmed that Singh had been killed and that Yadav had been with him the previous night. The police then launched a manhunt and nabbed Yadav from Thane. Yadav lived in a rented room in Vartak Nagar along with his wife and daughter. Kedar Joshi filed a complaint after the police informed him of the murder at his bungalow. The police have recorded his statement and will register a murder case against Yadav, who they said had confessed to the crime.

Western suburbs of Mumbai and Navi Mumbai will be connected via this underground route.\* Travel time will be reduced by 15–20 minutes.\* It will help in reducing noise and air pollution, besides saving fuel. Project details\* This is India’s first urban tunnel project that would pass underneath densely populated areas.\* The total length of the project is 9.96 km, including approximately 7 km of the underground tunnel.\* Each tunnel will have two lanes, each 3.2 metres wide, and one emergency lane. The speed limit in both tunnels will be 80 kmph.

\* For safety, both tunnels will be connected by cross-passages at intervals of 300 metres.\* The tunnels are proposed to allow mechanical ventilation for air circulation, have fire suppression systems, adequate lighting, and an Intelligent Transport System (ITS) for appropriate and modern traffic management.\* The underground alignment of the project minimises land acquisition, preserves the urban environment, and ensures minimal disruption to the city.\* It connects major infrastructure projects like the Mumbai Coastal Road and the Atal Setu.\* The machine used for this project is a Slurry Shield Type Tunnel Boring Machine (Slurry Type TBM), designed for precise and safe excavation in Mumbai’s coastal underground strata, which is mixed and rocky.\* This technology has been proven to be efficient as it was also used in the Mumbai Coastal Road project.

## Hyderabad couple gets seven years jail in loan fraud case

Hyderabad: A local court convicted and sentenced a couple involved in a loan fraud case registered by the Telangana Crime Investigation Department (CID) to seven years of rigorous imprisonment on Wednesday. A fine of Rs 30,000 was imposed on them.

Vuppala Dasarath Netha (57) and his wife Vuppala Laxmi Bai had obtained a loan of Rs 24,00,199 from the SBH Aircargo branch in 2007 by submitting forged and fabricated documents. The couple also created multiple sale registrations and obtained loans from two other banks, State Bank of Mysore, Kukatpally, and Canara Bank, Kundanbagh.

They defaulted on all loan repayments, causing financial losses to the lending banks, said Additional DGP CID Telangana, Charu Sinha.

During the trial, a total of 17 witnesses were examined and 60 documents were exhibited, including the forged Agreement of Sale cum GPA, mortgage deeds and bank records.

After the trial, the court convicted and sentenced them to seven years RI and imposed a fine of Rs 30,000. They were shifted to prison.



# Yunus govt had Osman Hadi killed to derail polls, says slain radical’s brother



Dhaka: As Bangladesh's political landscape turned volatile in recent days, Sharif Omar Hadi, the brother of slain Sharif Osman Hadi, has accused a vested quarter within the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government of orchestrating the killing of his brother to derail the February 2026 polls, local media reported.Slamming the interim government, during a programme organised by Inqilab Moncho outside the National Museum in Dhaka on Tuesday, spokesperson of the group Omar Hadi said, "It is you who had Osman Hadi killed, and now you are trying to foil the election by using this as an issue."

Omar added that his brother supported holding the national election by February and called on the Bangladeshi authorities not to hinder the election environment, the country's leading newspaper, The Daily Star,

reported."Ensure a speedy trial of the killers so the election environment is not harmed. The government has failed to show us any visible progress. If justice for Osman Hadi is not delivered, you too will be compelled to flee Bangladesh one day," Omar Hadi stated.Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber, while speaking at the rally, reiterated the 30-working-day ultimatum given to the interim government to identify and arrest those responsible for the killing, first announced in a press statement earlier this week.Earlier on Monday, Inqilab Moncho threatened to launch a movement to topple the Yunus-led interim government if justice is not delivered in the murder of its spokesperson, Hadi, local media reported.Addressing a press conference in Dhaka, the platform's member secretary Abdullah Al Jaber said that a 24-hour ultimatum announced during Hadi's funeral on December 20 expired without any action from the interim government's Home Advisor Jahangir Alam Chowdhury or the Bangladeshi authorities.He alleged that neither the Home Advisor nor his special assistant attended the ministry's briefing, calling it a move to trivialise the incident.Later in the day, the organisation also called for the immediate resignations of the Home Advisor, his special assistant, and the law advisor, holding them responsible for the killing of its convener, Hadi. It further demanded that judicial proceedings in the Hadi killing case be completed within a maximum of 30 working days through a speedy trial tribunal.Bangladesh has witnessed alarming violence targeting minorities, media houses, cultural institutions and diplomatic missions under the Yunus-led interim government following the death of Hadi on December 18.

# U.S. judge rejects business group's challenge to Trump's \$100,000 H-1B visa fee

A federal judge on Tuesday rejected a challenge by the largest U.S. business lobby group to U.S. President Donald Trump's \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers, saying it fell under his broad powers to regulate immigration.U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell in Washington, D.C., rejected arguments by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that the fee conflicts with federal immigration law and will lead many companies, hospitals and other employers to cut jobs and the services they provide to the public.

"The parties' vigorous debate over the ultimate wisdom of this political judgment is not within the province of the courts," Justice Howell wrote. "So long as the actions dictated by the policy decision and articulated in the Proclamation fit within the confines of the law, the Proclamation must be upheld."Justice Howell is an appointee of Democratic former President Barack Obama. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.The Chamber's executive vice-president and chief counsel, Daryl Joseffer, said many small and medium-sized businesses will be unable to afford the fee."We are disappointed in the court's decision and are considering further legal options to ensure that the H-1B visa program can operate as Congress intended," Mr. Joseffer said in a statement.The H-1B program allows U.S. employers to hire foreign workers with training in speciality fields. Technology companies in particular rely heavily on workers who receive H-1B visas. The program offers 65,000 visas annually, with another 20,000 visas for workers with advanced degrees, approved for three to six years.Mr. Trump's order would



sharply raise the cost of obtaining H-1B visas, which had typically come with about \$2,000 to \$5,000 in fees depending on various factors.The Chamber in its lawsuit says the new fee would force businesses that rely on the H-1B program to choose between dramatically increasing their labor costs or hiring fewer highly-skilled foreign workers.A group of Democratic-led U.S. states and a coalition of employers, nonprofits and religious organizations have also filed lawsuits challenging the fee.Mr. Trump in an order imposing the fee invoked his power under federal immigration law to restrict the entry of certain foreign nationals that would be detrimental to U.S. interests.Justice Howell on Tuesday (December 23) said Mr. Trump had adequately backed up his claim that the H-1B program was displacing U.S. workers, including by citing examples of companies that laid off thousands of Americans while simultaneously petitioning for H-1B visas.

# New Epstein files dump contains multiple Trump references

A new batch of Jeffrey Epstein files released on Tuesday (December 23, 2025) contains numerous references to U.S. President Donald Trump, including documents detailing flights he took on his then friend's private jet, and other claims that his Justice Department described as "untrue and sensationalist."The latest release contains reams of previously unseen material from the investigation into Epstein, a wealthy U.S. financier who died in jail in 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking underage girls.

A first collection of heavily redacted files made public last Friday sparked criticism that the Justice Department was deliberately excluding references to Trump.Mr. Trump figures prominently, however, in the thousands of documents published on Tuesday, underlining his close ties to the disgraced financier who was already a convicted sex offender when the more serious trafficking case began.A card that makes a crude reference to U.S. President Donald Trump, purportedly written by convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein to Larry Nassar, who is serving a life sentence for sexually abusing hundreds of girls, is shown in this image released by the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., U.S., on December 23, 2025, as part of a new trove of documents from its investigations into the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The postmark on its envelope is Virginia, not New York, where Epstein was jailed, and indicates the envelope was processed three days after his death in August 2019.A card that makes a crude reference to U.S. President Donald Trump, purportedly written by convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein to Larry Nassar, who is serving a life sentence for sexually abusing hundreds of girls, is shown in this image released by the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., U.S., on December 23, 2025, as part of a new trove of documents from its investigations into the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The postmark on its envelope is Virginia, not New York, where Epstein was jailed, and indicates the envelope was processed three days after his death in August 2019. | Photo Credit: via ReutersThe Justice Department issued a statement defending the 79-year-old Republican shortly after the files dropped, saying some documents "contain untrue and sensationalist claims made against President Trump."Mr. Trump, who is not accused of any wrongdoing, fought for months to prevent the release of the vast trove of documents about Epstein.But a rebellion inside Mr. Trump's Republican Party forced him to sign off on a law mandating release of all the documents.The extraordinary move reflected intense political pressure to address what many Americans, including Mr. Trump's own supporters, have long suspected to be a cover-up to protect rich and powerful men in Epstein's orbit.Mr. Trump said on Monday he did not approve of the file dumps, expressing concern that



people who "innocently met" Epstein over the years risked having their reputations smeared.

"Everybody was friendly with this guy," he said. He did not immediately react to Tuesday's release.Despite attempts to distance himself, Mr. Trump was friends for years with Epstein and has given different accounts of how he ended their relationship.Most recently, he said he threw him out of his Florida golf club for being "a creep." However, he has also said they fell out when Epstein "stole" young women working in the spa at his club.The latest documents add to evidence that Mr. Trump was close to Epstein.They include a January 2020 note from New York federal prosecutors who were investigating Epstein's associate, Ghislaine Maxwell, detailing Trump's repeated travel — eight trips between 1993 and 1996 — on the financier's private jet."Records we received yesterday reflect that Donald Trump traveled on Epstein's private jet many more times than previously has been reported (or that we were aware)," it says.One flight reportedly had just three passengers: Epstein, Trump and an unidentified 20-year-old.DelaysOne Trump reference was swiftly disputed by the Department of Justice. A handwritten letter released in Tuesday's tranche was purportedly written by Epstein, while in jail, to Larry Nassar, the former U.S. gymnastics doctor who was imprisoned over rampant abuse of female athletes.Epstein is shown complaining to Nassar that they are incarcerated while the "president shares our love of young, nubile girls. When a young beauty walked by he loved to 'grab snatch.'"In a statement the DOJ said the FBI "has confirmed this alleged letter from Jeffrey Epstein to Larry Nassar is FAKE," saying it was postmarked three days after Epstein's death, and entered the mail system in Virginia, despite him being jailed in New York.Trump critics say the government continues to slow-walk the release of embarrassing material.At least two emails in the cache mention 10 unidentified "co-conspirators" of Epstein, and Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called for the Justice Department to look into potential Epstein accomplices."The Department of Justice needs to shed more light on who was on the list, how they were involved, and why they chose not to prosecute," the senator said.Maxwell,

# PM Shehbaz offers talks to Imran Khan's party to ease political tension



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday (December 23, 2025) offered talks to the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf to ease political tension in the country, days after the party founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 17 years in jail each in a corruption case.Mr. Sharif made the offer while presiding over a federal cabinet meeting in Islamabad after recent overtures by the opposition leaders.

"These days, PTI and its allies are talking about dialogue. I have repeatedly stated in the National Assembly that if the PTI is serious about negotiations, the government is equally prepared," the Prime Minister said.Mr. Sharif

also said that talks could only move forward if they focused on "legitimate issues" and were free of "blackmailing". He stressed that political harmony among all parties was essential for Pakistan's development and prosperity.His offer comes days after the opposition alliance - Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP) - of which PTI is a part, said that its door to dialogue was open.

The issue of talks between the opposition, mainly the PTI, and the government has been in the news, but no concrete steps have been taken by any side to kick-start the process.Last year in December, the PTI and government officials started a dialogue, but the process was stalled on issues like the formation of two judicial commissions to probe the protests of May 9, 2023 and Nov 26, 2024, and the release of PTI prisoners.The offer for talks comes ahead of anticipated protests by Khan's supporters in the coming days. Khan had recently called for countrywide demonstrations following his conviction in a corruption case.The ongoing incarceration of Khan and critical remarks from his party leaders have contributed to an atmosphere of uncertainty.Khan, 73, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces multiple cases launched against him since his ouster from power in April 2022.Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 17 years in jail each by a court on Saturday (December 20, 2025) in the Toshakhana 2 corruption case.

# Assam tribal council chief’s house torched as anger over ‘encroachers’ explodes

Protestors torched the ancestral residence of an Assam tribal council chief on Monday (December 22, 2025) for his alleged failure to evict "outsiders" from two categories of government-designated grazing reserves.At least three protestors were among four people injured in clashes with security personnel at Donkamokam in central Assam's West Karbi Anglong district, where the Karbi tribe is in the majority. The place is 155 km southeast of Guwahati.

West Karbi Anglong and Karbi Anglong, located further east, are Sixth Schedule areas governed by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), where the Bharatiya Janata Party is in power. The protestors marched 26km from West Karbi Anglong's Kheroni, where they had been on hunger strike for a fortnight, demanding the eviction of "non-locals" allegedly occupying large swathes of village grazing reserves (VGRs) and professional grazing reserves (PGRs).Tension gripped the Kheroni area after the police picked up nine protestors on Sunday (December 21, 2025) night. This enraged the protestors, who blocked the roads and vandalised shops before proceeding to Donkamokam.

The protestors claimed the security personnel used force and fired blank shots to disperse them. As a section of the mob fought a pitched battle with the security personnel, another attacked the ancestral house of Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member of the KAAC, and set it on fire.A spokesperson of the KAAC in Diphu, the council headquarters 100 km east of Donkamokam, said Mr. Ronghang was away at the time of the incident.While the security personnel brought the situation in Donkamokam under control, violence and arson reportedly targeting "out-



siders" spread to other parts of West Karbi Anglong district.Given the gravity of the situation, the State government rushed additional forces to the violence-hit areas. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma deputed Education Minister Ranaj Pegu to visit these areas and assess the law-and-order position.Legal hurdlesLater, Mr. Ronghang told journalists that his government was following up on the eviction demand, but was hamstrung by legal hurdles. He said the KAAC administration served eviction notices on the settlers, but they challenged the notices in the Gauhati High Court."The case is in court. Had I done anything, I would have been punished for contempt of court," he said.In February 2024, the KAAC issued eviction notices to about 10,000 people accused of occupying 7,184.7 acres of VGR and PGR in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts. A large number of these people charged with encroachment are Hindi speakers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

# West Bengal student in Bangladesh says, ‘Feel more scared as an Indian than as a Hindu’



A young man from West Bengal studying in Bangladesh and also tracing his family roots there said that until recently, it was easy to get accommodation in that country as an Indian but now it was the opposite.According to Supriyo Saha (name changed on request), the situation in Bangladesh is drastically different from what it was in mid-2024, when an uprising forced the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee the country, with mobs now replacing protesting citizens, and most mobsters having no idea what they were fighting.

"Back then, people were enjoying the post-uprising scenarios. A large group of Awami League supporters went underground, and the stakeholders of the July [2024] revolution, which included almost every civil citizen, were cherishing the newly acquired freedom of speech. But now, many of those who were on the streets back then are busy with their lives, and their space has been occupied by the mob," Mr. Saha said."I hardly have a proper explanation for the mob. These are pressure groups formed with different political motives. Often individuals inside the mob have very little idea about why and what they are doing as a group or who they are serving. They get motivation from YouTubers, social media pages, and also by money, I guess," the young Indian, a Hindu, said.His family in West Bengal, needless to say, is far more worried about him now than they were in the middle of 2024. Until recently, his mother called him just once a day to check on him, but now WhatsApp calls are made almost on an hourly basis.

"My life in Bangladesh is still not as bad because as a Bengali, I don't stand out. Also, there are still people in this country who have empathy, but I don't know for how long. Back when I came, about three years ago, I easily got a room on rent because I was an Indian, but now I won't. Today they have mixed reactions about India — some still see it as a developed country which they can rely on, but many now see it as a hegemonic country. Though face-to-face, I haven't got a bad reaction," Mr. Saha said.When asked why he wasn't returning to India, he said he wanted to complete his course and also finish his personal project on family roots."I remember the first time I went to the place from where my family had migrated. I didn't know a soul there, but I was received with warmth. What a memorable morning it was. But today I sense tension in the atmosphere. More than my Hindu identity, I feel fear because of my Indian Identity," Mr. Saha said.According to him, the situa-

tion was getting bad not just because of tension related to religion but also because of mob culture and fake news. "I feel Bangladesh is going through a rough patch. Though they are trying to internally change some things, the situation can get worse without strong governance. Many of their citizens are trying to leave the country," he said.

# Two militants among six arrested in Manipur



"Two persons were held on Tuesday (December 23, 2025) after arms and ammunition were recovered from their possession in areas under the Porompat Police Station limits in Imphal East," the statement said.

Six people, including two militants and two alleged arms dealers, were arrested from various locations in Manipur's valley districts, police said on Wednesday (December 24, 2025)."One active cadre of the banned Prepak (G-5) was apprehended from Keibi Heikak Mapan in Imphal East district on Tuesday (December 24, 2025)," a police statement said."A 45-year-old member of the proscribed Peoples' Liberation Army was arrested from his residential locality at Kakching Khunou in Kakching district," it said.

"Two persons were held on Tuesday (December 23, 2025) after arms and ammunition were recovered from their possession in areas under the Porompat Police Station limits in Imphal East," the statement said."Two alleged arms smugglers were arrested from Keibi Awang Leikai Yaibirel in Imphal East district," it said. Search operations have been conducted in Manipur since ethnic violence broke out two years ago.More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. The Centre had, on February 13, imposed the President's rule in the state after Chief Minister N. Biren Singh resigned.The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation.



# How expired food products of brands imported from UK, US & Dubai were sold to high-end Indian stores



Expired food products imported at throwaway prices, Expired food products imported, Oreo, Lipton, Ritz, Kelloggs, Fanta, Starbucks, Nescafe, Heinz, Hellmans, Kikkoman, Kewpie, Lindt, Nutella, Cadbury, Pringles, Expired food products imported sold, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairs the time these consignments reached India, most of the products had already expired or become unfit for human consumption. Instead of destroying them as mandated by law, the accused illegally 're-manufactured' the products," said DCP Crime Branch Aditya Gautam.

A total of 43,762 kg of food items and 14,665 litres of beverages, 6,047 kgs of candies, biscuits and wafers, along with 23,050 kg of various sauces, vinegars and other condiments — these were among the expired food items worth Rs 4.3 crore seized as the Delhi Police Crime Branch busted a highly organised racket, officers said on Tuesday. The accused illegally imported, repackaged and sold expired international branded food products — bought at throwaway prices — to high-end grocery stores, such as Modern Bazaar and Nature's Basket, and e-commerce platforms, police added.Seven persons have been arrested so far. Police said the accused sold expired products of multiple brands, including Oreo, Lipton, Ritz, Kelloggs, Fanta, Starbucks, Nescafe, Heinz, Hellmans, Kikkoman, Kewpie, Lindt, Nutella, Cadbury, Pringles, and Lays. The racket posed a serious threat to public health, as several of the seized items included baby food and other consumables, officers underlined.

The operation was carried out by the Cyber Cell of the Crime Branch following tip-offs about a network that was bringing in expired food items or items nearing expiry date

from abroad at throwaway prices and fraudulently selling them as fresh, imported products across India. Raids were conducted in the Pahari Dheeraj and Faiz Ganj areas of Sadar Bazar, a hub of wholesale markets in Delhi.During the raid, officials from the Food Safety department of the Delhi government were called to the spot, samples were collected as per protocol, and the consignments were seized, said police.According to the police, the mastermind was identified as Atal Jaiswal (54).

"Investigation revealed that the mastermind was importing international food products, which were expired or about to get expired, at extremely low prices through Mumbai-based wholesale agents, who sourced consignments from the United Kingdom, United States, Dubai, and other countries. By the time these consignments reached India, most of the products had already expired or become unfit for human consumption. Instead of destroying them as mandated by law, the accused illegally 're-manufactured' the products," said DCP Crime Branch Aditya Gautam.

Police said manufacturing and expiry dates were altered, labels and product information were changed, fake barcodes, batch numbers and MRPs were affixed, and the items were repackaged to make them appear like they had been freshly imported."These tampered products were then supplied in bulk to Modern Bazaar, Food Story, Nature Basket, major retail chains, prominent malls, and various e-commerce platforms across India, generating huge illegal profits while endangering public health. The recovery of complete printing, sealing, and date-altering machinery confirms the existence of a full-fledged illegal adulteration and repackaging factory," said DCP Gautam.Among those arrested are Shiv Kumar (40) from Jharkhand; Bishwajit Dhara (25) from Malviya Nagar in Delhi; Vinod (43) and Arun Kumar (30) from Darbhanga in Bihar; Vijay Kant (50) from Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh; and Shamim (30) from Etah in Uttar Pradesh.A large quantity of specialised equipment used for forgery and repackaging — such as hand-held inkjet printers, cartridges, sealing machines, chemicals, glue guns and fake barcode stickers — was also recovered.A case has been registered under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Crime Branch police station. Police said further investigation is underway to trace the supply chain, identify retail and online buyers, and dismantle the entire network involved in the illegal trade of expired and adulterated food products.

# How Indian States are following a pro-incumbency trend



The recently concluded Bihar Assembly election highlights an interesting point; that Nitish Kumar, who has taken oath as Chief Minister for the 10th time, has been able to retain the government even after nearly two decades of ruling the State. This shows us a contrast between global and Indian State-level patterns of (anti) incumbency. In many major democracies across the world, voters displayed a strong sense of anti-incumbency.The defeat of the U.S. democrats, the U.K. conservatives, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party and South Africa's African National Congress reflect that people in these countries were willing to use their elections as an instrument to address perceived non-performance of the government and demand an alternative in power. Senegal's election similarly captured youth anger and a generational push against elites.

A pro-incumbency trendIndian State assembly elections held over the last few years indicate a trend in the opposite direction. Many governments during this period got re-elected, indicating a strong pro-incumbency sentiment. The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party government got re-elected in Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, despite spirited opposition campaigns. These governments were re-elected, beating anti-incumbency, because the ruling party anchored its election campaign pushing narratives of stability, 'double engine ki sarkaar' (the idea that the Centre and the State is ruled by the same party) for faster development, welfare delivery and strong leadership, which triumphed the narrative propagated by opposition parties. In Gujarat, the BJP extended its record to a seventh straight term, while Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha converted personal credibility and targeted schemes into multi-term mandates. West Bengal's 2021 mandate for Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, against a highly contested BJP challenge, highlights pro-incumbency in a polarised contest. These examples may look like isolated cases of States being voted back to power, with the recent Bihar Assembly election being one of them, but Indian elections since 1952 had witnessed periods of pro and anti-incumbency.The first few years (1952-1966) were a period of pro-incumbency. Out of the 39 assembly elections held during this period, almost 85% governments got re-elected. But the periods of 1967-79 and 1980-1988 witnessed both pro and anti-incumbency trends. During 1967-79, out of 82 assembly elections, 54% of governments got re-elected, while 46% of them got voted out. Similarly, during the 1980-88 period, of 53 assembly elections, 51% governments got re-elected while 49% governments got voted out.

However, the periods of 1989-98 and 1999-03 witnessed a very strong trend of anti-incumbency. During 1989-98, of 63 assembly elections, 71% of incumbent governments were voted out. The trend continued during the 1999-03 period, where of the 31 assembly elections, 61% of incumbent governments were voted out.

The trend changed again during the 2004-15 period, which witnessed a mix of anti and pro-incumbency. In this period, nearly 55% incumbent governments got re-elected, while 45% governments were defeated. The 2016-2018 period has seen a strong anti-incumbency trend where nearly 75% of incumbent governments got defeated. This is understandable, for when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government came to power at the Centre in 2014, many Congress-ruled States lost in subsequent State elections.We are again witnessing a strong pro-incumbency trend. Many BJP ruled States have witnessed governments

being re-elected. It is true that many of these governments were re-elected riding on the popularity of the welfare schemes, but it also has to do with general infrastructural improvement which the State and its people have started benefiting from. While politics of welfare has helped the ruling party mobilise the votes of the poor and the lower middle classes, infrastructural developments have especially helped in mobilising the votes of the upper middle-class voters.Examples from around the world indicate how structural pressures, economic strain, social churn, and an anti-elite sentiment are producing different electoral logics. Globally, these stresses have translated into a rotation of ruling parties losing elections, paving the way for a new party to form the government. But in India's States, governments have got re-elected, often being mediated through strong leader-centric, welfare-driven incumbencies that can absorb discontent and bring in renewed mandates.Sanjay Kumar is a professor and election analyst. Arindam Kabir is researcher with Lokniti-CSDS. Views are personal. It does not reflect the views of the institution.

## Suresh Menon column

Selectors are a strange lot, doing the strange job of looking into the future armed with little more than scorecards, instinct, and the knowledge that whatever they do will be dissected by players former, current, aspiring, and people who last held a bat at a school picnic. Theirs is a peculiar role: invisible when successful, infamous when not. There are always those with an unshakeable faith in the man who is not selected.

The selectors' job is to pick winning teams, which sounds simultaneously obvious and odd. Winning is the final justification for any team picked on any criterion, from performance to politics. The World Cup is for winning, not building for the future or playing fantastic cricket without a trophy to show for it. Cricket, which for generations emphasised the process over the result, now has a format where the result alone matters.India have picked their T20 World Cup squad some three weeks ahead of deadline.

Co-hosts Sri Lanka are the only other team to have done so, announcing a 25-member preliminary squad. Changes can be made later, which means the five-match series against New Zealand next month might have a role to play still.If India win the World Cup in February-March, then the team will be seen as an inspired selection. If they don't, the air will be full of 'I-told-you-so', and recriminations.The selectors, of course pick the team before the event, the criticism comes in hindsight.

Team selection is not a science because cricket is not only about numbers (if that were the case, a calculator could pick the team based solely on averages and strike-rates). Importantly, selectors make judgement calls. An enduring cliché is: form is temporary, class is permanent. And this is where there is a fundamental divide between team selection for Tests and T20. Class carries greater weight in the longer game, but, as Shubman Gill (among others) has discovered, in T20 form trumps all. Gill is a world-class player, and India's best batter, but he hasn't made a 50 in T20I this year.You could assume that in Test cricket he would play himself into form, as he did so brilliantly on the last England tour where he made his first century outside the subcontinent, and then added another three. But T20 doesn't look for balance in the Test match sense.It looks to manage uncertainty, and to have both captain Suryakumar Yadav and vice-captain Gill struggling ahead of the competition might be a compromise too far.As former England batter and selector Ed Smith has pointed out,

T20 is a game of restrictions.A team plays just 120 deliveries, bowlers can send down only four overs each, there are field restrictions and time limits. T20, which began as a game of possible strokes made consistently has evolved into one of implausible strokes. It hasn't changed in one sense — see ball hit ball was the original philosophy and that remains — but is unrecognisable in another, in how these shots are made.

# How digital breadcrumbs are reshaping policing in India



The Indian man who ran the alleged Rs 1,000-crore BlueChip Group con from Dubai was captured in Dehradun last month after around a year on the run. What brought him down was not an old-fashioned police stakeout but a food delivery order.Ravindra Soni's arrest is one of the most recent examples of law enforcement's increasing reliance on the digital residue of everyday life — one-time passwords, food-delivery logs, e-commerce histories — to trace elusive suspects and dismantle sophisticated criminal networks.Apps and services designed for convenience have become instruments for tracking individuals in an age where nearly every transaction, message and delivery request leaves behind an electronic fingerprint.

Soni arrived in Dubai in 2010 after completing his MBA in Delhi. In 2021, he set up the BlueChip Group for trading in forex and commodities such as gold, oil and metals. The group attracted investors from a number of countries including India, UAE, Malaysia, Canada and Japan. Three years later, investigators found out that Soni was running an elaborate scam and that his company had vanished with millions that people had invested.After a year on the run from authorities in Dubai, Soni was traced back to India last month. On November 30, police nabbed him in Dehradun as he stood at his doorstep to receive what he thought was a food order. As the investigation progressed, police discovered that Soni had allegedly defrauded numerous investors through multiple investment companies, including BlueChip. They estimated that the scale of the fraud could be as high as Rs 1,000 crore.The BlueChip Group case is not an isolated one. Last May, in a Rs 5,300-crore GST fraud case, investigators pieced together a web of fake companies and forged tax credits by analysing data that most people would consider trivial. One-time passwords (OTPs) generated by delivery apps like Swiggy and Zomato, and text alerts from FASTag toll transponders, became central tools in triangulating the movements of suspects who constantly switched phones, SIM cards and hotel identities to evade detection. The people behind the scam would keep changing their

mobile numbers, keeping them switched off most of the time, switching them on only to receive OTPs from delivery apps. This helped police track them down. FASTag was also tapped to track the high-end luxury cars used by these people on the Delhi-Noida-Lucknow route.This October, while trailing a Rs 22 lakh cyber fraud, the Delhi Police dismantled a network of digital fraudsters with the arrest of seven people, following a nine-day operation spanning 1,800 kilometres across four states, by connecting dots across multiple commonly used apps. WhatsApp data revealed the accounts were operating from Malaysia, while digital footprints from delivery platforms like Flipkart, Swiggy, and Zomato helped trace the accused despite frequent location changes.The fine print in online applications' privacy policy typically has a clause which allows them to share users' personal data with law enforcement agencies. For instance, Zomato's policy states that it may share a user's data with the police when it is necessary to investigate, prevent or take action regarding possible illegal activities or to comply with legal processes.This shift towards digital evidence is not confined to financial crime. In the United States, prosecutors building a case against the accused instigator of the devastating 2025 Palisades Fire in California cited interactions with ChatGPT — including prompts about sparking fires and AI-generated imagery of dystopian infernos — as part of the evidentiary mosaic linking the suspect to the blaze that consumed more than 23,000 acres and destroyed thousands of homes.According to a government press release from October, the surge in cybersecurity incidents from 10.29 lakh in 2022 to 22.68 lakh in 2024 reflects the growing scale and complexity of digital threats in India. At the same time, the financial toll is becoming more pronounced, with cyber frauds amounting to Rs 36.45 lakh reported on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) as of February 2025.

The Department of Telecommunications' (DoT's) recent directive to enforce SIM-to-device binding for messaging platforms reflects a broader shift in how authorities view digital identifiers in law enforcement. The DoT directed companies such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal to ensure that their services are "continuously" linked to the SIM card used to register with them. The department said they must disallow access if the device does not contain a SIM card.The Centre is drawing powers from the Telecommunication Cybersecurity Amendment Rules, 2025, that were notified in October, to introduce the concept of Telecommunication Identifier User Entity (TIUE) under the scope of telecom regulations. As per the rules, a TIUE (who is not a licensee like telecom operators) uses telecommunication identifiers — such as mobile numbers — to identify its users. This essentially means that apps that require a user's phone number to onboard, or register them, can be classified as a TIUE.While for now, the SIM binding directive has been sent to messaging services, experts believe that the broad definition of a TIUE could also cover food delivery platforms such as Swiggy or Zomato since they too utilise mobile numbers to create user accounts.

# Reordering management education: Putting analytics before leadership theory

Management education is undergoing a fundamental reset. As businesses become increasingly data-driven, the profile of an effective leader is changing in ways traditional curricula have been slow to recognise. Today's managers are expected to interpret dashboards as confidently as they inspire teams, question algorithms as critically as they challenge assumptions, and make decisions grounded in evidence rather than instinct alone. Yet, in many classrooms, leadership theory is still taught in isolation before learners have developed the analytical fluency required to understand the realities they will eventually lead.

This sequencing problem matters. Leadership without data literacy risks becoming aspirational rhetoric rather than effective action. In a world where every strategic decision is influenced by metrics, customer acquisition costs, churn rates, supply-chain efficiency, risk models, and predictive forecasts, leaders who cannot read, interpret, and question data are operating at a disadvantage from day one.

The new language of business is dataAcross industries, data has become the common language that connects strategy, operations, and execution. Marketing leaders are evaluated on attribution models and lifetime value. Operations heads rely on predictive analytics to manage inventory and logistics. Finance teams increasingly use real-time data to guide capital allocation. Even human resources now depend on analytics to assess productivity, engagement, and workforce planning.When management graduates enter such environments without a working understanding of analytics, they are forced to rely on specialists for interpretation. This dependency limits their ability to ask the right questions, challenge assumptions, or anticipate second-order consequences. True leadership requires agency, and agency begins with comprehension. Data fluency gives future leaders the confidence to engage meaningfully in decision-making rather than merely endorsing recommendations they do not fully understand.

Why leadership theory alone is no longer enoughLeadership theories, such as transformational leadership, situational leadership, and servant leadership, offer valuable frameworks for understanding human behaviour and organisational dynamics. However, when introduced before analytical grounding, they risk becoming abstract ideals disconnected from business reality. Learners may understand how to motivate teams but struggle to evaluate whether a strategy is working, why performance is slipping, or where resources should be reallocated.Modern leadership is as much about trade-offs as it is about vision. Deciding whether to prioritise growth or profitability, automation or employment, speed or accuracy requires the ability to interpret data under uncertainty. Without this capability, leadership becomes reactive rather than strategic. Data does not replace judgment, but it sharpens it.

From intuition-led to evidence-informed leadershipHistorically, many business decisions were driven by experience and intuition. While these qualities still matter, the scale and speed of today's markets demand evidence-informed leadership. Algorithms can process patterns far beyond human capacity, but they cannot contextualise outcomes or make ethical choices. That responsibility rests with leaders who understand both the numbers and their implications.Management education must therefore teach learners how to work alongside data, how to frame the right questions, identify biases in datasets, and recognise the limitations of models. This is not about turning every manager into a data scientist, but about ensuring that future leaders are literate enough to interpret insights and make informed decisions.

Analytics as a foundation, not a specialisationOne common misconception is that business analytics is relevant



only for specialised roles. In reality, analytical thinking is now a core managerial skill, much like financial literacy. Whether a graduate enters marketing, consulting, operations, or entrepreneurship, data fluency determines their effectiveness.

Placing analytics early in the curriculum builds a foundation for everything that follows. When learners understand how data is generated, analysed, and interpreted, leadership concepts gain practical relevance. Discussions about accountability, performance management, and strategic alignment become grounded in measurable outcomes rather than theoretical constructs.The role of experiential learningData fluency cannot be developed through lectures alone. It requires hands-on exposure to real datasets, live projects, and decision-making scenarios. Learners must experience the ambiguity of incomplete data, conflicting indicators, and time-bound decisions. This experiential approach mirrors the realities of the workplace and builds confidence in navigating complexity.Equally important is teaching ethical data use. As organisations collect vast amounts of information, leaders must understand privacy, consent, and bias. Embedding these discussions early ensures that analytical capability is balanced with responsibility, a critical attribute of sustainable leadership.

Reimagining the sequence of management educationIf leadership is about guiding organisations through complexity, then the ability to understand that complexity must come first. Management education should therefore rethink its sequencing: start with analytical thinking and data fluency, integrate functional knowledge, and then layer leadership theory on top. This progression reflects how leadership actually develops in practice through understanding systems before influencing people.When leadership theory is taught after analytical grounding, it becomes more powerful. Learners can relate concepts to real metrics, real trade-offs, and real consequences. Leadership stops being an abstract aspiration and becomes a practical capability rooted in understanding.

Preparing leaders for an AI-driven economy artificial intelligence becomes embedded in decision-making, the stakes are even higher. Leaders will increasingly be required to oversee algorithmic systems, interpret outputs, and take accountability for outcomes. Without data fluency, this responsibility becomes symbolic rather than substantive.India's demographic advantage and global ambitions depend on the quality of its managerial talent. Producing leaders who can inspire without understanding data is no longer sufficient. The future belongs to those who can combine analytical rigor with human judgment.In rethinking management education, the goal is not to diminish the importance of leadership theory, but to strengthen it. By placing business analytics and data fluency first, we prepare future leaders to lead with clarity, confidence, and credibility qualities that matter far more than theory alone in today's data-driven world.



# Indian women’s ovaries age faster compared to Caucasian women: why?



It’s a striking claim that’s been repeated in clinics and headlines: ovaries in some Indian women appear to show signs of “ageing” earlier than in many Western peers. Put simply, markers that clinicians use to estimate ovarian reserve — most commonly serum anti-Müllerian hormone (AMH) and antral follicle count (AFC) — tend to decline earlier in many Indian cohorts. Recent studies from 2024 and 2025 do not claim that there is a single simple cause; rather, they point to a complex mix of genetics, environment, metabolic health, and social change that together may explain why a sizable subset of Indian women show lower ovarian reserves at younger ages.

Where did the “six-year” figure that is being touted about come from? Older comparative work and clinic-based observations popularised the idea that the ovarian age in Indian women can appear roughly several years “older” than age-matched Caucasian women. More recent Indian population studies don’t aim to pin a single universal number on that gap; instead, they show consistent patterns of earlier AMH decline in multiple regional cohorts, supporting clinical observations, while calling for population-specific age nomograms and careful interpretation of AMH across ethnicities.

What could be behind this phenomenon? To start with, genetics and developmental factors are probably major contributors. Variability in the number of follicles one is born with as well as genes that regulate DNA repair in oocytes can determine the amount of ovarian reserve left at birth - these biological origins can be different for different populations. Next, a lot of evidence is gradually coming in that points to lifestyle and environmental stresses as major factors - increased exposure to endocrine-disrupting pollutants, heavy metals, and oxidative stressors can not only expedite follicular depletion, but can also cause damage. Several recent articles on premature ovarian insufficiency and ovarian ageing focus on the main cause of the environmental insults, together with genetics. Metabolic health and reproductive disorders also matter. Rising rates of metabolic syndrome, obesity, and insulin resistance — paradoxically coexisting with undernutrition in parts of India — influence ovarian function. Polycystic ovary syndrome

(PCOS), which alters follicular dynamics and AMH measures, is highly prevalent and complicates the interpretation of “reserve” versus “function.” Insulin resistance and chronic inflammation may blunt ovarian responsiveness and accelerate clinically apparent decline. Recent Indian studies link reproductive and metabolic markers to AMH trends.

The third component is societal change. Women in India are progressively postponing childbirth for education and careers; as a result, there has been an increase in women who come to fertility clinics at older ages or after years of subfertility; thereby, clinics are becoming more aware of cases of diminished reserves. Besides that, the differential limitations in access to nutrition, healthcare, and early detection lead to the manifestation of ovarian ageing being mostly at the stage when fertility is already compromised. International commentary in 2024 on AMH testing in India emphasises that there is a necessity for population-specific reference ranges and that the public should be more aware, so that over-diagnosis as well as under-diagnosis can be avoided. Nevertheless, a warning should be placed at the forefront: AMH is a worthwhile clinical tool - in particular, for the purpose of assisted reproduction - however, it is not a miraculous predictor of a woman’s capability of conceiving naturally or the time of menopause. Women need to stay wary of the heavy interpretation of AMH as a consumer “fertility test” without counselling; the hormone refers to the number of small follicles, not necessarily the quality of eggs or other aspects of fertility. Healthcare providers recommend that the AMH level be accompanied with other criteria such as: age, ultrasound, menstrual history, and metabolic screening together, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of fertility.

What can be done? At a public-health level, researchers recommend establishing robust, region-specific AMH/AFC nomograms so that clinicians and women have realistic, population-appropriate expectations; tackling environmental exposures, reducing air and water pollution, and monitoring heavy metals should be made a priority; addressing metabolic health early through lifestyle and primary care is crucial; and improving access to fertility counselling and timely testing for women who plan pregnancy will also help. On an individual level, awareness matters: earlier fertility planning, metabolic health optimisation, and early discussion with a reproductive specialist can preserve options. In short, the observation that ovarian reserve declines earlier in many Indian women is supported by studies and expert consensus, but it is not reducible to one cause or a single number. It is a multifactorial reality at the intersection of biology, environment, and social change, and it demands both better population-specific research and practical public health responses so women can make informed reproductive choices.

# India tops global doping list for the third consecutive year



India has recorded the highest number of doping offenders globally for the third consecutive year, according to the latest World Anti-Doping Agency’s (WADA) report. According to the WADA’s 2024 report, India recorded 260 positive doping cases from 7,113 samples — a 3.6% positivity rate as shown in below charts. This figure is more than double of any other nation’s numbers, as no other country exceeded a 1.75% positivity rate in 2024.

Norway documented the second-highest proportion of positive cases at 1.75%, followed by the U.S. at 1.15%. In terms of absolute figures, France registered the next highest volume of violations in 2024 with 91 cases, followed closely by Italy with 85. Russia and the U.S. reported 76 cases each, while Germany and China recorded 54 and 43 cases, respectively. Crucially, these nations recorded fewer positive results in both absolute and percentage terms than India, despite maintaining much more rigorous testing regimes. China, for example, conducted over 24,000 tests in 2024, more than triple India’s volume, yet reported fewer than one-fifth of the violations. The findings have come at a time when India is positioning itself as a credible global sporting host. The country is preparing to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games, seen as a stepping stone towards its larger ambition of hosting the 2036 Olympics.

Sport-wise data from India shows that athletics recorded the most positive results in absolute terms. Of the

260 positive cases in 2024, as many as 76 came from athletics, followed by weightlifting (43) and wrestling (29). Boxing and powerlifting recorded 17 cases each, while kabaddi accounted for 10 cases. These figures reflect a pattern that has held over several years, with endurance and strength-based sports dominating the list of violations. In July, under-23 wrestling champion and Paris Olympics quarter-finalist Reetika Hooda tested positive for banned substances and was provisionally suspended, drawing attention to doping risks even among elite athletes. At the grass-roots level, enforcement itself appears to be a deterrent. During India’s University Games earlier this month, there were reports of several athletes skipping track and field events after anti-doping officials arrived at venues, in some cases leaving only a single competitor to participate.

India’s National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) has defended its record, arguing that higher numbers reflect improved detection rather than rising drug use. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the agency said India had “significantly strengthened” its anti-doping framework in recent years. However, global comparisons suggest that India’s problem is not merely one of testing volume. Several countries with comparable or higher testing numbers continue to report far lower positivity rates.

The WADA report comes months after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) expressed concern over the widespread use of performance-enhancing drugs in India and urged authorities to “set their house in order”. In response, the Indian Olympic Association constituted a new anti-doping panel in August. The government has also moved to tighten the legal framework. Parliament recently passed the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, 2025, incorporating changes sought by WADA to bring India’s anti-doping regime in line with global standards. The Bill prohibits doping in sports, and provides a framework for testing, enforcement, and adjudication of violations. Note: Adverse Analytical Findings (AAF) is a laboratory report identifying the presence of a Prohibited Substance or its metabolites or markers (including elevated quantities of endogenous substances) or evidence of the use of a Prohibited Method, in line with WADA standards.

# Bombay HC tells Vijay Mallya to return to India before challenging Fugitive Offenders law

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday (December 23, 2025) declined to hear absconding businessman Vijay Mallya’s petition questioning the constitutional validity of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEO Act) unless he first returns to India and submits to its jurisdiction. Mr. Mallya has moved two petitions before the High Court — one challenging the special court’s 2019 order declaring him a fugitive economic offender, and another questioning the constitutional validity of the FEO Act. A Division Bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhkar and Justice Gautam Ankhad observed that he cannot pursue both pleas simultaneously while remaining abroad. “First submit to court’s jurisdiction” “You will have to make a statement as to when you will return to India; only then we will hear the petition challenging the vires of the FEO Act,” the Bench said, directing him to file an affidavit indicating his timeline. “Come back to India, we are here to provide you with a solution,” the judges added. The Court clarified that while his appeal against the special court’s declaration can proceed even if he stays overseas, the constitutional challenge requires his presence. “How does one wipe out criminal liability without submitting to the jurisdiction of the Court?” the Bench re-

marked. Senior advocate Amit Desai, appearing for Mr. Mallya, argued that the law does not mandate physical presence for such challenges. “The statute permits a person to question the validity of the Act without being in India. My client has cooperated and his assets worth ₹14,000 crore have been attached against an alleged liability of ₹6,000 crore,” Mr. Desai submitted. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Enforcement Directorate (ED), opposed the plea, citing Section 14 of the Act, which bars fugitives from contesting proceedings while evading Indian courts. He also noted that extradition proceedings in the United Kingdom are at an advanced stage and should not be stalled by these petitions. Mr. Mallya left India in March 2016 amid investigations into alleged loan defaults by Kingfisher Airlines. He was declared a fugitive economic offender by a Mumbai special court in January 2019 under the FEO Act. Enacted in 2018, the law empowers authorities to confiscate the properties of individuals accused of economic offences involving ₹100 crore or more if they refuse to return and face trial. The matter has been adjourned to February 12 for Mr. Mallya’s response on whether he will withdraw one petition or indicate a date for his return.

# A bittersweet Test for Australia’s Lyon-hearted spinner



Nathan Lyon knew immediately. As soon as he dived at full stretch to his right at fine-leg to prevent Jamie Smith’s pull from reaching the boundary in the 77th over of England’s second innings at the Adelaide Oval on Sunday, a slight grimace betrayed the sense that he wasn’t quite right. He threw the ball back to wicketkeeper Alex Carey whilst still on his knees and instantly clutched his right hamstring. When he did get back up on his feet, he couldn’t do much more than limp a couple of steps before signalling towards the dressing room for help and hobbling outside the field of play. As Marcus Labuschagne, who went up to the 38-year-old to check on him, disclosed to the host broadcaster later, Lyon knew then and there that he would play no further part in the game. “I think I have done my hammy,” Lyon told Labuschagne grimly.

By the time Australia took the final wicket of Josh Tongue later in the afternoon to retain the Ashes in just 11 days, Lyon was on crutches. Having made a quick visit to the hospital for a scan, he returned to the venue in time to witness the winning moment and willed himself back onto the park to congratulate his euphoric teammates. As chuffed as he would have been about Australia getting over the line, it was cruel for the Test to end the way it did for Lyon personally. Having very much helped set up the win with his exploits on the penultimate evening – this is his fourth consecutive Ashes series victory at home – he would have dearly loved to be on the outfield to soak in the moments leading up to victory. Moreover, this was the Test that saw him surpass Glenn McGrath’s tally of 563 wickets to go up to No. 2 in the list of Australia’s highest wicket-takers. To have accomplished the feat at the Adelaide Oval, a venue that he tended to as a groundsman before his Test debut, ought to have been a highlight not marred by his injury. In the final session of the fourth day, Lyon had been the wrecker-in-chief, removing Harry Brook, Ben Stokes and Zak Crawley in the space of six overs to essentially ensure that the hosts had one hand on the urn. Until Lyon’s dismissal of Brook, England had done reasonably well to get to 176 for three in 47 overs in pursuit of a record target of 435. Brook and Crawley had negotiated Lyon effectively, sweeping and reverse-sweeping routinely to throw the off-spinner off his lines and lengths. His figures in the fourth innings were unflattering before his opening breakthrough: 10-1-49-0.

But there is a reason why Lyon has been snaring Test wickets for a living for 14 years. Off the second ball of a new spell to Brook, he altered his line a tad wider of off-stump and had the 26-year-old reaching out for one reverse sweep too many. Adding to his catalogue of ungainly dismissals in this series, England’s impetuous No. 5 lost his balance and looked back in disbelief once the ball hit his leg stump.

Just four overs later, it was the turn of Stokes to look on in disbelief. As is often his reaction when the stumps are dislodged, the England skipper couldn’t quite believe his eyes when Lyon produced a ball that spun past his defence and clattered off-pole. It was a ripper alright, but truth be told, Stokes was neither forward nor back, a fallibility in his footwork versus spin that has now brought about 10 dismissals against the Australian in 23 encounters. If at all he was disputing Lyon’s propensity to produce such deliveries, all he had to do was to hark back to the first innings of this Test when the wily twacker dismissed his namesake, Ben Duckett, in similar fashion. The ball to the England opener will likely be etched in Lyon’s memory for a long

time, for it was the breakthrough that took him past McGrath. With Crawley’s stumping late on day four being the last of his five wickets across the two innings, Lyon has moved along to 567 wickets in 141 Tests. Second to Warne

Remarkably now, only the late Shane Warne, whose 708 scalps came in 145 Tests at an average of 25.41, stands above Lyon in the pantheon of Australia’s most prolific wicket-takers. It is worth remembering that in the period between Warne’s exit in 2007 and Lyon’s entry in 2011, Australia went through spinners with the frequency of a chameleon changing colour, yearning desperately to find a worthy successor to the irreverent genius from Victoria. While Lyon isn’t Warne – no one can fill those proverbial big shoes – he has optimised his attributes to carve a career that will be just as hard to emulate for the men to follow. Looking back, Lyon’s first two years were riddled with bumps, and when he was dropped for the opening Ashes Test of the 2013 series in England, he seemed set to go down the path of his immediate predecessors. But Australia was shrewd enough to realise its folly and bring Lyon back for the third Test of that series against Alastair Cook and Co. The turning point for the spinner came in the reverse Ashes just a few months later, where he proved to be an able foil to the Mitchell Johnson-led pace battery and claimed 19 wickets in a 5-0 whitewash at home. Starting from the middle of the English summer in 2013, Lyon has evolved into a near-permanent presence in Australia’s playing XI, with the Lord’s Test in 2023 marking his 100th successive appearance in whites. Not dissimilar to the mishap in Adelaide, it was only a calf injury while fielding during England’s first innings at Lord’s that curtailed his incredible streak and prompted a premature end to his series two years ago. Lyon’s success over a long Test career is proof that there is still a place for an off-spinner in the classical mould in the modern game. While he is one of three off-spinners with more than 500 wickets in Test history, he doesn’t possess Muttiah Muralitharan’s big-spinning off-break or deadly doosra. Neither does he have the repertoire to experiment as R. Ashwin did. But what he does have is a stock ball, armed with overspin and drift, that he backs himself to deliver at a desired spot at any given juncture. It has held him in good stead in a land usually unforgiving to his tribe: his record of 273 wickets in 74 Tests at 31.08 in Australia is in marked contrast to a host of visiting off-spinners of repute who have travelled to those shores. Unusually, though, he has been dropped from a couple of Tests in recent months. Having claimed a match haul of six for 117 in the second Test against West Indies at Grenada in July, Lyon was benched for the third Test in Jamaica as the Aussies opted for an all-pace attack with the pink ball. Australia’s selector on tour, Tony Dodemaide, described Lyon’s omission as a “one-off”. But when the team had to be picked for the second Ashes Test in Brisbane two weeks ago – another day-night affair -- Lyon was again left out. To say Lyon wasn’t pleased with the call would be an understatement. “Absolutely filthy,” he told broadcaster Channel 7 of his reaction to the omission. Long road to recovery

It will be all the more infuriating, then, that just as he had begun getting back into his groove in Adelaide, the injury has thrown another curve ball. On Tuesday, Lyon underwent surgery as Cricket Australia confirmed that he will be sidelined for an “extended period”. In Lyon’s place, the bespectacled Todd Murphy, who has played seven Tests so far, has been drafted into the squad for the next two games in Melbourne and Sydney. Coach Andrew McDonald weighed in on Lyon’s road to recovery. “The surgeon will give us a report and a rough length of time. It is going to take a lot of hard work with that type of injury. It is going to be a hard period for him to get back to where he was,” he told the Australian media on Tuesday. At the same time, McDonald knows that Lyon’s will to keep going hasn’t dimmed in the slightest. A five-Test tour of India, where Lyon has never won a series, in early 2027 is a target that the offie had long identified. “Lyon still wants to do it. That’s the main thing. India is on the horizon. He will be a key part of that,” McDonald added. “In Adelaide, it was probably the best I had seen him bowl for a little while in terms of the shape and energy he had on the ball. He will get through this rehab and then look forward to what it looks like.”

# How Indian States are following a pro-incumbency trend

The recently concluded Bihar Assembly election highlights an interesting point: that Nitish Kumar, who has taken oath as Chief Minister for the 10th time, has been able to retain the government even after almost two decades of ruling the State. This shows us a contrast between global and Indian State-level patterns of (anti) incumbency. In many major democracies across the world, voters displayed a strong sense of anti-incumbency. The defeat of the U.S. democrats, the U.K. conservatives, Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party and South Africa’s African National Congress reflect that people in these countries were willing to use their elections as an instrument to address perceived non-performance of the government and demand an alternative in power. Senegal’s election similarly captured youth anger and a generational push against elites.

A pro-incumbency trend Indian State assembly elections held over the last few years indicate a trend in the opposite direction. Many governments during this period got re-elected, indicating a strong pro-incumbency sentiment. The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party government got re-elected in Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, despite spirited opposition campaigns. These governments were re-elected, beating anti-incumbency, because the ruling party anchored its election campaign pushing narratives of stability, “double engine ki sarkaar” (the idea that the Centre and the State is ruled by the same party) for faster development, welfare delivery and strong leadership, which triumphed the narrative propagated by opposition parties. In Gujarat, the BJP extended its record to a seventh straight term, while Naveen Patnaik’s Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha converted personal credibility and targeted schemes into multi-term mandates. West Bengal’s 2021 mandate for Mamata Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress, against a highly contested BJP challenge, highlights pro-incumbency in a polarised contest. These examples may look like isolated cases of States being voted back to power, with the recent Bihar Assembly election being one of them, but Indian elections since 1952 had witnessed periods of pro and anti-incumbency.

The first few years (1952-1966) were a period of pro-incumbency. Out of the 39 assembly elections held during this period, almost 85% governments got re-elected. But the periods of 1967-79 and 1980-1988 witnessed both pro and anti-incumbency trends. During 1967-79, out of 82 as-



sembly elections, 54% of governments got re-elected, while 46% of them got voted out. Similarly, during the 1980-88 period, of 53 assembly elections, 51% governments got re-elected while 49% governments got voted out. However, the periods of 1989-98 and 1999-03 witnessed a very strong trend of anti-incumbency. During 1989-98, of 63 assembly elections, 71% of incumbent governments were voted out. The trend continued during the 1999-03 period, where of the 31 assembly elections, 61% of incumbent governments were voted out. The trend changed again during the 2004-15 period, which witnessed a mix of anti and pro-incumbency. In this period, nearly 55% incumbent governments got re-elected, while 45% governments were defeated. The 2016-2018 period has seen a strong anti-incumbency trend where nearly 75% of incumbent governments got defeated. This is understandable, for when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government came to power at the Centre in 2014, many Congress-ruled States lost in subsequent State elections.

We are again witnessing a strong pro-incumbency trend. Many BJP ruled States have witnessed governments being re-elected. It is true that many of these governments were re-elected riding on the popularity of the welfare schemes, but it also has to do with general infrastructural improvement which the State and its people have started benefiting from. While politics of welfare has helped the ruling party mobilise the votes of the poor and the lower middle classes, infrastructural developments have especially helped in mobilising the votes of the upper middle-class voters.



# How exports are concentrated in few States



Despite a weakening rupee that has put India in the bracket of Asian countries with the worst performing currency, the economy's export numbers look impressive in the aggregate. However, a closer reading of the data reveals a far more uneven and structurally revealing story. When stripped of national aggregates, the data reveals a sharp divergence in performance across regions. A rigorous interrogation of the RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25 reveals underlying structural dynamics.

A core-periphery patternThe geography of India's trade is becoming perilously lopsided as the export engine is being powered by a shrinking cluster of States. The top five exporters — Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh — now command nearly 70% of the national export basket. This creates a deceptive narrative where the national average masks a deepening regional crisis — where exports are becoming agglomerated rather than being dispersed across the nation. Firms are increasingly benefiting from spatial clustering, and not spreading out to newer regions.Half a decade ago, the top five States contributed roughly 65% of national exports. That figure has now crept close to 70%. In technical terms, the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI), a standard metric used to gauge market concentration, of India's export geography is rising, signalling that India's export geography is becoming dangerously top-heavy. Instead of regions which are lagging behind trying to catch up to these States, we are witnessing a hardening core-periphery pattern. The coastal belts of the south and west are integrating tighter into global supply chains while the vast demographic heartland of the north and the east are effectively decoupling from the trade engine.To understand why this divergence is accelerating, one must look beyond domestic policy to the tightening constraints of today's global trading environment.Shifting from volume to value

The window for low-skill, labour-intensive industrialisation that allowed countries like Bangladesh or Vietnam to plug into the world economy is closing. WTO data indicates a structural slowing of merchandise trade volume growth to a band of 0.5-3%. The UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 2023 report estimates show that the top 10 global exporters control approximately 55% of world merchandise trade. In this environment, global capital is not merely seeking low-cost labour which was the traditional advantage of India's hinterland. In today's global economy, capital is no longer drawn merely to low costs but to high economic complexity. Research in economic complexity shows that economies with more diverse and tightly connected export baskets are far better positioned to transition into higher-value production.Product space visualisations reveal a networked structure in which sophisticated goods, such as machinery and automotive components, cluster in dense core areas, enabling relatively smooth movement into adjacent advanced technologies. In contrast, regions whose export baskets are concentrated in sparsely connected, peripheral areas face steep barriers to structural upgrading, as they lack the underlying capabilities required to enter complex value chains.

The tragedy of this divergence is compounded by a shift in the nature of production itself. It undermines the long-held assumption that export expansion would automatically absorb surplus labour. For decades, development theory

assumed export expansion would serve as the primary bridge from agriculture to mass industrial employment. That link is now broken.We are witnessing a clear trend of capital deepening where the ratio of capital to labour increases permanently. The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) 2022-23 data reveals a "smoking gun" where fixed capital investment grew by roughly 10.6% while employment growth lagged at just 7.4%. The factory floor is becoming more expensive and less labour-absorptive as the fixed capital per person engaged has risen to ₹23.6 lakh. We are exporting value rather than volume of employment. This effectively bypasses the labour-intensive phase of industrialisation that East Asian economies utilised to build their middle classes.Capital over the workerThe Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) corroborates this capital bias from the household side. If the export boom were truly labour-intensive, we would expect a sharp structural shift of workers into factory jobs. Instead, the latest PLFS data indicates that the manufacturing sector's share of total employment has stubbornly hovered around 11.6%-12%. This stagnation persists even as export values hit record highs. It implies that the elasticity of employment with respect to export growth has collapsed. The jobs being created are not in the labour-absorbing factories of the hinterland but in the capital-intensive hubs of the coast.This capital bias is further evidenced by the structural compression in the wage share of Net Value Added (NVA). ASI data indicates that as productivity rises in automated sectors like petrochemicals or precision electronics, the gains accrue disproportionately to capital owners rather than wage earners. The worker is becoming less central to the production process. This explains why we see high GDP growth in industrial States without a commensurate explosion in mass prosperity. Even the PLI-driven surge in electronics exports, growing over 47% year-on-year, is spatially sticky. It remains locked in specific districts in Kancheepuram or Noida because the complexity of these supply chains requires a logistics precision that does not exist outside these industrial islands.The failure of the hinterland to converge is ultimately a failure of state capacity and financial depth. It creates a vicious cycle where the poor subsidise the rich. The RBI's data on Credit-Deposit (CD) Ratios offers a stark financial MRI of this divide. In export powerhouses like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the CD ratio frequently surpasses 90%. This implies a high velocity of money where local savings are aggressively recycled into local industry. In contrast, in the hinterland States of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, the ratio languishes below 50%. This indicates a perverse form of capital flight where the savings of the hinterland are deposited in banks only to be lent out to projects in the industrialised coast. These financial constraints are compounded by persistent human capital deficits in low-export States, constraining their ability to generate the skilled, healthy workforce required for integration into high-complexity global value chains.Need for new metricsWhat emerges from this evidence is a quiet but profound shift. Exports in India are no longer operating as a lever of structural transformation but have become an outcome of prior structural capacity. States do not export their way into development; they export because they are already developed enough to do so. In this sense, export performance is increasingly a mirror of accumulated industrial wealth rather than a pathway toward building it.If export-linked industrial policy may no longer generate labour-intensive employment, and not catalyse convergence, then the role of an open economy in India's development strategy must be carefully re-examined. Treating export growth as a proxy for inclusive economic prosperity for all risks mistaking outcomes for instruments. It also signals a gap between hope and reality. The danger is not that India misses global trade opportunities, but that it is perhaps measuring progress using a metric that increasingly reflects past advantages rather than future inclusion.Deepanshu Mohan is professor and dean, O.P. Jindal Global University and Director, Centre for New Economics Studies (CNES). He is a visiting professor at LSE and a visiting fellow at University of Oxford. Ankur Singh is a Research Assistant with CNES, O.P. Jindal Global University.

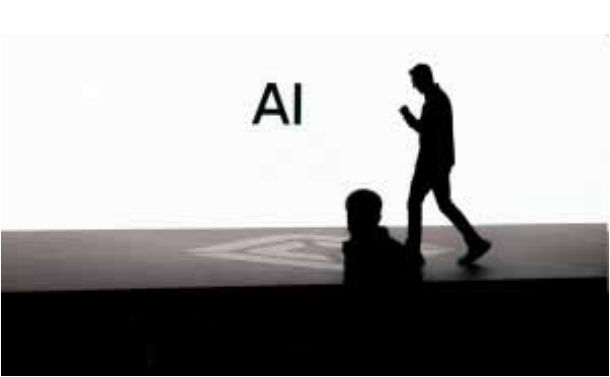
# Enterprise AI is maturing — will 2026 be the year it breaks free?

For the past few years, artificial intelligence has lived in a strange duality. On the surface, it looked magical — conversational systems, image generators, copilots that seem to reason. Underneath, enterprises have struggled with a more sober reality: hallucinations, brittle workflows, governance risks, and systems that work impressively in demos but falter at scale.In my recent conversation with Dwarak Rajagopal, Head of AI Research at Snowflake, what stood out was not optimism or scepticism, but maturity. AI, he suggested, is finally moving out of its adolescence. And the changes ahead, in 2026, will be less about bigger models and more about how intelligence is structured, verified, and distributed.

One of the most consequential shifts underway is the quiet erosion of monopoly power in foundation models. For much of the current AI cycle, a handful of companies have dominated the narrative, capital, and capabilities around large models. But Mr. Rajagopal pointed to a critical inflection: the centre of gravity is moving from pre-training to post-training.The biggest breakthroughs are no longer coming from simply scaling parameters, but from how models are refined with specialized, high-quality data. This is opening the door for open source foundation models that can be customized, fine-tuned, and deployed for specific enterprise needs.

In 2026, this will fundamentally weaken the grip of a few AI giants and enable a more distributed innovation ecosystem where startups, researchers, and enterprises build on shared foundations rather than proprietary silos.This shift has deep implications for how intelligence is deployed inside organisations. Enterprises do not need general intelligence; they need contextual intelligence. They need systems that understand their data, their workflows, and their constraints. Open source models, combined with enterprise data platforms, make that possible. AI is no longer being treated as an oracle. It is being treated as infrastructure. The next major frontier, according to Mr. Rajagopal, will not be another leap in raw model capability but advances in agentic AI, driven by improvements in context windows and memory.Today's models remain constrained by working memory. They are powerful in single interactions but fragile across long, multi-step tasks. In 2026, innovation will focus on giving agents persistent memory that will let them retain longer contexts, learn from prior actions, and operate across extended timelines.This will allow AI systems to move beyond reactive assistance and toward sustained problem-solving, supporting complex business processes rather than isolated queries.Automation won't be that easy

Yet autonomy brings risk. One of the biggest bottle-



necks in deploying agentic systems today is error accumulation. Small mistakes compound across multi-step workflows, forcing enterprises to rely on human oversight as a safety net.Mr. Rajagopal's view is that this dependency will not scale. The breakthrough will come from self-verification. Instead of inserting humans into every loop, AI systems will develop internal feedback mechanisms. They will be able to judge, validate, and correct their own outputs.These "auto-judging" agents will mark a shift from supervised automation to self-regulating systems, making large-scale, reliable agentic workflows viable for enterprise use.This evolution in AI capability will inevitably reshape the human side of technology as well.Plumbing organisational hierarchiesOne of the most striking implications Mr. Rajagopal outlined is how AI will redefine the software engineering hierarchy itself. As agents take over routine coding and repetitive tasks, the traditional ladder, in which juniors handle low-level implementation and seniors design systems, will blur.Junior engineers will be pushed up the stack, working earlier on infrastructure, integration, and system-level thinking. Senior engineers, meanwhile, will become orchestrators who design architectures, mentor teams, and ensure humans and AI systems collaborate effectively.This will force a rethink of computer science education, career paths, and what it means to be "experienced" in a world where execution is increasingly automated.Threaded through all of this is a geopolitical undercurrent. The U.S. style of AI development has become increasingly corporatized and closed, driven by scale, capital intensity, and proprietary advantage. China, by contrast, is leaning more heavily into academic and open-source approaches, integrating research and state-backed ecosystems.India, meanwhile, sits at a crossroads. It has the talent, the data, and the scale. But its position in the global AI race will depend on whether it invests in open foundations,

# Your appendix plays a bigger role in your health than you may think



For decades, the human appendix was casually dismissed as a "useless" vestige. Modern research and clinical experience, however, suggest that this small, narrow pouch, attached to the cecum in the lower right abdomen, has a more nuanced role than once believed."The appendix is like a safe house for good bacteria, supporting the digestive system after illness," says Sugi Subramaniam, senior consultant, surgical gastroenterology at SRM Global Hospitals, Chennai. Beyond this, it may influence the immune system, especially early in life, by exposing white blood cells to antigens in the digestive tract, he notes. Arunmozhi Varman, consultant for laparoscopic and robotic hernia surgery, Rela Hospitals, Chennai describes it as a lymphoid organ that helps the gut recover post-infection.

"Our ancestors may have needed the appendix more, when food cleanliness was uncertain, but even today, it quietly supports immunity. It's a small, silent job, but not the appendix is not a piece of waste as we once assumed," stresses J. Saravanan, senior consultant surgical gastroenterologist & robotic surgeon, VS Hospitals, Chennai. Typically 7–10 cm long, the appendix varies in position and size, sometimes ranging from 2 cm to 20 cm. Gautham Krishnamurthy, senior consultant, surgical gastroenterologist, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, adds that the appendix has historically been important for digesting raw, plant-based food. Today, it functions mainly as beneficial gut bacteria, protecting and aiding replenishment after disturbances such as diarrhoeal illnesses.

The appendix can become inflamed, causing appendicitis-- a common surgical emergency. Classic symptoms include abdominal pain beginning near the belly button and shifting to the lower right side, accompanied by fever, nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite. Siddharth D., consultant, minimally invasive surgery at SIMS Hospital, notes that acute appendicitis affects around 9% of the population, most commonly in their twenties and thirties.Appendicitis is caused by an obstruction from hardened stools (faecolith), an infection, or rarely, tumors. Myths — such as fruit seeds

# How junk food, hidden genes and obesity pushed teen to a liver transplant

Fatty liver in teens may seem rare. Except it isn't. It is now the most frequent cause of chronic liver disease, affecting an estimated 10–17 percent of adolescents with obesity. What remains rare, however, is the need for a liver transplant in a child under 18. That was the life-saving intervention for a 14-year-old boy from Surat, who arrived at Mumbai's Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital with acute liver failure caused by an advanced form of fatty liver disease.His case is a stark reminder of why childhood obesity demands urgent attention, especially in Indians who are genetically predisposed to fatty liver disease, even with only abdominal fat.

The teen is now recovering at home, with all parameters holding steady as he underwent a liver transplant just a month ago. His father stepped in as donor and gave his right lobe to save him. "The boy arrived with serious complications, including jaundice, fluid accumulation in the abdomen and severe water retention that led to a sudden 15–20 kg weight gain," says Dr Gaurav Gupta, co-director, Department of Liver Transplant and HPB Surgery at the hospital. "The swelling began to reduce after surgery."What triggered the crisis was a genetic mutation that promotes fat accumulation and retention in the liver. But genetics alone was not responsible. "These predispositions often interact with environmental factors such as diet, obesity and insulin resistance," Dr Gupta explains. "A person with high genetic risk may never develop severe disease if they maintain a healthy lifestyle. But like many teens, this boy regularly consumed ultra-processed and junk foods, which accelerated the damage."

Why teen obesity and imbalanced diet pushed the boy over the edge

After evaluating the boy, Dr Gupta thought about all means to manage symptoms of liver failure. But transplant seemed the only option. "In such cases, the liver can no longer perform essential functions such as filtering toxins, producing proteins and storing glucose," Dr Gupta says. "He had jaundice and massive fluid retention, particularly in his legs. Increased pressure in liver veins forces fluid into the abdomen, causing severe swelling that affects breathing and eating."A series of investigations revealed multiple genetic mutations that explained the rapid deterioration. "A transplant was necessary because a healthy donor liver does not carry the same mutations," he explains.At the time of surgery, the boy weighed nearly 84 kg due to fluid overload. Today, his weight is in the low 60s. "His bilirubin level was above 10 mg/dL and has now returned to normal. All symptoms of liver failure have resolved," says Dr Gupta. Because the condition had a genetic basis, first-degree relatives were also advised to undergo genetic testing. "The goal is early lifestyle correction to prevent similar damage," he adds.Genetic testing revealed high-risk variants in the PNPLA3 and GCKR genes, which significantly increase susceptibility to fatty liver disease and are particularly prevalent in the Indian population. "However, genetics alone was not responsible. The diet was the accelerator," says Dr Arti Pawaria, chief paediatric hepatologist and paediatric transplant physician. Unhealthy dietary patterns, excess calorie intake and reduced physical activity aggravated his genetic risk. "He consumed highly processed foods in his diet like packaged snacks, chips, burgers, cookies, noodles and sodas, usually teen favourites. He had a lot of refined sugar junk foods, which in his case turned out to be hazardous. Schools, parents, and policy makers must work together to reduce children's exposure to ultra-processed foods and sugary drinks, while promoting affordable, nutritious meals and daily physical activity. Early, population-level dietary interventions can avert a looming burden of advanced liver disease in young Indians," she says.

Excess fat from obesity releases fatty acids into the bloodstream, overwhelming the liver. "What children eat

causing appendicitis, or the condition resolving spontaneously — are incorrect. "Delay can lead to rupture, which is life-threatening," warns Dr. Varman.Appendectomy is the definitive treatment. Minimally invasive options include laparoscopic or robotic surgery. "Most patients walk the same day and go home in a day or two," Dr. Saravanan says. The procedure involves small keyhole incisions and camera guidance, though open surgery remains important for complicated cases.In some cases, uncomplicated appendicitis can be managed with antibiotics. Dr. Subramaniam explains, "Non-surgical methods work initially, but there is a greater risk of recurrence. Surgery remains the standard, long-term solution." Studies show about 70% of uncomplicated cases respond to antibiotics, but recurrence can reach 40% within a year, particularly in patients with appendicoliths or limited healthcare access, says Dr. Krishnamurthy.

Doctors often encounter several misconceptions about the appendix. Many believe it is completely useless, but while not essential for survival, the appendix does house beneficial bacteria and supports immunity. Another common myth is that removal of the appendix harms long-term health; in reality, most patients live normal lives without any dietary restrictions. As Dr. Arunmozhi Varman points out, "You can still enjoy pizza and biryani!"Some people think appendicitis affects only young adults, but it can occur at any age, though early adulthood is most common. There is also a dangerous belief that home remedies or ignoring the pain will help; untreated appendicitis can rupture, leading to serious complications. Dr. J. Saravanan emphasises, "If your body sends a strong signal, listen. Come early. We'll fix it before it becomes trouble."Post-surgery recovery is usually smooth. Patients may rest a few days, avoid heavy lifting for several weeks, and start with light meals. Long-term lifestyle or health impacts are minimal. Short-term changes, such as minor bowel adjustments, may occur, but minimally invasive techniques reduce the risk of adhesions or complications.Dr. Krishnamurthy recalls cases during a recent Diwali weekend where a patient delayed surgery, resulting in an emergency laparoscopic procedure due to severe infection. Such cases highlight the importance of timely intervention.The appendix, though small, plays a supporting role in immunity and gut health. Acute appendicitis remains the most common abdominal surgical emergency. Early recognition, proper medical evaluation, and timely treatment, preferably via minimally invasive surgery, ensure safe recovery and minimal long-term impact."Life after an appendix removal is completely normal, except in rare cases of complications," notes Dr. Saravanan "For most patients, it becomes something they barely remember and that's the best outcome we can hope for."



Fatty liver in teens may seem rare. Except it isn't. It is now the most frequent cause of chronic liver disease, affecting an estimated 10–17 percent of adolescents with obesity. What remains rare, however, is the need for a liver transplant in a child under 18. That was the life-saving intervention for a 14-year-old boy from Surat, who arrived at Mumbai's Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital with acute liver failure caused by an advanced form of fatty liver disease.

every day silently shapes their liver health — early dietary discipline can prevent a lifetime of liver disease. Children should be encouraged to eat fresh, home-cooked meals with plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, pulses, eggs, and milk-based proteins. High sugar and refined foods cause fat to accumulate in the liver, even in children who may not look overweight. Healthy eating habits, started early and sustained with physical activity, can prevent fatty liver disease," says Dr Pawaria.

People who receive a liver transplant in their teens can live long, healthy lives, with many experiencing a near-normal lifespan due to significant advances in medicine, leading to high survival rates. "The boy can resume school three months after transplant surgery. Slowly he can take up sports too. Post-transplant, obviously the first three to four months are very critical, where we need to keep a track of him. He should avoid infections and his diet has to be managed carefully. But thereafter, he can have an absolutely normal life, even marry and have children as an adult," says Dr Gupta.But diet and physical activity will have to be in tandem. "The healthy, transplanted liver portion can correct the genetic defect, provided the recipient adheres to a healthy lifestyle and manages associated metabolic risk factors," he cautions. The 14-year-old will be on immunosuppressants, too, for the rest of his life.Preventing teen obesity, experts stress, must be family-driven. Dr Pawaria advises aiming for at least five daily servings of vegetables and fruits, choosing whole grains, lean proteins, low-fat milk, and healthy fats, and prioritising water over sugary beverages. Lime or cucumber-infused water can help curb soda cravings. Always read food labels to avoid hidden sugars, advise nutritionists. Changes should involve the entire family to avoid singling out the child, while allowing occasional treats in controlled portions.Mindful eating habits also matter. Families should eat together at the table without screens, involve teens in cooking to teach portion control, exercise together, limit screen time, and ensure nine to ten hours of sleep each night. These habits, experts say, may be the most powerful medicine of all.



# Bold and brave, a tribute to armed forces heroes of Telangana



After more than three years of painstaking effort, the Directorate of Sainik Welfare, Telangana, has compiled a definitive record of the names and gallabr deeds of armed forces personnel from the State.Titled ‘Bold and Brave: Honouring Telangana’s Heroes of Valour, Sacrifice and Pride’, the book is an initiative of Col. Ramesh Kumar, director of Sainik Welfare and chronicles the courage of over 50 commissioned officers and other ranks across various wars fought by India.In a fitting tribute, the compendium was officially launched by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Friday, coinciding with Armed Forces Flag Day. Beyond celebrating heroism, the book offers readers a deeper understanding of soldiering, highlighting the discipline, etiquette and unwavering service ethos essential for leading troops in both peace and war.

Records from the Sainik Welfare Directorate show that nearly 50 personnel from the erstwhile unified Andhra Pradesh and those who later settled in Telangana have been honoured with gallantry awards. These include the Ashok Chakra awarded to Lt. Col G. Krishna lyengar, three Maha Vir Chakras to Major General C. Venugopal, Air Vice Marshal C.V. Parkar and Major Padmapani Acharya (posthumously). Additionally, 18 were awarded Vir Chakras, five Kirti Chakras and 18 Shaurya Chakras.Inspiring the youth

Speaking to The Hindu, Col. Ramesh Kumar said: “Through this compilation, I aim to commemorate the courageous deeds of these soldiers and pay tribute to their families, who continue to embody resilience and pride. By tracing their journeys, from childhood to military service and even life after retirement, I hope to inspire today’s youth to consider a life of service in the Armed Forces and encourage parents to support their children in this noble pursuit.”He

added that over the past three years, he meticulously identified gallantry award winners by combing through official records, contacting officers and personnel from various regiments, exploring social media and verifying accounts online. “I wrote to their units and headquarters, interviewed nearly all of them and documented detailed life stories, including family backgrounds, schooling, college, motivations for joining the Armed Forces, and the rigours of their training,” he said.

The book also highlights remarkable contributions of officers and soldiers, whether on the battlefield or during natural calamities/ disasters. Among them is Army Havildar A. Somaiah of the Artillery Centre, Hyderabad, who, on the night of September 27-28 in 1954, saved dozens of passengers when an express train en route to Kazipet was swept away by the floodwaters of the swollen Yashwanthpur river following a bridge collapse.Another inspiring story recounts the courage of Major Md. Ahmed Zaki of the Maratha Light Infantry Regiment during the 1965 Indo-Pak War. The book also references the heroic roles of Lt. B.V.R. Rao of the Gorkha Rifles (Vir Chakra), Squadron Leader Farokh Jehangir Mehta (Vir Chakra), Major Padmapani Acharya and Air Marshal Parkar among dozens of other war heroes.

Reactions from gallantry awardees and their families have further motivated Col. Ramesh Kumar in his work. Aparajita Acharya, daughter of Major Padmapani Acharya, said, “Though physically no more, he lives in me and his spirit in all of us.” Vir Chakra awardee Lt. Gen. Zaki noted, “Soldiering is in our blood. My brothers are Brigadier MM Zaki (Mechanised Infantry) and Group Captain MH Zaki (Fighter Pilot).” Half a dozen of his close relatives still serve in the armed forces.Ashok Chakra awardee Hav Somaiah’s children, now settled in the US and Australia, remember him as a devoted father who valued education and righteous living. Air Marshal Cecil Parker (Mahavir Chakra, Vayusena medal) recalled, “I used to admire British Air Force aircraft taking off and landing on the airstrip opposite our school and developed a passion to join the Air Force. Though my father was initially reluctant, my mother secretly gave me ₹28 from her savings to help me apply.”Lt. General K. Surendra Nath, former Army Commander of the Army Training Command, described Col. Ramesh Kumar’s Bold and Brave as “a poignant tribute to Telangana’s valiant heroes, extolling their courage, valour and sacrifice in the defence of our nation”.

# Chile’s lesson for India’s coal conundrum

Despite dramatic gains in renewable energy, India dropped 13 places to 23rd in the Climate Change Performance Index released during COP30 in Brazil in November 2025. The main reason is the lack of progress to phase out coal. Coal presents a conundrum of the worst kind because its phaseout presents a loss of jobs and the supply of low-cost electricity in some States, while the current trajectory means the loss of lives and livelihoods from runaway global warming and air pollution. This trade-off draws attention to Chile’s experience in tackling it.A comparison

The big Indian picture is that coal, as a source of the use of all energy, makes up over half while renewables (solar, wind, hydro, nuclear) are still a minority share. At the same time, the good news is that India doubled clean energy capacity during 2021-25. Now, the share of renewables in total installed power capacity is one half, although only one-fifth of electricity was actually generated using them in 2024, with coal contributing 75% of electricity generation. What is more, India is increasing domestic production of coal.In comparison, coal’s share of Chile’s electricity generation fell from 43.6% to 17.5% during 2016-24. Today, renewables (especially wind and solar) make up over 60% of the country’s power mix. This shift was driven by decisive government actions, first by a 2014 tax of \$5 a tonne of carbon emissions. The government imposed stringent emission standards on coal plants, raising construction and compliance costs by 30%. Competitive auctions for wind and solar power helped push renewables. Chile has also aggressively built out energy storage systems to stabilise the grid, and committed to phase out all coal by 2040. All this makes the case that even economies with coal dependence can accelerate a transition. That said, coal occupies a smaller share of Chile’s energy when compared to India, giving it fewer plants to shut down and a smaller dependent workforce. The transition was also enabled by a political environment that allowed swift, market reforms following privatisation of key sectors.

Crucially, Chile had already begun developing alternative industries, particularly in renewables, creating pathways to absorb displaced workers and capital. In contrast, India’s far deeper coal dependence and limited economic alternatives in coal regions make its transition more complex. Many districts in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal could face social risks from abrupt closures.But it is worth remembering that coal phaseout constitutes a “no regrets” policy. That is to say it is part of averting the damage from climate change. One estimate is that by 2100, climate change would sap 3%-10% of India’s GDP through heat stress and declining labour productivity. It is also part of stopping massive health damage: by one estimate, a one GW increase in coal-fired capacity corresponds to a 14% increase in infant mortality rates in districts near the plant site.Focus on decarbonisation

Considering this socio-ecological calculus, the eye needs to be squarely on decarbonisation which calls for a systematic removal of the oldest and most polluting plants, cancellation of new coal approvals, and replacement of coal output with firm renewable power backed by storage. It is important to have timelines for plant retirements and closures. TERI has suggested that India could phase out coal power entirely by 2050 to meet its net zero goals. In the transition to this target, there could be an incremental scaling down of coal, improved efficiency and decommissioning. Three sets of action aid this central thrust of a coal phaseout.First, the more the limitations of renewables are tackled, the better for the moving out of coal. The effort would also be aided by a drive to electrify transport, industry and households.Second, underpinning this physical transition would be the reform of markets and regulation to disincentivise coal, for example through carbon pricing, removal of coal subsidies, clean dispatch rules and power procurement contracts that favour renewables.Third, Chile’s experience also speaks to providing robust support for workers through reskilling and alternative livelihoods. A dedicated transition fund is essential, such as the “Green Energy Transition India Fund” proposed by the Inter-Ministerial Committee.

The issue of financeFinancing the transition will ben-



efit from a blended model of public and private capital, where government support is directed toward community welfare and workforce reskilling, while private investors lead the expansion of clean energy infrastructure. The District Mineral Foundation corpus can be strategically used to foster entrepreneurship and economic diversification in coal-dependent regions.Considering the high stakes, a phaseout of coal needs to become a top political priority. Renewable energy gains show tremendous promise, but without an actionable plan to replace coal, climate ambitions would remain hollow. The time has come for a coal exit road map, one that enshrines delivery timelines, financing of social protection, market reform, and learning from peers such as Chile.Mansi Dingra is former Consultant, Asian Development Bank. Vinod Thomas is Distinguished Fellow, Asian Institute of Management

# U.S. deportation flight with 172 migrants lands in Venezuela's Caracas

A plane from the United States carrying 172 expelled undocumented Venezuelan migrants arrived on Friday (December 5, 2025) in Caracas, after the South American country reauthorized deportation flights to land despite President Donald Trump’s declaration that Venezuela’s airspace was “closed”.

The aircraft from Phoenix, Arizona was the second flight to transport deportees to Venezuela from the U.S. this week amid a massive American military buildup in Caribbean waters.The Trump administration has been mounting a campaign targeting what it calls drug-trafficking operations with alleged ties to leftist Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, and has deployed military forces to Latin America, including the world’s largest aircraft carrier.U.S. forces in recent months have conducted more than 20 strikes in the



Maduro has asserted that the U.S. deployment is part of a campaign to overthrow his government and seize his country’s big oil reserves.At the end of November, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration notified carriers to “take extreme precautions” when flying over Venezuela, leading almost all international airlines to suspend their flights.Mr. Trump, whose fight against undocumented immigration to the United States is one of his top priorities, soon after stated that Venezuelan airspace should be considered entirely closed.Friday’s (December 5, 2025) deportation flight carried five children, 26 women, and 141 men, Venezuelan authorities said.According to official figures, that brought the number of Venezuelans repatriated on so-called “return to the homeland” flights to 18,260, including over 14,000 from the United States.

# What do ‘Stranger Things’, John Lennon and Malayalis have in common



Think about this. What connects the late rock legend John Lennon, the Netflix series Stranger Things, and Kerala? Or Squid Games, Superman and Malayalis? While, at first, it may seem like nothing to us, Kerala Tourism thinks differently. And that has got Kerala Tourism the 2025 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Gold Awards for most engaging social media campaign.Be it the Beatles’ iconic Abbey Road photo, Vecna from Stranger Things sipping coconut water, or the Superman whose kryptonite is Kozhikodan halwa — Kerala Tourism’s online persona has gone quirky, linking culturally relevant references with niche hyper-local instances.Ajith Gopinath, National Creative Director at Stark Communications says, “Everyone is jumping onto the Stranger Things trend. As a brand, we don’t waste global anniversaries, pop culture events and so on. Our cultural radar, which is a team of youngsters, is always on. That’s how it happened. Once we spot a trend online, our team picks it up, and we work with it in such a way that it aligns with our brief, this is done within a day due to its timely nature.”

From Monalisa garbed in kasavu sari and mullapoo (a homage to the Malayali stereotype in the popular media) to Tanjiro Kamado from the anime series Demon Slayer, the campaigns are a result of combining cultural trends with Kerala’s culture, art, heritage, and experiences in imaginative, thoughtful formats.“Our philosophy was very simple. We wanted to be emotionally truthful to the Kerala, but culturally current with the world,” says Ajit.“Kerala tourism has cracked the formula, adapting global trends and localising it in such a way that it aligns with their brand’s identity,” says Geoffrey Shocky, a creative planner at an advertising agency in Kochi, Kerala. “A few years ago, they posted an April fool’s day prank on its Instagram handle , which ‘showed’

# A growing shadow over digital constitutionalism

In an unprecedented move, the central government revoked its order to mobile phone manufacturers to install ‘Sanchar Saathi’, a government app, from 2026. The roll-back came in 48 hours following widespread concerns raised by most stakeholders about ambiguous data collection methods, the lack of consent, surveillance and unlimited data storage. Reuters broke the story and Apple refused to implement the policy.

These foreign entities may have played some sort of a backstage role as the government cannot afford to lose Apple and its manufacturing in India. Although the government’s move to have the app installed was apparently aimed as a safety measure — cybercrimes increased from 15.9 lakh cases in 2023 to 20.4 lakh in 2024 — to help mobile users and the police, legitimate questions were raised during the pushback against the government’s move about surveillance, state power and data misuse. These issues can be regarded as a significant step to understand the urgent need of what may be termed as digital constitutionalism.What digital constitutionalism entails

Digital constitutionalism signifies the extension of constitutional principles such as liberty, dignity, equality including non-arbitrariness, accountability and rule of law in the digital space. These values are being threatened in the world where data collection, artificial intelligence (AI) and surveillance technologies take the lead. Modern governance is becoming an invisible system, whether it is biometric databases, predictive algorithms or both. In the absence of strong constitutional protection within these systems, humans are likely to be exposed to abuse of authority.Everyday life is now being influenced by digital governance. Automated processes mediate Know Your Customer (KYC) verification, welfare distribution, job applications, health-care records, and even political expression in social media. These technologies tend to operate without any significant revelation or approval from people.

Consequently, the concentration of power takes place in the hands of tech designers, law enforcement agencies and private companies. This generates an unequal state where the citizens are passive data subjects but not active right-holders as they are supposed to be in liberal democracies.There has also been a worrisome development in surveillance which even George Orwell could not imagine in the celebrated and futuristic 1984. It has ceased to be visible and immediate. These days it is being performed with the help of metadata gathering, location tracing, biometric identification, behavioural modelling and predictive analytics.This kind of silent and constant surveillance can chill free speech, discourage dissent and disrupt democracies. People start censoring themselves when they are aware that they are under observation. Self-censorship is the new normal. The right to privacy is now considered to be one of the basic rights in India. This was affirmed in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) And Anr. vs Union of India And Ors. (2017) by the Supreme Court of India. More recently, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, was passed by Parliament. Although it was supposed to safeguard the data of the citizens, the law has some significant flaws. It gives broad exemption to the government, is not well overseen by the independent body, and has weak remedies for individuals. It places administrative convenience and national security over individual autonomy and dignity, rendering it inadequate as a constitutional protection.Efficiency but less personal control

Data-fication has entered every sector. Banks rely on behavioural analytics. Hospitals and insurance agencies depend on digital medical records. Education is delivered through online platforms. Social media do profile users constantly. These developments create efficiency, yet they also reduce personal control over information. Consent has become a routine “click-through” process, not a genuine voluntary choice. Purpose limitation is often ignored. Consequently, privacy loss is no longer just about isolated breaches. It is about the gradual erasure of personal control over identity and decision-making.Surveillance technologies now form part of public places. Closed circuit cameras, biometric scanners and digital identifiers constantly monitor

Hollywood actors Tom Holland and Zendaya clicked at Munnar in Kerala. It was an edited photo and a prank which went viral. This was before AI, and thus brought a lot of attention to the page,” says Geoffery, who also points out how these campaigns, bring more attention to their pages where other content which is more about timeless aspects about Kerala such as its nature, culture, trade and so on.

One of the Kerala Tourism’s recent popular campaigns was a homage to John Lennon, commemorating his 85th birthday, stating the lyrics of the 1971 track ‘Imagine’ — ‘Imagine all the people living life in peace’, with girls dressed in traditional wear often attributed to different religions, crossing the street — a re-enactment of the Abbey Road album cover.The post was about weaving globally-recognised cultural icons into the State’s narrative of harmony, peace, and coexistence. “Such tributes went far beyond standard travel content, tapping into a shared cultural vocabulary that resonates across borders. The John Lennon post, especially, struck a deeper chord: the UK remains a major market for Kerala, and the Beatles are an enduring pillar of British pop culture. The reference felt natural, familiar, and instantly attention-grabbing,” says Roy Mathew, managing director and co-founder of Stark Communications Pvt Ltd

By leaning on universally relatable symbols, Kerala Tourism expands its audience, makes its messaging emotionally intuitive, and positions the State as a destination engaged in a wider global conversation, not just promoting places, but also participating in culture. An apt example for this instance would be, a popular post which came out in June featuring the characters Young-hee and Chul-su from the Korean series Squid Game, seen boating near the mangroves in Kerala, for a break.The Travel for Peace campaign, a series of social media posts about welcoming guests to Kerala, positioning itself as a meeting point of identities, sent the message of reaching out to different cultures and travelling with intrigue, which might make the world a better place to live in. “The campaign was built on the belief that Kerala could be framed through a universal human value rather than any political lens,” says Roy.At a time when brands stop making statements through their work and the world feels increasingly fractured, the “ad was a reminder that movement, discovery and human connection can soften divisions. By anchoring the narrative in peace, Kerala Tourism showed how a destination can speak empathy, healing and humanity, while remaining firmly above the political fray,” says Roy.



people. Accordingly, facial recognition has been prohibited or severely limited in a few cities in the United States because of racial discrimination, surveillance and false identification. Facial recognition misidentification has led to wrongful arrests abroad. Digi Yatra data (at Indian airports) too is not with the government. Research has found that these systems at times adversely work against people of colour, women, and minority groups. Thus, facial recognition technology basically leads to discrimination rather than assisting crime prevention which like Sanchar Saathi, is its stated objective.While such technologies are still growing and are being used in India. There is no comprehensive law on surveillance. There is a lack of effective judicial control. Transparency is rare. This poses a serious disproportion between authority and responsibility. Unchecked surveillance may end up transforming a democratic state into a monitoring state like Big Brother.Algorithms determine who receives welfare, is profiled by police, has their content removed, and who gets a job or a loan application shortlisted. Such systems are commonly known as black boxes as their decision-making functions are obscure. In cases when a benefit is not provided to a person, or a person is suspected, there is no explanation. It also lacks a clear-cut mechanism of appeal.There are real consequences. Algorithmic failures have excluded deserving families from welfare schemes. Automated content moderation has silenced legitimate voices. Indeed, technology can quietly violate the constitutional principles of equality, reasonableness and natural justice.An inadequate legal systemThe legal system that is in place in India, including the Information Technology Act, 2000, and emerging digital laws, is mainly aimed at controlling technology and governing platforms. It is not doing enough to defend citizen’s liberties in general and privacy in particular. Few guidelines have been provided by courts, but these are disjointed and provisional. When it comes to high-risk algorithms and surveillance orders, there is no external institution with the ability to audit them or even review them. To the majority of tech-savvy citizens, remedies are slow and expensive and unreachable. Masses are unaware of dangers.

This gives rise to a paradox in the constitution. Rights, freedoms and state power are now being shaped by the digital system, just like the government institutions. These are not, however, subjected to constitutional discipline. This is an incongruity that undermines democracy.To find the appropriate model of digital constitutionalism, it will have to be more than being merely theoretical. It should develop institutional protection. Violations should be inquired into by creating an independent digital rights commission that will ensure accountability. The law should restrict surveillance except in grave situations of national security, which can be determined by necessity and proportionality. Public transparency reports and parliamentary scrutiny, and judicial warrants must be obligatory.Risky AI devices should be audited and bias-tested on a regular basis. Citizens should be granted the right to explanation and the right to appeal to the automated decisions. The tight control of purpose, limited collection and severe punishment of abuse should be reinforced to ensure better data protection.

Digital literacy too is to be considered as a constitutional empowerment. Individuals should be in a position to criticise, challenge and oppose digital power structures. Rights are mere theories without knowing.Digital technologies have become an integral part of citizenship.



# Sanchar Saathi app: Apple, Google set to push back citing privacy and system security concerns



Sanchar Saathi is a state-developed cybersecurity application and allows users to report fraudulent calls, messages, and stolen mobile phones. Industry sources aware of the companies' point of view said the phone-makers have no history or precedent of preloading state-owned applications to their devices anywhere in the world. The change poses operational challenges since it could require them to customise iOS and Android specifically for India.

Both Apple and Google are expected to figure out "less intrusive" means of distributing the Sanchar Saathi app, the source said. Samsung is evaluating its options and reviewing the government order, but has not made a decision yet, it is understood. Last week, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) sent a confidential directive to smartphone companies including manufacturers and importers, to pre-install Sanchar Saathi, and insisted that the app's functionality cannot be restricted or disabled. India has over 1.2 billion mobile phone users, of which more than 650 million are said to have a smartphone, making it one of the largest phone markets in the world. Civil society activists are raising alarm bells over the potential implications on people's privacy by mandating the app, since preloading it defeats the principles of choice and consent, while leaving the potential for 'functional creeping' in the future.

'Functional creeping' refers to a gradual expansion of a system beyond its original purpose.

The government has, however, argued that the Sanchar Saathi app allows users to check the genuineness of their phones through their IMEI number, and in a press statement released on Monday said, "Mobile handsets bearing duplicate or spoofed IMEI pose serious endangerment to telecom cyber security." Apple, Samsung and Google did not respond to a request for comment until publication. Reuters first reported that Apple was not going to comply with the government's order. Companies are considering several options and "a legal challenge is not out of the question," if private discussions with the government to overturn the directive aren't successful, one of the sources said. A second industry executive said implementing the government's order would mean that Google would have to create a custom version of Android specifically for India, with the Sanchar Saathi app pre-loaded. This will not be acceptable to the company, the executive said. Android, the operating system for smartphones controlled by Google, powers most phones in the country. A third executive said for Apple, it would mean violating its internal policy of not pre-loading iPhones with third-party software. These people spoke on condition of anonymity as the companies' pushback plans are currently private. Smartphone makers fear that following the Indian government's order could set a precedent that they were open to preload government-backed apps on their devices, and that could trigger similar requests in other jurisdictions they operate in. While such a move would be unusual in most Western democracies, it is not entirely without precedent. Russia recently directed smartphone companies to preinstall the state-backed messaging platform MAX, a rival to WhatsApp, which critics say could be used to track users.

# Credit card customer complaints spike 20% in FY25, pvt banks log most cases

The rise underscores the growing pressure points in private banks' customer-facing operations, especially as they expand aggressively in retail lending and digital banking. The rise underscores the growing pressure points in private banks' customer-facing operations, especially as they expand aggressively in retail lending and digital banking. Credit cards emerged as a major source of customer complaints in FY2025, with grievances in this segment rising far more than in other areas of banking, according to the Annual Report of the Ombudsman Scheme 2024-25 released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Overall credit card complaints surged by 20.04 per cent to 50,811 cases during the year. Private sector banks dominated this space by a wide margin, driven by their strong push into unsecured lending and the rapid expansion of their card businesses. They recorded 32,696 complaints — far higher than the 3,021 complaints received against public sector banks, the report said. One of the key reasons behind the growing pile of grievances is the fact that private banks are far more active in the credit card market, leaving PSU banks with a relatively small share. With more cards in circulation and heavier usage, private banks naturally attract a larger number of customer issues.

Interestingly, even as credit card complaints climbed, other categories showed encouraging improvement. Complaints related to ATM and debit card transactions fell sharply by 28.33 per cent to 18,082 cases in FY25. Issues tied to mobile and electronic banking declined by 12.74 per cent year-on-year. These trends indicate that digital systems are becoming more reliable, although the sheer volume of digital transactions handled by private banks continues to create pressure points. Pension-related complaints fell by 33.81 per cent to 2,719, those of remittances & collection of instruments declined by 9.73 per cent and para banking by 24.16 per cent. However, complaints on deposit accounts rose by 7.67 per cent and loans & advances by 1.63 per cent, according to the report. Overall, the numbers reflect a broader shift in the banking landscape. Private sector banks — now holding around 40 per cent of India's banking assets — have emerged as the largest source of



customer grievances. From a total of 2,96,321 complaints received by the banking system in FY25, up 0.82 per cent year-on-year, those against private sector banks saw a sharp rise from 34.39 per cent in FY24 to 37.53 per cent in FY25, amounting to 1,11,199 grievances. The rise underscores the growing pressure points in private banks' customer-facing operations, especially as they expand aggressively in retail lending and digital banking. In contrast, public sector banks, long perceived as complaint-heavy because of their large customer base, saw a notable decline. Their share of complaints dropped from 38.32 per cent in FY24 to 34.80 per cent in FY25, though the absolute number still stood at a sizeable 1,03,117 cases, as per the report. The shift indicates that the burden of dissatisfaction is gradually tilting toward the private sector as its market share and product footprint increases.

Of the total grievances received by the Ombudsman in FY25, individuals accounted for the overwhelming majority, filing 2,58,365 complaints or 87.19 per cent of the total, according to the report. Loans and advances remained the single largest area of dispute, drawing 86,670 complaints during the year, reflecting the widespread nature of lending-related issues across the banking ecosystem. Small finance banks, though smaller in scale, recorded the most dramatic surge. Complaints against them jumped 42 per cent year-on-year, signalling operational strains as these banks broaden their reach in underserved markets.

# Rupee breaches 90-mark against dollar: US-India trade deal uncertainty, FPI outflows weighing on sentiments



The Indian rupee continued its free-fall, breaching the 90-mark for the first time on Wednesday against the dollar, weighed down by uncertainty around the US-India trade deal, persistent equity selling by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) and weak supply of the US currency. The rupee hit the record low of 90.16 against the dollar, after opening at 89.96 against the previous close of 89.97. It was trading at 90.12 against the greenback at 10:46 am. In the current year, the Indian currency has fallen by around 4.4 per cent. "Lingering uncertainty over the Indo-US trade deal is keeping sentiments fragile. FPI outflow from equities and early signs of Japanese yen carry trade unwinding are putting pressure on the rupee," Anindya Banerjee, Head Commodity and Currency, Kotak Securities.

The domestic equity market has been witnessing selling from overseas investors for the major part of 2025. So far in this calendar year, FPIs have sold Rs 1.48 lakh crore of shares. In the first two days of December, they have offloaded Rs 4,335 crore of equities, putting pressure on the currency. Forex market participants that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was active in the market to moderate

the fall in the rupee, though its intervention seems limited. "The RBI has consistently stated that its focus is on managing rupee volatility. It is intervening in the market today but not defending any specific exchange rate level," said an analyst. The rupee's slide beyond the 90 mark has increased hedging costs, with forward premiums jumping as both corporates and leveraged traders rushed to secure protection against further weakness.

The one-year USD/INR forward premium rose another 7 basis points (bps) on Tuesday — over 12 bps in just three sessions — while the 1-month tenor spiked to a seven-month high near 19.5 paise. "The move reflects a mix of genuine hedging demand and expanding speculative positions, underpinned by the growing perception that the RBI may allow a deeper adjustment after the currency broke below the previously defended 88.80 level," said Dipti Chitale CEO Mecklai Financial Services Pvt Ltd. The depreciation has also widened the India-US 10-year yield spread to nearly 250 bps, the largest in almost a year. Investors are demanding a higher cushion for currency risk as foreign appetite softens amid tariff uncertainty and a heavy domestic bond-supply calendar, she said. According to Bank of Baroda's Chief Economist Madan Sabnavis, depreciating rupee will help exporters at the margin but is not good for importers or inflation.

The domestic currency is likely to remain weak in the near term. However, any progress on the US-India trade agreement could trigger sharp directional moves. With the RBI policy announcement on Friday (December 5), markets expect clarity on whether the central bank will step in to stabilize the currency, said Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities. "The market is talking of 91, though we think post policy there should be a correction back to 88-89 levels. But it is guesswork all the way — as it has been ever since we crossed the Rs 88 mark," said Bank of Baroda's Sabnavis.

# ‘No matter how much water I drink, I remain thirsty, even when my stomach is almost full. What could this potentially be?’



Imagine drinking gallons of water, feeling full beyond measure, and still feeling thirsty. Even as your stomach rumbles and can't accommodate any more H<sub>2</sub>O, your relentless thirst keeps pushing you to chug in more. One internet user had a similar experience, leading him to turn to the online forum Quora for answers. So, we reached out to Dr Narendra BS, Lead Consultant — Endocrinology & Diabetology, Aster Whitefield, to get to the root of this unusual condition. "Unrelenting thirst is a very real issue, and this symptom should definitely be given a proper medical check-up," Dr Narendra cautions, sharing the first ideas that came to his mind immediately after listening to the case: High blood glucose due to diabetes: As the body excretes sugar and water in the urine, you stay thirsty

Diabetes insipidus: A hormonal disorder in which the kidneys are unable to concentrate urine, thus one produces large amounts of very diluted urine and remains thirsty Primary or psychogenic polydipsia: A condition in which the thirst is abnormal; sometimes associated with psychiatric diseases or a change in the brain's thirst centre Some of the less likely causes, as per Dr Narendra, include electrolyte disorders (such as hypercalcemia), certain drugs (diuretics, lithium, some psychiatric meds), or dry mouth conditions that mimic thirst. "In case you are drinking a lot but are still thirsty, and if you happen to urinate frequently, lose weight, or feel very tired, it is about time you visited a doctor," he advises, explaining that blood and urine tests will most likely give a quick diagnosis.

Could it be diabetes? "Definitely, blood sugar needs to be monitored without fail," Dr Narendra tells indianexpress.com, pointing out that polyuria (excessive urination), polydipsia (excessive thirst) and sometimes polyphagia (excessive hunger) are among

# Sara Ali Khan reflects on her bond with mother Amrita Singh: ‘I don’t have any comfort zone’

Sara Ali Khan recently opened up about her bond with Amrita Singh, while expressing her admiration for her mother. "I don't have any comfort zone. But that also comes from a very secure comfort zone that I come from. Because every film set is different. Every set's vibe is different. I love travelling. I have studied in New York, then shot in Kedamath. So as far as movement is concerned, I don't have a restricted comfort zone," the actor said.

Speaking about her mother, Sara told Mirchi Plus, "But I go home and hug Amrita Singh every day. That is my comfort zone, and it gives me the strength every day to tackle different things. Like Ganga flows from everywhere, but she starts at Gangotri, so is my mother (for me)." Drawing on her personal experiences, let's explore how people, especially mothers, can be a source of comfort and support for their children. A person can become a comfort zone by offering love, understanding, and a sense of safety to the child, affirmed Dr Santosh Bangar, senior consultant psychiatrist, Gleneagles Hospitals, Parel Mumbai. For a child, this bond tends to form naturally with the mother. "A mother's familiar voice and encouraging words create an environment where a child feels secure and accepted," added Dr Bangar.

He mentioned that children often seek comfort from their parents. "Even small moments of connection in day-

the primary recognition signs of the earliest stages of uncontrolled blood sugar. "High blood glucose level causes kidneys to rid the body of sugar via urine, and this process drags water along, making the individual dehydrated and thirsty. Generally, this is the mode through which type 1 diabetes reveals itself, but newly diagnosed or poorly controlled type 2 cases may also be in the same situation," the endocrine specialist notes. Apart from diabetes mellitus, it can also be a sign of diabetes insipidus (central or nephrogenic), hypercalcemia, and renal failure. "An unexplainable persistent thirst is a symptom not to be overlooked, but rather be glucose-tested or ??????????HbA1c checked right away.""Symptoms like vomiting, abdominal pain, fruity breath, or becoming unconscious in a person with diabetes can be the indication of diabetic ketoacidosis (a medical emergency) and hence necessitate getting a doctor ??????????immediately," he further notes. In diabetes insipidus, Dr Narendra explains, the danger lies in the progression to severe dehydration and in a very extreme situation, sodium imbalance that can cause "disorientation or seizures". Thus, a notable change in one's drinking habit or thirst, accompanied with temperature, bad condition, or fainting symptoms calls for immediate medical attention. "These are the warning signs that transition me from 'clinic test' to 'urgent evaluation and ??????????labs." diabetes A finger-prick test for diabetes involves using a glucometer, a small needle called a lancet, and a test strip to measure blood glucose at a single point in time Start with the easiest measures: a capillary glucose finger-prick and/or a plasma glucose test with HbA1c to screen for diabetes. Provide a basic metabolic panel (sodium, potassium, creatinine, calcium) since electrolyte or kidney problems may also cause thirst. Urine tests for glucose and specific gravity/osmolality help determine whether the urine is very diluted (suggesting diabetes insipidus or primary polydipsia) or whether glucose is present (indicating diabetes mellitus). If urine is very diluted and serum sodium/osmolality is high, formal urine osmolality and a water deprivation test with vasopressin challenge can distinguish central from nephrogenic diabetes insipidus; if normal but thirst persists, consider psychiatric causes or dipsogenic polydipsia Depending on history and medications, assess thyroid function and drugs (lithium, some antipsychotics, diuretics) If central causes are suspected (head trauma, headache, visual symptoms), a pituitary MRI may be needed. "Those are the usual measures in endocrinology to move safely from a symptom to a ??????????diagnosis." Dr Narendra concludes.



to-day life, like sharing a meal, baking your favourite desserts, hugs, or some nice conversation, can help support the child's emotional well-being, while also allowing the parent to connect at a deeper level," said Dr Bangar. No matter the age, a parent's, especially a mother's, presence could offer assurance and support on a day-to-day basis, especially during testing times. "For every child, the mother is a comfort zone wherein one can share the problems, happiness, or any emotional difficulty," said Dr Bangar. According to Dr Bangar, having an emotionally available environment helps one become more confident, mentally healthy, and emotionally clear adults.

# Mira Kapoor praises husband Shahid’s ‘discipline’, says he wakes up ‘before sunrise’: ‘If he has gone to Delhi...’

Mira Kapoor recently reflected on her husband and actor Shahid Kapoor's role in supporting her and her dreams. "I have also learnt a lot of professional discipline. The way he wakes up before sunrise, has his day, makes sure he is back home to spend time with his kids, even if he is travelling...speaking to them every day, being in touch with family. If he has gone to Delhi, he will make it a point to meet my parents, my family," Mira, 31, said during a conversation with content creator Masoom Minawala on her YouTube podcast.

Apart from that, "I think, listening...sometimes, you just want to come home and talk about your day". "You just want to vent. You need a place where someone is not judging you, but also not being a blank wall, because they know when you are vulnerable and not looking at it the right way. That's the room you want to be in. You want to be in a room where someone says, Yes, I understand, but...that's the reality check you need sometimes. It is the tag teaming that works," she shared.



Mira's reflection on Shahid's discipline is not just about an actor waking up early; it highlights a deeper truth about modern relationships. "In a world where everyone is exhausted, overstimulated, and stretched thin, the greatest act of love is consistency. Not flowers. Not grand gestures. But showing up every single day through your habits," described psychotherapist Delnna Rrajesh, who is also a life coach. When someone wakes up early to create more time for their partner or

children, what they are really communicating is simple. "You matter enough for me to reorganise my life around what nurtures us. This is emotional generosity in a very practical form," shared Delnna. Listening without judgement, being a safe space, giving reality checks without crushing the other person — these skills separate emotionally healthy relationships from the ones that drain you, said Delnna. "A lot of couples do not need therapy because they lack love. They need therapy be-

cause they lack emotional structure. One person is venting into a vacuum. The other is absorbing without support. And slowly, both feel unseen," said Delnna. True tag teaming is not about splitting housework. It is about splitting emotional load, said Delnna. "One listens. One stabilises. Then you switch. This makes a relationship feel lighter, safer and more resilient." Here are small but powerful ways couples can build this kind of emotional discipline.



## England drop Ollie Pope for Boxing Day Test, Jofra Archer ruled out of Ashes 2025-26



England has dropped vice-captain Ollie Pope for the fourth test against Australia while pacer Jofra Archer was ruled out of the rest of the series with a left side strain, the visitors announced on Wednesday. "Fast bowler Jofra Archer has been ruled out for the remainder of the tour with a left side strain," the touring side said in a statement.

Pope's snub doesn't come as a surprise as the number three batter was struggling with form. He failed to score any fifty in the six innings he played with 46 in the first test

## 2025 reimaged: What if... Luciano Spalletti had stayed back as Italy coach

It is very well to say that the Spalletti ship has sailed - it sailed straight into an iceberg of Erling Haaland proportions in the sorry 3-0 loss to Norway, after which the professorial tactician was so dismayed he declared his own departure. It is very well to say that the Spalletti ship has sailed - it sailed straight into an iceberg of Erling Haaland proportions in the sorry 3-0 loss to Norway, after which the professorial tactician was so dismayed he declared his own departure.

What if former Italy coach Luciano Spalletti had not given up on the national team in its FIFA World Cup qualification bid, and inadvertently brought Gennaro Gattuso into the mix? It is very well to say that the Spalletti ship has sailed - it sailed straight into an iceberg of Erling Haaland proportions in the sorry 3-0 loss to Norway, after which the professorial tactician was so dismayed he declared his own departure. Italy play to plans, under geeky coaches marshalling gorgeous technicians at World Cups. Flair tends to be optional, at the discretion of the personnel; parked buses once second nature. But now, they go rumbling under buses like Jack in Speed. Unlike Jack of Titanic, they are mystifyingly alive still, hovering around jagged edges of icebergs, scoring an uncharacteristic 18-goal glut under Gattuso. But no guarantees it won't sink against Wales and Northern Ireland, like they did to Sweden in 2018 and North Macedonia in 2022.

Gattuso keeps press conferences entertaining, flagel-

## Ben Stokes concerned about the well being of his players



An emotional Ben Stokes on Wednesday said that mental well-being of his players was his main concern heading into the last two games of the Ashes series. The English captain was pointing at the heavy criticism his team has come under after losing the bragging rights over the Ashes following an 82-run loss in the third test on Sunday.

The criticism further stirred up after some media reports of players partying on a trip to the Queensland resort of Noosa surfaced. Team director Rob Key on Tuesday promised to look into reports of excessive drinking in Noosa and Stokes said it had all left him with a big job to do in his role as the protector of the players. "With the reports and everything circulating around right now, my main concern right now is my players," Stokes told reporters at the

## Vaibhav Suryavanshi breaks AB de Villiers' List A world record with fastest 150 in Vijay Hazare Trophy, misses quickest double century

Vaibhav Suryavanshi's imperious hitting streaks at the senior level continued as he walloped a 36-ball century in the Vijay Hazare Trophy Plate league opener for Bihar against Arunachal Pradesh at the JSCA Oval Ground in Ranchi on Wednesday. Turning up for the match only three days after India's Asia Cup U19 final debacle against Pakistan in Dubai, Suryavanshi peppered the Arunachal bowlers from the outset to storm to his century on the back of a feast of fours and nine sixes in 36 balls, making it only the second-fastest hundred by an Indian man in overall List A cricket. FOLLOW: VHT 2025-26 Live Scores, Round 1 Only Punjab batter Anmolpreet Singh has recorded a quicker ton among Indians in List A cricket, having smashed a 35-ball century against Arunachal in the Vijay Hazare competition last season. Suryavanshi's 36-ball ton ranks as the joint-fourth fastest ever in the world in List A cricket. Fastest List A centuries by Indians

35 – Anmolpreet Singh, Punjab vs Arunachal Pradesh, 2024

36 – VAIBHAV SURYAVANSHI, Bihar vs Arunachal Pradesh, 2025\*

40 – Yusuf Pathan, Baroda vs Maharashtra, 2010

41 – Urvil Patel, Gujarat vs Arunachal Pradesh, 2023

42 – Abhishek Sharma, Punjab vs Madhya Pradesh, 2021

Misses fastest List A double centuryThe dashing south-

being his highest score. Jacob Bethell will replace Pope in the squad and it will be interesting to see how will the batting of the visitors look like for the fourth test. With Archer gone, England has another big gap to fill. The pacer took a fiver in the third test and was the only English bowler who troubled the Australian batting line up with his express pace and precise short balls. Surrey seamer Gus Atkinson will replace Archer as England, 3-0 down in the five-test series, seek to salvage pride in the last two matches.

Apart from the two changes, England is going with same line up with no signs of spinner Shoab Bashir as Will Jacks remain their go-to spinner for the fourth Test. With Ashes gone and a lot of criticism for non cricketing reasons, the English team will look to give a tough fight to the home team who will be without skipper Pat Cummins and experienced Nathan Lyon. England XI for Boxing Day Test against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Jacob Bethell, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith (wicketkeeper), Will Jacks, Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse, abd Josh Tongue



lates self and his players with equal gusto, has spurred them on in a ridiculous 5-4 comeback against Israel and gotten them going 2-0 against Moldova after early bottling. Ridiculous, because the team was so scattered defensively, that scrambles were a default and solidity left behind in some museum. The 2006 WC winner though has backed their creative flair,

pushed two forwards up front. It will all look like a chaotic freefall if they don't score all those goals. Because they canter about like beautiful wild horses, the doughty work of mules, has slipped out of the Italian football DNA – and post-mortems of a third WC miss will become that much more tough to figure. Spalletti could've enforced those tactical patterns given the paucity of technical geniuses. Instead, they have Gattuso who keeps the swinging trapeze-artists in the qualification circus going, with nobody really sure of a safety net to break the falls.

Melbourne Cricket Ground, where the fourth test starts on Friday.

"How I handle this moment right now is the most important thing to me. The welfare of everyone in there, and probably some certain individuals as well, is the most important thing to me right now." "This kind of stuff is something that I have firsthand experience of, how it can affect people. And my role as England captain is to protect my players as much as I possibly can. I will always protect my players as much as I possibly can. And right here, right now, that is my main job as England captain," he added further. Stokes has been one of the voices constantly taking up the issues related to mental health.

He has been open about the challenges he faced in his career and also took a break in 2021 to focus on his well-being. "It's never a nice place to be when not only the media world but also the social media world is just piling on top of you," Stokes said. "It's a very tough, tough, tough place to be in as an individual, and when you know you've got the support of the people who are sort of leaders, it's very good to know that you've got that support." Stokes appeared to be more concerned with the impact of leaked video on social media than more mainstream criticism of England's cricket. "When you are 3-0 down and you've lost the series, everything you say, everything you do, gets scrutinized, and rightly so," he said. "You don't really have a leg to stand on when you've lost three games in a huge series like this." Stokes said England would name their team later on Wednesday.



paw had racked up his 150 in only 54 deliveries, with Bihar storming past the 200-run mark inside 18 overs. Suryavanshi thereby broke South Africa batting legend AB de Villiers' record (64 balls) for the fastest century in the format. Suryavanshi, however, missed out on recording the fastest List A double hundred as he fell on 190 off 84 deliveries. He clubbed 15 sixes during the whirlwind knock, only second to Rohit Sharma (16) and Ruturaj Gaikwad (16) in a List A innings among Indians. Australia batter Jake Fraser-McGurk had smoked a 29-ball century, representing South Australia against Tasmania in Adelaide in the 2023-24 season. In ODI cricket, de Villiers continues to hold the record for the fastest century in 31 deliveries against the West Indies at Johannesburg in 2014.

## Unnati, Tanvi may not have natural gifts of PV Sindhu, but are silently plotting their journeys in badminton's upper echelons



Sree Charani's ice-cool control. Sheetal Devi's relentless grit. Chess queen Divya Deshmukh unleashing gambits. In 2025, India's young sportswomen didn't just compete — they conquered. From Unnati Hooda and Tanvi Sharma ushering in a new era in badminton to the rise of another 'Phogat' — Suruchi — this time on the shooting range, Ankita Bhagat rattling South Korea's archery dynasty, Preeti Panwar's clinical power in the ring, or Antim Panghal reminding she still owns the mat. Express Sports dives deep into 'Gen She' – the trailblazers who kept the Tricolour flying high.

When Unnati Hooda defeated PV Sindhu at the China Open in June and later moved to World No 23 in the December 15 rankings, it wasn't merely a career milestone for the 18-year-old. There have been a bunch of India No 2s behind the world-beating Sindhu in rankings. Saina Nehwal, Ashmita Chaliha and most recently Malvika Bansod. But even as 5 ranking spots separate Unnati from Sindhu, and it might well take a few months for Unnati to edge ahead of the veteran, securing that mental advantage held significance like it would for a pugilist challenging for a heavyweight title. Unnati had a plan against Sindhu, a former World No 2, and she could execute it to perfection at a Super 1000. It takes some audacity to believe in it, and the Haryanvi went about it with fearless humility, that was evident in how she viewed the win later: Sindhu was a top international competitor, but there were bigger fish to fry from around the world, she respectfully stated. Make no mistake, India is not about to luck out anytime soon, and find itself in the enviable scenario of 10 years ago, when Sindhu seamlessly stepped into the niche where Saina Nehwal reigned, right into Olympic medals realm. 2026 is not 2016. Neither Unnati, nor the other big young hope, Tanvi Sharma, would call 2025 a breakthrough year – that's still some distance away. But 2026 will answer a few straight-up questions.

Can the promising duo make the jump from Top 25 to

## Card games, camaraderie and champagne, as Pragg and Co win title with SG Pipers

Inside an hour after their coronation as the champions of Global Chess League's season 3, the Alpine SG Pipers players made their way to the ornate balcony of Mumbai's Royal Opera House for a final flourish, for the sake of the fans. Along with fireworks came a twist: three champagne bottles were handed out to the players to spray into the fans like a Formula 1 podium celebration. With R Praggnanandhaa, Leon Luke Mendonca and Anish Giri looking hesitant, the champagne-opening responsibilities were passed on to American star Fabiano Caruana, Nino Batshishvili and the team manager. A minute's struggle with the bottles later, a gentle spray into the crowd followed, after which the players quickly moved on.

All the top three players of the side – Caruana, Giri, and Pragg – shared jokes during the presentations, a camaraderie that will soon turn into rivalry as they fly out to Qatar for the World Rapid and Blitz Championship and then the Candidates, which is one of the most important tournaments of all three players' careers. Some of that serious energy was still in the team on the initial days of the players coming together. So it's not a surprise that until a few days back, the team had slim chances of making it to the final itself. Pragg says their season, before they cracked the code to make it to the final, was 'shaky'. At some point our top three players (Caruana, Giri and himself) were not playing well. But we were joking about it and having fun about it and not really worrying about it," admits Pragg in a conversation with

The team started off with two defeats in a row in the season. But then, an inspired idea from the team's 'prodigy' player, Leon Luke Mendonca, became the social glue that brought together the team every night in the hotel lobby. A card game called 'Kabootar'. "We were playing a funny game called kabootar, which we played a lot after first starting it around round 4. We had a lot of time on our hands (since there is just one game a day), so we had to do something. Then I think we were all open to it. Leon basically got it.

## Kohli and Rohit return to Vijay Hazare Trophy as star power lifts domestic cricket

Bengaluru: The charismatic presence of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, alongside a host of top India cricketers, lends unprecedented gravitas to the Vijay Hazare One-Day Trophy beginning on Wednesday, giving all of them a chance to prove a point amid renewed focus on the domestic grind.

The line-up of superstars also features Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill, Suryakumar Yadav and Abhishek Sharma among others, but none attracts as much attention as Kohli and Rohit. Their appearance has a direct link to the BCCI decision of making at least two Vijay Hazare Trophy matches mandatory for India cricketers. In the case of Kohli, who is playing in this tournament after 15 years, and Rohit, it is a sharp reminder that they are no longer immune to the evolving power equations within Indian cricket. The celebrated pair remain the biggest current stars of the game, but that status

Top 10, without the natural strength and power that Sindhu possessed? Can Unnati and Tanvi really get into the Saina-Sindhu stratosphere without guidance of coach Pullela Gopichand? The answers have flitted through their brains, at several points in time, this year. Earlier this year, before she lost the World Juniors final to Thai Anyapat Phichitprechasak, Tanvi was in the semifinals of the Asian juniors, losing out to a Chinese. "When you play them you realise they are OK only...but we lack in physical strength, and aren't mentally as strong," she would say. Still only 17, her losses in finals at US Open and World Juniors, might get excused away legitimately, as inexperience.

An above-average stroke-player, diligent in training too, Tanvi is perhaps on par with exceptional talents of her age from around the world. But can she build that exceptional deception of Tai Tzu-ying, explosive agility of Yamaguchi or the astute aggression, backed by top-tier stamina and speed of Chen Yufei or Marin, that helped them all beat Sindhu at her peak – is the poser that needs answering from coaches Park Tae-sang & Co in 2026, when it is evident that she is neither going to match Sindhu in power or reach. It's mostly the same for Unnati, though she carries that X-factor when on a very good day of accuracy and attacking play for her, and a very off day for her opponent, she can be expected to turn the knife, with no nerves. Clump-prone, with a knack of bunching up her mistakes in a clump and frittering leads, she tends to be.

But world champ Akane Yamaguchi had confessed Unnati could take unsuspecting opponents by surprise, if they weren't careful. Still, the physicality metrics aren't exactly top notch, though that's more from her having been resistant to seeking help, and maxing out her father's coaching abilities, needing a far more pro training set-up.

No coach except Pullela Gopichand has actually delivered champions in women's singles, and even he would tell the duo how no amount of chiseling of their games will amount to anything substantial, unless their fitness is top-tier. Plateaus are the rule, dizzy heights exceptions in women's singles. And an outstanding array of strokes, tactical nous, defensive compactness, attacking intent and even exceptional fitness are only basic requirements to put together a game, worthy of titles and medals. Though it cannot be standardised across different body-frames, the women's singles game demands a few fitness fundamentals – the smash kill, first, second and even fifth, need the stinging punch. Long rallies don't come gift-wrapped in promises of the next one being any gentler. Both Tanvi and Unnati have faded massively towards second half of mid-games with Top 10 opponents, and are washed out in deciders. Sindhu at the Glasgow World's finals, is the golden fitness standard, and she still finished with silver. Ankles, knees, back and wrists are war-zones; they break and wreck careers. Every other shuttler from China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan is undergoing excruciating S&C drills. You need to assume this, and train smartly, because they draw their mental strength from this fitness base. The coming years thus, will solely pan out depending on how Tanvi and Unnati progress physically, for their games hold no quibbles. One of the two might well head to the 2028 Los Angeles Games, given how determined they both are. "But I need to beat all top players in the world, not just Sindhu," Unnati had said. Even she knew, it's neither easy said-nor easily done.



Then at some point we were just annoyed with that game because it just wasn't finishing. We also started getting other friends along. So then we moved on to another game called Avalon," chuckles Pragg. The card games did the trick. By the time the final game of chess came around, they were even comfortable discussing opening ideas with each other despite Fabi, Pragg and Anish facing an elephant in the room. They will be heading to one of the most cut-throat tournaments in the sport, the Candidates in March, where they will try their best to bruise their lifelong dream of earning a shot at the world champion's crown to contest against D Gukesh.

"We were even discussing some general stuff about openings," Pragg reveals before quickly adding: "Not too deep of course, we are all going to play in the Candidates. But generally we were having a lot of fun with the team. That's one of the main reasons we won, we had really good team spirit, you can always see someone chipping in." After the balcony celebrations, the Pipers were quickly on their way to the team hotel. Most of them will be flying out tonight for Qatar for the World Rapid and Blitz. Champagne, camaraderie and card games will soon be forgotten, with only Candidates on their minds.

cannot mask the reality that both cricket and time have moved ahead. Watching that gradual unfolding of struggle itself is fascinating.

Can Ro-Ko fire?

Rohit has made it clear that he will play the first two matches for Mumbai against Sikkim and Uttarakhand in Jaipur on December 24 and 26.

Kohli, who has been training with former India batting coach Sanjay Bangar in Mumbai, has not yet decided which two or three matches he will play for Delhi. Delhi will open their Elite Group D campaign against Andhra in Bengaluru at the BCCI Centre of Excellence after the Karnataka government denied permission to hold matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium citing security reasons.



# ‘Cold war’ between Mohammed Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar had them banning each other for 3 years, contesting each other’s Guinness Book claims

Hindi film music has been a part of our movies ever since we started making talkies in the 1930s. By the 1940s, when the music industry started to develop its legs and composers, singers and lyric writers started to gain prominence, there were a few titans that emerged, who continued to rule the space for the next few decades. Amongst the singers, Mohammed Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar became the voices that became synonymous with Hindi film music. Sure, other singers were respected just as much, but the kind of popularity that Rafi and Lata experienced was unmatched. And it was, perhaps, this popularity that led to a few clashes between them. So much so that the two did not even record with each other for three years, and for singers in their prime, who were known to sing every other song with each other, this was a lifetime.Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammed Rafi first recorded with each other in 1947. The song was called ‘Chalo Ho gayi Tayyar’ and it was a part of a film called Shaadi Se Pehle. Not many would know this song today, but it surely introduced one of the best duet jodis in the history of Hindi film music. In the next few years, they sang together for Baiju Bawra, Mother India, Kohinoor, Mere Mehboob, among many others and by the time the 1960s hit, the duo had established themselves as the best in the business. But 1963 cast a dark shadow on their otherwise successful partnership. Rafi was known to be a simple, naive man who loved his job and preferred to stay away from the business of the movies. It was perhaps his disinterest in this business aspect of the movies, that caused a clash between the duo.

It is well known that in Hollywood, every artiste – singer, writer, actor, director, or anyone else – who has worked on a film or television project continues to get royalties on their work as long as their work is consumed. So no matter how many times an old film plays on television, or an old song is played on the radio, or sells records, artistes associated with it, get paid. The ones who own the song or film make money from it, and the money is then distributed among those who contributed to making it. It sounds like a fair deal, and Lata, who was at her peak at the time, had probably recognised that her songs would be played for decades, so she made sure that she got a piece of this royalty, which wasn’t the norm in India at the time.Since Lata was getting her residuals, she suggested that other singers must also get the rightful share that belongs to them. She was of the belief that even if a singer isn’t getting as many opportunities at any

point in their life, or they wish to take a break, they will continue to make some money via royalties. This could also act like a pension scheme for older artistes. But to get this into effect, she needed the support of the entire music fraternity, and most of all, she needed Rafi’s support as these two were the most popular singers of the era.In a 2009 chat with Mumbai Mirror, Lata recalled that the situation went out of hand when they were all at a meeting of the Musicians’ Association. “I was taking royalty but I also wanted other artistes’ to get it. Rafi saab was instigated into opposing my campaign,” she said.Lata believed Rafi was a bit innocent and gullible. Or perhaps, he was too much of a saint to ask for more money than he already made. And so, he was vehemently opposed to the idea of taking more money from the producers. The debate got bigger as HMV, the most popular music label at the time, said that if royalties were to be paid, they would come out of the producers’ pockets, and the producers pointed in HMV’s direction. At this time, Lata, Mukesh and Talat Mahmood suggested that the only way forward was to declare that they wouldn’t sing for them, and the same was conveyed to all the other singers as well. But in the meantime, Lata got to know that Rafi was already recording for HMV.Recalling the argument they had with each other, Lata shared in the same interview, “In a meeting among musicians, he said, ‘We get money for what we sing from producers and that’s the end of what we get.’” He then looked at Mukesh and spoke about Lata, “I guess this ‘maharani’ here will say whatever has to be said.” Lata did not take this remark silently and immediately responded, “Of course I am a ‘maharani’. But why are you calling me that?”Mohammed Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar Mohammed Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar started recording again in 1977. (Photo: Express Archives)The issue escalated within minutes as Rafi declared that he won’t sing with Lata anymore. In a chat with Subhash K Jha in 2012, she recalled, “He said, ‘I won’t sing with Lata anymore’. I retorted, ‘Rafi saab, you won’t sing with me? I won’t sing with you. I stormed out and called all my composers there and then and informed them to rope in another singer if it was a duet with Rafi Saab.’Apology note from Mohammed Rafi that ended the ‘cold war’

For the next three years, the two stars didn’t work with each other, which made it rather difficult for the music composers to make songs that needed the best male and

the best female vocals. Other singers cropped up, but no one could replace them. The music industry could sense that this professional boycott was not sustainable, especially since the industry was already a small one. Thus, music composers tried to bring them back together. Lata, in the same 2012 chat, said that it was Jaikishen (of Shankar-Jaikishen) who got her an apology note from Rafi. “I asked him to get a written apology from Rafi Saab. I got the letter and ended the cold war. But whenever I’d see him, the hurt would return,” she said.In another chat with Khalid Mohamed, Lata shared that after their disagreement, they recorded many songs together. “We recorded so many songs together with so many composers after that. We would laugh over our difference of opinion, all was well,” she said.However, many suggest that the professional rivalry between these two started way before the issue of royalty came up. It has been suggested that during the recording of the song ‘Tasveer Teri Dil Mein’, composed by Salil Chowdhury, the two had a difference of opinion, which sowed the seed of discomfort. However, none of the subjects involved here has ever spoken about that.The issue of royalties was never resolved and it wasn’t until the 2012 amendment to the Copyright Act that they could claim royalties. Even Rafi’s descendants didn’t get any money out of his wealth of music.

‘Lata Mangeshkar is insecure’Mohammed Rafi passed away in 1980 when he was just 56. In the years since, it was his contemporaries or his family members who became the narrators of his story. In fact, when Lata shared that she got an apology letter from him, his son Shahid Rafi was quite offended as he refused to believe that this had ever happened.He called a press conference and claimed that if such a letter existed, then why did she not show it to the viewers, who considered Rafi next to god. “My father was national property. I am hurt and so are his fans. His fan following is much bigger than any other artiste. If she can prove that my father had written an apology letter to her, then I am ready to apologise. But the main thing is that she should come forward and produce that letter. All I want is that the truth should come out,” he said. Shahid Rafi went as far as to call Lata Mangeshkar “insecure” and added, “I think this is a publicity stunt as she is insecure with the huge fan following my father has, even after his death.” Lata never discussed the apology letter again.In the years after Rafi’s death, Lata always spoke highly of him. In a 2017 chat with



IANS, she remembered him saying, “For Rafi Saab, his singing was a form of worship. Even I am very serious about my work. But for Rafi Saab, the dedication was on another level. He had no vices at all. He didn’t smoke, drink or eat paan. He led an ascetic’s life. We recorded scores of songs together, so we met almost every day. Sometimes, we would be out of one recording studio and then into another for two different songs during the same day with scarcely something to eat.”In another chat with Subhash K Jha, she clarified that theirs was not a “mean-minded rivalry” and there was no reason to prove who was better than the other. “Rafi Saab and I had a perfect rapport. This rapport was always underscored by a feeling of one-upmanship. But this wasn’t a mean-minded rivalry. Not at all,” she said.Mohammed Rafi vs Lata Mangeshkar in the Guinness Book of World RecordsBut, this wasn’t the only point of contention between Mohammed Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar. In 1977, Lata Mangeshkar had claimed that she had recorded 25,000 songs and submitted a letter to the Guinness Book of World Records. Rafi, however, disputed that claim. In the book ‘Mohammed Rafi – Golden Voice of the silver screen’ by Sujata Dev and Dilip Kumar, it is mentioned that Rafi wrote a letter to the BBC saying, “I am disappointed that my request for a reassessment vis-a-vis Ms Mangeshkar’s reported world record has gone unheeded.” He claimed that he had recorded 25,000-26,000 songs too.After Rafi’s death, the record book stated that Lata was the one with the maximum recordings.

## Shin Min A-Kim Woo Bin’s wedding story revealed, Ahn Bo Hyun tears up: ‘She carried rice sacks, prayed during his cancer battle’



The scent of celebration is in the air, and wedding bells are all one can hear after South Korean actors Shin Min A and Kim Woo Bin tied the knot. Fellow stars and fans from all around the world are swooning since hearing the news, and many have hailed the couple for the way they have handled themselves throughout their relationship. Since their happy day, several stories have surfaced which prove just how movie-like this union really is.

The couple’s wedding took place in Seoul’s Shilla Hotel and was officiated by the Buddhist monk Pomnyun, who revealed some heartwarming details about Shin and Kim. The latter actually met the monk during his battle with nasopharyngeal cancer in 2017. The actor found peace and power through the monk’s teachings, and the conversations brought him the strength to fight the disease. Another factor giving him strength was the constant presence of Shin right by his side.

She too found the teaching of the monk helpful, and Pomnyun revealed that the actor did a lot more than just stay by Kim’s side. When the actor’s health was at its worst, Shin carried sacks of rice on her head — a traditional Buddhist offering — and prayed at a statue of Avalokitesvara on Mt Nam in Gyeongju. He said that the couple had been on a spiritual journey together and that them standing together on their wedding day was a result of a “karmic connection”.

The monk talked about Shin’s character at length and said that she and Kim had always been the kind of people who give back to society. The couple have apparently been supporting underprivileged children for many years now. Shin has also been heavily involved in helping patients, especially burn victims, to help cover their medical costs, and that too since 2015, the same year she started dating Kim. The husband has been donating anonymously for the betterment of underprivileged youths since 2014. He has also been making donations through the Asan Medical Centre in order to help children with cancer.The charity did not stop on their special day, as the couple decided to tie the day with a very generous ribbon. The donated 300 million won (Rs 2 crore approx.) and several other year-end donations marked the special day.

Another heartwarming moment came when actor Ahn Bo Hyun was seen visibly emotional during the wedding. He could be seen taking his glasses off, wiping his tears and choking up. It is an understandable reaction, as Ahn and Kim have known each other since they were teenagers making the rounds of modelling agencies. Apart from Shin,

Ahn was another constant by Kim’s side during his battle with cancer.

### Amid Dhurandhar criticism, Arjun Rampal calls it an ‘important film’: ‘I felt horrible’

Dhurandhar may have surpassed Ranbir Kapoor’s Animal to become the highest-grossing A-rated Indian film worldwide, with a collection of over Rs 930 crore, but the Aditya Dhar directorial appears to have outdone it not just at the box office, but also in controversy, headlines, criticism, and ongoing debate over its alleged “propaganda.” While several critics including YouTuber Dhruv Rathee have labelled the film a “well-made propaganda,” actor Arjun Rampal—who plays the ISI chief in the film—believes it is an “important film.”

In a recent interview with Grazia, Arjun Rampal spoke about the psychological toll of portraying the character and said, “I wanted to get out of the character as soon as I could.”Here’s why Arjun Rampal wanted to leave his character Major Iqbal behind

Addressing the larger debate around the film being termed propaganda, Arjun explained, “One of the important reasons to do it was because it is an important film to do.” Elaborating further, he added, “To see the event is one thing, what happened behind the scenes to see those events taking place is something that would excite me as an audience. I felt horrible when you’re doing it because you love your country so much, but I guess that’s what an actor’s job is and you just dive into it.”

Dhurandhar, based on crimes in Pakistan’s Lyari region, portrays three major incidents—the Uri attack, the Mumbai terror attacks, and the Kandahar hijacking. The makers introduce Ranveer Singh as a covert agent sent by India to infiltrate criminal networks in Pakistan and track movements against India. The film depicts several real-life figures and uses actual visuals and clips from multiple attacks carried out by Pakistan in India.

Who is Arjun Rampal’s character Major Iqbal

Arjun Rampal plays Major Iqbal who is an ISI operative and the architect of 26/11 attacks in India. His character is said to be based on Pakistani operative Ilyas Kashmiri. After the Mumbai attacks, David Headley Chase identified Major Iqbal as Chaudhry Khan during the case in a court in India.He had also called him the ‘mastermind’ behind the horrific attack.While actors like Hrithik Roshan praised the film’s cinematic merit, they also “disagreed” with its politics and questioned the responsibilities of filmmakers. This sentiment echoed the views of many who called the film “engaging” yet equally “dangerous,” with some alleging that it gaslights audiences by blending facts with fiction and presenting it as a “gospel truth.”Most recently, Aditya Dhar, for the first time, shared a cryptic post that appeared to take a dig at Dhruv Rathee’s video criticising the film. A story reshared by the filmmaker read: “A video maker tried to criticise it recently and got swept away by a wave of criticism against him.”

## Mirzapur movie: Ali Fazal reveals sinister first look as Guddu Bhaiya; walks out to iconic Sanjay Dutt’s Khal Nayak song

During the boom of web series in India, Prime Video’s Mirzapur and Netflix’s Sacred Games rose up as the top two properties in Indian entertainment. Now the former is coming back, but this time as a film. The highly anticipated project has been on the floor for quite some time, and the makers have already wrapped up a couple of schedules. Now, actor Ali Fazal has given a sneak peek into the filming of the movie via a video on social media.

The video features Fazal, dressed as his iconic character Guddu Bhaiya, walking around the set. His demeanour and, most importantly, his gait are all in character, as he is seen towering over the people around him. The lyrics to Sanjay Dutt’s memorable song ‘Nayak Nahi Khal Nayak Hoon Mai’ are playing from the Subhash Ghai film Khal Nayak (1993). While the whole song doesn’t play, the lyrics ‘Kitne khilono se khela hai tu. Afsos, fir bhi akela hai tu’ (You have played with so many toys. Too bad that you’re still alone,) can be heard in the background.

The caption of the post has Fazal gracefully thanking the people of Jaisalmer and Jodhpur for making the whole crew feel at home while shooting there. He wrote, “Mirzapur the film. Shooting now. Rajasthan Schedule. Thank you, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur, for the immense love and hospitality that knows no bounds. Aapne humein apna samjha (You thought of us as one of your own)... To all the hotels that made us feel at home while we were toiling away from our own homes.” The video ended with the words “Mirzapur: The Film”. Shooting Now.”The first episode aired on Novem-



ber 16, 2018, and the fans have since then fallen in love with the characters. Directed by Gurmmeet Singh, the cast of the film includes Ali Fazal, Pankaj Tripathi, Abhishek Banerjee, Divyendu Sharma, Jitendra Kumar, Rasika Dugal, Ravi Kishan, Shweta Tripathi, and Sonal Chauhan.

## Prabhas Ponytail Look Goes Viral



Noted star Prabhas’ off screen and on screen looks have been heavily criticized post Baahubali. There has been constant talk about how carelessly and lazily he has been appearing, both in films and in public, often with his head covered most of the time. Finally, it looks like Sandeep Reddy Vanga has addressed this long standing issue.

Prabhas came straight from the Spirit shoot to at-

tend The Raja Saab pre release event, and his look surprised many. He appeared slim, sharp, and well styled. The hairstyle stood out too. Something that was clearly missing earlier in Prabhas earlier looks.

This time, Prabhas looked razor sharp. His fitness, hair, and overall appearance truly justified his tag as India’s biggest pan India star. Going by this look, there is no doubt that Sandeep Reddy Vanga will present Prabhas in his best form. Full credit to him.