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Milind Kamble reviews the resolution of POCSO cases, protection, and rehabilitation of victims:

- District Legal Services Authority Secretary V. Madhavi Latha

“(Mandava Srisailam, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau, Indian Chronicle, December 20): - As per the instructions and under the supervision of the District Legal Services Authority President and District Judge A. Jayaraju, Special Additional District Judge Milind Kamble of the POCSO Court conducted a review meeting in the district court premises on the resolution of POCSO cases, protection, and rehabilitation of victims. He gave appropriate suggestions to the Public Prosecutor, police, and Childline departments on the measures to be taken to prevent delays in the resolution of POCSO cases.

Assam emerging as key engine of Viksit Bharat: PM Modi

Guwahati, Dec 20

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the world today views India through a transformed lens as the country steadily works towards realising the goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Highlighting Assam's growing strategic and economic importance, the Prime Minister said the state is emerging as a key engine of Viksit Bharat and a vital gateway to eastern India.

He said the collective efforts of all states are driving the vision of Viksit Bharat, with Assam and other northeastern states playing a pivotal role in this national mission.

The Prime Minister that sustained investments in infrastructure are strengthening Assam's connectivity and unlocking its development potential.

Referring to the con-



struction of bridges over the Brahmaputra, PM Modi said connectivity across the river has witnessed a historic transformation under the current dispensation.

He pointed out that in the six decades following Independence, only three bridges were built over the Brahmaputra, whereas four new bridges have been constructed in the last decade alone. This enhanced connectivity, he said, has emerged as a major catalyst for economic growth, mobility and regional integration in Assam.

The Prime Minister asserted that with robust infrastructure, policy support and people's participation

tion, Assam is steadily advancing towards becoming a cornerstone of India's development journey.

Earlier in the day, PM Modi inaugurated the new terminal building of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati, marking a major milestone in Assam's aviation infrastructure.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by Union Civil Aviation Minister K. Ram Mohan Naidu, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during the inauguration.

Improved road, rail, air and riverine connectivity is enabling the state to serve as a hub for trade, tourism and logistics for the entire eastern and northeastern region.

Designed to handle an annual passenger capacity of 13.1 million, the state-of-the-art terminal is expected to significantly enhance air connectivity in the Northeast while setting new benchmarks in sustainability and technology-driven airport operations in the country.

Government Whip and Alair MLA Beerla Ailaiah congratulates those who won the Sarpanch elections and offers encouragement to those who lost.

“(Mandava Srisailam, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau, Indian Chronicle, December 20): - In the Alair constituency of Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, Telangana State Government Whip, Alair MLA, and DCC President Beerla Ailaiah congratulated all the Sarpanch candidates supported by the Congress party who won the elections. Similarly, Beerla Ailaiah personally visited the homes of the winning candidates as well as those who lost in several villages, offering them encouragement and urging them to be at the forefront of village development. He inquired about the reasons for the defeat of the Sarpanch candidates in various villages and identified the shortcomings. Beerla Ailaiah reassured the defeated candidates, stating that their defeat should be considered a victory, and that development schemes and projects in the village would be implemented through them, giving them confidence. On Saturday, Beerla Ailaiah toured the villages of Anantharam, Suddala, Velmajala, Pachilla, Turkalashapuram, Peddapadishala, and Masanpally in Gundala mandal, offering support and encouragement to the defeated Sarpanches.

BJP's Ultimate Aim Is to Scrap MGNREGS and Snatch Livelihood of the Poor: PCC President Mahesh Kumar Goud Protest Held at MG Road; Ministers Sridhar Babu and Azharuddin participated

“(Indian Chronicle, Secunderabad, December 20): - Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President Mahesh Kumar Goud, along with Ministers D. Sridhar Babu and Azharuddin, strongly alleged that the

BJP government's ultimate objective is to scrap the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and deprive poor people of their livelihood. “Protesting against the move to remove Mahatma Gandhi's name from the scheme and introduce a new Bill in the Lok Sabha under the name ‘V.B.-G.-Ram-Ji,’ the TPCC organised a dharna at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi on MG Road in Secunderabad. Several senior leaders, including MP V.H., Ministers

Krishna Rao and Vakkiti Srihari, participated in the protest along with MLAs Sriganaesh, Naveen Yadav, Congress leaders and party workers. Addressing the media, the leaders said that the proposed Bill is not merely a change of name but an attempt to curtail the rights of states and local bodies. They pointed out that earlier the Centre used to bear 90 per cent of the expenditure while states contributed only 10 per cent, but under the new law, states would be forced to bear 40 per cent of the burden. They criticised the BJP for introducing schemes in the name of gods while carrying out policies that harm the poor. They asserted that while the BJP may try to remove the names of Gandhi and Nehru from welfare schemes, it cannot erase them from the hearts of the people. The leaders demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Bill and continuation of the scheme in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. “Sanathnagar Congress leaders Aitha Chiranjeevi, Nasreen, Sai Sandeep, Deepika, Shilpa, Ved Prakash, Madhuraveeran, Mallikarjun, Noman, Nagaraju, Mahesh, Raghu Yadav, Syed Ayoob and a large number of party workers participated in the protest.

Accreditation Cards Within 10 Days, Housing Plots Next Year: Telangana Minister Assures Journalists

“(Taj Khan, Kagganagar, December 20): - Telangana Minister for Revenue, Housing, and Information & Public Relations, Mr. Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, has asserted that the state government is firmly committed to resolving long-pending issues of journalists, including the issuance of accreditation cards and allocation of housing plots. “The Minister was scheduled to attend the district conference of the Telangana Working Journalists Federation (TWJF) held on Saturday at the SR Convention Hall in the district headquarters as the chief guest. However, due to unavoidable circumstances requiring his immediate presence in Hyderabad, he addressed the journalists over the phone. During his address, he outlined the key decisions being taken by the government for the welfare of journalists. “Accreditation Cards Soon” Minister Ponguleti announced that the long-awaited process of issuing accreditation cards to journalists across the state has reached its final stage. He assured that the Government Order (GO) related to accreditation would be issued within the next ten days. He further stated that all eligible journalists will receive accreditation cards, and urged journalists not to lose confidence. “Clarity on Housing Plots” On the issue of housing plots for journalists, the Minister said that detailed discussions have already been held with Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy. He acknowledged that the process was delayed earlier due to Supreme Court orders and legal complications, but



emphasised that the government has now overcome these hurdles. He assured that next year, the government will deliver positive news regarding housing plots for journalists. Protecting the self-respect and dignity of journalists is a key responsibility of the present government, he said. “Call for Unity: The Minister expressed happiness over the grand conduct of the TWJF district conference and congratulated the federation's leaders and members for their continuous struggle to safeguard journalists' rights. State and district-level representatives of TWJF, along with a large number of journalists, participated in the conference.

Bank Cooperation Essential to Curb Cyber Crimes: Hyderabad CP Sajjanar City Police Commissioner Meets RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra



“(Indian Chronicle, Secunderabad, December 20): - Hyderabad City Police Commissioner V.C. Sajjanar, IPS, has stressed that cyber crimes and financial frauds—posing a serious threat to the country's economy and the hard-earned money of citizens—cannot be curbed without comprehensive reforms in existing banking regulations. “Leading a team of senior police officers, CP Sajjanar met Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra at the RBI office in Hyderabad on Friday and brought several critical issues to his notice. The Commissioner pointed out that cyber criminals are luring innocent students and daily wage workers by offering commissions ranging from ₹2,000 to ₹5,000 and opening bank accounts in their names. These “mule accounts” are being widely used to swiftly transfer money looted from victims. He urged the RBI to adopt a stricter approach and proposed the creation of a centralized database to identify and control mule accounts. CP Sajjanar also called for tighter norms during the opening of bank accounts, suggesting mandatory geo-verification and live video KYC to ensure the physical presence of the account holder. Such measures, he said, would effectively prevent the misuse of bank accounts for cyber crimes. “Highlighting delays in cyber crime investigations,

Actress Aamani Joins BJP, Marks Political Debut

Hyderabad GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Tollywood veteran actress Aamani has officially entered the political arena, joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday at the party's state office in Hyderabad.

Aamani was welcomed into the party by Telangana

BJP state president N. Ramchander Rao, who presented her with a party scarf during the ceremony. The event was also attended by Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy and several other prominent BJP leaders.

In her address, Aamani expressed her commitment to public service, stating that her decision to enter politics was motivated by a desire to serve the community.

Major Fire Accident at Monda Market in Secunderabad



“(Indian Chronicle Secunderabad December 20): - A major fire accident occurred on Saturday at a plastic goods shop named Sri Rama Enterprises in Secunderabad's Monda Market, triggering panic in the busy market area. Thick smoke and huge flames suddenly engulfed the shop, forcing traders and customers to rush out of nearby shops in fear. According to preliminary information, the fire reportedly broke out when a lamp, lit as part of a daily ritual by the shop owner, accidentally fell down and caught fire on the plastic materials stored inside the shop. As the shop contained a large quantity of plastic items, the fire spread rapidly, sending dense black smoke into the air. Within minutes, the situation went out of control, creating chaos in the market. Local people immediately alerted the fire department, following which fire tenders

rushed to the spot from Secunderabad. Firefighting personnel worked strenuously to bring the blaze under control and took special measures to prevent the fire from spreading to nearby shops. Firefighters entered the smoke-filled area and used water jets to control the flames. Officials said it was a relief that no loss of life was reported in the incident. However, plastic goods stored in the shop were completely gutted, resulting in heavy property loss. Authorities are assessing the extent of the damage. The fire accident caused major traffic disruption in and around the Monda Market area. Movement of fire engines and police vehicles led to congestion on main roads. Police diverted traffic and implemented safety measures. Officials said a detailed investigation would be conducted to ascertain the exact cause of the fire.

the Commissioner said banks must respond swiftly to police requests to help save victims' money and apprehend offenders. He noted that banks currently provide statements in different formats, causing delays in investigations. He urged the RBI to direct all banks to adopt a uniform statement format containing complete debit and credit details, along with full sender and receiver information, and to promptly share crucial technical data with investigating agencies. The CP further warned that pyramid and Ponzi schemes operating under the guise of direct selling, multi-level marketing, “work-from-home,” and part-time job offers have become a serious threat to the nation's financial system. He appealed to the RBI to take strict action against such entities in coordination with central investigating agencies like the ED and CBI. “Responding positively to the issues raised and the three separate representations submitted by CP Sajjanar, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra assured that appropriate measures would be taken to address the concerns. The meeting was attended by Additional CP (Crimes) M. Srinivasulu, IPS, CCS DCP Swetha, Cyber Crimes DCP Arvind Babu, and other senior officials.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Attack on the idea of India

The shocking incident of shoe hurling at Chief Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai in the Supreme Court premises reflects the normalisation of hate in a deeply fractured society. It shows that even the highest constitutional spaces are not free from social prejudices. The attack has left the legal fraternity and the public deeply disturbed. The act, committed by 71-year-old advocate Rakesh Kishore in the name of honouring 'Santan Dharma', occurred while the Chief Justice was presiding over a hearing. Justice Gavai, who belongs to the Dalit community, upholds, at least symbolically, the promises of the Constitution, wherein equality and dignity transcend multiple socio-cultural barriers. The attack on him is a shameful reflection of the growing intolerance corroding our national fabric. When even the educated sections of society resort to such uncivil behaviour, it signals a dangerous moral decay. This mindset stems from blind religious fanaticism, political manipulation, and a deliberate assault on reason and constitutional values. India's strength lies in its tolerance, diversity, and respect for differing opinions — not in mob-like reactions. Such disgraceful conduct against the head of the judiciary undermines the dignity of the law. The nation must wake up to this rising tide of bigotry before it drowns our collective sanity. The CJI was apparently targeted for remarks he made while refusing to entertain a public interest litigation seeking judicial intervention for the reconstruction of an idol of Lord Vishnu in the Khajuraho temple. His comments were interpreted as being hurtful to Hindu sentiments.

Over the past decade, an ideological ecosystem promoting radical right-wing thinking has been created. This has emboldened certain groups that have repeatedly taken the law into their own hands, from cow vigilantism to street-level intimidation. The political glorification of 'Sanatan Dharma' as a rallying cry has often blurred into mindless aggression. Though the government distances itself from such acts, critics argue that the ideological ecosystem surrounding the Sangh Parivar has indirectly legitimised a culture of religious outrage.

Shramdaan Day: Fevicol Champion Club Members Undertake Voluntary Service at Venkat Reddy Nagar Primary School

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 20 (Indian Chronicle):" On the occasion of Shramdaan Day, members of the Venkat Reddy Nagar Fevicol Champion Club carried out voluntary service and carpentry works at the local Venkat Reddy Nagar Primary School under the



leadership of club president Chelalu Ellachari. As part of the initiative, club members repaired school windows and doors and undertook several minor maintenance works free of cost, contributing to a safer and better learning environment for students. Those who participated in the programme included Viswanadulu Ramakrishna Chari, Anantulu Srinivas Chari, Ketoju Raghavulu Chari, Satish Chari, Ketoju Krishnulu Chari, Brahmachari, Venkatesh Chari, Ganoju Balachari, along with Fevicol in-charge and company representative Vidyasagar, Mahesh, and others.

MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Lays Foundation Stone for Development Works in Ramanthapur Division Along with Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkat Rao



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 20 (Indian Chronicle):" Stating that the Ramanthapur Division is being developed in all sectors, local Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkat Rao said that continuous efforts are being made to fulfill the promises given to the people of the division. She informed that several development works are being taken up in the division with the cooperation of Malkajgiri Member of Parliament Etela Rajender and Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy. On Saturday, MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, along with Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkat Rao, laid the foundation stone for road development works worth ₹57 lakh at Indira Nagar Colony in Ramanthapur Division. Speaking on the occasion, the MLA assured that he would extend complete

Samsung Solve for Tomorrow 2025: Unlocking Access and Inclusion in Indian Sport Through Technology

Hyderabad

Sports has long been a vehicle for social mobility but uneven access to coaching, facilities, and exposure often limits talent to geography. At Samsung Solve for Tomorrow (SFT) 2025, the flagship education programme of Samsung, in partnership with IIT Delhi, young innovators reimaged sport as a pathway to opportunity by leveraging technology to democratize access and inclusion.

Thousands of students nationwide responded to the call under the theme "Social Change Through Sport & Technology." Here's how they are opening the gates of Indian sport:

1. A Purpose-Driven Theme

This category invited innovations expanding access to training, virtual coaching, e-sports, and skill development—aimed at building healthier, aspirational futures for young people across India.

2. NextPlayAI: Democratizing Talent Discovery

Tennis players and IIT Pune computer science students Aadish Shelke and Bhagyashri Meena created NextPlayAI, an AI-powered platform using video analytics and machine learning to uncover sporting potential through personalized feedback and performance comparison. Their goal: elite guidance accessible and affordable anywhere.

3. Diverse Innovations Driving Inclusion

Other finalists and winners are creating tech to make sport accessible to all, including:

Shatranj Swaya Crew (Assam): AI powered solution compliant with FIDE to enable people with visual impairment play chess independently



SPORTS4AUTISM (Tamil Nadu): Hybrid app that gamifies therapy for autistic children using sports, tracking progress and improving engagement

STATUSCODE200 (Uttar Pradesh): AI-powered app to help student athletes improve their skills (posture detection, skill level) to personalize coaching

Unity (Tamil Nadu): Patented device to support autistic children using gamified approach for cognitive development

4. Backing Innovation From Prototype to Product

Winners received up to ₹1 crore incubation support at IIT Delhi, with additional awards for top teams, including ₹1 lakh grants, Goodwill Awards and Young Innovator Awards and Samsung Galaxy Z Flip smartphones for the top 20 teams.

5. Growing a Decentralized Sporting Ecosystem

The 2025 cohort saw strong participation from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, with alumni mentoring newcomers and access to IIT Delhi's FITT Labs for prototyping—fueling the spread of sports tech innovation beyond metros.

Coca-Cola India's 'Locally Yours' Spotlights Resilient Kirana and Dhaba Owners of Telangana

Hyderabad:

Coca-Cola India, along with its bottling partner, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt. Ltd. (HCCB), is cel-

lating Telangana's vibrant retail community through its 'Locally Yours' campaign that highlights everyday contributions of Telangana's kirana stores and dhabs—the small businesses that keep neighbourhoods & highways connected. The initiative recognises their role in local communities while supporting them with upgraded infrastructure, modern retail tools, and consistent on-ground assistance to help them serve customers more efficiently and continue strengthening the state's retail ecosystem.

Across Telangana, kiranas and dhabs anchor local commerce by offering essential goods and services to families, travellers, and surrounding communities. Alongwith HCCB, Coca-Cola India is supporting these retailers with cooling equipment, reliable product availability, and access to the AI-enabled Coke Buddy plat-

form for easier ordering and inventory management.

These interventions help shop owners adapt to evolving consumer needs while delivering more consistent service and improved customer experiences.

Satyana Narayana, a dhaba owner along the highway, shared how this support has shaped his business.

"Our dhaba has been on the highway for many years and it supports several families who work with us. Good service and good food bring travellers back and Coca-Cola's support with coolers, regular supplies and guidance on improving our setup has helped us meet customer expectations better. Footfall has increased and the business has become more stable, which benefits everyone who depends on this place for their livelihood."

Bonthala Saritha, Telangana-based kirana owner added, "Before I opened this kirana store, I worked as a farmer and managed most of the responsibilities at home. Starting a kirana store was a big step. I wanted to create something steady for my family. Coca-Cola's support in areas like timely deliveries and store improvement helped me attract more customers and grow my income."

Karan Achpal, Vice President - Franchise Operations, Developing Markets, Coca-Cola India and Southwest Asia said, "Our focus is to ensure beverages are accessible, chilled, and ready to serve at every touchpoint, while creating economic momentum for thousands of retailers and distributors who are integral to the overall ecosystem. By building stronger supply chains and supporting partners on the ground, our endeavor is to deliver both consumer delight and community growth."

TGIC and AIC GNITS Conclude YESummit Telangana Regionals: Top 10 Startups Selected for National Grand Finale

Hyderabad Telangana Innovation Cell (TGIC), in collaboration with AIC-GNITS and Youth Aid Foundation, successfully concluded the Regional Round of the 9th Edition of YESummit 2025-26 on 19 Dec, 2025. After a high-stakes day of pitching and knowledge sessions, the Top 10 startups have been selected to represent Telangana at the National Grand Finale.

The event saw 46 shortlisted teams—narrowed down from over 217 submissions—presenting local solutions across Agri-Tech, Sustainability, Social Impact, and AI. The competition showcased the immense talent and problem-solving spirit thriving in Telangana's academic and startup hubs.

The success of the Regional Round was bolstered by the active participation and support of premier academic institutions. Nominations and expert jury members were drawn from a network of esteemed partners, including KG Reddy College of Engineering & Technology, Vardhaman College of Engineering, CBIT, St. Joseph's Degree & PG College, Ashoka School of Business, and ICFAI, among others. This collaborative effort underscores the unified commitment of Telangana's academia to fostering a robust entrepreneurial culture.

"We are honored to host participants from 15 esteemed higher educational institutions across Telangana," said Srividya Reddy, Vice-Chairperson of the G. Pulla Reddy Group of Institutions. "I am immensely proud to see how platforms like YESummit have legitimized entrepreneurship as a primary career choice. It is no longer viewed as a secondary option for those without placements, but rather as a driven pursuit for those with the zeal to solve the world's most pressing problems."



"The caliber of innovation emerging from Telangana today transcends regional boundaries; it is engineered to address global challenges," said Meraj Faheem, CEO of TGIC, Government of Telangana. "We are proud to support these 10 teams as they scale their solutions and prepare to represent our state's entrepreneurial spirit on the national stage."

The development of the cremation ground and to constitute a new service committee for its effective management. It was further resolved that another committee meeting will be held on Saturday, December 27, to elect the new service committee. It was noted that the concerned president and secretary were absent from the meeting. A large number of Motati Reddy relatives and Munnuru Kapu community members attended the general body meeting, showing strong community participation. Prominent participants included Goni Vidyasagar Reddy, Mekala Venkat Reddy, Giri Ramakrishna, Nayabu Venkatesh, Sukka Chandramohan, Goni Arjun Reddy, Mekala Dayasagar Reddy, Shameerpet Dharmareddy, Mandumula Anji Reddy, and leaders of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, including Puduri Jitender Reddy, along with members from other communities.

Jingle Through The Season of Christmas Flavours in Dubai

Hyderabad Imagine Dubai's skyline twinkling like a constellation of holiday wishes, the air scented with spiced chestnuts as laughter carries across shimmering canals. This Christmas, the city's finest hotels set the stage for festive indulgence, bringing families and friends together over generous brunches, elegant dinners, and sparkling afternoon feasts. From classic Christmas brunches to artfully curated festive buffets, here are some of the places where you can enjoy the true flavours of Christmas in Dubai this holiday season.

The St. Regis Downtown Dubai: Festive Italian Celebrations at BASTA! & Ginori Terrace: From December 4th-30th, BASTA! offers daily à la carte Italian favourites like rich pastas, roasted meats, and festive specials from 12:30pm-12am along the serene Dubai Water Canal. On

Christmas Eve, guests are served with elegant four-course dinner, paired with house beverages. Families then enjoy Christmas Brunch at BASTA! and Ginori Terrace, featuring live stations, Italian classics, entertainment, Santa, and canal views.

Date: 24th December | 7pm (Christmas Eve Dinner) & 25th December | 1:30-4:30pm (Christmas Brunch)

Price: Eve Dinner AED 450 incl. house beverages | Brunch AED 525 soft | AED 655 house | AED 850 premium | AED 395 for children 5-11 years.

Royal Mansour Marrakech: La Gastronomie: From late December, Royal Mansour Marrakech's restaurants serve refined festive menus showcasing seasonal flavours. Dine under the stars at La Grande Table Marocaine, savour French classics at La Grande Brasserie, or enjoy Italian at Sesamo A special teatime curated by Chef Hélène Darroze features Christmas sweets in a beautiful, delicious ceremony.

Date: Late December - early January | Lunch and dinner service (varies by restaurant)

Price: A la carte and set festive menus

Ciel Dubai Marina: Christmas Eve Dinner at East 14: East 14 sets the stage for an evening of indulgence where bold Asian flavours meet traditional holiday cheer. Guests can savour hand-pulled noodles, live dim sum and sushi stations, sizzling woks and decadent desserts, all enjoyed against the backdrop of Dubai Marina's twinkling lights.

Date: 24th December | 6pm to 11pm

Prices: AED 325, soft beverages | AED 475, house beverages | AED 595, sparkling beverages

Resolution Passed to Form New Service Committee for Uppal Motati Reddy, Munnuru Kapu Cremation Ground on December 27

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 20 (Indian Chronicle):" A general body meeting of the Uppal Motati Reddy and Munnuru Kapu Cremation Ground Committee was held on Saturday at the Lakshma Reddy Colony Association Hall in Uppal, under the chairmanship of Mekala Hanumanth Reddy. During the meeting, members unanimously passed a resolution to focus on



the development of the cremation ground and to constitute a new service committee for its effective management. It was further resolved that another committee meeting will be held on Saturday, December 27, to elect the new service committee. It was noted that the concerned president and secretary were absent from the meeting. A large number of Motati Reddy relatives and Munnuru Kapu community members attended the general body meeting, showing strong community participation. Prominent participants included Goni Vidyasagar Reddy, Mekala Venkat Reddy, Giri Ramakrishna, Nayabu Venkatesh, Sukka Chandramohan, Goni Arjun Reddy, Mekala Dayasagar Reddy, Shameerpet Dharmareddy, Mandumula Anji Reddy, and leaders of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, including Puduri Jitender Reddy, along with members from other communities.



support and cooperation for the overall development of the Ramanthapur Division. The programme was attended by DE Nagamani, AE Mounika, local residents Komirishetty Hari, Erva Balaraj, Chakrapani, Anji Reddy, Chilakamari Narsing Rao, Chandrayya, Poosa Sattaiah, Bikshapathi, along with leaders and activists of the BJP and BRS parties, and a large number of local residents.

Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi Performances Entrall at Uppal Mini Shilparamam



gracefully rendered by Sri Sarvani, Pramod Reddy, Shishira, Akshitha, Parineetha, and others, earning warm applause from the audience. The Kuchipudi segment was performed by the disciples of Smt. Sai Geetha, who presented a rich repertoire including Mooshika Vahana, Adivo Alladigo, Idigo Bhadradi, Ananda Tandavam, Saraswati, Tarangam, Shankara Srigiri, Devadevam, Mahaganapati, and Swagatham Krishna. The dancers Amrutha Janaki, Chandana, Harika, Janhavi, Mani Mekhala, Nikhileswari, and others impressed the audience with their expressive movements and rhythmic precision.

Government Gives Priority to Sports Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy at Navy Day Celebrations

“Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, December 20: “Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy said that the state government is giving top priority to sports and urged students and youth to focus in that direction. On the occasion of Navy Day, kabaddi and carrom competitions were organized in Nacharam under the leadership of former serviceman and Congress leader Mamidala Santosh Reddy. The competitions were held over two days, and a prize distribution ceremony was conducted for the winners. Addressing the gathering, organizer and Congress leader Mamidala Santosh Reddy said that students should excel in both academics and sports and bring name and fame to the state and the country. He expressed concern that youth are becoming addicted to drugs and said that turning towards sports would help them stay away from such habits. He added that sports provide physical fitness as well as mental refreshment. He further advised students and youth to avoid excessive mobile phone gaming and instead give priority to outdoor



field sports. He mentioned that competitions are being organized across the state as part of Navy Day celebrations. The event was attended by former servicemen, SSS Yuva Sena members, Congress party workers, and local leaders of Nacharam.

Collector Pushes for Faster Indiramma House Construction Kumuram Bheem Asifabad, December



Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, December 20 (Indian Chronicle) “District Collector Venkatesh Dhotre has directed officials to speed up construction of houses sanctioned under the Indiramma Housing Scheme for the poor in the district. Reviewing the progress through a video conference from the NIC hall at the Integrated District Collectorate on Saturday, he said the government treats the Indiramma housing programme as a flagship initiative and wants visible progress on the ground. Additional Collectors Deepak Tiwari and M. David, and Housing Department Project Director Prakash Rao also joined the conference. Mandal Parishad Development Officers, Mandal Panchayat Officers, Housing Department assistant engineers and Panchayat Secretaries from across the district attended the review. The Collector asked them to focus exclusively on housing works now that the

election process has concluded. He instructed officials to personally meet beneficiaries whose house construction has not yet started and ensure that work begins without delay. He pointed out that the government is supplying sand free of cost for house construction and told officials to make beneficiaries aware so they fully use this facility. The Collector asked Housing Department engineers to visit construction sites daily, monitor progress and resolve field-level issues quickly. He said completed houses should be made ready for house-warming ceremonies (Gruhapravesam) at the earliest so beneficiaries can move in. District Rural Development Officer Dattaraao, Divisional Panchayat Officer Umar Hussain, Housing Department DEE Venugopal and other officials were present. (Issued by the Department of Public Relations, Kumuram Bheem Asifabad District)

Clean, Green Campuses: District Schools Get National Certification



Kagaznagar have all earned special distinction under the rating programme. He stressed that educational institutions should not confine themselves to classroom teaching alone, but must also create awareness among students on cleanliness, environmental protection and green lifestyles. Through the Swachh Vidyalaya initiative, schools are helping nurture students as responsible citizens with strong values of hygiene and sustainability. The Collector observed that these schools have set a benchmark by maintaining high standards in optimum water use, toilet maintenance, personal hygiene, campus cleanliness, behavioural change and implementation of Mission LiFE activities. He said they have emerged as model institutions for others to emulate. In-charge CMO Katakam Madhukar,



Education Department officials, teachers, school representatives and students participated in the programme. (Issued by the Department of Public Relations, Kumuram Bheem Asifabad District)

Deputy Mayor Participated in Ayyappa Swamy Special Prayers and Annadanam



“Indian Chronicle, Secunderabad, December 20: Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shobhan Reddy, along

with Telangana Trade Union Congress (TTUC) State President Sri Mothe Shobhan Reddy, participated in special prayers offered to Lord Ayyappa at the Sri Veeranjaneya Temple in Bapujinagar under the SR Nagar area on Friday. On the occasion, an Annadanam programme was organised for Ayyappa devotees which witnessed enthusiastic participation from devotees. Local Corporator Sarala, residents of Bapujinagar basti, and a large number of devotees attended the programme and received the blessings of Lord Ayyappa. The prayers and Annadanam were conducted in a devotional atmosphere, creating a spiritually uplifting environment. Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shobhan Reddy said that such spiritual and service-oriented programmes play a significant role in fostering unity, spirituality, and social harmony. She stated that scriptures describe Annadanam as the greatest form of charity and prayed to Lord Ayyappa for peace, unity, and brotherhood among people. The organisers announced that similar programmes would be organised in the future.

Bhavitha Centre Launched to Support Children with Special Needs in K. B Asifabad Dist



“Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, December 20 (Indian Chronicle) “District Collector Venkatesh Dhotre on Saturday inaugurated a Bhavitha Centre set up to provide specialized support services for children with special needs in the district. The facility was opened at the district headquarters in the presence of Additional District Collector (Local Bodies) and in-charge District Educational Officer Deepak Tiwari, and Asifabad MLA Kova Laxmi. Speaking at the launch, the Collector said the centre is designed to provide quality education, therapy and guidance services to children with special needs and to support their educational, psychological and social development. He said the objective is to identify such children studying in government schools and extend need-based support, urging parents to make full use of the services offered at the centre. (Additional District Collector and in-charge DEO Deepak Tiwari said Bhavitha Centres are an important component of the Samagra Shiksha initiative, which focuses on inclusive education for children with special needs. Specifically trained staff at the centre will provide speech therapy, physiotherapy and academic support, with the government aiming to integrate these children into the mainstream education system through coordinated efforts by officials, teachers and parents. The programme was attended by Mandal Education Officer Subhash, Inclusive Education Resource Person Raman, Coordinator Katakam Madhukar, officials of the Education Department, special educators and parents. (Issued by the Department of Public Relations, Kumuram Bheem Asifabad District.

Dist Gears Up for Grand Christmas Fetes, Sanc tioned 4 Lakh for Christmas Events: Collector



“Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, December 20 (Indian Chronicle) “Dist Collector Venkatesh Dhotre has directed officials to ensure that Christmas celebrations in the district are conducted on a grand and joyful scale. On Saturday, he held a review meeting on the arrangements for Christmas celebrations with additional collectors Deepak Tiwari and David, Asifabad Revenue Divisional Officer Lokeshwar Rao, District Minority Welfare Officer Nadeem, tahsildars, church fathers and officials of concerned departments at the Integrated District Collectorate conference hall. The Collector said that Christmas celebrations on December 25 should be conducted in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. He informed the meeting that the government will provide each registered church with limewash material and funds for decorative electric lighting to the tune of Rs 30,000. He further stated that an amount of Rs 4 lakh has been sanctioned for organizing Christmas celebrations at four locations: Kagaznagar and Kouthala in the Sirpur constituency, and Asifabad and Rebbena in the Asifabad constituency. These funds will be deposited in the accounts of the respective tahsildars, and officials have been instructed to

Annual Day Celebrations “Terra Nova” Held with Grandeur at Paramita Heritage School



“Chittimalla Mahendar, Karimnagar Bureau, December 20: INDIAN CHRONICLE: The annual day celebrations of Paramita Heritage CBSE School, Padmanagar, were conducted with great enthusiasm and splendor under the theme “Terra Nova.” Renowned educationist and Chairman of Paramita and Explorica Educational Institutions, Dr. E. Prasad Rao, attended the event as the chief guest and formally inaugurated the celebrations by lighting the ceremonial lamp. Based on the theme Terra Nova, students mesmerized the audience with their vibrant and meaningful performances. Colorful dances, melodious songs, and thought-provoking skits captivated everyone present. Special performances portraying the evolution of human life from its origins to a higher state of consciousness received wide appreciation. Dances highlighting the significance of education, agriculture, and the defense sector added depth and value to the program. On this occasion, Dr. E. Prasad Rao distributed cash prizes totaling Rs 20,000 to meritorious students of Classes 6 to 9 who excelled in the Dadship Examination during the current academic year. The prize distribution included Rs 75,000 for the first prize, Rs 60,000 for the second prize, Rs 50,000 for the third prize, and Rs 10,000 each for the fourth and fifth prize winners. Students and teachers who demonstrated exceptional talent in academics and co-curricular activities at national and international levels were also felicitated with certificates of honor and mementos. Addressing the gathering, Dr. E. Prasad Rao urged students to aim higher and keep pace with the rapidly competitive global environment. He stated that the Paramita Eligibility Test, conducted annually, plays a key role in identifying and nurturing student talent. He emphasized that annual celebrations not only provide joy and encouragement to students but also help in enhancing their creativity and overall skills. The event was graced by the Directors of Paramita Educational Institutions — Prasuna, Anukar Rao, Rashmita, Vinoda Rao, Rakesh Prasad, Prachi, and Y.U.M. Also present were Prasad, Hanumantharao, Headmaster Gopikrishna, Coordinators Nagaraju and Ramu, teachers, correspondents from various schools, eminent educationists, distinguished guests, parents, and students. The grand celebrations concluded on a memorable note, leaving a lasting impression on all attendees.

With the implementation of Jan Dhan accounts, banking facilities have become accessible to everyone. Everyone should conduct transactions:

- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Additional Collector Veera Reddy

Yadadri Bhuvanagiri Revenue Additional Collector Veera Reddy at a special awareness program on "Your Money – Your Right" (Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 20): - As per the directions of the Central Government's Ministry of Finance (Department of Financial Services), and in coordination with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), a special awareness and resolution camp titled "Your Money – Your Right" was organized at the District Collectorate auditorium from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM on the 20th, for the resolution of unclaimed deposits, insurance amounts, and other financial assets in banks and insurance companies. District Additional Collector Veera Reddy attended the program as the chief guest. On this occasion, he requested that the genuine heirs of unclaimed financial assets such as bank deposits, insurance amounts, shares, dividends, and mutual funds should contact their respective banks or institutions with the necessary documents and take advantage of this special campaign. He instructed bank officials to provide full cooperation to the public to ensure that the maximum number of claims are resolved during this program. Additional Collector Veerreddy stated that the implementation of Jan Dhan accounts has made banking facilities accessible to everyone, but due to the lack of transactions in these accounts for a long time, thousands of crores of rupees in unclaimed funds are lying dormant in banks and insurance companies. He mentioned that this list includes not only individual accounts but also accounts belonging to government departments, and suggested that officials from the respective departments coordinate with the banks to resolve these issues quickly. In this



camp, various banks and insurance companies, including LIC, set up special stalls and provided complete information regarding unclaimed deposits and insurance amounts. Awareness was created through special counters on the claim process, required documents, and application procedure, and application forms were also made available. Officials stated that people can easily obtain the necessary information by contacting the officials with their identity documents and account details. "Later, claim documents were handed over to the account holders who had completed the claim process in various banks, by the officials. DRDA Nagireddy, NABARD DDM Ravinder, LDM K. Siva Ramakrishna, RDO Krishnareddy, MEPPMA Project Director Ramesh, district officials of various banks, and the public participated in this program.

Police, lawyers, and APP Os should cooperate with the National Lok Adalat and strive to resolve the maximum number of cases:

- A. Jayaraju, President of the Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Legal Services Authority and District Principal Judge



(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 20): - A. Jayaraju, President of the Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District

Strict Action Against Triple Riding, Minor and Rash Driving: Dist SP Nitika Pant.

Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, December 20 (Indian Chronicle) - "District Superintendent of Police Ms. Nitika Pant, IPS, has issued a strong warning that stringent legal action will be taken against those involved in triple riding, rash driving, and minor driving across the district." The SP stated that the district police are giving special focus to such traffic violations. In cases where minors are caught driving vehicles, criminal cases will be registered not only against the minor but also against the vehicle owner. "She cautioned vehicle owners not to hand over vehicles to minors, as accidents involving under-age drivers are more likely and can cause serious harm not only to the owner but also to innocent members of the public. Therefore, she urged parents and guardians to act responsibly and strictly refrain from allowing minors to drive." The SP further warned that strict action will be taken against motorists who drive without a valid driving licence, operate vehicles without number plates, conceal number plates, use fake or fancy number plates, or fit modified silencers on two-wheelers causing noise pollution and public inconvenience. She noted that some vehicle owners are deliberately using unreadable fancy designs or false registration numbers. All motorists have been instructed to install standard number plates as per regulations immediately, failing which cheating cases will be registered. "Additionally, legal action will be initiated against violations such as wrong-side parking, using mobile phones while driving, and reckless operation of overloaded vehicles, she said. "Emphasising road safety,



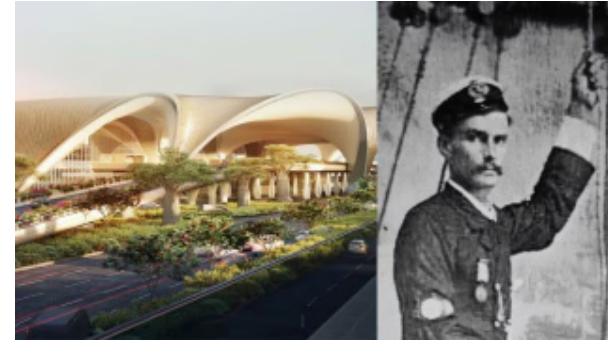
the District SP urged all motorists to strictly follow traffic rules. Drivers of four-wheelers must wear seat belts, while helmet use is mandatory for two-wheeler riders. She also warned that vehicles without number plates are often involved in chain snatching and other anti-social activities, and hence continuous checking drives will be conducted across the district." Ms. Nitika Pant, IPS, appealed to the people of the district to extend full cooperation to the police in maintaining road safety and public order.

Visit to Bhongir Sub-Jail and Interaction with Prisoners: - A. Jayaraju, Chairman of the Yadadri Bhongir District Legal Services Authority and District Principal Judge

(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhongir District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 20): - A. Jayaraju, Chairman of the Yadadri Bhongir District Legal Services Authority and District Principal Judge, visited the sub-jail in Bhongir. He interacted with the prisoners, reviewed the process of providing legal aid, and assured that legal assistance would be provided to those who need it. He inspected the facilities provided to the prisoners in the jail and gave appropriate instructions to the jail supervisor. District Legal Services Authority Secretary V. Madhavi Latha and Jail Superintendent Nehru participated in this program.



From Spencer Perceval's balloon in 1889 to Navi Mumbai airport, here's how Mumbai learned to fly



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

As Navi Mumbai International Airport prepares to begin flight operations on December 25, it adds a new chapter to Mumbai's long history of aviation. The city's engagement with air travel began in the late 19th century with balloon ascents, followed by early and often unsuccessful aeroplane experiments, the establishment of civil aviation at Juhu, and the gradual expansion of Santacruz into the country's busiest airport. The opening of Navi Mumbai airport now extends that evolution, reflecting how Mumbai's relationship with flying has developed over more than a century. The first recorded aerial ascent in the city took place in 1889, when British pioneering balloonist Spencer Perceval, who had made over 700 balloon ascents, took off from the grounds of the old Government House in Parel, where the Haffkine Institute now stands. At the time, hydrogen gas balloon ascents were used for scientific experiments, adventure and commercial entertainment, with people paying gate money to witness the spectacle. Perceval further thrilled the massive crowd by descending with the help of a parachute.

The next major balloon ascent that Bombay witnessed came in 1891. Crowds turned out in large numbers to watch Jeanette Van Tassel, described by newspapers as "big, young, handsome and blonde", take off along with her husband P A Van Tassel from an unnamed ground in the city. The performance, however, did not go entirely to plan, with Jeanette suffering a minor parachute malfunction, according to Stephen Meredyth Edwardes, a chronicler of the time. The accident that ended aerial ascents what finally brought an end to ballooning as public entertainment in Bombay was the tragic accident of December 10, 1891, involving 26-year-old Lieutenant R N Mansfield of the Royal Naval Reserve. Days earlier, on November 13, Mansfield had successfully descended by parachute from more than 11,000 feet in his balloon Wanderer and promised to repeat the feat. The second ascent was staged at the erstwhile Victoria Gardens in Byculla, now Veermata Jijabai Udyan, and drew a large gathering that included George Robert Canning Harris, the Governor of Bombay, and senior civil and military officials. While the take-off was smooth, disaster struck when the balloon reached an altitude of about 400 feet. It burst with a loud explosion and began to fall rapidly.

"Mansfield made the most desperate efforts to disengage the parachute from the collapsed balloon, but it had become entangled in the ropes and the unfortunate man was soon forced to release his hold. The spectators uttered cries of dismay as they saw his body come twirling towards them and some of the ladies fainted at the sight," a report published in The New York Times stated. An inquiry later found that the balloon had been damaged in an earlier accident.

dent and had not been properly repaired. The incident sent shockwaves across India and abroad, and for years Bombay authorities refused to grant permission for any flying or floating objects over Mumbai's skies. From balloons to airplanes, the first powered flight that attempted to take off from Bombay was before the First World War and was unsuccessful. "Since that date and up to the outbreak of the War in 1914, the only aerial spectacle offered to the Bombay public was a much advertised aeroplane flight from the Oval. This venture was a fiasco. The aeroplane would only rise a few feet from the ground and at that elevation collided violently with the iron railing," wrote Stephen Meredyth Edwardes, a chronicler of those times. Ballooning faded from public memory with the arrival of powered flight. During the First World War, an airstrip at Kalyan was used for military purposes, with aircraft typically operating from grass fields.

A turning point came with the setting up of the Juhu Aerodrome, initially during the war years, which later became the home of the Bombay Flying Club, India's first club for flying enthusiasts. By 1930, according to Flight International, the world's oldest aviation news magazine, the club had 161 members. It operated four aircraft of its own, including one provided by the government, while five others were privately owned by members. Patrons who paid a membership fee of Rs 50 flew sorties to Ahmedabad, Poona, Deolali, and Porbandar from the strip, which often flooded during the monsoon. The same airstrip went on to become Bombay's primary airport and was the site of J R D Tata's historic first flight on October 15, 1932. Flying from Karachi via Ahmedabad, Tata landed at Juhu with 25 kg of airmail, marking the birth of India's civil aviation industry and Tata Airlines, later Air India. Juhu Aerodrome remained the city's main airport until Santa Cruz airport opened in 1942, initially handling six flights a day. As air traffic grew, the need for expansion became evident. A committee headed by Tata had recommended a new terminal as early as 1967. Construction began in November 1977 to build a new terminal at Sahar, across the runway from Santa Cruz, with the first phase opening in 1980. The terminal had 42 check-in counters, 18 more than Santa Cruz's international section. In comparison, the new Navi Mumbai airport will have 88 check-in counters.

The expansion was not without setbacks. On September 21, 1979, Bombay's Santa Cruz airport shut down for the first time in its 20-year history after a fire gutted the international terminal, killing a family of three passengers in transit. Firefighters battled the blaze for nearly 30 hours. Domestic and international flights were paralysed, and special rail services were arranged to move stranded passengers. Temporary facilities and round the clock repairs allowed services to resume. In January 2009, the international Terminal 2A was demolished to make way for a new integrated terminal, which opened in January 2014. Even that expansion proved insufficient, leading to the decision to build a second airport. In August 2007, the Union Cabinet approved a greenfield airport at Navi Mumbai under a public-private partnership model. After multiple delays and changes in developers, the Adani Group took over the project in 2021 through Navi Mumbai International Airport Limited, a joint venture with the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO). With flight operations now set to begin on December 25 in a phased manner, Navi Mumbai International Airport marks the latest chapter in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region's long aviation history, a journey that began with hydrogen balloons and peril, long before concrete runways reshaped the city's skies.

Inside one of India's largest tech incubators, a thriving Pune public library fuels science entrepreneurship



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The strange clock seems to think that it is always the right time to read. It occupies an entire wall and appears to glow as people stop to admire its curious features. The hours on the clock face are not numbers, letters or symbols but models of famous books. The Power of 2 sits at 2 o'clock, The Five Biggest Ideas in Science at 5 o'clock, and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People at 7 o'clock. The books hold a clue that the clock ticks in a space where a reader seeks out a certain kind of knowledge—about science, entrepreneurship, financial economics, product design, emerging science, business planning, inspiration and some Sudha Murthy (whose book is at 3 o'clock)—that will give them a competitive advantage.

This is the Venture Centre Library, tucked away in the premises of one of India's largest technology incubators, Venture Centre in Pune, which was set up by the National Chemical Laboratory in 2006. A separate non-profit at present, the centre has supported more than 750 science-based startups since its inception. The courtyard is buzzing with innovators as they think, innovate and plan the next big disruption.

The library, which contains 3,500 books, as well as magazines and journals, offers a glimpse into what such entrepreneurs read as they navigate challenges in the life cycle of a product. The cosy, warmly lit space overlooks the greenery and activity outside its glass windows and houses 21 sections—ranging from Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Startups to Motivation, Personality Development, Skill Development, Marketing, Management, Biographies, Popular Science, and Science and Technology.

One rack is stocked with market research reports and studies that may be difficult to find. There are shelves with magazines that business leaders swear by—Harvard Business Review, Forbes and Entrepreneur, among other international and Indian titles. Inside one of India's largest tech incubators, a thriving Pune public library fuels science entrepreneurship. As the clock on the wall reminds visitors, there is always some knowledge to be gained every hour. Among the regulars is Kishor Harale, an accomplished scientist who is moving into entrepreneurship. "We get the latest magazines and a very good collection of books here," he says. Yet, while the library is popular with startup founders and budding business minds, it has escaped the attention of almost everyone else in Pune. This, despite the annual membership being an affordable Rs 1,000. Dr V Premanath, advisor, Venture Centre, emphasises that the library is open

to the public. "We are eager for more people, including children, to use the library. We do a lot of gaming-based learning for children and have a collection of games, such as Battleship and Othello," he says. Premanath adds that a Marathi collection and a selection of books from the library are also available online.

Rohit Joshi, head, People and Community Development, at Venture Centre, says, "While we have books on Intellectual Property, such as for software patents, which are generally not easily available, you also have many books on Mahatma Gandhi." He points to one of the sought-after books, Angel Financing for Entrepreneurs. "This is for any entrepreneur who is looking to raise angel investment," he says. Leading the way to the reference section, he points out titles that are a little more expensive than the others.

Ideas and some fun! Sheikha, a med-tech entrepreneur, comes here every fortnight. "When you look at the mainstream library or resources present online, you find that these are not curated for, let's say, entrepreneurship in the Indian context. If you were to look for books on 'technology and Indian market', you would find very limited literature out there. This is where the Venture Centre Library becomes an important resource," he says. Events organised by the library have been rewarding experiences, he adds. These have included sessions on Artificial Intelligence, Intellectual Property and a Toastmaster series which trains people for better communication. "We organise a lot of knowledge transfer events, where people from different startups come together and discuss issues, from research papers to idea formations.

Regency Culinary students host vintage-themed French Gourmet Gala

Hyderabad: The final-year culinary students of Regency College of Culinary Arts and Hotel Management, Irramanzil, organised a vintage-themed French Gourmet Gala Lunch at the Radiance Restaurant.

The event featured an elegant seven-course pre-plated Table d'Hôte (TDH) menu, inspired by classical European cuisine and executed to professional fine-dining standards. It had an elaborate culinary spread, including over 50 varieties of charcuterie and cured meats, a refined cheese display, a visually distinctive Smörgåstårta (Scandinavian savoury cake), an artisan bread counter, and thoughtfully curated salads and hors d'oeuvres. A signature highlight of the event was the Butter Swan Sculpture, intricately carved from 10 kg of butter, showcasing precision, creativity, and aesthetic sensibility under the guidance of Chef Naga Manikanta. The event was attended by Gareth Wynn Owen, British Deputy High Commission, Chef Naveen Nagaraj, Corporate Chef, Tatva & General Secretary, Telangana Chefs Association and Chef Rizwan Abdul Khader.

Passenger alleges assault by Air India Express pilot at Delhi airport



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

A passenger at the Delhi Airport alleged he was assaulted by an Air India Express pilot on Friday, after he objected to being bypassed in a queue. Nearly 12 hours after the incident, the Delhi Police Saturday said it has taken cognisance of it but has not received any written complaint. The airline, meanwhile, said the pilot has been removed from all official duties. The victim, Ankit Dewan, had penned a social media post, alleging that the police forced him to write a letter mentioning that he didn't want to escalate the matter further. "I was forced to write a letter stating that I will not pursue this matter further... It was either write that letter, or miss my flight and throw the 1.2 lakhs holiday booker.

ings down the drain. @DelhiPolice, why can't I file a complaint after coming back? Must I sacrifice my money too, to seek justice? Will the CCTV footage disappear in the 2 days till I make it back to Delhi," Dewan said in an X post.

In the same post, Dewan said that he first got into an argument with Air India Express pilot Virender Sejwal over the latter jumping the queue. "Me & my family were guided to use the security check that the staff uses (also the PRM check), because we had a 4 month old baby in a stroller," said Dewan. Dewan claimed that when he objected to Sejwal jumping the queue, the latter called him 'illiterate' and physically attacked him. Responding to Dewan's post, the Delhi Police said, "No such matter has been reported to the police station either by @ankidewan or by the airlines. The matter has come to the knowledge of the police through this social media post. Whenever a written complaint is received by the victim, in this regard, appropriate legal action will be taken." Meanwhile, an Air India Express spokesperson issued a statement about the incident, claiming that Sejwal has been removed from all official duties. We are aware of an incident at Delhi Airport involving one of our employees, who was travelling as a passenger on another airline, and had an altercation with another passenger. "We unequivocally condemn such behaviour. The employee concerned has been removed from official duties with immediate effect, pending investigation. Appropriate disciplinary action will be initiated based on the findings of the inquiry.

Municipal council and nagar panchayat poll results tomorrow, why are they important for BJP, Shiv Sena and opp parties?



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Voting for the second phase of elections to municipal councils and nagar panchayats across Maharashtra is being held on Saturday, with the results for all seats to be declared on Sunday. Together, the polls and the outcome will offer the clearest signal yet of the shifting political equations on the ground, ahead of the much larger municipal corporation elections scheduled next month. The second phase covers elections to 24 municipal councils and nagar panchayats, along with 154 wards in 76 other local bodies. These polls were earlier scheduled for December 2, but the State Election Commission had postponed the voting following appeals in district courts against decisions taken by returning officers.

Votes polled on Saturday will be counted along with those cast earlier, with results for a total of 246 municipal councils and 42 nagar panchayats to be announced together. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and the Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena aggressively campaigned throughout the elections, many a time against each other. The elections have also seen the split of existing alliances and the formation of new ones. Mahayati partners, the BJP and the Shiv Sena, have fielded candidates against each other in many districts like Sindhudurg, Satara, Dharavish, Palghar and Thane. On the other hand, the two warring factions of the NCP—one led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and the other by party founder Sharad Pawar—have joined forces in Kolhapur. In a few other places, factions of the Congress have joined hands with the BJP. In most places of Vidarbha, Fadnavis's backyard, the BJP and Congress are in direct contest with each other. The CM has deployed a team of senior leaders, including state Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule, to oversee the campaign here. The BJP has fielded candidates in all 27 cities of the region, while the Congress is contesting in 22, and is in a direct fight with the BJP in 18 cities. The Shiv Sena is contesting in 13 cities, while the Shiv Sena (UBT) is contesting in eight. The NCP (SP) has put up can-

didates in six cities while rival NCP is contesting in seven, resulting in triangular fights at several places.

The run-up to the polls also saw a war of words between leaders of the BJP and Sena, prompting Shinde to advise his partners "to follow alliance dharma". Fadnavis, however, expressed confidence that the Mahayati will emerge victorious in 70 to 75 per cent of the seats. The results will be seen as a referendum on political flexing shown by all political parties, as well as turncoats who have jumped seeing greener pastures. In addition, the results will give a boost to the victor while going into a bigger fight of municipal corporations and later into the Zilla Parishad polls. While the Mahayati leaders—Fadnavis, Shinde and Ajit—have extensively campaigned for the polls, addressing five-six rallies daily, only the Congress was seen extensively canvassing from the Opposition side. While Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sapkal campaigned in Vidarbha and Marathwada, other Congress leaders like Satej Patil, Amit Deshmukh and Yashomati Thakur focused on their strongholds of Kolhapur, Latur and Amravati, respectively. While Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar chose to stay away from campaigning, NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar and state chief Shashikant Shinde restricted their campaigns to their respective strongholds.

Mothers of four minor boys who 'harassed' girl arrested by Budaun police; SHO says wanted to 'teach them a lesson'



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Four women, mothers to young boys who allegedly harassed a girl from another community, were arrested under sections of preventive arrest in Uttar Pradesh's Budaun district. The reason? To teach them a lesson for not bringing up their children properly and not imparting 'achche sanskar (good values)', according to the SHO of the police station concerned. When The Indian Express contacted Budaun SSP Brijesh Kumar Singh to ask if he was aware of the action taken, his PRO picked up his official

number but was not aware of the case. Bareilly DIG, Ajay Kumar Sahni, did not respond to calls and messages seeking comment. Speaking to The Indian Express, Ajay Pal Singh, SHO of the police station concerned, said a case was lodged on Wednesday after the parents of a teenage girl alleged that four boys from the same village passed lewd remarks and harassed her on her way to school and back. He said as the boys are minors, their mothers were arrested on Friday under BNS sections after a notice regarding the case was served at their homes. SHO Singh said parents are served notices in cases of minors facing an offence. Asked why the mothers were arrested, SHO Singh said, "These four boys are ill-mannered and known to indulge in nefarious activities. A message should be sent and a lesson taught to such parents... for not imparting good values and ensuring a better upbringing of their children, due to which they commit such offences." "The fathers of all four, employed out of UP, would also be arrested once they are home," Singh said. The girl was allegedly being harassed by the boys for the past several days, he added. Meanwhile, the mothers were released after submitting personal bonds before the sub-divisional magistrate court, where they were produced on the same day of the arrest.

Liquor sales touch Rs.112 crore in erstwhile Adilabad during panchayat polls

Adilabad: The Excise and Prohibition department in the erstwhile Adilabad district recorded a sharp spurt in liquor sales, coinciding with the recently held three-phase Gram Panchayat elections. Excise and Prohibition officials said the region, comprising four districts, registered liquor sales worth Rs.112.74 crore between December 5 and 19, marking an increase of about 40 percent over normal sales for a fortnight. Officials attributed the surge to polling in 1,020 villages conducted between December 11 and 17. According to officials, Mancherial district topped the chart with liquor sales valued at Rs.39.90 crore during the period, while Kumram Bheem Asifabad district remained at the bottom with sales worth Rs.16.96 crore. Nirmal district recorded liquor sales worth Rs.32.80 crore, while Adilabad district

accounted for sales valued at Rs.23.08 crore. Mancherial district registered sales of 40,507 cases of Indian Made Foreign Liquor and 31,046 cases of beer during the two-week period. Nirmal district recorded sales of 33,595 cases of liquor and 27,082 cases of beer. Adilabad district witnessed sales of 31,535 cases of liquor and 7,405 cases of beer, while Kumram Bheem Asifabad district recorded sales of 21,442 cases of liquor and 8,874 cases of beer. Rural areas abuzz with local body electioneering also saw the mushrooming of belt shops or unauthorised liquor outlets. These belt shops, where liquor is sold openly at prices higher than the maximum retail price, fleece consumers by charging at least 20 percent more than the MRP. Tipplers often rely on these outlets instead of travelling to authorised wine shops operating in towns.

Ganja harvest season: Saurashtra under lens as Gujarat Police seize cannabis grown in wheat, cotton, tuar fields



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Acting on a tip-off, the Rajkot district police in Gujarat Thursday stumbled upon a harvest of Cannabis sativa, its palm-shaped compound leaves distinct from the slender green wheat stalks it shared space with, in the fields of Moti Khilori village of Gondal taluka. Weighing almost 21.3 kg, the plants found in the agricultural land belonging to farmer Nirmal Natha Der, 35, were valued at Rs 10.65 lakh. Der was booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. This was the latest in the series of police crackdowns this month in which they seized cannabis valued at over Rs 2 crore — growing in cotton, pigeon pea (tuar) and wheat fields in several districts of Saurashtra region of Gujarat — prompting the use of high-resolution drone cameras for surveillance besides human intelligence.

Hetal Patel, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Rajkot City Zone 1, watches a screen carefully as it shows live feed from drones flying in a grid pattern over the farmlands in villages, trying to locate if anyone was trying to grow Cannabis sativa, which is used to produce ganja, camouflaged amidst crops. The flying cameras went over Bedla village, Gundala, Barvan...as the police team marked them 'clear'. Police teams across Saurashtra are currently on the lookout for cannabis cultivation as these plants, sown during the monsoon, are now ready for harvest. Deemed illegal under the NDPS Act, the plants must be seized and destroyed.

Speaking on the latest seizure, an officer from the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Rajkot Rural Police said, "Ganja cultivation in Rural Rajkot is concentrated around the Jasdan and Vinchhiya areas. In this particular case, we found the illegal plants, ranging from 2.5 feet to 8 feet in height, in a wheat field. It was in plain sight and was growing on one side of the farm." Simran Bharadwaj, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), said, "Some farmers may not know what they are getting into, and grow it as a cash crop, but others are well aware of the law and still choose to grow cannabis in their fields." But not all illegal "weed" farmers make it as easy for the police as the one in Moti Khilori. Here, the plants, with their distinctive leaf pattern, had grown up to 1.5 times the height of an average individual and were clearly visible to anyone, being on the edges of a wheat field.

Fatehsingh Pargi, Police Inspector, Rajkot Rural SOG, said this was literally the first case in which cannabis was found growing in the wheat field. "In most cases, seasoned farmers grow it within fields of cotton and pigeon pea because these plants can grow up to 10 feet tall, thus effectively hiding the illegal crop grown in patches within these large fields often measuring 10 bighas (6.25 acres/2.5 hectare) or more," he added. The cannabis plant can grow to prodigious proportions, up to 10-12 feet, at maturity. On December 13, the Rajkot City police seized a massive 223 kg of contraband, worth Rs 1.11 crore, as standing crop besides harvested cannabis in Aniyala village just ahead of Aji Dam. Officials said they found 64 full-grown plants and 60.29 kg of product hidden in a pigeon pea farm.

AB Jadeja, Inspector, Aji Dam police station, said the cannabis was grown in a patch in the middle of the farm. "Some of it had already been harvested and was drying in the sun. The farm owner had been engaged in growing cannabis for the last one and a half years, and he had earlier

sold about 4-5 kg of finished product in the neighbouring Surendranagar district. He said he did it because he had fallen into debt and had been told that ganja was a quick cash crop." Similarly, on December 2, a State Monitoring Cell (SMC) team led by Inspector G R Rabari, booked Ajitsinh Jiva Barad of Nani Vavdi village in Botad's Ranpur taluka under several sections of the NDPS Act after finding 93 cannabis plants, weighing in over 198 kg and valued at Rs 99.09 lakh, in his cotton farm. Local police officers say that such illegal cultivations are few and far in between in often inaccessible areas deep in the rural heartland. Officers who don't agree with the drone approach say that human intelligence, through informants, still remains the best method to detect cannabis cultivation. However, drones are helpful to pinpoint the location of these plants within large fields to initiate a raid. M G Jadeja, a Police Inspector who is with the SOG in Botad, said they had done this to locate a field of cannabis in Sangarpur village, also in Ranpur taluka. "We had seized 130 plants from an ashram there. The accused had confidently grown only ganja in neat rows on the premises which was easily visible from the drone because there were no other plants to hide them." However, since the seizure was done in August this year, the plants were still small and so the value of the seizure is also less. If they had been caught at full maturity, the value of the ganja would have crossed Rs 1.5 crore. Perhaps the single largest cannabis cultivation seizure of the year in Gujarat took place in Sayla, Surendranagar, on November 25, when the SOG found a whopping 180 plants weighing 560 kg (half a tonne) and valued at Rs 2.79 crore.

Police Inspector B H Singharkhya of the SOG in Surendranagar told The Indian Express that the accused in this case had grown ganja intermittently on his 12-bigha cotton field. "He said he would take this risk every two-three years for quick cash. Additionally, the cannabis plants were not clustered in one place but were planted as one or two per row of 100 cotton plants and made up around 5 per cent of the total cultivation on the (7.5-acre) farm," the inspector said. An informant's tip had led to the seizure. The police had also tried flying a drone overhead but were unable to see anything out of the ordinary. However, when they raided the field, officers saw that the tallest cannabis plants had been tied down so they didn't poke above the cotton plants. This is a countermeasure to hide from drones because cannabis is often taller than the other plants like cotton, sugarcane or tuar. So the farmers bend the plants and tie them downwards so they aren't spotted. While police commissioners in big cities have their own drones, smaller districts have to share one with other districts in their police range, making availability a problem. Local police sidestep this issue by using private drones requisitioned for the purpose. But often, these are not very useful after dark due to the lack of night vision technology.

That is exactly what happened in Amreli on November 16, when the SOG there seized 45 plants, weighing 155.86 kg and valued at Rs 77.93 lakh, from a cotton field in Kherla village of Lathi taluka, about 26 km from the district headquarters. Inspector R D Chaudhari told The Indian Express, "The ganja was grown in a cotton field of 10 bighas. We did the search on the basis of information. We tried identifying it with a drone, but it had become dark, so it was not possible to positively identify these plants. Further, since the illegal plants were 10-feet-tall, the accused had tied them down to camouflage them and make them harder to detect." Since the end of October 2025, the value of drug seizures in India has gone up, not because of the number of raids but due to a revision in the "estimated street value" of these products by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). The impact on seizures of cannabis and its finished products, like ganja and marijuana, is drastic. According to an NCB notification dated October 24, seen by The Indian Express and forwarded to the Gujarat Police by Dr K L N Rao, DGP, Criminal Investigation Department (Crime), ganja is now valued at Rs 50,000 per kilogram. This is a five-fold increase from the earlier value of Rs 10,000 per kg, confirmed police officers.

Punjab Zila Parishad elections: Rejected and NOTA votes, ballot polling process emerge as silent factors in Punjab's Hoshiarpur

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

While the political focus in the recently concluded Zila Parishad elections in Punjab's Hoshiarpur district has largely remained on party performance and seat tallies, a closer examination of the final counting figures reveals a quieter but significant trend — the large number of rejected ballots and NOTA votes recorded across the district.

According to the Final Counting Report of the Zila Parishad elections, 4,41,915 cumulative votes were polled across 25 Zila Parishad zones in the district. Of these, 14,473 votes were rejected, while 2,817 voters exercised the NOTA (None of the Above) option. Taken together, 17,290 votes failed to add to the tally of any contesting candidate — a number large enough to warrant scrutiny in a grassroots democratic exercise. The Zila Parishad elections in Punjab were held on December 14, with the counting held on December 17. The entire process was conducted manually, due to the absence of electronic voting machines (EVMs). Ballot papers were printed, featuring the symbols of candidates from various parties. As a result, officials reported that many voters encountered difficulties in casting their votes correctly, as some voters' impressions inadvertently touched more than one symbol.

Margins undone by rejected votes in several zones, the number of rejected votes exceeded the winning margin, underlining how procedural lapses and voter confusion may have directly influenced electoral outcomes. The most striking example comes from Panam, where the winning candidate secured victory by a margin of 646 votes, while the constituency recorded 1,011 rejected ballots, far surpassing the margin of victory. Here, the number of NOTA votes was 373. An even narrower contest was witnessed in Hardokhanpur, where the seat was decided by a slender margin of just 15 votes. However, the constituency reported 377 rejected votes, making the rejected ballots more than 25 times the winning margin. The seat also saw 99 NOTA votes, again well above the victory gap. In Hajipur, the outcome was decided by a margin of 201 votes, but the number of rejected votes stood at 1,440, making it one of the highest rejected vote counts in the district. The figures indicate that the rejected ballots alone were nearly seven times the winning margin. In Amroh, the winning margin was 113 votes, while the number of rejected votes was 631, and NOTA votes numbered 79. Similarly, in Jaja, the winning margin was 263 votes, while the number of rejected votes was 428, and NOTA votes were 108. Even in constituencies where the winners enjoyed comparatively comfortable leads, the volume of rejected votes remained notably high, indicating that the issue was widespread rather than limited to closely fought seats. In Binewal, the winning margin was 1,035 votes, while 521 votes were rejected. Saini Khurd recorded 579 rejected votes, against a victory margin of 2,522 votes. In Tute Majara, 739 ballots were rejected, while the margin of victory stood at 1,764 votes. Similarly, Bhunga saw 644 rejected votes, with a winning margin of 1,661 votes.

Across all 25 zones, the number of rejected votes ranged between 238 votes and 1,440 votes, while the number of NOTA votes ranged between 53 votes and 373 votes. These figures suggest that even where results were not directly overturned by rejected ballots, a sizeable section of voters failed to successfully register a valid choice. NOTA as an indicator of discontent emerged as a consistent indicator of voter dissatisfaction across multiple constituencies. Apart from Hardokhanpur, where NOTA votes exceeded the winning margin, Binewal registered 166 NOTA votes. Tute Majara registered 310 votes under NOTA, Bhunga recorded 147 NOTA votes, Saini Khurd saw 129, and Barian Kalan registered 89 NOTA votes. While these numbers did not alter the outcomes, they reflect a segment of the electorate consciously opting out of the available choices.

Manual process and voter unfamiliarity. Election observers and local political workers point out that rejected ballots in rural body elections are often linked to the manual voting process, ballot design, voter unfamiliarity with symbols, and procedural errors during polling. Unlike Assembly or Parliamentary elections, Zila Parishad polls use a different ballot format, often confusing voters — particularly the elderly, less-literate voters and first-time participants. Multiple symbols, incorrect stamping, or marking beyond the designated area are among the most common reasons for rejection. A senior poll officer, requesting anonymity, said the cumulative impact of over 17,000 votes not translating into representation has renewed calls for simplifying the voting process, better voter education campaigns, clearer ballot instructions, and enhanced training for polling staff, especially at the rural level, where these institutions play a crucial governance role. The combination of high rejected ballots and consistent NOTA voting suggests that a significant number of voters either struggled with the voting process or consciously chose not to endorse any candidate.

Luigi Mangione's lawyers say Attorney General's death penalty decision was tainted by conflict of interest



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Luigi Mangione's lawyers contend that Attorney General Pam Bondi's decision to seek the death penalty against him in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson was tainted by her prior work as a lobbyist at a firm that represented the insurer's parent company. Ms. Bondi was a partner at Ballard Partners before leading the Justice Department's charge to turn Mangione's federal prosecution into a capital case, creating a "profound conflict of interest" that violated his due process rights, his lawyers wrote in a court filing late Friday (December 19, 2025). They want prosecutors barred from seeking the death penalty and some charges thrown out. A hearing is scheduled for January 9.

By involving herself in the death penalty decision and making public statements suggesting that Mangione deserves execution, Ms. Bondi broke a vow she made before taking office in February that she would follow ethical regulations and bow out of matters pertaining to Ballard clients for a year, Mangione's lawyers said. They argued Ms. Bondi has continued to profit from her work for Ballard — and, indirectly, from its work for UnitedHealth Group — through a profit-sharing arrangement with the lobbying firm and a defined contribution plan it administers. The "very person" empowered to seek Mangione's death "has a financial stake in the case she is prosecuting," his lawyers wrote. Her conflict of interest "should have caused her to recuse herself from making any decisions on this case," they added. Messages seeking comment were left for the Justice Department and Ballard Partners. Ms. Bondi announced in April that she was directing Manhattan federal prosecutors to seek the death penalty, declaring even before Mangione was formally indicted that capital punishment was warranted for a "premeditated, cold-blooded assassination that shocked America."

Thompson, 50, was killed on December 4, 2024, as he walked to a Manhattan hotel for UnitedHealth Group's annual investor conference. Surveillance video showed a masked gunman shooting him from behind. Police say "deceit," "deny" and "depose" were written on the ammunition,

mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims. Mangione, 27, the Ivy League-educated scion of a wealthy Maryland family, was arrested five days later at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of Manhattan. He has pleaded not guilty to federal and State murder charges. The State charges carry the possibility of life in prison. Neither trial has been scheduled. Friday's (December 20, 2025) filing put the focus back on Mangione's federal case a day after a marathon pretrial hearing ended in his fight to bar prosecutors in his State case from using certain evidence found during his arrest, such as a gun that police said matched the one used to kill Thompson and a notebook in which he purportedly described his intent to "wack" a health insurance executive. A ruling isn't expected until May.

Mangione's defence team, led by the husband-and-wife duo of Karen Friedman-Agnifilo and Marc Agnifilo, zeroed in on Ms. Bondi's past lobbying work as they seek to convince U.S. District Judge Margaret Garnett to rule out capital punishment, throw out some charges and exclude the same evidence they want suppressed from the state case. In a September court filing, Mangione's lawyers argued that Bondi's announcement that she was ordering prosecutors to seek the death penalty — which she followed with Instagram posts and a TV appearance — showed the decision was "based on politics, not merit." They also said her remarks tainted the grand jury process that resulted in his indictment a few weeks later. Ms. Bondi's statements and other official actions — including a highly choreographed perp walk that saw Mangione led up a Manhattan pier by armed officers, and the Trump administration's flouting of established death penalty procedures — "have violated Mr. Mangione's constitutional and statutory rights and have fatally prejudiced this death penalty case," his lawyers said. In a court filing last month, federal prosecutors argued that "pretrial publicity, even when intense, is not itself a constitutional defect." Rather than dismissing the case outright or barring the government from seeking the death penalty, prosecutors argued, the defense's concerns can best be alleviated by carefully questioning prospective jurors about their knowledge of the case and ensuring Mangione's rights are respected at trial. "What the defendant recasts as a constitutional crisis is merely a repackaging of arguments" rejected in previous cases, prosecutors said. "None warrants dismissal of the indictment or categorical preclusion of a congressionally authorised punishment." Mangione's lawyers said they want to investigate Ms. Bondi's ties to Ballard and the firm's relationship with UnitedHealth Group and will ask for various materials, including details of Ms. Bondi's compensation from the firm, any direction she's given Justice Department employees regarding the case or UnitedHealthcare, and sworn testimony from "all individuals with personal knowledge of the relevant matters".

Bombay High Court orders Rs50 lakh COVID insurance for family of deceased frontline worker

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The Kolhapur Bench of the Bombay High Court has directed the Maharashtra government to grant an ex-gratia insurance benefit of 50 lakh to the family of a Panchayat Samiti officer who died of COVID-19 in July 2021, holding that procedural rigidity cannot override substantive justice. A Division Bench of Justice M. S. Karnik and Justice Ajit B. Kadethankar allowed a petition filed by Vijaya Yashwant Jadhav, Sayali Yashwant Jadhav, Sahil Yashwant Jadhav, and Tulsabai Khandu Jadhav, legal heirs of Yashwant Khandu Jadhav, who served as an Extension Officer with Karveer Panchayat Samiti, Kolhapur. Represented by advocate K. D. Indapurkar, the petitioners sought directions to extend the benefit of the Government Resolution (GR) dated April 25, 2022, which provides 50 lakh insurance cover to frontline workers who died due to COVID-19, by relaxing the cut-off date of June 30, 2021.

According to the petition, Yashwant Jadhav contracted COVID-19 on June 16, 2021, while performing pandemic-related duties and was hospitalised until his death on July 11, 2021. The State had rejected the family's claim citing the GR's cut-off date. Advocate V. M. Mali, appearing for the State, argued, "The GR categorically provides that the benefit of insurance cover is applicable only to those employees who died having contracted COVID-19 till 30th June 2021. Some cut-off date has to be prescribed, and there is no infirmity in prescribing the said cut-off date." Supporting the State's stand, advocate Kedar P. Lad for the Zilla Parishad submitted that the proposal was rightly returned as the claim fell outside the GR's ambit.

However, the Bench rejected this argument and observed, "To deny or restrict the relief to those who passed away after 30th June 2021 would be contrary to the values



of justice, fairness, and dignity which animate our constitutional order, and also contrary to public conscience and societal gratitude." The Bench recalled the sacrifices made by frontline workers during the pandemic, stating, "Amidst this global turmoil, a category of individuals rose with extraordinary courage and unwavering dedication—our frontline workers. Their role was not just a professional obligation; it was an act of selfless service." Emphasising the need for a "humanitarian lens", the court said, "This would be in tune with the constitutional ethos that the State must act with sensitivity towards those who have suffered and must not allow procedural rigidity to eclipse substantive justice." That Yashwant Jadhav had contracted COVID before June 30 and was hospitalised until his death, the court held, "The cut-off date cannot be regarded as sacrosanct. This is a fit case where the benefit of GR dated 25th April 2022 ought to have been extended to the Petitioners." The Bench directed the State to release the insurance amount within four weeks. "Denying relief would be to do a disservice to the sacrifice made by the deceased in his fight against COVID-19."

Google warns staff with U.S. visas against international travel due to embassy delays: Report



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Alphabet's Google has advised some employees on U.S. visas to avoid international travel due to delays at embassies. Business Insider reported on Friday (December 19, 2025), citing an internal email. The email, sent by the company's outside counsel BAL Immigration Law on Thursday (December 18), warned staff who need a visa stamp to re-enter the United States not to leave the country because visa processing times have lengthened, the report said. Google did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Some U.S. embassies and consulates face visa appointment delays of up to 12 months, the memo said, warning that international travel will "risk an extended stay outside the U.S.", according to the report. The administration of U.S. President Donald

LPG leak triggers fire in apartment at Nallakunta, seven rescued

Hyderabad: Panic gripped the surroundings after a fire broke out at a multi-story residential building, triggered by an LPG leakage at Vaddera Basti in Nallakunta on Saturday. The explosion took place in a house located on the first floor, where a family of seven was residing. Following the blast, flames quickly spread across the house, trapping the occupants inside. Acting swiftly, the Nallakunta police team, along with fire department officials, rushed to the spot and rescued all seven family members using ropes.

Trump administration officials race to meet Dec. 17 deadline for Epstein files



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

President Donald Trump's Justice Department faces a Friday (December 17, 2025) deadline to release a massive trove of documents from its investigations into the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, after Congress overwhelmingly approved a new law forcing their disclosure last month. That legislation followed months of political wrangling as well as rebellion by some of Mr. Trump's staunchest supporters over his administration's months-long reluctance to make the records public.

It remains unclear how, or when, the files will be released on Friday (December 17), but they will likely not represent all unclassified records held by the agency. The law allowed the Justice Department to withhold personal information about Epstein's victims as well as any material that would jeopardize an active investigation. Attorneys in the Justice Department's National Security Division were ordered to review the materials and redact them in preparation for their release, two sources briefed on the matter said. They have been working on the task since after the Thanksgiving holiday and were ordered to prioritize it over other casework. But due to the quick turnaround time, some are nervous about potential mistakes and the chance that some personally identifiable information could accidentally remain, the sources said. Mr. Trump had initially urged Republicans, who control both chambers of Congress, to oppose the law, arguing that releasing potentially sensitive internal investigative records could set a dangerous precedent. He publicly reversed course just before the vote, even as the

White House quietly lobbied senators to slow-walk passage of the Bill.

But many Mr. Trump voters accused his administration of covering up Epstein's ties to powerful figures and obscuring details surrounding his 2019 death in a Manhattan jail, where he was awaiting trial on charges of abusing and trafficking underage girls. While Epstein's death was ruled a suicide, it sparked years of conspiracy theories, some amplified by Trump himself to his supporters when he was a presidential candidate. If the Justice Department does not release all of its files, it is likely that many Trump supporters will still not be satisfied. That could mean the issue remains a political headache for the president and his Republican Party heading into tough midterm congressional elections next year. Just 44% of American adults who identify as Republicans approve of Mr. Trump's handling of the Epstein issue, compared to his 82% overall approval rating among the group, according to a recent Reuters/Ipsos poll.

Last month, Democrats in the House of Representatives released thousands of emails obtained from Epstein's estate, including one in which Epstein wrote that Mr. Trump "knew about the girls," without clarifying what that meant. Trump, in response, accused Democrats of promoting the "Epstein Hoax" as a distraction. House Republicans released more emails the same day, including one saying Trump visited Epstein's house many times but "never got a massage." Mr. Trump was once friendly with Epstein until they had a falling out in the mid-2000s, before Epstein's first conviction in 2008. Trump has not been accused of wrongdoing and has denied knowing about Epstein's sex trafficking. But he reneged on a 2024 campaign promise to declassify the government's Epstein files if elected, prompting some lawmakers to launch what at first was seen as a long-shot effort to force a vote on disclosure. Two days after Congress' email releases, Trump ordered the Justice Department to investigate Epstein's connections to Democratic former President Bill Clinton and J.P. Morgan, in what critics viewed as an effort to shift the focus away from himself. The following week, despite White House pressure to delay the vote, U.S. lawmakers passed a bill forcing the release of the Justice Department records, which Mr. Trump then signed into law.

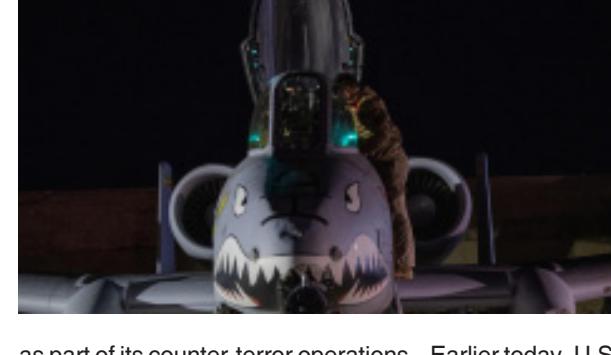
U.S. says it struck Islamic State targets in Syria

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The U.S. military said on Friday (December 19, 2025) it carried out massive air strikes on Islamic State targets inside Syria, in retaliation for the killing of two American soldiers last week. American fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery stationed in Syria fired more than 100 munitions at more than 70 suspected Islamic State locations across central Syria, the U.S. military's Central Command said in a statement. "Earlier today, U.S. forces commenced OPERATION HAWKEYE STRIKE in Syria to eliminate ISIS fighters, infrastructure, and weapons sites in direct response to the attack on U.S. forces that occurred on December 13th in Palmyra, Syria," Secretary of War Pete Hegseth wrote in a social media post. But he signalled that the attack was a one-off retaliation rather than the beginning of a new prolonged campaign. "This is not the beginning of a war — it is a declaration of vengeance. The United States of America, under President Trump's leadership, will never hesitate and never relent to defend our people." Jordanian forces assisted the American troops in carrying out the attack, according to the Central Command.

President Donald Trump, who had earlier said he would respond to the killing, said Syria's interim leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly Abu Muhammad al-Jolani), was fully on board. "The United States is inflicting very serious retaliation, just as I promised, on the murderous terrorists responsible," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post. "We are striking very strongly against ISIS strongholds in Syria, a place soaked in blood which has many problems, but one that has a bright future if ISIS can be eradicated. The Government of Syria, led by a man who is working very hard to bring Greatness back to Syria, and is fully in support," he added.

Two U.S. soldiers and one civilian interpreter were killed in the central Syrian city of Palmyra, which was once briefly held by the Islamic State, when they came under an ambush on December 13. These were the first American casualties since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2014. The U.S. has some 1,000 troops in Syria, who, according to Washington, have been deployed



as part of its counter-terror operations. Earlier today, U.S. forces commenced OPERATION HAWKEYE STRIKE in Syria to eliminate ISIS fighters, infrastructure, and weapons sites in direct response to the attack on U.S. forces that occurred on December 13th in Palmyra, Syria.

No group has claimed responsibility for the gun attack, but U.S. officials claimed that the Islamic State was responsible. The Islamic State, which once controlled huge swathes of territories, stretching from Deir Ez Zour in eastern Syria to Mosul in northern Iraq, lost its physical caliphate by 2018 due to sustained military campaigns by Kurdish and Shia militias as well as Syrian and Iraqi governments, backed by Russia, Iran and the U.S. But the group continues to operate as clandestine cells in several parts of Syria and Iraq, and continue to radicalise Muslim youth through online propaganda. The attack on American troops and the U.S. retaliatory strikes took place at a time when Mr. Sharaa is trying to centralise authority in the hands of his government in Damascus even as sectarian and ethnic tensions persist across the country. Mr. Hegseth warned on Friday that the U.S. would continue military strikes if its troops come under further attacks. "As we said directly following the savage attack, if you target Americans — anywhere in the world — you will spend the rest of your brief, anxious life knowing the United States will hunt you, find you, and ruthlessly kill you," he wrote in his post.

Agniveer reservation increased in CAPFs to 50%, marking policy shift by govt.

Months before the first batch of Agniveers retires from service, the Union Home Ministry has decided to enhance reservation for ex-Agniveers in the Group C posts of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) from the existing 10% to 50%, a senior government official told . On Friday (December 19, 2025), the Ministry notified that 50% vacant constable posts in the Border Security Force (BSF) will be reserved for ex-Agniveers. Though exempted from Physical Standard Test and Physical Efficiency Test, the notification suggests that the ex-Agniveers will have to appear for written examinations like other regular candidates.

The official said that the recruitment rules for Group C posts of all CAPFs will be amended gradually in the coming days. This is a significant shift from Ministry's earlier decision to implement 10% reservation for the temporary recruits of the armed forces in the CAPFs.

The recruitment policy announced in 2022 was met with violent protests and was one of the major issues during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Following protests, the Ministry announced that 10% of all vacancies in the CAPFs will be reserved for the armed forces recruits who have completed four years of service under the Agnipath scheme. It also announced five years age relaxation in recruitment for the first batch and three years age relaxation for subsequent batches. The first batch of Agniveers will be eligible for recruitment in the CAPFs in 2026. On Friday, the Ministry notified the Border Security Force, General Duty Cadre (Non-Gazetted) Recruitment Rules, (Amendment) Rules, 2025, with new provisions. The amended Rules say, "By direct recruitment (including fifty per cent vacancies shall be reserved for ex-Agniveers in every recruitment year, ten



per cent from ex-Servicemen and up to three per cent for absorption of annual vacancy amongst Combatised Constable (Tradesmen)." "In the first phase, the recruitment shall be conducted by the Nodal Force for fifty per cent vacancies earmarked for ex-Agniveers" and "in the second phase, recruitment shall be conducted by the Staff Selection Commission for candidates other than ex-Agniveers for the remaining forty-seven per cent (including ten per cent ex-Servicemen) for the vacancies along with the unfilled vacancies of ex-Agniveers in a specific category in the first stage", it said. For absorption in the rank of constables from among the Combatised Constable (Tradesmen) of the BSF, the age criteria have been relaxed from existing 30 to 35 years, and the minimum service period has been increased from three to five years. The upper age limit for deputation to other forces has been increased from existing 52 years of age to 56 years. The CAPFs comprise the Central Industrial Security Force, BSF, Central Reserve Police Force, Indo Tibetan Border Police, Sashastra Seema Bal and the Assam Rifles.

How South Asians became targets of racist hate on Elon Musk's X | Explained



How have hateful and racist comments against South Asians increased in recent years?

The Center for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH), a non-profit, non-partisan think tank in the U.S., reported a "visible up tick of anti-Indian hate" on X after Mr. Krishnan's appointment to his U.S. White House role, and also after a post on X by Mr. Ramaswamy in December 2024, when H1-B visa debates were raging. "Since then, anti-Indian racism on social media, including X, has shown no signs of abating," observed the organisation. After studying a dataset of 680 posts on X targeting Indians and Indian-origin communities that received over 281 million views between July 1 and September 7, CSHO reported that almost 70% of the posts focused on deportation, invasion, and job theft. "Immigration and calls for deportation are thus the central pillars and main drivers of anti-Indian racism on X," explained CSHO in the report, adding that "racist slurs and mockery, though less voluminous, also play a crucial role in normalizing and reinforcing anti-Indian hate on X. The repeated use of racialized terms like 'pajeet' or tropes of Indians as dirty or smelly provides the cultural scaffolding for more explicit exclusionary and hateful rhetoric." Mr. Mamdani and Ms. Khan faced both racism and Islamophobia on X, with the New York City mayor-elect frequently being linked to terrorism because he openly embraced his Muslim identity. Using his popularity with younger, left-wing voters in order to call for deportations was a popular strategy for racists on X. One example was U.S. politician Andy Ongles, who on October 29 posted, "Think of how many future Zohran Mamdani's we can stop by mass deportations. Let's deport them now before they are naturalized. Subversive immigrants must NEVER get citizenship." Mr. Mamdani's legal status was also questioned by U.S. President Donald Trump, triggering further abuse against the politician on X. Though former FTC Chair Ms. Khan is not vocal about her religious beliefs, the London-born American antitrust scholar was nevertheless attacked online over her surname, her appearance, and her parents' Pakistani heritage. Ms. Khan recently became a target for racists and misogynists after she was named the co-chair of Mr. Mamdani's transition team.

X user Paul Sperry, verified with a blue check mark and with over half a million followers, posted a photo of what he claimed was Ms. Khan's "family home" on X, possibly doxing her and her family members. He further claimed that she "hates capitalism and is pushing socialism on all New Yorkers." In another post, he referred to the former regulator as a "TROJAN HORSE?", called her "Ethnic-Pakistani Muslim" and said she would be able to "place fellow Muslims throughout the government". The normalisation of South Asian hate as well as mockery on X has also impacted everyday tech workers and social media users. What world events triggered hatred against South Asians on social media?

Apart from the souring relationship between the U.S. and India after Mr. Trump's return to the White House, the president's strong and repeated emphasis on the removal of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives has made more people view minority groups in a poor light. Referring to them as "illegal and immoral discrimination programs," his rhetoric unfairly showed South Asians as outsiders taking over American jobs. Referring to the H-1B visa programme for workers, Mr. Trump said in a September 19 proclamation that the "large-scale replacement of American workers through systemic abuse of the program has undermined both our economic and national security". A U.S. government report published this year stated that out of the H-1B petitions approved in FY 2024, 71% were for beneficiaries whose country of birth was India.

Cyclone Ditwah damage in Sri Lanka | Kandy's long path from wreckage to recovery



It was C. Nithsara's first bath in 12 days. Wrapped in a white bodysuit, with large black dots marked on his forehead and cheek — believed to ward off the evil eye — the two-month-old bounced gently on his grandmother's lap, flashing a wide grin at visitors, blissfully unaware of the storm that had destroyed his village. His family, from Rajathalawa in Sri Lanka's Kandy district in the Central Province, has been sheltering at a Buddhist temple in a neighbouring village for nearly two weeks. They have remained there since Cyclone Ditwah struck the island in late November, bringing torrential rains, floods, and landslides. With water treatment facilities inundated in the floods, piped water for bathing and cooking is unavailable, making wells and, in some cases, rainwater the only alternative. "Our home started sliding into the earth. The floor cracked and the walls came crashing down," says Nandika Kumari, while engaging her bubbly grandchild. "We are lucky to be alive. Eight of our relatives near our home were killed in the landslide... rescue workers have been able to recover only three bodies so far, so we held a small funeral just outside the temple."

Kandy has recorded the highest death toll from the devastating event. Of the 643 reported dead across the island so far, 237 are from this district, a popular Buddhist religious and cultural centre that draws scores of tourists every year. At least 73 are still missing in this district, as per the latest data. Some 60 families and nearly 200 people from Nandika Kumari's village are living on the temple premises, unsure of when and where they might go, leaving behind their loved ones beneath the soil, their crushed walls and roofs, and the place they once knew as home.

Efforts to restore essential services are ongoing in the locality. They are compounded by the hazard of continued rain loosening the slopes further, and the difficulty of working in layers of mud, not knowing where human remains lie. Moist, brick red soil, cleared to create a narrow path through the site, lay piled in large mounds on either side, obscuring the view of the surrounding hills. Ceylon Electricity Board personnel work to provide temporary lines for power and mobile connectivity. Trapped in the earth and peeking through it are a hollowed-out autorickshaw, a damaged van, tangled wires, and a torn pink teddy bear, among other household belongings — fragments of lives once lived and livelihoods painstakingly built. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assessment has found that the cyclone triggered around 1,200 landslides in Sri Lanka's hilly interior. The Disaster Management Centre continues to issue landslide warnings amid intermittent showers. "We have been told our area is still unsafe and prone to landslides. We have been asked not to return," says T.G. Nandavati, 65, who is also staying in the temple prayer hall. She is a Sinhala speaker who picked up Tamil from neighbours in her mixed ethnicity village, and even learnt some Arabic during her years as a housemaid in West Asia. Over decades, she built a modest home with basic appliances and utensils, using savings from her four-year stint in Riyadh, her later work in the surrounding small-scale tea estates, and with contributions from her daughter, who was a domestic worker in Kuwait for 13 years. "Every single item is gone; nothing is left. But I don't want any of those things. I am done," says Nandavati. "We must start all over again. All I need now is a basic meal and a place to sleep."

For the cyclone-hit country, the transition from urgent rescue operations to humanitarian aid and relief, and later to long-term rebuilding, is far from easy. Families have specific yet varied needs, ranging from new homes to household appliances. Soon, they will need new jobs, along with stronger social protection and some food security, if they are to cope with the huge losses to life, property, and livelihoods. The scale of the disasterThe cyclone's impact is visible not just in villages, but also in towns that were submerged for days. In Gampola, the once-bustling town nearest to Nandavati's village, small businesses and traders have laid bare the toll of the devastation along the main road. Wet and damaged ware, furniture, packing material, and sacks of rice and spices lie heaped along the margins. The stench is unbearable and the monetary loss is staggering. Locals are not just overwhelmed, but also in disbelief. "I have not seen anything like this in my life," says S.H. Adam, 80, temporarily staying at a mosque in the nearby Nawalapitiya town with other families who were evacuated amid landslide warnings. "Heavy rains and some flooding, we are used to. But not this. Something has really changed," he says, echoing the chief concern of climate activists everywhere. Ditwah is among the worst natural disasters Sri Lanka has witnessed, with development experts warning that the response may prove more challenging than in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The UNDP has estimated that 2.3 million people — about 10% of Sri Lanka's population — were living in flooded areas. Its geospatial analysis showed that floodwaters had inundated over 1.1 million hectares, almost 20% of the country's land area, reaching nearly 7,20,000 buildings — about one in every 12.

Over 300 roads and 40 key bridges have been damaged, with the Road Development Authority (RDA) reporting a loss of nearly LKR 75 billion (roughly \$22 billion). While more than half of the power connections on the island were disrupted during the cyclone days, the Ceylon Electricity Board has flagged 40% damage to its infrastructure in the impact. Disaster Management Centre officials have enumerated close to 5 lakh affected families and 17 lakh people. Over 6,000 homes are fully damaged, and at least 17 lakh homes are partially destroyed. While the full extent of damage and loss is still being assessed, authorities continue to search for the missing, clearing routes through the rubble, reopening roads wherever possible, and building temporary bridges to connect isolated and cut-off communities. The UN aims to mobilise \$35 million in grants over the next four years for the island nation which declared bankruptcy in 2022 as it could not repay its loans. Cyclone Ditwah is the country's third major blow in five years. As with the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and the financial crash of 2022, the burden once again falls heaviest on Sri Lanka's working-class poor, small-scale producers, and small and medium enterprises.

Among them, the Malaiyaha Tamils, a community long discriminated, marginalised socially, and highly exploited in their labour, are yet again badly hit. The official death toll from the cyclone is segregated district-wise, but not according to ethnicity. However, the highest number of deaths have been reported from the Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, and

Badulla districts, across the Central and Uva Provinces. These are home to scores of Malaiyaha Tamils, many of whom live and work on tea estates known to be prone to landslides. Their precarity, which has endured over the two centuries since their ancestors landed from southern India, heightens their vulnerability to shocks. Hundreds of thousands still live in overcrowded colonial-era barrack-style 'line rooms', where roads or water connections do not reach. Sanitation facilities are inadequate, and the access to education and health care is poor. Kalaiavani* estimates she will need close to LKR 1,00,000 (about \$30,000) to rebuild her home that was damaged in the landslide. After toiling in tea estates for 35 years, long enough to read the terrain and the yield, she sees little hope for those employed in the sector. "The tea bushes in our estate [on the outskirts of Kandy town] are not maintained well," she says. This neglect directly impacts a worker's daily wage, which is tied to unreasonable, or even impossible, targets. "If there are no tea leaves, we won't be called to work. Even on the days we are called, there won't be enough leaves for us to pluck [to meet the target in weight]."

The marginal wage hike that the plantation companies previously promised remains mostly on paper for many workers. Even with their best efforts, workers are unable to meet the targets. "The President [Anura Kumara Dissanayake] has said our wages will go up from January [2026]. Let us see," says Maheswari*, another worker on a Kandy estate. But the women labourers are not holding their breath. They have heard several promises of wage hikes over the years — governments and leaders have changed, yet plantation companies remain stubbornly opposed, citing high production costs and a volatile export market. Workers, on the other hand, point to their abysmal living and working conditions, high living costs after record inflation, and growing job insecurity. Many estate workers in the area have not been called for work since the cyclone hit. Those who returned have not heard a word on compensation for the workdays lost for no fault of theirs. The concerns they voiced before the cyclone have only become more acute and urgent.

The workers are tired of having to pay the price. After Sri Lanka defaulted on its external debt and declared bankruptcy in 2022, the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government made its first stop at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a longstanding lender whose loans it had sought 16 times already. Although it is Sri Lanka's foreign debt that is unsustainable, the IMF asked Colombo to restructure its domestic debt, which it did without a murmur. This exercise reduced the value of superannuation funds. The move hit Malaiyaha Tamil estate workers badly, with their only savings after decades of underpaid labour shrinking in final value abruptly. "We cannot return to our home because of the destruction and risk. But we have nowhere else to go," says Danam*, 56. "Our children do not want to work on the estates any more. They want jobs in the shops in nearby towns." With uncertainty shadowing them, young Malaiyaha Tamils are caught between a bleak present and a daunting future. To escape the difficulty at home, the men migrate within the country for low-paid service jobs. Women, meanwhile, seek domestic work abroad. Their families' plight barely changes, even as their remittances replenish the dollars in state coffers. Days after the cyclone, President Dissanayake visited some of the most affected areas in the hill country and met communities, reassuring them of the government's commitment to rebuilding their areas. He also directed officials to prioritise housing and livelihoods in their immediate response, apart from swift financial relief.

Experts say not just estate workers, but smallholder farmers and fishers must be centred in the recovery plan for Sri Lanka, as the country may have to face questions of food security. Terming smallholder farmers and fishers the "backbone of Sri Lanka's food system" in a recent media column, Food and Agriculture Organization representative in Sri Lanka, Vimlendra Sharan, says their rapid return to production is vital not only for their own recovery, "but also for ensuring food security and supporting rural economies." Citing the challenge of recovery ahead, activists campaigning for economic justice are urging the government to recast its ongoing IMF programme, to secure some fiscal space to support those worst hit by the disaster.

Expanding social protection and introducing a public distribution system, among other efforts, will be crucial for protecting the poorest, they contend. They also point to the structural inequality and discrimination that manifests in most affected sections' disadvantaged location, exclusion in official communication — many early warnings were issued in Sinhala only, keeping Tamil-speakers in the dark — and inability to resume livelihoods once the cyclone passed. Every recent crisis in the country has shown that some citizens, invariably the poor, bear the cost of others' recovery. Prior to last year's elections, Dissanayake's National People Power alliance made a bold pledge to renegotiate the predecessor government's IMF deal, to reduce the pain it is squeezing austerity inflicted on ordinary people. One year into power, the centre-left government has not veered away from the IMF guardrails, drawing high praise from Washington DC. The enormous losses suffered by the people in recent weeks did not prompt a single tweak in next year's national Budget, passed in Parliament days after the cyclone made its deadly landfall. Further, Sri Lanka has sought \$200 million in new borrowing from the Fund, to cope with the destruction. The ruling Dissanayake administration faces a formidable task. How it decides to rebuild, and whose lives and livelihoods it decides to foreground, will determine its own political fortune and Sri Lanka's future. Real recovery begins when every citizen feels the cyclone has passed.

Andhra's Pothireddypadu expansions threaten Telangana's Krishna River share

Hyderabad: What began as a modest inter-State agreement to supply drinking water to Chennai and irrigate drought-prone Rayalaseema has evolved into a major flashpoint in the ongoing Krishna River water dispute between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The Pothireddypadu Head Regulator (PRP), located on the foreshore of the Srisailam Reservoir in Andhra Pradesh's Nandyal district is turning out to be the centre of escalating tensions, with Telangana accusing Andhra Pradesh of unauthorized expansions that could deprive it of its minimum entitlements. Originally conceived as part of the Telugu Ganga Project, the PRP was formalized in 1983 under agreements where Maharashtra, Karnataka, and undivided Andhra Pradesh agreed to spare 15 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) annually, 5 TMC each, for Chennai's drinking water needs. The initial capacity was limited to 1,500-4,960 cusecs during flood periods (July-October), strictly for surplus water.



neurs and builders, digitise governance, and empower citizens to act — not wait endlessly for decisions.

The need to think beyond remittancesWe must also rethink our economic model. Kerala cannot thrive on remittances and retail alone. We need to nurture industries that reflect our strengths — knowledge, creativity and sustainability. Let us invest in green technologies, promote high-tech agro-processing, and support startups that seize new opportunities (biogenetics, rare earths and minerals, eco-tourism, space tech, Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing) to solve 21st century problems. High-tech value-added products and precision manufacturing, maritime and port development, export of marine products, and development of supply chains and logistics hubs need to be further explored. We must support women entrepreneurs with micro finance and digital training. We must mobilise our citizenry, including non-resident Indians, by launching a Kerala Savings Mission encouraging citizens to invest in State development bonds. We should attract back skilled Malayali professionals from abroad through incentives and recognition. And, we must give investors the security of an 'Investor Protection Act' to ensure that their capital will not be lost for non-market-related reasons.

Tourism must be reimagined not as a spectacle but as an immersive experience rooted in culture and community. Our strengths in health care and wellness could make Kerala a major centre for medical tourism spanning allopathic, ayurvedic and other forms of holistic healing. Above all, we must take pride in what we produce — from coir to code — and ensure that "Made in Kerala" becomes a mark of excellence. Education and health have long been Kerala's crown jewels. But even these are tarnishing. Our schools and colleges must prepare students not just for examinations but for life — for critical thinking, civic engagement and global citizenship. Internships should be available even during the academic year, to connect students to the real world. Our hospitals must be equipped not just with infrastructure but with compassion. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed both our strengths and our vulnerabilities. Let us learn from it and build resilient systems that serve all, especially the most vulnerable. Culture,

Australia tells AI chatbot companies to detail child protection steps



GNS News Agency, Dec 20 SYDNEY, Australia has ordered four artificial-intelligence chatbot companies to explain their measures to protect children from exposure to sexual or self-harm material, as its internet regulator beefs up safety measures on the AI front. The realistic conversational abilities of such services have taken the world by storm, but have also fanned concern that a lack of guardrails exposes vulnerable individuals to dangerous content. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here.

In a statement, the eSafety Commissioner said it sought details of safeguards against child sexual exploitation, pornography and material promoting suicide or eating disorders. It sent notices to Character Technologies, owner of celebrity simulation chatbot tool character.ai, and rivals Glimpse.AI, Chai Research and Chub AI. "There can be a darker side to some of these services, with many ... chatbots capable of engaging in sexually explicit conversations with

minors," Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said in the statement. "Concerns have been raised that they may also encourage suicide, self-harm and disordered eating."

Australia's online regulatory system gives the commissioner the power to compel internet firms to report internal safety processes or face daily fines of up to A\$825,000 (\$536,000). The most popular of the services queried, Character.ai, is being sued in the United States after the mother of a 14-year-old said her son died by suicide following prolonged interaction with an AI companion on the site. Character.ai has sought to dismiss the lawsuit and says it introduced safety features, such as pop-ups directing users to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline if they express thoughts of self-harm. Schools in Australia have reported children as young as 13 spending up to five hours a day talking with chatbots, sometimes sexually, the regulator said, adding that minors risked forming sexual or emotionally dependent ties with them, or being spurred to self-harm. However, the regulator did not query OpenAI, owner of the world's most popular AI search tool, ChatGPT, as its crackdown focused on companion-based tools and ChatGPT is not covered by an industry code until March 2026, an eSafety spokesperson said. Australia has one of the world's strictest internet regulation regimes. From December, social media companies will be forced to deactivate or refuse accounts for users younger than 16 or face a fine of up to A\$49.5 million, in a bid to safeguard young people's mental and physical health. Byron Kaye is the Reuters chief companies correspondent for Australia, based in Sydney. Over 10 years at Reuters he has covered banks, retail, healthcare, media, technology and politics, among other topics. He can be reached at +612 9171 7541 or on Signal via username byronkaye.01

Paris' Louvre reopens after heist, as backlash grows over security flaws

PARIS, GNS News Agency, Dec 20- The Louvre in Paris reopened on Wednesday, three days after thieves made off with historic jewellery worth an estimated 88 million euros (\$102 million) in a spectacular heist that has raised urgent questions over security lapses at the museum. Visitors queued to enter through the Louvre's glass pyramid for the first time since Sunday's brazen robbery, in which hooded assailants broke through a second-floor window using a stolen movers' lift before making off with jewels from the royal collection. The Reuters Daily Briefing newsletter provides all the news you need to start your day. Sign up here. Later on Wednesday the museum's director will appear before the French Senate to answer lawmakers' questions. The Galerie d'Apollon, the ornate gilded hall that was robbed, remains closed.

Amid rising frustration in France that no senior official has taken responsibility, French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said there had clearly been security failures and Culture Minister Rachida Dati had launched an administrative inquiry. "There was a burglary at the Louvre, some of the most precious jewels in France were stolen. So obviously it's a failure, there is nothing else I can say," Nunez told Europe 1 radio. But he added that "the alarm system worked perfectly, as soon as the window was attacked, it was activated. Police were notified, and within three minutes they were on the scene. The whole system worked, it didn't fail, but what happened has happened." He declined to comment on the police manhunt, but said he was confident the perpetrators would be found. Item 1 of 6 Visitors take pictures of the painting "La Liberte guidant le peuple" (Liberty Leading the People, 1830) by French artist Eugene Delacroix (1798–1863) displayed in the salle Mollien of Denon wing at the Louvre Museum on the day it reopened to the public for the first time since last Sunday's... Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab Read more Date came under fire after saying in parliament on Tuesday there had not been any security lapses. Louvre director Laurence des Cars will be questioned by senators later on Wednesday. Des Cars warned in January that the centuries-old building was in a dire state. President Emmanuel Macron has announced a six-year renovation of the Louvre, which will include money for security upgrades. Asked on RTL radio whether state budget cuts had led to security lapses in French museums, the head of France's national audit office Pierre Moscovici said that was not the case for the Louvre. "It is richly endowed, there are sponsorships, really, the Louvre is not without resources." Built in the late 12th century, the Louvre Palace used to be the official residence of the kings of France, until Louis XIV abandoned it for Versailles. It was turned into a museum for the royal art collection in 1793, four years after the French Revolution. last year. It hosts the Mona Lisa, the world's most famous painting, and the Venus de Milo statue, as well as countless old masters.



(Liberty Leading the People, 1830) by French artist Eugene Delacroix (1798–1863) displayed in the salle Mollien of Denon wing at the Louvre Museum on the day it reopened to the public for the first time since last Sunday's... Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab Read more Date came under fire after saying in parliament on Tuesday there had not been any security lapses. Louvre director Laurence des Cars will be questioned by senators later on Wednesday. Des Cars warned in January that the centuries-old building was in a dire state. President Emmanuel Macron has announced a six-year renovation of the Louvre, which will include money for security upgrades. Asked on RTL radio whether state budget cuts had led to security lapses in French museums, the head of France's national audit office Pierre Moscovici said that was not the case for the Louvre. "It is richly endowed, there are sponsorships, really, the Louvre is not without resources." Built in the late 12th century, the Louvre Palace used to be the official residence of the kings of France, until Louis XIV abandoned it for Versailles. It was turned into a museum for the royal art collection in 1793, four years after the French Revolution. last year. It hosts the Mona Lisa, the world's most famous painting, and the Venus de Milo statue, as well as countless old masters.

World Court to give opinion on Israel's obligations to allow aid to Palestinians



The request for an ICJ opinion was prompted by a 2023 Israeli law that banned U.N. Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA from operating in the country, as it said the organisation had employed members of Hamas who took part in the attacks on Israel. The U.N. said in August last year that nine UNRWA staff may have been involved in the Hamas assault and had been fired. Another Hamas commander, confirmed by UNRWA as one of its employees, was killed in Gaza in October 2024, according to Israel. In an earlier 2024 advisory opinion, the ICJ found that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal and should end immediately. The court also said that Israel had human rights obligations to the Palestinians because of its position as an occupying power.

Journalists imprisoned in Belarus and Georgia win EU's top human rights award

Two journalists, one imprisoned in Belarus and the other in Georgia, have won the European Union's top human rights honour, the Sakharov Prize, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola announced.

Andrzej Pocobut is a correspondent for the influential Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza. He was convicted of "harming Belarus' national security" and sentenced to eight years, which he is serving in the Novopolotsk penal colony. Mzia Amaghlobeli, a prominent journalist who founded two of Georgia's independent media outlets, was convicted in August of slapping a police chief during an anti-government protest. She was sentenced to two years in prison in a case that was condemned by rights groups as an attempt to curb media freedom. "Both are journalists currently in prison on trumped up charges simply for doing their work and for speaking out against injustice. Their courage has made them symbols of the struggle for freedom and democracy," Ms. Metsola said at the parliament in Strasbourg, France. The annual EU award, named after Soviet dissident Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov, was created in 1988 to honour individuals or groups who defend human rights and basic freedoms.

The 20-point ceasefire plan mediated by the U.S. earlier this month allows for 600 trucks of aid a day into Gaza. Israel has previously accused Hamas of stealing food delivered into the enclave, which it denies, and has said the aid restriction was to put pressure on the militant group. Israel did not appear before the ICJ in hearings but did submit its legal position in writing. In April, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar dismissed the hearings as a "circus" and said the court was being politicized.

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Saudi Arabia abolishes Kafala system – What it means for migrant workers



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Hyderabad: In a landmark reform, Saudi Arabia has officially abolished the decades-old Kafala (sponsorship) system, marking a major shift in the treatment and rights of migrant workers in the Kingdom. The move, effective since March 2021 and part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 initiative, is expected to benefit 'around 13 million migrant workers,' making it one of the most significant labour reforms in the Gulf region.

What is the Kafala system?

The Kafala system—Arabic for "sponsorship"—is a legal framework that binds migrant workers to a specific employer or sponsor (kafeel) for the duration of their stay in a host country. It has been widely implemented in countries across the Middle East, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and also in Lebanon, Jordan, and formerly Israel.

Under this system Employers controlled workers' legal status, work permits, and even their ability to leave the country. Migrant workers were often unable to change jobs or return home without the employer's permission. Employers sometimes confiscated passports, restricted movement, or withheld wages. Human rights organizations have long criticized the system for facilitating exploitation and abuse with little legal recourse for workers.

Why was Kafala controversial?

According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the kafala system gave employers unchecked power over foreign workers, especially in domestic, construction, and low-skilled sectors. In 2008, HRW said it was "incompatible with Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." In 2014, the International Trade Union Confederation estimated that 2.4 million domestic workers in the Arab Gulf and Levant were effectively enslaved, most from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and West Africa.

Where has Kafala been abolished?

IRA in the making: Ghazwa-e-Hind rhetoric, 8,850 trainees at seven camps in Bangladesh



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

New Delhi: The disclosure by a senior adviser to the Muhammad Yunus government in Bangladesh clearly suggests that the first phase to set up the Islamic Revolutionary Army (IRA) is underway. On October 20, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain, an adviser to the interim government, said on social media that recruitment and training were being imparted to 8,850 individuals across several centres. He said that these individuals would undergo training in martial arts, firearms instruction, taekwondo and judo.

This revelation confirms what the Indian agencies have been saying for a couple of months. The Yunus government, labelled as a puppet of the Jamaat-e-Islami and ISI, has been planning the IRA for several months now. The idea is to replace the existing army with the IRA. The IRA, according to Indian officials, would be on the lines with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRA would be a highly radicalised institution, which would help the establishment convert Bangladesh into an Islamic state. It would be used for moral policing, like one gets to see in Iran, officials add. However, the bigger target would be India, and this would mean that once the IRA is set up, the tensions along the border would be very high.

Recently, Dr Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, a Jamaat leader, said in New York that five million Jamaat youth were ready to fight against India. He said that if India enters Bangladesh, the bad name that was given in 1971 will be wiped out. We will prove ourselves as true freedom

fighters, and one part of the Jamaat's five million people will engage in guerrilla warfare, while the rest will spread inside India to implement Ghazwa-e-Hind. Analysts say that the developments and statements clearly indicate that the ISI has taken over Bangladesh. It has been the wish of Pakistan to get Bangladesh back to the pre-1971 situation, and since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, it has been working relentlessly on this plan. Currently, seven training camps cater to 8,850 individuals. All these people are being trained by retired Bangladesh Army officials who are pro-Pakistan.

Plans are afoot to set up more such camps in the future. The plan would be to train over 160,000 individuals, which is the current strength of the Bangladeshi Army. Further, these camps are frequented by both the Pakistan army and ISI officials. They are the ones who are providing the funds and equipment. Since the sea route was opened up to Pakistan by Muhammad Yunus, arms and ammunition have come to Bangladesh in large numbers. All these are currently being stored in the universities, which are largely controlled by the Jamaat. As per the requirement, these arms and ammunition are being transported openly to these training camps. The Jamaat-backed institutions are also open about their intentions where the IRA is concerned. In December 2024 itself, a group called the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, which comprises students close to Yunus, had announced the launch of a militia called the IRA. In a Facebook post, the organisation had called upon the youth to gather at the Dhaka University for enrolment. The plan was to set up training camps, and during the initial phase, there would be a martial arts session followed by a month-long military style training. They said that this would be conducted by the army and paramilitary forces. These developments clearly indicate that the Yunus administration, at the behest of the Jamaat and ISI, is looking to shut down both the army and DGFI in Bangladesh. There have been rumours of a rift between the army top brass and the ruling dispensation. Courts have been passing orders to arrest many army and DGFI personnel. While the courts have said that these persons have indulged in atrocities, in reality, all these persons who have been targeted are perceived to be close to Sheikh Hasina. These developments have caused a deep rift within the Bangladeshi Army, officials say, while adding that many are in favour of the IRA being set up.

Man crashes car into White House security gate, taken into custody

Washington: A man was taken into custody after crashing his vehicle into a security gate outside the White House in Washington, according to local media reports. The incident occurred around 10:37 p.m. on Tuesday (local time) at the intersection of 17th Street and E Street NW, near the southwest perimeter of the presidential complex. According to the US Secret Service, the driver rammed his car into the secured gate, prompting an immediate response from security personnel. Agents quickly arrested the suspect on the scene, deploying a heavy security presence in the area, reports Fox News. Armed officers were seen securing the perimeter, while forensic teams examined the damaged vehicle. Authorities have not yet released details about the suspect's identity, possible motive, or the circumstances leading to the crash.

Visuals circulating on social media show Secret Service officers surrounding the vehicle, conducting measurements, and photographing the scene. Following the collision, access to the area was temporarily restricted while officials assessed the situation. The White House itself was not placed under lockdown, but the road leading to the gate was closed until the vehicle was towed away. No injuries have been reported. The Secret Service said it is reviewing

surveillance footage and other evidence to determine the driver's intent. Some media reports also suggested that US President Donald Trump was inside the White House at the time of the crash. The site of the incident lies southwest of the main residential complex, close to the headquarters of the American Red Cross. This is not the first time a vehicle has breached security near the White House. In January 2024, a driver crashed into an outer gate and was detained by law enforcement. A few months later, in May 2024, another vehicle struck a security barrier near the complex, resulting in the driver's death. In both cases, the Secret Service ruled out any broader threat to public safety. The latest incident comes amid ongoing construction work for a new East Wing ballroom, which has already increased security measures around the White House.

It also follows a separate security concern just days earlier, when a suspicious hunting stand was found overlooking the area where President Trump was scheduled to exit Air Force One at Palm Beach International Airport in Florida. Authorities have not yet confirmed whether there is any connection between the two incidents, but investigations are underway.

RBI allows compounding of FEMA case against Genpact India



Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for compounding of the said FEMA "contraventions". On reference from the RBI, the ED issued "no objection" for such compounding in line with the true spirit of the Act (FEMA), and the banking regulator compounded the offence through an order issued on October 17 with a one-time payment of Rs 4.72 lakh to be made by the company, the ED said in a statement. A compounding order in the regulatory context means a formal decision taken by an authority to settle an offence by allowing the default者 to pay a monetary penalty instead of facing prosecution.

"This has resulted into termination of adjudication proceedings under the provisions of FEMA against the company and its office bearers as well as further litigation," it said. The agency said that a similar compounding had been ordered by the RBI in the case of some other companies. ED Director Rahul Navin, while speaking at an ED Day event in May, had said that to promote the Union government's policy of 'ease of doing business' and to reduce litigation, the agency will encourage defaulters of the civil law to file applications for "compounding" of the offence, in cases it deems appropriate. Officials earlier told PTI that cases of "petty or technical" FEMA violations would be allowed for compounding to end "frivolous" litigations.

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday said the RBI had issued a compounding order for Genpact India, against a one-time payment, resulting in termination of a FEMA against the technology major. The agency had filed a complaint against the company in October 2018 for alleged contravention of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) to the tune of about Rs 26 crore. It issued a show cause notice to the firm and its directors in the same month (and initiated adjudication proceedings).

Genpact subsequently filed an application before the

Oman's exports of 'banned' marble blocks to replace Turkish imports: Commerce Minister Goyal



Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said that Oman has agreed to export marble blocks to India under the trade deal that will help India replace the imports of Turkish marble and help the processing industry create more jobs. Muscat had banned the exports of raw marble since 2016 to promote value addition in the country. "Marble blocks were banned from being exported from Oman. We are the first country for which they have opened up marble blocks, which will help the processing and marble industry. And instead of importing finished marble, we will be able to provide jobs and have India produce final marble tiles and flooring. The good part, it will replace our imports from Turkey. They are better priced, too," Goyal said at a press briefing.

The minister's comment comes as India's ties with Turkey have been strained since May, as Turkish-made drones were used by Pakistan to target 23 cities in India during Operation Sindo. Citing national security concerns, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had revoked the security clearance of the Turkish ground handling firm, Celebi Airport Services India. A government official said that every country is interested in exporting market slabs and that blocks are important for the downstream industry. "It can be converted to slabs and used. It makes sense to us rather than getting slabs. We have allowed it under quota," the official said. The officials added that the imports could bridge the marble availability gap in India, as 'Makrana White' Indian marble is in short supply. However, marbles from Oman may not find use as marble floors due to its flaky nature and could be used for decorative purposes.

Marble processors from Udaipur had written to the

Prime Minister's Office (PMO) seeking import curbs on marble from Turkey, citing its support to Pakistan during Operation Sindo. India imports the majority of its marble from Turkey. The Indian marble industry is estimated at Rs 40,000-crore, Parveen Goel, Ex-President Laghu Udyog Bharti, told PTI. He added that they demanded to include this provision in the pact as India's raw marble block imports stood at about 13 lakh MT (metric tonne), and it comes mainly from Turkey, Italy, and Vietnam. The country's marble industry is concentrated in states like Rajasthan and Gujarat. Official trade data showed that India's exports to Turkey in FY25 totalled \$5.72 billion, and India's imports from Turkey during the last financial year stood at \$2.99 billion. This paper reported that Indian tourists had also increased cancelling holidays to Turkey and Azerbaijan, as reflected in visa applications to both countries. Tourists are now looking at destinations like Kazakhstan, Egypt, Jordan, Georgia and Armenia.

RBI MPC Minutes: Considering benign inflation outlook real interest rates need to be lower, says Governor Sanjay Malhotra



Given the benign outlook for both headline and core inflation, real interest rates need to be lower, Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra wrote in the minutes of the December Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, where he voted for a 25-basis-point repo rate cut. The MPC members unanimously lowered the repo rate by 25 bps to 5.25 per cent, marking a cumulative reduction of 125 bps in the key policy rate since February 2025. The six-member rate-setting panel, by a 5:1 majority, also decided to maintain the neutral stance, with one member voting for a shift to an accommodative stance.

"...demand pressures, as evident from low core inflation (excluding precious metals), are minimal and projected to remain low in the next three quarters. Considering the benign inflation outlook — headline as well as core — real interest rates need to be lower," Malhotra wrote in the minutes of the MPC meeting, held from December 3 to 5. The country's CPI inflation, or retail inflation, rose to 0.71 per cent in November from a record low of 0.25 per cent in October.

Malhotra added that although domestic economic activity remains resilient in Q3, weakness in some leading high-frequency indicators is suggestive of a deceleration in the growth momentum in the second half (H2) of FY25 compared with the first half (H1). The country's GDP expanded by a better than expected 8.2 per cent in Q2. Overall, real GDP growth is poised to exceed 7 per cent, much above the RBI's expectation of 6.5 per cent at the beginning of the year, as healthy domestic prospects outweigh the concerns on the external front, he said. "Going forward in H1 next year, domestic growth is projected to remain strong, though moderate to 6.7-6.8 per cent," Malhotra said. He favoured retaining the neutral stance as it gives the requisite flexibility to remain data-dependent and act according to the evolving macroeconomic conditions and outlook. RBI Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta said that the faster than anticipated moderation in CPI headline inflation has been the most crucial recent development from the perspective of monetary policy.

"Even if the MPC members traditionally consider a whole host of factors in their decisions, but when the prevailing inflation and its forecast is as low as it is currently — it alone ought to get a larger weight in the monetary policy deliberations," Gupta, who voted for a 25 bps cut, wrote in the minutes. One of the external MPC members, Saugata

Bhattacharya, said the cumulative policy rate cuts and liquidity infusions will now have moved the orientation of monetary policy from mildly restrictive to balanced. "Pending incoming data, I believe the policy interest rate is now consistent with macroeconomic stability," he wrote in the minutes. MPC member and RBI Executive Director Indranil Bhattacharya, who voted for a 25 bps reduction in the repo rate and a neutral stance, said, "when muted inflation outlook, both in terms of the trajectory of headline and core (excluding precious metals), suggests absence of demand pressures, the MPC ought to support growth, particularly when it is projected to decelerate going ahead." The neutral stance preserves the flexibility to respond judiciously to the evolving situation by remaining data dependent while avoiding the pitfalls of precommitment in an uncertain environment, he wrote in the minutes. MPC member Ram Singh said given the uncertainty on the external front, it seems prudent to go for only a 25-bps cut at this point. "In view of the dormancy in the price momentum underlying headline CPI and CPI core, and the case for supporting growth momentum, the rate cut should be accompanied by a change in stance to 'accommodative', " Singh said. mpc

Net direct tax collections rise 8 per cent to Rs 17.04 lakh crore till December 17

New Delhi: Net direct tax collection grew 8 per cent to over Rs 17.04 lakh crore this fiscal till December 17 on slower refunds and higher advance taxes from corporates, the income tax department data showed on Friday. Net corporate tax mop-up grew 10.54 per cent to over Rs 8.17 lakh crore. Non-corporate tax (which includes taxes paid by individuals, HUFs, and firms) grew 6.37 per cent at Rs 8.47 lakh crore.

Net revenue from Securities Transaction Tax (STT) rose marginally year-on-year at Rs 40,195 crore till December 17 of the current fiscal. Advance tax paid by corporates showed a growth of 8 per cent to over Rs 6.07 lakh crore. Advance tax collection from non-corporates showed a decline of 6.49 per cent at over Rs 1.81 lakh crore. Overall, advance taxes grew 4.27 per cent to over Rs 7.88 lakh crore till December 17.

Refund issuance dropped 14 per cent compared to last year to over Rs 2.97 lakh crore. Gross direct tax collections, before adjusting refunds, recorded 4.16 per cent growth at over Rs 20.01 lakh crore till December 17, as per the income tax department data.

In the current fiscal (2025-26), the government has projected its direct tax collection at Rs 25.20 lakh crore, up 12.7 per cent year-on-year. The government aims to collect Rs 78,000 crore from STT in FY26. Deloitte India Partner Rohinton Sidhwa said overall, the corporate advance tax increase signals good corporate earnings.

How early should you get a LDL cholesterol test?



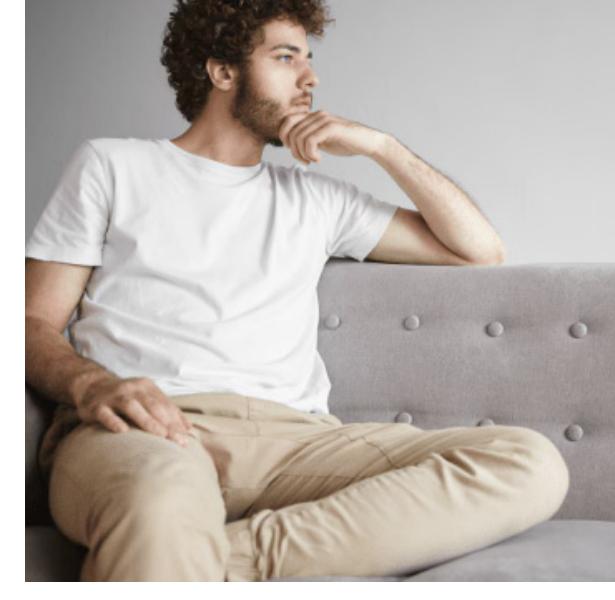
We take our hearts for granted until it's too late. But tiny habits can make a huge difference, and you can start small — by getting your LDL cholesterol levels checked. That is because bad cholesterol is one of the early predictors of cardiovascular issues, and should not be left unchecked. Signs start showing. CV Aishwarya, a clinical nutritionist and lecturer at Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research, Chennai, explained that LDL testing is recommended to begin early, depending on individual risk factors. "For the general population with no major health risks, the first LDL test should be done by the age of 20 years and repeated every 4-6 years if the values remain within the normal range," she told [indianexpress.com](#).

Why should you get tested early?

According to Aishwarya, LDL testing is important because elevated low-density lipoprotein cholesterol plays a central role in the development of atherosclerosis by promoting cholesterol deposition in arterial walls, leading to plaque formation. "High LDL levels are strongly associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases such as coronary artery disease, heart attack, and stroke," she shared, adding that measuring LDL enables early detection of dyslipidemia, accurate cardiovascular risk assessment, and timely intervention to prevent long-term cardiovascular complications.

What happens when your LDL levels are too high?

This is what it means when you see someone in your dreams



Why do certain people, like an ex-partner, a childhood friend, a parent, or even a colleague, keep appearing in your dreams? And why do some faces in these nightly stories bring up strong emotions long after you wake up? According to Dr Madhukar Bhardwaj, Director and Head of Neurology at Aakash Healthcare, dream characters are not random visitors. The brain chooses them to help us work through emotions we have not fully faced while awake. Dreams often act as emotional mirrors. They prompt us to revisit feelings we have hidden away in the rush of daily life or pushed aside due to social expectations. In India, Dr Bhardwaj points out that both children and adults often learn to hide anger, disappointment, or fear, especially around elders or authority figures. "Dreams help finish the emotional processing that we avoid when we are awake," he notes.

How dream characters help us process emotional conflict Dr Bhardwaj explains that the brain recruits familiar people in our dreams to help make sense of this emotional backlog. These dream figures act like symbols:

A stern teacher might represent unexpressed fear.

A supportive friend may embody a need for comfort.

A distant parent might reflect feelings of abandonment or unmet expectations.

Since many people in India are taught to maintain calm or silence during conflict, these suppressed emotions need a release. Dreams become that outlet, and the people who appear in them are chosen because they have played emotional roles in our real lives. They help the brain work through memories, conflicts, and emotional "leftovers" we didn't process when awake, the expert added.

Why does the same person keep appearing in your dreams? If a person shows up repeatedly — an ex, a childhood figure, a colleague, or a former boss — it usually signals unfinished emotional business. "There is a reason the brain keeps bringing back the same face," says Dr Bhardwaj. "It reflects an unresolved emotional memory that your mind is still trying to understand. These repeated appearances suggest that the brain is still searching for closure, clarity, or emotional equilibrium related to that individual."

Cultural factors amplify this pattern. Indian families often discourage confrontation or direct conversations about dissatisfaction, hurt, or disagreement. Over time, these unexpressed emotions accumulate. The brain, Dr Bhardwaj adds, shifts these conflicts into the dream world, creating scenarios where the emotional tension can be played out symbolically. Recurring dreams, therefore, hint at a psychological need that hasn't been addressed in real life — perhaps the need for validation, forgiveness, boundaries, or closure.

When recurring distressing dreams signal something

deeper Not all recurring dreams are benign. Dr Bhardwaj notes that recurring nightmares can sometimes be linked to anxiety, trauma, or overwhelming life transitions. "In anxiety disorders, the brain tends to replay fears in various forms, making dreams feel repetitive and emotionally intense. For people who have experienced trauma, the brain may repeatedly present disturbing images as a way of trying to understand or integrate the event." However, recurrent distressing dreams also emerge during significant life transitions — such as marriage, separation, moving to a new city, starting a new job, or taking on caregiving responsibilities. These situations overload the brain's emotional circuits, he adds. Importantly, Dr Bhardwaj cautions that such dreams do not automatically indicate a mental disorder. Instead, they are signs that the mind is carrying more emotional weight than it can comfortably hold and is attempting to work through it. A practical step to decode the message behind the dream Understanding a dream often begins the moment you wake up. Dr Bhardwaj recommends a simple but powerful practice: Notice the emotions before the dream memory fades. Sit up slowly, take a few deep breaths, and pay attention to the first feelings that arise — fear, longing, relief, anger, or confusion. These emotions are usually the clearest link to the unresolved issue the dream is highlighting. Write these emotions down in a small morning journal, along with any real-life situations that feel connected to them. "The act of recording," Dr Bhardwaj says, "helps you identify which emotional processes your brain is trying to resolve." Over time, journaling can reveal patterns: people who appear frequently, recurring situations, or emotional themes like abandonment, pressure, guilt, or desire for freedom.

FSSAI confirms eggs in India are safe, dispels nitrofuran contamination concerns

New Delhi: Amid the ongoing concerns of carcinogenic substances being found in eggs, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on Saturday categorically stated that eggs available in the country are safe for human consumption. Refuting the contamination claims as "misleading", the regulator, in a statement, noted that "these are not supported scientifically and capable of creating unnecessary public alarm".

This comes as in recent days several media reports and social media posts alleged the presence of nitrofuran metabolites (AOZ) — carcinogenic substances — in eggs. The FSSAI officials clarified that "the use of nitrofurans is strictly prohibited at all stages of production of poultry and eggs under the Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011".

According to FSSAI, an Extraneous Maximum Residue Limit (EMRL) of 1.0 micrograms per kg has been prescribed for nitrofuran metabolites solely for regulatory enforcement purposes. This limit represents the minimum level that can be reliably detected by advanced laboratory methods and does not indicate that the substance is permitted for use. "Detection of trace residues below the EMRL does not constitute a food safety violation nor does it imply any health risk," an official noted. FSSAI further emphasised that India's regulatory framework is aligned with international

practices. Notably, the European Union and the US also prohibit the use of nitrofurans in food-producing animals and employ reference points for action or guideline values only as enforcement tools. Differences in numerical benchmarks across countries reflect variations in analytical and regulatory approaches, not differences in consumer safety standards. On public health concerns, FSSAI cited scientific evidence indicating that "there is no established causal link between trace-level dietary exposure to nitrofuran metabolites and cancer or other adverse health outcomes in humans". No national or international health authority has associated normal egg consumption with increased cancer risk, the authority reiterated. Addressing reports related to the testing of a specific egg brand, officials explained that such detections are isolated and batch-specific, often arising from inadvertent contamination or feed-related factors, and are not representative of the overall egg supply chain in the country.

"Generalising isolated laboratory findings to label eggs as unsafe is scientifically incorrect," the regulator stated. The FSSAI also urged consumers to rely on verified scientific evidence and official advisories, reiterating that "eggs remain a safe, nutritious and valuable component of a balanced diet when produced and consumed in compliance with food safety regulations".

'There's a little bit of clarity lacking': Dinesh Karthik on exclusion of Shubman Gill, Jitesh Sharma from India T20 World Cup squad



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The huge news coming out of India's T20 World Cup squad announcement on Saturday was the exclusion of Shubman Gill. Gill, who was appointed both the Test and ODI captain, had returned to the India T20I setup ahead of the Asia Cup in September as the vice-captain but couldn't fire with the bat. As a result, Axar Patel who Gill had replaced as the vice-captain, was appointed captain Suryakumar Yadav's deputy for the T20 World Cup.

Another omission from the squad was Jitesh Sharma who missed out due to India selecting Ishan Kishan as the second wicket-keeper batter and Rinku Singh also made his way into the squad which ruled out Jitesh who had looked solid in the recent South Africa series. Former India player Dinesh Karthik reacted to India's World Cup squad announcement, saying that there was a little lack of clarity. He, however, lauded the selected squad as one of the strongest heading into the tournament.

"The big news of the day: India World Cup T20 squad is announced and guess what? Shubman Gill, the current

vice captain of the T20 team, incumbent opener has been dropped. Not just from the XI but from the squad. They wanted to bring in an extra opener and they brought in Ishan Kishan and dropped Jitesh Sharma as well. And instead of Jitesh Sharma, it's gonna be Rinku Singh. That is huge news. Dropping Shubman Gill and Jitesh Sharma. I didn't see it coming. Just tells you there's a little bit of clarity lacking. They have backed Shubman Gill for so long and come the day they pick the squad, they have let him go," Karthik said on Instagram. "India looks a strong squad on paper no matter what names you add there, this team is a solid team. Across every skillset, they have the best in the world: best opener: Abhishek Sharma, best spinner: Varun Chakaravarthy, best allrounder in the world: Hardik Pandya, the best fast bowler ever maybe: Jasprit Bumrah. So with those 4 in the squad, you are going to have a strong XI walking into that World Cup. Couple of areas of vulnerabilities that India would have: For the first time ever in a T20 World Cup, they will have no experience of the greatest two that's probably ever played in Rohit Sharma or Virat Kohli in a World Cup team. And the second point would be Suryakumar Yadav's form. But we all know how good he is. That vulnerable aspect will it change into a strength when he finds form? It definitely will. Well, let's just finish by saying: Shubman Gill. Didn't see that coming. And I feel really bad for Jitesh Sharma. 2 shocking omissions from this squad," he added. India will begin their T20 World Cup campaign against the USA at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on February 7. They will then travel to Delhi to face Namibia at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on February 12. That would be followed by the marquee clash against Pakistan at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium on February 15. India will round off their group stage by taking on the Netherlands at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on February 18.

'The experiment with Gill put to bed': Aakash Chopra reacts to India's T20 World Cup squad announcement

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Former India player Aakash Chopra on Saturday reacted to Shubman Gill's omission from India's T20 World Cup squad, saying that the former vice-captain's exclusion was not just a call made on basis of recent form but it was about India going back to their previous ideology before the Asia Cup. "Shubman Gill's name isn't in the team. Axar Patel is the vice-captain. The Shubman Gill experiment as a vice captain, as an opener started in the Asia Cup and it's over before the end of the year. Massive news in regards to Gill. India were looking for a 3-format captain but he couldn't solidify his place in one format. he missed out on the 2024 World Cup and he's missed out again in 2026. This is not a good sign. His 2025 was pretty good but towards the end, it's a shocking news that has come in," Chopra said in a video on X.

"Dropping Gill is not just a call made on the basis of his recent form...it's about the change in ideology India adopted at the start of the Asia Cup. The thought was that in multi-nation tournaments you don't need to score 200+ all the time...you need an anchor in big games. That thought robbing Sanju opportunities at the top and also, Yashasvi to be around the team," he had earlier posted on X. "Dropping Gill is not just a call made on the basis of his recent form...it's about the change in ideology India adopted at the start of the Asia Cup. The thought was that in multi-nation tournaments you don't need to score 200+ all the time...you need



an anchor in big games. That... "Whoaaa...that's a lot of changes so close to the World Cup. Jitesh wouldn't know what he did wrong. Rinku is back to where he belongs. Why was he left out in the cold? Happy for Ishan—both keepers are like for like in the batting slot. Axar back as VC. The experiment with Gill put to bed," he had posted in another tweet. Gill, who was announced as the India vice-captain ahead to the Asia Cup in September, hasn't had the best of times in the shortest format, scoring just 291 runs in his last 15 matches. In the recent South Africa series too, he could just notch up scores of 4, 0 and 28. He missed the 5th match on Friday which led to Sanju Samson grabbing the opportunity to play with both hands, scoring a quickfire 37 off 22, helping India get off to a strong start.

Ajit Agarkar on Shubman Gill's omission from T20 World Cup squad: We know what a quality player he is, but, perhaps short of a little bit of runs at the moment



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Chief selector Ajit Agarkar stressed on fielding the right combinations for the upcoming T20 World Cup and acknowledged former T20I vice captain Shubman Gill's lack of runs which led to his omission from the World Cup squad. Gill was appointed the deputy of skipper Suryakumar Yadav ahead of September's Asia Cup but hasn't fired with the bat. In the recently concluded South Africa series, he made 4, 0 and 28 before missing the fifth match because of an injury.

"We know what a quality player he is, but, perhaps short of a little bit of runs at the moment. It's unfortunate to

have missed out in the last World Cup as well because we went with different combinations. But it's the combinations more than anything else... Someone has to miss out when you pick 15 and unfortunately, it's Gill at this point," said Agarkar in the press conference for India's squad announcement on Saturday. "We are looking at the combination. If the keeper is going to bat at the top, at the moment Jitesh is there and he has not done too much wrong. But we need to look at the combination and a keeper at the top," said the former India pacer. Captain Surya too hinted at the necessity of combination as the reason behind Gill's omission.

"Post T20 WC (2024) we went to Sri Lanka and we had scored 200 and Gill was part of it. We wanted to have a keeper at the top and Rinku or Washy (down the order), which is why we have an extra keeper at the top. There is no question of (Gill's) form," said Suryakumar. Suryakumar also did not read too much into his extended lean phase, and expressed confidence of rediscovering his explosive self well in time for the upcoming T20 World Cup. Suryakumar has not fired this whole year in T20s, averaging close to a paltry 15 and his form has been a talking point ahead of next year's ICC showpiece, where India will be looking to defend its title, starting February 7. "I know what to do and I will do it. You will definitely see Surya the batter but this phase has lasted a little longer. Other players have also bounced back in form in the past," he said.

Shubman Gill omitted, Axar Patel named vice-captain in India's T20 World Cup 2026 squad

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

HYDERABAD: India star batter and captain of Test team Shubman Gill doesn't figure in the Indian team announced for the 2026 T-20 World Cup to be held in the sub-Continent. In a way, it was not surprising given the poor run of Gill in T-20 format having failed to score a fifty in the last 15 innings and scores only 220 runs.

Axar Patel being named as vice captain could also be deemed a surprise given the welcome return to form by all rounder Hardik Pandya.

India's squad for T20 World Cup 2026 and New Zealand T20Is: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube,



'Take nothing away from Bumrah, but Pandya was the difference': South Africa coach Shukri Conrad all praise for India all-rounder



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Hardik Pandya returned to international cricket after over two months in India's five-match T20I series against South Africa and showed just how lethal he is in the format when fit and firing. Pandya blasted a total 142 runs in three innings at a strike rate of 186.84 with two half-centuries, in addition to bowling some crucial overs and taking three wickets to boot.

His second fifty of the series came in the fifth T20I and it was the second fastest of all time for an Indian man in the format. Pandya's belligerence was a huge part of India getting to a score of 231/5, which ultimately proved to be the

difference as South Africa finished with 201/8 in reply. India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was also as impressive as he usually is, returning figures of 2/14 amid all the big hits, but South Africa coach Shukri Conrad reckoned that Pandya's knock was the difference. "Taking nothing away from (Jasprit) Bumrah, I think Hardik has been the difference in the two teams," he told reporters after the fifth T20I. "His knock tonight was the difference between us winning and losing. He played a knock in the first one as well, where he just walked in and we had him in a little bit of trouble."

"Look, there's a reason why he's one of the best in the world in this format (and) his performances have been right up there. I don't know who the man of the series is out there, but I'll be very surprised if it's not him," he added. In the end, however, it was spinner Varun Chakaravarthy who won player of the series and not Pandya. Varun bagged 10 wickets and averaged an impressive 11.20 in four innings. Pandya walked in after India captain Suryakumar Yadav fell for yet another low score. That wicket became a distant memory for South Africa very soon as Pandya went berzerk in Ahmedabad. The 32-year-old ended up scoring his half-century in just 16 balls. Pandya was eventually dismissed on 63 in 25 balls. His 105-run partnership for the fourth wicket off just 44 balls with Tilak Varma propelled India past 230.

'Couldn't find Surya the batter': Suryakumar Yadav brutally honest about form struggles after South Africa series win

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

India were largely clinical in their 3-1 series win over South Africa, despite their captain and arguably best batter in the format being completely out of runs, as he himself put it after the third match. After the fifth T20I, Suryakumar admitted that his form remains among the few things that the team is lacking going into the 2026 T20 World Cup. "Maybe the only thing we couldn't quite manage was finding Surya the batter, I think he went missing somewhere! (smiles) But he'll be back stronger. As a team, I'm really happy," Suryakumar said at the post-match presentation.

"Whenever we were in trouble, someone always put their hand up and pulled us through. As captain, that's very satisfying with the way this series went for us," he added.

Widely rated one of India's greatest T20I batters, Suryakumar's form has been on the wane since the team's successful 2024 T20 World Cup campaign. While the post-tournament dip in 2024, which was also when he took over as India's permanent captain in the format, was seen as a temporary one due to his performance in the 2025 IPL, this year has ended up being the worst in the 35-year-old's career by some margin.

Suryakumar has scored just 218 runs in 19 innings at a paltry average of 13.62 and strike rate of 123.16 with no half-centuries to his name. Contrast that with last year, which was previously seen as a dip for him, in which he

scored 429 runs in 17 innings at an average of 26.81 and a strike rate of 151.59 with four half-centuries. On Friday, Suryakumar's forgettable 2025 was squared off by him falling after scoring five runs in seven balls. However, his wicket became a distant memory for South Africa as Hardik Pandya replaced him and went berzerk. Pandya ended up scoring his half-century in just 16 balls, the second fastest for an Indian in men's T20Is and was dismissed on 63 in 25 balls. His 105-run partnership for the fourth wicket off just 44 balls with Tilak Varma propelled India to a score of 231/5 and that assault ended up being the difference for the hosts as South Africa managed to get themselves to a score of 201/8 in reply.

Why Shubman Gill, marketer's dream, will prevail over Sanju Samson in India's T20 World Cup team as opening batsman



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Over the years, national selectors, fairly or unfairly, have indulged star players longer than others. And it is this longstanding selection tradition that has, at times, cast selectors as prophetic visionaries or, conversely, as scapegoats for abject failure. Today Ajit Agarkar and Gautam Gambhir sit to have a debate on India's T20 World Cup squad. Considering his form-slump and the chatter over other allegedly better openers on the fringe, Gill's name is expected to trigger a discussion. But finally, after the mandatory talk, the selectors will hopefully bring out the good old 'long rope' and hand it over to the T20 vice-captain, who also happens to be the Test and ODI skipper. The decision will obviously upset fans of Sanju Samson, an opener with a far better opening record than Gill.

But is it wise to indulge Gill? Is he worthy to be given that long rope? With just a bit more than a month to go for India's opening game of the World T20, the answer is "Yes". It is too late in the day to try out Gill's alternatives at the top of the order. Gill and Abhishek Sharma will be walking out at the start of the Indian innings for most games as cricket frenzy over yet another ICC event hits India. Shubman Gill Abhishek Sharma India's Shubman Gill, left, and Abhishek

Sharma greets each other during the third T20 cricket match between India and South Africa in Dharamshala, India, Sunday, Dec 14, 2025. (AP Photo/Ashwini Bhatia) Samson and Jaiswal have a case but they aren't forcing the selectors' hand to underline their names. Changing plans, playing XI and batting order at the last minute isn't a great idea. Remember the omission of Ambati Rayudu in the 2019 World Cup and the confusion and chaos that ensued. India's present T20 line-up has squeezed itself in a very tight lane and there is no space to switch slots or manoeuvre the batting order.

The selectors can be faulted for removing Samson from the opening slot when he was in the form of his life. Last year, he had three T20I tons as an opener but mysteriously he was still dropped down the order. That milk split long back, crying over it now is a waste of time. Those are bygones. Sport is ruthless, it doesn't value past records nor does it have sympathy for those who are wronged. Samson, in 2025, lacks the rhythm and confidence of 2024. The In-

dian T20 batting line-up is a slippery slope. Samson was unfairly pushed down the order to accommodate Gill and he ended up losing his footing. Samson deserves a sorry but not an opening slot in about a month's time.

In last month's Asia Cup, Samson got his moment to unleash a blistering comeback. There he was out on the pitch in the closing stages of the India-Pakistan final. A winning hand in these tense most-watched games can change fortunes and opinions. Had he delivered the knockout punch, as Tilak Varma did, Samson could have got what he wished. It would have given him the confidence to be the batsman he once was, got back his opening position, even forcing the selectors to rethink on Gill the T20 player. Samson's 24 from 21 balls in the game that mattered, wasn't inspiring enough. There can even be an argument that Gill scored just 12 in that final and Samson wasn't batting at his usual slot. But earlier in the tournament, in the league game against Pakistan, Gill had a 47, was part of a hundred-run opening stand and had even talked back to Pakistan pacers.

What will make Gill a favourable candidate to get the 'long rope', is his brand and image. Sports needs faces on the billboard and images of athletes who represent the zeitgeist to sell events. Moan the death of meritocracy but thinking modern sports is a level-playing field, is an illusion. Gill's face is a marketing man's dream, he is the poise and grace that delights connoisseurs and he also has a batting record that is the envy of any cricketer in his mid-20s. His T20 record too is formidable and his IPL success compels selectors to back him. It could well turn out to be false hope but in a year when he took a young team to England and led from the front, it is too tempting not to believe in him. By the end of March 8, 2026 – the day of the final – the verdict on Gambhir and Agarkar would have been passed. They could either be hailed as strong men with conviction who valued class over form or fall guys who were slaves of Indian cricket's star culture. How time flies and perceptions change, in Indian cricket.

Six months back, 2025 was half gone, Gambhir and Agarkar were seen as the torch bearers who showed light during those dark days of transition, the brave men who weren't swayed by emotions and took the right call of weeding out the non-performing seniors from the Test team. The world wanted Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to stay but they didn't. Their stand was vindicated, the prince took the throne in England. Gill scored runs, showed steel and led the team to draw the series, a result no one expected. What goes around, comes around. The format has changed and so has the opinion. The year is yet to end but now Gill is the senior. He is seen as the one who is blocking the way of a deserving senior, read Sanju. When Gill is retained as vice-captain, Agarkar and Gambhir will be blamed for having double standards. If they could drop Virat and Rohit from Tests because they weren't scoring runs, why didn't they drop Gill? Just another day in the life of folks given the responsibility of picking the cricket team of a nation that can't stop debating the squads and playing XIs.

Dilip Kumar's sisters created 'hostile environment' for wife Saira Banu leading to her hospitalisation; 'orchestrated' his second marriage to drive her away



Dilip Kumar, one of the first superstars of Hindi cinema, was known to be a charming, handsome actor who had the looks to kill. That, combined with his stellar acting talent, and his extraordinary success, made him one of the most eligible men in the Hindi film industry in the 1950s. Much like today's superstars, the rumours of his relationships dominated the tabloids and so, when he actually decided to tie the knot with Saira Banu in 1966, there was joy in the air. At the time, Dilip was 44, and Saira was only 22. Dilip was old enough that he had gotten accustomed to his ways, and Saira was at an age where she believed that she could make adjustments for him, until the "hostile atmosphere" at Dilip's house started taking a toll on her health, and she ended up at a treatment facility in London. In fact, it has also been suggested that it was because of his sisters that he married Asma Rehman, his second wife, in the 1980s, but promptly divorced her after Saira got to know about the situation.

Before meeting Saira, Dilip had famously been in a relationship with Madhubala, but the two had broken up during the filming of *Mughal-E-Azam* in 1957. Just three years after that, Madhubala had gotten married to Kishore Kumar, but Dilip chose to stay single. Dilip had lost his parents by then, and had become the patriarch of his family as he was the one taking care of his 11 siblings and their families. They had also gotten used to him, and felt a certain sense of ownership over him. So when Dilip fell in love with Saira in 1966, he knew that his family would have a hard time accepting anyone in his life. Thus, he came up with a plan. He decided that after getting married, him and Saira, who was also a movie star, would live separately, until he found alternative accommodation for his family members.

Dilip Kumar asked Saira Banu to 'live separately' after marriage

In his memoir, *Dilip Kumar: The Substance and the Shadow*, the veteran actor was quite honest about his domestic situation as he recalled that his family was "very accustomed to being in charge of me." He told her that it would be "difficult, if not impossible, for them to easily reconcile to a new person in my life, as also for her to live together with the family without any problems arising between them." In no uncertain terms, Dilip told her that his family would be a challenge for her, and he wanted her to be prepared before she took them on.

Dilip made it clear that it wasn't about her per se, as they would have a hard time getting along with anyone whom he might have married, as by now, they had gotten used to him being in their service, without any distractions. "I went on to tell her that it was inevitable that 'Main saatva aasmaan ki hoor bhi laaoonga, toh usey accept nahin kar payegi meri family' (Even if I bring a celestial angel from the seventh heaven, my family will not be able to accept her). They were so used to my being a loner and were not used to sharing me with anyone," he shared, and thus concluded that, given the circumstances, they must live separately after getting married. "In such circumstances, I told her that to give our marriage the right beginning and environment, we would have to live separately, on our own," he shared and added that he would find "suitable alternative accommodation" for his sisters who were living with him, and also for the relatives who often came to stay with him.

While Dilip Kumar and Saira Banu did not live separately after getting married, they quickly realised that they would not find peace in his huge bungalow. As Dilip had a large family, he often found himself in a quiet little outhouse

attached to his bungalow. This was a place where he stayed for some peace of mind in a bustling household, and after his marriage to Saira, he asked her to stay with him here itself. In fact, he found it "awkward" to tell her that he wanted them to stay in this "segregated" part of the bungalow, but she said yes without asking many questions. "This one quality to happily fall in line with what I said was the essence of the success of our marriage," he believed. In later years, Dilip credited Saira for being as mature as she could when it came to dealing with his siblings. "When I married Saira she was young, even younger than my sisters. I wondered how she would cope with establishing the right vibes with my brothers and sisters, especially since she belonged to a small family. We siblings, were a dozen. But she not only respected and loved them as a devoted sister-in-law, but also kept me close to all of them," he told *Hindustan Times*. Dilip famously fell out with his sister Akhtar, who married director K Asif while Dilip was against their union. Years after K Asif's death, Saira brought the siblings back together. After Dilip Kumar and Saira Banu's marriage, there were two stars in the house, and his family was not prepared for the changes that came with her. He had anticipated that his sisters would find it "difficult" to share him, but he was shocked to see their "resentment" towards Saira as she too, was a star in her own right. Dilip's family was "ruled by" his older sister, Sakina, and his other sisters, and brothers-in-law would also frequently visit the house. Saira soon found herself in another world, as it was getting obvious that Dilip's sisters were consciously making life difficult for her. Little things like occupying the shower when Saira had to use it were getting quite frequent. In such circumstances, Saira would often walk across the road, to her parents' home to get ready for she had work commitments where she was required to report on time. Dilip knew that this was "not the ideal situation" but didn't know how he could help her. "I was silent and quietly observed the happenings till a given time, always being supportive of my sisters, so that they would not feel that I was letting them down," he said and added that Saira, who was younger than her sisters, showed immense maturity and tried to preserve these relationships, but the stress of the domestic life was starting to take a toll on her body.

Saira became ill with "ulcerative colitis", which was the result of the "emotional stress that had been building up within her in the hostile atmosphere that she was living in and the unfriendliness she was suddenly exposed to after leading a happy, secure and sheltered life in her own home." Such were the circumstances that Saira's mother took it upon herself to send her all the meals from her home, so she could be well taken care of.

Dilip Kumar moved into Saira Banu's home. After an extensive treatment that took Saira Banu and Dilip to London, Dilip decided to move into Saira's home, so she wouldn't be exposed to domestic disputes in his house. He knew that at his home, "tempers ran high," as this was the primary reason why he spent most of his time at his outhouse. Even something as simple as guests coming over would turn into a major issue in the house, and Saira would be subjected to unnecessary jibes. Dilip recalled that once when Manoj Kumar and his wife Shashi visited their home, his sister took a shot at Saira who was just entertaining the guests, and told her to be quiet in a rather rude way. Saira had no option but to listen to her timidly. After a long time of enduring such incidents on the domestic front, Dilip decided to shift to a hotel, or ask his brother to move into his empty flat but here, once again, Saira asked him to look at the bigger picture. She "pleaded with me that all these were meaningless incidents and she requested me to let things be," he said. Saira Banu and Dilip Kumar were married until his passing in 2021. Saira Banu and Dilip Kumar were married until his passing in 2021. Dilip Kumar's sisters introduced him to his second wife Asma Rehman in his memoir. Dilip Kumar shared that in 1982, he married a woman named Asma Rehman but he said that he "became a victim of a situation that was set to precipitate a deep crisis in my marriage with Saira." He also suggested that he met Asma through his sisters and found it odd when he found her to be present in many gatherings, as per his itinerary.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui on his tiff with Irrfan Khan on Lunchbox set: 'We couldn't afford to...'



In an earlier interview with ETimes, Nawazuddin's brother Shamas Siddiqui said that the two actors did not see eye to eye on the set of *The Lunchbox*.

Irrfan Khan's death in 2020 came as a shock to his fans and peers. Many of his colleagues, who had worked with him for decades across many films, continue to remember the late actor. In a recent interview, when actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui was asked about his relationship with

the late actor, and if they had a tiff during the making of *The Lunchbox*, the actor laughed it off. He recalled that he saw Irrfan as an older brother, and had worked with him in around 7-8 films. In a chat with *Hindi Rush*, Nawazuddin was asked about the "rumours of a tiff" between them and the actor said, "That was just the news. I don't think everything reported in the news is the truth." He then added, "Our film couldn't afford this. We were making the film in a very tight budget so we couldn't spend time on such useless things."

Nawazuddin shared that Irrfan was his senior at National School of Drama and the two shared a very "long association." "I think I did the maximum number of films with him. We did some 7-8 films with each other, and out of that, 3-4 films didn't even release," he said and shared that he first started working with Irrfan in 2002, and stuck with him when he was preparing for his Hollywood films. "Even when he was preparing for his Hollywood films, I would be with him all the time. Like for instance, I would play his co-actor to give him cues. So he has always had a big role. His aashirvaad (blessing) has always been there. I saw him as an older brother," he said.

In an earlier interview with ETimes, Nawazuddin's brother Shamas Siddiqui said that the two actors did not see eye to eye on the set of *The Lunchbox*. "Both, Nawaz and Irrfan, used to say that they would walk into the set if and only if the other one was present," he said and added, "I think such a thing happens in movies when both the actors are of such high stature." He implied that neither of the two was willing to wait for the other one on the shoot. Nawazuddin and Irrfan famously worked together in *The Lunchbox*, which also starred Nimrat Kaur. The two also worked together in New York, *Paan Singh Tomar* but in these films, Irrfan had a much bigger part than Nawazuddin.

Malayalam cinema's most iconic tragedy was written in 3 days, shot in 25 days at a cost of Rs 23.5 lakh; Mohanlal charged just Rs 4 lakh



Legendary screenwriter AK Lohithadas wrote Malayalam cinema's most iconic tragedy in just three days, without even getting up to take a shower or eat. Mohanlal won his first National Film Award for his performance in this Sibi Malayil directorial, penned by AK Lohithadas.

While Malayalam cinema is known for its hard-hitting, raw dramas, its tragedies hit even harder, making it almost impossible to watch them a second time. Among the many classic tragedies the industry has created over the decades, director Sibi Malayil's *Kireedam* (1989) is considered by a large section of Malayalam audiences to be the finest ever. Starring Mohanlal, Thilakan, Parvathy Jayaram, and Mohan Raj in the lead roles, the film was penned by legendary screenwriter-director AK Lohithadas. The film not only earned Mohanlal his first National Film Award (Special Mention), but his and Thilakan's performances, along with their spellbinding on-screen chemistry, are considered among the best of all time.

The movie revolves around a young man, Sethumadhavan (Mohanlal), whose dream of following in his father Achuthan Nair's (Thilakan) footsteps and becoming a police officer is shattered when he becomes embroiled in a physical altercation with a hardcore criminal, Keerikadan Jose (Mohan Raj). After he beats Jose to a pulp for assaulting his father, Sethumadhavan is crowned the local don, effectively ending his police aspirations and even his chance at a peaceful life. *Kireedam*'s climax, in particular, is still

Chinmayi Sripada got morphed nude image; kids received death threats after husband's mangalsutra remark



Singer-dubbing artiste Chinmayi Sripada has taken to Instagram to allege online abuse by trolls. She claimed that she received a morphed nude image of herself from an anonymous account. She even blurred and posted the photo and also shared a video addressing the issue. Chinmayi shared that she has been receiving a lot of hate online, and she received the morphed image shortly after her husband, actor and filmmaker Rahul Ravindran, shared his views on the mangalsutra tradition.

She wrote in the caption, "I got a morphed image from

considered a masterclass in screenwriting, direction, and film acting, with Thilakan's "Ninte achanaada parayunne, kathi thaazhe ideda" becoming one of the most iconic lines in the history of Malayalam cinema. Although many, even after three decades, consider *Kireedam* a benchmark for excellent screenwriting, did you know that Lohithadas crafted its script in just three days? Yes, you heard that right. In fact, he wrote it in one sitting, without even getting up to take a shower or have some food. The late screenwriter himself revealed this in a past interview. During an appearance on Amrita TV's *Sangeetha Samagamam* chat show, Lohithadas said, "The script for *Kireedam* was the quickest I've ever written in my life. I finished the entire script in about three days. I wrote the whole thing in one sitting, without bathing or eating. I was writing day and night. First of all, for me, I don't need to 'write'... Because of the emotional intensity of the story... I just need to touch the pen to the paper, and it will keep writing itself. That's how it was finished."

Interestingly, Lohithadas finished the script in just three days because he was worried he wouldn't be able to attend Sibi Malayil's wedding on the fourth day. He added, "The second half of the movie took me about a day and a half to write. However, while writing, I never know what the characters' arcs will be, how their journeys will progress, or how they will end up. Sibi would often ask, 'What will be the climax?' I'd say, 'I don't know. The climax will turn out just as it should.' We don't plan and fix a climax beforehand. I simply follow these characters and capture their journey."

During the same conversation, Sibi Malayil revealed that the title *Kireedam* was initially given by Lohithadas to another script he had written. However, since its director and producer weren't keen on that title, Sibi suggested using it for their Mohanlal-starrer because he felt it best fit their narrative. The project that was initially titled *Kireedam* eventually became *Mukthi*. Helmed by IV Sasi, it featured Mammootty, Urvashi, Shobhana, Seema, and Thilakan in key roles. According to *Manorama Online*, the filming of *Kireedam* was completed in 25 days at a cost of Rs 23.5 lakh. Mohanlal, whose remuneration during that period was Rs 4.5 lakh, worked in the film for Rs 4 lakh due to his friendship with its producer N Krishnakumar alias Unni. *Kireedam* was not only a critical success but also a commercial hit. It was later remade in multiple languages, including Tamil, with Ajith Kumar reprising Mohanlal's character.

page today and tagged the cops – whether legal action happen will happen or not is not the issue. But I made this video for girls and their families to safeguard against the 'Lanja Munda' spewing people here who have been paid to do this for the past 8-10 weeks to harass our family." In the video, Chinmayi said, "My husband happen to make a comment on mangalsutra and ever since then I have been abused, my children have been given death threats, I have filed a police complaint against a few on the Twitter Spaces who said that the kind of women they don't like shouldn't ever have children, and if they do, their children must die. There were men applauding and laughing at this." For the unversed, Chinmayi has been very vocal during the #MeToo movement. She had accused lyricist Vairamuthu of sexual harassment. In the video, she also spoke about how she is often the target of trolls after she opened up about facing sexual harassment. She said, "A lot of people have abused me; they have been paid for by political groups. There are IT cells who do that. There was a particular Tweet today that shared a morphed photo of me in the nude, I also tagged the police as I shared it." She added, "I am sharing so women know these kinds of things happen, men do this on social media to harass women and push us out of public spaces by making this space unsafe." Recently, Rahul, who is promoting his directorial movie *The Girlfriend*, reportedly shared his perspective on how cultural symbols like the mangalsutra should be a matter of personal choice and that there is no such symbol for men in society. *The Girlfriend* stars Rashmika Mandanna in lead role, which shows her taking a stand against her misogynist and toxic boyfriend.

Abhishek Bachchan on why he responded to troll who accused him of buying award: 'If I had to... would have done it 25 years ago'

In October this year, Abhishek Bachchan was in the news after he won his first major acting award, a Filmfare Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for the 2024. While the award was a significant milestone in the actor's career as he got one after 25 years of being in the industry, he also faced trolling. Abhishek being himself, gave a befitting reply to some major accusations. In his recent interview, the actor was again asked about the incident. Speaking to *PeepingMoon*, the actor said, "If you read my response, what I said was: anyone can have an opinion, and today we all have a platform to express it — that's fine. My job as an actor is to listen to the audience and if something needs improvement, you bring that improvement through your work. But if you are a journalist and you are accusing me of buying an award or doing active PR, then that is wrong." Abhishek went on to add, "You are a journalist, and you have certain responsibilities toward the audiences who read you.

People also forget that I am known for my grandfather, who was an eminent poet. I have another grandfather who was also very prominent — both were journalists. So I come from a family of journalists. I have seen journalism closely from my mother's side." "Through you, I understand the ethics and the responsibilities. That's exactly why I responded," added Abhishek. Just to set the record straight. Never has any award been bought or aggressive PR been done by me. Just hard work, blood, sweat and tears. But, doubt you'll believe anything I say or write. So.... Best way to shut you up is by working even harder so that you don't ever doubt



any... "Many people ask, 'Why are you even replying?' I am replying because you are a journalist, and I believe you should have enough responsibility to not make accusations that are not based on truth — that are fabricated. You may have an opinion, that's fine, but you cannot accuse somebody and tarnish their name by writing something so strong without knowing the truth," added the actor. "Secondly, if awards can be bought — I don't know what others do. But if I could buy an award, I would have bought it 25 years ago. Truly. As you said, I have been nominated 3-4 times — I could have bought it then. If active PR could win awards, I would have done that 25 years ago. Anyone who has struggled, worked hard, and stayed dedicated — and I am not just talking about myself