





# Indian Chronicle

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## End duopoly in aviation sector

Despite being the world's third largest market —accounting for 241 million flyers in 2024 —the civil aviation sector in India is caught in continuous turbulence. The recent operational meltdown at IndiGo, the country's largest carrier with over 60% market share, highlighted how the duopoly has stymied the growth of the passenger aviation sector. Air India and IndiGo have a domestic market share of over 90% cumulatively. The last couple of decades have seen the collapse of a string of private airlines as the industry has been moving from one crisis to another. In the current gloomy scenario, the latest decision of the Civil Aviation Ministry to give a go-ahead for two regional airlines is a welcome development to spur competition and growth. However, the full potential of the sector cannot be realised until the systemic challenges are addressed. They include high operating costs, fuel price uncertainty, infrastructure bottlenecks, a shortage of pilots and planes, and an ageing fleet. Regulatory weaknesses, high-cost structure, security concerns, and environmental impacts are the other concerns. Frequent flight cancellations, unprofessional handling of communication, poor route planning, fatigued pilots, and safety concerns have made domestic flying a nightmarish experience. Amid concerns over the adverse fallout of the duopoly, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) recently gave No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to two new airlines, AI Hind Air and FlyExpress, taking the number of regional airlines in the pipeline to four. Two more airlines, Air Kerala and Shankh Air, already have the NOCs since last year, but have yet to receive the Air Operator Certificates (AOCs) and start operations. While the entry of new regional airlines may be encouraging, it remains to be seen how far these new entrants will succeed in overcoming the impediments facing the Indian aviation market. Simplifying the procedures for approvals is needed to encourage more airlines in India, particularly in the regional segment. The regional airline segment has seen several failures in recent times. The list of private carriers which went bust is quite long: Paramount Airways, Air Pegasus, TruJet, Zoom Air, Air Carnival, Air Costa, Air Mantra, and Air Odisha.

## Radhika Gupta Assumes Charge as Uppal Zonal Commissioner

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle): “Radhika Gupta formally assumed charge as the Zonal Commissioner at the newly estab-



lished Uppal Zonal Office on Friday. “On the occasion, Uppal Deputy In-charge Commissioner Jagan welcomed her by presenting a bouquet. Deputy Commissioners from various circles under the zonal jurisdiction felicitated her and extended their greetings. “The charge-taking programme was attended by Deputy Commissioners and staff from the Uppal, Boduppal, Nacharam, Ghatkesar, Nagaram and Kapra circles. “Under the newly formed Uppal Zone, the Ghatkesar, Kapra, Nacharam, Uppal and Boduppal circles will continue to function.

## Grand Christmas Celebrations: Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Attends Festivities Across Several Colonies

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle): “Christmas celebrations were held with great enthusiasm across the Uppal constituency on Thursday. Special prayers were conducted in various colonies and churches as part of the festive observances. Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-



charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy attended the Christmas celebrations organized in different churches and residential colonies as the chief guest. He participated in the celebrations held at Sai Baba Colony in Uppal Division, which were organized under the leadership of Ratnam. “Parameshwar Reddy also took part in the Christmas celebrations organized at Bharat Nagar in Ramanthapur, conducted under the leadership of Satyanarayana (Samuel). On the occasion, he extended Christmas greetings to the Christian community and emphasized the importance of unity, peace, and brotherhood among people of all faiths.

# Seven-Crore Extortion Target?—Liquor Traders Allege Open Loot by Excise Officials in Karimnagar



“Chittimalla Mahendar “KARIMNAGAR CORRESPONDENT, December 26, INDIAN CHRONICLE: “Serious allegations of large-scale illegal collections by Excise Department officials have surfaced in the undivided Karimnagar district soon after the implementation of the new liquor policy. Taking advantage of increased liquor sales due to the upcoming sarpanch elections and the year-end rush on December 31, Excise officials are allegedly exerting heavy pressure on wine shop owners, triggering panic across the trading community. “There are 287 liquor outlets in the undivided Karimnagar district. According to liquor traders, Excise officials have orally directed each shop owner to pay Rs 2.5 lakh as a one-time payment for the two-year licence period under the new policy that came into force on December 1. If these claims are true, the total illegal collection target would amount to nearly Rs 7 crore across the district, raising serious questions about the functioning of the department. “Traders allege that the pressure is particularly severe on those who have newly secured wine shop licences. Many of them are already struggling after paying shop rents, first-quarter licence fees, furniture costs and initial stock purchases. At a time when they are still trying to stabilise their businesses, the sudden demand for lakhs of rupees has pushed them into deep distress.



Several traders reportedly chose to pay the amount to avoid harassment, while others are silently enduring the pressure out of fear of punitive action. “In addition to the lump-sum demand, Excise officials are also allegedly insisting on a monthly payment of Rs 15,000 from each wine shop. Traders say that refusal to comply could lead to frequent inspections, false cases or even threats of licence cancellation. Compared to previous years, when collections were reportedly limited to Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh annually, the present demands are said to be several times higher, making the business increasingly unviable. “According to traders, the collected money is allegedly passed on through a chain from lower-level staff to higher officials, indicating a systematic and well-organised operation. Some traders claimed that even festival seasons have become an opportunity for exploitation, with officials allegedly demanding costly liquor bottles during Dasara and other celebrations in addition to cash payments. Such practices, they say, have become routine over the years, leaving shop owners with little room to resist. “Many traders admitted that they had requested time to pay the demanded amounts in instalments, but their appeals were allegedly ignored. The fear of retaliation has discouraged most victims from filing formal complaints. However, a few traders are re-

portedly preparing to approach senior authorities, hoping for intervention despite the risks involved. Adding to the controversy, traders claim that last year too, officials collected around Rs 1 lakh per shop annually, along with monthly payments of Rs 10,000, further reinforcing allegations of long-standing malpractice. “Responding to these allegations, Karimnagar District Excise Superintendent Srinivas categorically denied any illegal collections from liquor shops. He stated that there was no truth in the ongoing (reports) and said the matter had not come to his notice so far. He warned against spreading false information and assured that strict action would be taken if any official was found involved in such practices. “However, the uniformity of allegations coming from a large section of liquor traders, coupled with past experiences and the current pressure tactics described, has raised doubts about the official denial. If the claims of a seven-crore rupee illegal collection drive are substantiated, it would not only expose corruption within the Excise Department but also point to a larger systemic failure that directly impacts government revenue and public trust. “As the controversy deepens, questions remain unanswered: Is the alleged extortion drive real? Who is orchestrating it? Will higher authorities or vigilance agencies step in to investigate? Unless these concerns are addressed transparently, the issue threatens to escalate into yet another major excise scandal in Karimnagar district.

## Uppal Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Extends Birthday Greetings to Government Adviser Ven Narender Reddy



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle): “On the occasion of the birthday of Telangana Government Adviser Ven Narender Reddy, Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Parameshwar Reddy met him courteously and conveyed his heartfelt birthday greetings. During the meeting, Parameshwar Reddy felicitated Ven Narender Reddy



by draping a shawl and wished him good health, long life, and many more birthdays. Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy expressed his hope that Ven Narender Reddy would continue to celebrate many such birthdays and go on to hold several more prestigious positions within the party. “Several senior Congress leaders were present on the occasion, including Medchal-Malkajgiri District Congress Party President Thotakura Vajresh Yadav, former MLA Kuna Srisailam Goud, Quthbullapur and Kukatpally Constituency In-charges Kolan Hanumanth Reddy, Bandi Ramesh, former TPCC General Secretary Narsa Reddy, Bhupati Reddy, GHMC Floor Leader Dharpalli Rajasekhara Reddy, and others.

Ramanthapur Division Congress President Mohammed Rafiq Tours Netaji Nagar Colony “KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle): “At the invitation of local residents, Ramanthapur Division Congress Party President Mohammed Rafiq toured Netaji Nagar Colony along with colony leaders. The programme received an overwhelming response from the public. During the visit, residents shared their grievances and day-to-day problems with him. They complained that snakes are entering houses after nightfall, and requested the authorities to lay proper drainage and roads in the colony. They also urged for daily mosquito-control spraying to prevent the spread of infectious diseases caused by mosquitoes. “Addressing the residents, Mohammed Rafiq assured them that he would bring all their issues to the notice of Uppal Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, discuss the matters with the concerned officials, and make all efforts to ensure permanent solutions to the problems. Several Netaji Nagar residents, including Swamy Shekhar, Mallesh Yadav, Pratap, Vinay, Mohan, Shravan, Gautham, Bestha Bhaskar, Mogili, Lagusani Srinivas Goud, Mohammed Nayeem, Thota Shankar, and others, participated in the programme.

## With the Blessings of Lord Ayyappa, May Everyone Live in Happiness and Prosperity: Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle): “Under the auspices of the Chilkannagar Ayyappa Seva Samithi, the Ayyappa Swamy Maha Padi Puja was conducted at the Chilkannagar Shiva Temple. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, along with Chilkannagar Division Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj, participated in the sacred ceremony. Speaking on the occa-

sion, MLA Lakshma Reddy and Corporator Geetha Praveen stated that they prayed for the blessings of Lord Ayyappa to be bestowed upon all people. The MLA assured that he would extend his full support for the completion of the Shiva Temple, which is currently under construction, and promised all necessary assistance until the work is completed. The program was attended by Guru Swamis Dasari Krishna, Amruta Rao, Subba Rao, Vasu, Ganesh, Burgula Ramesh Goud, other Guru Swamis, Chilkannagar BRS party leaders, and a large number of local residents.



## PRESIDENT OF INDIA PRESENTS PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR

“Posted On: 26 DEC 2025 1:25PM by PIB Delhi” The President of India, Smt Droupadi Murmu, conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar on children for



their exceptional achievements in the fields of Bravery, Social Service, Environment, Sports, Art & Culture and Science & Technology at a ceremony held in New Delhi today (December 26, 2025). “Speaking on the occasion, the President congratulated the recipients of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. She said that the award winning children have brought pride to their



families, their communities, and the entire country. She expressed confidence that these awards will inspire all children across the country. She stated that this award has been presented to them for their encouragement. She expressed confidence that these awards will inspire all the children of the country. “The President said that about 320 years ago, Guru Gobind Singh Ji—the tenth Guru of the Sikh faith and revered by all Indians—and his four sons made supreme sacrifices while fighting in support of truth and justice. She said that the bravery of the two youngest Sahibzadas, is honoured and respected both in India and abroad. She remembered with reverence the great child heroes who laid down their lives with pride for truth and justice.



## Grand Christmas Celebrations at Calvary Temple



“Indian Chronicle:- Christmas celebrations are reaching their peak at Calvary Temple in the Miyapur division of the Serilingampally constituency. Christian brothers and sisters, young and old, participated in prayers and worshipped Lord Jesus Christ from morning onwards.” At Calvary Temple, devotees participated in prayers with devotion and reverence on the occasion of Christmas, the birthday of Jesus Christ. Pastor Satish Brother said that Christmas is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, and that they have arranged transportation and police protection to ensure that devotees coming to Calvary Temple do not face any difficulties. He also said that special accommodation has been provided for the lakhs of people who have come from other districts and states. Pastor Satish Brother expressed his gratitude to Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, state ministers, MLAs, corporators, and the newly elected Panchayat Presidents.

## Annadanam Program for Ayyappa Devotees Continues for 56 Days at Suryanagar, Mallapur



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, December 26, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Sri Lakshmi Ganapati Devasthanam at Suryanagar, Mallapur, successfully organized a 56-day Annadanam program for Ayyappa devotees from November 1, 2025, to December 26, 2025, marking the 8th consecutive year of the initiative. The program was conducted under the banner of the Ayyappa Seva Samithi with the objective of supporting Ayyappa devotees observing the Mandala and Makara Jyothi pilgrimage period. Devotees from various areas participated in large numbers and benefited from the free food service offered daily. The Annadanam activities were coordinated and monitored by K. Yadagiri Goud, Tanneeru Govindu, Venkatachari, and Narsingarao, who oversaw the arrangements to ensure hygienic food preparation, sys-

tematic distribution, and uninterrupted service throughout the period. Women volunteers played a key role in the program by actively participating in cooking, serving, and overall management of the Annadanam from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM every day. Their contribution strengthened the smooth functioning of the service activities. Organizers stated that the Annadanam program was conducted with community support and voluntary contributions, highlighting the importance of collective service and devotion. The initiative received positive response from devotees, who appreciated the consistent efforts of the temple committee and volunteers. The successful completion of the 56-day Annadanam reflects the continued commitment of Sri Lakshmi Ganapati Devasthanam and the Ayyappa Seva Samithi towards social service and religious harmony.

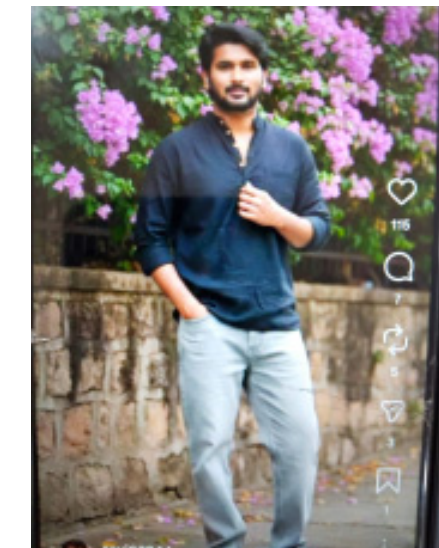
## Central Government's New Laws Are Anti-Worker CITU Protest at ECIL X Roads



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, December 26, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Alleging that the Central Government's newly introduced policies are anti-worker and anti-people, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) organised a protest at ECIL X Roads on Friday under the leadership of the CITU Kapra Circle Committee. As part of the protest, a rally was taken out from the CITU office at Kamalanagar to ECIL X Roads, followed by a sit-in demonstration at the ECIL junction. The protesters demanded the immediate withdrawal of several policies, including changes to the MGNREGA scheme, the proposed Electricity Amendment Act, the four Labour Codes, and the so-called Peace Agreement, which they described as detrimental to public interests. Addressing the gathering, CITU Kapra Circle Committee Convenor P. Ganesh stated that the four Labour Codes were completely anti-worker in nature. He warned that these laws would reduce employment opportunities and pave the way for imposing 12-hour workdays, thereby worsening working conditions.

He also expressed concern that the revised MGNREGA policy would deprive rural workers of guaranteed employment. Former Medchal district CITU president Komati Ravi criticised the proposed Electricity Amendment Act, alleging that it aimed to abolish free power schemes and hand over the power sector to private corporations. He further stated that the Peace Agreement posed serious risks to public safety, particularly in the nuclear power sector. Several CITU leaders and activists, including B.V. Satyanarayana, Unnikrishna, Venkat, Manikantha, Santosh, Sharif, Safiya, Srinivas, Srinivasa Rao, Durgayya, Shivannarayana, Yadagiri Rao, Kondal Reddy, Ravishankar and Hariprasad, participated in the protest.

## Man Goes Missing from Kapra After Family Dispute



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, December 26, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“A 28-year-old man has been reported missing from Shivaji Nagar Colony, Balajinagar, Kapra Mandal, Medchal District. According to the complaint lodged by Karina Maheshwari (25), a domestic worker, her husband Karina Ravi, a painter by profession, left their residence on December 16, 2025, at around 12:00 noon and has not returned since. The complainant stated that there was a quarrel between them on December 15, 2025, at about 9:30 PM due to internal family disputes. Following the argument, Ravi left the house the next day and his whereabouts remain unknown. Despite searching and making enquiries with friends and relatives, the family was unable to trace him. Subsequently, a missing person case was registered at the concerned police station, and an investigation has been taken up. Karina Ravi is a resident of Shivaji Nagar Colony, Balajinagar, Kapra Mandal, Medchal District. Anyone with information regarding his whereabouts is requested to contact the local police.

## Karimnagar Should Lead Telangana Cricket: Minister Ponnam Prabhakar

CHITTIMALLA MAHENDAR, KARIMNAGAR CORRESPONDENT, DECEMBER 26, INDIAN



CHRONICLE :“State Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnam Prabhakar stated that the undivided Karimnagar district should take the lead in Telangana cricket during the G. Venkataswamy Memorial Telangana Inter-District T20 League being conducted under the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA). He attended the final match held on Friday at the Velichala Jagapathi Rao Memorial Cricket Stadium in Alugunur, Karimnagar, along with Minister Vivek Venkataswamy, and paid floral tributes to late Kaka Venkataswamy.” Addressing the gathering, Minister Ponnam said the league, which began three days ago in Mahabubnagar with Visakha Industries as sponsor, has become a great platform for rural cricketers. He

recalled that Telangana has earlier produced national-level players like Harshad Ayub, Shivam Amarnath, Mohammad Azharuddin and VVS Laxman, and said the present generation should draw inspiration from players like Mohammed Siraj and Tilak Varma. He assured that a modern cricket stadium would be developed in Karimnagar and announced plans to construct a world-class stadium on 20 acres at Husnabad. “Minister Vivek Venkataswamy said the memorial T20 league organised in the name of Kaka Venkataswamy would help identify talented players across districts. He recalled Kaka Venkataswamy’s passion for sports development and his role in promoting district-level cricket and strengthening Indian cricket administration.” In the final match played between Karimnagar and Rajanna Sircilla districts, Karimnagar won the toss and elected to bat first, scoring 170 runs for the loss of five wickets in 20 overs. Ritvik Surya top-scored with 91 runs. Rajanna Sircilla were bowled out for 125 runs, with Irshad Pasha taking three wickets and Harshad and Sarthak claiming two wickets each. Ritvik Surya was awarded the ‘Man of the Match’ by former HCA Vice President and Adhoc Committee Chairman Prakash Chand Jain and senior member Dhanraj Jain. “Government Whip Adi Srinivas, MLA Kavvampally Satyanarayana, Karimnagar Cricket Association President Agam Rao, General Secretary N. Muralidhar Rao and other association office-bearers and dignitaries were present.

## Remunerative Prices Must Be Paid for Farmers’ Crops: P. Sugunakar Rao



CHITTIMALLA MAHENDAR, “Karimnagar Correspondent” December 26, Indian Chronicle “P. Sugunakar Rao, President of Kisan Jagrana, stated that many farmers are abandoning agriculture and shifting to other professions due to the absence of remunerative prices for their crops. He pointed out that nearly 70 percent of India’s population still depends on agriculture, and the sector provides livelihood to more than 50 percent of the population. Neglecting such a vital sector is highly unfortunate, he said. “He emphasized that the vision of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) is impossible unless the economic conditions and living standards of nearly 70 percent of the population improve. Even after 75 years of independence, the continued incidents of farmer suicides are deeply distressing, he added. He asserted that many of these issues can be addressed only by ensuring remunerative prices for farmers’ produce and by providing a legal guarantee so that such prices actually reach the farmers. He urged that instead of limiting efforts to slogans, practical and actionable plans must be implemented to solve farmers’ problems, with fair pricing being the foremost solution.” Prominent farmer leader Nallamalla Venkateshwara Rao stated that excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is degrading soil

fertility and leaving harmful residues in food crops, leading to serious health issues such as cancer, kidney failure, heart attacks, and hypertension. He stressed the need to adopt organic farming practices. “Another farmer leader, Narasimha Naidu, said that only through unity and collective movements can farmers compel governments to respond. He cited the example of farmers in Nizamabad district successfully achieving the Turmeric Board through organized struggle and said similar collective efforts are essential to resolve other farmers’ issues. “KVK scientist Venugopal highlighted that horticulture and floriculture can provide multiple benefits to farmers and assured full technical support in this direction. Dr. B. N. Rao expressed concern over the severe hardships faced by farmers and emphasized society’s responsibility to support them. Farmer leader Malla Reddy spoke about the advantages of crop diversification, while Kisan Jagrana President Nelamadugu Shankaraya stated that farmer organizations are being run successfully in Damuchintakunta village and called upon farmers from other villages to unite on similar lines. “During the Kisan Grameena Mela, several resolutions were unanimously adopted, including: “Ensuring remunerative prices for farmers’ crops with legal backing” “Compensation for crop losses” “Establishing one FEO in every village to organize farmers” “Providing old-age pensions to elderly farmers without any conditions” “Around 20 APO presidents and several farmer leaders from North Telangana participated in the meeting and addressed the gathering, offering valuable suggestions and guidance to farmers.

## Phule Seva Samithi Extends Rs 52,000 Financial Aid to Destitute Family



“Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, December 26 (Indian Chronicle) “Members of the Phule Seva Samithi demonstrated humanitarian concern by extending financial assistance of ₹52,000 to an impoverished family from Kondapalli village in Rebbena mandal of Kumuram Bheem-Asifabad district. “The beneficiary, Lendugure Nanubai, is a widow with two daughters—Harika (15) and Renuka (13)—both of whom are mentally challenged. Nanubai lost her husband, Tukaram, at a young age and has since been struggling to raise her two daughters by working as a daily wage labourer. “Adding to the family’s hardship, her elder daughter Harika was recently diagnosed with a lung-related illness. Doctors reportedly informed the family that the treatment would cost nearly ₹5 lakh. Unable to afford such a huge amount,

the distressed mother was left without any means to provide proper medical care. “Upon learning about the family’s plight, members of the Phule Seva Samithi mobilised donations through social media and provided financial assistance of ₹52,000 to help meet immediate needs. “Speaking on the occasion, Phule Seva Samithi founder president Morle Tirupati and other members urged government authorities to extend necessary support to the family. They also appealed for the sanction of disability pensions for the two mentally challenged sisters. “Phule Seva Samithi members including Gurnule Sattaiah, Morle Pandurang, Morle Tirupati, Morle Vijay, Morle Nagesh, Morle Raghupati, Gurle Srinivas, Nikode Arjun Kumar, Nikode Prabhakar, Vasake Shankar, Kotrangi Prashanth, Venkatesh Gurle, Lanchu Morle, Mondaiah



## Uppal Zonal Office Established with Initiative of Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy



KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle)“Amid prolonged public uncertainty over the establishment of a zonal office in Uppal, the Uppal Zonal Office was finally inaugurated on Friday at the Uppal Circle Office. Radhika Gupta formally assumed charge as the Zonal Commissioner.”As part of the Greater Hyderabad expansion, the government has merged sub-urban gram panchayats into the municipal corporation and created 300 divisions. Accordingly, a Government Order (GO) was issued for the establishment of 60 circle offices and 12 zonal offices across the city. However, the location of the zonal offices became a matter of intense debate, with leaders from various regions strongly lobbying to have the offices set up in their respective areas, believing it would bring administrative convenience and



development. In this context, several leaders from different political parties demanded that the Uppal Zonal Office be established either at Ghatkesar or Boduppal. Efforts to shift the office away from Uppal did not succeed.”Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy took special initiative and personally brought the matter to the attention of the Chief Minister and senior government officials. His sustained efforts ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Zonal Office at Uppal. The decision has been welcomed by leaders and residents from the Boduppal, Kapra, Nacharam, Nagaram, and Ghatkesar circle areas, who expressed happiness over the development. People believe that the newly formed circles will now have better access to administrative services through the Uppal Zonal Office.

## 29-Year-Old Lorry Driver Reported Missing from Dammaiguda



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, December 26, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“A 29-year-old lorry driver, Kura Mahendar, has been reported missing from Dammaiguda in Medchal district. According to the complaint lodged by his father, Kura Ramulu (53), a driver by profession and a resident of Kushi Garden, Dammaiguda, Mahendar left home on the night of December 23, 2025, at around 10:00 pm to attend a friend’s birthday party at Mariyala. On December 24, 2025, at about 11:30 am, Mahendar contacted his father over the phone and informed him that he would return home within one hour. After that call, his mobile phone was switched off. Despite continuous efforts to trace him by contacting relatives, friends, and acquaintances, no information regarding his whereabouts could be found. Mahendar belongs to BC-D (Mudiraj) community and works as a lorry driver. He has not returned home since then and remains untraceable. Based on the complaint, police have registered a missing case and initiated an investigation. Authorities have requested anyone with information about the missing person to come forward and assist the investigation.

## Additional SP Visits Boxing Clubs in Kagaznagar on Boxing Day“From Local Ring to National Arena: Empowering Kagaznagar Youth

“Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, December 26 (Indian Chronicle)“On the occasion of Boxing Day on Friday, Kumuram Bheem–Asifabad District Additional Superintendent of Police Chittaranjan, IPS, visited the National Fitness Gym and Shiva Boxing Club located near Potti Sriramulu Chaurasta in Kagaznagar town, following an invitation from mentor Nivas.”The Additional SP inaugurated the programme by offering floral tributes to the portrait of Lord Hanuman and breaking a coconut. He later interacted with the boxers at the club and formally inaugurated the boxing sessions.”Addressing the gathering, Chittaranjan, IPS, said that learning sports such as boxing helps youth develop not only physical strength but also mental resilience. He emphasized that sports play a vital role in instilling discipline, patience, and self-confidence, and encouraged young people to showcase their talent in sports and strive to reach higher levels.”He particularly appreciated Constable Nivas, who, while discharging his official duties, is providing free boxing coaching to youth and preparing them for state- and national-level competitions, describing him as an inspiration to



many.”The programme was attended by club organisers, coaches, and boxers, along with Ramakanth Yadav (former serviceman and senior national boxer), Zakir, Shrawan Goud (trainer, National Fitness Gym), and Vinay Yadav (coach).

## SPL Season 2 Cricket Premier League Held at Sri Narayana Junior College



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, December 26, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“The SPL Season 2 Cricket Premier League 2025 was successfully organized under the leadership of Madukar, Founder Chairman of Sri Narayana Junior College, Peerzadiguda. The tournament aimed to encourage students to balance academics with sports and extracurricular activities. Former Boduppal Mayor Thotakura Ajay Yadav attended the event as the chief guest, along with former Deputy Mayor Kotha Sravanti Kishore Goud and AISF State Secretary Putta Lakshman. AISF Medchal District President Chinna, District Secretary Anwar, Vice President Harish, college students, and faculty members also participated in the programme. Speaking on the occasion, the guests stated that nearly 15 teams took part in the tournament, making the competition lively and engaging. They emphasized the importance of promoting sports along with education to ensure the overall development of students and to help them excel in various fields in the future. The speakers appreciated the efforts of Chairman Madukar for organizing such a platform that encourages teamwork, discipline, and physical fitness among students, while maintaining a strong focus on academic excellence.

## BJP Leaders Submit Representation to Uppal Zonal Commissioner Seeking Shifting of Nacharam Municipal Circle Office to Mallapur



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 26 (Indian Chronicle):“BJP leaders from Mallapur submitted a representation to Uppal Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta on Friday, requesting that the proposed Nacharam Municipal Circle Office be shifted to Mallapur. Speaking on the occasion, the BJP leaders stated that the location



of the newly announced Nacharam Municipal Circle Office should be reconsidered by taking into account the opinions and needs of residents from the concerned divisions. They explained that the Nacharam Municipal Circle currently comprises five divisions—HMT Colony, Shakti Sai Nagar, Mallapur, Nacharam, and HM Nagar.”The ...

## Accreditations Must Be Issued to All Eligible Journalists – United Struggles Will Continue: WJI State Leaders Karunakar, Pramod Kumar



“CHITTIMALLA MAHENDAR, Karimnagar Correspondent“December 26, INDIAN CHRONICLE :“The Working Journalists of India (WJI) State Vice President Taduru Karunakar and State Secretary Shivvanadri Pramod Kumar have asserted that the organisation will strongly oppose the injustice being meted out to journalists across the state regarding accreditations.”Speaking at a programme held at Justice Kumarayya Function Hall in Kodimyal mandal of Jagtial district, the WJI leaders welcomed several journalists who formally joined the Working Journalists of India on Friday.”Addressing the gathering, the leaders alleged that the government orders issued in connection with new accreditations are illogical and unreasonable. They made it clear that their struggle would continue until justice is delivered to journalists in Telangana. They also announced that all jour-

nalists organisations willing to fight collectively would be taken along in this movement.”The leaders stated that their organisation is committed to resolving the problems of rural journalists. They observed that many journalists are coming forward to join WJI after witnessing the functioning of certain organisations that allegedly use journalists for personal gains and later abandon them. WJI, they said, would work sincerely to fulfill the aspirations and expectations of journalists.”They termed it unfortunate that journalists in Telangana, a state achieved through struggles, have been waiting for over a decade for solutions to their issues. The leaders criticised the government for relying only on the advice and suggestions of a single association leader, stating that this approach is responsible for the present plight of journalists. They warned that unless such individuals and organisations are sidelined, there is a risk of the entire journalist community distancing itself from the government. They urged senior government authorities to review the situation and initiate corrective measures without further delay.”Later, the new executive body of the Kodimyal Mandal Working Journalists of India Press Club was unanimously elected. The newly elected committee was congratulated by WJI union leaders Karunakar and Pramod Kumar, along with Karimnagar district WJI president Daram Jagannath Reddy.

## Ayyappa Mahapadi Puja Held at Kapra with Public Representatives as Chief Guests



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, December 26, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Kapra Division Corporator Swarnaraj Shivamani and Medchal–Malkajgiri District Agricultural Market Committee Vice Chairman Vithal Naik participated as chief guests in the Ayyappa Mahapadi Puja held at the Sri Lakshmi Chennakesava Swamy Temple, Kapra. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Swarnaraj Shivamani said he was happy to take part in the Ayyappa Mahapadi Puja and appreciated the temple trustees for organizing a meaningful spiritual programme. He stated that such religious events strengthen devotion and community harmony. Senior Congress leader and Agricultural Market Committee Vice Chairman Vithal Naik also attended the puja and said that Ayyappa devotees observe the Deeksha with great purity and devotion. He noted that the temple trustee board organized the Mahapadi Puja in the temple premises for the first time in a grand manner. Vithal Naik appreciated the temple trustees for undertaking several development works after assuming responsibility, including the construction of a new power bore, a fabricated shed for devotees, improved lighting facilities inside the temple, and reconstruction of the main access road to the temple for the convenience of devotees. Later, he participated in the Annaprasadam distribution programme along with Endowments Officer Krishnamachari, Junior Assistant Srinivas Goud, Temple Chairman Puttu Baburao, Director Malla Reddy, Narender Goud, Satyanarayana, Sridhar Reddy, and Vinod. A large number of Ayyappa Deeksha devotees and local residents took part in the programme. The event was also attended by Kapra Division Congress President Kobbanuri Nagaseshu, senior Congress leaders Pawan Kumar, Tanneeru Srihari, G. Satyanarayana, Srikanth Goud, Jagadeesh, Murali, K. Raju, Somnath, Nagaraju Yadav, Manoj Kumar, Murthuza, Sai Kumar Yadav, Goutham Banni, Shiva Chintu, Ritwik, and others.





## Special power blocks at Panvel from tomorrow; mail, express trains to be hit



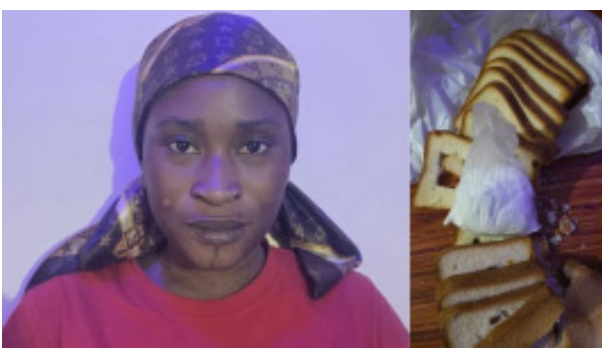
GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The Central Railway's Mumbai division will block train services at Panvel station from December 25 to December 31, to carry out a series of works linked to the Panvel-Kalamboli Coaching Complex and station redevelopment, officers said on Tuesday. Several long-distance mail and express trains will be regulated, rescheduled, or diverted on select days during the block period, they added.

"Passengers are requested to note the changes in train running and bear with the Railway Administration for the inconvenience caused," said Dr Swapnil Nila, Chief Public Relations Officer, Central Railway. According to Central Rail-

way, the blocks are being taken for the removal of infringements connected to the upcoming Panvel-Kalamboli Coaching Complex, shifting of Point No 101B towards the Diva end, launching of foot overbridge girder sets between platforms 5 and 6, and 7 and 8, and erection of steel columns and cross girders at Panvel station. The power block will impact the up and down Mail lines, loop lines, and Karjat lines, engine reversal lines within Panvel station limits, as well as platforms 6 and 7. The trains that will be affected include the 12134 Mangaluru Junction-CSMT Express that will be regulated at Apta for 20 to 30 minutes daily throughout the block period. The 01151 CSMT-Karmali Express will face delays of up to 1 hour and 15 minutes on most days, with one service on December 27/28 rescheduled to depart at 3 am. The return service, 01152 Karmali-CSMT Express, will be regulated at Jite for a similar duration. Several other trains, including the 22655 Ernakulam-Hazrat Nizamuddin Express, 11099 LTT-Madgaon Express, 22114 Thiruvananthapuram-LTT Superfast Express, and 22149 Ernakulam-Pune Express, will be regulated at stations such as Somatane and Mohpe on specific dates. The 22193 Daund-Gwalior Express scheduled for December 28/29 will be diverted via Karjat-Kalyan-Bhiwandi Road and will halt at Kalyan instead of Panvel. The works are part of ongoing efforts to enhance rail infrastructure and operational capacity in the Panvel section, a critical junction connecting Mumbai with Konkan and Pune routes.

## Nigerian woman conceals Rs 1.20-crore worth cocaine in bread loaves, held in Bengaluru



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The Karnataka Police have arrested a 29-year-old Nigerian woman for allegedly smuggling cocaine from Mumbai to Bengaluru, concealing it in bread loaves. The Central Crime Branch (CCB) of the Bengaluru city police announced the arrest of Olajide Esther Iyanuoluwa, who had come to Delhi in 2024 on a student visa, on Tuesday. She had concealed the contraband inside bread loaves and had kept it in her backpack, the police said. City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said, "Based on credible information that a foreign woman residing at Grace Trust, within the limits of Varthur Police Station, Bengaluru, was supplying prohibited narcotic drug cocaine to known persons, the CCB Narcotics Control Wing conducted a raid." During the raid, the police seized 121 grams of cocaine worth approximately Rs 1.20 crore, one mobile phone used for committing the offence, and other articles. According to the police, though Iyanuoluwa had claimed to pursue studies at a uni-

versity, she stayed in areas such as Ghatkopar (Gala Nagar), Ambawadi, and Nallasopara in Mumbai, without enrolling in any college. "She procured cocaine from her friend in Mumbai and, as per his instructions, transported and supplied the same to designated locations, thereby engaging in drug peddling and earning illegal money. Preliminary investigation has revealed that she used to travel from Mumbai to Bengaluru in private buses and transport cocaine by concealing it in covers of bread and similar products to avoid detection," Singh said.

Based on Olajide's statement, the police conducted a subsequent operation near Varthur and arrested the intended recipient. Officials confirmed that the prospective Nigerian buyer was deported shortly after his arrest. A police officer said, "The drug cartel, which usually smuggles through couriers or posts recently, changed its route after some raids were conducted on couriers and post offices as well".

The police have sent Olajide to judicial custody and have initiated proceedings to send her to Nigeria. According to the Home Department data, 4,168 narcotic cases were registered in 2024 and 1,833 were convicted, while 2,214 are pending trial. In 2025, the numbers increased to 5,747 cases across the state, and 1,079 were convicted, and 3,414 are pending before trial. According to data shared in the first week of December, Bengaluru reported 1,078 drug-related offences, arresting 1,543 people, including 52 foreigners, and seizing 1,446.75 kg of drugs worth Rs 160 crore. More than 300 foreign nationals have been deported after it was found that they were involved in drug peddling, Home Minister G Parameshwara had said during the winter session held in Belagavi recently.

## Kailash Kher live at Shalimar Ground today: Panchkula police issue traffic advisory on entry, parking, routes



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

In the wake of singer Kailash Kher's live performance in Haryana's Panchkula on Wednesday, the Panchkula Traffic Police have issued a detailed traffic advisory to en-

sure smooth movement around the venue on Christmas Eve. The concert is scheduled to begin at 6 pm at Shalimar Ground, Sector 5, Panchkula. According to the advisory, entry for music lovers attending the programme has been earmarked from the back side of Shalimar Ground, near the Night Food Market. Visitors have been urged to strictly follow the designated entry points to avoid congestion and inconvenience.

For those arriving by private vehicles, parking has been arranged at the showroom parking lot near the Night Food Market and at the Sector-5 protest site, the police said. The police have advised motorists to park only at notified locations and avoid roadside parking. Specific routes have been suggested for commuters to facilitate smooth access to the venue. Vehicles coming from the Majri Chowk side are advised to reach Shalimar Ground via Belavista roundabout, using the slip road towards Sector-5 protest site. Meanwhile, motorists approaching from the Chandigarh side should take the route via Housing Board, Sector 17/18 Chowk, Sector 11/15 Chowk, Tawa Chowk, and then proceed towards Belavista Chowk, said a traffic police officer. The traffic police have appealed to the public to adhere to the prescribed routes and parking arrangements, follow on-ground instructions issued by traffic personnel, and cooperate in maintaining orderly traffic conditions during the event. The advisory has been issued in the interest of public safety and convenience, considering the large turnout expected for the live musical evening, said a police officer.

## PAN may turn inactive if not linked with Aadhaar by December 31

New Delhi: The deadline to link Permanent Account Number (PAN) with Aadhaar is December 31, and failure to do so may result in the PAN becoming inactive after this date. Taxpayers who have not completed the linking process are advised to act promptly to avoid financial and compliance-related difficulties. According to a notification issued by the Income Tax Department on April 3, 2025, individuals who were allotted a PAN on or after October 1, 2024, are required to link their PAN with Aadhaar by December 31, 2025. For all other PAN holders, the original deadline for linking PAN with Aadhaar was May 31, 2024.

If the PAN-Aadhaar linking is completed on or before December 31, a penalty of Rs 1,000 will be applicable, as the original deadline has already passed. However, failure to link even after this date could lead to the PAN being deactivated. An inactive PAN can cause several problems for taxpayers. Filing income tax returns may become difficult, and those awaiting refunds could see their refunds getting stuck. In such cases, taxpayers may have to go through a lengthy process, including applying for a new PAN, to resolve the issue. Additionally, non-linking of PAN



with Aadhaar may result in higher rates of Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) and Tax Collected at Source (TCS). Taxpayers may also lose access to Form 26AS and may not receive TDS or TCS certificates. Banking and financial transactions can also be severely affected. Individuals with an inactive PAN may not be able to open bank accounts, obtain credit or debit cards,

## ‘As if Russia and Ukraine have united’: CM Devendra Fadnavis slams reunion of Raj, Uddhav Thackeray as ‘opportunistic politics’



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Maharashtra Chief Minister and BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis Wednesday criticised the reunion of Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray, calling it "a politics of opportunism and not ideology or thought". After months of talks, the Thackeray cousins made their alliance official in Mumbai on Wednesday, announcing that the Sena (UBT) and MNS would jointly fight the upcoming Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls.

Speaking to reporters at Mantralaya in Mumbai after the Cabinet meeting, Fadnavis said, "Uddhav Thackeray has buried the ideology of the party founded by the late Bal

Thackeray. Today, in the absence of any ideology or thinking, the union of Uddhav and Raj Thackeray seems a futile exercise aimed at retaining the political ground that they have lost. They are struggling for survival but will not succeed in the BMC polls." "There is so much hype created about their reunion. As if Russia and Ukraine have come together... It is being made to appear as though Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy are coming together," he said.

Describing the reunion of the estranged Thackeray cousins as an outcome of fear, the chief minister added, "They neither have any ideology nor agenda... You don't win elections by stoking emotions." Referring to Uddhav as a "disappointed person", Fadnavis continued, "He long ago buried the ideology of the Bal Thackeray-founded Shiv Sena... People will question their flips." The BJP leader said, "Mumbai and Maharashtra have always subscribed to Hindutva which is inclusive and progressive. It is our culture and identity. Anybody who believes in Lord Ram is acceptable, irrespective of caste, community." Taking a dig at Raj Thackeray, he said, "We don't wear a saffron shawl to display our Hindutva." Raj began wearing a saffron shawl during the 2017 polls to underline his right-wing politics. Expressing confidence that the BMC elections will be contested on the development plank, Fadnavis stated, "The people will exercise their votes for the development implemented on a massive scale by the BJP."

## Protests over Bangladesh killing enter second day in Kolkata; BJP workers stopped by police near Howrah Bridge



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Kolkata remained tense for the second consecutive day on Wednesday as protests continued over the killing of a Bangladesh-origin man, with chaotic scenes unfolding during the BJP's "Howrah Bridge Blockade" programme. Police stopped the BJP procession before it could reach the bridge, leading to scuffles and severe traffic congestion in the area. According to police, BJP leaders and workers began marching towards Howrah Bridge in the morning but were intercepted before stepping onto the bridge. Anticipating unrest, the police had cordoned off the area in advance. When protesters attempted to cross police barricades, they were blocked, prompting heated arguments. The workers then sat on the road shouting slogans, and a scuffle broke out when police tried to clear the stretch.

Protesters attempted to push past barricades and at-

tacked personnel, according to eyewitnesses, following which officers moved to disperse the crowd. The clashes resulted in massive traffic snarls on Howrah Bridge and its adjoining roads. The protests follow allegations of the mob lynching of Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, which triggered demonstrations across several parts of India, including West Bengal. On Tuesday, the Beckbagan area in central Kolkata turned volatile during a march towards the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission called by Sangh Parivar organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), ABVP and Hindu Jagran Manch.

Police had intercepted protesters before they could reach the mission, a high-security zone, after they said they wanted to submit a memorandum. The situation escalated into clashes between police and demonstrators, leaving at least 20 people injured and 19 arrested. Although the BJP was not initially part of Tuesday's rally, party leaders arrived at the spot later, following which the party announced the Howrah Bridge blockade.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari has called for a symbolic blockade at the Indo-Bangladesh border. Protests have also been reported from Siliguri and Malda, where activists from the VHP and Hindu Jagran Manch surrounded the Bangladesh Visa Service Centre. Similar demonstrations were reported from other pockets of the state. Police said security has been tightened at the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata and at major border points such as Petrapole, with forces on high alert to prevent further escalation.

## From 2 cows to 35 cattle, a young woman leads a dairy revolution in Punjab's Barnala



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

At just 27, Amandeep Kaur has achieved something rare in her village. A Business Administration graduate from Jodhpur village in Punjab's Barnala district, she is milking success through her dairy farm, which houses 35 cattle and produces around two quintals of milk each day. Amandeep, who hails from a humble background and is the youngest of three sisters, single-handedly manages the entire dairy farm and is one of the active dairy farmers in the district. "Things have never been easy for our family. Apart from farming on land taken on lease, my family reared two cows to supplement their income. It was after my brother passed away that I took the onus of making things better for my parents," says Amandeep.

Appreciating her efforts, T Benith, Deputy Commissioner, Barnala, said, "Amandeep has become an example for not only women but for men too. She broke the gender stereotype and is also an example for the male dairy farmer, who can learn skills of managing animals from her," he said. Amandeep began her business three years ago with just two cattle. Today, she has 35 cows and buffaloes at her farm, with her highest-yielding cow producing up to 40 to 45 litres of milk daily, she says. When she decided to start her own venture, Amandeep underwent dairy farmer training at the Barnala dairy department. "The training actually taught me the reason why I was not able to get high milk yield despite giving perfect feed and care to the animals. I learnt that a consistent diet and right breeding practices should be followed," she said. Since the training, there has been no looking back. With the help of the dairy department, Amandeep applied for subsidies, took loans, and today runs a successful venture, Surinder Singh, Deputy Director, Dairy Development, Barnala, said. Amandeep said that the department helped her get a loan sanctioned within seven days of applying. She used the loan amount and subsidy to get a shed constructed for the animals. "I did not have any knowledge about the shed and the importance of the right design of the shed. It was the department officials who helped me in getting the things done with the right perspective," she added. Today, Amandeep's modest home with a leaking ceiling has been replaced by a new house.

She is busy managing the farm and serving as the breadwinner for her family. Her dairy farm has broken the stereotype that only sons can support their families, says Amandeep, urging youngsters to become entrepreneurs.

## Man dies in leopard attack in Mandi, 5 others injured; animal succumbs after villagers retaliate

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

A man was killed and five others, including two women, were injured after a leopard attacked them around 7 am in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district Wednesday morning. The leopard was later attacked by villagers and succumbed to the injuries. Forest officials identified the victim as Balbir Singh, 39, who had come to Malwana village to visit relatives. The injured have been identified as Sahib Singh, Deena Nath, Champa Devi, Janit, and Rekha Devi. They were admitted to Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Medical College in Nerchowk. Preliminary findings suggest that Balbir had stepped out to relieve himself when the leopard attacked him. The injured belonged to three different villages in the Balh Valley. The animal first targeted residents of Chandiyal village before entering Bhadyal, where four people were seriously injured in separate attacks. It later attacked Balbir in Malwana village, killing him on the spot.

Speaking , Vasu Deogar, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Mandi, said the incident occurred in the Balh area of Mandi, where no previous leopard sightings had been reported. "Inspection of the leopard carcass suggests that the animal was in its old age, probably around 11 to 12 years. Its canines were found in a bad condition. Apparently, the animal ventured out of the core forest zone in search of easy prey such as dogs. There was dense fog in the area at the time. The possibility that the victim inadvertently came close to the leopard, or that the leopard found the victim in a squatting position, cannot be ruled out at this stage," he said. Deogar added that the leopard injured five people before it was attacked by villagers who gathered after hearing the cries of the wounded people. "When a wildlife rescue team reached the spot, the leopard was already injured. Our team rushed the animal to the veterinary hospital in Sundernagar, but it succumbed to the injuries and was declared brought dead. Post-mortem examination of the carcass is underway," he said. The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), in a survey conducted in March this year, estimated that Himachal Pradesh has a leopard population of about 1,114, with a density of two animals per 100 sq km.



# Going beyond crack down on peddlers | Counselling for drug users & parents: How Surat police unit freed 165 from addiction in its first year



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The question came as a bolt from the blue for 47-year-old Surat businessman when officials of the Surat city police’s Special Operations Group (SOG) came calling for his 21-year-old son, earlier in January. The anti-narcotics unit of the SOG landed up at the home of the Surat businessman after a drug peddler caught had named his son as among his “regular clients”. Shocked and embarrassed, the family has attempted to make sense of the information. The Surat city police later began counselling and rehabilitation sessions for the 21-year-old, keeping the family in the loop. Six months later, with multiple counselling sessions carried out by the Surat city police, the youngster has been ‘rehabilitated’.

He is among the 165 individuals, who have been sobered in the last one year by the Surat SOG’s Anti-Narcotics Unit, the only such unit run by the police in Gujarat, says Surat Police commissioner Anupamsingh Gahlaut. In a radical shift from the traditional approach of law enforcement, the Surat SOG anti-narcotics unit not only apprehend drug peddlers and question them about their suppliers, but also actively procures the names of all their customers, who are then contacted for sustained counselling sessions by police officials as well as psychologists—family members of youngsters aged up to 25 years are part of the sessions “by default”.

Not just that, post-counselling work requires families to keep a check on their wards and if necessary, even conduct basic tests for substance abuse — for which, the police have been training families. This SOG unit, comprising 25 trained police personnel and headed by a Police Inspector, was created for the purpose of counselling and rehabilitation of individual ‘consumers’ of narcotics, in a drive to crack down on drug abuse. Inaugurated in December last year by then Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi, the unit has come as a “saviour” for families who have been unaware about their children being addicted to drugs. Speaking to The Indian Express, the 47-year-old Surat businessman said, “When we attended the counselling sessions with the police officials, we could see that they encouraged and helped my son to quit the addiction through professional counsellors as well as police personnel, who explained the long term consequences of drug abuse and how it could devastate his family... My son turned a new leaf and rejoined our family’s manufacturing business. It has been a tough task and we decided to support my son instead of blaming him... We knew somewhere, we missed the signs and made a mistake of not keeping a check on the company he kept...”

The businessman has a word of caution for parents: “We realised our oversight as parents... we gave him freedom but did not check on him when he returned late night or whether he was fine... On some occasions, when we found him a bit agitated, we ignored the signs. Now, we realise that he was actually living in a dilemma; not knowing how to turn back and confide in us. I believe if the Surat police had not come knocking on our doors, we would have lost our son...” Although the rehabilitation is complete, the family continues to check on their son when he returns late at night. “The path was not easy... It took about six months for my son to be able to completely withdraw himself from substance abuse. Even now, when he returns late at night, I make sure I check him to be assured that he has not relapsed. The police have taught us ways to carry out the basic check and my son knows that we are doing it for his good,” he says. Police say that several families of youngsters, following the rehabilitation, have also procured narcotics testing kits for home testing to make sure that their

wards remain “off the substance” and any relapse is reported to the counselling unit of the SOG.

Surat City Commissioner of Police Anupamsingh Gahlaut told , “When we came up with this initiative as part of the endeavour to eliminate drug abuse from the root, we realised that involving families in cases of youngsters was of extreme importance to ensure they do not fall back after a rehabilitation to other forms of substance abuse... We have counselled the families to support and respond to their children instead of reacting and blaming. That has been the crucial factor in the success of this model. We have been advising parents not to compare their children with others which will cause an inferiority complex that then leads them astray, combined with peer group pressure, workload depression...” Gahlaut said, “Several families who went through the counselling have also purchased NDPS testing kits... The police officers have also trained them to conduct a basic test without the kit to ascertain if the ward has consumed any substance again. In case of any relapse, they will contact the police... We are doing this exercise with compassion and sensitivity as there is stigma attached to the issue...” Gahlaut says that the city police decided to move beyond cracking down on drug cartels and peddlers to “break the chain of consumers” when the police faced a question: What about the withdrawal symptoms? Gahlaut says, “We have booked about 300 cases against cartels, who operate from outside Gujarat and peddlers who are the agents selling the drugs to customers... When we sought suggestions from our partners in the N-Coord meeting (for anti-narcotics), the common opinion was that a coordinated rehabilitation of individuals, especially youngsters, was the need of the hour. So, we created a separate unit of SOG to only question peddlers to get a list of consumers and then contact them individually and through families to make them clean...” Earlier this month, Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi had said on the sidelines of a public event at Vadgam that the Gujarat police’s fight was not only against those selling drugs but “to help youth who have fallen into the trap of drugs, to come of it”. “Police have not only caught drugs from the soil of Gujarat, but from the ports of Bengal, from Maharashtra, and even from the networks operating inside the jails of Punjab. All this has been accomplished by our police and ATS. This fight will continue relentlessly; it will continue involving all communities,” Sanghavi had told reporters, in a purported response to Congress MLA from Vadgam Jignesh Mevani who had flagged the “rampant drug peddling” and warned that policemen “would lose their jobs” for not being able to contain drug peddling and bootlegging. With 84 psychiatrists empanelled in the initiative along with six rehabilitation centres, a team of 25 police personnel headed by the SOG police inspector collected a database of 450 consumers. Of these, 75 individuals aged between 17 to 25 years and 90 aged between 26 to 55 years have been counselled and “rehabilitated” since December 2024. SOG Police Inspector Tushar Pandya, who has been personally looking into the counselling of the individuals as the head of the anti-narcotics unit, says that while ganja (marijuana) has been the most common substance for abuse, the use of MD drugs and hybrid ganja is also common among those “who can afford”.

Pandya said, “In the younger age group, the addiction seen was ganja while about 15 persons were also addicted to MD drugs along with ganja. In the older age group, the addiction included ganja and MD drugs. In most cases of youngsters, the reason for turning to drugs has been the company of friends and peer pressure as well as flaunting lifestyle... Among the older group—above 35-40 years—marital discord and financial stress have emerged as major factors during the counselling sessions.” Pandya narrates the incident of August 2025 when the railway police rescued a woman while attempting suicide with three children. “The woman was brought to the SOG when she said that her husband’s drug addiction had driven her to contemplate the drastic step... We counselled the husband for several weeks and continue to follow up. Now, the man is de-addicted and the family is living happily,” Pandya says. Pandya adds that as part of strengthening the force for implementation of the anti-narcotics drive, police personnel as well as other government officials are currently receiving monthly training to be “able to identify drug addicted persons and also be able to deal with them or attend to them”

# ‘Ghar to unka Unnao hai’: UP minister Om Prakash Rajbhar mocks Unnao rape victim



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Uttar Pradesh Cabinet minister Om Prakash Rajbhar Wednesday mocked the Unnao rape survivor, laughing at her for staging a protest in Delhi. The woman and her family members had protested at India Gate on Tuesday, hours after the Delhi High Court suspended the sentence of former BJP MLA Kuldeep Sengar, the accused in the case, pending a final decision on the appeal against his life sentence.

Rajbhar, who heads BJP ally Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) in UP, made the remark while he was heading to attend the Assembly session in the morning. Media persons asked him about police apathy towards the rape survivor in Delhi, after purported video surfaced of the victim being dragged away by police personnel. As a media person said the victim was picked up from India Gate, Rajbhar, laughing loudly, said: “India gate? Ghar to unka Unnao hai (Why India gate? She is from Unnao).” He further said, “The court has issued directions that Sengar would stay away from the family, maintaining a 5-km distance. Why a dharna in Delhi when the court has given directions ensuring security. Where is the question of lack of security?” While Rajbhar did not respond to calls seeking comment, his son and SBSP national general secretary Arun Rajbhar said, “So, Om Prakash Rajbhar should cry over this, then it would be fine. Investigation has already been done in the case. The court has given directions on security for the family. There is nothing left to say.” The state government had allegedly withdrawn security of the survi-

vor and her family, claiming there is no need for it since Sengar was convicted and was in jail. Sengar was sentenced to life imprisonment in December 2019 by a Delhi trial court, after it found him guilty under Section 376 (2) (rape) of the IPC and Sections 5(c) & 6 of the POCSO Act for raping a minor. The case was probed and prosecuted by the CBI. Sengar, who is currently in prison, will not be out until a similar order suspending his sentence in the case of custodial killing of the minor’s father is issued by the Delhi HC.

# 'Discussion to come together is going on': Sule on joining hands with Ajit Pawar-led NCP in Pune civic poll

Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) Executive President Supriya Sule said Wednesday that efforts were underway to bring Ajit Pawar-led NCP and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) under the Maha Vikas Aghadi for the elections of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC).

The PMC elections, to be held after almost four years, will be conducted on January 15, 2026, with the counting of votes and results expected on January 16.

In a democracy, there has to be discussion. If similar-minded people come together, then there should be a discussion in the interest of Pune. There’s a need to bring a change in Pune for proper development,” said Sule on a possible alliance with Ajit Pawar’s party for the civic polls in Pune. Sule said there will be no compromise on ideology and values, adding, “The discussion to come together is going on, and is being done in the larger interest of the organisation and the city.” The Baramati MP said they are in touch with NCP leaders but don’t have anything productive to share, adding any final decision will be made after discussing with local party leaders.

# Punjab’s power sector sees rare united front as employees, engineers and pensioners join hands



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Unrest in Punjab’s power sector is intensifying, with no visible indication that the Punjab government will step in to resolve the growing standoff between the power department and its employees. The latest flashpoint came on Wednesday with the formation of the Joint Action Committee of Power Sector Employees, Engineers and Pensioners—a development being described as unprecedented in the history of the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL). For the first time, all branches of the power department, including serving employees, engineers, HR, accounts, junior engineers, etc and pensioners, have united under one banner. The joint action committee has been formed amid mounting resentment over what unions describe as systematic attempts to pave the way for the privatisation of Punjab’s public power utilities.

Union leaders said the joint action committee has been constituted to oppose the sale of power utility properties, the delay in setting up two 800 MW units at the Ropar Thermal Power Plant, and the Punjab government’s silence over the draft Electricity Amendment Bill 2025. According to them, these developments indicate a gradual move towards privatisation. However, beneath these stated issues lies a widening communication vacuum between the government and power sector employees, increased disciplinary actions, and an absence of meaningful dialogue. There is a growing political interference in this autonomous body, union leaders frequently allege during protest speeches at dharnas. All India Power Employees Federation even wrote to Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann Wednesday to timely intervene and resolve the issues through a dialogue.

Background of power utilities The Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) was unbundled into Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) and Punjab State Power Transmission Corporation Limited (PSTCL) on April 16, 2010. While both entities are autonomous bodies, they remain 100 per cent owned by the Punjab government. “At its peak, the PSEB employed over 1.2 lakh regular employees. Today, PSPCL and PSTCL together have around 28,000 regular employees, along with nearly 15,000 contract and outsourced workers, while the consumer base has increased manifold,” said Gurpreet Singh Gadiwind, state president of PSEB employees federation. A joint meeting of various power sector organisations was held in Patiala on December 22, followed by the formal announcement of the joint forum on December 24. Organisations that have come together include the PSEB Engineers Association (PSEBEA), Council of Junior Engineers, Power Employees Sangharsh Morcha, Pensioners Association, IT Officers Association, HR Officers Association, Accounts Association and several other bodies. The organisations have jointly decided to fight for common demands under the banner of the Joint Action Committee of Power Sector Employees, Engineers and Pensioners.

“Under which the Joint Action Committee has announced agitation programs as well which are: January 2, 2026: Zonal dharna and protest at Amritsar; January 6, 2026:

Zonal dharna and protest at Bathinda; January 9, 2026: Zonal dharna and protest at Patiala; January 15, 2026: Zonal dharna and protest at Ludhiana; January 20, 2026: Zonal dharna and protest at Jalandhar;,” said Avtar Singh Kainth, one of the spokespersons of the joint action committee. Engineers Amandeep Jehlvi and Jatinder Garg, also spokespersons of the committee, said, “Further, a dharna will be held outside the PSPCL head office, Patiala, in the last week of January. If anti-power sector activities will still not stopped, all power sector employees, officers and engineers will proceed on a mass leave.” They emphasised that this was the first time engineers, employees and pensioners had come together under one banner. “Therefore, it is not only the responsibility of employees but also of the general public to participate in this struggle to protect Punjab’s public power sector in public interest,” a spokesperson said.

The joint action committee has also received support from the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), particularly on the opposition to the draft Electricity Amendment Bill 2025, the sale of PSPCL properties to generate funds, and delays in enhancing the state’s own power generation capacity. The spokespersons hence said, “farmers’ organisations under the banner of SKM will also participate in this agitation.” The spokespersons said a delegation met the chairman of PSPCL on December 23 and submitted a struggle notice. “The Chairman assured positive steps and has scheduled a meeting with the Joint Action Committee on 30/12/25 on the above-mentioned issues,” they said. Even so, the committee made a direct appeal to the state leadership. “This is yet another appeal to the Chief Minister of Punjab, Bhagwant Mann, to immediately intervene to protect Punjab’s public power sector in the interest of the people,” the spokespersons said.

The draft Electricity Amendment Bill 2025 was sent by the Union power ministry to states for feedback on October 7, triggering strong opposition from power sector employees who view it as a pathway to privatisation. The delay in setting up two 800 MW thermal units at Ropar has been a longstanding issue, while the proposed sale of more than 50 PSPCL and PSTCL properties at prime locations across Punjab has emerged as a fresh controversy since October.

The unrest, however, escalated sharply after October 30, when Ajoy Sinha, CMD of PSPCL and PSTCL, was replaced by another bureaucrat Dr Basant Garg. A series of disciplinary actions followed this. On November 2, Harish Sharma, chief engineer with joint charge of Ropar and Goindwal Sahib thermal plants, was suspended. On November 4, Harjeet Singh, director of generation PSPCL, was removed from his post over alleged irregularities in fuel costs. PSPCL claimed that despite sourcing coal from its own Pachhware mine, government plants were generating power at a cost of Rs 0.75 to Rs 1.25 per unit higher than private plants, leading to losses of several crores. Sources said an inquiry is underway. On November 18, chief engineer Harmohan Kaur, who was earlier denied earned leave and issued a show-cause notice after proceeding on leave without formal sanction. The notice was later withdrawn following a sit-in by over 200 engineers at the director of finance’s office. The most recent trigger was the amendment of recruitment rules for CMDs of PSPCL and PSTCL without consulting stakeholders. On December 23, PSPCL transferred 17 engineers, all members of PSEBEA, including general secretary Ajaypal Singh Atwal, finance secretary Devinder Kumar Goyal and another active member Jatinder Garg. While engineers have accepted the transfer orders, the joint action committee has warned that such actions are “further increasing the rift between the employees and management without easing things out”.

# Beed sarpanch murder: A year later, charges framed against 6 accused



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The murder rocked the Winter Session of the state Assembly in 2024, with the Opposition questioning the law and order in the state. The murder rocked the Winter Session of the state Assembly in 2024, with the Opposition questioning the law and order in the state. More than a year after Santosh Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Maharashtra’s Beed district, was murdered, a special court on Tuesday framed charges against six accused in the case, including Walmik Karad, allegedly a close aide of former Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde, paving the way for the trial.

Deshmukh was murdered on December 9, 2024, and the uproar over his death had led to Munde’s resignation. The prosecution had submitted charges, including stringent sections of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA), along with sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for murder, kidnapping, wrongful restraint, criminal conspiracy, and sections of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act). While Special Public Prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam proposed these charges, the accused denied their involvement and pleaded not guilty. They will now face trial with the examination of witnesses set to begin soon. The next scheduled date is on January 8, 2026.

According to the prosecution, 46-year-old Deshmukh was kidnapped in broad daylight, shoved into a car, and assaulted for around three hours. After he succumbed to the injuries caused by the assault, his body was dumped on a road near his village. The prosecution alleges that Deshmukh was murdered as he had tried to prevent an extortion bid by the accused. It is alleged that the accused, led by Karad, were in the process of extorting Rs 2 crore from a windmill company. Faced with opposition, the accused conspired and killed Deshmukh. The murder rocked the Winter Session of the state Assembly in 2024, with the Opposition questioning the law and order in the state. The police arrested Karad, a relative of the main accused, Vishnu Chate. A group leader in the Parli Nagar Parishad, Karad, was also the president of the Ladki Bahin Yojana in Beed and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) member of the Beed district planning committee. Munde had resigned as

minister in March 2025 over his association with Karad, although he cited health reasons for the stepdown. Karad, who remains in judicial custody, has in the past year sought bail and also challenged the invocation of MCOCA in the case. The Beed court rejected both pleas. On the invocation of MCOCA, the court had, in July 2025, said that the validity of the sanction and other aspects can be looked into during the trial.

# Women from SC & ST categories, primary beneficiaries of MGNREGA in Himachal despite shrinking budget

Women, particularly from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories, have been the primary beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Himachal Pradesh, with more than 60 per cent of the person-days generated under the scheme accruing to them. Although the approved labour budget for Himachal under MGNREGA by the Government of India has declined from Rs 330 lakh in the financial year 2020-21 to Rs 250 lakh in 2025-26, the share of women in total person-days remained largely intact, ranging between 61.05 per cent in 2020-21 and 63.22 per cent in 2025-26.

The total central release for Himachal under MGNREGA has also decreased significantly: from Rs 963.69 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 756.13 crore in 2025-26. Correspondingly, the total person-days generated under the employment guarantee scheme have fallen sharply from Rs 336.19 lakh to Rs 170.05 lakh for the same period., the state has 13.62 lakh active workers out of 28.31 lakh registered workers under the MGNREGA. Of the active workforce, 26.53 per cent belong to the Scheduled Caste category, while 6.24 per cent are from the Scheduled Tribe category. “A senior officer of the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, the implementing authority of MGNREGA in the state, said, “Himachal Pradesh has been among the better-performing states under the scheme despite its relatively small population.” The officer, however, expressed “serious concern” over the new scheme Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G), warning that “normative allocations may decline and adversely affect the implementation”. (Normative allocation is a system where a central authority sets fixed, principled limits (norms) for funding or resource distribution to states/regions, shifting from demand-driven models



# Bangladesh's ex-PM Khaleda Zia's son readies return amid her deteriorating health, says party leader



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Bangladesh's ailing former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, who has been living in self-exile in London for over a decade, is preparing to return home soon, a senior leader of her party has said. The development comes as the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson remains in a critical condition and has been placed on ventilation. BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters late on Monday (December 1, 2025) that the party's acting chairman Mr. Rahman "will return to Bangladesh soon". His remarks followed a meeting of the BNP's top decision-making body, which also discussed the current political situation and strategies for the upcoming election campaign. The Daily Star reported on Tuesday (December 2). BNP has re-emerged as the frontrunner in Bangladesh's changed political landscape after a student-led violent street protest toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5, 2024. According to BNP leaders, Mr. Rahman, who has been in London since 2008, is awaiting the issuance of a new Bangladeshi passport, as he is unwilling to use a one-time travel pass offered by the interim government. At a press conference on Monday (December 1), Election Commission (EC) Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said Mr. Rahman is not registered as a voter in Bangladesh but may do so if permitted by the EC. Meanwhile, security has been tightened around Ms. Zia, who is undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital. Police erected a barricade at the hospital's main gate around 2:00 a.m. on Tuesday (December 2), and hospital sources said more than two dozen police personnel were deployed to ensure the movement of patients and reinforce the former prime minister's security, according to The Daily Star report.

Four members of the Special Security Force (SSF) visited the hospital from midnight and inspected various sections of the building for nearly three hours. The interim government on Monday (December 1) declared Ms. Zia a "very, very important person", enabling SSF deployment for her protection. The BNP chief is currently staying in a cabin on the fourth floor, and hospital officials said surrounding cabins have been vacated due to security protocols. She was admitted to the private hospital on November 23 after being diagnosed with infections affecting her heart and lungs. Four days later, the three-time Prime Minister was shifted to the coronary care unit after several of her health complications worsened. "She is in a very critical condition. There is nothing more to do except seek prayers from the whole nation," he told reporters outside the hospital. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also confirmed that Ms. Zia remains in a critical condition as she continues to receive treatment at the hospital in Dhaka, with both local and international medical specialists involved in her care. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday (December 1) voiced deep concern over Ms. Zia's health and offered all possible support.

also spoke over the weekend with the four bipartisan lawmakers leading the Senate and House Armed Services Committees in which he reiterated "his trust and confidence in the experienced commanders at every echelon," Gen. Caine's office said in a statement. The statement added that the call focused on "addressing the intent and legality of missions to disrupt illicit trafficking networks which threaten the security and stability of the Western Hemisphere." Senate Majority Leader John Thune on Monday broadly defended the operations, echoing the Trump administration position that they're necessary to stem the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States. "I don't think you want to draw any conclusions or deductions until you have all the facts," Thune said of the September 2 strike. "We'll see where they lead." After the Post's report, Mr. Hegseth said Friday on X that "fake news is delivering more fabricated, inflammatory, and derogatory reporting to discredit our incredible warriors fighting to protect the homeland". "Our current operations in the Caribbean are lawful under both US and international law, with all actions in compliance with the law of armed conflict — and approved by the best military and civilian lawyers, up and down the chain of command," Mr. Hegseth wrote. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer called Mr. Hegseth a "national embarrassment" over his response to critics. Schumer added that the armed services committees should demand that Mr. Hegseth release the video of the strike and testify under oath about what happened. Mr. Trump later on Monday met with his national security team to discuss the ongoing operations and potential next steps against Venezuela. The U.S. administration says the strikes are aimed at drug cartels, some of which it claims are controlled by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Mr. Trump also is weighing whether to carry out strikes on the Venezuelan mainland. Mr. Trump on Sunday confirmed that he had recently spoken by phone with Mr. Maduro but declined to detail the conversation. Speaking to supporters in Caracas on Monday, Mr. Maduro said that U.S. pressure has "tested" the country, but that Venezuelans are ready "to defend it and lead it to the path of peace". "We have lived through 22 weeks of aggression that can only be described as psychological terrorism," Mr. Maduro said. The September strike was one in a series carried out by the US military in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean as Trump has ordered the build up a fleet of warships near Venezuela, including the largest US aircraft carrier. More than 80 have been killed the strikes on small boats that the Trump administration alleges smuggle narcotics for drug cartels. Venezuela's National Assembly has announced the launch of an investigation into the lethal strikes carried about by the US. Sunday's announcement by the Assembly's president, Jorge Rodríguez, marked the first time that a Maduro government official explicitly acknowledged that Venezuelans have been killed in the monthslong US military operation. Rodríguez, Maduro's chief negotiator, said a group of lawmakers will come together to investigate "the serious events that led to the murder of Venezuelans in the waters of the Caribbean Sea".

# White House says admiral ordered follow-on strike on alleged drug boat, insists attack was lawful



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The White House has said that a Navy admiral acted "within his authority and the law" when he ordered a second, follow-up strike on an alleged drug boat in the Caribbean Sea in a September U.S. military operation that has come under bipartisan scrutiny. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt offered the justification for the September 2 strike after lawmakers from both parties on Sunday announced support for congressional reviews of U.S. military strikes against vessels suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. The lawmakers cited a published report that Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth issued a verbal order for a second strike that killed survivors on the boat in that September incident.

Ms. Leavitt in her comments to reporters on Monday (December 1, 2025) did not dispute a Washington Post report that there were survivors after the initial strike in the incident. Her explanation came after President Donald Trump a day earlier said that he "wouldn't have wanted that — not a second strike" when asked about the incident. "Secretary Hegseth authorised Admiral Bradley to conduct these kinetic strikes," said Ms. Leavitt, referring to U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Frank Bradley, who at the time was the commander of Joint Special Operations Command. "Admiral Bradley worked well within his authority and the law, directing the engagement to ensure the boat was destroyed and the threat to the United States of America was eliminated." The lawmakers said they did not know whether last week's Post report was true, and some Republicans were sceptical. Still, they said the reports of attacking survivors of an initial missile strike posed serious legal concerns and merited further scrutiny. Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, when asked about a follow-up strike aimed at people no longer able to fight, said Congress does not have information that happened. He noted that leaders of the Armed Services Committee in both the House and Senate have opened investigations. "Obviously, if that occurred, that would be very serious and I agree that that would be an illegal act," Mr. Turner said. Mr. Trump on Sunday vigorously defended Mr. Hegseth. "Pete said he did not order the death of those two men," Trump said. He added, "And I believe him." Ms. Leavitt said Hegseth has spoken with members of Congress who may have expressed some concerns about the reports over the weekend.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

# Pope Leo wraps up Lebanon visit with silent prayer at site of 2020 port explosion

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Pope Leo XIV visited the site of a deadly 2020 Beirut port explosion and offered a silent prayer on the last day of his trip to Lebanon. Pope was also expected to meet with relatives of some of the 218 people killed by the blast, which tore through Beirut and did billions of dollars in damage after hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate detonated in a warehouse. Pope Leo XIV prays at Armenian cathedral in Istanbul as Türkiye, Armenia attempt reconciliation. Five years on, these families are still seeking justice. No official has been convicted in a judicial investigation that has been repeatedly obstructed, angering Lebanese for whom the blast was just the latest crisis after decades of corruption and financial crimes. When he arrived in Lebanon on Sunday (November 30, 2025), Pope urged the country's political leaders to pursue the truth as a means of peace and



reconciliation. The American Pope opened his final day with a visit to the De La Croix hospital, which specialises in care for people with psychological problems, and is expected to close it with a Mass along the Beirut waterfront before returning to Rome.

# NITI Aayog member bats for better access for rural women to markets



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Member of NITI Aayog Ramesh Chand underscored the need for better access to markets to rural women so that they could sell their agricultural produce at a competitive price to ensure their economic empowerment. Speaking at the inaugural session of the three-day 33rd Annual Conference of Agricultural Economics Research Association (AERA) being held at ICAR-National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (ICAR-NARM) here on Monday, he said women contribute over 34% of the total workforce and their participation in the agri-related activities had increased to 12% in the recent years.

Stating that their contribution and productivity were higher when compared to their counterparts (men) in farm-related activities, he said their economic empowerment would go a long way in the overall economic growth of the country.

He suggested gradual reduction in agricultural emissions to mitigate the climate changes to some extent. Elaborating on the large scope for innovations in the agriculture and food systems and innovations in agribusiness, Director General of ICRISAT Himanshu Pathak said there were many challenges in improving the role of women in agriculture as well as tackling the varieties of climate change. Innovations in agriculture could be fostered through enabling environment, collaborations and partnerships alongside increase in investments. He asked agriculture scientists to release climate resilient varieties of different crops to reduce impact on the productivity and production to meet the growing demand for food crops. President of AERA P.K. Joshi, secretary Anjani Kumar,

Deputy Managing Director of NABARD A.K. Sood, former Asia Regional Director of International Potato Center (CIP) Samarendu Mohanty and acting Director of NAARM Gopal Lal and others spoke at the international session of the conference being held with the theme of 'Innovations in Agribusiness, Empowering Women and Climate-Resilient Agriculture'. Later, during the technical sessions, focus was on Innovations in Agribusiness: Empowering Start-ups and Promoting Agricultural Exports; Empowering Women in Agriculture: Bridging Gender Gaps and Advancing Gender Equity; Climate Resilient Agriculture: Strategies for Adapting to Changing Climate and Ensuring Food Security. Agricultural economists, industry personnel, scientists, young scholars and students from across the country participated.

# Putin to visit India for annual summit on December 4 and 5



GNS News Agency, Dec 26 Russian President Vladimir Putin will make a two-day visit to India from December 4 to hold annual summit talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the External Affairs Ministry announced on Friday. Mr. Putin will lead the Russian delegation in the 23rd India-Russia annual summit, the Ministry said. "The forthcoming state visit will provide an opportunity for the leadership of India and Russia to review progress in bilateral relations, set the vision for strengthening the 'special and privileged strategic partnership' and exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," it added. Mr. Putin will

also meet President Droupadi Murmu, who will host a state banquet in his honour. He earlier visited India in 2021, for the 21st India-Russia annual summit.

Russia launched the "Special Military Operation" against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which attracted tough western sanctions on Russia, prompting a reorientation of India-Russia trade ties where energy became a major component for the first time. Russian energy import to India has been a major issue in India-U.S. relations since President Donald Trump imposed punitive sanctions on India in August for purchasing Russian crude oil. India has been calling for an end to the Ukrainian conflict, with Mr. Modi saying, "this is not the time for war". During Mr. Putin's visit, New Delhi is expected to press for addressing the increasing trade deficit caused by India's procurement of large volumes of Russian crude oil. The two sides are also likely to focus on deepening cooperation in areas of civil nuclear energy. The Kremlin said Mr. Putin's visit carried "significant importance" as it offered an opportunity to review the entire spectrum of the special and privileged strategic partnership — from politics, trade and the economy to science, technology, and cultural and humanitarian ties. "The current international and regional issues will also feature prominently in the talks with the Indian delegation led by Prime Minister Modi," it said.

# Hong Kong to set up inquiry into deadly fire



Hong Kong will set up an independent commission of inquiry headed by a judge to determine the cause of a deadly apartment block fire that shocked the city and make recommendations to prevent a similar tragedy from happening again, its leader said Tuesday. John Lee, the chief executive of the Chinese region, pledged to overcome vested interests and pursue accountability for a fire that killed at least 151 people.

"We must uncover the truth, ensure that justice is served, let the deceased rest in peace and provide comfort to the living," he told the media at a 30-minute weekly ap-

pearance completely dominated by last week's blaze. The fire started in scaffolding that had been set up around the Wang Fuk Court complex for maintenance work and spread to seven of the eight towers. They were home to more than 4,600 people and many have been left homeless. A fire truck drives past fire-damaged residential blocks at the Wang Fuk Court housing complex following a deadly fire, in Tai Po, Hong Kong, on November 28, 2025. A fire truck drives past fire-damaged residential blocks at the Wang Fuk Court housing complex following a deadly fire, in Tai Po, Hong Kong, on November 28, 2025. The initial investigation has focused on why the fire expanded so rapidly, overwhelming firefighting efforts. Authorities have cited both high winds and substandard materials used for the maintenance work — both highly flammable foam panels that had been used to block the windows and the green netting — which is required to be flame-retardant — hung around the scaffolding. Mr. Lee said that those responsible had mixed substandard netting with qualified netting "so as to cheat the inspection". Police and the city's anti-corruption authorities have already detained 14 people, including the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company. Thirteen of them have been arrested on suspicion of manslaughter.

# Third Russian tanker attacked in Black Sea, Turkish authority says

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Ankara: A tanker carrying sunflower oil from Russia to Georgia was attacked in the Black Sea, the Turkish maritime authority said Tuesday, days after two Russian "shadow fleet" oil tankers were attacked by Ukrainian naval drones. The Turkish Directorate General of Maritime Affairs said the MIDVOLGA-2 came under attack about 130 kilometers (80 miles) off the Turkish coast. The 13 crew members were unharmed and the vessel has not requested assistance. It was heading toward the Turkish port of Sinop, the maritime authority said in a statement on X. On Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke out against Ukraine's drone attack on two Russian vessels, the Kairos and Virat, saying it signalled a "worrying escalation" of the conflict. "We cannot condone these attacks, which threaten navigational safety, life, and the environment, especially in our own exclusive zone," Erdogan said in a televised address. "We are issuing the necessary warnings to all parties regarding such situations." Friday's attacks against the Kairos and Virat occurred inside Turkey's exclusive economic zone. Crew members on board both vessels were reported to be safe.

The OpenSanctions database, which tracks people or organizations involved in sanctions evasion, describes the vessels as part of a fleet of ships used to evade sanctions imposed on Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine has carried out successful naval strikes against Russian shipping during the war, particularly using



A Russian tanker carrying sunflower oil to Georgia was attacked in the Black Sea near Turkey, days after Ukrainian drone strikes on two Russian "shadow fleet" vessels. Turkey condemned the escalating attacks, warning they endanger navigation and occur within its exclusive economic zone

explosives-packed marine drones. However, Ukrainian missions have previously largely been limited to the waters of the northern Black Sea.



# What is the Kerala masala bond probe | Explained



Once again, the battle over the ‘Masala Bond’ issued by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB)—the Kerala government’s principal funding arm for large infrastructure projects—is hotting up on the southern State’s political scene. In the latest instance, the issue has grabbed headlines with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) issuing show-cause notices to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, former Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac and KIIFB chief executive officer K.M. Abraham citing violation of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) and the directions of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). According to the ED, it issued the notices on November 12, 2025, during the adjudication proceedings related to the alleged violation of FEMA and the RBI directions by “KIIFB and its authorities amounting to ₹466.91 crore.” The specific charge is that this amount, which forms a part of the funds raised through the masala bond, was used to purchase land, an action that was “specifically prohibited.”

What is masala bond?

In a nutshell, a masala bond is an instrument for raising rupee-denominated resources internationally. The name itself is meant to give a local flavour—‘masala’ literally meaning ‘blend of spices’—to the debt instrument. For funding infrastructure projects, KIIFB had raised ₹2,150 crore through the bond issued in March 2019 when Mr. Isaac was Finance Minister in the 2016-2021 CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government. The bonds were listed in the London Stock Exchange and the Singapore Stock Exchange. In July 2024, the current Finance Minister, K.N. Balagopal informed the Kerala Legislative Assembly that KIIFB had repaid the amount in full in March 2024.

ED probe and the controversyThe ED probe has centred around the alleged contravention of FEMA regulations and RBI directions and the end-use of the funds raised

# The need for ‘heart-resilient’ urban planning

On October 8, 2025, the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) observed World Habitat Day in New Delhi under the theme, ‘Urban Solutions to Crisis’. The event spotlighted programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) and the Smart Cities Mission. Yet, beneath the visible challenges of pollution, heat and inequity lies a quieter emergency — a surge in heart disease and diabetes. Cardiovascular ailments are a main reason now for urban deaths, with prevalence rate nearly twice that of rural India, and witnessing more patients under the age of 50 years.Daily life in urban India — long commutes, polluted air, shrinking green spaces, and rising stress — has resulted in rising health risks. Access to care remains limited, even as cities promise opportunity. Yet, few have addressed this crisis through deliberate, evidence-based planning. The distribution of health care still follows profit, not need. Hospitals cluster where land values and paying populations are high, while vast areas remain underserved. Market logic, not medical necessity, continues to decide who receives care and who does not.

Looking at planningAs India urbanises, fragmented planning risks locking in sedentary lifestyles, pollution and inequity. Integrating heart health into urban planning through coordinated land use, transport, housing, and green space is now essential. For decades, development has operated in silos: transport divorced from housing, green initiatives sidelined, and health rarely considered. Expressways have encouraged car dependence, fast-food zones have caused unhealthy diets, and traffic congestion has given rise to rising pollution. Integrated planning offers a remedy. Compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods can cut commutes, reduce emissions and promote active living. The World Health Organization (WHO)’s Healthy Cities Network shows that embedding health in governance lowers chronic disease risks. Reviving such an approach in India, supported by digital tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled air quality and heat mapping, can make cities healthier and more resilient. Heart-healthy planning rests on interconnected pillars that address multiple crises at once and complement national missions such as the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), Smart Cities Mission, and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). There are some steps

First, walkability and Active mobility: safe, shaded footpaths, cycle lanes and pedestrian crossings promote movement and lower risks of hypertension and diabetes.Second, green infrastructure: tree cover, parks and urban forests cool neighbourhoods and filter air, reducing heat stress and pollution-linked heart attacks.Third mixed land use: combining residential, commercial and recreational areas reduces commute times and car dependence, encouraging more active living.Fourth, public transport systems: affordable, clean-energy transit improves access, reduces emissions, and shortens sedentary travel time.Fifth, healthy food ecosystems: local markets, community gardens and restrictions on junk-food advertising help shift diets toward heart-friendly choices. Together, these measures amplify impact: green, walkable neighbourhoods with reliable transit cut pollution while improving activity, diet, and community connection — critical determinants of cardiovascular health.Tackling invisible urban threats

Many urban health risks remain invisible yet deadly. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) from vehicles and industry triggers heart attacks and strokes, while concrete-heavy layouts trap heat, heightening cardiovascular stress. Poor water and waste systems worsen metabolic disorders. Without intervention, Asia could see a 91% rise in cardiovascular mortality by 2050.Holistic planning offers practical remedies. Expanding tree cover enhances natural ventilation, renewable energy cuts emissions, and modern water and waste systems reduce toxic exposure. Digital innovations — AI-enabled sensors, citizen-reporting apps, and urban heat-mapping tools — can make these risks visible and actionable.Embedding such systems within urban planning frameworks aligns with WHO’s call to make health central to urban governance.Equity must anchor every urban health

through the bonds. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), in its State Finances Audit Report for the year ending March 2019, had observed that the RBI nod for the masala bond was questionable and “appear to be in violation of the Constitution and encroachment on the powers of the Centre.”The row over masala bonds is part of a broader debate over ‘off-budget’ borrowings by KIIFB and its consequences for the State’s overall borrowing limit. The KIIFB borrowings have been a matter of contention with the Centre treating them as direct liabilities of the State, much to the dismay of the Kerala government. Repeated requests that they be treated as contingent liabilities have not produced any result.After Dr. Isaac had moved the High Court following an ED summons in 2023, the Court had asked the ED whether it had verifiable information for continuing its investigation. The Court had also orally observed that the agency was entitled to conduct a proper inquiry, but it could not conduct a roving inquiry.

What is the political angle involved?

While the Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) has alleged corruption in the floating of the bonds, the LDF government has consistently maintained that the ED probe is motivated by the political agenda of the BJP government. Dr. Isaac has repeatedly stated that all transactions were in accordance with RBI guidelines on External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) and conducted with RBI approval. On occasion, KIIFB too has maintained that it issued the masala bond “under the approval route and in consonance with all the regulations in this regard.” Over the years, the LDF government has drawn flak from the Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) for the interest rate of 9.723% which the latter described as exorbitant. The government has countered the charge stating that it was the best rate available at the time. The rate in the internal bond market had stood at 10.15%. The rate for the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority’s own masala bond had stood at 10.72% then, according to the government.The CPI(M) also accuses the ED of reviving the controversy ahead of elections in Kerala. Both Dr. Isaac and CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan have gone on record stating that it has been true for the 2020 local body elections, the 2021 Assembly elections and the 2023 Lok Sabha polls.

What next?The show-cause notices issued to the Chief Minister, Dr. Isaac and Mr. Abraham do not require them to appear in person. Dr. Isaac has stated that a response to the notice would be finalised after the Chief Minister, who is abroad, returns.



strategy. Low-income communities endure the worst conditions — polluted air, poor connectivity, limited greenery and scarce health care. The India State-Level Disease Burden Study reports a 2.3-fold increase in cardiovascular disease among marginalised groups. Even well-intentioned projects risk “green gentrification”, where parks and greenways displace those they were meant to benefit. Truly healthy cities must prioritise vulnerable areas, conduct equity audits, and involve communities in planning. Such participation prevents disparities, builds trust, and embeds prevention into daily life — strengthening campaigns such as Tobacco-Free Youth 3.0 by creating environments that make healthy choices easier.An urban turning pointIndia’s cities stand at the crossroads. Unchecked expansion could lock in unhealthy lifestyles for decades, but health-centred planning can turn them into models of resilience. Imagine Delhi’s shaded corridors reducing pollution for walkers, Chennai’s cycling routes tackling childhood obesity, or Surat’s compact, transit-linked neighbourhoods lowering stress and emissions.Building on the NUHM’s outreach and the Asian Development Bank’s \$10-billion urban investment plan announced in 2025, India can embed heart health into its development agenda. Collaboration among the MoHUA, health agencies, academia and civil society can align land use, mobility, and environment with measurable well-being outcomes. Updating planning curricula, conducting digital equity audits and engaging youth through Urban October and beyond can help shape a new generation of health-con

# National Guard shooting suspect radicalised in U.S., Homeland Secretary says

U.S. authorities believe the Afghan immigrant accused of ambushing National Guard members in Washington, D.C., was not radicalized until after he came to the United States, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said on Sunday (November 30, 2025).Speaking on NBC’s “Meet the Press” and ABC’s “This Week,” Ms. Noem said authorities think alleged shooter Rahmanullah Lakanwal was already living in Washington state when he became radicalized. Investigators are seeking more information from family members and others, Noem said.Authorities identified Lakanwal, 29, as the suspect in a Wednesday shooting that took place just blocks away from the White House and which killed one National Guard member and critically wounded another. After the shooting, U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration pointed to a lack of vetting of Afghans and other foreign nationals during the term of former President Joe Biden, although Lakanwal was granted asylum under Trump.Mr. Trump told reporters on Sunday his administration could pause asylum admissions into the United States for an extended period. “No time limit, but it could be a long time,” Mr. Trump told reporters on Air Force One. “We have enough problems. We don’t want those people.”

# The new action plan on AMR needs a shot in the arm



India’s new National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR 2.0) — (2025-29) — has been released at a time when Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is affecting human health, veterinary practices, aquaculture, agriculture, waste systems and the entire food chain. Antibiotic residues, resistant organisms and environmental discharge connect these sectors in powerful ways. AMR does not remain confined to hospitals. It moves through soil, water, livestock, markets and food systems, making it a true One Health challenge. Therefore, any national plan must be matched by real and coordinated action across all levels of governance.The evolution, from the first action planThe first National Action Plan on AMR, launched in 2017, was a significant step forward. It brought AMR into national consciousness, encouraged multi-sectoral participation, improved laboratory networks, expanded national surveillance and supported stewardship. It also placed AMR firmly within a One Health framework, recognising the links between human health, animal health and the environment.

Despite this progress, implementation during the first plan period remained limited at the State level. Only a small group of States — Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Sikkim and Punjab — developed formal State Action Plans, and only a few moved meaningfully into execution. The majority continued to rely on fragmented activities within individual sectors: State-wide, multisectoral One Health structures did not take shape in most parts of the country.This slow uptake was not due to a shortage of national effort, but because the major determinants of AMR fall under State jurisdiction. Health administration, hospital functioning, pharmacy regulation, veterinary oversight, agricultural antibiotic practices, food-chain monitoring and waste governance are controlled by State departments. National guidance alone cannot create uniform implementation when the operational levers sit elsewhere.

India’s broader public health experience shows that real progress happens only when the Centre and States work within a structured, mutually accountable system. The National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme is a clear example: its achievements arise from regular joint reviews, shared monitoring missions and clearly defined roles across levels of government. The National Health Mission follows similar principles, where coordinated planning, dedicated funding signals and periodic performance assessments enable States to turn national priorities into on-ground action. The NAP-AMR 2.0 represents a more mature and implementation-oriented framework when compared with the first plan. It moves beyond broad intent and outlines clearer timelines, responsibilities and resource planning. An important advancement is the recognition that India cannot address AMR without meaningful participation from the private sector, which delivers a major proportion of health care and veterinary services. The plan also strengthens its scientific base by placing greater emphasis on innovation — rapid diagnostics, point-of-care tools, alternatives to antibiotics and improved environmental monitoring.It deepens its One Health perspective, giving more attention to food-system pathways, waste management and environmental contamination. Surveillance structures are more integrated

# The AIADMK is on a weak footing



Last week, veteran leader K.A. Sengottaiyan, who was formerly with the All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), joined the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) led by actor Vijay in Tamil Nadu, which is set to go to the polls next year.Mr. Sengottaiyan, who is a former Transport and School Education Minister, was expelled from the AIADMK about a month ago. He felt sidelined by party general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami and resigned from his post as MLA of Gobichettipalayam constituency in Erode district before joining the fledgling TVK.

The move did not surprise many people. Mr. Sengottaiyan had only two options: to either walk over to the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) or join the TVK. He would have probably found the first option unacceptable, having been trained in anti-DMK politics for years. When there was pandemonium in the Tamil Nadu Assembly on March 25, 1989, the then Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, alleged that Mr. Sengottaiyan had hit his face and broken his spectacles. On the same day, AIADMK supremo and the Leader of the Opposition, Jayalalithaa, too, was attacked. When she attempted to exit the Assembly during the melee, a DMK Minister held the end of her sari. Against such a backdrop, joining the TVK was Mr. Sengottaiyan’s best option as Mr. Vijay has, from the beginning of his political career, presented himself as a critic of the DMK.Even though Mr. Sengottaiyan’s critics feel that the senior leader has lowered his stature by joining the TVK, a recent entrant into the political arena, the former Minister, who was elected to the Assembly nine times since 1977, will be an asset to the TVK. There is no leader in the TVK who can match Mr. Sengottaiyan’s experience in politics and election management. Mr. Sengottaiyan has been appointed the chief coordinator of TVK’s high-level administrative committee and organisation secretary for four western districts, traditionally known as AIADMK strongholds. By making him in charge of four districts, Mr. Vijay has signalled that he, like the DMK, is going to make things difficult for the principal Opposition party in the elections.

The woes of the AIADMK seem to continue: in recent months, it has lost some of its prominent second-rung leaders, including former MPs A. Anwhar Raajhaa and V. Maitreyan, to the DMK. Nearly eight months have gone since the AIADMK and the BJP announced the revival of

across human, veterinary, agricultural and environmental sectors, creating a harmonised national approach.In terms of governance, the NAP-AMR 2.0 introduces a higher level of national oversight by placing intersectoral supervision under NITI Aayog through a dedicated Coordination and Monitoring Committee. It repeatedly stresses that every State and Union Territory should establish State AMR Cells and prepare State Action Plans aligned with the national framework, supported by a national dashboard for progress reporting. These developments signal that AMR is evolving from a technical health issue to a national development priority requiring multi-departmental engagement.

Where the new plan falls short

Despite these important developments and the stronger emphasis on State-level implementation, the fundamental weakness of the first plan remains unchanged. The plan stresses that States must develop AMR Action Plans and establish AMR Cells, but it does not create any mechanism to ensure that they do so. There is no formal Centre-State AMR platform, no joint review mechanism, no statutory requirement for States to notify or implement their plans and no financial pathway — such as NHM-linked incentives — that could anchor sustained State commitment. In a federal system where the key determinants of AMR — health services, veterinary oversight, agricultural antibiotic use, food-chain safety and waste regulation — lie almost entirely within State jurisdiction, this is the pivotal gap. Without a structured method for political engagement, administrative follow-through and shared accountability, even a well-designed national plan risks remaining a technical document rather than a functional national programme.The AMR policy cannot succeed through guidance alone. Unless India builds a mechanism that brings the Centre and the States into a common implementation framework, the NAP-AMR 2.0 will struggle to convert national intent into measurable national outcomes. The need for a coordinated mechanism

To make the NAP-AMR 2.0 effective, India needs a clear architecture that brings political leadership, senior administrators and sectoral departments from all States into a unified system. A national-State AMR council, chaired by the Union Health Minister and guided by NITI Aayog, could provide the platform for regular review, joint decision-making and coordinated problem-solving across human health, veterinary sectors, agriculture, aquaculture, food systems and environmental regulation.State engagement would also strengthen if the Union Government formally requested each State to prepare and notify its AMR Action Plan, with timelines and annual reviews. Experience from the National Health Mission (NHM) and tuberculosis (TB) programmes shows that high-level communication, especially through Chief Secretaries, can significantly shift administrative attention.Financial mechanisms should follow. Even modest conditional grants under the NHM can drive improvements in surveillance, stewardship, infection control and laboratory strengthening. When funding signals priority, States respond with administrative energy and policy focus.The NAP-AMR 2.0 provides the scientific and strategic foundation India needs. But its success will depend entirely on how effectively national and State systems work together. AMR is driven by real-world practices along the entire One Health continuum — from hospitals and farms to markets, food chains and wastewater systems. Without strong State participation, national plans cannot have national impact.India has an opportunity now to build a coordinated and accountable Centre-State model for AMR control. If such a system is established, the country can achieve measurable progress and set an international example. Without it, even the most well-crafted national plan may remain a document of intentions rather than a framework for action. With stronger coordination, political commitment and sustained support across States and sectors, the NAP-AMR 2.0 can become a turning point in India’s AMR jour-

# Prompt Injection attack poses critical risk business data

their relationship, yet they have not been able to attract any party with a considerable following to their side. If this situation continues, it is going to be difficult for the combine to take on the DMK-led front, which has been able to keep its flock together.When the two parties announced the renewal of their ties on April 10, their proponents predicted that they would secure a vote share of 41%. The believed that both parties would retain their allies from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections through 2026 as well. It is now clear that the AIADMK is not going to get the support of all the constituents of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, which faced the electorate in April-May last year. One of the main reasons is that the Pattali Makkal Katchi, founded by S. Ramadoss in 1989, is heading towards a split. Mr. Ramadoss’s year-long political rift with his son and former Union Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss has only widened. The Election Commission’s recent decision formally recognising Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss as the party president is likely to force the founder to chart his own course.In the BJP, former State president K. Annamalai has often made remarks that have not been palatable either to the AIADMK

# Prompt Injection attack poses critical risk business data

Hyderabad: A recently reported critical vulnerability, known as prompt injection, is threatening to become a major risk for modern businesses that depend on Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems, according to reports released by cyber security authorities in Hyderabad. This attack targets the language models that power AI chatbots, which are central to customer services. It allows cybercriminals to bypass safety rules and manipulate AI systems into revealing confidential internal or customer data.AI models operate based on the instructions users give them, known as prompts. Cybercriminals are now using these prompts in harmful ways. By inserting cleverly crafted malicious instructions, attackers can manipulate AI systems into revealing information that should remain protected.In simple terms, it involves tricking the AI with specific words or phrases and confusing it into leaking internal company documents, customer records or system details. This technique, which is spreading fast among cybercriminals, is one of the fastest growing attack methods in the AI-driven sector.According to cybercrime authorities, many companies integrate AI tools directly with sensitive internal systems, CRM databases, support-ticket dashboards, employee information and financial records.“Ideally, this data should remain completely inaccessible to end users. However, a single deceptive command from a hacker may be enough for the AI to reveal confidential data, posing a high-risk breach for organisations,” said the Hyderabad Cybercrime Police.



# New HIV cases highest in Mizoram; fresh infections drop nationally by 48% from 2010-2024: report



New HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, also known as 'annual new HIV incidence rate', stood at 0.05 nationally in 2024, a report released on Monday (December 1, 2025) said. Mizoram (0.90) reported the highest estimated new HIV incidence, followed by Nagaland (0.42) and Tripura (0.28), the India HIV estimate 2025 technical report further said. Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya were other States with an incidence rate of 0.20 or higher. Annual new cases declined nationally by around 48.70% between 2010 and 2024, but increased by more than 400% in Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. Globally, annual new infections had declined by 40% between 2010 and 2024.

The report added that the annual AIDS-related mortality rate per 1,00,000 population was estimated nationally at 2.32, with Manipur topping the list, followed by Mizoram and Nagaland. "Annual AIDS-related deaths declined by 81.40%

between 2010 and 2024. AIDS-related deaths have declined between 2010 and 2024 in nearly all States/Union Territories, except in Chandigarh, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura, where more PLHIV [People Living with HIV] died due to AIDS-related causes during 2024 as compared to 2010. Globally, annual AIDS-related deaths had declined by 54% between 2010 and 2024," said the report.

V. Hekali Zhimomi, Additional Secretary and Director-General, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) noted in the report that the 2025 round of HIV estimates reaffirms that the epidemic remains low in the country. "Between 2020 and 2024, the country has achieved a 19.4% decline in annual new HIV infections, a 30.6% reduction in AIDS-related mortalities, and a 63.7% drop in vertical transmission rates. In comparison, global reductions during the same period stands at 13.3%, 14.9%, and 16.7%, respectively," she noted. The report further estimated that India had around 25.61 lakh PLHIV in 2024. The adult HIV prevalence was 0.20% — 0.21% among males and 0.19% among females — and among the young population (15-24 years) 0.06%. Two States — Mizoram and Nagaland — had an estimated HIV prevalence of more than 1%. Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Telangana, and Meghalaya had estimated adult prevalence higher than 0.40%. "Maharashtra (3.99 lakh) had the highest PLHIV size followed by Andhra Pradesh (3.10 lakh) and Karnataka (2.91 lakh). Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Bihar, Gujarat, and Punjab were other States with estimated PLHIV in the range of 1 lakh to 2 lakh. Together, these nine States have 74% of the total PLHIV burden in India," added the report.

# All you need to know about: Crohn’s disease



Digestion is a process in our bodies that most of us take for granted -- we eat our food, and then let the body do it's work. But if the digestive tract isn't as healthy as it should be, it could cause a number of issues. One condition pertaining to the digestive tract, is Crohn's disease. And this week being marked as awareness week for Crohn's, here is all you need to know about it.

What is Crohn's disease?

Crohn's disease is a long-term condition in which the digestive tract becomes swollen and inflamed. The digestive tract is the long, hollow tube from the mouth to the anus, comprising the esophagus, stomach, small intestine and large intestine. While Crohn's disease can affect in part of the digestive tract, it is most often the small and large intestine that are affected. Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are two common conditions that fall under the category of inflammatory bowel disease. Crohn's disease is named after Burrill B. Crohn, an American gastroenterologist who first described the condition in 1932, along with his colleagues, Leon Ginzburg and Gordon D. Oppenheimer. The type of Crohn's disease depends on which part of the digestive system is affected. In ileocolitis, the most common form, the end or lower part of the small intestine and part of the large intestine are affected. Ileitis affects only the ileum or small intestine, while colitis affects only the large intestine (colon). Gastroduodenal is when the stomach and the beginning of the small intestine (duodenum) are affected. In jejunitis, the upper half of the small intestine (jejunum) is affected, while in perianal disease, there is inflammation around the anus.

Why does it occur?

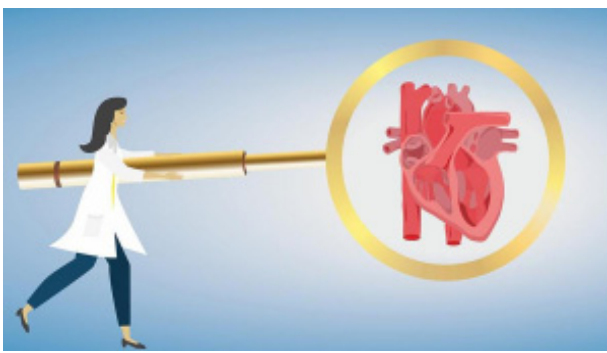
The exact cause of Crohn's disease is not fully understood as yet, but researchers believe several factors may play a role in its development. It is thought that the disease may be linked to the immune system: a normal immune system reaction triggers inflammation that eventually goes away, but in atypical reaction, bacteria that is normally found in the gut may be attacked too, and the inflammation from this immune response may not go away. Crohn's disease can affect people at any age. However, it is commonly diagnosed in people during their late teens to early thirties. Genes may also play a part: having certain genes could predispose people to getting Crohn's. As inflammatory bowel disease runs in families, those with a relative that have the disease have a higher risk. Smoking is another risk factor for Crohn's disease. Common symptoms of Crohn's disease include: frequent diarrhoea, stomach pain and cramps,

# Diabetic women are more prone to having cardiovascular diseases compared to men: Expert

Diabetic women are more prone to having cardiovascular diseases compared to men, said Chitra Selvan, head of the Department of Endocrinology, Ramaiah Medical Centre. Speaking at the international conference on 'Ayurveda and Integrative Approaches to Obesity and Metabolic Syndrome', she said, "Generally, it is believed that heart disease is a thing that is more common in men. But if you have diabetes, the risk of having cardiovascular disease increases four to five times in women as compared to a two-time increase in men."

She added that women are probably at more risk of cardiovascular disease if they are getting treated for Type 2 diabetes. Estrogen protection "What it essentially means is that the protection offered by estrogen in terms of cardiovascular for women is almost erased when a woman gets diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. So women are probably at risk of cardiovascular disease if they are getting treated for Type 2 diabetes," Dr. Selvan added.

Dr. Selvan, who delivered a talk on 'Bridging the Gap: Women-Centric Pathways in Metabolic Health, Obesity and Dyslipidemia', said that women with diabetes are at more risk of getting coronary artery disease, stroke, dementia or end-stage renal disease compared to men. "If you are trying to look at complications related to diabetes, and you are trying to look at the odds of getting complications based on



whether you are woman, you can see that the odds of getting coronary artery disease, stroke, dementia or end-stage renal disease increases if you are woman with diabetes versus a man," she said. PCOS and diabetes Dr. Selvan added that women who have Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) at a young age are at an increased risk of getting Type 2 diabetes and also cardiovascular diseases.

The two-day conference brought together leading experts from Ayurveda, modern medicine and allied scientific disciplines to deliberate on emerging challenges in the management of metabolic disorders.

# Why does India need bioremediation? | Explained



Human waste is leading to a decaying world where access to clean air, water or soil is becoming increasingly difficult. The solution is two-pronged - stop making more waste and clean up the waste already made.

What is bioremediation?

Bioremediation literally means "restoring life through biology." It harnesses microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi, algae and plants to sequester or transform toxic substances such as oil, pesticides, plastics, or heavy metals. These organisms metabolise these pollutants as food, breaking them down into harmless by-products such as water, carbon dioxide, or organic acids. In some cases, they can convert toxic metals into less dangerous forms that no longer leach into the soil or groundwater. In situ bioremediation, where treatment happens directly at the contaminated site — think oil-eating bacteria sprayed on an ocean spill. Ex situ bioremediation, where contaminated soil or water is removed, treated in a controlled facility, and returned once cleaned.

Modern bioremediation combines traditional microbiology with cutting-edge biotechnology. First, new biotechnologies are enabling humans to gain unprecedented insight into biology, allowing them to identify biomolecules with useful characteristics. Second, these technologies allow humans to replicate these biomolecules under desired conditions of use, such as sewage plants or agricultural lands. For example, genetically modified (GM) microbes are designed to degrade tough chemicals like plastics or oil residues that natural species struggle with. Synthetic biology also allows for "biosensing", organisms that change colour or fluorescence when they detect toxins, providing early warnings of contamination.

Why does India need bioremediation?

India's rapid industrialisation has come at a heavy environmental cost. Although pollution has been reducing, rivers such as the Ganga and Yamuna receive untreated sewage and industrial effluents daily. Oil leaks, pesticide residues, and heavy-metal contamination threaten both ecosystems and public health. Traditional clean-up technologies are expensive, energy-intensive, and often create secondary pollution. Bioremediation offers a cheaper, scalable, and sustainable alternative, especially in a country where vast stretches of land and water are affected but resources for remediation are limited. Moreover, India's diverse biodiversity is a huge advantage. Indigenous microbes adapted to local conditions, such as high temperatures,

# Why EC note on SIR was an early warning, citizenship became key issue in SC



The removal of the Citizenship Act reference and Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu's cautionary note are significant for two key reasons. First, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?in Bihar triggered concerns among voters and the Opposition about disenfranchisement and a backdoor route to a National Register of Citizens (NRC), the creation of which was mandated by the 2003 amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955. As The Indian Express reported, there was widespread panic in the state as voters scrambled to get their papers in order.

Even though the reference to the Citizenship Act was deleted and did not reflect in the final order, official records bear out the Commission's initial reasoning. Second, Sandhu's warning was prescient: the first week of rollout in Bihar saw chaos on the ground, a scramble for documents, and confusion among voters, leading the EC to tweak the process a few times. The EC had given an indicative list of 11 documents that electors could submit; importantly the list did not include Aadhaar, Voter ID and ration card, which are widely held.

The Supreme Court eventually ordered the EC to accept Aadhaar as an identity document. But this was after the enumeration phase and in the midst of the one-month claims and objections period when electors could submit documents. The Commission had ordered the SIR on June 24, in a break from the practice of the last two decades, when electoral rolls have been revised annually and before Lok Sabha and Assembly elections by making additions and deletions to the existing list of electors. In an intensive revision, the rolls are prepared afresh. Since electoral rolls were digitised about two decades ago, the commission has not felt the need to carry out an intensive revision till now. The EC relied on Article 324 of the Constitution, from which it derives its powers, and Article 326, which entitles adult citizens to be registered as electors, in its June 24 order and in subsequent submissions before the Supreme Court while defending the SIR.

The exercise has faced questions and criticism for seemingly conducting a check of citizenship, akin to the government's proposed National Register of Citizens. The petitioners have argued that matters relating to citizenship fall under the Ministry of Home Affairs' ambit under the Citizenship Act, and not the EC. The Commission has countered that it is well within its powers to determine the citizenship status of those applying to be electors, relying on Article 324, Article 326 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950. However, the draft order dated June 24, 2025, shows that the EC had initially invoked the Citizenship Act and cited the absence of any intensive revision since the 2003 amendment to justify launching a nationwide SIR.

Till the 2003 amendment to the Citizenship Act, any-

salinity, or acidity, can outperform imported strains in environmental recovery.

Where does India stand today?

Bioremediation is gaining traction in India, though still largely in pilot phases. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has supported several projects through its Clean Technology Programme, encouraging partnerships between universities, public research institutions, and industries. CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute has a mandate to propose and implement programmes related to bioremediation. Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology have experimented with a nanocomposite material synthesised from cotton that can be used to mop up oil spills and others have identified bacteria that can consume toxic pollutants in soils. Startups are entering the space too. Firms like Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL) and Econirral Biotech offer microbial formulations for soil and wastewater treatment. However, widespread adoption faces challenges - technical ones such as a lack of site-specific knowledge and the complex nature of pollutants, and regulatory ones such as a lack of unified bioremediation standards.

What are other countries doing?

In many advanced economies, bioremediation is a part of mainstream environmental management. For example, Japan integrates microbial and plant-based cleanup systems into its urban waste strategy. The European Union funds cross-country projects that use microbes to tackle oil spills and restore mining sites. China has made bioremediation a priority under its soil pollution control framework, using genetically improved bacteria to restore industrial wastelands.

Opportunities and risks

The opportunities for India are immense. Bioremediation can help restore rivers, reclaim land, and clean industrial sites, while creating jobs in biotechnology, environmental consulting, and waste management. It can also integrate with the government's Swachh Bharat Mission, Namami Gange, and other green technology initiatives. But risks remain. The introduction of genetically modified organisms into open environments need to be strictly monitored to prevent unintended ecological effects. Inadequate testing or poor containment or monitoring can create fresh problems while solving old ones. Public engagement will be necessary to allow the smooth adoption of new technologies, and their further monitoring. India will need new biosafety guidelines, certification systems, and trained personnel to scale this technology responsibly. The way forward To realise the full potential of bioremediation, India needs to strengthen a few area. First, there is a need to develop national standards for bioremediation protocols and microbial applications. Second, building regional bioremediation hubs linking universities, industries, and local governments would enable better understanding of local issues and identifying appropriate technologies for their resolution. This can be implemented through support for local startups and community projects through the DBT-BIRAC ecosystem. Finally, public engagement would raise awareness that microbes can be allies, not threats, in environmental restoration.

one born in India between January 26, 1950 and July 1, 1987 was entitled to citizenship by birth, and those born after July 1, 1987 needed at least one parent to be a citizen at the time of their birth. The 2003 amendment, brought by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, introduced the concept of an "illegal migrant" and made citizenship by birth for anyone born after December 2, 2004 contingent on either both parents being citizens or one parent being a citizen and the other not being an illegal migrant. The Bihar SIR concluded on September 30 with the publication of the final electoral roll, which saw the electorate shrink by 6%. The EC on October 27 announced the SIR in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, with a total of 51 crore electors. The exercise was to culminate with the publication of the electoral roll on February 7, but the EC on November 30 extended it by one week. The decision comes in the wake of the several reported deaths, including by suicide, of Booth Level Officers engaged in the exercise and slow progress of matching the electoral rolls to the last intensive revision rolls in some states. Hearing petitions seeking postponement of the exercise, the Supreme Court had on November 26 said it could order the EC to extend the deadline if a case is made out.

# Ranveer Singh apologises amidst backlash for his Kantara mimicry

Mumbai: Actor Ranveer Singh, who is facing massive backlash for mimicking Rishab Shetty's Daiva from "Kantara Chapter 1" has now apologized for his act. Ranveer tried to recreate the sequence from the film where Rishab is possessed by the Chamundi daiva during one of the ceremonies of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) 2025.

Post the event, the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) even lodged an official complaint against Ranveer for allegedly hurting religious sentiments. Now, the 'Dhurandhar' actor has issued a heartfelt apology, saying that all he wanted to do was to show his appreciation for Rishab Shetty's exceptional performance in the film as an actor.

Ranveer wrote on his Instagram Stories, "My intention was to highlight Rishab's incredible performance in the film. Actor to actor, I know how much it would take to perform that particular scene in the way that he did, for which he has my utmost admiration. (sic)."

He further stressed that he has deep respect for every culture, tradition, and belief in our country. "If I've hurt anyone's sentiments, I sincerely apologise," Ranveer's apology read. Ranveer landed in trouble after a video from the event went viral on social media, where he was heard calling Chamundi daiva a "Female ghost". Showing his appreciation for the movie, Ranveer said, "I watched Kantara Chapter 1 in theatres, and Rishab, it was an outstanding performance, especially when the female ghost (Chamundi daiva) enters your body that shot was amazing." After this, he went on to imitate the scene in which Chamundi daiva possesses Rishabh.



## ‘Sure of remarkable change in IMF’s assessment of Indian statistics’



The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) assessment of India's official statistics should improve significantly once the ongoing review of the key macroeconomic indicators is complete, according to Mridul Saggarr, Chairman of the Technical Advisory Committee on the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). "We started this workshop with a note about IMF assessment. You wait for next year's assessment — I am sure there will be a remarkable change in the assessment," Saggarr said on Tuesday at a workshop organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Last month, the IMF had retained its overall 'B' grade on India's official statistics and 'C' grade for the GDP data, while acknowledging the government's ongoing effort to update data such as GDP and Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Noting that the IMF's three main concerns had to do with the old base of the GDP, the lack of double-deflation method to compute real GDP, and statistical discrepancies, Narendra Kumar Santoshi, MoSPI's Director General of Central Statistics, said at the workshop that the new data series were addressing these issues to the "best possible extent". Commenting specifically on the new CPI series, which will be released on February 12, 2026, Santoshi said it will be "fully aligned with international standards". As part of the statistical overhaul, MoSPI is changing the basket of goods and services on which CPI inflation is calculated, along with several other methodological alterations. Currently, a basket based on the 2011-12 household consumption expenditure survey is used; this will be updated to a 2023-24 basket, with the base year being updated to 2024 from 2012. Further, GDP data is also set for a big revision, with the base year moving to 2022-23 from 2011-12 as well as new data sources being used to more accurately measure the final value of goods and services.

According to MoSPI Secretary Saurabh Garg, while its too early to comment on the impact of the various changes being made to the new GDP series — which will be released on February 27, 2026 starting with data for October-December — "we don't expect much changes from what our previous expectations are". BN Goldar, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics responsible for making suggestions to revise the GDP data,

added at the workshop that "we will produce as good an estimate as possible". The two latest GDP growth prints of 7.8 per cent for April-June and 8.2 per cent for July-September have led to economists raising questions about certain methodological aspects. While Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said at the workshop that "half-baked" questions sow seeds of doubt in people's mind about the numbers, Niti Aayog Vice Chancellor Suman Bery said it was important to have a "series of fierce and knowledgeable critiques" of the GDP methodology as that would lead to improvements. "I think the Indian public is owed a responsible discussion so that after this enormous amount of work, the issues of — within a range — the credibility of the data can be set aside," Bery said.

As part of the IIP revision, which is used to calculate industrial growth, MoSPI has already released a discussion paper in which it has proposed to swap from its sample factories that have shut down with new ones. On Tuesday, officials from the statistics ministry said it is also being discussed if the fixed panel of factories used to calculate industrial production can be expanded every year. Another discussion paper on the same will be published for comments. "The main criticism of the IIP has been divergence in NAS (National Accounts Statistics) growth, ASI (Annual Survey of Industries) growth, and IIP growth. But it should be noted that the ASI frame is revised and updated every year and using this frame ASI estimates are compiled. But for IIP, we have a fixed panel of factories... Some factories get closed and new factories may emerge with significant production, or a factory which was not selected in the base year may become a significant producer of an item. To account for this underestimation by IIP... it is proposed to augment the factories annually in the IIP compilation and align it with ASI numbers," Ankita Singh, a Deputy Director General in MoSPI, said.

Mridul Saggarr, head of the IIP review committee, added that the thinking at the moment was to add new factories in the panel only once a year and only in cases where it's a "very significant effect coming from entirely new production processes or new, substantive production that might get missed. So, that call will have to be taken once a year and not as a rule, but as an exception, was our thinking." However, when asked if changes being made for the new IIP series will put to bed the criticism the data attracts, Saggarr and Ila Patnaik — a member of the IIP review committee and Aditya Birla Group's Chief Economist — said that was unlikely to be the case. "To imagine that anything will solve all the problems is never going to be true because new ones will arise... The rapid change that you are seeing in the economy, it has to lead to new issues. When we look at what the rest of the world does or the guidance we have from international best practices, sometimes we actually don't have that kind of guidance because no other country which is at our level of per capita income and so poor is growing so rapidly... But I think we are making a lot of progress," Patnaik said.

## Amid rising complaints of stuck refunds, Income Tax Dept cites high ineligible claims; asks taxpayers to file revised ITRs

The Department said it has contacted such taxpayers through SMS and email under the NUDGE campaign to correct such errors for which the revised returns need to be filed by December 31. The Department said it has contacted such taxpayers through SMS and email under the NUDGE campaign to correct such errors for which the revised returns need to be filed by December 31. Amid surging complaints by taxpayers over stuck income tax refunds for the ongoing assessment year 2025-26, the Income Tax Department on Tuesday said certain taxpayers have "claimed ineligible refunds by availing deductions or exemptions to which they are not entitled, resulting in understatement of income". The Department said it has contacted such taxpayers through SMS and email under the NUDGE campaign to correct such errors for which the revised returns need to be filed by December 31.

Sources said the Income Tax Department had been scrutinising high-value deductions and refunds above the threshold of Rs 50,000 but it has now started to issue refunds which is likely to reflect in the next 10 days.

"It is advised that the concerned taxpayers review their Income-tax Returns (ITRs), verify the correctness of their deduction and exemption claims, and revise their returns, if required, within the prescribed time by 31 December 2025, so as to avoid further enquiries in the matter," it said. Taxpayers and chartered accountants have taken to social media to complain about the stuck refunds, with many even claiming that their refunds have been stuck despite not having received any SMS or mail from the Department for any discrepancies. The return filing deadline for individuals and non-audit cases was September 16 this year. As per the latest official data for April 1-December 17, refunds were 13.52 per cent lower than last year.

So far, over 15 lakh income tax returns have already been revised for AY 2025-26, it said. Separately, over 21 lakh taxpayers have updated their ITRs for assessment years 2021-22 to 2024-25 and paid over Rs 2,500 crore in taxes during the ongoing financial year, it added. A revised return can be filed three months before the end of the assessment year, that is, December 31. An updated return (ITR-U) can be filed by a taxpayer within 48 months from the end of the assessment year (increased from 24 months in the Finance Act, 2025). An updated return can be filed even if the return was not previously filed. If the updated



return is filed during 24-36 months from the end of the relevant AY, then additional tax payable is 60 per cent of the total tax and interest on additional income. For ITR-U filed 36-48 months after the AY, then 70 per cent additional tax is payable of the aggregate tax and interest. Since the messages and emails under the NUDGE campaign were issued in December, several taxpayers are now asking for an extension of the revised return filing deadline by a month to January 31.

Under the "Non-intrusive Usage of Data to Guide and Enable (NUDGE)" campaign, the I-T Department, which comes under the purview of the Central Board of Direct Taxes, has sent messages and emails to several lakh taxpayers for discrepancies regarding deductions, especially as donations to unrecognised political parties or charitable institutions, or for mismatches in tax deducted at source and Annual Information Statement or non-disclosure of foreign assets and income. Terming it as an initiative to encourage taxpayers to voluntarily review deduction or exemption claims, the Department said these cases have been identified under the risk management framework with the use of advanced data analytics. "The framework includes instances where bogus donations to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) and other ineligible deductions or exemptions appear to have been claimed in the Income-tax Returns (ITRs). It has also been observed that, in some cases, either incorrect PANs or invalid PANs of donees have been quoted. Some cases also contain errors relating to the extent of deduction or exemption claimed," it said. Taxpayers whose "deduction or exemption claims are genuine and correctly made in accordance with law" are not required to take any further action, it said.

## Al Hind Air, FlyExpress get govt nod for operations

New Delhi: Two new airlines — Al Hind Air and FlyExpress — are set to take to the skies, with the carriers receiving their no objection certificates from the civil aviation ministry. In 2026, apart from these two carriers, Uttar Pradesh-based Shankh Air, which already has a No Objection Certificate (NOC), is likely to start operations. Al Hind Air is being promoted by Kerala-based alhind Group.

The ministry is keen to have more airline operators in the country, which is one of the world's fastest growing domestic civil aviation markets. Currently, there are nine operational scheduled domestic carriers in the country. Fly Big, a regional airline, suspended scheduled flights in October. IndiGo and Air India Group — Air India and Air India Express — together have over 90 per cent of the domestic market share. Concerns about apparent duopoly in

the fast-growing domestic airlines' industry got amplified this month in the wake of the massive operational disruptions at IndiGo, which has a market share of more than 65 per cent. "Over the last one week, pleased to have met teams from new airlines aspiring to take wings in Indian skies—Shankh Air, Al Hind Air and FlyExpress. While Shankh Air has already got the NOC from the Ministry, Al Hind Air and FlyExpress have received their NOCs this week," Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu said in a post on X on Tuesday. According to him, it has been the endeavour of the ministry to encourage more airlines in Indian aviation which is amongst the fastest growing aviation markets. Schemes like UDAN, have enabled smaller carriers Star Air, India One Air and Fly91 to play an important role in the regional connectivity within the country.

## ‘We don’t hear murmurs... when data disappoints’: CEA Nageswaran hits out at GDP critics



On Tuesday, Nageswaran argued that similar complaints about the single-deflator method were not heard when wholesale inflation was high in 2021-22 and 2022-23, which likely reduced services sector growth on a real basis. On Tuesday, Nageswaran argued that similar complaints about the single-deflator method were not heard when wholesale inflation was high in 2021-22 and 2022-23, which likely reduced services sector growth on a real basis. (Express File Photo by Narendra Vaskar) Calling for a more even and symmetric evaluation of India's economic performance, Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) V Anantha Nageswaran on Tuesday defended the GDP data and said "we don't hear too many murmurs" when growth numbers disappoint.

"When the Indian statistical authorities reported a 25 per cent contraction (for April-June 2020), nobody got up to question the methodology, the reliability of the numbers, the single deflator being used, etc. All of them were kosher because the GDP data met their priors or even exceeded their priors because they want the GDP data to disappoint. And when the disappointment was met, there was no complaint about methodology; it's only when the GDP growth numbers surprise on the upside, we hear all these concerns being raised," Nageswaran said at a workshop organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Data released late November showed India's GDP growth rate comfortably beat expectations for the second quarter in a row, coming in at 8.2 per cent in July-September after 7.8 per cent in April-June in the ongoing fiscal year.

However, economists have pointed out that growth was likely overstated in the two quarters due to certain deficiencies in the methods used by the Statistics Ministry, including the use of the so-called single-deflator method to arrive at real gross value added (GVA) from current price estimates. At a time when prices of commodities used as inputs are falling or not rising at the same pace as the price of final goods and services, the use of this method can inflate a sector's GVA. Further, as wholesale inflation is mostly used to deflate GVA in current prices to arrive at constant price estimates, economists have also argued that this can lead to overstating real GVA — and, in turn, growth — when wholesale inflation is lower than the actual inflation for a

sector, such as services. In July-September, for instance, the difference between real and nominal services GVA growth as per the GDP data was only around 120 basis points (bps), implying services sector inflation of only 1.2 per cent. However, economists say this is far lower than the services inflation of around 3.3 per cent as per Consumer Price Index data.

On Tuesday, Nageswaran argued that similar complaints about the single-deflator method were not heard when wholesale inflation was high in FY22 and FY23, which likely reduced services sector growth on a real basis. The government's top economist said that using a hypothetical services sector price deflator as a proxy and applying it to GDP data from FY22 showed that the discrepancy is "not even 1 per cent". As such, Nageswaran said, the GDP data wasn't really overstating growth. But unfortunately, all these under-informed or half-baked questions are left deliberately hanging so as to sow the seeds of doubt in people and it doesn't necessarily serve any purpose because they are not rigorous. "Nageswaran also said that India does not follow certain questionable methodologies used by developed countries while compiling some of their official statistics, including the inflation number. And while all estimation methodologies have limitations, "we seem to be particularly fond of questioning our methods and less so of others, somehow thinking that our methods are inferior to others". This, the CEA said, was a reflection of our mindset and that had to change. "As long as they (data) are consistent, transparent, and reveal broadly the true picture of the underlying economy and pass the smell test, we need to be a lot more mature in the way we evaluate and publicise or write our critique of the data. And also, when we write our critique of what the great work, the tireless work that the Ministry of Statistics does, we should also be symmetric in our appreciation when things do not meet our priors," Nageswaran said, adding that MoSPI should make its manuals and other documents easily accessible to the public "because credibility comes from replicability". "If outsiders are able to replicate our data, our estimates, then their trust in the data will also increase. And even after that if there are people willing to criticise, then we can't do much about them; that is part of their DNA or work ethic or their daily practice or ritual," he said.

On the informal sector, the CEA said measuring its size was not an easy exercise because there is no uniform definition of the term. However, Nageswaran said he was of the opinion that the extent of the Indian informal sector was likely being overstated because Indian businesses are predominantly sole proprietorships and small limited partnerships and don't keep separate books of accounts for their personal and professional activities. "That is a reason, I think, that no matter how much we do, we actually are ending up overestimating informality," Nageswaran said.

## Axis Energy, Reliance top bidders in coal gasification mine auctions

New Delhi: Hyderabad-based renewable energy firm Axis Energy and Reliance Industries Ltd emerged as top bidders in the latest auction of coal block auctions aimed at boosting domestic coal gasification and cleaner energy production. According to bid participant details released following the opening of technical bids, Axis Energy Ventures India Pvt Ltd and Reliance Industries Ltd jointly bid for 17 blocks in Odisha, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, underscoring their strong strategic interest in coal gasification and downstream value-added applications. Other bidders included Penna Enterprises, which bid for one block in Odisha. NRSK Mines and Minerals Pvt Ltd and Caliber Mining and Logistics Ltd bid for two blocks each. Sai Surya Professional Services Pvt Ltd and Singareni Collieries Co Ltd-Telangana Power Generation Corp Ltd, MMPL Commercial Mines Pvt Ltd-Mohit Minerals Ltd were the other bidders.

The government had, in October, offered a total of 41 coal mines in the 14th round of commercial auctions, including provisions for underground coal gasification (UCG) for the first time. Of the 41 mines, 21 were specifically identified as possessing potential for UCG. The round was aimed at promoting coal gasification to produce cleaner fuels like syngas, hydrogen, and methanol, reducing India's dependence on imported natural gas and crude oil. The government has set a target to gasify 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030. UCG allows for the harnessing of deep-seated coal reserves that are uneconomical to extract through conventional mining methods. A total of 49 bids were received for 24 of the 41 blocks. Axis Energy and Reliance Industries bid for UCG-potential blocks, reflecting private sector confidence in the new policy framework. The two companies were common participants in bids for coal blocks located in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh, including prominent blocks such as Badibahal-Kendudih, Chhatabar



Combined, Ustali, Recherla, and Chintalpudi Sector A1. In several other blocks, Axis Energy and Reliance Industries were part of consortium bids alongside other mining and logistics firms, highlighting their intent to secure feedstock for large-scale gasification and industrial use.

The Ministry of Coal had put up 41 coal mines for auction as part of its push to promote coal gasification, reduce import dependence, and support India's transition towards cleaner and more efficient use of coal resources. Bids were opened only for blocks that received participation from two or more bidders, with Axis Energy and Reliance Industries featuring prominently among the qualified bids. Industry observers note that the strong presence of Axis Energy and Reliance Industries reflects growing private sector confidence in India's coal gasification policy framework, as well as the long-term demand outlook for energy, chemicals, and industrial fuels. The outcome of the auctions is expected to play a critical role in shaping India's coal gasification ecosystem and accelerating investments in cleaner coal technologies.

## Neurosurgeon challenges you to do the viral ‘Foot and 6’ brain trick, asks if you are a ‘superbrainer’

Can you rotate your right hand and right ankle in opposite directions? That's the viral 'Foot and 6' trick that challenges your brain's motor skills. This exercise requires you to rotate your hand clockwise, as the arm needs to form a '6' (and, as such, is a contrasting action). Are you able to do it?

Neurosurgeon Dr Arun L Naik recently explained the science behind it in an Instagram post, sharing that those who can ace the challenge are among the five per cent of people who are "superbrainers." "Are you a superbrainer? There's a viral neuroscience challenge that almost nobody can do: draw a smooth clockwise circle with your right foot while your right hand draws the number 6 in the air. For most people, the foot suddenly flips direction without permission. This isn't a mistake — it's your brain short-circuiting." He continued, "Your right foot and right hand share the same motor cortex, and when you ask that one hemisphere to run two opposite rotation programs at the same time, the supplementary motor area tries to merge the movements, while the cerebellum steps in to 'correct' the conflict. The result? Your foot automatically obeys your hand. And if you can keep the foot clockwise the whole time... congratulations — you're in the top 5 per cent of super brains!" He also added that if you're a lefty, the circle should be anti-clockwise and the number should be nine

written in a circular fashion using your left hand.

Intrigued by the trick, we decided to understand more about how it works. Dr Sheetal Goyal, a consultant neurologist at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, explained that this trick asks the brain to do something it isn't naturally wired to handle: running two conflicting movement patterns on the same side of the body simultaneously. "Overlapping areas in the motor cortex control the right hand and right foot. The supplementary motor area, which plans and coordinates complex movements, tries to manage both actions simultaneously — while the cerebellum, responsible for smoothness and error correction, steps in to resolve the mismatch. Because hand movements are usually more precise and dominant, the brain unconsciously adjusts the foot to follow the hand's direction. This switch happens automatically, without conscious awareness," said Dr Goyal. This response is completely normal. "The brain prioritises efficiency over performing conflicting tasks at the same time. Failing the challenge has nothing to do with intelligence, reflexes, or brain health; it's simply how the nervous system is designed to work," said Dr Goyal.

What about people who can do it successfully? A small percentage of people can keep both movements independent. According to Dr Goyal, this is often seen in individuals with extensive motor training, such as dancers, musicians, or athletes. "



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



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Bengaluru: The charismatic presence of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, alongside a host of top India cricketers, lends unprecedented gravitas to the Vijay Hazare One-Day Trophy beginning on Wednesday, giving all of them a chance to prove a point amid renewed focus on the domestic grind. The line-up of superstars also features Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill, Suryakumar Yadav and Abhishek Sharma among others, but none attracts as much attention as Kohli and Rohit. Their appearance has a direct link to the BCCI decision of making at least two Vijay Hazare Trophy matches mandatory for India cricketers. In the case of Kohli, who is playing in this tournament after 15 years, and Rohit, it is a sharp reminder that they are no longer immune to the evolving power equations within Indian cricket. The celebrated pair remain the biggest current stars of the game, but that status cannot mask the reality that both cricket and time have moved ahead. Watching that gradual unfolding of struggle itself is fascinating.

Can Ro-Ko fire?

Rohit has made it clear that he will play the first two matches for Mumbai against Sikkim and Uttarakhand in Jaipur on December 24 and 26. Kohli, who has been training with former India batting coach Sanjay Bangar in Mumbai, has not yet decided which two or three matches he will play for Delhi. Delhi will open their Elite Group D campaign against Andhra in Bengaluru at the BCCI Centre of Excellence after the Karnataka government denied permission to hold matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium citing security reasons. They will then face Gujarat. Since his arrival in Bengaluru on Tuesday night, assumptions are

being made that the star batter will play those two matches. Both Kohli and Rohit still have the power to choose their games, but what they do not seem to have is the power to choose their destiny. An underwhelming outing in the Vijay Hazare Trophy will not affect their selection for the ODIs against New Zealand next month, but more than anyone else, Kohli and Rohit would know that the space around them is shrinking. They know that younger names are breathing down their necks. How long can they resist the weight of domestic runs scored by rising stars? There are plenty of them too, in the likes of Yash Dhull and R Smaran. The recent omission of Gill from India's T20 World Cup squad and the inclusion of Ishan Kishan on the back of a stellar Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy is a grim pointer to what might happen with Kohli and Rohit if runs do not flow easily from their bats.

If selectors can drop Gill, the current high-value property in Indian cricket, because of combination compulsions, then not many will be spared. So, for Kohli and Rohit, this is a battle with themselves to find the inner fire in the modest surroundings of a domestic event, as much as it is against a tight circle of younger players. Besides the Ro-Ko show, there are several interesting sub-plots to explore. Pant, a Test certainty, will be eager to bring himself back in contention for white-ball formats. The wicketkeeper-batter has not represented the country in either ODIs or T20s since August 2024. Gill, on the other hand, will be picking himself up after the selectors' call to overlook him for the upcoming T20 World Cup. The right-hander will aim to vent some of that frustration while turning out for Punjab. For Gill, it will be a good warm-up ahead of next month's three-match ODI series against New Zealand, in which he will lead India.

Will young bowling talents emerge?

Another pertinent point could be the interest of selectors in young bowlers in this edition of the tournament, particularly pacers. Since Mohammed Siraj came through the Ranji Trophy circuit a few years back, no young talent has been able to produce compelling outings to break into the established Indian pace order. Even the support line consisting of Prasidh Krishna, Harshit Rana and Akash Deep has not been consistent enough. In that context, Gurjapneet Singh (Tamil Nadu), Gurnoor Brar (Punjab), Yudhvir Singh (J&K), Anuj Thakral (Haryana) and Sakib Hussain (Bihar) will evoke keen interest from selectors.

## Rohit Sharma cracks his fastest List A century in 62 balls on Vijay Hazare Trophy comeback for Mumbai after 7 years



Rohit Sharma enjoyed a blockbuster return to domestic cricket duties as he cracked a century in 62 balls against Sikkim in his first Vijay Hazare Trophy appearance in seven years for Mumbai on Wednesday. Setting to gun down Sikkim's 236-run total in Jaipur, Rohit sped off the blocks with a steady flow of sixes and fours and made light work of the challenge. Closing in on 14,000 runs in the 50-over format, the century was Rohit's 37th ton in List A cricket, his fourth besides the 33 centuries in international colours for India. The century is also his fastest in the format, bettering the 63-ball hundred against Afghanistan at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi during the 2023 ODI World Cup.

After four hours of build up to his innings, the crowd that had swollen to almost as much as the limited capacity venue at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium can hold. By the time he hit his first six, swivelling to connect with a length ball from Sikkim's Kranthi Kumar and depositing it in the crowd, the roar was deafening. The one stand that the

Rajasthan state association had left open has not been enough, they have opened three more and a conservative estimate would have the number of spectators at over 10,000. Interestingly, Rohit's century is his second List A ton for Mumbai, 17 years since his debut in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, which was rebranded from the domestic 50-overs tournament that was earlier called the Ranji Trophy One Day Trophy before 2008.

Over the course of the last 19 years in his List A career, Rohit has appeared in 19 Vijay Hazare Trophy matches for Mumbai. Rohit last turned up for Mumbai seven years ago in 2018, shortly after leading India to the Asia Cup title. The Mumbai batting heavyweight appeared in the quarter-final and semi-final matches against Bihar and Hyderabad with the team winning both games comfortably. Rohit aggregated 49 runs in both games, remaining unbeaten on 32 against Bihar.

The 38-year-old Rohit, now only playing the ODI format, seemingly wishes to have one last shot at a World Cup title, with cricket's marquee tournament taking place in two years' time in South Africa-Namibia-Zimbabwe. The question over his form has been answered: three of his four innings since the Australia series have been 50+ scores. That includes a match-winning, unbeaten 121 in the third ODI in Australia in Sydney, and two half-centuries in India's 2-1 home series win over South Africa. Rohit brought up his 150 in 91 balls in Jaipur, on the back of 18 fours and nine sixes across the park. Known for his daddy hundreds in ODIs in the previous decade, this was the first time Rohit had crossed the 150-run mark in a 50-over innings since his 159 against the West Indies in late 2019.

## Ishan Kishan records 33-ball hundred with 14 sixes against Karnataka in Vijay Hazare Trophy, misses fastest century by one ball

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Only days after powering Jharkhand to their maiden Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy win and earning an India recall, Ishan Kishan clubbed one of the fastest-ever centuries by an Indian in the List A format against Karnataka in the Vijay Hazare Trophy on Wednesday. Sliding down from his usual top-order role in the 50-over format, Kishan walked in at number six at the end of the 38th over and stormed his way through to a sensational century at the Gujarat College Cricket Ground 'A' in Ahmedabad. Kishan clubbed 14 sixes and cracked a century in only 33 balls as Jharkhand racked up a staggering 412 for nine in 50 overs. However, Kishan narrowly missed out on the fastest List A century by an Indian on a day where three centuries in under 40 balls have already been registered. In the Plate league, Bihar prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi and captain Sakibul Gani rewrote the record books twice, smashing 36-ball and 32-ball hundreds, the latter being the quickest-ever by an Indian. Kishan's blazing century is now the second-quickest by an Indian man, with Punjab batter Anmolpreet Singh having recorded a 35-ball century against Arunachal Pradesh last season. Since the beginning of this season, a different Ishan has been on display. For a batsman who appeared to bat only in top gear, he showed he could play the situation in red-ball cricket. And on the back of strong performances in Ranji, he carried over that form into the SMAT, where leading a young



team, he showed he has come of age. Watching him bat in the Ranji Trophy, former India batsman Robin Singh, who had worked with him in the past at Mumbai Indians, revealed this new version of Ishan isn't far from knocking the doors again. And two months later, the opening he cherished came when he must have least expected it. In another match, Odisha opener Swastik Samal recorded a double century against Saurashtra in only his 11th List A appearance for the side from debut. The 25-year-old who previously held a high score of 57, converted his maiden century into a 167-ball 212, making him only the 14th Indian man to smash a List A double century.

## ‘They are running a campaign against them’: England find support in former Australia coach amid excessive drinking accusations during Ashes



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

England cricket's managing director Rob Key has said that the board will investigate reports of players' conduct during the break (Reuters Photo) England cricket's managing director Rob Key has said that the board will investigate reports of players' conduct during the break (Reuters Photo) England have found support from somewhat unexpected quarters amid reports of players drinking excessively during their break in the popular beach side destination Noosa ahead of the third Ashes Test in Adelaide. Former Australia head coach and former batter Darren Lehmann said that he was there around the time that England were there and he saw that they were well-behaved and well-liked by the locals.

"I was in Noosa and this bugs me. I am all for getting stuck into England. They haven't played well enough, their preparation before the first game of the series (was not good) I get all that. But I was actually there. They were actually really well behaved. They mixed with the locals, had a good time," said Lehmann on ABC Sport. "The reports of them tagged is just wrong. They were polite and a delight to the people of Noosa, played golf, played soccer with the locals all that sort of stuff. They were well liked there."

England cricket's managing director Rob Key has said that the board will investigate reports of players' conduct during the break, adding that drinking heavily is 'completely unacceptable' for an international cricket team. Opener Ben Duckett is especially under fire over a viral video in which he is alleged to be inebriated. "I would defend them a bit because that's just out of order. They are running a campaign against them almost and now Rob Key is doing what, a stag-do review or whatever they call it," said Lehmann. "I didn't see that. I saw people relaxing, enjoying Noosa for what it is. It didn't look good because what had happened previously but I have to come to their defence here because

they are professional athletes and they are well behaved from what I saw." The accusations came after England suffered an 82-run defeat in the third Ashes Test, which put them 3-0 behind in the series and thus confirmed a series defeat for them. England had come under fire for their preparations before the start of the series, choosing not to play any first class games in Australia before the first Test. Additionally, England's overly aggressive batting tactics that they have maintained under the leadership of captain Ben Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum have come under heavy fire due to the manner in which their batters have been dismissed.

## Permission denied for cricket match at Chinnaswamy Stadium

Bengaluru: Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh on Tuesday said that permission has been denied to hold the Vijay Hazare Trophy match at the city's Chinnaswamy Stadium on December 24.

The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) had sought permission to hold the match without spectators. State Home Minister G Parameshwara had constituted a committee to examine the request, and the panel visited the stadium on Monday.

Matches at the Chinnaswamy Stadium were stopped after a stampede outside during Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL victory celebration on June 4, in which 11 people died. The match will now be played at the BCCI Centre of Excellence near Kempegowda International Airport, according to official sources.

"There may be some confusion among you (media) whether there is permission to hold a cricket match or not at Chinnaswamy Stadium. There is no need for confusion. Based on the committee's recommendation, permission has been rejected. So there is no match there tomorrow," Singh told reporters.

The committee, headed by the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) commissioner, included the police commissioner and officials from the PWD, Fire, Health departments and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM).

GBA Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said the committee, after detailed verification, would submit a report to the government, which will decide how to publish it.

## ‘Denied permission to host Vijay Hazare matches at Chinnaswamy as KSCA failed to comply’, says Karnataka home minister

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The permission to host the Vijay Hazare trophy match between Delhi and Andhra Pradesh at the Chinnaswamy Stadium was denied as the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA), which manages it, has failed to comply with the safety and security requirements, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Wednesday. He advised the KSCA to comply with the recommendations of the Justice John Michael Cunha's Commission, and said that following which the request may be considered. He asserted that the government will not take any "hasty decision" on the matter. KSCA spokesperson Vinay Mruthyunjaya on Tuesday had said that the Vijay Hazare trophy matches have been shifted to the BCCI Centre of Excellence, on the outskirts of the city, near the Kempegowda International Airport.

In a statement he said that with this proactive approach and full compliance with the recommended measures, KSCA is confident that the necessary permissions for conducting Vijay Hazare Trophy matches at the Chinnaswamy Stadium will be granted in the near future. "After Venkatesh Prasad (former cricketer) led team was elected to administer the KSCA, they met the Chief Minister and deputy CM, seeking permission to host cricket matches at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. The cabinet after discussion authorised me as the Home Minister to take a decision," Parameshwara told reporters. He also mentioned that KSCA was not complied with any recommendation and that is why the permission was denied. "I had constituted a



committee headed by Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) commissioner Maheshwar Rao and consisting of police commissioner and other department officials to visit the stadium and provide feedback." Stating that the Committee during the visit to the stadium found that none of the recommendations were compiled to by the KSCA, the Home minister said. The Justice Cunha Commission had reportedly concluded in its report that the "design and structure" of the stadium were "unsuitable and unsafe" for mass gatherings. Its reported recommendations include adequate gates for mass entry and exit, purpose-built queuing and circulation zones separated from public roads, emergency evacuation plans compliant with international safety norms, and sufficient parking. The match between Delhi and Andhra Pradesh was played behind the closed doors and featured former India captain Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant.

## Virat Kohli follows Rohit Sharma, smashes 58th List A century in Vijay Hazare Trophy return for Delhi after 15 years



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

After Rohit Sharma's whopping 155 for Mumbai in Sikkim, Virat Kohli ended his 15-year break from the Vijay Hazare Trophy with a characteristic century in a 299-run chase against Andhra at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru on Wednesday. Steering the tall chase with his typical flair in the format, Kohli stormed his way to a rollicking hundred in under 85 deliveries, making it his 58th List A century and a third hundred in four innings since the South Africa series earlier this month. With his first run of the innings, Kohli became only the ninth man in history to reach 16,000 List A runs, over 14,000 of which have come in India colours since his debut in 2008. Kohli has only featured in 18 matches for his state side, Delhi, in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. Interestingly, Kohli's last Vijay Hazare Trophy appearance came 15 years ago on February 18, 2010, captaining Delhi against Services at the Tata Energy Research Institute Oval ground in Gurgaon. In his last outing back in 2010, Kohli batted at No. 5 and scored 16 runs in Delhi's colossal 113-run win, powered by a century from Mithun Manhas, the current BCCI president. During the knock in Bengaluru, Kohli also completed 1000 runs for Delhi in the 50-over format. Approaching 20 years into his List A career, Kohli had made his debut in the format in February

## Venus Williams weds Andrea Preti in Florida



Palm Beach: Venus Williams and Andrea Preti are married, the tennis great announced Tuesday on social media. Williams and Preti became wife and husband over the weekend in Palm Beach, Florida, as part of a five-day celebration. Becoming the second-oldest woman to win a tour-level singles match in July, the 45-year-old Williams gave thanks to her fiancé, who was in the stands at the DC Open. Preti is a Danish-born Italian model and actor, according to the website IMDb. Williams hadn't played in a tournament in 16 months until entering the event in Washington. The seven-time Grand Slams singles champion plans to play in a 33rd straight season on the WTA Tour, starting in Auckland in January.

2006 for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy One-Day tournament at the Feroz Shah Kotla. He did not bat in that game.



## Nawazuddin Siddiqui says indie cinema's isolation is 'dangerous': 'All We Imagine As Light was wiped out of theatres in 4 days'



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Streaming happened to India and Nawazuddin Siddiqui at just the right time. Riding on the success of Anurag Kashyap's 2012 gangster drama Gangs of Wasseypur, Siddiqui then starred in the filmmaker's 2017 crime thriller show Sacred Games, which was also Netflix India's maiden original. Besides these two milestone projects, which also had follow-ups in the form of a sequel and a season 2 respectively, Siddiqui has repeated a character only one more time. In Honey Trehan's new whodunit Raat Akeli Hai: The Bansal Murders, Siddiqui reprises his role of investigating police officer Jatil Yadav from the first part which released in 2020. But he admits slipping into the same shoes wasn't as effortless as it may seem.

"It's better if it takes effort," Siddiqui tells SCREEN in an exclusive interview. "The basic spine is the same. But if you go into it thinking that doing it again would be a cakewalk, then there are more chances of it going wrong. Because you've taken it for granted. But if it's a new film, it's a new beginning that you have to take. Of course, the core is the same. But it's a new, different, and layered case that also deals with class disparities," he adds. Interestingly, both parts of Raat Akeli Hai are written by Smrita Sharma, who also co-wrote Sacred Games. "There's no similarity at all. And that's what's special about Smrita. Her dialogues are also very easy to remember. So an actor doesn't have to try too hard to remember the dialogues because there's a rhythm to them. There's also a connection of every line to another. Once you learn the dialogues, they're a lot of fun to mouth because of that connection and rhythm," Siddiqui points out. Nawazuddin Siddiqui in Raat Akeli Hai: The Bansal Murders. Nawazuddin Siddiqui in Raat Akeli Hai: The Bansal

Murders. Powerhouse performers Like the first part, Raat Akeli Hai: The Bansal Murders also boasts of an ensemble cast. Along with Radhika Apte and Ila Arun reprising their roles of Jatil's love interest and mother respectively, new additions include Chitrangada Singh, Rajat Kapoor, Sanjay Kapoor, Revathy, and Deepti Naval. Siddiqui admits he was on his toes working with the two seasoned female actors.

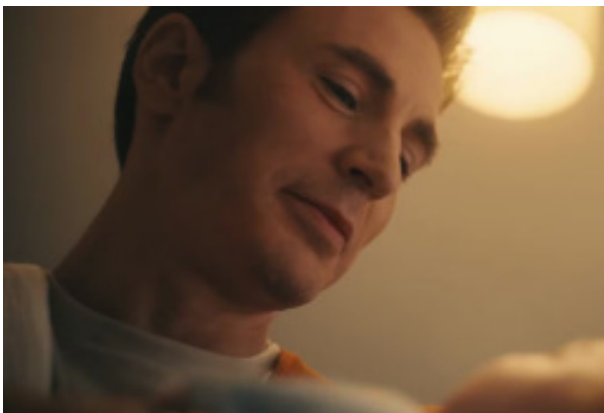
"I used to see Revathy ma'am's performance get more real take by take. When I observed her act, there were some characteristics that she added which weren't there in the script. So, it felt strange initially in the first and second take. But in the later takes, it felt she's not Revathy, but someone else. So, it was a great learning curve for me," recalls Siddiqui. He was all praise for Trehan, who's also been a casting director, for roping in "Miss Chamko" Deepti Naval against type as a scheming spiritual guru. "Deepti ji is Guruma (laughs). What can I say about her? She says everything with so much love: 'Nawaz, iski gardan kaat do.' It used to be so haunting," says Siddiqui in a soft voice while signalling the slashing of his throat. Siddiqui, also a champion of independent cinema, laments the crisis indie films are going through in the country, particularly after Kanu Behl's critically acclaimed Agra wasn't given enough screens last month because it clashed with a more mainstream movie in Ajay Devgn-starrer romantic comedy De De Pyaar De 2. Siddiqui pines for the return of the years when streaming had just entered India and indie films at least had a bankable home. "One can only hope that time comes back. There are only a few films that have kept cinema alive," argues Siddiqui, adding, "To those who say films have to be commercially viable, that's not necessary. If I go to a restaurant whose food I love, whether they market it or not, I'll still go there no matter how far it is because I have the taste. If the food is not good, no matter how much marketing you do, it won't work. Cinema should not be dependent on marketing." He lauds independent cinema for giving India recognition in the international film circles. "For instance, Payal Kapadia's film All We Imagine As Light (2024) was in the Competition section at Cannes Film Festival after a long time. It also won an award. We can't imagine how many people around the world would've watched it. But once it released in India, it was thrown out of theatres after four days! The audience already knows about it, but at least it should get its fair place in the sun," says Siddiqui, dubbing this practice of sidelining indie films "dangerous". He adds independent cinema can also be aspirational in nature, given the current crop of mainstream cinema is only dumbing the audience down. "Not all audience members are dumb. The dumbest of dumb, including someone like me, wants to progress. I've developed a lethargy within me watching the commercial stuff. So, even I want to remove those cobwebs from my eyes and watch something using my brains," says Siddiqui.

## Avengers Domsday teaser: Chris Evans' Captain America returns to save the world

Avengers Domsday Movie Teaser Out: To the delight of fans worldwide, Captain America is officially returning to the Avengers universe in the highly anticipated Avengers: Domsday. The newly released teaser for the film, which was initially screened exclusively alongside James Cameron's Avatar: Fire and Ash in theaters, has now been unveiled to the public. The teaser confirms that Chris Evans will reprise his iconic role as Captain America. The teaser opens with Steve Rogers riding a motorcycle up to his home as a piano rendition of the Avengers theme plays in the background. We then see him pulling out his costume out of a box to admire nostalgically. The teaser then shows him holding a newborn baby, looking on with pride, before concluding with a super that reads, "Steve Rogers will return in 'Avengers: Domsday.'"

Marvel Cinematic Universe fans last saw Steve Rogers in Avengers: Endgame, where he helped assemble the Avengers and played a crucial role in saving the world from Thanos. At the film's conclusion, Steve passed on his Vibranium shield to Sam Wilson, also known as Falcon, played by Anthony Mackie, officially naming him the new Captain America. Steve was then shown reunited with Peggy Carter, the love of his life, with strong implications that the two lived out a peaceful life together in another timeline, or possibly the original one.

The teaser raises several unanswered questions, particularly regarding which version of Steve Rogers audiences will see in Avengers: Domsday, and which timeline the story will explore. The appearance of Steve holding a baby

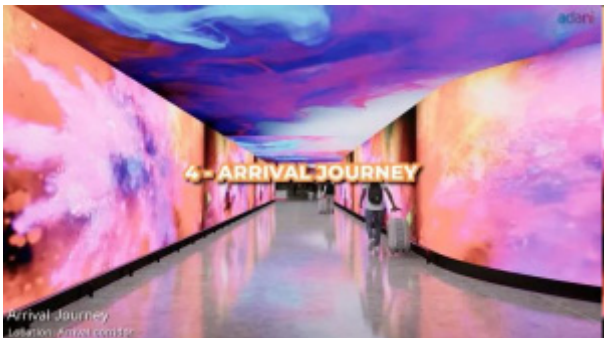


has also sparked speculation among fans, with many wondering whether the child could possess superhuman abilities. According to reports, Avengers: Domsday will receive a total of four teasers in the coming weeks, with the final teaser expected to introduce Robert Downey Jr. as Doctor Doom. Excitement has already been building around Downey Jr.'s return to the MCU in a villainous role. The film, also starring Chris Hemsworth, Vanessa Kirby, Anthony Mackie, Sebastian Stan, Letitia Wright, Paul Rudd, Tom Hiddleston, Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, Channing Tatum and Pedro Pascal, among others, is scheduled to release on December 18, 2026, exactly one year after the debut of its first teaser.

## Inside Navi Mumbai International Airport with Farah Khan and Dilip, share its opening date and what's new

Navi Mumbai International Airport opening date: Farah Khan, who has often taken viewers inside celebrity homes through her popular vlogs, has now become the first to offer a sneak peek into the much-anticipated Navi Mumbai International Airport. With the airport set to become fully operational from Christmas, it is being positioned as far more than just a transit point—it's an experience in itself. Farah, along with her trusted cook Dilip, was seen visiting the yet-to-be open airport that has been conceptualised with a vision led by Jeet Adani and his wife, Diva Adani.

As always, Farah kicked off the vlog with a fun twist. She and her longtime cook Dilip travelled separately to the airport, both aiming to outdo each other in becoming the first YouTuber to showcase the new terminal. The friendly banter set the tone for what followed. After the playful introduction, Farah interacted with Chintan Shukla, Vice President – Airport Planning and Design, who shared insights into the airport's planning and design philosophy. Art at Navi Mumbai airport Moving art to promote local art and culture. (Photo: Farah Khan/YouTube) Talking about the art installations, Chintan said, "We have eight art installations here—four along the departure journey and four along the arrival journey." He explained that the idea was to solely promote local art, adding, "You won't get to see this anywhere. This is unique." Impressed by the installations, Farah remarked, "This is so beautiful. You would not have seen such an art installation anywhere in the world." Farah then moved to the security hold area, aptly



named NAVIgate, a clever pun that reflects the airport's design language. "They've used smart wordplay here, and this art installation promotes Maharashtrian culture and art," she noted. Showcasing another installation, Farah explained, "The ribbons you see here dance to the music being played. They are made of Paithani fabric." She also highlighted the airport's Pranaam service, designed especially for senior citizens. "Earlier, with just wheelchairs, senior citizens were taken straight to the plane. But with the Pranaam service, they can shop, dine at restaurants, and move around comfortably," she said. Farah later interacted with Jeet Adani and Diva Adani to understand the vision behind the airport. The trio then headed to Gully Kitchen,

## Shraddha Kapoor charges more fee than Alia Bhatt, Ananya Panday, says dad Shakti Kapoor when asked if she's not getting enough work: 'Ziddi hai'



Shraddha Kapoor dominated headlines and magazine covers last year after Stree 2 rewrote box-office history, becoming the first female-led Indian film to cross Rs 857 crore worldwide—nearly five times the lifetime earnings of its 2018 prequel. Around the same time, online discussions resurfaced around the actor's relatively limited filmography and fewer appearances on screen. Shraddha was frequently compared to contemporaries such as Alia Bhatt and Ananya Panday, with some reports even suggesting that her career opportunities were affected by her father Shakti Kapoor's image. However, Shakti Kapoor has now put these rumours to rest, stating that Shraddha consciously chooses to do fewer films and, in fact, commands higher fees than many of her peers.

Shraddha Kapoor made her debut in 2010 with Amitabh Bachchan-starrer Teen Patti and soon became a national crush with films like Aashiqui 2, Ek Villain, and Half Girlfriend. Despite being in the industry for 15 years, she has featured in only around 18 films. In comparison, Alia Bhatt—who debuted two years later with Karan Johar's Student of the Year—has already completed nearly 20 films, including blockbusters such as Highway,

Udta Punjab, RRR, and Gangubai Kathiawadi. Meanwhile, Ananya Panday, who entered Bollywood in 2019, has completed 12 films so far, with her 13th release Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri hitting theatres tomorrow. 'Shraddha Kapoor charges more fees than Alia-Ananya' on the podcast The Powerful Humans, Shakti Kapoor addressed the speculation head-on. "She does very few films," he said, clarifying that it has nothing to do with her lineage. "She chooses the best films and charges higher fees than most of her counterparts." Referring to Alia Bhatt and Ananya Panday, he added, "She charges more than these actors."

He further explained that Shraddha prefers to do just one or two films a year and dismissed rumours about her not getting work. Laughing off such claims, he remarked sarcastically, "She is not getting work?" Talking about Shraddha's personality, Shakti Kapoor shared, "She is very stubborn and does what her heart says. She has certain ethics and follows them strictly." Speaking about their bond, he added, "We share a great relationship. Sometimes we fight, sometimes we plan holidays, sometimes we discuss films. I am very proud of her—her performances are outstanding. She is a very fine actor."

Beyond films, Shraddha Kapoor enjoys massive influence on social media. She is currently the second most-followed Indian personality on Instagram after Virat Kohli, boasting 94.2 million followers—over 2.2 million more than global star Priyanka Chopra and even ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Alia Bhatt ranks fifth on the list, while Ananya Panday trails far behind. Shraddha has also made significant strides as an entrepreneur and investor. She has backed several lifestyle and fashion-focused ventures, including MyGlamm, Shunya, Koo, and Chargeup, and is the co-founder of the demi-fine jewellery brand Palmonas. According to the Candere Hurun India Women Leaders List released on June 4 this year, Shraddha Kapoor has emerged as the most-followed celebrity investor. Shraddha Kapoor's net worth said to be Rs 130 crore As per Times Now, Shraddha Kapoor's net worth is estimated at around Rs 130 crore, with reports suggesting she charges over Rs 15 crore per film. Following the success of Stree 2, reports went viral about her signing a project backed by Ekta Kapoor and directed by Tumbbad filmmaker Rahi Anil Barve. The actress was reportedly signed for Rs 17 crore along with a profit-sharing agreement, although no official confirmation has been made. In comparison, Alia Bhatt is said to charge between Rs 10–12 crore per film, while Ananya Panday reportedly charges around Rs 5 crore, with the latest figures emerging ahead of her Christmas release alongside Kartik Aaryan.

## 'Dhruv Rathee ko bhi fame mila': Dhurandhar actor 'doesn't agree' with YouTuber's video, wants people not to make film 'Hindu-Muslim issue'

Aditya Dhar's Dhurandhar has taken the box office by a storm since its release around three weeks ago. However, the Ranveer Singh starrer has also been receiving backlash for its alleged 'propaganda' and 'agenda-driven' content. In fact, content creator Dhruv Rathee also criticised the spy-thriller in a recent video on YouTube. Now, actor Naveen Kaushik, who played the role of Donga on Dhurandhar, joined SCREEN for a sit-down interview in Delhi. During the candid conversation, he reacted to a section of people slamming the film, as well as Rathee's latest viral claims.

When asked if he reflected on the backlash Dhurandhar faced, Naveen said, "When someone criticises your work and you are passionate about it, you should take the opportunity to try and look at it from their point of view. I do feel saddened by the criticism coming this film's way. Please talk about the way it has been made. If you feel it has been made badly, if it hasn't lived up to the way the standards of cinema should be, definitely talk about it." He further added, "But, if you are just going to pull out certain aspects and try to manipulate those things into ideology or a propaganda, I don't think I appreciate that. Some people are trying to make it a Hindu-Muslim issue, but everyone is loving (the film). If it was an agenda driven movie, then there wouldn't have been Muslim technicians working on the movie."

The actor further expressed that while he doesn't agree with Rathee's thoughts about his film. "He is a very opinionated person and I welcome people who question and challenge. That is supposed to be done and that's how you improve yourself. I don't necessarily agree with what he has said about the movie, because I am closely associated with it," he stated. Naveen continued, "The video that he has put out a few days ago has had a massive response, he has got a lot of views. So, I want to say you're welcome. Aapko bhi thoda fame mila (you also got fame). Not that he needed it, but of course talking about our movie is helping his channel as well. And, I have learnt over time that you can't make everyone happy. Some people are not going to like what you do. If he doesn't like it, you have all the freedom in this country to have your own opinion about it." He was then asked if the team of Dhurandhar expected the criticism, and he replied, "Everyone knew that when you are going to take up such a sensitive topic of India and Pakistan relationship, and you are going to address the incidents of our history, it is going to touch a nerve. A lot of people will try to analyse and dissect it. We knew it will get a lot of eyes, but we also knew that the film, script, and actors are strong. We didn't know that an entire army of audience will defend us." Rathee had posted a video on his YouTube channel criticising Dhurandhar. "Director of the film Dhurandhar, Aditya Dhar, has made a false claim and tried to spread nonsense propaganda through his film. Well-made propaganda is more dangerous. Films like The Taj Story and The Bengal Films were not dangerous, kyunki wo bakwaas films thi (because they were bad films). But Dhurandhar is an engaging film," he had said. He added, "The problem is that Dhurandhar repeatedly shows you it's inspired by real events. It says so in the trailer. It shows the real footage from the 26/11 at-



tacks. The real audio recordings of conversations between the terrorists and their handlers have been used. It also uses real-life gangsters and cops based in Pakistan's Lyari."

## Allu Arjun to reunite with Trivikram for grand mythological epic

Chennai: If rumours doing the rounds in the industry are to be believed, Icon Star Allu Arjun and acclaimed filmmaker Trivikram Srinivas are set to reunite for a spectacular mythological epic, marking their fourth collaboration together.

This ambitious project, industry insiders say, will be based on a powerful script originally conceived for Allu Arjun. The rumours have triggered immense excitement among fans and the film fraternity. Allu Arjun and Trivikram share an exceptional creative legacy, having delivered multiple blockbuster films together. Their previous collaboration, 'Ala Vaikunthapuramulo', shattered several box office records across South India and emerged as one of the most celebrated films of its time.

Industry sources claim that the upcoming film will be mounted on a never before seen scale, with a massive budget of over 1000 crores, making it one of the most ambitious mythological films ever produced in Indian cinema. The film is expected to blend powerful storytelling with grand visuals and cutting-edge technology, redefining the mythological genre for a pan Indian and global audience. An official announcement is expected in the coming weeks, and the film is scheduled to go on floors in February 2027.