





# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Challenges galore for Nirmala Sitharaman ahead of Union Budget

As the Budget Day draws closer, there are several challenges, both internal and external, that need to be addressed head-on to make the Indian economy truly resilient and robust. For Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who is preparing to present the Union Budget for a record ninth consecutive time, it is a defining fiscal moment amid external headwinds and internal tests. The key challenge is to balance growth with fiscal discipline and provide momentum for fiscal, labour and tax reforms. Though India has been the fastest-growing major economy for several years now, it needs to step up further to escape the middle-income trap and become a developed nation by 2047. The Budget 2026-27 provides an opportunity to bring about greater ease of doing business in the economy. Reforms, especially in terms of eliminating the regulatory excesses in the system, need to be carried out much more quickly compared to the GST restructuring and implementation of the labour codes. Only then will it be possible to push growth to the levels needed to become a developed economy. On the one hand, India's real GDP growth is projected in the range of 7% to 7.5 %, in contrast to a slowing global economy. On the other hand, the eroding value of the Indian rupee — predicted to touch the 100- mark against the US dollar in the months ahead — poses a complex policy trade-off. A stronger dollar, coupled with tariff-induced capital flows, would increase import bills, exert upward pressure on inflation and complicate fiscal planning. The government will have to weigh exchange rate realities into Budget forecasts, potentially conservatively estimating both revenue and subsidy costs.

## Instagram Empowers Creators to Go Global with Local Voice Translations and Fonts



Hyderabad: Today, we're excited to announce that you can now use Meta AI to translate reels into Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi, in addition to Hindi, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. While this was announced in November 2025, the feature to translate, dub, and lip sync reels into more Indian languages is rolling out to everyone today. Today, at the exclusive 'House of Instagram' event in Mumbai, we shared two new updates from Instagram that not only underline India's importance for Meta, but also further the possibilities for creators to reach new audiences. Meta AI Translations Expand To Five New Indian Languages on Instagram & Facebook We're excited to announce in the coming months you will soon be able to use Meta AI to translate reels in five new Indian languages, helping you discover more entertaining content from across India and around the world. In October, we launched the ability for creators to dub and lip-sync their reels to and from English, Hindi, Spanish, and Portuguese, helping them reach more people globally. Now, the same capability will soon be available in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi.

How will this work?

Creators have the option to use Meta AI to transform their reels, so they sound and look fluent in some of the world's most spoken languages, helping them reach more people globally and grow an international audience. When turned on, the tool preserves the sound and tone of your voice, so your reels feel authentically you. You can also choose to enable the lip syncing feature, which syncs the translated audio to your mouth's movements, so it looks like you're actually speaking the language. New Indian Fonts Available on Edits Additionally, creators will now have the benefit of using new Indian fonts on Edits. So you'll now be able to style your text and captions with Devanagari and Bengali-Assamese scripts, in languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Assamese. This update will roll out on Android in the coming days.

How will this work?

Within your editing timeline, head to "Text" on the bottom tools tray. From there click on the "Aa" icon where you'll see the list of fonts available. If your device is already in Devanagari or Bengali-Assamese scripts, these fonts will be defaulted in the font tab. If not, slightly swipe down when you're on the "all fonts" tab to filter your fonts by language. These new updates follow a spree of other features launched in the past month to benefit creators. This includes the ability to restyle your photos and videos in Instagram Stories and make edits—big or small—using Meta AI. There are also new features in Edits, such as bulk editing captions, reversing your videos, using lip sync to bring your photos to life, and access to 400 more sound effects.

## Telangana government orders major reshuffle of IPS officers

Hyderabad: The State government on Saturday ordered a major reshuffle in the police department, transferring and giving new postings to as many as 20 IPS officers. As per the orders, Dr Gajjarao Bhupal has been transferred and posted as Inspector General of Police, Provisioning and Logistics,

## PERNOD RICARD INDIA LAUNCHES SEAGRAM'S XCLAMAT!ON IN TELANGANA



Hyderabad: Pernod Ricard India announces the launch of Seagram's Xclamat!on in Telangana, marking the company's most ambitious innovation in 30 years. Seagram's Xclamat!on is India's singular brand portfolio having five distinct spirit categories, Whisky, Vodka, Gin, Rum, and Brandy, all at a uniform price point, in the premium admix segment.

The brand is strategically positioned in a sizeable white space at the entry-level premium price segment, catering to India's rapidly growing young adult consumer base. The target consumer is 26 – 30 years. These consumers are

effortless statement makers and gravitate towards what's distinct. They connect in tribes and when they get together in mixed gender gatherings, everyone has a different preference of beverage. That explains the growth of categories beyond Whisky, such as Gin, Vodka, Rum and Brandy. With over 20 million consumers entering the legal drinking age category annually, Xclamat!on addresses an unmet market need for quality spirits at accessible premium pricing. The brand's proposition, "It's time for Xclamat!on", positions it as a catalyst that transforms ordinary moments into extraordinary experiences, for India's new generation of consumers.

Jean Touboul, CEO, Pernod Ricard India, said, "For over three decades, Pernod Ricard India has been at the forefront of shaping the country's premium spirits industry. Xclamat!on is a brand born from deep consumer insight, designed for India's next-gen consumer who seeks both premium quality and variety for mixed-gender social occasions. Xclamat!on is boldness, innovation, and celebration in a bottle. The launch marks our first unified brand spanning five spirits categories — whisky, vodka, gin, rum and brandy — in the premium admix segment that is poised to outpace industry growth in the next decade. Xclamat!on is not just a brand, it is a blend of the finest Indian spirits crafted with global know-how for an exceptional taste."

## ROYAL ENFIELD GOAN CLASSIC 350 2026 EDITION RECEIVES NEW RIDER-FOCUSED UPDATES



Hyderabad: Royal Enfield, the global leader in the mid-size motorcycle market (250-750 cc), has introduced the 2026 edition of the bobber-inspired, free-spirited Goan Classic 350. The bobber-inspired motorcycle, which celebrates and embodies non-conformity and free-spirited lifestyle, now comes with additional rider-focused features that enhance the overall ride experience.

With a new assist-and-slipper clutch, the Goan Classic

350 offers better control during downshifts, smoother gear changes, and lighter clutch action. The existing USB Type-C charging port on the motorcycle has been upgraded for faster charging, ensuring riders stay connected with essential devices on the go. At the core of the Goan Classic is the popular 349cc air-oil-cooled, single-cylinder engine that balances effortless power with refined character. Producing 20.2 bhp at 6,100 rpm and 27 Nm of torque at 4,000 rpm, this engine is tuned for smooth, unhurried performance, ideal for the laid-back nature of bobber riding. The 5-speed gearbox allows for easy shifts and relaxed cruising, whether in city traffic or on open highways. True to its roots, the Goan Classic 350 boasts an iconic single-seat bobber silhouette, a floating rider seat for all-day comfort, whitewall edge-type aluminium tubeless spoke wheels, distinctive chopper fenders, slash-cut exhaust and mid-ape handlebars—embodying bold custom culture and self-expression, now refined with these modern touches for contemporary riders. The Goan Classic 350 with the new rider-focused improvements will be available at all authorised Royal Enfield stores in India, at Rs. 2,19,787 (ex-showroom) for Shack Black & Purple Haze and Rs. 2,22,593 (ex-showroom) for Trip Teal Green & Rave Red colourways.

## Many shades of Vijay Sethupathi: A birthday binge special on Tata Play Binge



Hyderabad: If there's one actor who has mastered the art of being unpredictable, powerful, and deeply human, all at once, it's Vijay Sethupathi. From playing the charming anti-hero to the quiet everyman and the menacing antagonist, his filmography is a masterclass in range. This birthday, we celebrate the Makkal Selvan with a specially curated watchlist that captures his versatility at its finest. Whether you're in the mood for intense drama, quirky storytelling, or edge-of-the-seat thrillers, this Vijay Sethupathi binge has you covered, streaming across platforms on Tata Play Binge.

Master In this massy campus thriller, Vijay Sethupathi locks horns with Vijay as Bhavani, a chillingly charismatic

antagonist with a tragic past. Set against the backdrop of juvenile reform schools, the film explores crime, redemption, and power dynamics. With Vijay Sethupathi bringing quiet menace and emotional depth to the role, Master proves that villains can be just as compelling as heroes. Also starring Malavika Mohanan and Andrea Jeremiah, this one's a high-voltage watch.

Sethupathi A grounded, gripping cop drama, Sethupathi sees Vijay Sethupathi as an honest police officer navigating personal loss and professional duty. Paired with Remya Nambeesan, the film blends investigative grit with emotional realism. It's a no-frills portrayal that relies on strong writing and a restrained performance, making it one of his most relatable and quietly powerful roles.

Ace

Stepping into a lighter, more playful zone, Ace showcases Vijay Sethupathi in a breezy entertainer packed with humour and charm. Sharing screen space with Yogi Babu and Rukmini Vasanth, the film leans into situational comedy while letting Sethupathi's effortless screen presence do the heavy lifting. It's proof that even in easy-going roles, he leaves a lasting impression.

Super Deluxe

Arguably one of the most daring films of his career, Super Deluxe features Vijay Sethupathi as Shilpa, a transgender woman returning to her family. Interwoven with multiple unconventional storylines and starring Fahadh Faasil, Samantha Ruth Prabhu, and Ramya Krishnan, the film challenges norms with sensitivity and dark humour. Sethupathi's fearless performance anchors this cult classic and remains one of the most talked-about roles in contemporary Tamil cinema.

Vikram Vedha

Inspired by the folklore of Vikram and Betaal, this neo-noir thriller pits Vijay Sethupathi's enigmatic gangster Vedha against R. Madhavan's righteous cop Vikram. With each encounter blurring the lines between right and wrong, the film thrives on sharp writing and electric performances. Sethupathi's layered portrayal, witty, philosophical, and dangerous, makes Vikram Vedha an absolute must-watch. Download the Tata Play Binge app to enjoy the best of entertainment across 30+ OTT platforms.

## Grand Rangoli Competitions at Chaitanya Bharathi High School



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 17 (Indian Chronicle): "On the occasion of Makar Sankranti, rangoli (muggulu) competitions were conducted for students at Chaitanya Bharathi High School located in Kaveri Nagar, Uppal. Girl students of the school actively participated in the competitions with great enthusiasm. As part of the celebrations, students also enjoyed flying kites. The Sankranti festivities were celebrated in a grand and colorful manner with the participation of students and teachers together. The entire school was filled with a festive atmosphere. Correspondent and Principal Vemulakonda Venkanna Goud, Shobha Goud, teachers, and students took part in the celebrations with joy, recalling and honoring Indian culture and traditions. Speaking on the occasion, Correspondent and Principal Vemulakonda Venkanna Goud and Shobha Goud stated that such cultural programs greatly help in developing artistic skills, creative thinking, teamwork, and cultural awareness among students."

## Rakesh jaiswal the bharsteeya janatha party true leader



"Jan 17, (Indian Chronicle). "Rakesh jaiswal one of the bc community top leader in the entire hyderabad city, jaiswal the boss of the masses helps the poor people, rakesh jaiswal participated bjp victory celebrations in maharashtra urban, local bodies elections at state office nampally sri lalasingh corporator, sri darshan corporator and senior bjp leaders, bjp party true workers attended in the program."

## Chilkanagar Division Ranks No. 1 in Development: CORPORETER BANNALA GEETHA PRAVEEN



— Corporator Bannala Supervises Road Works Worth 95 Lakhs at Beerappa Gadda

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 17 (Indian Chronicle): "Chilkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee member Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj, along with officials from the GHMC Engineering Department and members of the Beerappa Gadda Welfare Association, inspected the CC road construction works being carried out in several lanes of Beerappa Gadda at an estimated cost of approximately ₹95 lakhs. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Geetha Praveen stated that GHMC Engineering Department officials must ensure strict supervision during the CC road construction. She instructed the contractor to adhere to quality standards in all aspects and to ensure that residents do not face any inconvenience during the construction process. She also directed that any damaged drinking water pipelines and sewerage pipelines be repaired promptly. She warned that strict action would be taken if there were any delays in the road construction works. GHMC DE Vinil Goud, AE Raj Kumar, Work Inspector Kedar, BRS Party State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Yedula Kondal Reddy, Muddam Srinivas Yadav, Shyam, Balu, Beerappa Gadda Welfare Association President and Secretaries Kokonda Jagan and Pilla Ramachander, Advisor Advocate Jagan, Solomon, Marka Sheenu, Balaraju, Ganesh, Jahangir, Pandu, Chandrayya, and others participated in the programme."

## Demand for Removal of Obstructing Poles and New Drainage Line Inspection in Old Mallapur

Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, January 17: "Mallapur Division Following demands raised by local residents regarding the removal of poles obstructing the Mallapur main road and the laying of a new drainage line at Peerla Kottam in Old Mallapur, the issue was inspected on the ground. "Mallapur Congress Party President Kappara Sai Kiran Goud visited the area along with Water Board AE Sriraj and Electrical AE Vijay to review the problem and discuss possible solutions. Congress senior leaders Danturi Raju and Nemali Anil, along with Division Vice President Johnny Bhai, Balaraj, Imtiaz, Irshad, Bhanu, Madhu Yadav, Vinesh Yadav, and local colony residents were also present. "The leaders assured the residents that necessary coordination would be done with the concerned departments to resolve the drainage and road obstruction issues at the earliest."





## Collector Finalises Municipal Ward Reservations Through Lottery System



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 17, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Municipal ward reservations for the upcoming elections in the district were finalised through a lottery system, District Collector Manu Choudhary said on Saturday. A meeting to finalise and announce the reservation details for the Ellampet, Muduchintalapally and Aliabad municipal elections was held at 11.00 am in the Video Conference Hall of the District Collectorate. Representatives of all political parties attended the meeting in the presence of Additional District Collector Vijayender Reddy and District Revenue Officer Haripriya. As part of the process, reservations for ST, SC, BC and Women categories were finalised for 24 wards each in Ellampet and Muduchintalapally municipalities, and 20 wards in Aliabad municipality. The reservations were determined through a



lottery system based on the Socio, Economic, Educational, Employment, Political and Caste (SEEEPC) Survey, 2024, approved by the Planning Department. The Collector announced the reservation details and stated that the related gazette notification would be issued shortly. District Rural Development Officer Sambasiva Rao, municipal commissioners of Ellampet, Muduchintalapally and Aliabad, along with other concerned officials and staff, were present.

## Kuchipudi Dance Performances Enthrall Audience at Uppal Mini Shilparamam“



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 17 (Indian Chronicle):““As part of the weekend cultural programmes at Uppal Mini Shilparamam, the Kuchipudi dance performances presented on Saturday evening by the students of Priyanka and Smarana Dance Academy captivated the audience. “The young dancers mesmerized spectators with a series of classical items including Sri Vigna Rajam Bhaje, Shuklam & Angikam, Mooshika Vahana, Gandhamu

Pooyaruga, Maha Ganapathim, Swagatham Krishna, Tarangam, Ekadantaya, Kala Bhairavashtakam, Narthana Ganapathim, and Aigiri Nandini.”The performances were rendered with grace and devotion by Shuthika Reddy, Sreenika, Shanmukha Priya, Devanshi, Shanvi, Sreeja, Achyutha, Rama Jaswitha, Mahalakshmi, Geetika, Ditya, Mohana, Gowthami, Varshika, Sannidhi and others, earning appreciation from the audience for their expressive movements and rhythmic precision.

## The municipal reservations in the district were conducted transparently.““??



District collector Prateek Jain announced. “Vikarabad (Indian Chronicle, 17, Jan)““Vikarabad District Collector Prateek Jain stated that the municipal reservation process in the district was conducted transparently. The reservation process for 100 wards across 4 municipalities was carried out on Saturday at the Collectorate’s video conference hall, involving various political parties. “The reservations were allocated based on the 2011 census data and Election Commission guidelines. The process involved



drawing lots for SC, ST, and women reservations in Kodangal (12 wards), Parigi (18 wards), Tandur (36 wards), and Vikarabad (34 wards) municipalities. “The finalized municipal chairman seats in Vikarabad district are: “Vikarabad - SC Woman“- Tandur - BC General“- Parigi - BC Woman“- Kodangal - Unreserved”The event was attended by Additional Collector Sudhir, Municipal Commissioners Zakir Ahmed, Balram Naik, Venkataiah, Yadagiri, Local Bodies Election Superintendents Anand Rao and Nandkumar, and other concerned officials.

## Woman Goes Missing Along With Two Minor Daughters in Lakshmi Narasimha Colony

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 17, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“According to the complaint, the complainant stated that she has one son and one daughter. Her daughter, Yamjala Naveena alias Soni, aged 27 years, wife of Sridhar, is working as a GHMC worker. On 13 January 2026, Yamjala Naveena came along with her husband Sridhar to the complainant’s residence located at Lakshmi Narasimha Colony. On 16 January 2026, at around 11:00 AM, Yamjala Naveena left the complainant’s house along with her two minor daughters, Tanmayi aged 7 years and Niharika aged 4 years, and has not returned since. The complainant made enquiries and conducted a search at the houses of relatives, friends, and all known places, but the whereabouts of her daughter and grandchildren could not be traced so far. Therefore, the complainant requested



the police to take necessary action to trace them. Based on the complaint, an FIR has been registered and investigation has been taken up.

## Permanent Solution to Storm Water Drain Issue in Endowment Colony: Ramanthapur Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkat Rao

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 17 (Indian Chronicle):““A long-pending storm water drain problem in Endowment Colony under the Ramanthapur Division has been permanently resolved with the initiative of Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkat Rao. “Residents of Endowment Colony, including the New Gokhale Nagar area and surrounding localities, had been facing severe difficulties due to the absence of a proper storm water drainage system. During rains, waterlogging and related issues caused significant inconvenience, which the residents brought to the attention of the Corporator. “Responding promptly, Corporator Srivani Venkat Rao sanctioned and initiated restoration works of the storm water drain at an estimated cost of approximately 77 lakh. With the completion of these works, problems such as water stagnation and drainage overflow during the monsoon have been considerably reduced, providing much-needed relief to the residents. “Local residents expressed their happiness and gratitude, stating that the permanent solution has greatly improved living conditions in the area. The programme was attended by the Corporator along with AE Swetha, Mahender, and local residents Prahlad Goud, Suresh, Praveen, and others.



## Chilkanagar Division Ranks No. 1 in Development: CORPORETER BANNALA GEETHA PRAVEEN



— Corporator Bannala Supervises Road Works Worth 795 Lakhs at Beerappa Gadda “KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 17 (Indian Chronicle):““Chilkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee member Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj, along with officials from the GHMC Engineering Department and members of the Beerappa Gadda Welfare Association, inspected the CC road construction works being carried out in several lanes of Beerappa Gadda at an estimated cost of approximately 795 lakhs. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Geetha Praveen stated that GHMC Engineering Department officials must ensure strict supervision during the CC road construction. She instructed the contractor to adhere

to quality standards in all aspects and to ensure that residents do not face any inconvenience during the construction process. She also directed that any damaged drinking water pipelines and sewerage pipelines be repaired promptly. She warned that strict action would be taken if there were any delays in the road construction works. GHMC DE Vinil Goud, AE Raj Kumar, Work Inspector Kedar, BRS Party State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Yedula Kondal Reddy, Muddam Srinivas Yadav, Shyam, Balu, Beerappa Gadda Welfare Association President and Secretaries Kokonda Jagan and Pitla Ramachander, Advisor Advocate Jagan, Solomon, Marka Sheenu, Balaraju, Ganesh, Jahangir, Pandu, Chandrayya, and others participated in the programme.

## MP R Cricket Tournament Inaugurated by Uppal Congress Party In-Charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy“— Under the leadership of Ramanthapur Division Congress Party President Mohammed Rafiq

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 17 (Indian Chronicle):““The cricket tournament being organized at Ramanthapur Chinna Cheruvu under the leadership of Ramanthapur Division Congress Party President Mohammed Rafiq was inaugurated by Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-Charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, who attended as the chief guest and formally launched the tournament by tossing the coin. “Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy said that organizing such sports tournaments helps provide mental relaxation and enthusiasm to players. He congratulated Mohammed Rafiq for organizing the event and expressed his hope that more such programs would be taken up in the future. He criticized the previous government, stating that sports were neglected during the last ten years of their rule. “Parameshwar Reddy further stated that after the formation of the people’s government, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy introduced a new sports policy with the aim of taking rural sportspersons to the international level. He assured that the Congress Party would stand by every sportsperson in the Uppal constituency. “The program was attended by Mohammed Taufiq, Mohammed Rafiq, Aakarapu Arun, Kandi Shrayan, Vallapu Srikanth Yadav, Garika Sudhakar, Nam Raji Reddy, Angala Sandeep, Poosa Sathayya, Gangaputra Bhaskar, Mogili Lingam, Bullet Ashok, Sandeep, Bhaskar, Meetu, Jilla, Satti Reddy, Wazir Baba, Sai, Shaga Sridhar, Ambika Mahesh, Surya, Icon Madhu, Swamy, Mohammed Jangir, Chinna, Kashamalla



Shankar, Kishore, Gade Raghu, Pasha, Narsing Rao, Nayeem, Ravi, and others.



# Tandur municipality reservations finalized.““?? Municipal chair position reserved for BCs ?? Priority given to women



““Vikarabad,Tandur(Indian Chronicle 17,Jan)““The eagerly awaited municipal ward reservations were announced through a lottery process at the District Collector’s office on Saturday. The reservations for 36 wards in Tandur muni-

pality were officially finalized and the list was released.“The reservations were allocated across SC, ST, BC, and General categories. The municipal chairman position has been reserved for a BC General candidate, heating up the political equations in Tandur.““Reservation Details:- SC Category:- Ward 19 - SC General“- Ward 2 - SC Woman“- ST Category:- Ward 13“- BC Reservations:- 15 wards reserved for BCs (8 BC General, 7 BC Women)- BC General: Wards 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 21, 29, 31“- BC Women: Wards 3, 5, 9, 17, 26, 27, 34“- General Category:- 18 wards (10 General Women, 8 General)- General Women: Wards 1, 4, 14, 16, 20, 25, 30, 32, 35, 36“- General: Wards 6, 15, 18, 22, 23, 24, 28, 33“The announcement has intensified efforts among BC aspirants for the chairman position, and political parties have begun finalizing their candidates.

# KND Charitable Trust Applauds the Selfless Eye-Care Services of Sri Vaidya Foundation.



““P. S. ASHOKAN. “KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. ““Moved by the remarkable humanitarian services rendered by Sri Vaidya Foundation—particularly its dedicated efforts to support underprivileged families suffering from eye ailments—Smt. Cheemala Koteswaramma, Chairperson of KND Charitable Trust, took a heartfelt initiative to extend support and express gratitude.““After learning about the Foundation’s impactful work through news reports while she was in Khammam, Smt. Koteswaramma resolved that such noble service deserved not only appreciation but also tangible encouragement. With this conviction, she personally travelled from Khammam to the Manthani region to meet the team behind these commendable initiatives.““On be-

half of KND Charitable Trust, she conveyed sincere congratulations to Dr. Satish and Venkatesh, lauding their unwavering commitment to humanitarian service. She emphasized that such efforts not only restore vision but also bring hope and dignity to countless lives, and encouraged them to continue serving many more people in need.““Responding warmly, Dr. Satish assured that the Foundation would extend all possible cooperation and support, reaffirming their dedication to social responsibility and community welfare.““The KND Charitable Trust expressed its deep appreciation for the valuable time and consideration extended by the Sri Vaidya Foundation team, and once again conveyed heartfelt congratulations for their exemplary service to humanity.

# A New Political Alliance Formed in the State

Indian Chronicle, Secunderabad, January 17:““A new political alliance has been formed in the state of Telangana. Nine political parties registered with the Telangana State Election Commission (SEC) have come together to form a new alliance named the Telangana Political Alliance.“The details of the Telangana Political Alliance were announced on Saturday by the alliance President, former professor Gali Vinod Kumar, and Secretary General Kapilavai Dileep Kumar. Speaking at a media conference held at the Rashtriya Lok Dal Telangana State Office in Kavadiguda, they said that the alliance was formed with nine like-minded political parties with the objective of achieving political power for marginalized and weaker sections of society.“They stated that the alliance will jointly contest the upcoming local body elections in the state, including MPTC, ZPTC, and municipal elections. They further said that in the 2028 State Assembly elections, the alliance aims to come to power with the support of marginalized communities.“They criticized the major political parties in the state—Congress, BRS, and BJP—saying that they have lost the trust of the people and that the public is no longer in a position to believe in these three parties. They alleged that during the previous BRS government, crores of public funds were looted, and claimed that the Congress government is now following the same path.“They stated that in the Telangana state, which was achieved after a long struggle, the common people have gained nothing, and asserted that the Telangana



Political Alliance is 100% committed to the welfare of oppressed and marginalized sections. They further said that their alliance would ensure seats, reservations, welfare schemes, and employment opportunities in proportion to the population.“Those who attended the meeting included Alliance Vice President Teegala Pradeep Goud of the Mahajana Sena Party, EC Member Dr. Eeda Seshagiri Rao of the Aadhaar Party, Working President Lalu Nayak Ramavat of the Bahujana Rajyam Party, General Secretary David Andrew of the Indian Christian Secular Party, official spokesperson Goura Beerappa from TRLD, along with leaders from the respective parties.

# Reservation of Municipal Wards Finalized Following State Election Commission Guidelines: Hanumantha Rao

(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 17):- District Collector Hanumantha Rao stated that the reservation of municipal wards has been finalized in accordance with the guidelines of the State Election Commission. On Saturday, the Collector conducted the reservation finalization process transparently in the presence of representatives of various recognized political parties at the Collectorate’s mini meeting hall.“Reservations were finalized for 35 wards in Bhuvanagiri Municipality, 12 wards in Aleru Municipality, 12 wards in Yadagirigutta Municipality, 20 wards in Choutuppal Municipality, 13 wards in Pochampally Municipality, and 12 wards in Mothkur Municipality in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district.“The Collector stated that according to the ward reservation process for the municipalities, the allocations were made through a lottery in the presence of representatives of various political parties.“On this occasion, Collector Hanumantha Rao clarified that the reservation allocations were made in accordance with the instructions of the State Election Commission. Additional Collector for Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao, RDOs Krishna Reddy and Shekhar Reddy, Municipal Commissioners, and representatives of various political parties participated in this program.



# Ramagundam Police Commissionerate Intensifies Road Safety Awareness Under “Arrive Alive” Campaign.



““P. S. ASHOKAN “KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. ““As part of the prestigious “Arrive Alive” road safety awareness initiative launched by the Telangana Police on the directions of the Hon’ble Director General of Police, the Ramagundam Police Commissionerate has undertaken extensive awareness programmes across Peddapalli and

Mancherla districts.““Disclosing the details in an official statement, Ramagundam Police Commissioner Amber Kishore Jha stated that the campaign aims to inculcate a strong sense of road safety and responsible road behaviour among students, who are the future citizens of the nation.““As per the directions of the Commissioner, awareness programmes were conducted in schools, colleges, and other educational institutions under all police station limits. As part of these initiatives, essay writing, rangoli (muggu), and painting competitions were organised to educate students on road safety norms and traffic regulations. These activities were designed to foster a responsible and disciplined attitude towards road usage from a young age.““Addressing the occasion, Commissioner Amber Kishore Jha observed that a significant majority of road accidents in the country occur due to human error. He emphasised that early awareness of road safety rules is crucial in preventing such accidents. He highlighted the life-saving importance of wearing helmets and seat belts, adhering to speed limits, and strictly following traffic signals. He also urged students to share this vital awareness with their family members and the wider community.““The Commissioner further appealed to students to strictly follow traffic rules and set an example of safe and responsible travel. He reiterated that the sole objective of the “Arrive Alive” programme is to ensure that every individual reaches their destination safely and securely.

# TWJF Hyderabad District Meeting on the 20th: - Federation Founder President and State Convener Mamidi Somaiah

(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 17):- The Telangana Working Journalists Federation (TWJF) Hyderabad district-level meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 20th, at 10 AM at Raj Function Hall in Ramnagar, announced the Federation’s founder president and state convener, Mamidi Somaiah. He stated that the meeting will discuss the various problems faced by Hyderabad journalists and formulate a future course of action. He mentioned that preparations are underway to form a Federation committee in Hyderabad district, similar to the 32 districts across the state, and as part of this, consultations were recently held with many print and electronic media journalists working in Hyderabad. He said that Federation state leaders and several senior Hyderabad journalists will participate in the meeting on January 20th, and an ad-hoc district committee will be formed on this occasion. Mamidi Somaiah stated that after the membership registration, the district general body meeting and the election of the new committee will take place. He urged print and electronic media journalists working in Hyderabad to participate in this meeting and take up TWJF membership.



# Sarpanches must compulsorily attend the training on the scheduled dates

: Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao““Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 17):- In accordance with the orders of the Telangana Panchayat Department, training classes have been arranged for Sarpanches in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district. Therefore, District Collector and District Zilla Parishad Special Officer Hanumantha Rao stated that the concerned Sarpanches must compulsorily attend the training on the scheduled dates, participate in the classes, and make them a success.“The training classes, organized by the Panchayat Raj Department in batches as shown below, are to be attended at Swami Ramananda Tirtha Rural Institute (SRTRI), Jalalpur (village), Bhudan Pochampally (mandal), Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district. Date: January 19, 2026 to January 23, 2026, Batch Numbers 1 and 2: Valigonda, Bhudan Pochampally, Turkapally. Date: February 3, 2026 to February 7, 2026, Batch 1 and 2: Bommalaramaram, Addaguduru, Aleru, Ramannapet. Date: February 9, 2026 to February 13, 2026, Batch 1 and 2: Bhuvanagiri, Mothkur, Rajapet, Yadagirigutta. Date: February 17, 2026 to February 21, 2026, Batch 1 and 2: Bibinagar, Choutuppal, Narayanapur. Date: February 24, 2026 to February 28, 2026, Batch 1: Gundala, Motakondur, Atmakur. The District Collector stated that the training sessions will be conducted in this manner.



# All arrangements for the Republic Day celebrations should be meticulously planned and executed

- Additional Collector for Local Bodies and Additional Collector for Revenue, Bhaskar Rao““Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 17):- Additional Collector for Local Bodies and Additional Collector for Revenue, Bhaskar Rao, instructed the concerned officials to make all arrangements for the Republic Day celebrations meticulously and complete them on time. On Saturday, he held a meeting with officials from all departments in his chamber to review the arrangements for the Republic Day celebrations. On this occasion, the Additional Collector reviewed the arrangements for the programs to be undertaken during the Republic Day celebrations with officials from various departments. He issued instructions to the officials of the respective departments. He suggested that all departments should work in coordination to ensure that the Republic Day celebrations are conducted smoothly without any shortcomings. Since the celebrations will be held at the Government Junior College, he instructed that the stage and seating arrangements for VIPs, officials, and others should be meticulously planned accordingly. He suggested that invitations should be sent to guests following the protocol. He said that cultural programs should be organized by students to foster a sense of national pride. He said that all departmental officials should efficiently carry out the responsibilities assigned to them and ensure the success of the celebrations. In this meeting, ZP CEO Shobha Rani, District Revenue Officer Jayamma, Bhongir RDO Krishna Reddy, District Rural Development Officer Nagireddy, Municipal Commissioner Ramalingam,



Collectorate Administration Officer Jagmohan Prasad, and district-level officials from various departments participated.



# ‘No one in family knew law... father’s support prompted me to take it up’



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

He woke up at 6 am, got ready all excited to meet the man, who he says has inspired many in his village and is fondly called “Surya.” “Chief Justice of India Justice Surya Kant was to attend a felicitation ceremony at his native Petwar village in Hansi. I travelled 14 km to meet him. His statement that ‘the court can sit till midnight to deliver justice to poor litigants’ has inspired many youngsters in my village. There are very few people who continue to love their motherland even after reaching such heights in life. We are deeply touched that he still remembers the names of villagers.”

Like Shastri, 80-year-old Chander Singh Jangra, who has known ‘Surya’ since his childhood days, has been waiting for the day since November. “I have known him since his childhood, and he was always a hardworking boy. It was my privilege that I was chosen to present him with a turban,” he said.During his first visit to his native village after being sworn in as the 53rd CJI in November 2025, Justice Surya Kant received a rousing welcome from the people, with villagers dancing to the beats of the dhol. The road leading to the venue was lined with posters bearing his image and the words “Petwar Rattan.”Chief Justice of India Surya Kant Saturday visited his native place in Haryana and inaugurated two court complexes — one in Hisar district and the other in Hansi. He was accompanied by Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, reached his native Petwar village in the newly carved Hansi district in the afternoon. The CJI who did his early education in the village said, “No one in my family had any idea about law, and none of my relatives had ever studied it.” He also remembered his English teacher, Prem Singh, who had held extra classes to help them achieve better results in the class 10 examination of 1977.He embraced schoolchildren and signed autographs when they presented him paintings of his photograph.Pankaj, a class 12 student, added, “I am grateful that the Chief Justice accepted my paintings, which gave me immense joy. His rise in life has given us the strength to believe that we too can fulfil our dreams and bring honour to our village.”

Recalling his school days, justice Kant said, “In terms of education, Petwar was advanced enough to have a primary school, a middle school for girls, and a co-educational

high school. But children had to struggle greatly to pursue education at that time. We all faced those struggles. Sometimes there were no teachers. I still remember that when the English teacher was transferred, it created very tough times because his substitute would not arrive for months.”He added, “In those days, the school lacked facilities. We used to sit on the floor. Yet I remain proud of the commitment shown by the teachers of that era.”Recalling his father Madan Gopal Shastri’s support at every stage of his life. He said, “I expressed my wish to go to college at a time when my father, a school-teacher, was burdened with the responsibility of educating four children. He always supported me.”In another dilemma after graduation, he said, “Some family members wanted me to prepare for competitive exams for a government job. But I was a bit stubborn. I insisted on studying law. No one in the family or among our relatives had any idea about law. But it was my wish to pursue it, and my father fully supported me. He was both a friend and a guide. Had he not supported me then, my career would have been very difficult.”Even after decades, he still remembers the elders of his village and their blessings. Recalling Master Rishal Singh, Chaudhary Molu Ram ji, and the father of his friend Thambu Ram he said, “Whenever I touched their feet, they would tell me, ‘Son, you must become a great man and bring honour to this village.’ Those words of inspiration carried me from the village to the city of Hisar, and from there to Chandigarh. Their prayers, blessings, and faith in me became my strength, and it is because of all these things that I stand before you today.”

He moved to Chandigarh in 1985 to practice in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, specialising in constitutional, service, and civil matters. At the age of 38, he became the youngest Advocate General of Haryana on July 7, 2000. He was designated a senior advocate in March 2001 and elevated as a permanent judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court on January 9, 2004.

At the function, Union law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal described him as “sooraj, the Sun,” adding, “Blessed is the village where people like Justice Suryakant are born.”Earlier in the day, Justice Surya Kant inaugurated the newly constructed court in Barwala in Hisar district and also laid the foundation stone of the upcoming court complex.The programme was attended by Punjab and Haryana High Court Justice Sheel Nagu, many judges of the High Court, Haryana Ministers Ranbir Singh Gangwa and Arvind Sharma, among others.Addressing the gathering, Justice Surya Kant said that the primary objective of establishing new courts is to make justice simple, accessible and affordable for the common citizenCongratulating the Haryana government, he said that judicial work in Barwala (Hisar) and Narnaund (Hansi), where he also inaugurated a court complex, will commence from Monday.Following the concept of ‘Justice at Your Doorstep,’ judicial complexes are being constructed closer to the public, which has proved particularly effective for the poor in accessing justice. Along with continuous infrastructure development, it is equally important that citizens receive quality justice, he said.

# 3 accused involved in thefts arrested, stolen jewellery, household appliances recovered

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Chandigarh Police arrest three in Mani Majra theft cases and recover stolen jewellery and household appliancesChandigarh Police arrest three in Mani Majra theft cases and recover stolen jewellery and household appliances.The Chandigarh Police has arrested three accused involved in a series of theft cases in the Mani Majra area and recovered stolen jewellery and household appliances from their possession.The arrests were made following multiple theft and burglary incidents reported in the area over the past several days.

The police constituted special teams, which collected and analysed CCTV footage, conducted raids at suspected hideouts and deployed informers to track down the culprits. The accused have been identified as Shamsher Singh, 32, a resident of Mari Wala Town, Mani Majra; Shankar Rawat, 30, a resident of Pipli Wala Town, Mani Majra; and Karan, alias Pepsi, 23, a resident of Majri Chowk, Panchkula.

Two FIRs were registered at Mani Majra police station on January 9. In FIR number 4, shopkeeper Abhinav Pal reported the theft of a blower and mixer grinder from outside his shop at Market Hall Complex, Mani Majra. In FIR number 5, complainant Jyoti Sharma, a housewife, reported the theft of jewellery from her residence when she had gone to the rooftop to dry clothes.The stolen items in-



cluded one pair of gold earrings, two pairs of silver anklets, one pair of silver bangles, and one silver chain with a locket.During investigation, the police arrested the three accused on January 9.The stolen blower, mixer grinder and two oil tins were recovered from Shamsher Singh and Shankar Rawat, while the jewellery stolen from Jyoti Sharma’s house was recovered from Karan, alias Pepsi.All three accused were produced before the court and remanded in 14 days’ judicial custody on Saturday.Police officials said that Shamsher Singh and Shankar Rawat have no previous criminal record, while Karan, alias Pepsi, is involved in an earlier case registered in 2025 under the Arms Act at Ambala City police station.

# Narrow escape for 6 as ‘drunk’ driver crashes car into Bengaluru restaurant after losing control



A major accident was narrowly averted in Bengaluru Thursday night after a speeding car driven by an allegedly intoxicated 42-year-old man crashed into a restaurant on a busy road. A viral CCTV recording of the accident showed six people standing outside the restaurant moving out of the way just in time to avoid being struck.

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Speeding car crashes into Bengaluru restaurant as six people escape injury, driver allegedly intoxicated, police saySpeeding car crashes into Bengaluru restaurant as six people escape injury, driver allegedly intoxicated, police say (Screengrab from CCTV video)A major accident was narrowly averted in Bengaluru Thursday night after a speeding car driven by an allegedly intoxicated 42-year-old man crashed into a restaurant on a busy road. A viral CCTV recording of the accident showed six people standing outside the restaurant moving out of the way just in time to

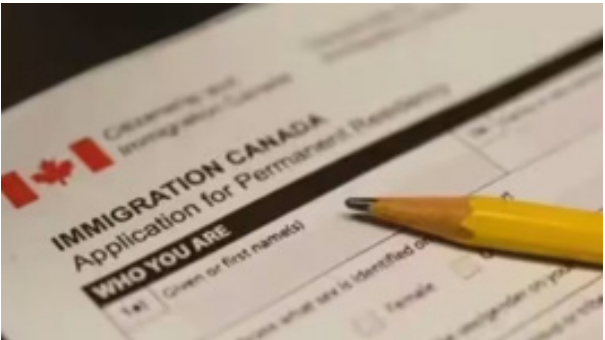
avoid being struck.

The accident was reported on Indiranagar’s 100 Feet Road, and the accused driver has been identified as Derrick Tony, a software engineer and a resident of Domlur in Bengaluru.According to the police, the accident occurred around 11.35 pm when Tony, who was driving a Skoda under the influence of alcohol, failed to make a left turn due to excessive speed. As a result, he hit a central divider, collided with a parked motorcycle, and crashed into the exterior wall of the Barbeque Nation restaurant, said the police.

The CCTV visual of the accident showed a group of six people standing outside the restaurant, engaged in conversation. When they noticed the car speeding recklessly toward them, they quickly ran to their left and narrowly avoided being hit. The Skoda car then collided with the restaurant’s walls, as shown in the visual

The traffic police in Jeevan Bima Nagar arrived after the accident and subjected Tony to alcohol tests, confirming that he was drunk. The police took him into custody and seized his car. “We have registered a case against Derrick, and his car has been impounded,” a police officer said.The people who escaped the accident had just come out after dinner and were having a casual conversation outside the restaurant, said a police officer.According to the police, a two-wheeler rider, Zabeer Ahmed, 20, sustained minor injuries in the accident.Following a complaint from a staff member at Barbeque Nation, the traffic police booked Tony under sections 281 (rash or negligent driving or riding on a public way, endangering human life or likely to cause injury) and 125 (acts that endanger human life or personal safety through rash or negligent behavior) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and provisions concerning drunk driving under the Motor Vehicles Act.

# Canada puts parent, grandparent sponsorships on hold for 2026



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

IRCC will process only 10,000 applications from the 2025 intake, while families are urged to consider the super visa option.Canada has suspended new Parents and Grandparents Program sponsorships from January 1, 2026, to clear backlogs and meet revised immigration targets.Canada has paused accepting new sponsorship applications under its Parents and Grandparents Program (PGP) effective January 1, 2026, citing adjustments to immigration targets and the need to clear existing backlogs.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the department responsible for immigration matters, said new ministerial instructions prohibit the intake of new sponsorship and permanent residence applications under the PGP “until further notice”. The move follows the closure of the limited 2025 intake and is aligned with changes outlined in Canada’s 2025–2027 Immigration Lev-

# AAP targets Badal, SAD and BJP seek action against Atishi as Punjab witnesses day of protests and counter-protests



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Even as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced a gherao of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann’s residence in Chandigarh on January 16, widespread protests and counter-protests by AAP, BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) over the issue of an allegedly doctored video of the former Delhi chief minister and current Leader of Opposition were seen across Punjab on Saturday.AAP MLAs, ministers and party workers staged protests outside the residences of SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal at village Badal in Muktsar district, Pathankot MLA and BJP Punjab working president Ashwani Sharma in Pathankot, Congress MLA Pargat Singh in Jalandhar, and Congress MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira in Bholath (Kapurthala district), demanding their arrest for allegedly sharing a doctored video of former Delhi chief minister and Leader of Opposition Atishi on social media.

The Jalandhar police commissionerate on Friday registered an FIR against unknown persons for sharing doctored video on social media platforms.Simultaneously in other parts of Punjab, BJP and SAD workers held protests at various locations across the state, seeking action against Atishi, alleging that she had hurt religious sentiments by disrespecting Sikh Gurus during her speech in the Delhi Vidhan Sabha.Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar announced that the party would gherao the Chief Minister’s residence in Chandigarh on January 16 to protest against what he described as the continuously deteriorating law and order situation in the state, Punjab emerging as a hub of drugs, and increasing corruption, besides the handling of the Atishi video issue.

Jakhar said that although the clarification issued by former Delhi Chief Minister Atishi regarding her video itself looks like an admission of guilt, the Punjab Police conducted a forensic examination of her video within a day and gave her a clean chit. He questioned why the same Punjab Po-

els Plan.The PGP allows Canadian citizens and permanent residents to sponsor their parents and grandparents for permanent residency.In 2025, IRCC conducted a restricted intake drawn solely from the remaining pool of “interest to sponsor” forms submitted in 2020. Invitations to apply were issued from July 28, 2025, with 17,860 invitations sent over about two weeks. The department aimed to accept up to 10,000 complete applications by October 9, 2025. That intake has now closed, and no further applications from the 2025 round will be accepted.

Under Ministerial Instructions 89, which came into force on January 1, 2026, IRCC will continue processing up to 10,000 PGP applications received during the 2025 intake through the course of 2026. However, the instructions make clear that no new applications by parents or grandparents, or related sponsorship applications, will be received for processing until further directions are issued.IRCC said the pause is an administrative step to allow continued processing of existing files and to better align new intakes with available spaces in the family reunification category. Canada’s latest immigration levels plan has reduced overall permanent resident targets, citing pressures on housing, infrastructure and public services.Processing times for PGP applications remain lengthy, at about 24 months for applicants outside Quebec and up to 48 months for those destined for Quebec, reflecting provincial admission caps.As an alternative, IRCC continues to promote the super visa, which allows parents and grandparents to stay in Canada for up to five years per entry, with multiple entries permitted over 10 years. Recent changes have eased the requirements for private health insurance for the visa.

lice could not conduct a forensic examination of the purported sacrilege video related to the Chief Minister within a day and give him a clean chit as well.He challenged Mann to either resign from his post or immediately get the investigation conducted into the video related to alleged religious sacrilege circulating about him, and prove himself completely innocent.The Punjab BJP chief also questioned the silence over a purported audio related to the Patiala SSP, saying that the latter was allegedly planning to rig the Zila Parishad elections by acting as a tool of the ruling party, but the state government is silent. He said that despite the high court’s orders, the government has not yet given any response regarding the investigation into the Patiala SSP’s audio.

Amid the Atishi’s video’s controversy, the Speaker of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha issued notices to the Punjab Director General of Police, the Special DGP and the Jalandhar Police Commissioner, seeking their replies within 48 hours over the registration of the FIR, stating that the matter was already under consideration as a breach of privilege in the Delhi Assembly.Reacting to the notices, AAP chief spokesperson Malwinder Singh Kang said that the FIR in Jalandhar was registered on the basis of a complaint from the persons whose sentiments were hurt and a forensic examination had shown the video to be doctored. He said Atishi had clarified that she had no intention of hurting anyone’s sentiments and her video was tempered. Kang accused the BJP of indulging in “low-level politics”.Meanwhile, the Shiromani Akali Dal, held district-level protests across the state demanding registration of a case against Atishi and cancellation of her membership of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha. SAD delegations submitted memorandums to deputy commissioners, urging the Punjab Governor and the Speaker of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha to take action, alleging that Atishi’s remarks in the Assembly had hurt Sikh sentiments.The SAD also demanded removal of what it termed disparaging videos against Sikh Gurus and institutions from social media and registration of cases against those responsible under cyber crime laws.During the dharna at the district headquarters, the SAD leaders alleged that Chief minister Bhagwant Mann had committed an unpardonable sin by grossly disrespecting the great Guru Sahiban in a viral video. They said instead of repenting this sin, the chief minister had opened a front against Sri Akal Takht Sahib. “Not only is he disrespecting the supreme temporal seat of the Sikhs but he has also unleashed a defamatory campaign through his proxies against the great Guru Sahiban, the premier institutions of the Sikh community and Sikh leaders,” the leaders added.

# NMRC Executive Director removed after calendar features his photos



Prasad had said on Friday that there was “nothing personal, nothing commercial” in the calendar. He had added that it was all in the government interest and not personal. “

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

NMRC calendar features IAS officer Lokesh M in two April photographs showing him playing the sitar and addressing an event (Express)NMRC calendar features IAS officer Lokesh M in two April photographs showing him playing the sitar and addressing an event The Noida Authority on Friday removed Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) Executive Director Mahendra Prasad, appointing Krishna Karunesh, the Authority’s Additional Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in his place.On Saturday, The Indian Express reported that the official 2026 calendar of NMRC featured Prasad’s photographs on the page for July, which also happened to be the month of his birthday. In the first photograph, Prasad – also the Officer on Special Duty in Noida Authority – can be seen walking in a corridor and in the second, addressing an event. A 2014-batch IAS officer, his

birthday happens to fall on July 5.

Prasad had said on Friday that there was “nothing personal, nothing commercial” in the calendar. He had added that it was all in the government interest and not personal. “It’s not as if I have printed anyone’s photo who does not hold an official post,” he had said.In a letter dated January 9, the Authority said, “In the immediate interest of the Authority’s work, Shri Krishna Karunesh, Additional Chief Executive Officer, Noida, is nominated as the Executive Director, Noida Metro Rail Corporation, in place of Shri Mahendra Prasad, Officer on Special Duty, Noida, with immediate effect.”

As per the letter, the “said order was issued with the approval of the Chief Executive Officer, Noida and the Managing Director, Noida Metro Rail Corporation Limited”, Lokesh M, whose photographs also featured in the NMRC calendar. The calendar carried two photographs of Lokesh M, a 2005-batch IAS officer, for the month of April. His birthday falls on April 3. In one photograph, the officer can be seen playing the sitar and in the other, addressing an event.Lokesh M had told The Indian Express on Friday that his photographs had been used without his permission. He had also said that he had issued a “show-cause notice” to the officials concerned as soon as he came to know about the matter. The photograph was taken when he played Vande Mataram on the stage at Noida Authority’s Independence Day celebration, he had added.

However, in a purported photograph taken recently, Lokesh M could be seen posing with the calendar that featured his photographs, while other officials clapped.Though he did not respond to calls and messages on Saturday, an official said, “The show-cause notice was issued on the day the CEO learnt about the photographs. We are confirming when it was issued.”



# Suspended for ‘inaction against gangsters’, IPS officer reinstated, posted as SSP Ropar



GNS News Agency, Jan 14

Amritsar Rural Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Maninder SinghManinder Singh was suspended on November 15, 2025, immediately after the Tarn Taran by-poll results. The Punjab government Saturday reinstated and posted a 2019-batch IPS officer as SSP Ropar nearly two months after he was suspended as SSP Amritsar Rural for alleged dereliction of duty and failing to take action against gangsters. Maninder Singh was suspended on November 15, 2025, immediately after the Tarn Taran by-poll results. The primary ground cited by the government for his suspension was alleged failure to take effective action against gangsters and dereliction of duty in curbing rising organised crime and gangster-related activities in Amritsar Rural district. A senior police officer said the fact that Maninder has been again posted as SSP means that the initial allegations against him have proven to be false. The Indian Express had reported at the time of his suspension that while the officer was accused of inaction against gangsters, his track record in Amritsar Rural was fairly good as far as

encounters with gangsters is concerned.No detailed public explanation for the withdrawal of his suspension has been put out by the state government. The government issued posting orders for 22 IPS officers which includes new SSPs for Ropar, Bathinda and Khanna. Former Tarn Taran SSP Ravjot Kaur Grewal who was also reinstated recently has been transferred to Punjab Vigilance. She was suspended by the Election Commission of India in the run-up to the Tarn Taran by-poll following complaints by Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and an adverse report by the Police Observer deputed by the EC for the by-poll.

Khanna SSP Jyoti Yadav has been posted as SSP Bathinda replacing Amneet Kaundal. Kaundal has been promoted and posted as DIG Personnel and DIG Social Media in Chandigarh. Darpan Ahluwalia, Staff Officer to DGP Punjab, has been posted as new SSP Khanna. Gulneet Singh Khurana, SSP Ropar has been posted as DIG Counter Intelligence in Chandigarh while Rupinder Singh, DCP Ludhiana has been posted as Additional CP Ludhiana on promotion. Other changes on account of promotion of officers and reshuffle includes Naresh Sharma (Special DGP PHRC), A S Rai (Special DGP Traffic and Road Safety and Special DGP Public Grievances Division), Kaustabh Sharma (ADGP Human Rights), Jagadari Nilambri Vijay (IG ANTf and IG Faridkot Range), Rajpal Singh (IGP Crime and IGP PAP-2), Snehdeep Sharma (DIG ANTf and DIG Ferozepur Range) and Sandeep Goel (DIG Border Range on promotion from SP). Other transfers include Jasdev Singh (DIG Security Punjab Lok Bhawan), Sandeep Kumar Garg (DIG Intelligence), Dhruv Dahiya (DIG Internal Security), Akhil Chaudhary (DIG ANTf), Gurpreet Singh (DIG Commando), Sarabjit Singh (DIG Crime, BOI), Harpreet Singh Jaggi (DIG EOW) and Rishab Bhola (Staff Officer to DGP).

# Bangladesh is also a warning for us: Yogi at Magh Mela event



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addresses gathering at Magh Mela in Prayagraj amid remarks on caste and religious divisions. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addresses gathering at Magh Mela in Prayagraj amid remarks on caste and religious divisions. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Saturday that divisions on the basis of caste, sect or religion will become cause of total destruction for us like what's seen in Bangladesh today.

Addressing an event at Magh Mela in Prayagraj, the CM said, “No one speaks on incidents there? (Bangladesh). Shops of those running contracts in the name of secularism wield power to break Hindu society and Sanatan Dharma, but on Bangladesh incidents, Fevicol and tape seem stuck on their mouths. No candle march even on Bangladesh incidents. This is a warning for us too.” The CM warned that those dividing society can never be well-wishers of people. “When in power, these people couldn’t think beyond their families. They will give many slogans again, but when opportunity comes, they will do the same as before. “We must not allow repetition of their actions. The double-engine government always stands to strengthen the Sanatan faith. Never let dividers weaken us. If we all advance with this resolve, the future belongs to Sanatan Dharma. Just as flag waves on Ram Mandir, Sanatan flag will wave worldwide, and then no one will dare to kill the weak and Dalit Hindus in Bangladesh,” Adityanath added. “Ayodhya’s grand Ram Mandir construction is a result of the revered saints’ unity. After the 1952 first general elections, the country saw several prime ministers. All contributed to development, but Ayodhya’s core soul deserved respect and Ram Lalla reinstatement and this sentiment was concretised by PM Narendra Modi,” he claimed.

# UP Police bags SKOCH award for Mahakumbh ICCC, Social Media Centre

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Uttar Pradesh Police on Saturday was awarded SKOCH Award-2025 (Gold Category) at the 105th SKOCH Summit held in New Delhi for the innovative Meta Suicidal Alert initiative of the Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC) established during Mahakumbh 2025 and the UP Police Social Media Centre.

The theme of this year’s summit was “Governing Viksit Bharat.” The award presented to Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Krishna was received on his behalf by the officers nominated by him — IPS Amit Kumar, former In-charge of ICCC Mahakumbh-25, and for the Meta Suicidal Alert, by Rahul Srivastava, Public Relations Officer to the DGP, along with Satya Yadav, Director Outreach, South Asia, Facebook (Meta).

DGP Rajeev Krishna said that in line with the Chief Minister’s vision, priority is being given to the use of technology and artificial intelligence in policing. UP Police is also effectively implementing technological innovations. Receiving the prestigious SKOCH Award-25 reflects strong national-level recognition of UP Police’s technological innovations, excellence in governance, and impactful work in the field of public safety and protection of life. The ‘Meta Suicidal Alert’ mechanism has been developed by the UP Police Social Media Centre in collaboration with Meta. Under this system, if suicide-related content is posted on social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram, Meta



immediately sends alerts via email and phone call to the Social Media Centre at Police Headquarters. A dedicated 24x7 desk, integrated with the UP STF server, promptly identifies the victim’s location and informs the concerned district. The local police then contact the victim and their family to provide timely assistance, rescue, and counseling, while also attempting to resolve the issue within their jurisdiction. According to the data, between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025, a total of 1,805 individuals were safely rescued. Among them were 1,389 men and 416 women. The DGP has introduced a new initiative by issuing directions for counselling of all suicide attempt cases through district Mission Shakti centres and 1090 tele-counsellors, ensuring sustained psychological support to the victims.

# Sikh leader questions visa overstay of Punjab woman who married Pak national during pilgrimage

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

The return of Punjab woman Sarabjeet Kaur, who got married in Pakistan, to India has been stalled with Pakistan’s Home Ministry putting a hold on her special travel permit. Following this, Sarabjeet Kaur, who was arrested by the police, has been sent to a Pakistani shelter home (Darul Aman), where she is being kept under police protection.

Meanwhile, Sikh leader and former Pakistan’s Punjab Assembly member Mahinder Pal Singh has intensified scrutiny on Sarabjit’s visa overstay in Pakistan amid stalled deportation proceedings. Sarabjit, 48, from Kapurthala’s Amani Pur village, travelled to Pakistan on November 4, 2025, with a 1,932-member Sikh jatha via Attari for Guru Nanak’s birth anniversary celebrations. While the group returned, she stayed and later converted to Islam with her name changed to “Noor Hussain” following her marriage with Nasir Hussain. The 48-year-old woman’s arrest on January 4 from Nankana Sahib halted her same-day deportation after Pakistan’s Home Ministry intervention. Talking to The Indian Express, Mahinder Pal Singh said that their concern is why the woman misused the pilgrim visa. “The case is now with the federal government. We filed a petition in the high court, but we haven’t received a date yet. They gave 15

days’ time to concerned government departments,” the Sikh leader said.

Notices issued on December 5 remain unheeded, he claimed. “The Sikh angat at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib gathered and appreciated that I took this step; otherwise, the government wasn’t taking it seriously. Pakistan’s Sikh community wants a proper investigation because this has made the entire pilgrim system questionable,” Mahinder Pal Singh said. He also questioned an Indian no-objection certificate (NOC) despite Sarabjit’s pending criminal cases. “Why did India give her an NOC? India knew there were already FIRs against her. Why (do you) allow a woman with a criminal record to go to Pakistan?” While noting concerns for the Sikhs in Pakistan, he said, “There is huge resentment in the community.

They’re angry that the pilgrim system was misused”. Meanwhile, Ali Changezi Sandhu, the lawyer representing the case in the Lahore High Court, said that the matter related to Sarabjeet is still under legal proceedings. Efforts are ongoing to stay in constant touch with the court and relevant departments to complete all formalities and send Sarabjeet back to India as soon as possible, Sandhu added.

# Testing begins on elevated section; May opening likely



GNS News Agency, Jan 14

Bengaluru’s Namma Metro Sunday began rolling stock type tests on the Pink Line’s elevated corridor between Kalena Agrahara and Tavarekere. The 7.5-km section is likely to be open to the public from May. Rolling stock type tests rigorously assess new trains and components for safety, performance, and regulatory compliance through lab and on-track trials, ensuring they meet standards before public service. Crashworthiness, braking performance, and dynamic performance are among the parameters generally assessed during such tests to prevent issues and ensure passenger safety. According to Bangalore Metro Rail

Corporation Limited (BMRCL), mainline testing is a vital activity before commissioning, followed by comprehensive validation of train performance and system integration under actual field conditions to obtain statutory approvals.

The BMRCL is conducting tests with a six-coach train delivered by Bharat Earth Movers Limited in December of last year. According to BMRCL, these tests are expected to be completed by mid-April, after which the appropriate authorities will approve the train for commercial operations. “During the above-mentioned period, traction and brake type tests, oscillation trials at various speeds, integration tests with signalling, and power and telecommunication systems, among others, will be conducted,” the BMRCL said in a statement. The Pink Line will cover 21.25 km, connecting Kalena Agrahara and Nagawara. It will include 13.76 km of underground tracks and 7.5 km of elevated tracks. The Pink Line will feature 18 stations, linking areas such as MG Road, Pottery Town, IIMB, JP Nagar 4th Phase, Hulimavu, and others. The 13.76-km underground section from Dairy Circle to Nagawara is targeted for completion by December 2026. The major interchange stations on the Pink Line are Jayadeva Hospital, which connects with the Yellow Line; MG Road, which connects with the Purple Line; Nagawara, which connects with the future Blue Line; and JP Nagar 4th Phase, which connects with the proposed Orange Line.

# Delhi Assembly issues notices to 3 top Punjab Police officers over FIR against Kapil Mishra, others



Delhi Art, Culture and Language Minister Kapil Mishra Delhi Assembly issues notices to three Punjab Police officers over FIR against Kapil Mishra for sharing doctored Assembly video.

The Delhi Assembly on Saturday issued notices to three Punjab Police officers, asking them to reply within 48 hours after an FIR was lodged in Jalandhar against Law Minister Kapil Mishra for allegedly sharing a doctored video of the Assembly proceedings in the Capital. The notices have been issued to Punjab’s director general of Police (DGP), Special DGP (Cyber Cell) of Punjab and the Jalandhar Police Commissioner, Speaker Vijender Gupta told media persons.

The Jalandhar Police Commissionerate had on Friday registered booked Mishra for allegedly uploading and circulating a doctored video, in which Leader of Opposition Atishi is allegedly seen insulting Guru Tegh Bahadur in the Assembly on Tuesday after a debate on a programme held last November to mark the 350th martyrdom day of the ninth Sikh Guru. A day later, Mishra had shared the video from his X account. According to the notices issued by the Delhi Assembly Secretariat, the video has been referred for forensic examination and to the Committee of Privileges. The Assembly also asked for all the related docu-

ments and the forensic report, based on which Punjab Police claimed that the video was “doctored”, Gupta said. “The matter is of extremely serious and constitutional importance and is directly linked to the dignity, authority, and privileges of the House. The issue is not confined to any individual or political party,” he added.

Gupta said that any recording of proceedings inside the House is the exclusive property of the Assembly and does not belong to any political party, individual, or external agency. “Misuse of the property of the House in this manner, and registration of an FIR against a minister on the basis of such material, is not only unfortunate but also extremely serious and condemnable,” he added. He questioned on what basis and under what authority the FIR in this matter was registered by Punjab Police. “The role of the Jalandhar Police commissioner in the entire episode is highly questionable and appears prima facie to be a clear case of breach of privilege of the House. A direct case of privilege violation is therefore made out against him and the House will consider it seriously,” Gupta said.

Further, he pointed out that describing the official recording of the House as “tampered” or “doctored” amounts to a direct attack on the dignity of the Assembly. “This is not merely a false allegation but appears to be a well-planned conspiracy aimed at undermining the prestige of the House and maligning constitutional institutions... Anyone found directly or indirectly involved in this conspiracy will face the strictest possible action by the House,” Gupta said. The BJP MLAs have demanded cancellation of Atishi’s Assembly membership for allegedly “insulting” the Sikh Guru. “She (Atishi) was asked to simply offer a brief apology, but she refused to do so; otherwise, the matter would have ended there itself,” Gupta said. The AAP, meanwhile, demanded Mishra’s Assembly membership to be revoked.. “The AAP is firm in demanding the immediate termination of BJP Minister Kapil Mishra’s membership over the ‘beadbi’ of Sikh Guru Sahibs,” it said.

# Jathiya Devi mountain township: Gram Sabha Bagi passes resolution against land acquisition

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Amid mounting opposition to the proposed Jathiya Devi mountain township, the Gram Panchayat Bagi in Shimla (Rural) Saturday passed a resolution by an overwhelming majority and refused to part with any land for the project. The resolution was adopted during a Gram Sabha convened at the Jathiya Devi Panchayat Bhawan by the Panchayat pradhan Naresh Kumar Thakur and up-pradhan Desh Raj. According to Panchayat representatives, 280 families out of 418 households under Gram Panchayat Bagi signed the resolution opposing the proposed land acquisition.

Gram Panchayat Bagi comprises 11 revenue villages, of which eight have been identified for land acquisition for the proposed township. The identified land includes agricultural holdings, non-agricultural land, common village land (shamlat) and forest land falling within these eight villages. In addition, Manjiyari village — located in Mamlig tehsil in Solan district — has also been marked for acquisition, further expanding the project’s footprint. “The resolution was passed with a clear and full majority. Although to pass a resolution we need a 1/4 majority of 120 households out of 418 houses... resolution was signed by 280 people... We will hand over this resolution to Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Town and Country Planning Minister Rajesh Dharmani and the concerned officials. Our local MLA from Shimla (Rural) Vikramaditya Singh, who is also PWD and Urban Development Minister, was also expected to attend today’s Gram Sabha meeting but couldn’t due to his Delhi visit. He expressed his full support to our resolution,” said Naresh, pradhan of Gram Panchayat Bagi.

Thakur said, “A long time back, Himachal Pradesh Urban Development Authority (HIMUDA) had acquired more than 250 bighas for the mountain township. So far, not a single brick was laid at the acquired land. That land was infertile. But this time, the government says it will acquire agricultural land along with the houses of local residents.” Locals said the opposition intensified after details of the nature and extent of land acquisition became clear. “Men and women from almost all households signed the resolution. Some people were initially willing to give their land, but once it became known that agricultural land, shamlat land and forest land — over which villagers have traditional and legal rights — would be acquired, almost everyone decided to oppose the project,” said Bal Krishan, a local resident. The proposed Jathiya Devi satellite township, estimated to cost around Rs 1,374 crore, is planned under the HIMUDA. Located about 14 km from Shimla city and nearly 2 km from Jubbarhatti Airport, the project has been under discussion since 2014. However, tensions escalated recently after the officials issued land acquisition notices under Section 5 and Rule 8 of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. The notices sought suggestions and objections to the Social Impact Assessment



(SIA) study, with a deadline of December 29, 2025. As per the SIA report, around 249 hectares (approximately 2,959 bighas) of land across eight villages in rural Shimla — Chanan, Panti, Aanji, Shilli Baghi, Majhola, Shilru, Dhanokari and Kyaragi — and one village in Solan were earmarked for potential acquisition. The assessment estimates that 386 households would be directly affected by the project with nearly 158 families likely to face loss of livelihoods.

# BJP flays Congress over desecration of religious place of worship, seeks ‘encounter’

GNS News Agency, Jan 14 Hyderabad: Condemning the incident of a youngster urinating in front of a religious place of worship in Safilguda, BJP State president N Ramchander Rao said the Congress in Telangana was competing with Bangladesh and Pakistan on who would outdo the other in attacks on Hindus.

The incident reportedly occurred on Sunday night. Videos of a youngster urinating in front of the place of worship have been circulated on social media platforms. In the video, locals are seen catching and thrashing him.

As the videos were shared extensively, BJP leaders rushed to the spot, raising slogans against the Congress government for its alleged failure to ensure law and order in the State.

They charged that such incidents had been occurring repeatedly ever since the Congress government came to power in the State.

“Even though I respect human rights, the other side speaks the language of “Sar Tan Se Juda”, therefore this incident calls for encounter of the person,” Ramchander Rao said on X.



# Iran protests enter third week as deaths rise and tensions grow



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

DUBAI (United Arab Emirates): Nationwide protests challenging Iran’s theocracy saw protesters flood the streets in the country’s capital and its second-largest city into Sunday, crossing the two-week mark as violence surrounding the demonstrations has killed at least 116 people, activists said. With the internet down in Iran and phone lines cut off, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. But the death toll in the protests has increased, while 2,600 others have been detained, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

Meanwhile, Iran’s parliament speaker warned that the U.S. military and Israel would be “legitimate targets” if America strikes the Islamic Republic, as threatened by President Donald Trump. Qalibaf made the threat as lawmakers rushed the dais in the Iranian parliament, shouting, “Death to America!” Those abroad fear the information blackout will embolden hard-liners within Iran’s security services to launch a bloody crackdown, despite warnings from Trump that he is willing to strike Iran to protect peaceful demonstrators.

Trump offered support for the protesters, saying on social media that “Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!” The New York Times and Wall Street Journal, citing anonymous U.S. officials, said on Saturday night that Trump had been given military options for a strike on Iran, but had not made a final decision. The State Department separately warned, “Do not play games with President Trump. When he says he’ll do something, he means it.”

Iranian state television broadcast the parliament session live. Qalibaf, a hard-liner who has run for the presidency in the past, gave a speech praising police and Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, particularly its all-volunteer Basij, for having “stood firm” during the protests. “The people of Iran should know that we will deal with them in the most severe way and punish those who are arrested,” Qalibaf said. He went on to directly threaten Israel, which he referred to as “the occupied territory”, and the U.S. military, possibly with a pre-emptive strike. “In the event of an attack on Iran, both the occupied territory and all American military centres, bases and ships in the region will be our legitimate targets,” Qalibaf said. “We do not consider ourselves limited to reacting after the action and will act based on any objective signs of a threat.”

# Afghan journalist detained in Islamabad amid fears of forced deportation



Kabul: Freelance Afghan journalist Ubaidullah Ahmadi has been detained by police in Pakistan’s Islamabad, sparking concerns regarding the safety of exiled reporters facing possible forced deportation, local media reported. The reason behind Ahmadi’s arrest remains unclear, and Pakistani police have not yet issued any official statement regarding the detention. His detention comes as Pakistani authorities have increased conducting house-to-house inspections in Islamabad to identify undocumented Afghan migrants for detention and forced deportation, Afghanistan’s news agency Khaama Press reported.

As per the media workers and advocacy groups monitoring the situation, dozens of Afghan journalists have reportedly been detained during these operations, with the majority of them remaining without legal protection, leaving them exposed to arrest, harassment and possible deportation under Pakistan’s stringent migration policies. Several detained journalists have warned that forced return to Afghanistan would put their lives at risk, considering the ongoing threats from the current authorities. The arrest of the journalist has renewed concerns among rights groups and media organisations, who have repeatedly urged Pakistan to safeguard exiled journalists and uphold press freedom obligations.

# ‘We are well, I am a fighter’: Venezuelan Prez Maduro’s message to son from US jail

Caracas: Venezuelan lawmaker Nicolas Maduro Guerra has said that his father, President Nicolas Maduro, sent a message through his lawyers saying he is in good condition and remains resolute while being held in the United States. “The lawyers told us they are strong and that we should not be sad,” Guerra said while addressing leaders of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela on Saturday (local time).

He quoted his father as saying: “We are well. I am a fighter.” President Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are currently held in the United States after US forces carried out military strikes in Caracas and three other Venezuelan cities on January 3, an operation that resulted in their capture. The strikes have drawn worldwide condemnation and concern, reports Xinhua news agency. Maduro Guerra said his father remains unbroken, adding that the government and its supporters “are united and standing firm.”

It remains unclear how serious Iran is about launching a strike, particularly after seeing its air defences destroyed during the 12-day war in June with Israel. Any decision to go to war would rest with Iran’s 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The U.S. military has said in the Middle East that it is “postured with forces that span the full range of combat capability to defend our forces, our partners and allies and U.S. interests.”

Iran targeted U.S. forces at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar in June, while the U.S. Navy’s Middle East-based Fifth Fleet is stationed in the island kingdom of Bahrain. Israel, meanwhile, is “watching closely” the situation between the U.S. and Iran, said an Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to journalists. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio overnight on topics including Iran, the official added.

Online videos sent out of Iran, likely using Starlink satellite transmitters, purportedly showed demonstrators gathering in northern Tehran’s Punak neighbourhood. Authorities appeared to have shut off streets, with protesters waving lit mobile phones. Others banged metal while fireworks went off. Other footage purportedly showed demonstrators peacefully marching down a street and others honking car horns. “The pattern of protests in the capital has largely taken the form of scattered, short-lived and fluid gatherings, an approach shaped in response to the heavy presence of security forces and increased field pressure,” the Human Rights Activists News Agency said. “At the same time, reports were received of surveillance drones flying overhead and movements by security forces around protest locations, indicating ongoing monitoring and security control.”

In Mashhad, Iran’s second-largest city about 725 kilometres northeast of Tehran, footage purportedly showed protesters confronting security forces. Flaming debris and dumpsters were seen on the street, blocking the road. Mashhad is home to the Imam Reza shrine, the holiest in Shia Islam, making the protests there carry major significance for the country’s theocracy. Protests also appeared to take place in Kerman, about 800 kilometres south-east of Tehran. Iranian state television on Sunday morning sent correspondents to streets in several cities to show calm areas, with date stamps displayed on screen. Tehran and Mashhad were not included. The channel also aired pro-government demonstrations in Qom and Qazvin. Ali Larjani, a senior security official, went on state television to accuse some demonstrators of “killing people or burning some people, which is very similar to what ISIS does”, referring to the Islamic State group. State television aired funerals of slain security force members while reporting that another six had been killed in Kermanshah.

Iran’s exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, who called for protests on Thursday and Friday, urged demonstrators in his latest message to take to the streets again on Sunday. He asked protesters to carry Iran’s old lion-and-sun flag and other national symbols used during the time of the shah to “claim public spaces as your own”. Pahlavi’s support of and from Israel has drawn criticism in the past, particularly after the 12-day war. Demonstrators have shouted in support of the shah in some protests, but it remains unclear whether this reflects support for Pahlavi himself or a desire to return to the period before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The demonstrations began on Dec. 28 over the collapse of the Iranian rial currency, which trades at over 1.4 million to a dollar, as the country’s economy is squeezed by international sanctions, in part imposed over its nuclear programme. The protests later intensified and grew into direct challenges to Iran’s theocracy.

tion under Pakistan’s stringent migration policies. Several detained journalists have warned that forced return to Afghanistan would put their lives at risk, considering the ongoing threats from the current authorities. The arrest of the journalist has renewed concerns among rights groups and media organisations, who have repeatedly urged Pakistan to safeguard exiled journalists and uphold press freedom obligations.

In December last year, media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) stated that Pakistan had forcibly returned at least 20 Afghan journalists to Afghanistan in 2025, breaching international protections for refugees, Afghan media outlet Amu TV reported. Citing Pakistani media reports and its own documentation, RSF said the expulsion of Afghan journalists from Pakistan was a “clear breach” of the international principle of non-refoulement, stressing that dozens of other Afghan journalists who are living in Pakistan face fears of arrest, extortion and immediate deportation. RSF noted that around 200 Afghan journalists had fled to Pakistan after facing Taliban threats or reprisals after the group seized power in Afghanistan in 2021. Many of these journalists were awaiting relocation to Western nations with RSF’s backing; however, resettlement processes have stalled for years, leaving applicants in legal limbo. RSF said Pakistan has rarely extended residency permits for Afghans since mid-2025, placing thousands, including journalists, at risk of being declared “illegal,” Amu TV reported. It further stated that arbitrary arrests, detention and deportations of Afghan journalists have sharply increased over the past six months.

“The strength of Chavismo lies in unity. Whatever happens, we must remain united,” he said. Venezuela’s acting president, Delcy Rodriguez, on Saturday pledged to secure the return of Maduro and his wife. Speaking at a community event in Miranda state, Rodriguez said there was no uncertainty about Venezuela’s leadership or governing program. “There is no uncertainty here. The Venezuelan people are in charge, and there is a government, that of President Nicolas Maduro,” she said, calling for unity to guarantee peace, stability and the country’s future. Rodriguez vowed not to rest “for a single minute” until Maduro and Flores return to Venezuela. She noted that a year ago, she was sworn in alongside Maduro at the start of his third term, adding that “today, one year later, we are swearing for his freedom.” Rodriguez said national unity would be decisive in what she described as the effort to “rescue” Maduro, reaffirming that her government continues to implement the seven lines of action set by Maduro

# US launches new airstrikes on ISIS targets in Syria after deadly ambush



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Washington: The US has launched another round of retaliatory strikes against the Islamic State in Syria following last month’s ambush that killed two US soldiers and one American civilian interpreter in the country. The large-scale strikes, conducted by the US alongside partner forces, occurred around 12:30 pm ET, according to US Central Command. The strikes hit multiple Islamic State targets across Syria.

The Jordanian military later announced it had taken

# Retouched images of Israel’s first lady, distributed by the State, ignite a fiery ethics debate



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

The photos seemed destined for posterity in Israel’s State archives. In the snapshots, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is joined by his wife, Sara, as well as U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee and a group of Israeli soldiers, as they light Hanukkah candles at Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews pray. The leaders exchange triumphant looks. But something is off. Sara Netanyahu’s skin is poreless, her eyes overly defined and her hair perfectly coiffed — a look officials acknowledge is the result of heavy retouching.

Critics say the issue isn’t the use of photo-editing software, which is common on the social media accounts of celebrities and public figures. They say it’s the circulation of the images in official government announcements, which distorts reality, violates ethical codes and risks compromising official archiving and record-keeping efforts. “All the pictures to this day in the archives in Israel are authentic pictures of reality as it was captured by the lenses of photographers’ cameras since the establishment of the State,” said Shabi Gatenio, the veteran political journalist who broke the story in The Seventh Eye, an Israeli site that covers local media. “These images, if entered into the database, will forever infect it with a virtual reality that never existed.”

Since the manipulation of images was revealed, the government has taken the unprecedented step of crediting Ms. Sara Netanyahu in its releases that include manipulated images. And it’s not clear if the official archive will include images of her taken during the second half of last year, when Mr. Gatenio said the editing appears to have begun. The first lady’s personal spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment. Nitzan Chen, director of the Government Press Office, told The Associated Press that images of the Prime Minister are never manipulated and that his office would not upload any retouched photos to the official archive. Sara Netanyahu, 67, has long used photo-editing software on her images. Her social media account is filled with images in which her face appears heavily retouched. But the topic raised eyebrows since her Photoshop habit entered the public record. Mr. Gatenio said he first noticed this last July, when the couple visited President Donald Trump in Washington, D.C., and again in September, as Sara Netanyahu joined her husband on the tarmac ahead of a trip to New York for the U.N. General Assembly.

At the time, the Prime Minister’s office released a video of the send-off along with a photo, credited to Avi Ohayon,

# After water contamination tragedy, Madhya Pradesh CM orders safe supply for all

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that ensuring the supply of safe drinking water to every citizen was the responsibility of urban local bodies and directed officials to prevent the supply of contaminated water under all circumstances. Mr. Yadav’s directive came after seven persons died in Indore’s Bhagirathpura area recently following a diarrhoea outbreak triggered by the consumption of contaminated water. Mr. Yadav is also the guardian Minister of Indore, ranked as the country’s cleanest city. The Opposition Congress, which has sought the resignation of MP Urban Development Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya in whose constituency the tragedy took place, is scheduled to hold a massive protest over the water contamination deaths in Indore on Sunday (January 11, 2026).

Addressing a high-level meeting at the airport in Bhopal after returning from a visit to Sagor district, CM Yadav on Saturday (January 10, 2026) launched a state-wide ‘Swachh Jal Abhiyan’ (Clean Water Campaign) aimed at ensuring safe drinking water in both rural and urban areas, a government statement said. He said the quality of drinking water must be tested regularly and alternative arrangements should be made immediately if contamination is detected. “This is a big challenge, but it must be addressed with seriousness so that the state can set an example for the country,” Mr. Yadav added. The Chief Minister said the

part in the strikes. Saturday’s strikes are part of a broader operation that is part of President Donald Trump’s response to the deadly ISIS attack that killed Sgt. Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar, Sgt. William Nathaniel Howard and Ayad Mansoor Sakat, the civilian interpreter, in Palmyra last month. “Our message remains strong: if you harm our warfighters, we will find you and kill you anywhere in the world, no matter how hard you try to evade justice,” US Central Command said in a statement Saturday. A day earlier, Syrian officials said their security forces had arrested the military leader of IS’s operations in the Levant. The US military said Saturday’s strikes were carried out alongside partner forces without specifying which forces had taken part.

The Trump administration is calling the response to the Palmyra attacks Operation Hawkeye Strike. Both Torres-Tovar and Howard were members of the Iowa National Guard. It launched on December 19 with another large-scale strike that hit 70 targets across central Syria that had IS infrastructure and weapons. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces has for years been the US’ main partner in the fight against IS in Syria, but since the ouster of former Syrian President Bashar Assad in December 2024, Washington has increasingly been coordinating with the central government in Damascus. Syria recently joined the global coalition against IS.

an official government photographer. Comparing the photo to the raw video, Hany Farid, a digital forensics expert at the University of California, Berkeley, said, “The image had been post-processed, bearing local manipulations to smooth the first lady’s skin and remove wrinkles. Since then, photos showing the first lady meeting with Vice President J.D. Vance and his wife, Usha, in Washington also appear to have been retouched, Mr. Farid said. “There’s been some Photoshop editing to — let’s call it — ‘beautify,’ lighten, smooth the face,” Mr. Farid added

“Is it nefarious? No. Is it a problem? Yes. This is about something bigger than, ‘she Photoshopped her face to make herself look younger.’ This is about trust. Why should I trust any official photo coming out of that administration?” Mr. Chen, the head of the Government Press Office, said office lawyers are trying to determine how to handle and properly identify photos “processed by people other than GPO photographers.” He said the Justice Ministry is also examining the “criteria, limitations and possibilities” of the edited images, though he stressed there is nothing illegal about touching up photos. The issue, he said, is being transparent when such changes are made. For now, his office has decided to add Sara Netanyahu’s name to press releases that include retouched images. Since November, press releases showing photos of her smiling next to Trump and the family of the last hostage in Gaza in Washington, visiting a Miami synagogue and attending a funeral for an Israeli mayor have included this label.

At least one outlet, the Times of Israel, has said it will no longer carry official State photos that appear to have been manipulated. The Associated Press does not publish images that appear to have been retouched or digitally manipulated. Mr. Chen said the Prime Minister is never edited: “No Photoshop, no corrections, no colour. Nothing.” While his face may not be retouched, the Prime Minister’s official Instagram account tells another story. The page has posted a bevy of content that appears to be AI-edited or generated, including a picture of the couple with Mr. Trump and first lady Melania Trump celebrating the new year in Washington. The photo raised suspicions in Israel because it shows Sara Netanyahu wearing a black dress, absent from other photos of the event, where she wore a dark red frock. Appearing in the sky above the couple are brightly coloured fireworks and American and Israeli flags that Mr. Farid said were “almost certainly” generated by AI.

It is now marked with a tag on Instagram indicating that it may have been altered or generated using AI. It is not clear when the tag was added, nor by whom. Mr. Netanyahu is not alone. Many world figures, including Mr. Trump, use AI-generated image manipulation frequently in their public output. Tehilla Schwartz Altschuler, who runs the “Democracy in the Digital Age Program” at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, called it “part of the populist playbook” and said there was “no question” that Mr. Netanyahu was emulating how Mr. Trump uses the technology. Mr. Netanyahu’s official Instagram has posted a video of Mr. Trump and Mr. Netanyahu in a B-2 bomber that appears entirely AI-generated. It is captioned “on our victory lap,” referencing the joint Israel-U.S. attacks on Iran last year. “This is exactly what Mr. Netanyahu and his surrounding circle have tried to do for many years,” she said. “Presenting himself as a superhero, his wife as a supermodel, their family as a super loyal family. Even when it wasn’t the case, even at the expense of actual political work, administrative work and social work.” Ms. Altschuler added that Israel has reached a critical point in official government record-keeping and communications. “The question of archiving the truth, archiving history, will be one of the questions of our time.”

government was committed to better management to provide pure drinking water to all and called upon public representatives and officials to discharge their responsibilities efficiently.

The Clean Water Campaign will be conducted in two phases - the first from January 10 to February 28 and the second from March 1 to March 31. As part of the initiative, ‘Jal Sunwai’ (water grievance hearings) will also be organised to address drinking water-related issues of citizens, the CM said, asking officials to take these hearings seriously. Mr. Yadav directed that all pipeline leakages be repaired promptly to ensure safe drinking water from a public health perspective and stressed that clean water should reach every household. He appreciated the use of a mobile application by the urban administration department for monitoring the initiative. Warning of strict action, the Chief Minister said any laxity in the supply of clean drinking water would not be tolerated.

The campaign, launched through video conferencing, focuses on water security, its conservation and grievance redressal. It includes cleaning of all water purification units and drinking water storage tanks, with monitoring through a GIS-based mapping application. Under the initiative, water and sewage pipelines will be mapped on GIS platforms, interconnection points will be identified.



# Iran warns U.S. troops, Israel will be targets if America strikes over protests as death toll rises



Nationwide protests challenging Iran's theocracy saw protesters flood the streets in the country's capital and its second-largest city on Sunday, crossing the two-week mark as violence surrounding the demonstrations has killed at least 116 people, activists said. With the internet down in Iran and phone lines cut off, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. But the death toll in the protests has grown, while 2,600 others have been detained, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

Meanwhile, Iran's Parliament Speaker warned the U.S. military and Israel would be "legitimate targets" if America strikes the Islamic Republic, as threatened by President Donald Trump. Qalibaf made the threat as lawmakers rushed the dais in the Iranian parliament, shouting: "Death to America!" Those abroad fear the information blackout will embolden hard-liners within Iran's security services to launch a bloody crackdown, despite warnings from Mr. Trump he's willing to strike the Islamic Republic to protect peaceful demonstrators. Mr. Trump offered support for the protesters, saying on social media that "Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!" The New York Times and Wall Street Journal, citing anonymous U.S. officials, said on Saturday night that Trump had been given military options for a strike on Iran, but hadn't made a final decision. The State Department separately warned: "Do not play games with President Trump. When he says he'll do something, he means it." Parliament rallies

Iranian state television broadcast the parliament session live. Mr. Qalibaf, a hard-liner who has run for the presidency in the past, gave a speech applauding police and Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, particularly its all-volunteer Basij, for having "stood firm" during the protests. "The people of Iran should know that we will deal with them in the most severe way and punish those who are arrested," Mr. Qalibaf said. He went on to directly threaten Israel, "the occupied territory" as he referred to it, and the U.S. Military, possibly with a preemptive strike.

"In the event of an attack on Iran, both the occupied territory and all American military centres, bases and ships in the region will be our legitimate targets," Mr. Qalibaf said. "We do not consider ourselves limited to reacting after the action and will act based on any objective signs of a threat." It remains unclear just how serious Iran is about launching a strike, particularly after seeing its air defences destroyed during the 12-day war in June with Israel. Any decision to go to war would rest with Iran's 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The U.S. military has said in the Mideast it is "postured with forces that span the full range of combat capability to defend our forces, our partners and allies and U.S. interests". Iran targeted U.S. forces at Al

## Death toll in violence surrounding protests challenging Iran's theocracy reaches 116, activists say

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Nationwide protests challenging Iran's theocracy reached the two-week mark on Sunday (January 11, 2026), as the death toll in violence surrounding the demonstrations reached at least 116 people killed, activists said. With the internet down in Iran and phone lines cut off, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. But the death toll in the protests has grown to at least 116 and over 2,600 others detained, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency. The agency has been accurate in multiple rounds of previous unrest in Iran.

Iranian state TV is reporting on security force casualties while portraying control over the nation, without discussing dead demonstrators, whom it increasingly refers to as "terrorists". However, it also acknowledged protests went on into Sunday morning, with demonstrations in Tehran and in the holy city of Mashhad to the northeast. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has signalled a coming clampdown, despite U.S. warnings. Tehran escalated its threats on Saturday, with the Iran's attorney general, Mohammad Movahedi Azad, warning that anyone taking part in protests will be considered an "enemy of God," a death-penalty charge.

The statement carried by Iranian state television said even those who "helped rioters" would face the charge. "Prosecutors must carefully and without delay, by issuing indictments, prepare the grounds for the trial and decisive confrontation with those who, by betraying the nation and creating insecurity, seek foreign domination over the country," the statement read. "Proceedings must be conducted without leniency, compassion or indulgence."

U.S. President Donald Trump offered support for the protesters, saying on social media that "Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!" The New York Times and Wall Street Journal, reporting citing anonymous U.S. officials, said on Saturday night that Mr. Trump had been given military options for a strike on Iran, but hadn't made a final decision. The State Department separately warned: "Do not play games with President Trump. When he says he'll do something, he means it." Saturday marked the start of the work week in Iran, but many schools and universities reportedly held online classes, Iranian state TV reported. Internal Iranian government websites are believed to be functioning. State TV repeatedly played a driving, martial orchestral arrangement from the "Epic of Khorramshahr" by Iranian composer Majid Entezami, while showing pro-government demonstrations. The song, aired repeatedly during the 12-day war launched by Israel, honours Iran's 1982 liberation of the city of Khorramshahr during the Iran-Iraq war. It has been used in videos of protesting women cutting away their hair to protest the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini as well. It also repeatedly aired video of purported protesters shooting at security forces with firearms.

In one online video verified by The Associated Press, protesters demonstrated Friday in northern Tehran's Saadat Abad area, with what appeared to be thousands on the street. "Death to Khamenei!" a man chanted. The semiofficial Fars news agency, believed to be close to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and one of the few media outlets able to publish to the outside world, released surveil-

lance camera footage of what it said came from demonstrations in Isfahan. In it, a protester appeared to fire a long gun, while others set fires and threw gasoline bombs at what appeared to be a government compound. The Young Journalists' Club, associated with state TV, reported that protesters killed three members of the Guard's all-volunteer Basij force in the city of Gachsaran. It also reported a security official was stabbed to death in Hamadan province, a police officer killed in the port city of Bandar Abbas and another in Gilan, as well as one person slain in Mashhad. The semiofficial Tasnim news agency, also close to the Guard, claimed authorities detained nearly 200 people belonging to what it described as "operational terrorist teams." It alleged those arrested had weapons including firearms, grenades and gasoline bombs.

State television also aired footage of a funeral service attended by hundreds in Qom, a Shiite seminary city just south of Tehran. Iran's theocracy cut off the nation from the internet and international telephone calls on Thursday, though it allowed some state-owned and semiofficial media to publish. Qatar's state-funded Al Jazeera news network reported live from Iran, but they appeared to be the only major foreign outlet able to work. Iran's exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, who called for protests Thursday and Friday, asked in his latest message for demonstrators to take to the streets Saturday and Sunday. He urged protesters to carry Iran's old lion-and-sun flag and other national symbols used during the time of the Shah to "claim public spaces as your own." Mr. Pahlavi's support of and from Israel has drawn criticism in the past — particularly after the 12-day war. Demonstrators have shouted in support of the shah in some protests, but it isn't clear whether that's support for Pahlavi himself or a desire to return to a time before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The demonstrations began December 28 over the collapse of the Iranian rial currency, which trades at over 1.4 million to \$1, as the country's economy is squeezed by international sanctions in part levied over its nuclear program. The protests intensified and grew into calls directly challenging Iran's theocracy.

Protests also appeared to happen in Kerman, 800 kilometres (500 miles) southeast of Tehran. Iranian state television on Sunday (January 11, 2026) morning took a page from demonstrators, having their correspondents appear on streets in several cities to show calm areas with a date stamp shown on screen. Tehran and Mashhad were not included. They also showed pro-government demonstrations in Qom and Qazvin. Ali Larjani, a top security official, went on state TV to accuse some demonstrators of "killing people or burning some people, which is very similar to what ISIS does," referring to the Islamic State group by an acronym. State TV aired the funerals of slain security force members while reporting another six had been killed in Kermanshah. It also showed a pickup truck full of bodies in body bags and later a morgue. More demonstrations planned Sunday

The son of Iran's deposed Shah, Reza Pahlavi, who called for protests Thursday (January 8) and Friday (January 9), asked in his latest message for demonstrators to take to the streets Saturday (January 10) and Sunday (January 11). He urged protesters to carry Iran's old lion-and-sun flag and other national symbols used during the time of the Shah to "claim public spaces as your own." Mr. Pahlavi's support of and from Israel has drawn criticism in the past — particularly after the 12-day war. Demonstrators have shouted in support of the shah in some protests, but it isn't clear whether that's support for Pahlavi himself or a desire to return to a time before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The demonstrations began December 28 over the collapse of the Iranian rial currency, which trades at over 1.4 million to \$1, as the country's economy is squeezed by international sanctions in part levied over its nuclear program. The protests intensified and grew into calls directly challenging Iran's theocracy.



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# Delcy Rodriguez | Pragmatic successor



Merely a couple of days after the abduction and detention of President Nicholas Maduro by U.S. Special Forces, Vice-President Delcy Rodriguez was sworn in as the Acting President of Venezuela in surreal circumstances. U.S. President Donald Trump backed Ms. Rodriguez over the claims of Opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Machado, whom he called "not respected" despite her saying everything in favour of Mr. Trump and his imperialist actions. Mr. Trump's "endorsement" of Ms. Rodriguez as Washington's preferred interlocutor reveals the contradictions at the heart of Venezuela's new political reality. On January 5, when her brother Jorge, President of the National Assembly, administered the presidential oath, Ms. Rodriguez delivered a defiant inaugural address condemning the "kidnapping" of Mr. Maduro, the country's "legitimate President".

Yet, she also extended an invitation to Washington for a "cooperation agenda" and "shared development"—clearly indicating pragmatic priorities during an economic crisis exacerbated by the U.S.'s naval blockade. Mr. Trump had tacitly accepted her interim authority, heeding the CIA's suggestion that the Bolivarian state apparatus was more cohesive and capable during the crisis. Yet, he later issued threats that should she deviate from his expectations, she could be the next potential target. For Ms. Rodriguez, this U.S. imperialist conjuncture represents a difficult choice. She must navigate Venezuela from imminent economic collapse while managing the interests of the Chavista rearguard and a restive military establishment bristling at attacks on national sovereignty.

The 56-year-old Ms. Rodriguez's ascension reflects recognition, both by the Chavistas and the U.S. invaders, of her ability to manage mutually contradictory positions at a difficult moment. It is a role the lawyer-turned-diplomat has played over years shaped by tragedy, revolutionary ideology and pragmatism. Ms. Rodriguez's father Jorge Antonio Rodriguez, a founder of the Marxist Socialist League, died from custodial torture when she was seven, after being arrested in connection with a corporate executive's kidnapping. Within the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the siblings are seen as inheritors of an ideo-

## Is hiring lobby firms common in diplomacy? | Explained

The story so far: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) faced uncomfortable questions this week as filings with the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) showed that the Indian Embassy in Washington used an American lobby firm for unconventional tasks normally done by diplomats. Among other things, the firm fixed meetings for Minister S. Jaishankar and other Indian officials with U.S. leadership, and helped contact the White House during Operation Sindoor and trade talks.

Why does India need to hire lobby firms?

In order to deal with the U.S. government and legislature, hiring lobby firms and advocacy groups is common practice for embassies, business establishments and private organisations. The Indian Embassy in Washington has hired dozens of different firms known as "K-Street" for the street in the U.S. capital they are located, since 1949. For the last few years, the Embassy had focused on three agencies: Republican Party-linked BGR Government Affairs, Democrat Party-linked Cornerstone Government Affairs, and the African American caucus-linked Williams Group (terminated in 2025). In 2025, after the swearing in of U.S. President Donald Trump, the Embassy hired three more, including two closely linked to Trump associates — SHW LLC headed by former Trump spokesperson and campaign strategist Jason Miller, and Mercury Public Affairs, where White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles was earlier co-chair. SHW LLC was contracted for \$1.8 million (?16 crore) or \$1,50,000 a month.

Why are latest filings by SHW LLC unusual?

While filings by all the other firms registered and mandated under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), were routine, a supplementary statement filed in December 2025 by SHW LLC has drawn the most comment. It detailed about 60 entries where it had been asked by the Indian Embassy to contact top officials in the Trump administration to discuss bilateral issues as well as the India-Pakistan conflict from May 7-10. The firm was hired on April 24, following Mr. Trump's call to PM Narendra Modi to express his condolences over the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22. While the MEA has consistently denied Mr. Trump's subsequent claims that he mediated an end to the conflict, Mr. Miller, the sole principal at SHW records four calls, including three to White House officials and one to U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on May 10, the day of the ceasefire, to "discuss media coverage of Operation Sindoor" that have not thus far been explained. In June, he records making calls to fix meetings for a number of Indian officials including Mr. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, and the parliamentary delegation led by Shashi Tharoor, with top U.S. leadership like Vice-President J.D. Vance, War Secretary Pete Hegseth and CIA chief John Ratcliffe. Later in the year, as 50% tariffs over Indian import of Russian oil came into focus, SHW was tasked with many more calls over the trade deal, as well as to "flag the White House" on social media posts by Mr. Modi in praise of Mr. Trump. The Hindu spoke to several officials and diplomats who said the entries were startling, as such tasks were undertaken by the Indian Embassy, not a foreign lobbyist.

Does Pakistan also use lobby firms?

Yes. According to filings, Pakistan retained at least six lobby firms, spending approximately \$6,00,000 a month, about 2-3 times more than India. These firms were tasked with preparing and distributing briefs to promote Pakistan's version of Op Sindoor, as well as its Financial Action Task Force commitments and Kashmir. One lobby firm, Gunster Strategies, hired by Pakistan's Minister of Interior Mohsin Naqvi, set up meetings with congressional members for a visit in January 2025, while others showed a major uptick in outreach to congressional members in the aftermath of the conflict.

How does the MEA explain the filings?

logical outlook represented by their deceased father, unlike Mr. Maduro who rose through trade union activism or Diosdado Cabello, Hugo Chavez's compatriot with a military and political legacy. Mr. Cabello controls the PSUV's radical wing and organisation. Ms. Rodriguez is, however, no mere ideologue, combining her activism from student days with training in Europe that has enabled her to navigate diplomatic circles in New York and Geneva. This helped her exercise technocratic authoritarianism especially as the Maduro administration moved away from the charismatic populism of the Chavez era.

Between 2014 and 2017, as Foreign Minister, Ms. Rodriguez became the face of Venezuelan diplomacy during its most confrontational period, when she withdrew Venezuela from the Organization of American States, which she characterised as a "Ministry of Colonies" under U.S. hegemony. As Executive Vice-President from 2018 to earlier this week, Ms. Rodriguez managed Venezuela's economy and guided it to a more manageable crisis after the disaster of 2017, with hyperinflation, lack of essential goods, poor oil production and massive out-migration. She maintained radical rhetoric while implementing market-friendly reforms that allowed contracts to Venezuelan business classes to circumvent U.S. sanctions, permitting de facto dollarisation—measures the government said were necessary to fight an "economic war" launched by the U.S.

These measures, while helping the economy stage a moderate recovery, also created a dual economy where Venezuela's elite could access goods in dollars while the majority struggled with a hyperinflated bolivar. Her endorsement of the Anti-Blockade Law, which permitted confidential transfer of oil production assets to private contractors, created tensions within the PSUV and with leftist allies. By 2024, the electorate seemed tired of economic challenges. Mr Maduro managed to retain power only by dubious means in the 2024 elections. The challenges Ms. Rodriguez faces are greater than before.

The U.S. demands economic capitulation and handover of Venezuela's assets, which will be strongly resisted by the Chavistas. She must balance the interests of the military establishment, to whom Mr. Maduro had ceded control of key economic institutions to consolidate power. Two factors may offer limited room for manoeuvre. First, the lack of unanimous support for full-scale invasion among Mr. Trump's MAGA base, which partly explains his "endorsement" of her interim authority over regime change. Second, Chavistas recognise that further escalation could trigger complete economic collapse and loss of popular support. Yet, the situation is also volatile. With the Trump administration featuring headline Latin American emigré descendants like Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and a Venezuelan opposition elite long determined to reclaim power by any means necessary, Ms. Rodriguez must navigate an increasingly narrow path between capitulation and confrontation.



To a detailed questionnaire sent by The Hindu, the Indian Embassy spokesperson said that "it is a standard practice for embassies, private and business organisations in the U.S. to hire the services of lobbyists and consultants to augment outreach." The MEA and the Embassy, however, did not explain why the tasks of diplomats to set up key meetings were outsourced, or why the calls on May 10 were made. Also unanswered is the question of how effective such firms are. India and the U.S. have conflicting narratives over Operation Sindoor. The U.S. imposed 50% of tariffs on Indian goods, with the threat of a further 500% in tariffs due to the Russia Sanctions Act. The India-U.S. trade deal is also yet to be finalised.

## Prime Minister Narendra Modi, German Chancellor Merz to hold wide-ranging talks in Ahmedabad

New Delhi: Shoring up bilateral ties in trade, investment, critical technologies and defence will be the focus of wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Ahmedabad on Monday. As Merz's trip to India is taking place amid a fractious geopolitical environment, including the US's display of raw military strength to capture Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, the German leader and Modi are also likely to discuss pressing global challenges.

Merz's January 12-13 visit to India will be his first to Asia as the German Chancellor. Ways to bring peace to Ukraine may also figure prominently in Modi-Merz talks. The German leader will travel to Bengaluru after concluding his engagements in Ahmedabad. Besides holding talks with PM Modi, Merz is scheduled to visit the Sabarmati Ashram, participate in a kite festival and attend a skill development event in Ahmedabad, according to officials. In their talks, Modi and Merz are likely to deliberate on trade and investment ties as New Delhi is looking at deepening economic engagement with Europe against the backdrop of Washington's 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, people familiar with the matter said. Germany is one of India's most important partners in Europe. It is New Delhi's largest trading partner in the European Union and the bilateral trade in goods and services between the two countries reached USD 51.23 billion in 2024-25. Germany accounts for roughly one-fourth of India's trade with the EU, reinforcing its position as New Delhi's leading EU trading partner. Indo-German trade in services rose by 12.5 per cent in the financial year 2024-25, reaching a record USD 16.65 billion. The influential European nation is the ninth largest foreign direct investor in India, with cumulative FDI inflows of USD 15.40 billion from April 2000 to June 2025. More than 2000 German companies are currently operating in India.



# Israeli fire kills four in Gaza, casting further doubt on ceasefire



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Israeli airstrikes killed four people and wounded 18 others in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Thursday, local health authorities said, as Hamas and Israel accused each other of violating a near six-week-old, U.S.-brokered ceasefire. Medics said that one strike on a house in Bani Suhaila town, east of Khan Younis, killed three people, including a baby girl, and wounded 15 others, while another killed a man and wounded three others in the nearby Abassan town. Israel's military confirmed the strikes but said it was not aware of casualties.

On Wednesday (November 19), Israel said it struck targets across the enclave after members of the Palestinian militant group fired on its troops, and Gaza medics said at least 25 people were killed. Hamas called the attacks a dangerous escalation and urged Arab mediators, Turkey and the United States to intervene. Ceasefire eases conflict but attack continuesIn Gaza City's Zeitoun suburb, where

at least 10 people were killed in a building that used to house displaced families on Wednesday, Palestinians sifted through the wreckage to salvage furniture and belongings as rescue workers searched for any further victims.

"They say there is a ceasefire but I doubt this. Day by day, they say there is a ceasefire, this is completely untrue," Zeitoun resident Akram Iswair said on Thursday. "Missiles struck the displaced, poor citizens. What can we, our women, and our families do?" he told Reuters. The October 10 ceasefire in the two-year Gaza war has eased the conflict, enabling hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to Gaza's ruins. Israel has pulled troops back from city positions, and aid flows have increased. But violence has not completely halted. Hamas has been seeking to reassert itself, some are concerned about a de facto partition of the territory and conditions are dire. Palestinian health authorities say Israeli forces have killed 312 people in strikes on Gaza since the truce, nearly half of them in one day last week when Israel retaliated for an attack on its troops. Israel says three of its soldiers have been killed since the ceasefire began and it has targeted scores of fighters. The war in Gaza began after Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and seized 251 hostages in an attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 69,000 Palestinians, most of them civilians, health officials in Gaza say. Under the terms of the truce, Hamas released all 20 living hostages held in Gaza in return for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and wartime detainees held by Israel. Hamas also agreed to hand over the remains of 28 dead hostages in exchange for the bodies of 360 Palestinian militants killed in the war. The remains of 25 hostages have so far been handed over.

# U.S. Congress approves release of Epstein files, sending Bill to Trump

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

U.S. lawmakers voted overwhelmingly Tuesday (November 19, 2025) for releasing government files on sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, after President Donald Trump dropped his opposition to opening the books on a scandal that has roiled politics, law enforcement and the country's elite. The President had put allies in Congress under intense pressure not to make the material public, but the Republican leader threw in the towel over the weekend as it became clear that much of his party was poised to defy him. Congress approved the Epstein Files Transparency Act almost unanimously — compelling publication of unclassified documents detailing the investigation into the disgraced financier's operations and jailhouse death, which was ruled a suicide. Lawmakers say the public deserves answers in a case with over 1,000 alleged victims. Mr. Trump says the files will expose powerful Democrats' connections to Epstein, but the president himself faces uncomfortable scrutiny over his years-long friendship with the man alleged to have supplied underage girls to rich and influential men.

The Bill passed the House earlier Tuesday (November 19) with just one dissenter out of 428 members voting, and the Senate agreed to rubber-stamp and bounce the text straight to the White House, without a hand-count vote, as soon as it arrives from the lower chamber. Mr. Trump has pledged not to veto the legislation, but Washington-watchers are not expecting imminent damning new revelations. The Justice Department has wide latitude to hold back information if its release "would jeopardize an active federal investigation." Meanwhile Mr. Trump, in a widely criticised intervention last week, ordered officials to probe Epstein's ties with high-profile Democrats. The saga has exposed rare fissures in support for the Republican leader, who previously campaigned on releasing the files but changed course after taking office, accusing Democrats of pushing a "hoax." After multiple attempts by Republican leaders to block the vote, all Democrats and four Republicans signed a "discharge petition" -- an extraordinary procedure forcing the Bill to the House floor against the wishes of leadership. Relenting on his longstanding resistance, Mr. Trump said on social media late Sunday that Republicans should vote to release the files "because we have nothing to hide." "I have nothing to do with Jeffrey Epstein," Mr. Trump told reporters Tuesday at an Oval Office event with



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "I threw him out of my club many years ago because I thought he was a sick pervert." Long association However, Mr. Trump had a well documented relationship with Epstein, who was famous for throwing parties and other networking opportunities for the rich and powerful.

The U-turn marks a rare occasion when a revolt from Mr. Trump's allies has forced his hand, and Epstein survivors at a news conference ahead of the vote questioned the president's motives. "I can't help to be skeptical of what the agenda is," said Haley Robson, who was recruited to massage Epstein when she was 16. "I am traumatized — I am not stupid." At the time of his death, Epstein was facing federal trial over an alleged sex trafficking operation said to have exploited underage girls and young women, following a 2008 conviction for procuring a minor for prostitution. For years, Mr. Trump's right-wing movement encouraged followers to believe that the government was covering up a major conspiracy. But Mr. Trump's Justice Department said in July officials had completed an "exhaustive review" of the case and had "no basis to revisit the disclosure" of any Epstein materials. The White House escalated efforts last week to mothball the vote, with Mr. Trump and his allies making last-minute appeals to two of Republican signers of the discharge petition. The rupture widened when Mr. Trump pulled his endorsement of top loyalist Marjorie Taylor Greene in a stunning break that she said "has all come down to the Epstein files." "The real test will be, will the Department of Justice release the files? Or will it all remain tied up in investigations?" she said at the news conference.

# On Bangladesh's extradition request for Hasina, Delhi has several options

As Bangladesh's National Security Advisor Khalilur Rahman arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday (November 18, 2025), and Dhaka prepares a 'note verbale', the Indian government is considering its response to Bangladesh's demand for the extradition of its former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. During his visit to Delhi, Mr. Rahman is expected to meet with NSA Ajit Doval and attend the Colombo Security Conclave, which includes India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Bangladesh. Officials and experts are clear that Ms. Hasina — who has lived in New Delhi since last August — is and will remain an "honoured guest". However, they also point out that according to the India-Bangladesh mutual extradition treaty signed in 2013, there are many steps yet to be followed by the administration of Chief Executive Muhammad Yunus before the government needs to proceed. In addition, a big question looms over the legitimacy of Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, which was set up in 2009 by Ms. Hasina herself to prosecute those accused of war crimes during the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. 'No formal extradition request yet' In its statement reacting to the death sentence that the ICT handed down to Ms. Hasina on Monday, after her conviction for ordering the killing of anti-government protesters between June and August 2024, the Ministry of External Affairs said that it would "engage constructively with all stakeholders", indicating it will not be rushed into a definitive "yes or no" response. "Let us be clear that so far India has not received a single formal extradition request," said Veena Sikri, who served as India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh from 2003 to 2006. "A press statement is not a formal request - the process for an extradition is very complex and legal," Ms. Sikri added. As a "first step", she said, a formal request would have to include the ICT's Monday order along with all the evidence provided, explaining the legitimacy of the court itself and the trial process details as well. Once a request is received, officials said, the government will have to assess it against its obligations under the 2013 agreement signed by then-Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde during a visit to Dhaka. That agreement was meant to smoothen the path for the extradition of criminals and terrorists wanted in India, including ULFA leader Anup Chetia, who was transferred to India in 2015. The 2013 agree-

ment came as Ms. Hasina faced international criticism for setting up the ICT to try the killers of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and others who colluded with Pakistan during the liberation war, expanding the mandate of Bangladesh's International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973. The ICT's death sentences — especially against 66-year old Opposition BNP leader and six-time MP Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury, and 73-year old Jamaat e Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami, among the six accused hanged between 2013 and 2016 — led to accusations that the Hasina government was targeting political opponents through the court. India's support had helped Ms. Hasina at the time. However, the 2013 treaty itself makes many exceptions the government could use to defend its grant of refuge to Ms. Hasina. Article 6 of the extradition treaty refers to the "The Political Offence Exception", that allows the parties to refuse an extradition if it is for an "offence of a political character" (Article 6(1)). However, Article 6(2) also says that if the offence is for murder, incitement to murder, and a number of other charges, then these cannot be considered "political".

As a result, the article leaves room for interpretation, officials said. Article 8 of the extradition treaty sets out more than six other grounds for the refusal of an extradition request and says that if the accused "satisfies" the requested state (in this case, India) that the charges are "unjust or oppressive" or "not made in good faith in the interests of justice", the extradition may be denied. Full trial possible Another option would be to honour the extradition request and to initiate a process based on the Bangladeshi request. This would involve a full extradition trial, where Ms. Hasina would be able to respond to the charges against her, something she has been unable to do in Bangladesh. Finally, New Delhi could choose not to accept the validity of the ICT. Under the extradition treaty, the warrant must be issued by a "judge, magistrate or other competent authority". Experts, including former diplomats, pointed to the irony of the ICT set up by Ms. Hasina, which was decried as "illegal and unconstitutional" by the Opposition parties, now being used to convict and sentence her in turn. The appointment of Tajul Islam as the ICT's chief prosecutor is particularly ironic, given that he was earlier the chief defence lawyer for the Jamaat-e-Islami.

# Washington's governor declares emergency so Seattle airport will get fuel despite pipeline leak



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Seattle: Washington state's governor declared an emergency on Wednesday to ensure enough jet fuel gets to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport after a leak shut down a major fuel pipeline. The order temporarily waives and suspends state regulations limiting the number of hours commercial vehicle operators can drive when transporting jet fuel, Gov. Bob Ferguson's office said in a news release.

# Meta alerts young Australians to download their data before social media ban

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Melbourne: Technology giant Meta on Thursday began sending thousands of young Australians a two-week warning to download their digital histories and delete their accounts from Facebook, Instagram and Threads before a world-first social media ban on accounts of children younger than 16 takes effect. The Australian government announced two weeks ago that the three Meta platforms plus Snapchat, TikTok, X and YouTube must take reasonable steps to exclude Australian account holders younger than 16, beginning Dec. 10.

California-based Meta on Thursday became the first of the targeted tech companies to outline how it will comply with the law. Meta contacted thousands of young account holders via SMS and email to warn that suspected children will start to be denied access to the platforms from Dec. 4. "We will start notifying impacted teens today to give them the opportunity to save their contacts and memories," Meta said in a statement. Meta said young users could also use the notice period to update their contact information "so we can get in touch and help them regain access once they turn 16." Meta has estimated there are 350,000 Australians aged 13-to-15 on Instagram and 150,000 in that age bracket on Facebook. Australia's population is 28 million. Account holders 16 years old and older who were mistakenly given notice that they would be excluded can contact Yoti Age Verification and verify their age by providing government-issued identity documents or a "video selfie," Meta said. Terry Flew, co-director of Sydney University's Centre for AI, Trust and Governance, said such facial-recognition technology had a failure rate of at least 5 per cent. "In the absence of a government-mandated ID system, we're always looking at second-best solutions around these things," Flew told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. The government has warned platforms that demanding that all account holders prove they are older than 15 would be an unreasonable response to the new age restrictions. The government maintains that the platforms already had sufficient data about many account holders to ascertain they were not young children.

Failure to take reasonable steps to exclude young

The proclamation ensures safe-driving measures are in place, the release said.

The Olympic Pipeline was shut down on Nov. 11 because of a leak north of Seattle, between the cities of Everett and Snohomish. Operators notified the state of the leak and were working with state and federal agencies to contain, clean and repair it, the governor's office said. There was no estimate for when the pipeline would resume delivering fuel normally. But if it doesn't start back up by Saturday, the governor's office said airport operations would be "significantly affected." The office did not share details on what that impact would look like. The airport "has limited fuel on hand to sustain operations," the governor's office said, and since last week, airport officials have told incoming flights to fuel up to capacity before arriving because of the pipeline shutdown. The 644-km-long Olympic Pipeline is operated by BP Pipelines North America, Inc. It carries gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other petroleum products from refineries in northwest Washington to points in Washington and Oregon. It is the primary way petroleum is delivered to fuel distribution terminals in the Pacific Northwest west of the Cascades.



children could earn platforms fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (US\$ 32 million). Meta's vice president and global head of safety, Antigone Davis, said she would prefer that app stores, including Apple App Store and Google Play, collect the age information when a user signs up and verifies they are at least 16 years old for app operators such as Facebook and Instagram. "We believe a better approach is required: a standard, more accurate, and privacy-preserving system, such as OS/app store-level age verification," Davis said in a statement. "This, combined with our investments in ongoing efforts to assure age ... offers a more comprehensive protection for young people online," she added. Dany Elachi, founder of the parents' group Heaps Up Alliance that lobbied for the social media age restriction, said parents should start helping their children plan how they will spend the hours currently absorbed by social media. He was critical of the government's only announcing the complete list of platforms that will become age-restricted on Nov. 5. "There are aspects of the legislation that we're not entirely supportive of, but the principle that children under the age of 16 are better off in the real world, that's something we advocated for and are in favour of," Elachi said. "When everybody misses out, nobody misses out. That's the theory. Certainly, we expect that it would play out that way. We hope parents are going to be very positive about this and try to help their children see all the potential possibilities that are now open to them," he added.

# Nepal Gen Z protest: Curfew reimposed in Bara district; at least 10 injured



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Fresh tension erupted Thursday (November 20, 2025) as 10 people were injured after Gen Z youths clashed with members of the ousted Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli's party, prompting authorities to reimpose curfew to contain the situation in Nepal's Bara district bordering India. Tension escalated in Simara Chowk in Bara district as youths returned to the streets a day after clashing with cadres of Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), accusing police of failing to arrest individuals named in their complaint over Wednesday's (November 19, 2025) clashes, The Kathmandu Post said.

Protesters gathered at Simara Chowk from 11 a.m. Local administration at Bara had imposed a curfew from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. (local time) to prevent possible loss of life and property. "However, the prohibitory order failed to take effect, with demonstrators pouring into the streets and clashing with police. Authorities fired six tear gas canisters and two rounds of aerial fire after protesters defied the curfew

The 'Nagar Van' (urban forest), which is developed on 50 hectares of land at the Kurumbapatti Reserve Forest in the district, is receiving good response from the public. The Kurumbapatti Zoological Park near the Yercaud foothills is one of the main tourist attractions in the district. The park, spread across 76 acres, houses 254 animals and attracts 1.40 lakh visitors annually. The reserve forest has streams and bamboo groves near the park.

Considering the arrival of tourists to the park, the Forest Department decided to develop a 'Nagar Van' in the Kurumbapatti reserve forest, near Salem City. The work that took place for the past one year was completed and opened for the public from Monday (November 17, 2025). The 'Nagar Van' has a walking path for three

and continued advancing," news portal Khabarhub said. "Protesters also pelted stones at security forces, injuring six police personnel, while four Gen-Z protesters were also reported injured," it added. In a separate incident, the Gen Z demonstrators set fire to the police beat in Simara Bazaar, the news portal said, adding, "Items from the UML office were also removed and torched by protesters, accusing police of hesitating to arrest UML cadres involved in earlier clashes." The clashes in the district had first erupted on Wednesday (November 19, 2025), when the news of CPN-UML general secretary Shankar Pokharel and party youth leader Mahesh Basnet taking off from Kathmandu for Simara to address an anti-government rally spread amongst Gen Z members. Gen Z protesters gathered at the airport to oppose their arrival, triggering the clash with local CPN-UML cadres. Authorities subsequently imposed the curfew around the airport area to bring the situation under control. The UML leaders had then cancelled the rally. Meanwhile, police have arrested two UML cadres, ward chairpersons—Dhan Bahadur Shrestha of Jeetpursimara Ward No. 2 and Kaimoddin Ansari of Ward No. 6—on charges of assaulting Gen Z youths during Wednesday's clashes. According to the police, arrests were made after the complaint was filed against them at the Area Police Office, Simara. Deposed Oli's CPN-UML has been organising protests across Nepal demanding reinstatement of the House of Representatives, which dissolved on September 12 following the Gen Z movement that toppled the Oli-led government. Oli had resigned on September 9 following the massive Gen Z protests. Gen Z activists have sought action over the alleged mass killing of protesters on September 9 during demonstrations against corruption and the then proposed social media ban under the then Oli administration.

# Nagar Van at Kurumbapatti Reserve Forest gets good response in Salem

kilometres, eight huts for tourists to sit and relax, , a play area for children with playing equipment, and a cycling path. Drinking water facilities are also provided in the urban forest. The Forest Department fixed ₹10 as an entry fee for a person entering the 'Nagar Van'. As the 'Nagar Van' was created near the park and Yercaud foothills, it has started to attract visitors.

Forest Department officials said the 'Nagar Van' will be open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day. Issuing of tickets will be closed at 5 p.m., and after which no one will be allowed entry. Every day, 30 to 40 people are visiting the place. They added that people prefer to come to the Nagar Van since walking inside provides relaxation due to its scenery, pure air, and noise-free environment.



# In Pre-budget meet with Union Finance Minister: States flag revenue loss after GST cuts, erosion of fiscal powers

Revenue losses due to implementation of mid-year GST rationalisation, erosion of fiscal powers, more equitable Centre-state funding pattern in centrally sponsored schemes (CSS), including the recently-amended rural employment guarantee scheme — these were some of the key issues raised by states and Union territories in the pre-Budget meeting chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday. The meeting was attended Governor of Manipur; CMs of Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya, and Sikkim; Deputy CMs of Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana; the Finance Ministers of 17 states/UTs, and representative officers of two states, along with officials from Ministry of Finance's Departments of Economic Affairs, Expenditure, and Revenue.

States also sought simplified conditions for capital spending and 50-year loans, renewed focus on investment promotion, developmental priorities while flagging certain borrowing curbs. Revenue loss accruing to states on account of sweeping rate cuts under the GST regime, effective September 22 last year, is learnt to have featured prominently in the discussion by many states including West Bengal, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala and Karnataka. Goa pointed out the need to focus on sustaining momentum in critical infrastructure projects, seeking a more equitable Centre-state funding pattern under CSS.

The shrinking fiscal space, especially after the GST cuts, was a major concern raised by states. While states reiterated their support for GST rate cuts as a pro-people measure, it is learnt that several of them asked for revenue sharing from the collections of excise duty on tobacco and cess on paan masala that have come in lieu of the GST compensation cess. West Bengal's Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said the impact of GST rationalisation was discussed in detail by many states in the meeting, where she posed the question: why are states being treated as step-children? "States emphasised that they had supported the rate cuts in the GST Council meeting as a pro-people measure, but it has resulted in decline in revenues of states. Many states asked for inclusion of the cess and surcharge in the divisible pool, the collection from cess on paan masala should also be shared with states. After all, it is the states which are collecting these levies, but these are being taken away from them," Bhattacharya told The Indian Express. Karnataka's Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda in his speech said his state is facing shrinking fiscal space amid GST changes, rising social commitments, climate shocks, and rapid urbanisation. "Post-GST rate rationalisation, Karnataka's GST growth has fallen from 12 per cent to 5 per cent, resulting in a Rs 5,000 crore shortfall this year and Rs 9,000 crore annually. While the Centre has offset its loss through cess on pan masala and excise on tobacco, states lack similar flexibility," he said, requesting for a 50:50 sharing of excise duty on tobacco and cess on paan masala to restore fiscal equity and cooperative federalism.

Kerala's Finance Minister KN Balagopal said state governments are facing significant challenges in financing growth and development as their fiscal powers continue to erode. "The immature implementation of GST, cessation of GST compensation and RD grants, conditions attached to the CSS, newer restrictions in borrowing, and reduction in the inter se share from the divisible pool are major concerns to the fiscal space of the state governments especially Kerala," he said in his speech. Kerala asked for a special fiscal correction package to rectify a severe resource gap of over Rs 21,000 crore arising from the current year's borrowing constraints. "This shortfall is a direct result of about Rs 17,000 crore cut in the borrowing limit, com-



pounded by a loss of Rs 4,250 crore due to GSDP estimation methodologies that deviate from the accepted recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission (FC)... by requesting this special package, the state aims to restore the fiscal space necessary to align with national growth objectives while upholding the principles of equitable federalism," he said. Goa's Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, in a post on social media platform X, said he put forth his state's perspectives, demands, and developmental requirements, with a focus on sustaining momentum in critical infrastructure projects, strengthening social welfare schemes, ensuring continued support for capital investment, carrying forward state-specific FC recommendations, and seeking a more equitable Centre-state funding pattern under CSS, taking into account Goa's coastal challenges, Western Ghats ecology, and national tourism responsibilities. The Union Finance Ministry said many participants highlighted that the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) be continued with higher allocations as it helps in fast-tracking asset creation and supports capital investments in states and UTs with legislature. Since 2020-21, the Union Government has released over Rs 4.25 lakh crore as 50-year interest free loans to the states under SASCI, it said. States also flagged concerns about funding pattern of Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) that has replaced the demand-driven Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Unlike the MGNREGS, which was primarily funded by the Centre, the VB—G RAM G proposes states to bear 40 per cent of the financial burden, a deviation from the existing arrangement where the Centre takes care of 100 per cent of the labour cost and 75 per cent of the material cost. "Shift from demand-driven MGNREGA to allocation-based G—RAM G has reduced effective employment days. In order to continue to provide livelihood security to the tune of 13 crore person-days, Karnataka would require approximately Rs 2,000 crore that is fiscally unsustainable. New cost-sharing has increased state burden. It is requested for reconsideration of scheme design, restoration of demand-driven employment, and adequate uncapped Central funding," Karnataka's Minister Byre Gowda said. He also asked for revision of Centre's contribution to Anganwadi and Asha (accredited social health activist) workers. "Many states asked for revision of pay to Anganwadi, Asha workers. They are our frontline workers and they have to be remunerated well," Bhattacharya said, who also spoke in Bengali about Vande Mataram, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore at the end of her speech in the meeting. West Bengal also sought release of pending amount of Rs 1.97 lakh crore on account of several schemes related to food distribution, panchayat, and housing, among others, she said. Bhattacharya also suggested an amendment of Constitution for inclusion of climate as a subject under state list or Centre list. At present, it is not mentioned explicitly in either state list or Centre list or the concurrent list.

## Stock indices log worst weekly fall in 3 months amid fresh US tariff concerns



The stock market logged its worst weekly fall in three months over fresh fears on the tariff front from the US after President Donald Trump approved the 'Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025' bill which calls for increasing the import tax to at least 500 per cent on goods as well as services from countries "that knowingly engage in the exchange of Russian-origin uranium and petroleum products".

The benchmark Nifty50 index, which fell over 1 per cent on Thursday, ended 193.55 points or 0.8 per cent lower on Friday, closing out the week at 26,683.30, down 2.4 per cent. Analysts said investors likely took the uncertainty as an opportunity to book some profits after benchmark indices had raced to a fresh high earlier this month. "Domestic markets fell from all-time highs on profit taking amid rising global tensions and fresh round of tariffs threats over Russian oil purchase," said Vipin Kumar, assistant VP of equity research at Globe Capital Market. According to VK Vijaykumar, investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services, the stock market in the short run "will be swayed more by sentiments than fundamentals". "In recent days, particularly after President Trump's moves in Venezuela and the US capture of a Russian-linked oil tanker, geopolitical uncertainty has spiked," Vijaykumar added.

The India Volatility Index, or VIX — a barometer of market uncertainty — surged nearly 16 per cent this week to end at a one-month high. The Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025 bill could be put to vote in the US Congress next week, with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham saying potential targets include India and China, among others. Market sentiment further darkened due to comments by US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on Friday that India did not respond in time to a trade deal offered by the US. "It was all set up. But you had to have Modi (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) call President Trump. They (India) were uncomfortable doing it. So Modi didn't call," Lutnick said on a podcast.

India's external affairs ministry, however, said Lutnick's characterisation of the negotiations was "not accurate". India was one of the first countries to broach talks of a trade deal with the US in early 2025. However, negotiations stalled after the imposition of a penal 25 per cent tariff in late August, only to resume later. While some analysts think the stock market may now be discounting the possibility of a

# ‘Mujhe sabne bola tha duniya se alag ho jao; Now, after 5 years...’: Aspirant opens up about experience of preparing for competitive exams; experts weigh in

Every year, about 12 to 15 lakh candidates in India apply for the Civil Services Examination (CSE), but only a handful, depending on the number of vacancies that year, make the list. Rightly touted as one of the toughest exams in India, it calls for dedicated study, sleepless nights, and more. One such aspirant, Tejaswini, took to X and shared her story of quitting after dedicating five years of her life to preparation.

"Mereko sabne bola tha UPC ki preparation karni hai to duniya se alag ho jao, isolate ho jao. Friends ko chorhdo, bahar jana chorh do, ghumna chorh do and maine kiya bhi tha bahut time tak kiya tha until it actually got to me aur mereko therapy me bahut zyada effort karna pada khud ko normal karne k liye. Now, after 5 years of preparation, mereko corporate me ghusna hai. I have no skillset, no contacts. I have nothing" (Everyone suggested that I isolate myself and stop going out. I followed the advice until it got to me. I had to put in a lot of work in therapy to feel normal. Now that I plan to enter the corporate world, I have nothing), she said, adding how, despite multiple achievements and a decent education, she went blank while making the 'first resume of her life.' UPSC Civil Services Exam, Union Public Service Commission, UPSC @ 100, UPSC 100th anniversary, editorial, Indian express, opinion news, current affairs Each year, between 10 lakh (1 million) to 14 lakh (1.4 million) candidates apply to take the UPSC Civil Services Examination (image: file) This isn't just Tejaswini's story. Her confession raises important concerns about the mental health of students preparing for competitive exams. To better understand this, we reached out to a few mental health experts. Here's what they have to say. How can this kind of isolation affect a person mentally and emotionally?

Experts confirm that extended isolation during exam preparation can take a real toll on mental and emotional health. "When individuals withdraw from social connections, they lose important sources of emotional regulation, perspective, and support. Over time, this can lead to heightened anxiety, low mood, irritability, and even symptoms of depression," notes Mehezabin Dordi, Clinical Psychologist at Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital, Mumbai. According to the psychologist, without social interaction, people often develop "tunnel vision," in which self-worth becomes tied solely to performance. Many begin to view their identity solely as "a student preparing for exams," which erases other meaningful parts of who they are, such as being a friend, a family member, or someone with diverse talents.

"Many aspirants start questioning their abilities and lose touch with hobbies or relationships that once gave them joy. The pressure to meet family or social expectations can also increase feelings of guilt and stress. Over time, self-identity becomes centred around the exam and not clearing it may feel like a personal failure rather than just an academic one," says Dr Divya Shree K R, Consultant – Psychiatry, Aster CMI Hospital, Bangalore.

How difficult is it to readjust to the "normal world" after years spent in a high-pressure preparation bubble? As per the experts, it is surprisingly difficult. "Many individuals feel lost once the structure of daily studying and exams is gone,"

## ‘I like my workouts simple yet tough’: Ameesha Patel squeezes a quick workout in despite a busy schedule; learn the benefits

Fitness is an essential pillar for good health, and it's not always necessary to have an elaborate and extensive routine. The smallest efforts count, whether it is taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or walking to the nearby supermarket instead of taking a cab. Ameesha Patel swears by this mindset, trying to squeeze in quick workouts despite being pressed for time. Taking to Instagram, she shared a video documenting her time in the gym training weights. "Was pressed for time — Had to get a quick workout in. I like my workouts simple yet tough, mind over matter!!" she mentioned in the caption of her Instagram post. Fitness expert Garima Goyal noted that weight training helps women develop lean muscle, which not only improves physical appearance but also enhances functional strength. The benefits

"Unlike cardiovascular exercise, which primarily burns calories during the activity itself, weight training boosts metabolism long after the workout is over. This is due to the increased energy expenditure required to repair and maintain muscle tissue. As a result, regular weight training can help women achieve and maintain a healthy weight more effectively than cardio alone," Goyal told indianexpress.com. Osteoporosis, a condition characterised by weakened bones, is more prevalent in women, particularly post-menopause. Goyal noted that weight training plays a crucial role in maintaining bone density and reducing the risk of osteoporosis. "By subjecting bones to mechanical stress, weight-bearing exercises stimulate bone formation, helping combat age-related bone loss," she said.

Fitness Weight training helps women develop lean muscle. (Source: AI) Weight training also has a profound impact on mental health and well-being. Exercise, including resistance training, triggers the release of endorphins, neurotransmitters that promote feelings of happiness and euphoria. "This natural mood enhancement can help alleviate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, making



notes Dordi, adding that aspirants may experience a sense of emptiness or even guilt when they try to relax. "This happens because their body and mind have been conditioned for constant pressure, which psychologists refer to as post-stress adjustment difficulty."

Dr Shree affirms this and further explains that life outside the preparation bubble feels difficult and unfamiliar. "The sudden change from a highly structured, goal-oriented life to an open, uncertain world can also cause anxiety or confusion," she notes. Dodi also notes that reintegration can be socially challenging. "Relationships might have drifted, and reconnecting can feel awkward. It takes time to rebuild comfort with leisure, spontaneity, and normal life rhythms." They say UPSC changes you — they never said it leaves nothing untouched. I gave my 20s to it. Locked myself away. Sacrificed birthdays, people, smiles. And when it finally ended... I didn't even know who I was anymore. Somewhere between chasing UPSC and losing sleep, I lost myself... pic.twitter.com/uba1HK487r Dordi explains that while in exams, success is clear-cut, study hard, perform well, and get results, in the workplace, success is more subjective — it depends on interpersonal skills, adaptability, and teamwork qualities that long exam preparation doesn't always nurture. "This uncertainty often triggers self-doubt or impostor syndrome- the feeling that one doesn't truly belong or isn't good enough. The lack of clear feedback or structured validation can further amplify these doubts."

What steps can help them re-adapt to the real world and rebuild confidence? The psychologist recommends the following steps: Rebuild balance: Reintroduce hobbies, social activities, and physical exercise to reconnect with different aspects of yourself. Shift perspective: Focus on effort and learning rather than just outcomes. Embrace mistakes as part of growth. Reconnect socially: Start small — reach out to friends or peers. Social connection restores perspective and confidence. Set small goals: Breaking down larger ambitions into achievable steps helps regain a sense of progress and control. Seek mentorship or counselling: Professional guidance can help normalise this transition and strengthen coping skills. Redefine identity: Move beyond the "exam taker" label. Recognise that you are more than your results, you are a whole person with multiple roles and strengths. "Understanding that success in such exams does not define one's value, and focusing on overall growth and mental well-being, can help protect self-worth during the journey," Dr Sree concludes.



weight training an effective form of therapy for women seeking emotional balance and resilience," said Goyal. One of the most underrated benefits of weight training is its ability to improve functional fitness and enhance daily living. Many activities of daily living, such as lifting groceries and climbing stairs, require strength and muscular endurance. "By incorporating weight training into their routine, women can develop the strength and stamina needed to perform these tasks more easily and safely," said Goyal.

The most important thing is to ensure that you are lifting with good form," she added. "To get the most out of your routine, you must start easy and focus on simple exercises that offer maximum muscle engagement. If you focus on your form, then even simple exercises will generate results," said the expert. However, there is no need to work out every day to reach your health goals. "Take time off to rest and recover. Focus on your nutrition, sleep, and stress management. Together, these things help your body repair itself," she said, adding that women should aim to incorporate weight training into their fitness routine at least 2-3 times per week. This frequency allows for sufficient stimulus to promote muscle growth, strength gains, and other physiological adaptations.

## ‘Meri Marzi’: Smriti Irani on being questioned for returning to television and practically all decisions of her life

Smriti Irani has been a model, a massively successful television actor and even a Union minister. Like any other public figure, she has been under constant scrutiny from the media and the general public, who, according to her, repeatedly question her on this. During an episode of Raj Shamani's podcast, Figuring Out, the model-turned-actor-turned-politician spoke about the same. Irani recently made headlines by reprising her most iconic role, Tulsi Virani, on Balaji Telefilms' latest show, Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi Season 2, which has returned after around 17 years. The show is a continuation of the original storyline, which ruled the Indian television for eight long years. Irani recalled a reporter asking her why she was returning to acting. The witty leader confidently replied, "Meri Marzi (It's my choice)." She revealed that she was similarly questioned at each stage of her life.

Smriti Irani Smriti says that when she clearly tells people that it's her choice, they'd label her "ghamandi" (Image: Instagram/Smriti Irani) "Pehle kehte the naukri kyu nahi kar rahi, ab keh rahe hain naukri kyu kar rahi hai. Pehle kehte the arrey actor ko mantri ko kyu banaya. Ab keh rahe hain arrey Smriti Irani ko mantri kyu nhi banaya" (Earlier they asked why you are not doing a job, how they are saying why are you doing a job. Previously, they said why did you make an actor a minister. Now they have a problem with why Smriti Irani was not made a minister.) Laughingly, she said that people should toss a coin and finally let her know what they actually want her to do. "Ye chit bhi meri pat bhi meri nahi chalega (You cannot have it both ways)." The psychological impact on constant scrutiny Irani's remarks highlight the relentless scrutiny public figures endure—where every action, even those suggested by the media earlier, becomes a topic of debate. Sneha Shivarajan,



consultant psychologist at Good Wave Foundation, explains that constant questioning can lead to hypervigilance and decision fatigue. "Individuals under persistent scrutiny may spend significant mental energy justifying every action,"



## ‘Spinners are going to need to learn how to bowl on surfaces that don’t encourage spin in Australia’ – Jason Gillespie



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

The pine after spin bowling after Australia ghosted the bowling art during the Ashes, has turned into a clamour. After MCG Test became the first time in Australia when not a single over of spin was bowled, Australia didn’t select a specialist spinner in three of the five Tests, including at Sydney, where SCG has seen a spinner all the 138 preceding years. Former international pacer and ABC Sport expert Jason Gillespie said while spinners still had a key role to play at Test level, they would simply need to bowl on surfaces that didn’t aid them.

“A spinner always plays a role, even if the surface doesn’t necessarily dictate it,” Gillespie told ABC cricket. “Spinners are going to learn how to bowl on different surfaces, surfaces that may not encourage spin. I can kind of understand why the teams both chose not to play spin at times in this series — they probably felt that the Test matches weren’t going to go for five days. But it’s a Test match and our young spinners need to learn how to bowl in all conditions, not just in spin-friendly conditions,” he urged. The Ashes had young upcoming spinners as young as U15s calling in to ask what was their future. 12-year-old Boyd, had messaged ABC Sport during the Sydney Test asking, “As a young aspiring spinner playing under 12s, why has the Australian team made it so hard for me and other young spinners to play Test cricket?”

ABC also quoted 19-year-old leg break Geelong bowler in Victoria’s Premier Cricket competition, Paawan Sharma

saying Australia’s pace-friendly pitches were tough to survive on. “It’s obviously hard with the pitches in Australia, they don’t offer much to spinners,” Sharma said. “Pitches are favouring pace bowlers more, so spinners aren’t getting much of a go. We obviously don’t get [pitches] that turn a lot or bounce, so spinners don’t get much value from spinning the ball.” “It’s not great to be seeing a team with no spinners, especially in Australia,” he added to ABC. “[Spin bowling] is always going to keep evolving, it’s not going to say the same as what it was five years ago — spinners will keep finding a way to get up there because we are an important part of the team. I guess we just have to find a way to get up there,” he mulled. Former Australian spinner Ray Bright said this Ashes series had probably been one of the shortest, so it hadn’t really given wickets a chance to deteriorate. “They’ve been green and grassy from day one, so they haven’t broken up at all in any shape or form. If they keep serving up the wickets they have, well you might as well play a batter [instead].” He sensed a dearth of support from coaching side for spinners. “I don’t know how much effort has been put into developing and encouraging them,” Bright said. “We need captains and coaches to give [young spinners] a bowl and not just go to the medium pacers all the time, particularly on good, flat wickets.”

Frankston-Peninsula Cricket Club’s Peter Buchanan said the drop-in pitches were more conducive for medium pacers. “A lot of young cricketers today tend to be bowling medium pace or even faster,” Buchanan said. “There is the odd spinner, but nowadays boys and girls tend to rely on two or three of the skills. You don’t see too many young cricketers that are just trying to learn how to bowl off spin and leg spin, they’re generally batters who can bowl a bit. I think there’s still a place in the game for a spinner, but I just think at the moment with these drop-in pitches, they’re tending to be more conducive to medium and fast bowling,” he said. “With the white ball format, a lot of these junior competitions, young cricketers are only allowed to bowl certain amount of overs and as a spin bowler you actually need to bowl lots of overs to ... improve your craft and it takes a long time. “So, I think it’s an issue but hopefully it’s not a dying art because we need to have spin bowling as an option in all games of cricket.”

## Kunlavut Vitidsarn, An Se-young start the season with Super 1000 titles; beats Wang Zhiyi in 8th final since 2025

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Chinese World champion Shi Yuqi had told BWF that every time he played Kunlavut Vitidsarn, it was a new challenge and a new feeling. Calling him a great player, Yuqi stressed that he would need to find a new plan to implement in the final of the Malaysia Open Super 1000. The Thai former world champion ended up with the crown, as Yuqi went down 21-23, 1-6 and ceded the match due to injury on Sunday. At the Axiata, Kunlavut looked fairly in control of proceedings despite saying prior to the match that he had been tired after two punishing matches in quarters and semis.

The four-time semifinalist at the Super 1000 level, had finally cracked the entry into the final beating Jonathan Christie 21-16, 21-16. It needed immense patience as attack wasn’t yielding results. “I felt tired and moved slower than him,” he told BWF after the Jojo match. “I don’t have much energy left. I used a lot of power last two days,” he added. Chinese Wang Zhiyi just can’t catch a break. Playing her 8th final against all-conquering Korean An Se-young, the Chinese 25-year-old stumbled once more losing 21-15, 24-22 in the



final. The two were level at 11-11, after which Se-young took off to claim the opener. Wang led 17-9 and even 19-13 in the second, but just could not stop the Korean world No 1 from showing her up once more as she went on a 6 point rally to level scores. Thereafter, Wang Zhiyi had three set points which she promptly frittered, showing nerves. And Se-young coolly marched to convert her first match point to take their career head to head to 17-4.

## Why Stan Wawrinka and Nick Kyrgios were given wildcards at Australian Open



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Heading into his final season on the ATP Tour, 40-year-old Stan Wawrinka has been given the wild-card at the Australian Open as he returns to the site of the first of his three career Grand Slam titles. Back in 2014 when ranked World No 3, Wawrinka defeated Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open quarterfinals and went all the way be-

fore claiming the French Open in 2015 and U.S. Open in 2016. Operating in the Fedal and Djokovic eras, the Swiss player tallied 16 career titles and \$38 million in winnings.

‘Winning the Australian Open in 2014, my first Grand Slam title, is an absolute career highlight for me, so I’m incredibly grateful to receive this wild card,’ Wawrinka declared after the announcement. Wawrinka made the finals of United Cup for Switzerland at Sydney and will take on Hubert Hurkacz of Poland, after Belinda Bencic rescued Switzerland against Belgium, as Wawrinka fell to Zizou Bergs. ‘To have the chance to play the Australian Open at the beginning of my final year on tour means the world to me.’ Also extended the wildcard albeit in doubles was Australian Nick Kyrgios. Plagued by injuries the past three seasons, he received a wild-card entry into the doubles’ competition of his home event. He will partner with countryman Thanasi Kokkinakis. ‘After some good conversations with Tennis Australia I’ve made the call to focus on doubles for this year’s AO,’ Kyrgios wrote on social media. ‘I’m fit and back on court, but five-setters are a different beast and I’m not quite ready to go the distance yet.’



“If there is one batter who is going to get close to Sachin Tendulkar, it would be Virat Kohli. I don’t think I have ever seen a hunger in a player like Virat. I’ve got massive respect for him. He is just a machine. I actually miss him. I miss him in the Test match arena. I still think he’s almost like an AB (AB de Villiers). You think he’s retired too early. But, no doubt we will see him in the white-ball arena and in the 2027 World Cup as well,” Donald told ANI. Kohli is back in action on Sunday as India take on New Zealand in a three-match ODI series before five T20Is in the lead up to the T20 World Cup.

## How a ‘fed up’ Viswanathan Anand planned his return to competitive circuit and nearly clinched the Tata Steel Rapid title in Kolkata



GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Viswanathan Anand may be 56, but his appetite for challenging the younger generation and remaining a tough competitor even at this age makes him the legend he is. The five-time World Champion enjoyed an impressive run at the 2026 Tata Steel Chess India Rapid and Blitz Tournament in Kolkata, starting the year with a second-place finish in the Rapid segment. As a semi-retired professional, Anand shared how difficult it is to regain the mental shape and compete against some of the very best players of this generation.

“The biggest problem recently is that after seven or eight months of not playing chess, you forget that aspect. I mean, I sort of know what the young chess players are doing and when. I can do commentary, and it’s not that my moves would be totally off. But it’s another thing when you’re actually playing. The thought of, ‘What am I actually going to do now? What opening am I going to play?’ ... all these decisions, you forget how to think about after a long break,” said Anand. After being part of the Tata Steel event in Kolkata for its first three editions, Anand hasn’t played in the tournament since 2020. As an ambassador, he still travels every year and remains part of the event, but not as a player and that began to bother him. He said, “Basically, at the end of last year in Kolkata, I had the feeling that I’d reached my limit just coming to watch the tournament. It’s much harder than playing. I got fed up with not playing,” he said. “It’s funny you come to a tournament and the first year you enjoy it; it’s fun watching and leaving. The following year, you do it again, but last year I thought, ‘How many years can I just stand there and watch?’” Anand Viswanathan Anand and Arjun Erigaisi plays Tata Steel chess india Blitz at Dhino Dhanyo Auditorium on Jan 10, 2026. Express photo by Partha Paul.

“I pretty much knew it was better to make the decision to play rather than keep delaying. And I tried to get ready. I already had it in my mind that I wanted to play. You want to warm up as well; you want to be in a kind of chess-playing zone. The nice thing is that this year it worked out: I received an invitation from the Jerusalem Masters, then I was going to play in the Global Chess League, and then here in Kolkata would be the third in the series. So, I got the time to warm up.” The Jerusalem Masters, where Anand reached the final before losing to Arjun Erigaisi, and then playing in the GCL, helped him get into shape for the Tata Steel event. While Anand revealed he hadn’t done any specific preparation for this event in his busy schedule, the work he had done in October and November was still helping him. “I’ve been consulting with GM Sandipan Chanda about building up readiness to play, so to speak. But after the GCL, I had a short holiday in Mumbai, then went to Doha for the World Rapid and Blitz Championship for three days, came back for New Year’s—so nothing really got done in the short break I had. I believe sometimes you just want to let go and rest. But having come here, the work I’d done in late October and November was what I was building on,” he explained.

For the first two days of the Rapid event, Anand was in a joint lead, first with Hans Niemann after Day 1, and then alongside Nihal Sarin after Day 2. Nihal surged into the lead after drawing with R. Praggnanandhaa and dismantling Wesley So, gaining a winning position in just 13 moves on the final day. To win the overall event, Anand needed to win his last game against Nihal. Instead, he chose to play it safe, making a relatively easy draw without putting up a big fight, which made Nihal the Rapid champion while Anand finished second. He explained his choice to play for a draw and secure second place rather than fight for the title: “I just felt that I would play my usual stuff. I could have done something incredibly risky, but it depends whether you’re in the mood for that or not. Also, my games on the last day of the rapid event weren’t that great. But to be honest, it was quite a surprise for me that Wesley almost lost in just 15 moves... he could basically have resigned. That’s not the Wesley I’m familiar with. He’s one of the most well-prepared, solid players. I didn’t really think about it beforehand, but by the end, I didn’t want to take such a risk.” While Anand said he still needs to decide on his 2026 schedule, which events to play and which to skip, he expects many invitations from 2025 to be repeated. He said, “I expect a lot of the invitations from last year may be repeated, but I’m not going to announce it on their behalf. Let them announce the tournament, and that’s how it will be.”

## What Mo Salah said after guiding Egypt into AFCON semis post a 3-2 win over Ivory Coast

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

Salah however said Egypt were not “100 per the favourite” to win the title, with Nigeria, Morocco and Senegal all boasting fine teams. (Reuters) Salah however said Egypt were not “100 per the favourite” to win the title, with Nigeria, Morocco and Senegal all boasting fine teams. (Reuters) Mo Salah was in roaring form as he helped secure the decisive goal in a 3-2 win for Egypt against the Ivory Coast in the AFCON.

En.africatopsports.com reported his joy after he helped clinch a tougher against the reigning champions. “I am very happy and proud to play with these guys,” he said. “We always want to bring joy to the Egyptian fans, and we believe we can win every match with this mindset.” The winger also spoke of the challenge Egypt faced when having to close out the game under pressure after getting a two goal cushion after halftime, adding: “It was a difficult match. The Ivorians won the AFCON last time at home. They played like champions today as well.” Liverpool’s No. 11 elaborated on the responsibility he carries for Egypt, saying: “I always give my all for my team. I try to bring my experience to help us achieve great things.” Egypt had a fine night when Omar Marmoush opened the scoring after four minutes and Ramy Rabia headed in a corner assist from Salah to go 2-0 up midway through the first half. An own goal from Ahmed Fotouh inadvertently made it 2-1. Salah however netted the 4th of the tournament in the second half, in his 4th match. Salah needs just one more goal to become Egypt’s all-time top scorer in the tournament alongside coach Hassan El-Shazly, who is on 12.

Centre back Rami Rabia took the ball from well inside



his own half and chipped it over the top of the Ivory Coast defensive line, allowing Emam Ashour to run on to it and hit an accurate pass with the outside of his right boot into the path of Salah to score. “It was a perfect win, but as I said before, we are fighting for our country,” Salah was quoted as saying later by beln sport, ahead of the semis with Senegal at Tangiers. “Hopefully we go through the next game as well, it’s against a tough opponent, but we will give our best. We are fighting so hard, you can see the players, nobody is holding anything. We are just carrying on,” he added. Salah, 33, however said Egypt were not “100 per the favourite” to win the title, with Nigeria, Morocco and Senegal all boasting fine teams. “Most of our national team players play in the domestic league, it’s not to belittle them, but we are trying our best because we love our country,” he told belN Sports. “The game [against Senegal] will be difficult, they have a squad that plays at a high level in Europe, but I hope we can achieve victory.”

## How the Chinese have approached the puzzle of the unbeatable An Se-young?

GNS News Agency, Jan 17

There are some stunning pointers to the An Se-young-Chen Yufei rivalry that are thanks only to the surfeit of matches they play, in what is otherwise a much-maligned badminton circuit, where top names keep running into each other. Injury to Yufei intervened to deny another chapter to this saga at Malaysia. But the two have met 28 times at all sorts of big and small venues, which means the last two Olympic champions are embroiled in a loopy repetitive battle, as high-viz as construction supervisors’ neon signs when working the night shift. It stands out in the fog.

Make no mistake — the high propensity to battle, the voluminous quantity hasn’t dulled the quality in their games, though scorelines are varied, and subject to fitness, from straight sets with single digit points to three set epics. But the rivalry that started in 2018 (same year as when Sincaraz turned pro, and have tallied 16 matches, with 10 to Alcaraz), is currently 28-matches long, poised tantalizingly at 14-14.

The aforementioned stunning stat isn’t how there’s almost parity, though Yufei’s ability to withstand that dominant onslaught in the era of An Se-young (she won 73 of 77 matches in 2025) is hugely under-rated. It is how the two, separated by 4 years (nice Olympic metaphor too) in age, have kept each other on their toes, bookended by startlingly hopeless periods of dominance. Yufei won the first 7 times she played Se-young. The Korean has won 10 of the last 14. It’s worth mentioning that Se-young emerged at the fag end of several careers of the golden generation — Carolina Marin, Okuhara-Yamaguchi, Tai Tzu-ying, He Bingjiao and even PV Sindhu. That is to say her prime caught and scythed at all of them on their down-curves. Which means one can only speculate if Marin’s top speed could’ve held her at bay, or if peak Tai Tzu-ying could’ve parried her relentless attack with misdirections. This whole week at Malaysia, before she takes on Wang Zhiyi in the final, Se-young played three opponents who have never won against her in

more than a dozen attempts. This includes Nozomi Okuhara. Sindhu hasn’t come close to defeating the Korean in 8 matches, though Irwansyah’s tactics and preparation raise hopes that it might happen. Someday. But does it mean the Chinese (Yufei more than Wang Zhiyi) are the only ones with a semblance of an answer to the intractable ASY puzzle? On current evidence, that’s a resounding Yes. The Chinese badminton system is in the business of maintaining dominance, and An Se-young is simply the current thorn in their flesh. But it’s no surprise that entire coaching cohorts in China look to find ways to take down the Korean, and the likes of He Bingjiao first and Yufei thereafter, have focussed their efforts on regaining the crown from her, and have found limited success as compared to rest of the world.

Wang Zhiyi losing 7 of her 8 finals to Se-young, and starting this season with another makes 2026 a year of China vs An Se-young. But fitness permitting, only Chen Yufei seems to hold the cryptic clues to the problem that is the Korean, if not the key. Unsurprisingly, the focus is inward and not on any weaknesses of Se-young which are almost none. Speaking to BWF at the start of the year, Yufei said, “On a scale of 10 for maximum performance, if I can play at level eight or nine I’d stand a chance. Anything less than I’d lose. But the same is true for any opponent.” That last line adds an air of nonchalance and unperturbedness to what is frankly a very tough opponent to break down. But even if she pulled out with injury from Axiata, Yufei was clear in telling BWF that it was consistency and not perfection that could defeat Se-young. The Korean reads the game a few frames faster than most, has the footwork to get under the shuttle to smoothen her defense, and easy attacking clean lines, to finish rallies. The only way to chip at her rhythm is sustained and compulsive new tricks in angles and persistence to weather her storms. Tai Tzu-ying hardly found sustained success against her, because the Korean can’t be disarmed by deception — she takes it in her sure stride.



## Pennu Case movie review: Nikhila Vimal film makes for a passive watch

Pennu Case movie review and rating: One of the major strengths of the Nikhila Vimal-starrer is that it focuses on only the smaller things: tiny delightful moments, small jokes, modest drama, and so on. Pennu Case movie review and rating: While thinking about Pennu Case again could make some curious about Nikhila Vimal's character, Rohini, she may well be the only one who manages to elicit that reaction from us.

Pennu Case movie review and rating: What's the biggest draw of Febin Sidharth's directorial debut Pennu Case? It isn't fundamentally misogynistic. That's the bare minimum, of course. But while Malayalam cinema, even if at times, comes up with abominations like Aabhyanthara Kuttavaali that outrightly and proudly loathe women, Pennu Case proves that it is possible to create a movie revolving around a morally ambiguous female character without spewing hate towards women in general. This isn't to bluntly say that Febin's film is devoid of problematic depictions, but to assert that movies like Aabhyanthara Kuttavaali aren't innocent.

Subash (Aju Varghese) is excited beyond measure as his wedding day has finally arrived, a day most had predicted would never come. While preparations are in full swing, a group of men barges into the venue in Kannur district, leading to an altercation that disrupts the ceremony. The Kudiyanmala police immediately swing into action and, upon inquiry, learn that the men were there for the bride, Bindu (Nikhila Vimal), whom they claim duped all of them one by one through marriage fraud. CI Manoj (Hakim Shahjahan) begins an investigation and learns that her 'actual name' is Rohini. Don't Miss | Parasakthi movie review: Sivakarthekeyan-starrer deserved stronger writing, Ravi Mohan steals the show

During interrogation, she opens up about her past and reveals that she committed her first scam in Mysuru, colluding with a gang led by local don David (Shivajith), to find money for her ailing mother's treatment. However, she explains, she was soon entrapped by David, who began threatening her and forcing her to commit more frauds, thus making her part of a larger chain. With all the evidence solely against her, Rohini is now in deep trouble. Feeling sorry for her, Manoj and his fellow officers decide to help her and expose the racket, which apparently also involves local political bigshot Jeevan (Kiran Peethambaran), with whom Manoj has a personal beef.

One of the major strengths of Pennu Case is that it focuses on only the smaller things: tiny delightful moments, small jokes, modest drama, and so on. It never tries to bite off more than it can chew. While that approach has helped it to some extent, it has also proven to be a bane, as the movie never manages to grow on the audience beyond a certain point. For most of the film, viewers only feel like watching it passively, as it never attempts to explore its moments beyond a superficial level. From the very beginning, things are quite plain and in your face, kept slightly interesting solely by the few funny exchanges between various characters. However, since even the jokes aren't chuckle-worthy and the moments aren't too intriguing, the burden of continuing to watch the film falls squarely on the audience, with not many elements to keep them engaged.

## Manoj Tiwari addresses his viral roadshow moment on The Great Indian Kapil Show: ‘The driver started taking me in the opposite direction’



Actor, singer and politician Manoj Tiwari has been campaigning for over 12 years now. A former Delhi BJP president, he's been a Member of Parliament from the North East Delhi constituency since 2014. For those who've followed his career and campaigns closely, they wouldn't forget the viral moment in which a confused Tiwari was seen asking his driver to head in the opposite direction during a road show. When Tiwari appeared as a guest on the latest episode of The Great Indian Kapil Show on Netflix, host Kapil Sharma showed everyone that video clip and asked the politician in jest, "Did you sit in the opposition's car or what?" Tiwari clarified, "This is a



Had at least the lines been a bit more interesting, Pennu Case's woes might have been mitigated to some extent, particularly since the movie is dialogue-heavy.

(Spoilers ahead) At the same time, what complicates things for Febin and his co-writers is that they have a major suspense to reveal in the climax. So, their attempts are also to ensure as much secrecy as possible, executed through misdirections using an unreliable narrator. However, the buildup to this reveal isn't strong enough, and at least some viewers might see through it early on. As a result, if they feel the climactic reveal isn't impressive — having seen it coming beforehand — they might find the entire movie disappointing, since Febin and his team's conscious downplaying of certain aspects only saps the movie's overall energy as it has prevented them from extracting more from the narrative. While thinking about Pennu Case again could make some curious about Rohini, she may well be the only one who manages to elicit that reaction, as almost all others, including Manoj, are reduced to the dialogues they have to deliver. The movie also features a slew of supposedly supporting characters, like Manoj's fiancé Vijisha (Anarkali Nazar) and Thomas (Irshad Ali), one of the victims of Rohini's matrimonial fraud, who appear and disappear out of the blue, contributing little to the overall narrative. At the same time, although the film sidesteps misogynistic portrayals to a great extent, it does feature a few problematic depictions, the most notable being the portrayals of the female police officers — one perpetually preoccupied with vegetable cultivation on the station premises, mostly unperturbed about her official work, and another obsessed with television soap operas.

Although Nikhila Vimal's expressions during Rohini's stressful and emotional moments are more or less the same as the monotonous ones she is frequently trolled online for, it doesn't become too much here, particularly since the character has more to do in the film. However, had Febin and his co-writers focused more on fleshing out Rohini's character instead of the misdirections, she could have turned out better. While Hakim Shahjahan and Aju Varghese are serviceable in their roles, Ramesh Pisharody as Vijayakumar, another one of Rohini's victims, offers more laughs than all others combined. Pennu Case movie cast: Nikhila Vimal, Hakim Shahjahan, Aju Varghese, Ramesh Pisharody Pennu Case movie director: Febin Sidharth Pennu Case movie rating: 2 stars Anandu Suresh

## Manoj Tiwari addresses his viral roadshow moment on The Great Indian Kapil Show: ‘The driver started taking me in the opposite direction’

political game. It was the last day of my election campaign. I wanted to end the road show. He (the driver) started driving away in the opposite direction."

Manoj Tiwari recalled that after finishing his road show, he had to meet a member of opposition to discuss something important. But thanks to the driver and his sense of direction, the conclusion of Tiwari's road show only got further delayed. "That is why I was scolding my driver and asking him to turn around. I was stressed that people would be waiting for me. So, I wanted to complete all the road shows assigned to me," added the actor-politician. He said that wherever he goes, he's always asked about the viral video. "This is called political artistry," said Tiwari. Before he became a politician, Manoj Tiwari was best known for his singing and acting in the Bhojpuri film industry. In 2005, the BBC even reported that along with Ravi Kishan, Tiwari was the biggest star of Bhojpuri cinema. Charging a fee of \$90,000 (over Rs 80 lakh as per current currency conversion rate) back then, he even gave major Bollywood stars a run for their money in the early 2000s. In the realm of Hindi entertainment, Manoj Tiwari has been a contestant on popular reality show Bigg Boss 4, hosted by Salman Khan, in 2010. He also lent his voice to the memorable song "Jiya Tu Bihar Ke Lala" in Anurag Kashyap's 2012 hit gangster saga Gangs of Wasseypur. He most recently sang "Hind Ke Sitara" in season 3 of Amazon Prime Video India's popular dramedy show Panchayat in 2024.

## Alia Bhatt praises Yami Gautam's performance in Haq



Mumbai: Just like many, actress Alia Bhatt has also declared herself to be a Yami Gautam fan after witnessing her phenomenal performance in her latest release "Haq". Alia took to the Stories section of her Instagram handle and called "Haq" Yami's top performances of all time.

Lauding her contemporary, the 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' actress wrote, "Queen @yamigautam you are pure craft, heart and all things gold in Haq! One of my top female performances of all time. (sic)." Alia further revealed that she

even called Yami to congratulate her on such an incredible movie, declaring herself to be a true Yami 'fan'. "As I mentioned over the phone too, am a Yami fan waiting eagerly for all your work to once again charm and entertain us all," she added. Several other members from the film fraternity used social media to praise Yami and the team of "Haq" for the success of the drama. Filmmaker and choreographer, Farah Khan, applauded Yami and Emraan Hashmi in a social media post that read, "Yami Gautam get ready to receive every award! Outstanding performance." Tagging Emraan, Farah added, "ur best to date", followed by clap emojis. Presently streaming on Netflix, the courtroom drama "Haq" is believed to be inspired by the landmark Supreme Court judgement of Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Banu Begum, which revolves around a few key matrimonial rights of women within Muslim households.

Jointly backed by Vineet Jain, Vishal Gurnani, Juhi Parekh Mehta, and Harman Baweja under the banners of Jungle Pictures, Insomnia Films, and Baweja Studios, the screenplay of the movie has been written by Reshu Nath. The technical crew of the film also has Vishal Mishra as the music composer, Pratham Mehta as the cinematographer, and Ninad Khanolkar as the editor. With a theatrical release on November 7, 2025, "

## Ranveer Singh's film crosses Rs 850 cr in India, inches closer to surpassing Yash's KFG 2

Dhurandhar box office collection Day 37: Aditya Dhar's period spy thriller Dhurandhar, starring Ranveer Singh in the lead role, is still going from strength to strength even during its fifth weekend at the domestic box office. The film has now crossed the Rs 850 crore mark, and is slowly inching towards dethroning Prashanth Neel's 2022 Kannada action thriller KGF: Chapter 1 to become the third highest grossing Indian film ever domestically.

On Saturday (day 37) at the domestic box office, Dhurandhar earned Rs 5.75 crore, as per Sacnilk. This was a significant improvement on its earnings on Friday (day 36), which stood at Rs 3.50 crore. Even in its fifth week, the film earned over Rs 51 crore in India. However, as per an Instagram post of its production houses, Jio Studios and B62 Studios, the film earned Rs 56.35 crore. The post also claimed that in the first four weeks since its release last month, Dhurandhar has amassed Rs 784.50 crore at the domestic box office. After adding its week 5 earnings and of this past Friday and Saturday, the total box office collection of the film in India now stands at Rs 850.20 crore. Its earnings on Sunday (day 38) are expected to add a few more crores to its haul, on account of it being a weekend. Thus, Dhurandhar is now only Rs 9.5 crore away from being the third highest grossing Indian film ever at the domestic box office. That spot is currently held by Yash-starrer KGF: Chapter 2, which amassed Rs 859.70 crore across five Indian languages. However, Dhurandhar's ascent to the top 2 spots are a rather uphill climb.

The two highest grossing Indian films at the domestic box office are Sukumar's 2024 Telugu action thriller Pushpa 2: The Rule, starring Allu Arjun, at Rs 1234.10 crore; and SS Rajamouli's 2017 Telugu action fantasy epic Baahubali 2: The Conclusion, starring Prabhas, which stands at Rs 1030.42 crore. Both the highest grossers at the Indian box



office are beyond the lofty milestone of Rs 1000 crore. But even if Dhurandhar manages to beat KGF: Chapter 2 in the coming days, it would become the highest grossing non-Telugu film of all time at the Indian box office. Worldwide, it's already surpassed the box office collection of Yash's film, having amassed over Rs 1250 crore, significantly ahead of the Rs 1215 earned by KGF: Chapter 2 and Rs 1230 earned by Rajamouli's 2022 period action epic RRR, starring Ram Charan and Jr NTR. Dhurandhar is the fourth highest grossing Indian film at the global box office, but still way behind the top three grossers — Pushpa 2: The Rule (Rs 1742.10 crore), Baahubali 2: The Conclusion (Rs 1788.06 crore), and Nitesh Tiwari's 2016 Bollywood family sports drama Dangal (Rs 2070.30 crore). If the Rs 1200 crore from the China box office is excluded from its overall global haul, Aamir Khan's film would be out of the race, allowing Dhurandhar to become the highest grossing Hindi film ever at the worldwide box office.

## Bobby Deol got irritated after giving 10-15 takes for The B\*\*\*ds of Bollywood, says Gautami Kapoor: ‘Aryan Khan is a stickler for perfection’



Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan received rave reviews for his debut show The B\*\*\*ds of Bollywood. Recently, Gautami Kapoor, who plays a pivotal role in the series, opened up about her experience of working with Aryan and shared how the star kid was clear-headed, confident, and hands-on from the very beginning. She revealed that Aryan was deeply involved not just in staging scenes but also in performing stunts himself and demonstrating exactly what he wanted from the actors. Speaking to Siddharth Kannan, Gautami said, "During the reading of the show, was the first time I met Aryan. I was waiting to see what he does. We were 25 actors in a room, he came, started the reading and the clarity he had for each and every character, big small doesn't matter, the clarity he had was staggering. My mouth was open. I was like oh my god at 24-25, he has this kind of clarity and maturity about a project that he has written

## Priyanka Chopra rings in New Year quietly, heads to Golden Globes



Mumbai: Global star Priyanka Chopra celebrated the New Year with husband Nick Jonas, daughter Malti Marie Chopra Jonas, and her family in an isolated location but now, she is headed back to the bay and is all set to return to work mode. PeeCee took to the Stories section of her Instagram and posted a video showing her Insta Fam what she is leaving behind. The 'Barfi' actress uploaded a clip capturing the serene beauty of the island she has been staying in for the last couple of days with her loved ones to kick in the New Year.

"Going from this to the craziness of the Golden Globes", she was heard saying. PeeCee further added that she has not met any human being besides her family in the last 10 days.

In her next few posts, Priyanka treated the netizens with some more sneak peeks of the beautiful place she decided to welcome the year 2026 in. For those who do not know, PeeCee will be presenting an award at the forthcoming edition of the Golden Globe Awards. Going by a report in Variety, the awards have announced its lineup of presenters for the ceremony scheduled to take place on Sunday at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET. on CBS and streaming on Paramount+ in the U.S.. The list further includes some prominent names such as George Clooney, Julia Roberts, Charlize, Snoop Dogg, and "Heated Rivalry" stars Connor Storry and Hudson Williams. Besides PeeCee, Amanda Seyfried, Ana de Armas, Ayo Edebiri, Chris Pine, Colman Domingo, Dakota Fanning, Dave Franco, Diane Lane, George Clooney, Hailee Steinfeld, Jason Bateman, Jennifer Garner, Joe

Keery, Judd Apatow, Julia Roberts, Justin Hartley, Kathryn Hahn, Keegan-Michael Key, Kevin Bacon, Kevin Hart, Kyra Sedgwick, Laila Manobal, Luke Grimes, Macaulay Culkin, Marlon Wayans, Melissa McCarthy, Milla Kunis, Miley Cyrus, Minnie Driver, Orlando Bloom, Pamela Anderson, Queen Latifah, Regina Hall, Sean Hayes, Snoop Dogg, Wanda Sykes, Will Arnett and Zoe Kravitz will also be presenting the award.

## Niri9 International Film Festival opens in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: The third edition of the Niri9 International Film Festival was inaugurated today at Lok Bhavan Samskruti Auditorium, Hyderabad, marking the beginning of a vibrant two-day celebration of cinema, creativity, and powerful storytelling.

The opening ceremony witnessed the presence of acclaimed national award-winning Bollywood actor Seema Biswas, filmmaker SV Krishna Reddy, legendary singer and cultural icon Lou Majaw, renowned performer Carlyta Mouhini, former Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court, Ajit Borthakur, and others.

Over the two days, selected films, at the Prasad Film Labs, Hyderabad, will compete across multiple categories including Feature Film, Short Film, Shorter Film, and Documentary. Day 1 and Day 2 will witness back-to-back screenings of officially selected movies like Dahini, Juiphool, Kuhipat, Ghar, Dhonguloi, The Elephant Haven, Golden Thread, Papa, Chori, Ilish, Abaseshot, Manitha Subhavam, Character, Beyond The Unfinished,

The Ugly Green Planet, Omnipresent, Shesh Chithi, Paa among the competitive category and critically acclaimed film Kooki, and the internationally acclaimed feature film The Voice of Hind Rajab in the non-competitive segment.