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## Kapra Carpenters Association 2026 New Year Calendar Launch

\*\*\*\*\*NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“On the occasion of Amavasya, the Kapra Carpenters Association unveiled its 2026 New Year calendar at Raju Interiors Shop. The event was conducted with the support of Kailash Plywood Hardware and Manav Marketing, and the calendar was officially launched by Ramesh Patel. The program was attended by the Association's President, Raju Chari; Treasurer, Sadguru Chari; Founder, Venkatesh Chari; along with executive committee members Bhargav Chari, Narsimha Chari, Gagan Kumar, Yadagiri Chari, Poorna Chari, Shekhar Chari, Sampath Chari, Rambabu, and Chandra Shekhar Chari, as well as several association members. The event highlighted the Association's commitment to community engagement and its continued efforts in promoting solidarity among local carpenters.



## Over 15,000 snakes rescued in Telangana in 2025

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad-based Friends of Snakes Society (FOSS), in collaboration with Telangana Forest department has rescued 15,265 snakes across Telangana in the last year. Interestingly, the FOSS rescue data has indicated that 55.61 per cent of the rescued snakes were venomous and predominantly in urban and peri-urban settings of Hyderabad. There is a strong clustering of snakes along Hyderabad's expanding urban fringe, particularly near the Outer Ring Road corridor. Prominent hotspots in areas such as Miyapur, Dammaiguda, Nagaram, Rampally, Vanasthalipuram, Balapur, Bandlaguda Jagir, and Manikonda correspond closely with zones of rapid residential and infrastructure development.

## TMC hurting national security, end 'jungle raj' in Bengal: Modi in Singur

New Delhi, Jan 18

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government in West Bengal of “playing with national security by protecting infiltrators” and said it had turned governance into “jungle raj” that was marked by corruption, lawlessness and fear.

He also charged the Congress with weakening Assam through years of infiltration-driven politics and said the party had now been pushed to the margins even in Mumbai where it was founded.

Speaking at rallies in Kaliabor (Assam) and Singur (West Bengal), Modi asked voters in both states to back the BJP for development, security and administrative stability ahead of the coming elections. In Kaliabor, Modi said the Congress had been reduced to a marginal political force, pointing to its performance in the recent Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections where it finished fourth with just 24 seats.

He said the party had lost public trust and had no credible development agenda, adding that voters across the country were turning away from what he termed the Congress' negative politics. The PM accused the Congress of two Amrit Bharat Express trains connecting Assam with Rohtak and Lucknow.

He said improved connectivity was central to the North-East's growth and Assam had become crucial to India's Act East policy.

He said the recent election outcomes in Bihar, Thiruvananthapuram and Mumbai reflected a broader rejection of the Congress' politics and showed increasing public confidence in the BJP's governance. Later in the day, at a rally in Singur, Modi criticised the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government, alleging that the state was facing lawlessness, corruption and administrative collapse. He said women were unsafe under the current state government and claimed that the education system was controlled by mafias and corrupt elements.

The Prime Minister said voting for the BJP would help prevent incidents of violence and exploitation, and would restore order and transparency. He also referred to the Sandeshkhali controversy and said such incidents

would not recur under a BJP government.

He accused the TMC of obstructing central welfare programmes, particularly the Ayushman Bharat health scheme, and said this had deprived poor families in the state of free medical treatment. Modi said voters were



now more aware and were punishing governments that blocked development.

Highlighting the benefits of a “double-engine” government, he cited improvements in the drinking water supply in Tripura under the BJP rule and said similar progress could be achieved in Bengal. He said the Centre had created digital platforms and schemes for fishermen, but the Bengal Government had failed to implement these.

The Prime Minister said the BJP had taken steps to recognise and preserve Bengal's cultural heritage, including securing classical language status for Bengali and UNESCO recognition for Durga Puja.

Before the rally, Modi launched development projects worth more than Rs 830 crore in Hooghly district, including rail connectivity works and port modernisation initiatives, which, he said, would generate employment and improve infrastructure.

eral area of Son Nar, northeast of Chhatru, during a search operation conducted as part of ongoing joint counter-terror operations with the J&K Police,” the Nagrota-based White Knight Corps said in a statement.

“Operations remain underway, with additional forces inducted to reinforce the cordon, supported by close coordination with local administration and security agencies,” it added.

Special forces of the Army, troops from 17 and 11 Rashtriya Rifles and the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the J&K Police are involved in the operation. Officials said the terrorists were heavily armed with modern weaponry and trained in jungle warfare, and may have used grenades against security forces, causing serious injuries.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is managing the outer cordon. The Army said helicopters were being used for surveillance and additional troops had been deployed to strengthen the cordon.

In recent months, multiple encounters have taken place in the Chhatru belt of Kishtwar district, an area that offers dense cover and natural caves used as hide-outs. Officials also reported the presence of overground workers (OGWs) in the region who provide food and other supplies to terrorists.

## Government Provides Interest-Free Loans to One Crore Women and Women's Self-Help Groups in Urban Areas through the Indira Mahila Shakti Scheme: Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao

\*\*\*\*(Mandava Srisailam, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau, Indian Chronicle, January 18):- The state government, with the intention of making one crore women millionaires through the Indira Mahila Shakti scheme, has sanctioned interest-free loans to women's self-help groups in urban areas, said Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao. On Sunday, he held a review meeting with the commissioners of all municipalities in the district and MEPMU staff in his chamber. On this occasion, the Additional Collector of Local Bodies stated that a large-scale program should be organized in all municipalities on the 19th and 20th of this month to distribute interest-free loans to women's self-help groups through the hands of the local MLAs, and instructed them to distribute the checks. The state government has issued interest-free loans to municipalities for the financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25 as follows: Alair - 78.87 lakhs for 375 groups; Bhongir - 2.99 crore (two crore ninety-nine lakhs) for 1170 groups; Choutuppal - 1.28 crore (one crore twenty-eight lakhs) for

K Sadanand “ “Husnabad January 18:-“Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar revealed that Husnabad constituency of Siddipet district will be promoted in all fields. “372 Indiramma Houses have been handed over to the eligible beneficiaries of the second installment under Husnabad Municipality. “3520 people were given a check of 13 lakh rupees interest-free loans from women's associations. Indiramma sarees were distributed to every woman above 18 years of age. “Husnabad, which is located in the middle of Karimnagar, Siddipet, Hanumakonda and Jangam districts, was promised to be further developed. “He said that the construction of 171 Indiramma houses sanctioned in the



first phase is being completed. “Those who do not have a house should apply and they promised that Indiramma houses will be granted to every eligible person. “He criticized the

previous government for not giving even a single house in 10 years. He said that 3500 Indiramma houses were given to each constituency under the people's rule

government. Those who were granted houses were asked to start the construction of the house from tomorrow. “8 tractors of sand free for house builders

## NTR Will Remain a Legend in the Hearts of the Telugu People



\*\*\*\*Indian Chronicle, “Secunderabad, January 18:\*\*\*\*The 30th death anniversary of former Chief Minister of united Andhra Pradesh and founder of the Telugu Desam Party, Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR), was celebrated in a grand manner in Secunderabad. “TDP Secunderabad

in-charge Vallabrapu Srinivas Kumar attended the anniversary programmes organised in various areas of the constituency as the chief guest. He garlanded the portrait of NTR and paid rich tributes. “Speaking on the occasion, Vallabrapu Srinivas Kumar said that NTR played a historic role in instilling self-respect among Telugu people across the world. He stated that NTR proved his excellence both in cinema and politics, and emerged as a role model in governance for the entire country. “He further remarked that NTR's invaluable services for the welfare of the weaker sections of the state would remain unforgettable, and asserted that NTR will forever live on as a legend in the hearts of the Telugu people. “TDP leaders Chander, Venkataswamy, Shashirekha, Subhadra, G.V. Krishna, Vijay Kumar, Murali, and others participated in the programme.

## Protests Against The Extension Of The Nominated Post

\*\*\*\*\*Secunderabad Cantonment. January 18 (Indian Chronicle):“Protesting against the extension of the tenure of the nominated civilian post in the Cantonment Board for another year, BRS party official spokesperson and former chairman of the Mining Corporation, Manne Krishank, staged a protest in front of the Cantonment Board office on Sunday. BRS party members destroyed the gazette copy released by the central government extending the nominated post's tenure and also poured petrol on the nominated member's chair and set it on fire. They raised slogans against the BJP party during the protest. Speaking on the occasion, Krishank lashed out, saying that the BJP is murdering democracy in the Cantonment area. He expressed anger that the BJP is wasting time by not conducting elections in the Cantonment for years, under the pretext of merging the Cantonment with GHMC. It has been reported that a case has been registered against Manne Krishank for destroying the gazette copies and the chair during the protest in front of the Cantonment Board office.



## Eight soldiers injured in Kishtwar gun battle, hunt on for 2-3 terrorists

Jammu, Jan 18

At least eight soldiers were injured in a gunfight with terrorists in the Chhatru forest area of Kishtwar on Sunday, officials said. According to reports, three of the



injured personnel were airlifted to an Army hospital after sustaining serious wounds.

This is the third encounter between the security forces and terrorists in the Jammu region this year. Earlier, gunfights took place on January 7 and 13 in the Billawar area of Kathua district.

Officials said the Army rushed reinforcements to the Chhatru area and launched aerial surveillance after establishing contact with terrorists suspected to be from the banned outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). Two to three Pakistani terrorists are believed to be in the area. Search operations were continuing when last reports came in.

The Army launched “Operation Trashi-1” after receiving intelligence about the presence of terrorists in the Singhpora area, which is marked by difficult terrain and dense forest.

“Contact was established with terrorists in the gen-

## Fatal road accident claims two lives in Shamshabad

Hyderabad: Two persons were killed in a road accident at Shamshabad on Sunday evening.

The victims were identified as Abhijith Das (25) and Sujith Kuar Mukya (20), both natives of Bihar and working at a company in Shamshabad.

According to the police, Abhijith and Sujith were travelling on a motorcycle from Gollapalli village to Bahadurguda when they lost control of the bike due to high speed and rammed into a roadside tree. Both suffered severe injuries in the crash and died on the spot, police said.



591 groups; Mothkur - 61.33 lakhs for 318 groups. Pochampally: ?1.11 crore for 528 self-help groups. Yadagirigutta: ?98.23 lakhs for 344 self-help groups. “Similarly, for the year 2025-26, through bank linkage and Stree Nidhi, loans have been sanctioned as follows: Alair - ?15.29 crores for 179 groups. “Bhongir - ?43.81 crores for 334 groups. Choutuppal - ?30.58 crores for 314



groups. Mothkur - ?10.48 crores for 106 groups. “Pochampally - ?17.93 crores for 206 groups. Yadagirigutta - ?12.73 crores for 87 groups. This information was conveyed during the event. Municipal Commissioners Ramalingam, Anjan Reddy, Srinivas, Satish, Venkatram Reddy, Linga Swamy, and ME?MA staff participated in the program.



# 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. Whether Sitharaman opts for a contingency buffer in the Budget to accommodate currency volatility, or leans on structural measures to stimulate exports, will be closely watched by markets and policymakers alike. Trade is the big issue on the horizon in a world with fast-changing alignments due to US President Donald Trump's maverick economic policies. Given the inordinate delay in finalising the trade pact with America, the Budget will now have to provide support for export-led industries, which could face tough times ahead. The manufacturing sector has not yet expanded sufficiently to absorb unskilled or skilled personnel available in the market. It is here that lessons can be learnt from other Asian economies that have managed to expand small and medium enterprises sufficiently to provide more labour-intensive employment. The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) account for a large share of India's employment and exports, yet they remain vulnerable to credit constraints and volatility. There is a need for greater credit access, technology adoption incentives, and improved digital infrastructure for MSMEs

### MP Etela Rajender Unveils GSM Foundation Calendar

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):““BJP senior leader of Chikanagar Division, Gone Srikant Mudiraj, unveiled the New Year–2026 calendar of the GSM Foundation. The calendar was formally launched by Malkajgiri Member of Parliament Etela Rajender.“Speaking on the occasion, MP Etela Rajender praised the service activities carried out by Gone Srikant Mudiraj. He lauded Srikant for being constantly among the people, fighting for public issues



and striving for their solutions while actively organizing various service programmes. He also appreciated the initiative of honouring sanitation workers as part of the Sankranti celebrations, calling it a commendable gesture. On this occasion, under the leadership of Chikanagar Division President Dappu Dattasai, Sankranti festival greetings were extended to MP Etela Rajender. Senior leaders Gone Anjaiah, Vaidyula Veera Reddy, Madipadige Srinivas, Parupati Ram Reddy, Rachakonda Shivakumar, Polozu Srinivas Chary, Gurralla Mallesh, Seekuri Krishna Mudiraj, Putta Bala Mahender, Kasula Ramakrishna Goud, Nakkaboyina Keshavulu, Srikant Chary, Sabbani Satyanarayana, Raju and others participated in the programme.

### Bandi Mahesh Yadav Seeks BJP Corporator Ticket for GHMC Elections



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Bandi Mahesh Yadav, Vice President of the Peergadiguda unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), met Malkajgiri Member of Parliament Etela Rajender and submitted a representation seeking the BJP corporator ticket for the upcoming GHMC elections. Along with former MLA Bodiga Shobha, Bandi Mahesh Yadav requested



that the party allot the corporator ticket to him from Boduppall Circle, Peergadiguda 10th Division. He stated that the ticket should be given to a candidate from a poor BC background, providing an opportunity to contest the elections on behalf of the BJP. Speaking on the occasion, Bandi Mahesh Yadav said he would work in the spirit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and dedicate himself to public service. He expressed confidence that the BJP would hoist its flag in the upcoming GHMC elections in the Peergadiguda area. MP Etela Rajender responded positively to the representation and stated that the matter would be discussed with party leadership before taking a final decision.

### Young Skaters from Chengicherla Selected for Team India, Receive Sponsorship for International Championship

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“To encourage young sporting talent, BJP Vice President of GHMC Boduppall Circle, 12th Division, Mr. Gandipalli Raju extended financial support of Rs.20,000 to enable two young skaters to participate in an upcoming international skating championship. Mr. Gandipalli Raju expressed his happiness over the selection of brothers Ippakayala Vishwank Tej and Ippakayala Ishan Tej to represent Team India at the international level. He said it was a matter of pride that children from Chengicherla, Telangana and India are competing on an international platform and wished them great success in bringing laurels to the country. The two boys are the sons of Ippakayala Ramu and Sandhya, residents of Kranti Nagar Colony, Road No. 1, Chengicherla, Medchal–Malkajgiri district. Vishwank Tej and Ishan Tej have already achieved notable success by winning three national-level medals along with several medals at the state and district levels. They will be representing India at the International Skating World Medal Championship 2026, scheduled to be held on January 23 and 24, 2026, in Nepal. Teams from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Nepal will participate in the championship.“Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Gandipalli Raju said that the achievement of these young athletes is a proud moment for Chengicherla and Telangana. He expressed confidence



that the boys would perform at their best and strive to win the championship title, thereby enhancing the reputation of India on the global stage. As a mark of encouragement, Mr. Gandipalli Raju felicitated Vishwank Tej and Ishan Tej with shawls and conveyed his best wishes for their success in the international competition.

### Grand Observance of NTR's 30th Death Anniversary at Chiluka Nagar Crossroads — Under the Leadership of Dr. Anthagalla Ashok



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):““TDP Malkajgiri Parliament Adac Committee member Dr. Anthagalla Ashok stated that the late Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR) was the only leader who moved forward with the principle that “society itself is a temple and the people are God.”On Sunday, under his leadership, the 30th death anniversary of former Chief Minister and founder president of the Telugu Desam Party, the late NTR, was observed, during which fruits were distributed. On this occasion, floral tributes were paid to NTR's portrait at the Chiluka Nagar crossroads by gar-



landing it. Speaking at the event, Dr. Ashok said that NTR's glory has never faded and his fame remains unforgettable among the people. He added that the credit for proclaiming the self-respect of the Telugu people to all corners of the world goes to Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, the founder of the Telugu Desam Party. Leaders Imam, Gopal Reddy, Qasim, Krishna Reddy, Raju, Yadagiri, P. Raju, Shankar, and others participated in the program.“[5:03 PM, 1/18/2026] +91 93911 09207: END

### Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Performs Special Pujas at Sri Kalabhairava Swamy Temple on the Occasion of Mauni Amavasya



“KISHOR VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):““On the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy participated in special puja rituals conducted at the Swayambhu Sri Kalabhairava Swamy Temple located in Uppal Bhagayat. Mauni Amavasya is considered one of the most sacred days in Hindu tradition. Devotees believe that observing silence and engaging in divine meditation on this day leads to spiritual purification and the removal of all sins. On this occasion, the MLA performed special abhishekams and prayers at the temple, seeking peace, prosperity, and good health for the people of the Uppal constituency. Senior leaders of the BRS party and a large number of local devotees participated in the program and conducted the event in a grand manner.

### 190th Week of Jnanamala Program Held at BJR Colony, Jamigadda, Kapra Mandal

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“As part of the 190th week of the Jnanamala program, an event was organized at BJR Colony, Jamigadda area, Kapra Mandal, under the leadership of the Jnanamala Team. On this occasion, floral tributes were offered to the statues of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Dr. B.R.



Ambedkar and Babu Jagjivan Ram, marking the continuation of the weekly Jnanamala initiative. As part of the same program, the Jnanamala 2026 Scientific Calendar was formally released. The calendar was unveiled by Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshmi Reddy. The event was attended by leaders from various political parties and organizations, including Singireddy Somashekhar Reddy, Pedarla Sharath Chandra, former corporator Kotha Rama Rao, and Spurthi Group member Godugu Yadagiri Rao. Other participants included Mahipal Reddy, Kumaraswamy, Upender, Ravinder Rao, Manemma, Srisailam, Balaraj, Ramesh Chary and Lakshmi Narayana. The Jnanamala Team members present included organizer Taduri Gagan Kumar, advisor S.A. Rahim, coordinator Narasimha Chary, and members Ravi Naik, Narendra Rao, Dayanand, Srinivas, Venkatayya, Nagesh, Joshua, Ramulu Raju, Chandu, Ramu and Samad. Local residents, including women from the colony, actively participated in the program, making the event a collective and inclusive community gathering.

### Uppal Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Participates in Mauni Amavasya Annadanam Program

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):““Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy participated in the Mauni Amavasya annadanam (free food distribution) program organized under the auspices of the International Vysya Federation at Sri Nalla Pochayya Temple, Ramanthapur, Uppal constituency. The Mauni Amavasya annadanam program was held on Sunday, with Parameshwar Reddy and TPCC General Secretary



Uppala Srinivas Gupta attending as chief guests. Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy said that elders have rightly stated that “Annadanam is the greatest charity,” as food is the very foundation of human life. He explained that feeding the hungry is akin to giving them



life energy and that sharing a portion of what one has with the needy is true service to God. He further appealed to everyone to come together and participate in noble initiatives like annadanam to contribute to the building of a better society. Parameshwar Reddy expressed happiness that the International Vysya Federation is organizing its 65th monthly Amavasya annadanam program. TPCC General Secretary Uppala Srinivas Gupta, Medchal District Sambhu Pandayya, GS Kothapalli Ramesh, Treasurer Bonagiri Sravan Kumar, Aakarapu Arun Kumar, Ramanthapur Division Working President Vallapu Srikanth Yadav, Upender Reddy, Bullet Ashok, Pola Venkateswarlu Vishwanath, Manjunath, Pokala Satyanarayana, Doddi Ashok, committee members, and others participated in the program.



## Maruti Mitra Mandali Organises Amavasya Annadanam at Kushaiguda

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Maruti Mitra Mandali organised its monthly Amavasya Annadanam programme on Sunday at the Pochamma Temple premises in Kushaiguda. The food distribution programme, held with devotion and community participation, is conducted regularly on every Amavasya day. The event began with special prayers and offerings to the presiding deity, followed by the distribution of food to devotees and local residents. A large number of people benefited from the annadanam. Several mem-



bers of the mandali actively took part in the programme, including Srikant Reddy, Ramesh Goud, Balaji Goud, Mandali President Guru Manchi Ashok Chari, General Secretary Varganti

Hanumanthu, Treasurer Machababu, Kasula Suresh Goud, Satish, Guru Manchi Venugopal Chari, Gurralla Mallesh and Phani Chandrasekhar. Speaking on the occasion, the organisers said that

annadanam is considered a noble form of service and plays an important role in promoting social responsibility and compassion among people. They reiterated their commitment to continue the programme every month for the benefit of society.

## Call to Participate in “Jago Bhagyanagar – Chalo Balapur Dharma Raksha Sabha” on January 24



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):“A call was given to participate in the “Jago Bhagyanagar – Chalo Balapur Dharma Raksha Sabha,” scheduled to be held on Saturday, January 24, in Balapur. The meeting is being organised to oppose alleged illegal infiltration by Bangladeshi and Rohingya Muslims and to protest attacks on Hindu temples, with the objective of demonstrating unity among Hindus. On Sunday, under the leadership of Sangi Swamy Yadav, Convener of the Chikanagar Bhagyanagar Ganesh Utsav Samithi, pamphlets for the Dharma Raksha Sabha were

released and distributed door-to-door along with leaders from various political parties. Those who participated in the programme included Devasani Balachander, Jalli Mohan, Palle Nursing Rao, Palvancho Vittal, Gudi Madhusudan Reddy, Mukkala Ramakrishna, Shamirpet Chandrayya, Dr Ashok, Gopal Reddy, Tirupati Satyanarayana, Orsu Shekhar, Dasari Yadagiri, Balakrishnan, Vasu, Dandu Yadagiri, and several other leaders and activists. Addressing the gathering, the leaders raised slogans against extremist forces and emphasised the need to demonstrate unity among Hindus.

## NTR's 30th Death Anniversary Observed in Dr. A.S. Rao Nagar Division

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“On



the occasion of the 30th death anniversary of former Chief Minister and legendary actor Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR), tributes were paid at various locations under the Dr. A.S. Rao Nagar Division Floral tributes were offered at the statue of Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao located at Jammi Gadda NTR Circle. In addition, garlands were placed on NTR's portraits installed at Bhavani Nagar Colony, South Kamala Nagar, High Tension Road, and Brindavan Colony. The programme was attended by Telangana Telugu Desam Party Malkajgiri-Medchal District Convener Kandikanti Ashok Kumar Goud as the chief guest. Former Corporator Kotha Ramarao, former TDP State

Secretary Neerukonda Satish Babu, ex-councillor Gaddamidhi Ramulu Yadav, State Women Leader Prathibha, former TNSF State General Secretary Shivanand, Uppal Division President Tikka Prakash, and several senior leaders also participated. Senior party leaders Gottipati Venkateswara Rao, Goberu Ramesh, Bingi Biksha Pati, Kommu Upender, Movva Srinivasa Kumar, Vadlamudi Srinivas, Boppana Srinivas, Machha Ashok Goud, Venkateswara Rao, Challapalli Nageswara Rao, P. Nageswara Rao, Mandava Koteswara Rao, Saradhi, Paruchuri Ravindra, Harish, Venkatesh, Suryadevara Ramakrishna, Koteswara Rao, Patibandla Nageswara Rao, Malyadri, along with party workers, supporters, and local residents, took part in the programme. Speakers recalled the contributions of Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao to Telugu cinema and politics, highlighting his role in bringing political awareness among the masses and implementing welfare-oriented governance during his tenure.



## Kushaiguda Reddy Sangham Releases New Year Calendar: UPPAL MLA BANDARI LAKSHMA REDDY



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“The New Year calendar release programme was organised in a grand manner under the auspices of the Kushaiguda Reddy Sangham. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the event as the chief guest and formally released the calendar. Speaking on the occasion, the MLA appreciated the Reddy Sangham for taking the lead in social service activities. He stated



that the initiatives undertaken by the association would serve as an inspiration to the youth. He also assured his continued support for the overall development of the Kushaiguda area. Kushaiguda Reddy Sangham president Nagilla Bal Reddy, general secretary Raghava Reddy, along with Srikant Reddy, Mahipal Reddy, executive committee members, BRS party leaders and workers participated in the programme in large numbers.

## OBC Employees Play a Pivotal Role in the Growth of Telangana Grameena Bank.



“P. S. ASHOKAN “KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. “Unity is the Key to Effective Resolution of Employees' Issues: K. Shankar“KARIMNAGAR, January 18“Stressing that collective strength alone can pave the way for effective resolution of employees' issues, K. Shankar, State General Secretary of the OBC Employees Welfare Association, said that unity among employees is essential for safeguarding rights and ensuring welfare.“He stated that Telangana Grameena Bank, with the highest number of branches, has emerged as the second-largest bank in the state and stands at the forefront in extending banking services to rural communities. He asserted that the contribution of OBC employees to the bank's sustained growth and achievements is invaluable and unforgettable.“K. Shankar was addressing a joint meeting of OBC employees from the Karimnagar and Jagtial regions, organised on Sunday at Varahi Banquet Hall, Bhagat Nagar, Karimnagar, under the leadership of Regional Secretary Aleti Ramesh.“Speaking on the occasion, the association leaders highlighted that the OBC Welfare Association has been acting as a strong bridge between employees and the bank management in addressing long-pending issues. They reaf-

firmed that the association is continuously striving for the welfare, dignity, and professional advancement of OBC employees.“The meeting witnessed the participation of Association President P. Devender, Executive President Kondapalkala Venumadhav, Bandari Srinivas, Deputy General Secretaries Y. Naveen Kumar and Badineni Sudhakar, Affairs Secretary D. Srinivas, Regional Secretaries Aleti Ramesh and Vanarasa Venkatesh, Treasurer Rajesh Khanna, Executive Committee Member Kiran Prashanth, and several other leaders.“A large number of OBC employees working in various cadres across bank branches in the Karimnagar and Jagtial regions attended the meeting, reflecting strong organisational unity.“During the deliberations, participants discussed key issues such as staff transfers, promotions, challenges faced in day-to-day banking operations, and measures required to address them. They also deliberated on the need for sustained dialogue with the bank management on various policy and administrative matters.“Union Central Committee leaders Ravula Santhosh Kumar, Ravi Kumar, P. Devender, K. Kotaiah, B. Sudhakar, D. Srinivas, Thalla Krishna Priya, among others, were present and addressed the gathering.

## BJP Mahila Morcha President Shilpa Reddy Donates Rs 75,000 to Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):“On the invitation of the Uppal Division New Shantinagar Welfare Association, BJP Telangana State Mahila Morcha President Shilpa Reddy visited the Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple and performed special prayers. As part of the temple reconstruction works, Shilpa Reddy donated an amount of ₹75,000 to the Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple. On behalf of the colony committee and residents, the welfare association expressed their gratitude for the generous contribution. The programme was attended by BJP Division President Marineni Phaninder, senior leaders Shamirpet Dharma Reddy, Division General Secretaries Teega Vithal Rao Mudiraj and Nagaraj Goud, Treasurer Duvvala Ramesh, senior leaders Narsi Reddy, Adapu Ramesh, Arun, Raviteja, Sai and Abhiram. Also present were Association President Venkatesh, General Secretary Anjaneyulu, K. Srinivas, G. Satyanarayana, N. Bhaskar, Kondal, Ravinder Reddy, Shiva, Sai, Sandeep, Ajay, Srinivas Chary, Raghavulu, Dr. Satyanarayana, Gopal, Bhavani, Sharada, Pushpalatha, Sabitha, Roopa, Renuka, Lakshmi, Manjula, Andalamma, Buchamma, Surekha, Lakshamma, Sujatha and several others.



## Free Jaipur Foot Caliper Camp Organised by Marwadi Yuva Manch Greater Hyderabad



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 18, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Hyderabad: Marwadi Yuva Manch Greater Hyderabad has organised a free Jaipur Foot Caliper distribution camp to support persons with physical disabilities. The camp is being conducted from January 18 to January 25, 2026, between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm at Vishnu Fire Works premises, located behind Rajadhani Hotel, Feelkhana, Begum Bazaar. The initiative aims to provide free Jaipur Foot Calipers to economically weaker and

physically challenged individuals, helping them regain mobility and improve their quality of life. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the programme as the chief guest and distributed Jaipur Foot Calipers to the beneficiaries. Speaking on the occasion, he said that such service-oriented programmes play a vital role in bringing positive



change in the lives of persons with disabilities and appreciated Marwadi Yuva Manch for its commitment to social responsibility. The camp is being successfully organised under the leadership of Marwadi Yuva Manch Greater Hyderabad President Rajesh Balar, Project Head Praveen Kothari, along with Dheeraj Choradia, Mahaveer Bagrecha and other members. Several dignitaries, including Sanjay Kaleru and Jai Naveen, participated in the programme. Bharat Samachar is the media partner for the event. Organisers stated that the camp is expected to benefit a large number of persons with disabilities by providing them free Jaipur Foot Calipers, enabling them to lead a more independent and dignified life.



## Massive Congress Party Joinings Under the Leadership of Kandi Shravan Kumar Reddy in Habsiguda Division



""KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 18 (Indian Chronicle):""In Habsiguda Division, a large number of youth from various colonies joined the Indian National Congress under the leadership of former Medchal-Malkajgiri District Youth Congress President, Kandi Shravan Kumar Reddy.The programme was held under



the leadership of Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, Congress Party In-charge of the Uppal Assembly Constituency, who attended as the chief guest. Youth from Maheshwari Nagar, Ravindar Nagar Colony, and Lakshmi Nagar Colony joined the Congress Party in large numbers. Among those who joined were youth leaders from other parties, including BRS leaders Shiva and Vi...

## It is unfortunate that two teachers lost their lives and three others were injured in a road accident near Arvapalli in Suryapet district:

- Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Member of Parliament, Bhongir



""(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhongir District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 18):- Bhongir Member of Parliament Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy stated that he was deeply shocked by the tragic road accident near Arvapalli in Suryapet district, in which two teachers from Nalgonda lost their lives and three other teachers were seriously injured while they were traveling to school in a car after the Sankranti holidays. He prayed for the souls of the deceased teachers to rest in peace and expressed his deepest condolences to their families."He also directed the concerned officials to take necessary measures to ensure that the injured teachers recover quickly and that the affected families receive the necessary assistance. MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy requested the concerned officials to take steps to ensure that the affected families receive the necessary assistance from the government.

## In Bhongir, we must elect Congress party councilors with a huge majority, stand by MLA Anil Anna, and hoist the Congress flag on the fort of Bhongir:

- Former Councilor, Former Chairman of Pachala Katta Someshwara Temple, Devarakonda Narasimha Chari



“ “ ( M a n d a v a Srisailam, Yadadri Bhongir District Bureau, Indian Chronicle, January 18):- In Telangana state, the notification for municipal corporation and municipal elections will be released next week, and elections will be held in 117 municipalities and 10 corporations in the second week of February. Along with Bhongir Municipality, the Congress party has the responsibility to ensure the grand victory of our candidates in approximately 10 municipal corporation elections and 117 municipalities across Telangana state. Especially in the municipalities within our Bhongir constituency, we must secure victories and present this as a gift to our beloved leader MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy, and to the Chief Minister of Telangana state, Revanth Reddy, said former councilor, former chairman of Pachala Katta Someshwara Temple, and president of Yadadri Bhongir District Viswabrahmin Viswakarma United Association,



Devarakonda Narasimha Chari. As part of this, speaking to the district representative today, Sunday, he said, "Let's join hands and ensure the victory of the Congress party candidates. Friends, instead of hastily claiming 'I will win, I have the best chance,' let's conduct an honest survey with the advice of the Bhongir town Congress president and other senior Congress leaders of Bhongir town, and through our MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy. Let's hoist the Congress party flag over the municipalities in the Bhongir constituency."Let's proudly showcase the 40-year winning history of Kumbham Anil Kumar Anna."Please, without creating discord among the historical Congress workers, let us all, as members of Anil Anna's Congress family, work collectively and demonstrate our unity," he stated.

## Excellence in Sports Paves the Way for a Promising Future

.""P. S. ASHOKAN "KARIMNAGAR BUREAU ""— State-Level Sripada Cup 2026 Mega Cricket Tournament Concludes on a Grand Note""Prominent social leader Loke Sharath has asserted that young athletes can secure wide recognition and a bright future if their sporting talent is nurtured and encouraged at the right time. He observed that Manthani is home to many promising sportspersons who, with proper motivation, can excel at the state and national levels.""Addressing the gathering on Sunday at the Government College Grounds, Manthani, Sharath distributed prizes to the winners of the State-Level Sripada Cup-2026 Mega Cricket Tournament, organised with the encouragement of Duddilla Sridhar Babu, Hon'ble Minister for IT and Industries, Government of Telangana, and youth leader Duddilla Srinu Babu.""Speaking on the occasion, Sharath emphasised that a balanced focus on academics and sports during the student phase plays a decisive role in shaping one's future. He noted that excellence in sports not only builds discipline and confidence but also opens doors to professional opportunities and societal recognition.""In the thrilling final match, Zuber 11 from Karimnagar emerged as champions and were awarded a cash prize of ₹1,00,000, while Al Rahim 11 finished as runners-up, receiving ₹50,000. The winners and runners-up were warmly congratulated for their spirited performance and sportsmanship.""The tournament was generously supported by sponsors including Stage Pantry Raju (Town Youth Congress President), Vivek, Erukala Praveen (Balls), DJ Loke Manohar, Sharath, Water Shivaganga Purified (Medagoni Srinivas Goud), and Shields MD Jameel Ahmed.""The event witnessed the participation of several dignitaries and organisers, including Pentari Raju, Marupaka Pawan, Polu Shiva, Teja, Raju, Agricultural Market Committee Chairman Kududula Venkanna, RTI Member Manthani Suresh, Congress Party Campaign Committee Chairman Odnala Srinivas, Electricity Regulatory Board Member Shashibhushan Kache, former PACS Chairman Kotha Srinivas, Congress District General Secretary Udari Shankar, former Mandal Youth Congress President Erukala Praveen, former Market Committee Chairman Azeem Khan, and District Social Media In-charge Arelli Kiran.""The successful conclusion of the Sripada Cup stood as a testament to Manthani's vibrant sporting culture and the collective commitment to promoting youth and sports development in the region.



## ‘Lungs of Haryana under threat’: Bhupinder Singh Hooda slams state government for dodging Aravalli debate, public issues



GNS News Agency, Jan 18

The potential destruction of the Aravalli hills and the Haryana government's silence on the issue took centre stage on Tuesday as Leader of the Opposition and former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda accused the Nayab Singh Saini-led BJP government of systematically evading discussion on matters of public interest during the recent Assembly session.A new uniform definition of the Aravalli hills has sparked a controversy as it could leave more than 90 per cent of the 692-km-long range vulnerable to mining and construction. Calling the Aravallis the "lungs of Haryana," Hooda cited a Forest Survey of India report, warning that their degradation would have the most severe impact on the state, including a sharp rise in pollution.

He said the Congress had moved a short-duration discussion on the issue in the Winter Session that concluded on Monday, but the government avoided debate. "Why did the government not defend Haryana's interests in the Supreme Court, and why is it not filing a review petition now?" he asked, adding that no clear answer had been given.Addressing a press conference at his residence in Chandigarh on Tuesday, Hooda described the BJP government's conduct in the Assembly as "anti-people and evasive". He alleged that throughout the session, the Opposition's questions, resolutions, and motions on public concerns were ignored. "For the first time in the history of the Haryana Assembly, not a single adjournment motion, suspension of business motion, or short-duration discussion proposed by the Congress was accepted," he said.

Hooda said the Congress had sought debates on a wide range of issues, including mining in the Aravalli hills, the status of Chandigarh, farmers' distress, unemployment, recruitment scams, Minimum Support Price, MNREGA, corruption, education, health, the SYL water dispute, rising pollution, and alleged hate speeches by BJP leaders. "But the government showed no willingness to discuss any of these," he alleged.He also accused the BJP of trying to divert attention from serious allegations of "vote chori" by

bringing a proposal on electoral reforms in the Assembly. "This subject does not even fall under the Assembly's jurisdiction. That is why the Congress walked out of the House. We will bring a special resolution on vote chori again in the next session," Hooda said.On sports infrastructure, Hooda said Haryana's national standing had improved significantly under the Congress government due to a focused sports policy and the construction of over 300 stadiums. "Today, these stadiums are in a dilapidated condition," he claimed. Referring to the deaths of young sportspersons Hardik Rath and Aman Kumar in Lakhna Majra and Bahadurgarh, respectively, Hooda said government negligence was responsible and alleged that the BJP did not even respond to a motion seeking discussion on the issue.Raising concerns over MNREGA, Hooda said that while around 8 lakh people are registered under the scheme, only 2,100 have received the full 100 days of work. He also claimed that no compensation had been paid to workers in the past five years, despite mandatory provisions. He further alleged that drug-related deaths in Haryana had surpassed those in Punjab and that corruption was rampant.

On the status of Chandigarh, Hooda said the Congress repeatedly sought clarity amid reports of shifting positions and the alleged rejection by the Union Home Ministry of proposals related to a new Assembly building. "If Chandigarh is the capital of Haryana, then who can stop us from acquiring land of our own?" he asked.Referring to the SYL canal issue, Hooda said Supreme Court orders were final and reminded that an all-party meeting had earlier decided to approach the President and Prime Minister. "The chief minister took responsibility for arranging a meeting with the Prime Minister, but it has not happened to this day," Hooda said.He also questioned discussions in the Assembly on issues such as Vande Mataram and electoral reforms, calling them attempts to hide governance failures. "These are not matters that can be decided by a state Assembly," he said.Highlighting the state's financial health, Hooda cited a NITI Aayog report placing Haryana 14th out of 18 states in the Fiscal Health Index and 15th in the debt index. He said the state's total debt had crossed Rs 5.16 lakh crore and was likely to rise further.He also pointed to shortages across departments, including a 40 per cent shortfall of doctors, a large number of vacant teaching posts, and nearly half of all sanctioned government posts lying vacant.Concluding, Hooda said the government failed to respond to any issue raised during the no-confidence motion, including the cancellation of BPL cards and unfulfilled promises under welfare schemes. "The BJP government wants the opposition to remain silent, but the Congress will continue to raise the voice of the people—from the Assembly to the streets," he said.

## In Pune, a quiet Christmas turkey tradition survives on orders, hotels, and home cooks

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

In the Christmas season, Pune witnesses a small but steady demand for turkey, a festive dish that remains uncommon but deeply symbolic for the community. Unlike chicken or mutton, turkey is not part of the city's everyday food culture; instead, it appears briefly between late November and December, sustained by families who enjoy it, expatriates, luxury hotels, and a handful of meat suppliers who continue the tradition despite high costs and logistical challenges.

One of the key suppliers in this seasonal market is Bismillah Foods in Shivaji Market, Camp. For the past eight years, owner Owais Shaikh has been sourcing turkeys only on demand. "Turkey is completely seasonal for us. We do not keep stock unless there is a confirmed order. Most local customers do not ask for turkey. The demand comes mainly from Christian households, foreigners, and a few hotels," he says.Shaikh sources the birds from farmers in Karnataka, as Maharashtra has very limited turkey farming. Fresh turkey is priced between Rs 650 and Rs 800 per kg, depending on availability and transport costs as well. He also says that a single bird usually weighs between five and seven kilograms. "Because it's expensive and bulky, we cannot risk wastage. Every bird is pre-booked by us for sale," he adds.

Luxury hotels form the second pillar of Pune's turkey tradition. Conrad Pune is among the few establishments that serve turkey every Christmas. Chef Murty Sitaram said the hotel imports Butterball turkeys from the United States to maintain consistency in size and quality. "Each bird costs us anywhere between Rs 18,000 and Rs 22,000 before

preparation," he says.The preparation process is slow and precise. "We brine the turkey overnight, partially steam it and then slow-roast it while basting regularly. This ensures the meat remains moist and the skin turns golden," says Sitaram. The dish is served with winter vegetables, Yorkshire pudding, giblet gravy, and cranberry sauce. "Turkey is expensive, but for many guests, Christmas feels incomplete without it...that emotional connection is why we continue the tradition every year," he adds.Other hotels such as The Ritz-Carlton Pune, JW Marriott Pune, and The Westin Pune Koregaon Park also include turkey as part of their Christmas Eve or Christmas season brunches. These festive spreads are typically priced between Rs 3,500 and Rs 5,000 per person, depending on the order, and attract families and expatriates looking for a traditional holiday meal.

Customers, too, go out of their way to source turkey. Reeva Anthony, a Pune-based home cook, imports her turkey from Dubai. "I prefer getting it from Dubai because the cold-chain system is reliable and the bird reaches within three hours. It costs me around Rs 14,000, including transport, but the quality and freshness make it worth it for me," she says.Anthony slow-roasts the turkey with whole spices, black peppercorns, caramelised onions, and butter. "For me, turkey is not just about taste. It is about recreating Christmas memories at home," she says.Despite remaining a niche product, turkey continues to hold a special place in Pune's Christmas celebrations. Sustained by one or two suppliers, a few luxury hotels and dedicated home cooks, the tradition also survives on planning, pre-orders and sentiment, quietly bringing a global festive flavour to the city every December.

## Amit Shah to review Haryana Police passing-out parade in Panchkula tomorrow; 5,061 constables to join force

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

As many as 5,061 newly trained constables will formally join the Haryana Police on Wednesday after successfully completing their basic training. Their passing-out parade will be held at the Tau Devi Lal Stadium in Panchkula Sector 3.The grand ceremony is being organised under the aegis of the Haryana Police Academy, Madhuban, and will witness the recruits displaying parade drills, discipline, and professional excellence.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be the chief guest at the event and take the salute at the parade, lending national importance to the occasion. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, along with senior police and administrative officers and other dignitaries, will also be present.A traffic rehearsal and thorough inspection of the entire route of the home minister and other dignitaries was conducted by the police force across Chandigarh and Panchkula on Tuesday."The recruits have undergone an intensive and multi-dimensional training programme conducted at Madhuban, PTC (Police Training Centre) Sunaria, RTC (Recruit Training Centre) Bhondsi, Ambala, and Naval Training Centres from December 16, 2024, to September 22, 2025. The training focused on physical fitness, legal awareness, weapon handling, field tactics, disaster management, human rights and effective public interaction, preparing the constables for modern and citizen-oriented policing," A S Chawla, Director of the Haryana Police Academy, was quoted as saying in a press statement.



"The batch stands out for its strong academic profile. Among the 5,061 recruits, 969 are postgraduates, 3,324 are graduates, and 768 hold 10+2 or diploma qualifications. Many of them are proficient in Hindi, English and Punjabi, which is expected to strengthen communication with the public, enhance cybercrime handling and support technology-driven policing. All recruits have also been registered on the Karmayogi Portal and encouraged to undertake further capacity-building courses," Chawla added."Women recruits have recorded notable achievements in this batch, reflecting growing empowerment and equal opportunity within the Haryana Police. Nishu from Jind secured the Overall First Position, Mohit from Gurugram stood second, while Manjeet Chahal from Hisar secured third position and also won the Best Outdoor Trophy," Chawla added.



# 'Call of Duty' co-creator Vince Zampella killed in car crash



GNS News Agency, Jan 18

The developer and executive died on Sunday (December 21, 2025) while driving his Ferrari on a scenic road north of Los Angeles, according to local broadcaster NBC4."For unknown reasons, the vehicle veered off the roadway, struck a concrete barrier, and became fully engulfed," the California Highway Patrol (CHP) said in a statement, without identifying the two victims in the crash.The CHP added that both the driver and a passenger who was ejected from the vehicle succumbed to their injuries.

Witnesses posted video of the mangled cherry-red Ferarri, engulfed in flames, on the mountain road. The cause of the crash remains under investigation.His studios created some of the world's best-selling video games, and Zampella was considered an innovator in first-person military shooter style games.This year, when his "Battlefield 6" video game set a new sales record for the franchise, Zampella expressed gratitude, saying "we never take moments like this for granted" — despite a long career of success in gaming.

The mass-combat game has won over 100 million players in the past two decades, in its various iterations.And

yet, that number isn't a first. To this day, "Call of Duty" boasts more than 100 milion active players, monthly."You have that dream of the game being popular, but I don't think you're ever ready for that level of success," Zampella told gaming site IGN in a 2016 interview.Profound, far-reachingZampella was best known for co-creating the "Call of Duty" franchise and founding Respawn Entertainment, the studio behind "Titanfall," "Apex Legends," and the "Star Wars Jedi" games.After starting out in the 1990s as a designer on shooter games, he co-founded Infinity Ward in 2002 and helped launch "Call of Duty" in 2003. Activision later acquired his studio.He left Activision under contentious circumstances and established Respawn in 2010, which Electronic Arts acquired in 2017.

At EA, he eventually took charge of revitalising the "Battlefield" franchise, cementing his reputation as one of the most influential figures in modern first-person shooter games."This is an unimaginable loss, and our hearts are with Vince's family, his loved ones, and all those touched by his work," Electronic Arts said in a statement."Vince's influence on the video game industry was profound and far-reaching," the company said, adding that "his work helped shape modern interactive entertainment."A statement by Respawn, posted on the "Battlefield" X account, praised Zampella "for how he showed up every day, trusting his teams, encouraging bold ideas, and believing in Battlefield and the people building it."Zampella "championed what he believed was right for the people behind those studios and our players because it mattered."It was a bold, transgressive method of storytelling, of a moment in time that was political, that was violent, and that was impactful," Washington Post video game reporter Gene Park told NBC4."He really knew how to create stories and create experiences that really hit at the heart of human experience — whether it was terror, dread, heroism. I think he was really able to kindof encapsulate that through the designs of the video games that he made," Mr. Park said.

# How Bengaluru celebrated Christmas in the ‘80s and ‘90s

In the '80s and '90s, a typical Christmas morning in Bengaluru was marked by the smell of plum cake and trees outside lined with fairy lights. For those who grew up in that generation, memories such as these live more vividly in the mind than in photo albums, and are replayed every season.From a parish choir testing their mics to pressure cookers hissing and all your cousins trying to fit into a single auto, the festive spirit seemed to hover in the air. Before the time of malls and Instagram, the joy of the festival spread through word of mouth and the city's iconic streets.

Places such MG Road, Brigade Road and Commercial Street turned into informal meeting points, spots where everyone met up at least once during the season. "In the '80s, we used to walk to church in the chill midnight for mass, because hardly anyone in our area had a car back then," recalls Jom James, a restaurant owner at Sri Krishna Cafe, in Halasurur, who has lived in the city for 52 years.Inside homes, the celebrations were simple but rooted in love and connection. James remembered his mother making appam and mutton stew as he and his sister waited, while a simple Christmas tree surrounded by balloons stood propped up as a decoration.

A 20-foot replica of the US World Trade Center at Nilgiri's 30th Annual Cake Exhibition in Bangalore on Friday. To make this replica of the destroyed towers, 3,500 kg sugar and 2,800 man-hours were employed. It took one and a half months to finish. The exhibition will be open for the public up to January 1 1994: Velankanni Shrine in Bangalore? This is just the 23.5 ft. replica in sugar of the St. Mary's basilica at Velankanni in Tamil Nadu, the highlight of the 24th annual cake exhibition-cum-sale held by the Nilgiris Mechanised Bakery here. The unique feature of this show is to make cakes resembling historical monuments such as the Taj Mahal, the Mysore Palace, the London Bridge, etcBarbie as Princess Anneliese greet little girls in Bangalore city on December 17, 2004. Mattel Toys, a trendsetter in the toy industry worldwide and maker of the Barbie Dolls, in keeping with the spirit of Christmas brought joy to little hearts this year by hosting a Barbie Meet 'n Greet Party' in Bangalore. She crowned 2 lucky little ladies as Barbie's Best friends.

The décor was modest, but food was what gave the holiday its flavour. "My mother would go to MG Road and come back with boxes from Koshy's — nutty bars, rose cookies and other snacks," says Yamini Atmavilas, a development sector professional and fourth-generation Bengalurean.Beyond, Christmas used to glow through various corridors of the city. Yamini and her mother, Bhargavi Nagaraja, a former development columnist in the city, speak of the famous Nilgiris cake exhibition and the towering Christmas tree on Brigade Road, followed by an evening at Koshy's on St Mark's Road.

1994: Velankanni Shrine in Bangalore? This is just the 23.5 ft. replica in sugar of the St. Mary's basilica at Velankanni in Tamil Nadu, the highlight of the 24th annual cake exhibition-cum-sale held by the Nilgiris Mechanised

# Search engines will soon start filtering adult content under new eSafety rules

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

Melbourne: Search engines in Australia will soon have to blur pornographic and violent images in some cases to limit the chances children accidentally encounter this content.This is one of several rules outlined in a new online safety code covering internet search engines that comes into force on December 27.In 2022, Australia's online safety body, eSafety, surveyed more than 1,000 Australians aged 16 to 18 years.

The research found that one in three were under age 13 when they were first exposed to pornography. This exposure was "frequent, accidental, unavoidable and unwelcome," with content described by young people as "disturbing" and "in your face.The eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, has said "a high proportion" of accidental exposure is through search engines, which are "the primary gateway to harmful content".The new code was co-developed by the Digital Industry Group Inc, an industry association representing tech companies including Google, Meta and Microsoft, and the Communications Alliance — the peak body of the Australian telecommunications industry.The code was announced in July 2025, but has been in development since July 2024.A single breach could result in fines of up to AUD 49.5

million.How will account holders' ages be assured?The code requires providers of internet search engine services, such as Google and Microsoft (which owns Bing), to "implement appropriate age assurance measures for account holders" in Australia by 27 June 2026.

Age checks will identify whether search engine account holders are over or under 18.Currently, children as young as 13 can create and hold a Google account, the search engine used by more than 90 per cent of Australians

The industry code of practice outlines several examples of appropriate age assurance strategies companies can choose, such as: • photo identification, including digital ID systems • facial age estimation• authentication by a parent of a child account holder's age • use of artificial intelligence (AI) to estimate age from user data Some of these approaches (such as digital ID and credit card checks) can verify that a person is over 18. However, age estimation, whether based on an AI assessment of user behaviour or facial scanning, and parental attestation may be inaccurate.The implementation of social media restrictions earlier this month has already highlighted the limitations of age assurance technologies.Children may also use VPNs to get around the restrictions, or they may use adults' accounts on their devices, if these are not logged out.

# Duty-free access, visas as India-New Zealand seal FTA



New Delhi: India and New Zealand on Monday announced the conclusion of talks for a free trade agreement that will give duty-free access to a range of domestic goods, particularly from labour-intensive sectors, and includes an FDI commitment of USD 20 billion over 15 years.The agreement is expected to help double bilateral trade in goods and services to USD 5 billion in five years.

On the other hand, New Zealand will get duty-free access to goods such as sheep meat, wool, coal and over 95 per cent of forestry and wood articles. Under the pact, Wellington will get duty concessions on a number of other items such as kiwi fruit, wine, some seafood, cherries, avocados, persimmons, bulk infant formula, Manuka honey and milk albumins.To protect the interests of domestic farmers and MSMEs, India will not give any duty concessions in the politically sensitive dairy sector, like milk, cream, whey, yoghurt, and cheese.The other products which will not be covered under the pact include vegetable products (onions, chana, peas, corn, almonds), sugar, artificial honey, animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils, arms and ammunition, gems and jewellery, copper and its products, and aluminium and articles.In the services sector, New Zealand will give a temporary employment entry visa pathway for Indian professionals in skilled occupations with a quota of 5,000 visas annually and a stay of up to three years.This pathway covers Indian professions such as AYUSH practitioners, yoga instructors, Indian chefs, and music teachers, as well as high-demand sectors including IT, engineering, healthcare, education, and construction, strengthening workforce mobility and services trade.The agreement is likely to be signed and implemented in about 7-8 months. The pact would help Indian exporters, reeling under the impact of 50 per cent tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Indian goods, to diversify shipments in the Oceania region. India has already implemented a trade pact with Australia.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his New Zealand counterpart Christopher Luxon on Monday announced the firming up of the pact.The two Prime Ministers held a phone conversation, following which the announcement on the FTA was made.With negotiations having been initiated during Luxon's visit to India in March 2025, the two leaders agreed that the conclusion of the FTA in a record time of nine months reflects the shared ambition and political will to further deepen ties between the countries.

The FTA would significantly deepen bilateral economic engagement, enhance market access, promote investment

# ISI plot to provoke India amid Bangladesh unrest: Intel sources



New Delhi: With the situation in Bangladesh going from bad to worse, Intelligence agencies have learnt that there is a deliberate attempt by the ISI to provoke India. The plan is to provoke India into attacking Bangladesh, so that it garners international attention, agencies have learnt.The ISI-backed elements are provoking people, stating that India is protecting ousted leader Sheikh Hasina, while backing her party, the Awami League. The August 2024 uprising managed to create an anti-Hasina wave across the country, and this is being taken advantage of by the ISI.

Following her ouster, she fled to India and remained in New Delhi since then. Following the collapse of the Sheikh Hasina government and the subsequent takeover by Muhammad Yunus as caretaker of the interim government, chaos ensued throughout the country. Street violence has become a daily routine apart from the persecution of the minority community.An official stated that there is a significant amount of anti-India sentiment that the ISI has managed to cultivate over the past year. However, the systematic persecution of the minority community, especially the Hindus, is a clear attempt to provoke India. In the last couple of days, disturbing visuals of a Hindu man being lynched have been in circulation.

ISI-backed handles are deliberately making these clips go viral in India so that it provokes the general public. The aim is to provoke the Indian public to such an extent that they put pressure on the government to act militarily against Bangladesh. The other intention is make India look like the aggressor in the international community, an official said.An official says that India's intention is not to be the aggressor. However, it will do everything it can to protect its integrity and sovereignty. Moreover, the ISI is well aware that any such action could derail the February 2026 elections. This is what the ISI and Jamaat-e-Islami have been planning, as they want the elections to be postponed or cancelled. If this were to take place, they would run the country the way they like with their proxy Muhammad Yunus, another official said.

In addition to the lynching incidents, two student leaders have been shot in a span of a week. Osman Hadi and Motalab Sikder, both top student leaders, were shot, and this has led to an increase in violence. The Bangladesh agencies have accused some Awami League members of shooting the two student leaders. This is being used as a tool against Sheikh Hasina and her party.The message that is being put out is that India is sheltering the leader of a party that is responsible for the killings of Bangladeshi leaders. The ISI is trying to fuel anger against India so that the people in Bangladesh carry out more violence and develop a deep hatred for India. It is similar to what the ISI created in

flows, strengthen strategic cooperation between the two countries, and also open up new opportunities for innovators, entrepreneurs, farmers, MSMEs, students and youth of both countries across various sectors."Both leaders expressed confidence in doubling bilateral trade over the next five years as well as an investment of USD 20 billion in India from New Zealand over the next 15 years," an official statement said.Goyal said that the investment will give a boost to domestic manufacturing and generate jobs.Further under the pact, New Zealand will set up a dedicated Agri-Technology Action Plan on kiwifruit, apples and honey with a view to helping Indian farmers enhance productivity and quality.

The cooperation includes the establishment of Centres of Excellence, improved planting material, capacity building for growers and technical support for orchard management, post-harvest practices, supply chain performance, and food safety.Commitment has been extended by New Zealand on Geographical Indications (GIs), including amendment of its law to facilitate the registration of India's wines and spirits."Cooperation has been agreed in AYUSH, culture, fisheries, audio visual tourism, forestry, horticulture and traditional knowledge systems," the commerce ministry said.

Apart from tariff liberalisation, the pact includes provisions to address non-tariff barriers through enhanced regulatory cooperation, and streamlined customs, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures and technical barriers to trade disciplines.Pharma and Medical Devices sector will get a boost through faster regulatory access in New Zealand by enabling acceptance of GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) and GCP (Good Clinical Practice) inspection reports from comparable regulators, including approvals by the US FDA, EU's EMA, UK's MHRA."This will reduce duplicative inspections, lower compliance costs, and expedite product approvals, thereby facilitating the growth of India's pharmaceutical and medical devices exports to New Zealand," the ministry said.Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that this is the seventh agreement finalised by the NDA government. It includes the UAE, Australia, the UK, EFTA bloc, Oman and Mauritius.He said that the India-New Zealand pact is the first pact in which all the main officials from the Indian side involved in the negotiations were women. India's chief negotiator is Joint Secretary in the Ministry, Petal Dhillon.He also said that India has so far finalised FTAs with three members of the Five Eyes (FVEY) alliance — Australia, the UK and New Zealand.The five countries of the intelligence sharing network are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US.India is in the advanced stage of negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement with the US and in the process of resuming talks for a trade agreement with Canada."The current bilateral trade with New Zealand is small but the upside potential is huge," Goyal told reporters here.Bilateral merchandise trade stood at USD 1.3 billion in 2024-25, while total trade in goods and services reached about USD 2.4 billion in 2024, with services trade alone reaching USD 1.24 billion, led by travel, IT, and business services.Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that although only five formal rounds were held for the pact, both sides remained in continuous touch to close the negotiations.

# 5 policemen killed in attack in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



Peshawar: Unidentified armed assailants opened fire at a police van, killing five policemen in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Tuesday, officials said.The incident occurred in the Karak district when the police officials were on a routine patrol. District Police Officer (DPO) Saud Khan said that all five police personnel in the van have been killed in the attack.A heavy contingent of police rushed to the spot, cordoned off the area, and began collecting evidence.A search operation to apprehend the attackers was launched.Chief Minister Sohail Afridi strongly condemned the attack in the Karak district, describing the incident as "highly unfortunate" and "deplorable." He added that maintaining law and order across the province remains the top priority of the government and that such cowardly attacks cannot weaken the resolve of the state and security institutions.The government accuses the banned terror outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) of carrying out terror attacks, especially in provinces bordering Afghanistan, after its ceasefire deal ended in November 2022.



# Takeaway coffee cups release thousands of microplastic particles



Melbourne: It's 7:45am. You grab a takeaway coffee from your local cafe, wrap your hands around the warm cup, take a sip, and head to the office.To most of us, that cup feels harmless – just a convenient tool for caffeine delivery. However, if that cup is made of plastic, or has a thin plastic lining, there is a high chance it's shedding thousands of tiny plastic fragments directly into your drink.

In Australia alone, we use a staggering 1.45 billion single-use hot beverage cups every year, along with roughly 890 million plastic lids. Globally, that number swells to an estimated 500 billion cups annually.In new research I coauthored, published in Journal of Hazardous Materials: Plastics, we looked at how these cups behave when they get hot.The message is clear: heat is a primary driver of microplastic release, and the material of your cup matters more than you might think.

What are microplastics? Microplastics are fragments of plastic ranging from about 1 micrometre to 5 millimetres in size – roughly from a speck of dust to the size of a sesame seed.They can be created when larger plastic items break down, or they can be released directly from products during normal use. These particles end up in our environment, our food, and eventually, our bodies.Currently, we don't have conclusive evidence on just how much of that microplastic remains in our bodies. Studies on this subject are highly prone to contamination and it's really difficult to accurately measure the levels of such tiny particles in human tissue.Furthermore, scientists are still piecing together what microplastics might mean for human health in the long term. More research is urgently needed, but in the meantime, it's good to be aware of potential microplastic sources in our daily lives.Temperature mattersMy colleagues and I first conducted a meta-analysis – a statistical synthesis of existing research – analysing

data from 30 peer-reviewed studies.We looked at how common plastics such as polyethylene and polypropylene behave under different conditions. One factor stood out above all others: temperature.As the temperature of the liquid inside a container increases, the release of microplastics generally increases too. In the studies we reviewed, reported releases ranged from a few hundred particles to more than 8 million particles per litre, depending on the material and study design.

Interestingly, "soaking time" – how long the drink sits in the cup – was not a consistent driver. This suggests that leaving our drink in a plastic cup for a long time isn't as important as the initial temperature of the liquid when it first hits the plastic.To see how this works in the real world, we collected 400 coffee cups of two major types around Brisbane: plastic cups made of polyethylene and plastic-lined paper cups which look like paper but have a thin plastic coating inside.We tested them at 5°C (iced coffee temperature) and 60°C (hot coffee temperature). While both types released microplastics, the results revealed two major trends.First, material matters. The paper cups with plastic linings released fewer microplastics than the all-plastic cups at both temperatures.Second, heat triggers a significant release. For the all-plastic cups, switching from cold to hot water increased the microplastic release by about 33%. If someone drinks 300 millilitres of coffee in a cup made of polyethylene per day, they could ingest 363,000 pieces of microplastic particles every year.But why exactly does heat matter so much? Using high-resolution imaging, we examined the inner walls of these cups and found that all-plastic cups had much rougher surfaces – full of "peaks and valleys" – compared to the plastic-lined paper cups.This rougher texture makes it easier for particles to break away. Heat accelerates this process by softening the plastic and causing it to expand and contract, creating more surface irregularities that eventually fragment into our drink.We don't have to give up our morning takeaway habit, but we can change how we approach it to manage the risk.For hot drinks, the best option is to use a reusable cup made of stainless steel, ceramic, or glass, as these materials do not shed microplastics. If we must use a disposable cup, our research suggests that plastic-lined paper cups generally shed fewer particles than pure plastic cups, though neither is microplastic free.Finally, since heat is the factor that triggers plastic release, avoid putting boiling liquids directly into plastic-lined containers. Telling the barista to make our coffee slightly cooler before it hits the cup can reduce the physical stress on the plastic lining and lower the overall exposure.By understanding how heat and material choice interact, we can design better products and make better choices for our daily caffeine fix.

# Fight between many avatars of Mahayuti and Maha Vikas Aghadi

For the second phase of civic polls across Maharashtra, the six parties in the State — BJP, two Shiv Senas, two NCPs and Congress — have allied in different combinations to fight each other across the 29 municipal corporations which will go to polls Crucial cities where civic polls will be held include Mumbai, Thane, Kalyan-Dombivli, Nashik, Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad, Kolhapur, Nagpur to name a few. Results will be announced on January 16.Stakes on these corporations, which have been run by administrators for the past three years, are high as all six parties have rejigged their coalition partners based on the local heft each of them hold. In the first round of civic polls held in two phases in December 2025, the Mahayuti and MVA parties fought separately including several 'friendly fights', but stuck to their respective coalition partners post-polls .

Of the 288 municipal councils nagar panchayats which went to polls, Mahayuti won 207 – BJP grabbed victories in 117 civic bodies, followed by Shiv Sena in 53 and NCP in 37. The MVA managed to win only 52 municipalities– Congress (28), Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP-SP won only nine and seven respectively. Ahead of voting, 68 candidates of the Mahayuti have already won 'unopposed'. These include – 44 BJP candidates, 22 from Sena and two from NCP. The 'winners' are spread across Kalyan-Dombivli, Thane, Pune, Pimpri Chinchwad, Panvel, Bhiwandi, Dhule, Jalgaon and Ahilyanagar. Amid Opposition crying foul, the State Election Commissio (SEC) has stated that it will not declare winners till an inquiry report is submitted. For India's richest civic body – Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), BJP has retained Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena as its partner to dent Shiv Sena (UBT)'s chances. Uddhav Thackeray has buried his hatchet with cousin Raj Thackeray and allied with Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-SP). Meanwhile, Congress has allied with Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) while Ajit Pawar's NCP is contesting independently.BJP is contesting on 137 seats, Shiv Sena on 90 seats in the 227-member BMC. Mahayuti ally RPI(A) was furious at being excluded from the seat-sharing and will contest on 20 seats. On the Thackeray side, Sena (UBT) will contest on 165 seats, MNS on 52, leaving NCP-SP to contest 10 seats. The third coalition in the fray will see Congress contest on 143 seats, VBA on 62 and smaller allies on six seats, taking the bloc's total to 195 seats. However, in 21 of the 62 seats allotted to it, VBA failed to find a suitable candidate, leaving 32 seats where BJP-Sena will clash directly with the Thackerays.

NCP and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are contesting independently on 94 and 75 seats respectively.BMC has stayed with the Shiv Sena since 1985 (barring 1992-1996) and is where the Thackeray clan has its strongest hold, fending off its prime challenger BJP several times. BJP, which nurtures wishes to contest 2029 Assembly polls solo, came close to dethroning the Sena in 2017 winning 82 seats while the undivided Sena won 84, retaining its mayor seat.Wishing to retain this Thackeray turf, the two cousins have buried their twenty-year-old hatchet, marking the first Shiv Sena-MNS joint bid for the BMC - a first since 2005.Suburbs outside Mumbai

Thane is a Shiv Sena stronghold – specifically, Eknath Shinde's home turf. For the 131-seat council, Sena is contesting on 87 seats, BJP on 40 and smaller allies have been allotted four seats. The Thackerays and NCP-SP which have continued their alliance in Thane, will see Sena (UBT) clash on 53 seats, MNS on 34 and NCP-SP on 36. Congress and NCP are contesting solo on 96 and 75 seats respectively. In 2017, the undivided Sena won 67 out of the 131 seats, forming the council on its own while NCP won 34 seats and BJP grabbed 23 seats. Currently, 66 of the 67 Sena corporators who were elected in 2017 are backing Mr. Shinde, giving him a definitive edge. However, Mr. Thackeray is banking on support for the 'original' Sena. Barring 1987-1993, Sena has ruled Thane owing to legacy of Shiv Sena stalwarts – Balasaheb Thackeray and Anand Dighe.The alliance holds true in Kalyan-Dombivli too where Mr. Shinde's influence holds true. His Sena is contesting on 65 seats,



BJP on 57. While NCP was expected to be given 10 seats from either party's kitty, it did not fructify. On the Opposition side, the Thackerays split the 122 seats with Sena (UBT) contesting on 68 and MNS on 54. NCP-SP switched alliances joining the Congress-VBA bloc and is contesting on 45 seats. Congress has grabbed 55 seats, while VBA on 12 seats. A dog fight is underway for Mira-Bhayander, Navi Mumbai and Bhiwandi as all main parties are contesting independently, with some already winning 'unopposed'. Local alliances with smaller parties like Bahujan Vikas Aghadi, Bahujan Samaj Partt have cropped up in Amravati, Jalna, Vasai-Virar to name a few.Pawar clan has come together in a bid to regain their fiefdom in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad. In 2017, BJP stormed into power winning 97 seats in the 165-member corporation, a first for the saffron party. Like the Thackerays, Ajit Pawar and NCP patriarch Sharad Pawar have buried their differences as a last-ditch attempt for their bastion. Both Ms. Supriya Sule and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar presented a united front and unveil their joint manifesto and senior NCP leader Sunil Tatkarare has not ruled out a merger of the two factions.In Pune, NCP has put up 130 candidates while NCP-SP had fielded 43, setting up a friendly fight in seven seats. Similarly, in Pimpri-Chinchwad, Ajit Pawar's faction has grabbed 110 seats while Sharad Pawar's faction is contesting on 18 seats for the 128-member civic body. The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance talks broke down in Pune as BJP refused to cede more than 15 seats to Sena, while Mr. Shinde demanded 25 seats. A disgruntled Sena has fielded 119 candidates setting up a direct fight with the BJP which has also decided to contest solo. Congress, on the other hand, has foregone its reservations regarding MNS, allying with the Thackerays to counter the Pawars. Sena (UBT) is contesting on 65 seats of which MNS has been allotted 21.Nashik and DhuleIn Nashik and Dhule municipal corporations, the smaller Mahayuti parties – Shinde's Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP have allied to take on the Thackerays-Sharad Pawar and the BJP which is going solo.Post-polls too fluidity among the Mahayuti partners is evident as it emerged winners in key councils of Ambarnath falling under Thane district, Parli in Beed and Akot in Akola.In Ambarnath, where polls were held on December 20, post-poll tussle have gotten ugly as BJP councillors allied with Congress and Ajit Pawar's NCP to form the 'Ambarnath Vikas Aghadi' - securing 31 seats in the 60-member council. This was to keep Shinde's Sena which had won 27 seats from taking control. While Congress expelled its 12 councillors (who promptly jumped to BJP), Sena wrested away NCP (which won 4 seats) from the Aghadi and secured one Independent's support. The Sena-led coalition has successfully elected Sadashiv Hender Patil as the deputy mayor along with five other members who were nominated to the council. Similarly, in Akot, BJP councillors had joined hands with ideological rival – All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) to form the 'Akot Vikas Manch' after elections. Prior to the polls, BJP had allied with NCP which in turn sought AIMIM's support after the elections. After CM Devendra Fadnis issued a rebuke to Akot MLA Prakash Bharsakale, the local BJP unit distanced itself from it. However, the BJP nominee for council president - Jiten Barethia was elected with the backing of the five AIMIM councillors. BJP's Mahayuti partners too seemed to have picked up the idea. In Parli, the NCP, which won 16 seats in the 35-member municipal council,

# The importance of blue



In India, the colour blue has an age-old association with the struggles of the marginalised. In early 1859, peasants in Bengal, who had been exploited by white planters for decades, took a cue from a magistrate's notice that made the sowing of indigo non-obligatory, and for the first time refused to cultivate the plant. Though many historians have termed the protests that ensued as non-violent, some others say that besides non-cooperation — passive resistance and boycotting of Indians who served British planters — peasants attacked factories and defended themselves against armed goons sent by the planters. The Bengali bourgeoisie were careful not to antagonise the British government. This fence-sitting by the intellectuals may have been one of the reasons why this 'blue movement', which sustained for over a year, remained local and anti-planter, and did not develop into a larger anti-colonial campaign. Nearly 60 years after this episode, the indigo blue came back into focus. But this time, it was as the launch pad for an entirely new method of anti-colonial activism. One that played a pivotal role in freeing us from the colonial yoke in 1947.

Gandhi's first experiment with satyagraha, or civil disobedience, in India was in Champaran, Bihar, in 1917. Champaran was full of indigo plantations. The tenants of the plantation were bound by law to plant indigo on a portion of their land. 'This system was known as the tinkathia system, as three kathas out of twenty kathas (which make one acre) had to be planted with Indigo,' Gandhi noted. The tenants lived in oppressive conditions, and landlords used force and extortion to make sure they remained subjugated. Even when the price of indigo began falling, they had no choice but to grow the crop.Gandhi first went to Champaran on the invitation of Rajkumar Shukla, an agriculturalist. Very soon, he realised the gravity of the situation. He studied the problem, listened to the voices of the tenants, and mobilised public participation for a peaceful agitation. His overtures to the office-bearers of the planters' association were rudely rebuffed; he was an outsider.

Still, Gandhi's investigations were having an impact and made the government uneasy. He was issued a notice to leave Champaran, but he stayed on. Then the administration issued him a summons. The night before Gandhi was to appear in court, crowds gathered around the house where he was staying. The following day, the court was overflowing. In his characteristic style, Gandhi said, 'In my humble opinion it is a question of difference of opinion between the Local Administration and myself. I have entered the country with motives of rendering humanitarian and national service. I have done so in response to a pressing invitation to come and help the ryots, who urge they are not being fairly treated by the indigo planters ... As a law-abiding citizen my first instinct would be, as it was, to obey the order served upon me. But I could not do so without doing violence to my sense of duty to those for whom I have come. I feel that I could just now serve them only by remaining in their midst ... I venture to make this statement not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be awarded against me, but to show that I have disregarded the order served upon me not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience.'Soon enough, the case was withdrawn. Gandhi continued his inquiry and recorded thousands of statements by tenants and held multiple public meetings. The result was the abolishment of the tinkathia system. The satyagraha began as a response to violence in the name of blue. Momentarily, blue also became the colour of ahimsa, satyagraha and righteousness.But the

dark blue of indigo soon faded from memory. It needed Ambedkar to bring it back into the public imagination. Ambedkar statues, seen in innumerable street corners across the length and breadth of the country, have him attired in a blue suit, holding the Constitution in one hand and urging us to move forward. There are many theories about how the association between blue and Dalit movements came about. Was it Ambedkar's favourite colour? Ambedkar's suit was a social statement and the choice of blue possibly just his preference. Some associate blue with the expanse of his vision and the non-discriminatory nature of the sky itself. Blue is also considered the colour of equality, representative of the working class. Buddhist and folklore associations with the colour blue have also been pointed out.We know that Ambedkar gave blue a political presence by choosing it as the colour of the flag of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation that he founded in 1942. Part XI of the amended Constitution of the Federation, published in 1955, states: 'The flag of the Federation shall consist of stars against a blue cloth cut in triangle.' The Republican Party of India, founded by Ambedkar in 1956, also had a blue flag.

In his Riddles of Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses, Ambedkar reviewed what the Puranas had to say on the origin of the varna system. He quoted from John Muir's translations of some sections of the Mahabharata and the vulgar version of Harivamsha.From the Mahabharata: 'The colour (varna) of the Brahmans was white; that of the Kshatriyas red; that of the Vaishyas yellow, and that of the Sudras black.'From Harivamsha: 'The Brahmans, beautiful (or, dear to Soma), were formed from an imperishable (akshara), the Kshatriyas from a perishable (kshara), element, the Vaisyas from alteration, the Sudras from a modification of smoke ... Hence in the world men have become divided into castes, being of four descriptions, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras ...'That the colours blue and black are used as interchangeable shades was not important in these correlations. The scholar Nick Allen demonstrates that equivalences between certain colours and people's social functions, nature and even appearance are found in many cultures. These cultural associations also reveal that people at the lowest rung of society are invariably allocated dark colours, very often blue or black. Allen calls black a 'non-colour' which is connected with the semiotics of inferiority and otherness.Although Ambedkar wrote this particular essay in the 1950s, he had been seriously engaging with the Hindu scriptures for a long time. This makes me wonder if his choice of blue was influenced by the association of this colour with shudras.Be that as it may, the blue has come to stay. Dalit protests across the country are flooded with blue flags. Political parties that represent Dalit communities have at least a spatter of blue on their emblems and flags. Homes are coloured blue; activists, musicians and movie makers use blue to signify battles against oppressors. The spirit of the blue has also changed with every generation of Dalit voices. It used to be about gentle appeals, then a strong collective demand. Today it is a forceful assertion of identity and rights, a powerful pushback that informs the oppressing majority that their time is up.The blue chakra is at the literal heart of the Indian flag, holding within itself the strength of the Dalit community and the spirit of civil disobedience. It is a reflection of our right to assemble peaceably and without arms. An assertion that we will assemble to protect our rights and ally with all those society forgets to notice. It is also a reminder of our unkept promises.Interestingly, Ambedkar doesn't seem to have been present in the Constituent Assembly on 22 July 1947, when the resolution to accept the flag was moved by Nehru. With the partition of Bengal, Ambedkar had ceased to be a member of the Constituent Assembly. In late June, an anxious Rajendra Prasad wrote to the prime minister of Bombay, asking him to elect Ambedkar so that he could attend the next session commencing on 14 July. Ambedkar was re-elected in July and signed in his credentials on the first day of the session. He came in on 21 July too, but is conspicuously absent on the next day. Perhaps he did not care very much for symbols and signs; it was minds and actions that needed to change. The blue wheel of dharma moves only when those on the periphery are placed at the hub of social, cultural, economic and political activity.

# U.S. tariff threat puts India-Iran ties, BRICS plans under strain



India's ties with Iran have come under renewed pressure after U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Tuesday (January 13, 2026) that "any country" having trade ties with Iran would face a 25% tariff if it sought to do business with the United States.Government sources told The Hindu that India is preparing to bring down its trade with Iran further in the current financial year, citing "external economic factors". The developments have come even as India still last weekend, was getting ready to host Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian for the upcoming BRICS summit, which India will host this year as it marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of India-Iran diplomatic ties.

The U.S. policy on increasing pressure on Iran has also put a question mark on the expected visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Syed Abbas Araghchi to New Delhi later this month. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced India's vision for BRICS 2026 on Tuesday, saying that as BRICS Chair, India will highlight that the intergovernmental organisation is capable of absorbing "global shocks". India's policy on Iran will be keenly watched as the Islamic Republic is a member of BRICS of which India has been a founding member.Mr. Jaishankar spoke at an event to launch the logo of the upcoming BRICS summit that was attended by several envoys of BRICS member states, including Russian ambassador Denis Alipov and Iranian ambassador Mohammad Fathali. In the evening, Mr. Jaishankar announced that he had a telephonic conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and informed that the conversation covered "trade, critical minerals, nuclear cooperation, defence and energy."

Against the backdrop of fast-paced moves, India's policy on Iran will be keenly watched as the Islamic Republic is a member of BRICS, of which India has been a founding member. At both bilateral and multilateral levels, the India-Iran relation was expected to see multiple high points this year as India was getting ready to broaden its presence

in Iran's Chabahar port, which is of crucial importance for both India's connectivity plans with Central Asia and Russia as well as for its newly unfolding partnership with the anti-Pakistan Taliban administration in Afghanistan. Iran joined BRICS as a full member on January 1, 2024, as the grouping expanded by including Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates at the 2023 summit in South Africa.Officials informed that as a member of the BRICS, Iran's President may not face legal hurdles while travelling to India for the summit. However, they indicated that Iran's escalating confrontation with the U.S. President has pushed the country into crisis for at least one month.

An official with knowledge of India's assessment of the situation said that the ongoing public protests in Iran— which are being supported by President Trump— pose a serious threat to the current regime in Tehran. The official added India's embassy is in contact with the Indian citizens in the Islamic Republic, where authorities have blacked out Internet connectivity. The welfare of Indians in Iran was expected to figure prominently during Mr. Araghchi's proposed visit, which would have been his second visit to India in less than a year. The Iranian Foreign Minister had last visited New Delhi in May 2025 after India launched Operation Sindoor against terror targets in Pakistani territory.

# Parties scout for winning candidates as Karimnagar municipal polls approach

Karimnagar: As the process for municipal elections resumes, political parties have begun searching for suitable candidates.Besides conducting surveys, several other methods are adopted to identify the best aspirants among leaders vying to contest the civic polls. There are two municipal corporations and 13 municipalities in the erstwhile Karimnagar district.While parties are looking for winning aspirants, leaders keen on contesting the elections are approaching party leadership circles to secure confirmed tickets. However, political parties determined to win a majority of civic bodies are scouting for capable candidates, irrespective of seniority.In almost all parties, senior leaders mount pressure on the leadership for tickets by projecting their seniority. However, the parties insist on) giving tickets only to candidates with winning prospects.



## German Chancellor in Bengaluru: Friedrich Merz visits Bosch campus, IISc



Friedrich Merz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, visited the Bosch campus at Adegudi, on Tuesday (January 13, 2026) as part of his maiden India tour. The Chancellor also visited the Centre for Nano Science and Engineering at the Indian Institute of Science. The media was not allowed at these events. Chancellor Merz's visit underscored the deep economic and technological ties between India and Germany in the areas of mobility, manufacturing and innovation, and also highlighted the role of German enterprises in India's growth story, said Bosch in Bengaluru.

The delegation was also introduced to a range of

Bosch's software solutions, including AIShield, an AI security solution that offered protection and reliability of AI systems. The delegation was also introduced to a range of Bosch's software solutions, including AIShield, an AI security solution that offered protection and reliability of AI systems. | Photo Credit: Special arrangementGuruprasad Mudlapur, President of the Bosch Group in India, and Managing Director, Bosch Limited said, "We feel honoured to welcome the esteemed Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz to the Bosch India campus. His presence not only affirms Bosch's enduring legacy but also reinstates India's position in the world as a hub of technological innovation and economic growth." Mr. Mudlapur also hosted the delegation at Bosch's India headquarters and spotlighted innovations from the region. "This is a moment of immense pride for Bosch and a testament to the partnership between our nations," he added. According to information shared by Bosch, the guests experienced Bosch's H2ICE (a Hydrogen Internal Combustion Engine) demonstrator truck with a fully integrated powertrain and telematics system. Bosch India, along with Bosch Germany, is driving the hydrogen transformation to accelerate zero-emission, sustainable mobility. The delegation was also introduced to a range of Bosch's software solutions, including AIShield, an AI security solution that offered protection and reliability of AI systems.

## Six-lane highway with service roads all along to come between B.C. Road and Surathkal

The four-lane B.C. Road-Surathkal Port Connectivity Road will soon be widened into a six-lane road with service roads all along the 38km stretch by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to ease vehicular movement through Mangaluru. As a prelude to widening the Port Road—Bengaluru-Mangaluru NH 75 and Kanniyakumari-Panvel NH 66 — the Authority also wants to construct a bypass highway connecting NH 66 and NH 75 to divert the through traffic between Bengaluru and Mangaluru Port/ Industrial Ara as well as Udupi.

These initiatives are being taken up after Dakshina Kannada MP Captain Brijesh Chowta rigorously followed up the issue of improving the Port Road with the Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari. Following the MP's efforts, the New Mangalore Port Road Ltd., an SPV of New Mangalore Port Authority and the NHAI, got merged with the Highways Authority, thereby fully empowering the Agency to take a call on developing the highway.

NHAI Mangaluru Project Director Abdulla Javed Azmi told The Hindu that the Authority has floated tenders for preparing detailed project reports (DPR) for both the initiatives — widening the Port Connectivity Road and Bypass Highway. The agencies are likely to be finalised soon. NHAI is already in possession of required lands to widen the highways up to 45 m, he added. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has planned to widen the entire stretch of 38 km B.C. Road-Surathkal Port Connectivity Road into six lanes with appropriate modifications to existing flyovers. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has planned to widen the entire stretch of 38 km B.C. Road-Surathkal Port Connectivity Road into six lanes with appropriate modifications to existing flyovers. | Photo Credit: HS



ManjunathThe Authority, Mr. Azmi said, wants to have an elevated highway between Kulai and KPT Junction with optimum utilisation of existing flyovers at Kulai, Kottara Chowki and Kuntikana. There would be no issue to have an elevated highway between Kulai and Kuntikana; the issue arises after A.J. Hospital where the existing highway moves on the steep ascent of Kadri Hills. The DPR consultant would be asked to provide a better solution for this stretch as constructing an elevated road on a steep gradient would aggravate problems for heavy vehicles. Consequent to the larger scope of work concerning the Port Road, the NHAI has foreclosed the contract for a vehicular overpass at KPT Junction sanctioned to be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹34 crore. Similarly, the Authority would not go ahead with the proposed grade separator at Nanthoor Circle estimated to cost about ₹51 crore. The ongoing work would stop after the service roads are constructed between Nanthoor and KPT Circles, the Director said. Meanwhile, NHAI has widened the Nanthoor Circle enough to accommodate free-left turns on all directions.

## Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar bats for flyover at Manipal Hospital junction, EV cluster in Mysuru

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, MP, has urged authorities to expedite key infrastructure projects in Mysuru, particularly the proposed flyover at Manipal Hospital junction on the Outer Ring Road. In this regard, Mr. Wadiyar met National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) Chief Secretary Umashankar in New Delhi on Wednesday and submitted a memorandum seeking early implementation of the project. He explained that the junction, located on the busy Bengaluru–Mysuru highway, witnesses heavy traffic movement and frequent congestion. The MP said the construction of the flyover would prove to be a milestone for Mysuru, as it would help reduce road accidents, cut travel time, ease congestion, and ensure smoother entry and exit to the city. The NHAI Chief Secretary reportedly responded positively to the proposal.

During the meeting, Mr. Wadiyar also discussed the construction of service roads along the Mysuru–Kushalnagar highway. He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, and NHAI officials for approving several infrastructure projects for Mysuru and Kodagu districts. Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, Mysuru MP, submitting a memorandum to Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H D Kumaraswamy in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, Mysuru MP, submitting a memorandum to Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H D Kumaraswamy in New Delhi on Tuesday. He MP also met Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H.D. Kumaraswamy on Tuesday and urged him to establish an automobile and electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing cluster in Mysuru. Submitting a memorandum, Mr. Wadiyar sought priority for the overall industrial development of the region. Explaining Mysuru's advantages, he said the city has excellent connectivity to Bengaluru,



Chennai and Kerala through national highways, expressways and rail networks, and is well connected to the international airports at Bengaluru and Kannur. These factors, he noted, make Mysuru a suitable location for automobile and EV manufacturing units.

He also pointed out that Mysuru has several engineering colleges, polytechnics and research institutions, providing a strong base of technically skilled manpower. Availability of land, lower congestion, high quality of life and an industry-friendly environment made the city an ideal investment destination. The proposed automobile and EV manufacturing cluster would not only boost industrial growth but also generate thousands of direct and indirect employment opportunities for youth besides supporting allied sectors such as auto components, batteries, electronics and logistics, the MP said. Referring to the Union government's initiatives such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat and the thrust on the EV sector, Mr. Wadiyar urged the Union Minister to take a policy decision to establish a major industrial cluster in Mysuru.

## North Korea's Kim Yo Jong says South's hopes for better relations are an illusion

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

North Korea's Kim Yo Jong, the sister of leader Kim Jong Un, said on Tuesday (January 13, 2026) South Korea's hope for an improvement in relations is an illusion that cannot be realised, state media KCNA reported. The leader's powerful sister, who is a director of North Korea's ruling party, criticised a comment attributed to a South Korean government official on Tuesday (January 13, 2026) that Seoul saw a chance of talks resuming with Pyongyang based on her recent reaction to an alleged drone incursion into her country.

"In conclusion, it has already gone wrong in their expectation," Kim was quoted by KCNA as saying. "As far as Seoul's various hope-filled wild dreams called 'repair of [North-South] relations' are concerned, they all can never

come true," Ms. Kim said. The official at South Korea's Unification Ministry, which oversees relations with North Korea, told reporters that Kim Yo Jong seemed to have toned down her statement at the weekend when she urged Seoul to investigate drones flown to the North. South Korea had "committed a grave provocation by infringing upon North Korea's sovereignty," Kim Yo Jong said in the statement published late on Tuesday, echoing her earlier criticism over the drones, according to KCNA. "I make it clear once again to the hooligans of the enemy state," she said, demanding a South Korean government apology and a pledge never to let similar incidents from occurring. The administration of South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has been seeking to improve ties with Pyongyang, but so far its overtures have been rebuffed by its neighbour.

## Jaishankar, Rubio hold phone talks on trade, defence cooperation



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday (January 13, 2026) held a phone conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, focusing on cooperation in areas of trade, critical minerals, nuclear energy and defence. The Jaishankar-Rubio phone call came a day after newly-appointed U.S. ambassador Sergio Gor said there would be some contact between the two sides on the trade issue. The External Affairs Minister said he had a "good conversation" with Mr. Rubio and that they agreed to remain in touch.

"Just concluded a good conversation with @SecRubio. Discussed trade, critical minerals, nuclear cooperation, defence and energy," he said on social

media. Agreed to remain in touch on these and other issues," he added. Recent downturn in ties The India-U.S. ties witnessed a major downturn after President Donald Trump slapped a whopping 50% tariffs on Indian goods, including a 25% punitive levy over Russian oil purchases.

Both sides have held multiple rounds of negotiations last year to firm up a bilateral trade deal. However, it could not be sealed yet largely in view of Washington's demands to open up India's farm and dairy sectors. In an address at the U.S. embassy on Monday, Mr. Gor said India and the U.S. were actively engaged on the proposed trade deal. "Both sides continue to actively engage. In fact, the next call on trade will occur tomorrow," he said. In his remarks, Mr. Gor also said that no country was as essential as India to the United States. "No partner is more essential than India. In the months and years ahead, it is my goal as ambassador to pursue a very ambitious agenda. We will do this as true strategic partners, each bringing strength, respect and leadership to the table," he said. The phone conversation between Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Rubio also came on a day Mr. Trump announced that a 25% tariff would be levied on countries doing business with Iran. Sources in the Indian government said the new tariff was expected to have "minimal impact" on India as volume of trade between India and Iran was currently less than \$2 billion. For India, Iran does not even figure in the top 50 global trading partners, the sources said.

## Indian envoy dismisses Canada's allegations in 2023 on killing of Sikh separatist leader

Indian High Commissioner Dinesh K. Patnaik has dismissed Canada's old allegations linking New Delhi to the killing of a Sikh separatist leader, asserting that the case is against four individuals and not against the government of India. In an interview with CBC News on Tuesday (January 14, 2026), Mr. Patnaik also pointed out how the investigation into the Air India bombing has still not yielded anything and not a single person has been convicted of it, despite New Delhi talking about terrorism in Canada for the last 40 years. The remarks by Mr. Patnaik, who took charge in September 2025, coincided with British Columbia Premier David Eby's visit to India on a trade mission amid the improving relationship between New Delhi and Ottawa.

The ties between India and Canada strained after the then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September 2023 of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing outside a gurdwara in Surrey city on June 18 that year. India, which had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020, had strongly rejected the allegations as "absurd" and "motivated." The two countries have taken several steps in recent months to normalise their relations. They have also agreed to revive several mechanisms to advance relations in a range of areas. Mr. Patnaik was asked how the two countries move past the 'gap' of more than a year after Mr. Trudeau's accusation. "Well, where is the evidence? Every time you keep on saying credible information, which is fine," Mr. Patnaik said. "We have always said, it's preposterous and absurd. It's something we don't do. These allegations ... have not been backed by evidence. There's always ... (it is) easy to make accusations," the Indian diplomat said. Who was Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the Sikh activist whose killing has divided Canada and India?

Mr. Patnaik also pointed out how the investigation into the Air India bombing (of June 1985) has still not yielded anything. "Nothing has happened on the ground. We've been talking about terrorism in Canada for the last 40 years. What has anybody done about it? Not a single person has been convicted of it," he said. The case in connection with Nijjar's



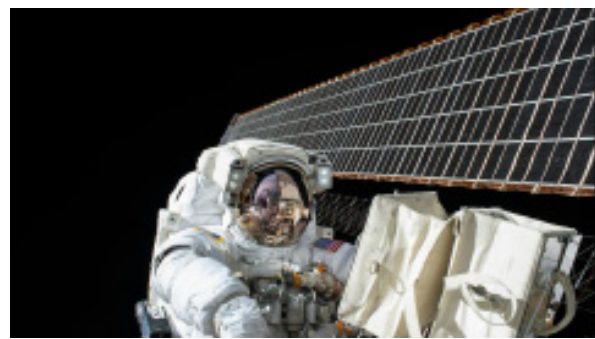
death is against four individuals, he said, "You have a case going on in Surrey, which says very clearly against four individuals. There is no case against the government of India. The government of India does not do such actions ... never." India will take action if Canada provides evidence, he said, adding, "What we need is for you to give us evidence, for us to take action." Mr. Patnaik repeated that Canada has only been providing information, but no evidence. He cited several examples of cases where prior information provided by India was not acted upon but later turned out to be true. "When you accuse us, what happens here is ... my accusations need evidence, your accusations don't need evidence," he said, and then went on to add: "When I accuse you, and you tell me, 'evidence is not enough', I agree with it. And I say, 'Yes, you are telling me evidence is not enough, when I find evidence, I'll give it to you'." "When you accuse me, and I tell you, 'evidence is not enough', please accept it with the same alacrity with which you have," he added. When the interviewer pressed on by saying, "It's about the activities of the state of India. It's about allegations about the Government of India," Mr. Patnaik said the government of India never does something like that. "If there are people in the government of India (who) have done it, and you give us evidence, we will take action against them. We have never said otherwise," he added.

## Scientists find spaceflight affects immune genes, deforms the brain

As humans prepare for longer missions to the moon and eventually Mars, scientists need to understand exactly how spaceflight affects the human body. They already know the microgravity and radiation in space affect astronauts' health. To this end, a study published on January 2 in Science by researchers from Saudi Arabia examined human immune cells (THP-1 monocytes) that had been sent to the International Space Station. They found that the space environment significantly altered the cells' gene expression, the instructions that tell cells how to behave.

Specifically, genes related to heart function, the nervous system, and the senses of vision and smell became overactive, which could explain astronaut health issues like heart risks and sleep trouble. On the other hand genes that repaired DNA and helped cells divide worked less effectively, signalling long-term risks. The brain is a particularly important area of concern. Previous research has shown that without gravity, the brain tends to shift position inside the skull. However, these studies only looked at the average movement of the whole brain. Another study published on January 12 in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences by researchers from Germany and the US has examined changes in specific regions.

The researchers analysed MRI scans from 26 astronauts before and after missions and compared them to a control group of 24 participants in a head-down tilt bed rest study. Here, people lie in bed with their heads slightly lower than their feet for 60 days to mimic the effects of weightlessness. This way, the study found that during space-



flight, different parts of the brain (reversibly) move and deform in different ways. Those that handle movement and sensation shifted the most. In astronauts who spent a year in space, the supplementary motor cortex moved 2.52 mm up. The researchers also found that the more the posterior insula shifted, the worse the astronauts performed on balance tests when they returned, although the 'why' remains unclear. The scientists also identified the limited sample size, inability to capture changes within specific brain regions, crew members being tested at different times post-mission, and the incomplete ability of the tilt test to mimic the effects of gravity on the brain as limitations of their effort. Nonetheless, "Our approach provides state-of-the-art regional brain deformation and position shift maps induced by varying duration exposures to microgravity," the team wrote in its paper.

## What is the NASA Artemis II mission?



A: Artemis II is the first crewed mission of NASA's Artemis programme. It will be the first time humans will travel to the vicinity of the moon since 1972. The 10-day flight will

test the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and the Orion spacecraft to ensure all life-support and navigation systems are safe for future lunar missions. On January 9, NASA said the mission was in its final preparation stages. The earliest targeted launch date is February 6, 2026. NASA has also identified launch windows across February, March, and April 2026. The rocket stack is expected to be rolled out to Launch Pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Centre in mid-January for the final tests. Artemis II has a four-person crew. The commander is Reid Wiseman; the pilot, Victor Glover; and Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen are the mission specialists. Mr. Hansen is from the Canadian Space Agency, the rest are from NASA. Rather than land on the moon, the crew will fly in a hybrid free-return trajectory. Specifically, after liftoff onboard the SLS,



# Decisive new factors in the Iranian conundrum



The recent civic unrest in Iran has been enveloped in a media fog and has polarised binary narratives, making an objective analysis difficult. Yet, given Iran's geopolitical importance and economic potential, such a granular exercise is required, particularly as it lies in India's extended proximity. The genesis of the ongoing crisis lies in the increasingly dire eco-political conditions. It began on December 28, 2025, when a group of Tehran merchants ("Bazaari") staged a shutdown to protest the frequent devaluation of the market value of the rial, the national currency. While the rial's official exchange rate to a dollar was 42,000, the market rate was nearly 35 times lower at 1.45 million, having fallen 20,000 times since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Its 45% decline in 2025 made importing essential commodities such as rice, sugar and edible oil and selling them in the rial at officially controlled prices, unprofitable. Subsequently, other disaffected sections of the population, such as unemployed youth and low-paid employees, also joined the stir, making it a country-wide anti-government movement. Arson, vandalism and anti-establishment violence were reported. On January 13, authorities disclosed that over 2,000 people had died during the unrest, blaming the casualties on unnamed "terrorists".

Crises and the official playbook Since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the authorities have perfected a four-stage playbook for dealing with recurring mass civic unrest, as seen in the election fraud in 2009, petrol price hike in 2019 and Hijab protests in 2022 — none of which succeeded. In the first phase, stern police action is taken to contain the law-and-order problem. If the agitation persists, a "good-cop, bad-cop" routine is played: while some high officials warn of enemy conspiracies, others exude sympathy for the "legitimate grievances", offering talks and concessions. Social media is locked down. The third stage involves weeks of attrition, seeding confusion, splitting the organisers and holding pro-government rallies. These three stages normally succeed in tapering off the protests. Thereafter, the leading protesters are rounded up and sentenced exemplarily with long prison terms or even execution. During all this time, the western media plays the role of an agent provocateur to the hilt.

The current melodrama now seems to be entering the third phase. Over the next four months, a token 10 million rials (\$7), as a monthly handout, will be directly transferred to all citizens to mitigate inflation. The funerals of the security personnel killed and pro-establishment rallies were accompanied by a denunciation of foreign attempts to hijack the agitation. The Pasdaran (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps or IRGC) and the army have stayed loyal, condemning the agitation as a continuation of the 12-day Israel-United States war of June 2025 against Iran. The oil industry, the mainstay of the national economy, has stayed unaffected, and the governing elite has also not splintered. Moreover, no alternative leadership has emerged among the protesters. The dynamics in Iran, foreign threats Although the establishment seems to have managed to overcome the protest, the outbreak has exposed new systemic vulnerabilities. First, the Bazaari strike against the clergy-led regime was unprecedented. In Iran's modern history, the Bazaaris have been an influential bellwether lobby, at times forcing Iranian rulers to retract. Their withdrawal of support doomed the Shah in 1979. Their informal symbiosis with the clergy initially permitted profiteering from unfettered imports at a preferred exchange rate and selling domestically at market rates. However, during the past two decades, this bromance has cooled. The economic conditions worsened mainly due to the U.S.'s "maximum pressure" sanctions. Further, they were also squeezed by the IRGC and the Bonyads (various ostensibly charitable foundations for war veterans, widows and orphans), muscling into lucrative sec-

tors of trading, manufacturing and contracting. While Iran's President, Masoud Pezeshkian, recently claimed resolution of the merchants' grievances, the details have not been made public. It remains to be seen if the omnipotent IRGC, currently crucial to government survival, would agree to roll back their businesses. Second, while Tehran may have tactics to curb protests, the ruling elite lacks eco-political levers to fix the root causes of the recurring social convulsions. The Iranian leadership's steadfast pursuit of a nuclear and missile programme and support to regional proxies diverts scarce economic resources and triggers western economic sanctions, causing social angst.

Over two-thirds of Iranians were born after the Revolution and have different aspirations than their gerontocratic politico-theocratic leadership. They see the affluence of their Gulf Arab neighbours and hold the leadership responsible for their abject penury. They also notice the kleptocracy and corruption in the top echelons of power. Moreover, with radicals in control of the clergy, parliament and judiciary, and a relatively powerless executive, significant social groups, such as women and non-Shia minorities feel alienated. While the managed election of a moderate President in 2024 raised hopes, these have been belied due to regional turmoil. Third, the foreign abatement of the agitators has become mainstream, with U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly encouraging them with military threats to punish the Iranian regime and possibly replace it. However, they lack any smart and easy options, and the outcome of any precipitous foreign action cannot be guaranteed. In 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein attacked Iran to exploit the post-Islamic revolutionary chaos, only to see all Iranians unite against foreign aggression. Moreover, Iran's Shia majority has a long tradition of glorifying martyrdom and sacrifice, making them more inured to foreign military threats. Despite its losses during the June 2025 military bout with Israel and the U.S., Iran retains sufficient retaliatory capability to thwart a repetition. Tehran's options include targeting U.S. interests in the geoeconomically sensitive and febrile region, making the Gulf Arab states wary about paying for a U.S. military misadventure.

Moreover, when driven to a corner, Iran could close the Strait of Hormuz, raising global oil prices. Mr. Trump has often criticised his predecessors for dragging the U.S. into "endless wars" and has so far avoided having "boots on the ground", preferring surgical airborne strikes and smart economic coercion. Although he has been emboldened by his tactical success against President Nicolás Maduro Moros of Venezuela, there is a clear realisation that the multiplicity of power centres in Iran makes military decapitation a risky and even counter-productive endeavour. Instead, Mr. Trump is veering toward non-kinetic measures such as cyberattacks and the imposition of secondary punitive tariffs on the countries trading with Iran, encouraged by the outcome of a similar exercise in curbing Indian imports of Russian crude. Their efficacy remains uncertain as Iran has long been subject to Israeli cyberattacks and has a well-oiled sanctions-busting machinery in place, from marshalling cryptocurrencies to dark oil-tankers smuggling crude to China and dhows to Dubai (the world's largest trans-shipment port just 150 kilometres across the Persian Gulf). Despite U.S. pressure, China and the United Arab Emirates are Iran's top two trading partners, with respective bilateral commerce estimated at \$40 billion and \$30 billion last year, totalling over half of the entire Iranian foreign trade. The proposed secondary sanctions by the U.S. may not curb such trade but only obfuscate it. Still, as a diversionary tactic, Tehran has offered to reopen talks with Washington. The notion that turmoil in Tehran is inconsequential for India is misplaced. First, any conflagration in Iran would affect the security and stability in the Gulf, where India has substantive stakes in terms of diaspora, oil supplies, remittances and trade and investments. Second, it would allow Pakistan to project itself as a dubious security arbiter to both Iran and the Gulf Arabs and earn brownie points with the White House. India also needs Iran to access Afghanistan and Central Asia. Third, after Iran, South Asia has the largest number of Shias, with their number in India estimated at around 25 million. They are natural stakeholders in what happens to their Iranian co-confessionals. Lastly, once four decades of western sanctions are lifted, the resuscitation of the Iranian economy would provide lucrative opportunities for India, particularly as Tehran has long pursued its version of Atmanirbharta.

# Avoid travelling to Iran: India issues fresh advisory

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday (January 14, 2026) issued an advisory against travelling to Iran amid ongoing unrest and widespread protests in Iran. "In view of the ongoing developments in Iran, Indian nationals are once again strongly advised to avoid travel to the Islamic Republic of Iran until further notice," the MEA said in a statement. The Indian Embassy in Iran also issued an advisory for Indian citizens living in Iran. "In continuation of the advisory issued by the Government of India on 5 January 2025, and in view of the evolving situation in Iran, Indian nationals who are currently in Iran (students, pilgrims, business persons and tourists) are advised to leave Iran by available means of transport, including commercial flights," the advisory said.

"It is reiterated that all Indian citizens and PIOs should exercise due caution, avoid areas of protests or demonstrations, stay in contact with the Indian Embassy in Iran and monitor local media for any developments," it further read. "All Indian nationals in Iran are requested to also have their travel and immigration documents, including passports and IDs, readily available with them. They are requested to contact the Indian Embassy for any assistance in this regard," it read. The Indian embassy listed the following emergency contact helplines: Mobile Numbers: +989128109115; +989128109109; +989128109102; +989932179359. Email: cons.tehran@mea.gov.in

"All Indian nationals who are in Iran, and who have not registered with the do SO on the Indian Embassy, are to requested link (<https://www.measr.com/request/home>). The link is also available on the Embassy website. In case any Indian national is unable to register due to internet disruptions in Iran, their families in India are requested to do so," the MEA advisory said. The Ministry, on January 5, had said that "Indian citizens and PIOs currently in Iran should exercise due caution, avoid areas of protests or demonstrations, and closely monitor news as well as the website and social media handles of the Embassy of India in Tehran". "Indian nationals living in Iran on resident visas are advised to register with the Indian Embassy, if not already done so," the advisory further said. Earlier on Wednesday (January 14), the head of Iran's judiciary signalled there



would be fast trials and executions ahead for those detained in nationwide protests despite a warning from U.S. President Donald Trump. The comments from Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei come as activists had warned hangings of those detained could come soon. Already, a bloody security force crackdown on the demonstrations has killed at least 2,571, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported. That figure dwarfs the death toll from any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalls the chaos surrounding the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

## Centre plans Aadhaar-style ID for EV batteries for traceability

New Delhi: The road transport ministry has proposed a new system to give electric vehicle batteries a unique identification number, similar to Aadhaar, to improve tracking, safety and recycling.

The move is aimed at ensuring complete traceability of batteries from manufacturing to final disposal. Under the draft guidelines issued by the ministry, every battery producer or importer will be required to assign a 21-character Battery Pack Aadhaar Number, or BPAN, to each battery introduced in the market or used for self-consumption.

# CMF Headphone Pro Review: A versatile everyday option



After adding a twist to the smartphone segment, CMF by Nothing has stepped into a new gadget category: the overhead headphone. It has launched the CMF Headphone Pro, blending funk, practicality, and well-thought-out features, all for just ₹6,999. With Hi-Res certified sound, a 100-hour battery, adaptive ANC and a modular design that lets you express your style, CMF aims to redefine what everyday headphones can offer. The CMF Headphone Pro immediately stands out because of its modular design. The interchangeable ear cushions allow you to customise the look depending on your mood or outfit. It's quick and satisfying to swap them: just a gentle twist, and they come right off. This fresh approach turns a pair of headphones from a mere audio accessory into something personal.

CMF has focused on making these headphones practical for daily use, eschewing touch controls, which can be hit or miss, for physical buttons and dials. At the heart of this control system is an Energy Slider paired with a Multi-function Roller, letting you fine-tune bass and treble, adjust volume, manage playback, and control ANC with precision. There's also a customisable Action Button for quick access to features like Spatial Audio. On the right earcup, you'll find a dedicated button that lets you call up your Google Assistant instantly, which is great for setting reminders or changing tracks hands-free. The headphones also pack a clear on/off button and a 3.5mm audio jack for wired listening. And for charging, CMF includes a modern USB Type-C port that tops up the battery fast and can even draw power directly from your smartphone when you need it. Comfort is another area where CMF gets it right. The lightweight build and soft cushioned ear pads make these easy to wear for long hours. They served an additional purpose on chilly Delhi mornings, keeping my ears warm while blocking out the wind. The build quality feels tough and dependable, tested through 66 different durability checks, which means they're ready to handle the bumps and twists of daily life. Whether you're in the gym, on your commute or just relaxing at home, they sit snug and stable without feeling too tight.

Controls I've already mentioned some of the controls, but they're worth a closer look. The Energy Slider lets you change the feel of your music instantly, moving between bass-heavy punch and treble-rich clarity. It works in real time, too. The Multi-function Roller takes care of volume ad-

justments, playback, and noise cancellation. Its scroll-and-click style is satisfying and quick to use. Along with this, the Action Button offers one-tap access to features like Spatial Audio. Together, these controls make everyday interaction simple and reliable without forcing you to constantly reach for your phone.

Connectivity CMF Headphone Pro pairs up quickly with devices, whether phones, tablets, or laptops. Even without the Nothing X app, connecting is straightforward on both Android and iOS. Google Fast Pair and Microsoft Fast Pair make first-time pairing almost instant. If you install the Nothing X app, you unlock deeper control. You can tweak the EQ, customise buttons, adjust ANC intensity, and keep firmware updated. One standout feature in the app is the Audiobook personal sound profile test, which tunes the audio specifically for your hearing and stores it directly on the headphones. Your sound stays personalised no matter the device. Sound Quality The CMF Headphone Pro's sound quality is impressive for its price. The 40mm custom drivers with nickel-plated diaphragms deliver clear highs, detailed mids, and deep, satisfying bass. It's the kind of sound that feels balanced without losing energy. The Hybrid Adaptive ANC is especially good in everyday use. It adapts automatically to your surroundings and reduces ambient sound by up to 40dB. In crowded metros or busy street traffic, it works well to filter out noise and keep your listening peaceful. Spatial Audio adds depth to music and movies. Cinema mode creates a broad soundstage for clearer dialogue, while Concert mode pumps up the energy for live tracks. LDAC and dual Hi-Res certification mean high-resolution audio every time, whether you're listening wired or wireless. Call Quality Call quality on this gadget is solid for daily communication. The three HD microphones with Clear Voice Technology help keep your voice audible and reduce wind noise. Busy outdoor settings may demand a slightly louder voice; however, clarity remains good in most situations. Battery

The battery life is excellent, offering 100 hours of playback with ANC off and around 50 hours with ANC on. Even with mixed use, frequent recharging is not a challenge here. A 5-minute charge translates to around four hours of listening with ANC on; a full charge via the Type-C port takes under two hours. The ability to charge directly from your smartphone makes them even more practical, especially for those who travel or use headphones all day. Verdict CMF has packed modular style, strong audio performance, smart controls, and excellent battery life into the Headphone Pro, and kept the price reasonable, at under ₹6,999. The combination of interchangeable ear cushions, tactile sliders and rollers, a Google Assistant button, wired and wireless listening, and Adaptive ANC makes these headphones a versatile everyday option. Students and young professionals especially will like the blend of fashion and function offered by these headphones. But anyone looking for a comfortable, reliable, and feature-rich headset for daily use will find good value here.

# Accident leads to rescue of 'kidnapped' children in Dharwad; accused had a POCSO case against him in 2018



An accident at Joida in Uttara Kannada district on Monday (January 12, 2026) night helped in the miraculous rescue of two children who were allegedly kidnapped by a motorcyclist from a government school in Dharwad. The two children, Tanveer Dodmani and Lakshmi Kariyappanavar, were picked up on January 12 by the motorcyclist — later identified as Karim Mestri — from their school at Kamalapur in Dharwad during their lunch break, on the pretext of taking them to Ulavi Jatre (fair). Their disappearance from the school came to light in the evening, leading to panic among the public. The police launched a manhunt for the motorcyclist who was caught leaving the premises with the two kids in the CCTV of a shop near the school.

When the residents of Joida in the neighbouring Uttara Kannada district alerted the police about an accident involv-

ing a motorcyclist and two kids, they did not realise that their intervention had actually resulted in the children's rescue. It was only after the police reached the spot that the link to the kidnapping in Dharwad became clear. While the accused suffered injuries on his head and limbs, the children suffered minor injuries. They were initially treated at Joida taluk hospital and later brought back to Dharwad and treated at the district hospital before being reunited with their parents. On Tuesday (January 13, 2026), Hubballi Dharwad Police Commissioner N. Shashikumar visited district hospital in Dharwad and consoled the parents. Mr. Shashikumar said the accused Karim Mestri (50), now being treated at KMCRI Hospital in Hubballi, had issued incoherent statements about taking the children with him. "He is a construction worker and said he loved children and had taken them to get them snacks. He also spoke of buying chocolates for them. But taking unknown children with him raises suspicion about his motive." Preliminary investigation has revealed that a POCSO case was registered against him in 2018 for taking a child into a forest, in which he had, subsequently, escaped too. And he is named in the history sheet of Haliyal Police Station. After his discharge from the hospital further interrogation will be conducted," he added. Clarifying that the parents of the children were not related to the accused, he said that fortunately, the children had returned safely. The Police Commissioner also said that in the presence of the parents and the police, the medical examination of the children was carried out and that the kids had suffered minor injuries.

# Inquiry panel to look into lapses that led to kidnap of children from school



Chief Executive Officer of the Dharwad Zilla Panchayat Bhuvanesh Patil has constituted an inquiry committee to look into the kidnap of two children from a government school at Kamalapur in Dharwad during school hours. Speaking to presspersons after meeting the rescued children getting treated at the District Civil Hospital in Dharwad on Wednesday, Deputy Commissioner Divya Prabhu G.R.J. said that based on the inquiry committee report, action will be taken against those responsible, if there have been any lapses. She said that the incident happened after the lunch hour and already, teachers, members of the school development and monitoring committee and parents have been informed about the safety guidelines. Instructions have also been issued to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in future, she added.

Ms. Divya Prabhu said that already the Zilla Panchayat

CEO has been directed to submit an action plan to the district administration for increasing security on school premises and implementing the requisite guidelines for ensuring safety of students. Earlier, she spoke to the children who suffered injuries in the accident which actually led to their miraculous rescue and collected information from them about the whole incident. Consoling the children's family members, she assured them of impartial investigation of the incident to ensure justice. Later, speaking to police officials, she said that the district administration has taken the case seriously and if there is any need for a special prosecutor to argue on their behalf, the police should submit a report to the district administration. Zilla Panchayat CEO Bhuvanesh Patil said that based on the report of the inquiry committee action will be taken against those responsible. During school hours, it is mandatory that teachers are on the school premises and taught students and also took care of their safety. Suitable directions have been issued in this regard, he said. CCTV cameras He also said that a circular will be issued to all government schools to install CCTV cameras on school premises. Steps will also be taken towards improvement of school infrastructure and construction of compound walls, he said. Deputy Director of School Education S.S. Keladimath, Block Education Officer Ramakrishna Sadalagi, District Surgeon Sangappa Gabi, District Health Officer S.M. Honakeri, Assistant Commissioner of Police Prashanth Siddanagoudar and Deputy Director of Women and Child Development H.H. Kukanur were present.



# The nostalgic return of handmade toffees across India



When it comes to sweet treats at Christmas, the classic rum-infused cake takes precedence with bakers hosting cake mixing parties weeks before the festival. Alongside are traditional treats such as kulkuls, rose cookies, gingerbread men, mince pies, and a range of frosted cookies. Among this varied buffet lies a silent showstopper that is central to the festival (and otherwise too) but often forgotten: the toffee. Of late, there has been a real nostalgia-driven revival of the traditional confectionery and makers across the country are creating chewy toffees and even flavoured, nut-infused variants.

Nestled in Raison, a village in Himachal Pradesh, Big Bear Farms (that launched in 2020) has been making toffees at their farm since 2022. Co-founder Nikita Kapur, 36, says the team began making toffees in their home kitchen in Kullu Valley initially only for family and friends, for celebrations and festive gifting. “We first introduced them during the festive season, expecting them to be a limited offering. The response, however, was overwhelming, and what began as a seasonal experiment soon became a permanent part of our range,” she says. “Nostalgia was not something we set out to create, but it has naturally found its place in our brand.” Today, they retail three variants: original caramel toffees, chocolate caramel and most recently, coffee caramel toffees. Down South, Le Cordon Bleu Chef Pooja Srinivasan launched Inippu Indulgence in April this year to spotlight heritage toffees. “I am also a mother of two young kids and I noticed that my kids and my nephews don’t enjoy chocolate cake! The joy of indulging in a piece of shared pastry or dessert has been swapped for caramels, ice creams, and toffees. And I have also noticed a change in celebratory trends with customers choosing smaller cakes because in general we as a population are more mindful of what we consume,” says Pooja of the Chennai-based brand, adding how this mindset led her to create bite-sized toffees. South Indian heritage ingredients are the heroes of the toffees at Inippu Indulgence and bestselling flavours include filter coffee, and Tuticorin sea salt. “Our original heritage toffees also include pure vanilla bean, Malabar spice, and Dakshina cocoa. We have introduced rum- flavoured toffees for this festive season, and also had a limited edition drop for Halloween that included roasted pecan Malabar spice, brown sugar and salted butter,” explains Pooja, who will launch nut inclusions for the upcoming Wedding Edit.

But what is it about toffee that has got these brands invested? Nikita says the love received from customers across the country has been a driving factor. “We began with farm fresh fruit preserves, jams, jellies, pickles, chutneys and dessert spreads that we had been making for years for home consumption. The toffees caught up and are doing as well as our preserves,” she says. Like the preserves, the toffees are made by hand in small batches, and slow cooked. “Nothing is mechanised. We stir by hand, watching closely as colour and texture develop, and relying on experience rather than metrics. Wrapping and packing are all done manually too. It’s hands-on work. The human judgement involved is what gives the toffee its character.” For Pooja, veering away from social media trends was key. “Our generation has a lot more exposure thanks to more travel, the Internet and just from the availability of international products a click away. I did not want to deal with another ‘golden latte’ trend and decided that there was no reason why I couldn’t create something that was globally viable while using ingredients that have been staple in south Indian households for generations,” she says. At her brand

too, toffees are entirely handmade. “I started with trials in my home kitchen and I have slowly step by step increased production in a commercial kitchen tweaking the product as our volume increases.”

Another brand born out of kitchen trials is Tarvoti. Based in Goa, Preethi Hirendra Dhekne, 44, launched the label in 2023 inspired by the many local treats she chanced upon during her travels. “My husband is in the merchant navy and while sailing with him I discovered a new joy of picking up local treats from various countries, and bringing them back home to share with my loved ones. During Covid, my husband took a break from sailing and we missed our dose of foreign chocolates. One day, we curated a unique toffee at home using local cashew, and an idea to market this unique concept as a ‘gift of Goa’ was born.” And hence the name Tarvoti, which means ‘sailor’ in Konkani. The brand offers three different flavours of toffee: roast almond, cashew coffee, and country cashew. “The latter is a rustic combination inspired by the ginger used in traditional Goan sweets. We will soon introduce new regional flavours such as coconut, banana, and mint”. She explains how sugar and butter are cooked together to form a creamy caramel that is then mixed with nuts and other “secret” ingredients to form the core of the toffee. “Toffee squares are then coated with chocolate and sprinkled with nuts.”

As with any business, the challenges of running an artisanal confectionery business in India are many. Nikita says one of the biggest challenges is consumer awareness. “Reaching customers and helping them understand why an artisanal product behaves differently from a factory-made one. For instance, while some consumers immediately recognise shorter shelf lives as a sign of freshness, many still associate longer shelf life with better value, not realising it often comes at the cost of high usage of artificial preservatives,” she says. Pooja agrees. “Toffees have a nostalgic touch to them so for it to be revived, organic word of mouth has been the best way to get the word out. Having patrons who feel strongly enough to want to share it with their peers has been the biggest win. However, mindful indulgence works as a double edged sword with regards to treats as customers who are repeat buyers all don’t want to buy a box every week.” Another issue with artisanal products in India or anywhere in the world, explains Pooja, “is that for them to be sustainable you need steady sales and you need to grow beyond a certain volume but the question then arises: are you artisanal? How do you offer the quality of handmade, small batch but gain traction and recognition for it to be more than a fad?

Given that the concept of artisanal confectionery is not very popular in India, Preethi says most people tend to associate toffee with mass products like say a Coffee Bite or an Alpenliebe. Manufacturing is also not easy. “We need to maintain strict atmosphere control during the production process as our toffee is very sensitive to humidity and temperature,” says Preethi who once tried using freeze-dried fruits in the toffee, but they went soft. At Big Bear Farms, the initial hiccups faced were in trying to figure out how to ship a fresh product across the country. “Through the seasons, particularly the summer months, when they would begin to melt. We were determined not to use artificial preservatives, which meant learning the limits of the product: how it reacts to temperature changes, travel time, and storage. There were moments when we chose not to ship at all, or redesigned our packaging entirely, simply to protect the toffee as it was meant to be eaten,” says Nikita. It took Pooja four months of trials in her home kitchen to launch the brand. “I had made the toffees entirely out of brown sugar and jaggery, focussed on each piece being sizeable enough that it was comparable to an Indian sweet like a Mysurpa.” Initial feedback was that it was too sweet and too big, and that led her to modify the recipe to what it is today, by experimenting with different types of sugars and cooking processes. And all this effort by brands has not been in vain given the rise in demand for artisanal toffee, and proof is in the many gifting hampers with boxes of these chewy treats. “We continue to receive stories of how the toffees take them back to childhood, their nani, their school-days, holidays, and hill stations. It’s truly amazing to know that our toffees evoke this nostalgia and warm memories,” concludes Nikita.

# In axolotls and flatworms, regeneration is a body-wide choreograph



Planarian flatworms are small, unassuming creatures with an astonishing talent. Cut one into pieces, and each fragment can regrow a complete animal. This seemingly magical ability comes from their prolific stem cells, known as neoblasts, which can produce every tissue in the body. In most animals, such regenerative stem cells grow under the care of nearby niche cells, small micro-environments that signal when to divide. But planarians, despite their extraordinary powers of renewal, appear to lack any such neighbourhoods, leaving biologists puzzled about where their stem cells get their cues.

In a new study in Cell Reports, researchers at the Stowers Institute for Medical Research in Missouri, USA, found that the missing niche might not be local at all, but comes from the gut. They combined a powerful gene-mapping tool called Slide-seqV2 with electron microscopy to chart where thousands of stem cells sit and which genes they switch on. The maps revealed that neoblasts rarely stay in contact with nearby tissues, yet their activity depends on chemical messages sent from the intestine. When key intestinal genes were turned off, the usual post-injury burst of cell division disappeared and regeneration faltered; even day-to-day cell replacement changed. “The planarian gut functions as a central regulator for whole-body regeneration,” the study’s corresponding author Alejandro Sánchez Alvarado, a molecular biologist at the Stowers Institute, said. He added that the same gut signals may also help guide routine tissue renewal across the body.

The findings don’t put the intestine in charge. Instead, they point to a cooperative system in which many tissues, including the gut, help steer stem cells through shared chemical cues. Because stem and intestinal cells sit only a few micrometres apart (roughly a single cell’s width), their conversations are likely carried by molecules such as small proteins, fats or other metabolic signals rather than direct contact. That is to say, in planarians, regeneration seems to depend on a diffuse web of nearby chemical signals rather than a single, fixed neighborhood. When an axolotl (Ambystoma mexicanum) loses a limb, the cells at the stump gather and multiply into a mound of tissue called the blastema, which becomes an engine of new growth. For decades, scientists believed this small structure contained a major part of the regenerative programme. But a new study in Cell by a group at the Harvard Stem Cell Institute in Massachusetts, USA, has reported that the body itself joins the act. After amputation, a burst of activity in the animal’s stress response nerves briefly drives cells throughout the body to reenter the cycle of division. This organism-wide systemic activation seems to prime the animal for repair. When a previously uninjured limb is later amputated, its blastema is noticeably larger by two weeks. The response was found to be carried by special proteins on cells that sensed stress signals. In distant tissues, one group of these proteins switched on a growth control system called mTOR, putting

the body into a temporary state of readiness. At the injury site, another group kept the new limb growing. In both places, the same stress hormone, norepinephrine, a close chemical cousin of adrenaline, acted as the messenger.

When the researchers blocked the animal’s stress nerves, regeneration slowed down. But when they used common blood pressure drugs to mimic or block those stress signals, they could dial the response up or down, showing that the body’s repair mode could be switched on and off chemically. The primed state itself faded after about four weeks, suggesting that regeneration is not a permanent condition but a short-lived ‘repair mode’ under the nervous system’s control. The group also expressed suspicion that the system actively shut down this state rather than letting it fade, perhaps through a surveillance mechanism that reined in cell growth once the injury response had served its purpose. Rethinking regeneration The same signalling machinery exists in mammals, so scientists are now wondering if mammals could have such abilities, too. However, regenerative biologist and associate professor Jessica Whited, who led the Harvard group, strongly emphasised that any parallels to humans remain speculative. “It could be possible that humans have latent regenerative abilities that need to be coaxed out with the proper molecular instructions, in a specific sequence,” she said, stressing that such hypotheses still require direct testing.

Her team is considering whether mammals could even trigger a similar adrenergic response after severe injury but become “stuck” before the process can proceed, a failure that could reflect molecular brakes blocking the later steps of regeneration. Even in axolotls, she noted, regeneration is tightly confined to the wound. “Systemically activated cells don’t grow new limbs all over the body,” she said. “They appear to be held in check by brakes that limit where and how regeneration proceeds.” Some of these cells near the stump may themselves become blastema precursors while others might act indirectly, signalling to their neighbors to initiate growth. In both cases, she said, the process depends on communication across tissues rather than within a single compartment. Even so, the way this global coordination works is not the same in every animal. Ken Poss, a biologist at Duke University in North Carolina in the USA, said evolution seems to have invented several ways to achieve that coordination. “Innate regeneration as a whole certainly uses different architectures,” Dr. Poss said. “Nerves and their signals can have major, minor or no role in regeneration, depending on the species and tissue. Finding commonalities and differences helps us piece the puzzle together.” However, those differences don’t contradict the idea of body-wide coordination; they refine it. These studies address an outstanding question: how local is the regenerative response to injury? Nadia Rosenthal, a researcher at Imperial College of London, said. “They reveal a more complex, coordinated response where the entire organism is involved in the regenerative process.” Salamanders may rely on neural signals and flatworms on metabolic cues, but both, she added, expose “a dynamic balance between local responses and whole-body governance of tissue repair.” Together, the two studies recast regeneration as a team effort, not a solo act. Whether driven by gut signals or nerve impulses, the process depends on a dialogue between the wound and the rest of the body. The next challenge is to learn how those conversations start, and how the body knows when to stop them.

# How are we protecting astronauts from deadly space debris?



Millions of naturally occurring Micrometeoroids and Orbital Debris (MMOD) orbit the earth, posing a constant threat to all spacecraft and space stations. The menace attracted global attention recently when a piece of debris struck the Chinese crewed vehicle Shenzhou-20, causing a minor crack in the window of its return capsule, rendering it unusable for crew travel.

What is MMOD?

Micrometeoroids are typically extremely small, with sizes ranging from a few micrometres (a millionth of a meter) — the approximate size of a grain of dust — to up to about two millimetres. Each weigh less than a dried grape. Most of them (about 80 to 90%) originate from collisions between asteroids in the Asteroid belt (between Mars and Jupiter) with a small portion coming from comets. They also travel at extremely high velocities (about 11 to 72 km/s). Orbital debris (also called space debris, space junk or space trash) consists of human-made objects in the Earth’s orbit that no longer serve any useful purpose. All orbital debris originated primarily from exploded rocket stages, satellites, accidental collisions and intentional anti-satellite weapon tests. The typical average speed of orbital debris is about 10 km/s. With increase in density of space debris, there could be a theoretical scenario wherein collisions between them may create a cascade of further collisions, eventually making space travel impossible, a phenomenon known as the Kessler Syndrome.

The Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC) — an international forum of major space agencies such as NASA, ESA, ISRO, JAXA, etc. — plays a vital technical role by generating the foundational standards for space debris mitigation. These technical standards form the basis for the space debris mitigation guidelines adopted by the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS). However, the guidelines are considered as “soft law” implying that they are voluntary, and have no legally binding enforcement mechanism to compel the countries to adopt them.

How is MMOD distributed in space?

Orbital debris is mostly concentrated in a “shell” around the Earth in Low earth Orbit (LEO) ranging from about 200 km up to 2,000 km altitude. In contrast, micrometeoroids exist everywhere in space, but due to the Earth’s gravity pull their distribution is slightly higher near our planet. There are hundreds of millions of pieces of orbital debris in the LEO — an estimated 34,000 objects larger than 10 cm (and

are accurately tracked) and over 128 million pieces greater than 1 mm in size. The micrometeoroids in Earth’s orbital environment are effectively uncountable and they deliver billions of impacts to orbiting spacecrafts annually.

How are space systems designed for MMOD impact?

The risk of being hit by MMOD in the LEO is not uniform; it is highly directional. The face of the spacecraft in the direction of travel experiences the maximum overall hazard because the debris collides directly with the highest relative speed. Because of the very high velocity of the debris, even tiny fragments carry enough kinetic energy to cause catastrophic failure or critical damage to onboard systems. Space agencies utilise complex engineering models that process tracking and statistical data to determine the MMOD flux, which is the expected number of particles of a given size that will hit a spacecraft over its mission lifetime. This data with other relevant information is fed into specially developed software tools to perform a vulnerability analysis and to calculate the probability of loss or failure of critical components under the impact of MMOD. If the calculated risk exceeds the established safety standard, then the spacecraft is protected by physical shielding against the impact. How are satellites protected from MMOD? MMOD threats are countered using a strategy of design and operational methods. Engineers rely on Whipple shields to protect the space vehicle from MMOD where energy dissipation is achieved through fragmentation and turbulence, analogous to sea waves breaking against tetrapods and splitting its energy. Whipple shields have an outer “bumper” and inner “rear wall” with a stand-off or gap between two. The bumper shatters the incoming high-velocity debris into a cloud of fragments. As the cloud expands across the standoff distance, the momentum is distributed over a wide area, allowing the rear wall to absorb the energy without failing. For avoiding the risk from larger debris, space agencies maintain detailed tracking catalogs of objects larger than 10 cm. When a potential collision with a trackable object is projected, a debris avoidance manoeuvre is executed by firing the spacecraft’s thrusters to slightly alter its orbit and move out of the projected impact zone. How is Gaganyaan crew protected? The main difference in Gaganyaan compared to other ongoing human space missions is that it is a standalone mission as there is no space station where the orbital module can dock and seek help in case of any exigency during the orbital phase. Since the mission duration is very short (less than a week), the probability of being hit by a catalogued space debris is extremely low, though the risk from small un-catalogued, high-velocity fragments still necessitates protective measures. The MMOD protection scheme for Gaganyaan is based on internationally accepted standards, such as employing passive defences like Whipple shields. To ensure that these shields meet stringent human-rating requirements, ISRO uses specialised facilities and software tools for design and validation. The gas gun facility at DRDO’s Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (TBRL), Chandigarh, is one of the facilities used for validating the design where a 7 mm spherical projectile can be accelerated to achieve an impact velocity of up to 5 km/s.

# U.S. lawmakers condemn killing of Hindu man in Bangladesh



U.S. lawmakers have condemned the targeted mob killing of a Hindu man in Bangladesh, calling on authorities to protect religious minorities and restore the rule of law. Bangladesh unrest, highlights on December 23, 2025

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi condemned the targeted mob killing of Dipu Chandra Das, amid rising instability and unrest. Mr. Krishnamoorthi, an Illinois Democrat, called on Bangladeshi authorities to ensure accountability, protect religious minorities, and restore the rule of law. “I am appalled by the targeted mob killing of Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu man in Bangladesh — an act of violence amid a period of dangerous instability and unrest,” Mr. Krishnamoorthi said in a statement on Sunday

“While authorities have reported arrests, the Government of Bangladesh must aggressively pursue a full and transparent investigation and prosecute all those responsible to the fullest extent of the law. It must also take urgent action to protect Hindu communities and other religious minorities from further violence. For the sake of all Bangladeshis, this unrest must end and the rule of law must be upheld,” he said. New York State Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar said she is “deeply disturbed” by the ongoing violence against Bangladesh’s Hindu minority, exemplified most recently by the brutal lynching of Das. Bangladesh burns again: How will Hadi’s death impact elections and ties with India? | Worldview “A mob beat him, set him ablaze, and left his body on a highway. Authorities have reportedly arrested twelve individuals in connection with the horrific crime,” she said. Ms. Rajkumar said the incident is part of a “troubling” pattern of religious persecution and targeted violence against religious minorities in Bangladesh. She added that the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council documented 2,442 incidents of vio-

lence against minorities and more than 150 temples vandalised from August 2024 to July 2025.

“From Queens to countries across the globe, we all share in the fear, pain, and uncertainty faced by Hindus in Bangladesh. We stand in solidarity with Bangladesh’s Hindu community and for human rights and religious freedom globally,” she said. On December 19, Das was lynched to death and his body set on fire over alleged blasphemy in Bangladesh. Das was a factory worker in Mymensingh city. At least 12 people have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the murder.

# Tripura party sets condition for reopening Bangladesh office in Agartala

Tipra Motha founder and royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma said that the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Tripura’s capital, Agartala, would not be allowed to reopen unless attacks on Hindus and other minorities, and anti-India statements in the neighbouring country stopped.

Reacting to the suspension of all visa and consular services by the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission, he said on Tuesday (December 23, 2025) that India was capable of responding firmly to threats issued to Indian diplomatic missions in Bangladesh. Addressing the people of Tripura and members of his party’s youth wing, Mr. Debbarma said that national interest must take precedence over party politics, and called for unity in the face of external challenges. “The Bangladesh mission in Agartala will not be allowed to resume operations unless the attacks on minorities in Bangladesh, especially the Hindus, end and also hostile statements against India. They are also threatening to occupy the northeast,” Mr. Debbarma said.

Earlier, he said he was “astonished by a few Indian intellectuals” suggesting that former Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, be handed over to Dhaka. “Would they suggest handing over the Dalai Lama to China? As Indians, our policy is and should be that we stand by friends unwaveringly,” Mr. Debbarma said.



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## ‘Pushing him to no 6, below Axar/Jadeja, is going to be a cardinal sin’: Dodda Ganesh on ‘Rolls-Royce’ KL Rahul after ton vs New Zealand



GNS News Agency, Jan 18

Former India and Karnataka cricketer Dodda Ganesh lauded KL Rahul for his century in the second ODI vs New Zealand on Wednesday, adding that this innings was an example why he advocated for playing the Delhi Capitals batter in the No.5 position. He added that pushing Rahul at 6, below Axar Patel/Ravindra Jadeja was a cardinal sin. “This is why I was always harping about having KL Rahul at no 5, in the ODIs. KL knows to pace the inns well, and has all the shots in his armoury to go all-out in the death. Pushing him to no 6, below Axar/Jadeja, is going to be a cardinal sin. KL is Rolls-Royce. Use him,” he said on X. Even former India allrounder Irfan Pathan lauded Rahul. “100 of the highest quality from Kl Rahul,” he posted. When Rahul had reached his half century, Pathan had also praised his innings. “Solid half-century from KL Rahul. Playing low risk cricket while

keeping the strike rate nearly 100 says a lot about his class and game awareness,” Pathan posted. This is why I was always harping about having KL Rahul at no 5, in the ODIs. KL knows to pace the inns well, and has all the shots in his armoury to go all-out in the death. Pushing him to no 6, below Axar/Jadeja, is going to be a cardinal sin.

In the match, Rahul held a faltering innings together on a sluggish surface with a gutsy hundred, guiding India to 284/7 in the second ODI against New Zealand on Wednesday. Rahul produced a gritty unbeaten 112 off 92 balls which included 11 fours and two sixes, forging vital partnerships in the second half and snatching control from the Kiwis who had ran through India’s formidable batting line-up earlier. New Zealand had seized control with discipline and some stroke of luck as India had slipped from 99 for one to 118 for four before the halfway mark, leaving Rahul and others with the task to rebuild on a track that remained tricky for batters due to its lack of pace and occasional low bounce. The other major contribution from captain Shubman Gill (56 off 53), who collected his second half-century in as many games. With India in need of stability, local hero Ravindra Jadeja (27) walked out amid loud cheers and played his part well in a 73-run stand for the fifth wicket with Rahul. However, Jadeja too was beaten by one that stopped a little on him as he hit one back to Bracewell for a low catch. With Nitish Kumar Reddy (20) in row, Rahul added another 57 for the sixth wicket before the comeback all-rounder too fell for a slow, short ball from Zak Foulkes.

## ‘Everything’s going to plan. We took a few..’: Aussie pacer Josh Hazlewood on his chances on playing the T20 World Cup

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

The last time Australia won the ICC T20 World Cup, it was during the 2021 edition when pacer Josh Hazlewood played his part in Australia’s dominance in UAE along with spinner Adam Zampa. Hazlewood would finish with 11 wickets to be among the tournament’s top five leading wicket-takers with Zampa taking 13 wickets in the marquee event. While Hazlewood was ruled out of the first two Tests of last year’s Ashes with a hamstring strain followed by a Achilles soreness during rehab ruling him out of the entire series, the 35-year-pacer has started training and now confident of making to the Australian squad for this year’s T20 World Cup to be held in India and Sri Lanka starting next month.

“Everything’s going to plan. We took a few extra weeks once we couldn’t make the Test matches. I had a couple of bowls off the half-run last week. Running’s going well, all the strength stuff’s going well so, yeah, on track. My gym and everything is still mostly the same, but I think purely from a bowling workload, leading into the next red-ball game, do as much as we can in terms of just dicing it up a little bit differently,” Hazlewood told ESPNcricinfo in an interview.

In the last 24 Tests played by Australia, Hazlewood has only played in ten Test matches. In the last Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Hazlewood only played in two Tests before a side strain and calf strain ruled him out of the series. A calf injury would also see him being ruled out of the Sri Lanka tour last year. The pacer, who is currently ranked ninth in ICC World Rankings for bowlers in Tests, spoke about how he has been facing back-to-back injuries and how his body has been responding to the injuries.

“Sometimes, when one thing goes and the other thing resurfaces,” Hazlewood said of the back-to-back injuries this season. “But it (the ankle) was probably another thing I’d been just managing over the last few years, and then it just creeps up. I guess when you start back up, sometimes your body doesn’t like that stopping and getting it going (again). So probably not as much of a dive into these two little niggles. But we’re still working on implementing training a little bit. My gym and everything is still mostly the same, but I think purely from a bowling workload, leading into the next red-ball game, do as much as we can in terms of just dicing it up

## ‘They’re not party animals’: Stuart Broad rubbishes claims about England’s ‘drinking culture’ after 1-4 Ashes drubbing

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

As scrutiny grows on the England team’s behaviour during the recent Ashes series Down Under where Ben Stokes’ men were thumped 1-4 by Australia, former England cricketer Stuart Broad has come to the defence of the side claiming they “do not have a drinking problem.” The four defeats in five Tests at the hands of Australia were punctuated by incidents of players being seen drinking. Multiple England team members were spotted drinking on multiple days in Noosa during a break that the team took in the middle of the Ashes tour. After England’s defeat in the series was completed, media reports revealed that England’s limited-overs captain Harry Brook had been slapped with a fine of 30,000 pounds (\$40,300) for getting into a fight with a bar bouncer during England’s tour of New Zealand right before the Ashes. While Brook was given a ‘final warning’ for his future conduct, he was not stripped of the white-ball captaincy and also continued to be the vice captain of the England team in the recently-concluded Ashes tour.

Despite those incidents painting a picture of the England players, Broad believes that the side do not have a drinking problem. “They’ve just had a couple of guys who have made mistakes and that’s got into the media. I think it’s up to your teammates to get you out of those situations, and that’s when your culture’s really strong. Ben Duckett isn’t left alone, no idea where his hotel is. Harry Brook doesn’t get himself in a situation with a bouncer, because they’re not allowed anywhere near that situation. So I think that’s the thing that will disappoint [head coach] Brendon McCullum,” Broad said on his For the Love of Cricket podcast. Broad also dismissed suggestions that England could impose a “midnight curfew on players.” “I really didn’t like having a 12 o’clock curfew, because I just didn’t feel like you should need it. As long as you have people around you to get yourself home at a suitable hour, having the teammates around you to go, your time’s up.

“I look at this England team, they’re not drinking. I’ve seen loads of things about a drinking culture and we got that in 2021-22 when we left Australia. Crawley, Pope, and in recent times Stokes and Root – they’re not really drinkers, are they? They’re not party animals and going out tearing it



a little bit differently. Potentially bowling two or three days in a row and then having four or five days off and then doing that again, rather than Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Monday, Wednesday, Friday,” Hazlewood added. The Australian pacer is currently ranked 11th in ICC Rankings for T20I bowlers. Last year, Hazlewood played a stellar role in Royal Challengers Bengaluru’s maiden IPL title win with his tally of 22 wickets in 12 matches for the team. The pacer, who turned 35 earlier this month, forms the part of the Australian pace attack consisting of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Scott Boland and others and spoke about how white ball cricket is a different story. “(With) white ball, you can really sit down and nut it out because you know you’re involved for four or ten overs pretty much,” he said. “But Test matches are more like, okay, if it’s like a Perth or Melbourne Test, then you are fine to bowl in the next Test, but if it’s like a Sydney Test, where Barrell (Scott Boland) bowled 50 overs, then that’s a different story. With the red ball, it is a bit more on the run. You can map out the way you want to train to get ready for that first one, but I think once the Tests start then it’s sort of play it by ear and have those conversations on the go. I feel young in that attack. (But) I’m certainly realistic. I still think the hardest hurdle for me is the first one. So if you get over that first one, things can roll on. But if you play too many in a row, obviously weakness starts to creep in. So if you sort of sense that coming, yes, you might have to sit one out.” Hazlewood said.



Multiple England team members were spotted drinking on multiple days in Noosa during a break that the team took in the middle of the Ashes tour. Just before the Ashes, England’s limited-overs captain Harry Brook got into a fight with a bar bouncer

to shreds. There isn’t a drinking culture. I’ll hang my hat on that, if I’m honest, knowing the boys as well as I do. But it is just making sure the boys don’t get in trouble when situations arise,” he added.

Broad’s views are contrary to those of other former England cricketers like Michael Vaughan, who, upon learning about the incident with Brook, had remarked that it did not surprise him. “The incident doesn’t surprise me. They’ve (England team) been quite loose for a while. And I guess, you know, whether it’s consequences with shots that have been played over the course of the last three years, there hasn’t been one,” Michael Vaughan told BBC. “And now obviously the loose nature of this environment. The Noosa trip was fine for me, but the Noosa trip on the back of what we now know went on in New Zealand. You have to point the finger at the leadership group or the ECB, because if they knew, and then we had this incident, and then he played the next day as England captain,” he added.

## KL Rahul scores gritty century vs New Zealand, first Indian to get a ton at Rajkot’s Niranjan Shah Stadium



GNS News Agency, Jan 18

India’s KL Rahul on Wednesday steadied the Men in Blue’s innings after they were in a bit of bother after losing stalwarts like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill, scoring a patient century, his 8th ODI ton of his career. Rahul, who came in at No.5, took 87 deliveries to get to his 100 in an innings peppered with 9 fours and 1 six. He was also the first Indian batter to get to a century at Rajkot’s Niranjan Shah Stadium. The highest score by an Indian at this stadium before Rahul’s ton was Shikhar Dhawan who scored 96 vs Australia in 2020. In the same

match, Rahul had scored 80 runs. Ultimately on Wednesday, the Delhi Capitals player ended his innings at 112\* as India ended up posting 284/7.

Invited to bat, India were off to a confident start with Rohit (24) and skipper Gil (56) adding 70 runs for the first wicket but Kiwi spinners snatched the momentum with disciplined bowling in middle overs.

Kohli (23), Ravindra Jadeja (27) got starts but could not convert them into big knocks. Nitish Kumar Reddy hit a 21-ball 20. India are leading the three-match series 1-0. In the 1st ODI at Vadodara, in a 301-run chase that seemed to fritter with a flurry of wickets against New Zealand on Sunday, Rahul took his time to settle in but eventually quelled the nerves by sealing a four-wicket win for India. He got them across the line with some flair too, smashing the winning six for the sixth time in his career. Only the legendary MS Dhoni has done it on more counts (9) for India in one-dayers. Earlier, New Zealand skipper Michael Bracewell opted to bowl in the second One-day International against India on Wednesday. The visitors made one change to the side, which lost the opening game by four wickets at Vadodara, giving ODI debut to 31-year-old left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox in place of Adithya Ashok. Gill also made one change, bringing in pacer Nitish Kumar Reddy in place of Washington Sundar, who got injured in Vadodara.

## Who is Kristian Clarke, New Zealand pacer who dismissed Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Shreyas Iyer in Rajkot ODI?

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

New Zealand pacer Kristian Clarke turned heads in his second ODI outing against India at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot by dismissing Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Shreyas Iyer within two spells. Featuring in only his second appearance for the Kiwis on Wednesday, the 24-year-old stopped India’s batting heavyweights on a flat pitch, forcing the hosts into a spot of bother after being sent into bat by New Zealand captain Michael Bracewell. Clarke first dismissed Rohit with a slower delivery that the senior India opener miscued to the deep point fielder. In his second spell, the right-arm seamer dismissed India vice-captain Iyer, who chipped the ball back to the mid-off fielder. Clarke then dismissed the in-form Kohli, snapping his five-match fifty-scoring streak, with a delivery outside the off-stump. Attempting to glide the ball down to third man, Kohli could only manage an inside-edge back to the stumps, falling on 23.

A product of the Waikato region, south of Auckland, Clarke first broke through at the age of 16. Representing Northern Districts in the U19 National Championship, Clarke would however manage just four wickets at an average of 35-plus. During the 2018–19 season, Clarke rose to prominence as a top performer for Hamilton Boys’ High School in the Gillette Cup. Following a 12-wicket haul at the U19 National Championship, he broke into the New Zealand U19 national side in July 2019. Clarke was a member of the 2020 Under-19 World Cup squad which also comprised senior



New Zealand players, Adithya Ashok, Will O’Rourke and Rhys Mariu. He racked up seven wickets in four games, averaging 14. Clarke made his first-class debut for Northern Districts against Wellington in March 2022, followed by his List A and T20 debuts later that year. To date, he has secured 79 first-class wickets and 56 List A wickets across 36 matches. A standout performer in the 2023–24 Ford Trophy, he finished the tournament as the leading wicket-taker. Interestingly, Clarke has also turned up handy with the bat, having scored a century from No. 7 (an unbeaten 100) against Central Districts in October 2025. He had a forgettable ODI debut in Vadodara last week, conceding 1/73 in 10 overs as India secured a four-wicket win. Clarke would, however, chip in with an unbeaten 24 that helped the Kiwis post a 301-run target for the hosts.

## Danish shuttler Anders Antonsen on pulling out of India Open: ‘Don’t think Delhi is a place to host tournament due to extreme pollution’

GNS News Agency, Jan 18

A day after women’s singles shuttler Mia Blichfeldt criticised conditions in New Delhi for the India Open Super 750 badminton tournament, her compatriot Anders Antonsen, current men’s singles world No 3, shared his reasons for pulling out of the event. “Many is (sic) curious to why I have pulled out of the India Open for the third consecutive year. Due to the extreme pollution in Delhi at the moment I don’t think it’s a place to host a badminton tournament,” Antonsen wrote on an Instagram story. The Dane had pulled out of India Open on January 4, even before the season-opening Malaysia Open, where he entered and lost in the semifinal against world No 1 Shi Yu Qi.

Antonsen’s sharp criticism comes on the back of Blichfeldt calling out the playing and training conditions at the IG Indoor Stadium, where the 2026 edition of India Open is being hosted – at a bigger arena compared to KD Jadhav Indoor stadium inside the same complex, where the tournament had been held in the past few years. The shift in venue was because of India hosting the BWF World Championships later this year in August, and the organisers wanted to use India Open as a trial event at IG Indoor Stadium. Antonsen hoped that situation will be better that time of the year, and also called out BWF for fining him, for pulling out of one of the mandatory events for top-ranked shuttlers. “Crossing my fingers that it will be better in the Summer when the World Championships will take place in Delhi. As a result BWF once again has fined me 5000 USD,” he wrote. Antonsen also shared a screenshot of air quality in Delhi on the Instagram story, which showed AQI to be 348 and described conditions as hazardous.

Blichfeldt, world No 20, is in India to play the event and after her first-round win on Tuesday, told reporters that she wasn’t happy with the health conditions. “I’m happy with the court conditions but not the health conditions. The floors are dirty and there is a lot of dirt on the courts. Also, there are birds flying in the arena, there is bird poop also.” This is the second year in a row Blichfeldt has complained about the conditions now at two different indoor stadiums adjacent to each other in New Delhi. After 2025 edition, she had said: “It’s really hard to accept that many weeks of work and preparing, gets wasted because of bad conditions. It’s not fair to anyone that we have to train and play in smog, birds shitting on the courts, and dirt everywhere. These conditions are too unhealthy and unacceptable.”

Blichfeldt had also asked BWF to look into player’s health before the country hosts World Championships in August. “The arena itself is huge and I think it’s really great for major events like this, especially World Championships. But I really hope that it’s going to be better conditions for the players during the Worlds. Everybody is trying their best to make conditions good for the athletes but BWF should look into it as this is a professional sport,” she had said on Tuesday. In response to Blichfeldt’s comments, BAI General Secretary Sanjay Mishra issued a statement clarifying that the playing arena was fine and the shuttler was referring to training area. “Mia’s comments were made in a broader context around general playing conditions and personal health sensitivities, and not about the playing arena at



the India Open specifically. Regarding the warm-up area, it is important to note that she was referring to the KD Jadhav Stadium, which serves as the training venue, and not the main playing arena.”

## PV Sindhu crashes out early at India Open after shock loss to Nguyen

New Delhi: India’s ace shuttler and two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu endured a shock early exit at the India Open 2026, suffering a three-game defeat to Vietnam’s T.L. Nguyen in the Round of 32 at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium on Wednesday.

Sindhu started the contest on a positive note and showed her experience in the opening game, saving crucial points and edging past Nguyen 22-20 in a closely fought opener. The Indian relied on her strong defence and net play to seal the first game despite stiff resistance from the Vietnamese shuttler. However, Nguyen turned the tables in the second game with an aggressive approach. She dominated the rallies, targeted Sindhu’s backcourt effectively, and forced a series of unforced errors from the Indian to level the match with a commanding 21-12 win.

The decider saw Nguyen maintain her momentum as Sindhu struggled to regain control. The Vietnamese player kept the pressure on with sharp returns and consistent attacking play, gradually building a lead. Sindhu attempted a comeback, but Nguyen remained composed and closed out the match 21-15, sealing one of the biggest upsets of the tournament. The defeat marks an early end to Sindhu’s campaign at her home tournament, while Nguyen advanced with a confidence-boosting victory. This first-round defeat marks a new low for the Indian star. This is Sindhu’s earliest exit from the India Open since 2023. In last year’s edition of the Super 750 tournament, she had reached the quarter-finals on home soil but failed to continue the momentum in the semi-finals.



# Emraan Hashmi clarifies he’s not doing Awarapan 2 to cash in on the nostalgia after Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood: ‘It’s been seven years in the making’



Hashmi.The tag of the ‘serial kisser’ continues to change him even till today, right since his 2004 blockbuster, Anurag Basu’s romantic thriller Murder. “Colloquially, popular culture draws things that have a sticking point. What that sticking point is, nobody knows. You just go out there and do your stuff. It just so happened that in my films, this happened to be a sticking point. You don’t run away from it. You own that more than anything,” says Hashmi with a shrug.Even at the trailer launch of Taskaree, Hashmi’s co-star Zoya Afroz was asked if erotica was a part of their arsenal in the show. She admitted that when she told anyone she’s doing a show with Hashmi, they gave her a side-eye. “Emraan has taught an entire generation about romance and passion. Why would you run away from that?,” she told SCREEN. Emraan said Zoya confessed to her that she had to sneak in his movies at home in her childhood because she was not allowed to watch them.

“It’s an inherent part of my career, and not something I run away from. You’ve got to own up to everything you do. There are no regrets, and the audience loves you for it. So, it’s fine. They also appreciate the different kind of things you do as an actor. And then they appreciate the more tailor-made commercial spinners, which is a proud thing. I love it because those are ironic characters,” explains Hashmi. To his credit, the actor has often ventured out of that comfort zone to attempt films like Haq, Dibakar Banerjee’s 2012 political thriller Shanghai, and Raj Kumar Gupta’s 2013 black comedy Ghanchakkhar. “That’s an interesting film. It’s underrated, but a great dark comedy,” agrees Hashmi.

Would Hashmi going back to doing an Awarapan 2 now undo all the efforts he’s taken to undo his past image? “I’m not doing Awarapan 2 for nostalgia. This film was being planned for the past seven years. We just happened to stumble upon a script. We were holding off a sequel, but when we read a script which was taking Shivam’s journey ahead, we got to it. It’s not cashing in,” says Hashmi.One would imagine Hashmi’s return to Vishesh Films would be an obvious move after the resurgence of that image post his Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood cameo. “We have done that in the past, and a lot of people have been party to that. But we have to see that the audience now has become so smart and perceptive. Social media is such a tricky affair. You can’t be disingenuous with anything. You have a good script and heart in the right place, you’ll make a good film. That’s all there is to it,” clarifies Hashmi.It’s no coincidence that Bilal Siddiqi has written both The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood and Awarapan 2. But Hashmi claims him and Bilal go a long way back than that. “I met him through a common friend, Hussain Zaidi. He wrote The Bard of Blood (2015), which was the book I launched with Hussain sir. We wrote a book (The Kiss of Life, 2016) together on my son and his cancer journey. Since then, he’s been a family member. And then after that, Ba\*\*\*ds and “Akha Bollywood,” that’s him. And now, he’s writing Awarapan 2. He’s family more than a friend right now,” says Hashmi.

The actor is excited to be back as the face of unforgettable bangers. “But there are no songs in this show. There’s no custom officer singing at the airport to the people in the red and green channel while chucking bags into the X-ray machine. That would’ve been another show,” he says in jest. He adds that all he did over the years was to walk in an empty corridor in style, and the music became instantly iconic.Little do they know that the choreographer gave me steps, but I was too lazy to do them,” says Hashmi, grinning. When I remind him he did shake his leg (or rather, his finger) in “Jhalak Dikhlia Ja” from Aksar (2005), he’s quick to recreate the step and say, “That’s it, that’s how far it gets.” But did he also not do the uninhibited baarat dance in Shang-hai? “That Dibakar showed me every move personally on set. I was just mimicking him,” adds Hashmi, still grinning.

# Zubeen was intoxicated, refused life vest before going for a swim, Singapore court told



incident, Singapore police is looking specifically into what happened on that particular day,” he said.

The coroner’s inquiry is a fact-finding process led by a Coroner, who is a Judicial Officer of the Courts, to establish the cause and circumstances of death.Zubeen was in Singapore as a cultural brand ambassador for the North East India Festival. Before the festival began, he went for a yacht outing, reportedly organised by members of the Assam Association Singapore, and lost consciousness while swimming. He was declared dead at Singapore General Hospital. The death certificate issued by Singapore authorities stated that the cause of death was drowning.ASP Lim told the court that Garg had consumed alcohol and refused a life vest before jumping off the yacht, and that he became motionless as his friends tried to convince him to swim back to the yacht, reported The Straits Times. The report also stated that Lim said that witnesses noted that Garg did not have any suicidal tendencies and was not subjected to duress or coercion before his death.Additionally, it stated that the police officer said Garg had 333 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood in his system, which an autopsy report said would have impacted his coordination, in comparison to the drink driving limit in Singapore of 80 mg per 100 ml of blood. Under the Motor Vehicles Act, the legal limit of alcohol for driving in India is 30 mg per 100 ml of blood.The report also stated that the yacht captain’s assistant testified that no one had forced Garg to drink alcohol or enter the water, and that Garg and the rest of the group had been briefed on the yacht that they ought to don life jackets before swimming.In contrast, in its chargesheet submitted to a local court, a Special Investigating Team of the Assam police charged four persons with murder: festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, Zubeen’s manager Siddharth Sharma, and comedians Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta. His cousin and Assam Police Service officer Sandipan Garg has been charged with culpable homicide.Mahanta was in Singapore for the festival while the other four were on the yacht when the incident happened. the chargesheet alleges that those accused of murder had “caused” him to drink alcohol and get intoxicated, “caused” and “encouraged” him to swim without a life jacket, and did not do enough to save him. It also accused the manager Sharma of making plans to retire the star and “making financial gains out of him.”

Assam superstar Zubeen Garg was “severely intoxicated” and refused a life vest when he drowned while swimming in Singapore last September, Singapore media has reported Singapore police as telling a court Wednesday during an inquiry there into the circumstances around his death.This was testified by Assistant Superintendent of Police David Lim, who is with the Police Coast Guard, who was the first of 35 witnesses who will testify at the coroner’s inquiry there into the Garg’s death, which had taken place on September 19 last year in Singapore, The Straits Times reported

Garg’s uncle Manoj Borthakur, who was present during Wednesday’s hearing in Singapore, noted the differences and ascribed them to both investigations “being conducted in different situations.” He said that only four witnesses testified on Wednesday and that the hearing is scheduled to continue next month.“In Singapore, there is a coroner’s case which doesn’t look at a criminal angle; it only takes into account the cause of death. It confines itself to that. There is a feeling of difference between what has been presented by the Singapore police and the Assam police. Both cases have been looked into with different perspectives and conducted in different situations. Assam police is looking into the background of the

# Anaganaga Oka Raju review: Naveen Polishetty charms his way through a fun, albeit cliched, ride



In a Sankranthi race involving the biggest names like Prabhas, Chiranjeevi and Ravi Teja, it is, indeed, charming to note that the hopes were pinned more on the relatively new star, Naveen Polishetty. The fact might not surprise many, given the actor’s recent record – including comedy hits such as Jathi Rathnalu and Miss Shetty Mr Polishetty – and with Naveen himself (partly) taking over the reins of his latest release as the co-writer (with Chinmayi, also the creative director), the expectations were sure to be high. The 36-year-old actor delivers as expected, albeit with a few notable stumbles along the way, to make his maiden festive run an enjoyable one.Raju (Polishetty) is what the internet would term a ‘self-dabba’ character, someone who blows his own trumpet and asks you to take notice before you go deaf. Despite being the grandson of a zamindar, Raju isn’t conventionally rich, but the reputation and glory are held on to with all his might: the self-proclaimed king won’t climb stairs but will be carried on another man’s shoulders, won’t field in a cricket match but will take the credit, and generally would never think of breaking a sweat for his own gains.

His face beams with a smile (Polishetty’s trademark), his kurtas are blindingly shiny, but beneath all that lurks an insecure man who wants to marry into a rich family and call it a day. Enter Peddapalem’s wealthy Bhupathiraju (Rao Ramesh), who conveniently is looking to get his only daughter Charulatha (Meenakshi Chaudhry) married off at the same time, and who better than a “zamindar” himself to take care of the young woman’s love for expensive brands and other quality preoccupations?Directed by Maari, Anaganaga Oka Raju is a film that breathes easy because of its male protagonist. The world created is generic not only in terms of its template look and feel but also because of the stock characters that inhabit it. Yet, the focus is cast entirely on Naveen Polishetty, who takes centre stage with great confidence and struts about with his now well-known comic tim-

ing and self-effacing warmth. The story might be predictable all along, but his one-liners come at a breakneck speed, and the gags remain at the optimum level of silly and harmless.The first half, in particular, is a breeze as Raju and his stooges (including actors Chammak Chandra, Mahesh Achanta and others) try to accomplish “Operation Charulatha” on sheer, mindless comic logic. He saves dogs, beats up rowdies, and drops punchlines like “My heart is like Rapido; only one person can hop on” to bowl her over, all in the desperate hopes of resting forever in his future father-in-law’s riches. But if the father-in-law himself seems too keen to get on with the alliance, there surely must be a catch? Well, Polishetty isn’t one to shy away from taking a joke, and his film throws a pretty stiff one at him at the interval block.In parallel, composer Micky J Meyer tries to keep the spirits high, but his songs, quite surprisingly, don’t make strong impressions. Each track sounds indistinguishable from one another, and their visual renderings aren’t noteworthy either. Anaganaga Oka Raju evidently doesn’t aim too big with respect to ambition, but it would have only benefited from an overall, better finesse that also concerns the cinematography (by J. Yuvraj), the production design, and other technical facets.Even the writing in the second half, despite a reasonably effective interval twist, starts to take shortcuts. Raju’s life pivots in interesting directions as he tries to navigate his new marital life, but circumstances lead him towards a political career. The village of Peddapalem is riddled with problems – from streams of garbage water on the streets to poor farmers being scammed – and who better than Raju, a selfish and equally incompetent man, to be forced to get into the thick of it? On paper, this turn of events feels justified, and one is reminded of the Nani-starrer Pilla Zamindar here, wherein a similarly indifferent character is tasked with a social change. But while the latter film traced this emotional journey through a host of relatable characters and problems, Anaganaga Oka Raju doesn’t bother enough to go through that grind. The gags continue to occur timely, but the stakes never really feel significant.

Instead, the payoff portion is navigated through moments that don’t fully give us the high. The writing doesn’t make a huge fuss about the drama and rather wishes the humour to be the guiding force, but it also risks growing a bit too clichéd in the proceedings. Tarak Ponnappa, as Charulatha’s former suitor and the film’s main villain, is thinly sketched, and the rest of the characters, too, become placeholders over the course. More importantly, the exciting dynamic between the two leads is glossed over, missing the opportunity to spin it into a fun subplot around two misfits as husband and wife. But while its blips are easily noticeable, Anaganaga Oka Raju sails through without much damage because of its simplicity. It rests solely on Naveen Polishetty, who, although not asked to do anything grand, does a neat job as the lead.

# Vaa Vaathiyaar movie review: Karthi’s shoddy vigilante film makes Indian Thatha look cool



Vaa Vaathiyaar movie review and rating: Between the cliched flashback sequence in the opening and a serviceable interval block, there are moments when director Nalan Kumarasamy has ‘accidentally’ revealed Vaa Vaathiyaar’s true potential, hinting at how sleek it could have been had he treated it in a unique style, something he is known for. Instead, in his attempt to pay tribute to mainstream masala movies — as he mentioned in earlier interviews — Nalan has stripped the Karthi-starrer of its uniqueness. Thus, what we are left with is a never-ending fantasy vigilante actioner with far too many all-too-familiar elements, and the only unique one being that the male lead, Rameshwaran (Karthi), is depicted as the second coming of MG Ramachandran (MGR), a popular actor and the former chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

As Rameshwaran was born on the same day and around the same time that MGR passed away in 1987, his grandfather (Rajkiran), an ardent fan of the icon, believes that he is MGR’s reincarnation. Convinced that his grandson will also do great things like Vaathiyaar and become a ray of hope for the commoners, the old man introduces him to MGR films from a young age and instils in him the idol’s mannerisms and teachings. Although initially attracted to it, Rameshwaran realises that the idealistic MGR way of life won’t take him anywhere and decides to follow MN Nambiar’s (known for his villainous roles) devious path instead. While he becomes a police officer, as his beloved grandfather wished, Rameshwaran is corrupted to the core. At one point, he even colludes with kingmaker Periasamy (Sathyaraj) and extends help to him and the Chief Minister (Nizhalgal Ravi) to crush a public protest that’s been causing them a headache and eliminate an anonymous citizen activist group that exposed one of Periasamy’s key plans. While his grandfather is initially unaware of Rameshwaran’s illegal activities, believing him to be righteous, he is heartbroken upon learning the truth. However, this moment marks a change in all their lives. In a way, MGR himself makes an appearance here to fix everything and weed out the evil from Rameshwaran and society at large.Vaa Vaathiyaar’s story is essentially something an overreactive, verbose friend of ours might blurt out during a drinking session. Four pegs in, the so-called righteous citizen within them might awaken and proclaim, “How amazing would it be if MGR returned to teach all these tainted fellows a lesson with his whip?!” In that buzz, we might also agree without realising that it’s simply something that should be forgotten once sober — much like the business ideas we think are brilliant while discussing them drunk, only to realise how ridiculous they are once sobriety dawns. However, it seems that Team Vaa Vaathiyaar took such an idea and crafted an entire feature film around it, ultimately disappointing both themselves and us.The most disheartening thing

about Vaa Vaathiyaar is that it comes from Nalan Kumarasamy, who gifted Tamil cinema the pathbreaking Soodhu Kavvum (2013) and the extraordinary Kadhalum Kadandhu Pogum (2016). In his first feature film venture in a decade, Nalan fails miserably to find the right tone for his narrative, which used to be one of his strongest qualities. From the very beginning, the hollowness of Vaa Vaathiyaar is evident, as the opening flashback, showing Rameshwaran and his grandfather cherishing everything MGR, gives a major déjà vu of old movies. Although one could argue that this is because Vaa Vaathiyaar has been crafted as a tribute to the masala genre, it never feels inspired, and hence appears lazy on the part of the makers.Intriguingly, almost no one gets a proper intro — neither the hero (Karthi) nor the villain (Sathyaraj). Instead, they appear as the story organically unfolds. However, it’s only in these small, trivial aspects that Nalan’s experimentation has worked, as almost no character in the movie has any depth and comes across as extremely half-cooked and directionless. Apart from dressing like MGR all the time and forcing his grandson to emulate him, how much does Rajkiran admire the icon? The movie never shows. Although it is established that Rameshwaran became a cop at his grandfather’s wish, we are never shown the extent of their love for each other. Also, what’s the role of Wu (Krithi Shetty), a young content creator who supposedly has the power to communicate with spirits, in all this, and why is she helping a cop-turned-vigilante from the word go? Why did the film give so much build-up to Periasamy and his daughter, Malini, initially, yet offer them no scenes to be formidable villains? Nalan is totally not in the mood to provide answers this time.Although his script evidently required an experimental, out-of-the-box filmmaking style to appear fresh and intriguing, the director surprisingly denies the movie this. The little bits of audio-visual experimentation he has attempted also backfire significantly, owing to a lack of conviction. One of the biggest shortcomings of the movie is the uninspired and middling editing by Vetre Krishnan, which fails to give the film any flavour and makes it look as plain as possible. Santhosh Narayanan’s music, particularly the background score, has also played spoilsport in quite a few instances, with the placement of some tracks coming across as outright senseless.

As I mentioned earlier, the movie clearly contained elements that could have turned it into a fascinating psychological-fantasy-vigilante actioner. Just imagine: a young boy who wishes to become a righteous leader of the masses, like his icon, realises that this path won’t bring him fortune and ultimately succumbs to corruption. He is then hunted down by his conscience and also develops Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), with one personality being a tainted cop and the other a version of his icon, leading to a battle of angels vs demons within his mind. However, what Vaa Vaathiyaar ends up being instead is a shadow without substance of Anniyan (2005), possessed by the ghost of Indian Thatha — and that too from Indian 2 (2024) and not even the original Indian (1996) — with theatrics and moral science lectures taking centre stage while the script is asked to deboard even before the trip begins.Although there’s no doubt that MGR remains a beloved figure in Tamil Nadu, despite certain grey chapters in his life, anchoring the film solely on him and the nostalgia surrounding him may have been a poor creative choice, particularly since the movie offers little more than the MGR aura. It almost appears as if the makers decided to simply piggyback on the legacy of the actor-politician to avoid putting much effort into creating something fresh.