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Pugmarks confirm tiger's movement in Karimnagar, residents asked to stay alert

Karimnagar: A tiger, which reportedly moved between Bahaddurkhanpet and Vedugatta villages of Karimnagar rural mandal over the last two days, has now moved towards Rukmapur village in Choppadandi mandal.

Forest officials, who launched a search operation on Tuesday, found pugmarks of the big cat in agricultural fields on the outskirts of Rukmapur on Wednesday. Officials assessed that the animal is a male tiger aged around three to four years.

Telangana Government Releases Rs 713 Crore for Pending Employee Bills

Hyderabad, Dec 31

The Telangana government has announced positive news for its civil servants by releasing Rs 713 crore to settle outstanding bills. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka has issued directives for the disbursement of payments related to the month of December.

The funds, released by the Finance Department on Wednesday, include payments for gratuity, the General Provident Fund (GPF), surrendered leave, and various advances. This marks a continued commitment from the government, which has pledged to allocate Rs 700 crore each month to employee unions.

Since the end of June, when ₹183 crore was disbursed, the government has consistently released a minimum of Rs 700 crore each month beginning in August.



Rs 85L-cr projects expedited in a decade via PRAGATI, says PM

New Delhi, Dec 31

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday chaired the 50th meeting of PRAGATI -- the ICT-enabled multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation -- marking a milestone in a decade-long journey of cooperative, outcome-driven governance. During the meeting, Prime Minister reviewed five critical infrastructure projects across road, railways, power, water resources and coal sectors. These projects span five states, with a cumulative cost of more than Rs 40,000 crore.

At the meeting, the PM said that over the years PRAGATI-led ecosystem has helped accelerate projects worth more than Rs 85 lakh crore and supported the on-ground implementation of major welfare programmes at scale.

Since 2014, 377 projects have been reviewed under PRAGATI, and 2,958 out of the 3,162 identified issues have been resolved. This translates as 94 percent projects which have been resolved, reducing delays, cost overruns and coordination failures.

The Prime Minister

said that as India moves at a faster pace, the relevance of PRAGATI has grown further and it was essential to sustain reform momentum and ensure delivery.

"The government has worked since 2014 to institutionalise delivery and accountability creating a system where work is pursued with consistent follow-up and completed within timelines and budgets. Projects that were started earlier but left incomplete or forgotten have been revived and completed in national interest," the PM said.

Among stalled projects revived under PRAGATI are Bogibeel rail-cum-road bridge in Assam, first conceived in 1997; the Jammu - Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link, where work began in 1995; the Navi Mumbai International Airport, conceptualised in 1997; the modernisation and expansion of the Bhilai Steel Plant, approved in 2007; and the Gadarwara and LARA Super Thermal Power Projects, sanctioned in 2008 and 2009 respectively.

Modi today also reviewed PM SHRI scheme asking for it to become a national benchmark for holistic and future-ready school education and said

"The government has worked since 2014 to institutionalise delivery and accountability creating a system where work is pursued with consistent follow-up and completed within timelines and budgets.

the scheme's implementation should be outcome oriented rather than infrastructure centric.

He asked all Chief Secretaries to closely monitor the PM SHRI scheme and emphasized that efforts must be made for making PM SHRI schools benchmark for other schools of state government.

PM suggested that senior officers of the government should undertake field visits to evaluate the performance of PM SHRI schools.

Modi added, "The 50th meeting of PRAGATI is a symbol of the deep transformation India has witnessed in the culture of governance over the last decade. When decisions are timely, coordination is effective, and accountability is fixed, the speed of government functioning



naturally increases and its impact becomes visible directly in citizens' lives," Modi said at the meeting where Cabinet secretary TV Somanathan made a presentation on what PRAGATI has achieved so far.

Prime Minister noted that projects do not fail due to lack of intent alone, many fail due to lack of coordination and silo-based functioning.

"PRAGATI has helped address this by bringing all stakeholders onto one platform, aligned to one shared outcome," he noted.

No China role in truce with Pak, says India as Opposition targets govt

New Delhi, Dec 31

A day after China claimed credit for mediating between India and Pakistan during the brief but intense military confrontation in May, New Delhi on Wednesday firmly rejected the assertion.

Sources within the Indian establishment dismissed the claim outright, maintaining that the ceasefire was a strictly bilateral military arrangement. "The ceasefire between India and Pakistan was directly negotiated through the DGMO channel. India has already responded to such claims multiple times in the past and put them to rest," a senior official said.

Earlier, speaking at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing had played a role in easing "the tensions between Pakistan and India," projecting China as a responsible global actor guided by "fairness and justice".

"Following this Chinese approach to settling hotspot issues, we mediated in northern Myanmar, the Iranian nuclear issue, the tensions between Pa-



kistan and India, the issues between Palestine and Israel, and the recent conflict between Cambodia and Thailand," Wang said.

Notably, US President Donald Trump has also, on multiple occasions in the past, sparked diplomatic rows by claiming that he had personally intervened to stop a war between India and Pakistan, publicly stating that he used trade leverage to pressure both sides into de-escalation.

India has consistently and categorically denied any third-party role -- whether by Washington or Beijing. New Delhi maintains that the ceasefire followed a request from Pakistan and was concluded through established military-to-military channels. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has earlier told Parliament that India does not accept mediation in bilateral matters and that decisions on national security are taken independently and in accordance with sovereign interests.

China's latest remarks, seen in New Delhi as part of its broader effort to project itself as a global peacemaker, add another layer to competing international narratives over the brief but consequential India-Pakistan standoff.

Meanwhile, Congress general secretary and MP Jairam Ramesh questioned the government, seeking clarity on China's alleged role in the ceasefire decision. In a post on X, Ramesh said Trump had claimed on at least 65 occasions, across multiple countries, that he personally intervened to stop Operation Sindo, while PM Narendra Modi had remained silent on the assertions.

He said the issue had gained fresh relevance after the Chinese foreign minister also claimed that Beijing had mediated between India and Pakistan. Ramesh recalled that on July 4, 2025, Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Rahul Singh had publicly stated that India was effectively confronting China during Operation Sindo, underlining that Beijing was decisively aligned with Pakistan at the time.

Against this backdrop, he said Chinese claims of mediation were troubling and raised serious concerns about how the operation was brought to an abrupt end. Ramesh warned that such assertions contradicted what Indians had been told about the operation and risked weakening the credibility of India's national security narrative. He also linked the issue to the broader state of India-China relations, alleging that New Delhi's re-engagement with Beijing had taken place largely on Chinese terms, and cited the Prime Minister's June 2020 statement following the eastern Ladakh standoff as having weakened India's negotiating position.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

A welcome correction by India's Supreme Court on the Aravallis

It is not very often that the country's top court reverses its own order, that too on a suo moto basis. And, it is particularly rare for a Supreme Court Bench to stay the decision of an earlier Bench of equal or higher bench strength. The recent move by the SC Bench, headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, staying an earlier order on the Aravalli Hills issue is truly unprecedented. It is particularly significant that the latest decision was not based on a conventional review petition by any aggrieved party but came as a suo moto case. The earlier order of the apex court, issued on November 20, had accepted the 100-metre height definition for the Aravalli Hills. This has now been set aside by the CJI-led Bench, citing "public dissent and criticism arising from ambiguity and lack of clarity". The court has also directed the constitution of a high-powered expert committee with domain experts to resolve all critical ambiguities. The November 20 order, issued by the three-member Bench headed by former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai, gave its nod to the new definition for the mountain range proposed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. As per this definition, any landform that is at an elevation of 100 metres or more above the local profile will be considered as part of the Aravalli Hills, along with its slopes and adjacent land. This is seen by the environmentalists, social activists, and local people as a big blow to the conservation efforts.

This elevation-based definition could potentially leave more than 90% of the forest range vulnerable to mining and construction. The 100-metre benchmark and the use of local profile — the immediate surroundings of a hill — as the measuring base rather than a standardised baseline such as the State's lowest elevation, would result in a very significant part of the Aravalli range not being counted as Aravalli anymore. According to the Forest Survey of India's internal assessment, the new definition would cover only 1,048 of the overall 12,081 Aravalli Hills that are 20 metres or higher. The latest suo moto intervention by the apex court highlights how the top judiciary is committed to its role as a guardian of the country's environment and has earned public appreciation. The fact that the SC felt it necessary to constitute a new expert committee to review not only the findings of the earlier committee but also to clarify other issues suggests that the earlier report was prepared in haste. The suo motu cognisance also means that the government's public response was not convincing. Over decades, several hillocks of the Aravallis, India's oldest mountain range, have vanished due to illegal mining and deforestation, leading to a loss of an ecosystem that is most crucial for the survival of not just mankind but also for wildlife.

Vemuri Nageswara Rao Appointed as Pan-India Vice President of HEAD World Human Rights Council

"Kishore Vaddepalli, Hyderabad, December 31 (Indian Chronicle):"The HEAD World Human Rights Council, which has been actively working in the states of Andhra



Pradesh and Telangana, has appointed Vemuri Nageswara Rao, a native of Andhra Pradesh, as its Pan-India Vice President, HEAD organization Chairman Madhav announced. Speaking on the occasion, Vemuri Nageswara Rao expressed his gratitude to Chairman Madhav for reposing confidence in him. He also thanked National General Secretary Satish Devarakonda, Andhra Pradesh Women's President Kambampati Madhavi, and Andhra Pradesh Women's Working President Gorrepati Sudha for their efforts in his appointment. Vemuri Nageswara Rao stated that he would work to the best of his ability for the growth of the organization and stand firmly in support of victims. He emphasized that he would strive to ensure justice for the aggrieved and reaffirmed the organization's commitment to the protection of human rights under the banner of the HEAD World Human Rights Council. He added that this appointment has further increased his sense of social responsibility. On this occasion, trust members, local dignitaries, social activists, and others felicitated the newly appointed Pan-India Vice President Vemuri Nageswara Rao and extended their heartfelt congratulations.

Ramanthapur BJP Division President Congratulates Uppal Zonal Commissioner



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 31 (Indian Chronicle):"Ramanthapur Division BJP President Vangala Santosh Gupta, along with party leaders, paid a courtesy visit and extended congratulations to Additional Collector Radhika Gupta on her assumption of charge as the Uppal Zonal Commissioner of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). During the meeting, the BJP leaders discussed key civic issues and major problems prevailing in the Ramanthapur Division with the Zonal Commissioner and sought her attention for their resolution. Senior BJP leaders Talla Balakrishna Goud, Vempati Srinivas, Pentam Shailender, Darshanala Sudhakar, Palugula Anjaiah Patel, Bodupalli Muthyam, Pabbala Ramakrishna, Vempati Ram Raj, Neradi Ramesh, and others were present on the occasion and conveyed their best wishes to the Zonal Commissioner.



Congress Corporators Meet Uppal Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta

Corporators bring major constituency issues to the Zonal Commissioner's notice



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 31 (Indian Chronicle):"Congress corporators from the Uppal Assembly constituency paid a courtesy visit to GHMC Uppal Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta, who has recently assumed charge. The meeting was held on Wednesday at the Uppal Zonal Office. Uppal Corporator Mandamula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy, Charlapalli Corporator Bonthu Sridevi, and Kapra Corporator Swarnaraju met the Zonal Commissioner and conveyed



their congratulations. During the interaction, the corporators briefed the Zonal Commissioner about the Uppal constituency and highlighted the major civic issues faced by residents. They also brought to her attention the development works that need to be taken up on a priority basis. Responding positively, Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta assured the corporators that all issues would be addressed by taking up necessary development works and emphasized that coordinated efforts would be made to resolve public problems effectively.

Teaching Should Foster Interest and Curiosity in Science Among Students

— MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy



"Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, December 31: "Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy has advised that lessons should be taught in a way that turns students towards a scientific outlook and enhances their interest and curiosity in science. On Wednesday, the New Year calendar was unveiled at Vignana Bharathi High School located in Venkataramana Colony, Mallapur. The calendar was inaugurated by Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy along with Mallapur Corporator Pannala Devender Reddy, who attended the programme as chief guests. Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that teachers are the architects of tomorrow's society. He emphasized that teachers hold a highly respected posi-



tion in society and should act in a manner that upholds this dignity. He stated that shaping students' futures is the responsibility of teachers, and as mentors, they must continuously work towards building a better society. School Correspondent P. Bucchi Reddy said that the institution is preparing students to face global-level competitions. He explained that students are being groomed with a scientific outlook along with spiritual values so that they can confidently face future challenges. The cultural programmes performed by the students on the occasion greatly entertained the audience. Students who displayed exceptional talent were felicitated by chief guest Lakshma Reddy. Local leaders, teaching staff, and students participated in the programme.

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



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 31 (Indian Chronicle):"Chilkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee member Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj on Wednesday inspected the ongoing CC road construction works being carried out at an estimated cost of ₹40 lakh. The works stretch from behind the Ambedkar statue, Telangana Thalli statue area, to Doctor Ashok Clinic in Chilkanagar. The inspection was conducted along with GHMC officials and members of the New Ramnagar Colony Association. During the visit, Corporator Geetha Praveen instructed GHMC Engineering Department officials to ensure continuous supervision of the works and directed the contractor to strictly adhere to quality standards. She emphasized that residents should not face any inconvenience during the construction process and ordered immediate repairs of any damaged drinking water pipelines and sewerage lines. Warning against delays, she stated that strict ac-

Farmers' Day and New Year Celebrations Held with Grandeur at Kakatiya High School

Manthani. "P.S. ASHOKAN" KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. "The Farmers' Day and New Year celebrations were organised with great dignity and enthusiasm by Kakatiya High School (English Medium), not only for the people of Manthani but as a meaningful tribute to the farming community. The event was held at Mahalakshmi Gardens with the objective of creating awareness among students about the hardships, sacrifices, and struggles faced by farmers. "Navya, Mandal Agriculture Officer, attended the programme as the chief guest and addressed the gathering. In her speech, she emphasised that the farmer is the backbone of the nation and that without farmers, food security would be impossible. She stated that today's farmer can proudly speak about his contribution to society and assured that the government stands firmly in support of farmers. "Speaking on the occasion, Hariprasad, Mandal Education Officer of Mutharam, appreciated the programme and remarked that the students had beautifully and effectively conveyed



the pain and struggles of farmers. "Bharath Reddy, Headmaster of ZP Girls High School and State Resource Person, praised Kakatiya High School for organising such meaningful and socially responsible programmes, stating that initiatives like these instill strong values and social awareness among students. "The cultural programmes presented during the event captivated the parents and guests alike. A skit depicting the sufferings and emotional struggles of farmers deeply moved the audience, leaving many in tears and creating a lasting impact. "Addressing the gathering, Pradeep Reddy, Principal of Kakatiya High School, urged parents to share their hardships and life experiences with their children. He encouraged them to take their children to agricultural fields to provide firsthand exposure and practical understanding of farming life. He also extended warm New Year greetings to everyone present. "Mallaiah, Mandal Resource Person, stated in his address that the farmer is the true king and that without farmers, there can be no food and no survival. "The programme witnessed the gracious presence of the school directors Ravikiran Reddy, Shravan Reddy, Sravanti, and Pavani, along with a large number of parents. Their active participation and support contributed significantly to the grand success of the event.

Everyone should live with love and peace

"Secunderabad Cantonment, December 31 (Indian Chronicle):"In the New Year, everyone should live with love and peace. There should be harmony and peace



among everyone. New Year is a good opportunity to start afresh and become a better person. All India Cantonment Boards Association Vice Chairman Jampan Pratap said. To celebrate the New Year, Jampan Pratap attended the celebrations organized under the aegis of J P Youth Association at Bowenpally Cantonment Play Ground as the Chief Guest, cut the cake and wished the New Year. After this, Ayan said. At this time, one should take a step forward with new hopes like making good resolutions, setting goals, working hard to achieve them, the new year fills new hopes and enthusiasm, youth should forget the things that happened in the past and move ahead. Var Prasad said in this programme. Shashi, Karan Singh, Mukesh Yadav, Place. Maula Yagdri. Suresh and others participated.



tion would be taken if the road works are not completed within the stipulated time. Speaking on the occasion, the Corporator said that by fulfilling the promises made to the people, the Chilkanagar Division has been developed into the No.1 division in terms of development. Those present at the programme included GHMC AE Sai Kiran, Work Inspector Kedar, BRS State leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Eddula Kondal Reddy, Kokonda Jagan, Masa Shekhar, Pratap Reddy, Yadagiri Pochayya, Harish Rao, Tahir, Praveen Mudiraj, and others.



Retirement Is an Inevitable Milestone in Every Professional Journey: Peddapalli DIO Kalpana



““P. S. A SHOKAN” KARIM N G A R BUREAU“Retirement is an unavoidable and significant phase in the professional life of every employee, stated Kalpana, District Intermediate Education Officer (DIO), Peddapalli.“She was speaking as the chief guest at the retirement felicitation programme of Syed Saleem, Principal of the Government Girls Junior College, Manthani, held on Wednesday. Addressing the gathering, Kalpana praised Syed Saleem for his distinguished service spanning more than three decades in the teaching and academic field. She noted that through his dedication and guidance, he played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of numerous students who went on to attain prestigious positions.“She further remarked that while Syed Saleem maintained cordial and friendly relations with all, he was equally firm in enforcing discipline among those who showed negligence towards their duties. Expressing emotional sentiments, she said it was deeply painful to part with a colleague who had worked alongside them for many years, and wished him a retired life filled with joy, peace, and quality time with his family.“Commending his journey from a school-level teacher to a college principal, she lauded his invaluable services to the education sector and described his career as truly exemplary.“Following the speeches, Syed Saleem was felicitated in a grand manner and presented with a memento as a mark of respect and gratitude.“The programme was attended by District Intermediate Education Office Siddipet representatives, including the Siddipet DIO; K Ravinder Reddy, State General Secretary of the Principals’ Association; Anjaiah, Mancherla DIO; and government college principals K Ramachandra Reddy, Sanjeevaiah, Ravinder Reddy, Vishwa Prasad, Sudhakar, and Usha.“Retired principals Ambarish and Layak Ali were also present. A large number of former and current students, colleagues, and admirers attended the event, making the occasion memorable and dignified.

Ramanthapur Division Congress President M.D. Rafiq Conducts Field Visit in Balaji Nagar Colony



““KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 31 (Indian Chronicle)““Ramanthapur Division Congress Party President M.D. Rafiq on Wednesday conducted a field-level visit to Balaji Nagar Colony under the Ramanthapur Division and interacted with local residents to understand their problems. Residents informed him that internal roads and underground drainage systems in the colony are in a very poor condition and alleged that their grievances have been ignored for the past ten years despite repeated representations. They expressed dissatisfaction over the continued neglect of basic civic amenities. Following the interaction, the residents submitted memorandums detailing their issues to M.D. Rafiq. He assured them that the identified problems would be brought to the notice of Constituency In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy

CSAB stands by the cantonment area athletes.



Association Prabhu Kumar Goud in this program. Satyanarayana, Jairaj, Stanley, Wrestling coach Saibaba Yadav, Jampana Ravi Bandi Srinivas and others participated.

Permanent Solution to Ram Reddy Nagar Drainage Problem with the Efforts of Habsiguda Division Corporator Kakkireni Chetana Harish



laid for trunk line and super sucker drainage works worth approximately ₹1.90 crore.“Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Chetana Harish stated that the decades-old drainage issue that had been troubling the residents of Ram Reddy Nagar has now been completely resolved. She explained that by holding discussions with officials and giving special attention to the trunk line project, a lasting solution to the drainage problem was made possible.“Following the foundation-laying ceremony, a festive atmosphere prevailed in Ram Reddy Nagar. Residents expressed immense happiness and conveyed their heartfelt gratitude to the corporator for addressing a problem that had persisted for many years. Locals thanked her for successfully resolving the long-standing sewage and wastewater issue.“The program was attended by BJP senior leaders Thinderu Hanumanth Rao, Sanjay Patel, Vemulakonda Somashekhar Goud, Gaddam Sai Kiran, Division General Secretary Cheulo Ellachari, along with Puchula Ashok, Haribabu, Kondu Sravanti, Jetta Dheeraj, Gaddam Venkat Sai, Peesari Shankar, Avula Sudhakar, and several local leaders and residents including Pentavalli Venkanna, Battula Nagaraju, Yadav, Lakshman, Renuka, Kokkala Satyanarayana, Anam Ashok Kumar, Prabhakar, Lakshmi, Putta Krishna, Kumaraswamy, Kondal Rao, Mallesh, Narasimha, Ramakrishna, Naresh, Bhanu, and many colony residents, who participated in large numbers.

““KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, December 31 (Indian Chronicle)““With the special initiative of Habsiguda Division Corporator Kakkireni Chetana Harish, a permanent solution has been achieved for the long-pending drainage problem in Ram Reddy Nagar. As part of this effort, the foundation stone was

MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Distributes Christmas Gifts to 30 Church Pastors in H.B. Colony Division

““Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, December 31:““On the occasion of the Christmas festival, MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy distributed Christmas gifts to pastors of nearly 30 churches located within the Meerpeta H.B. Colony Division. As he does every year, the MLA provided these gifts from his personal funds. The distribution of clothes as Christmas gifts took place at the MLA’s camp office.“Speaking on the occasion, MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy conveyed his Christmas greetings to pastors of almost all churches within the Uppal constituency and stated that the gifts were being presented as part of the festive celebrations.“Corporator Jeripothula Prabhudas, former corporator Gundarapu Srinivas Reddy, Shekhar Goud, pastors from churches of the H.B. Colony Division, and others participated in the program.



Celebrate New Year with family members happily. ACP Gopala Krishna Murthy..

““Secunderabad Cantonment, December 31 (Indian Chronicle):““ACP Gopala Krishnamurthy wished the people of Begumpet division early New Year. He warned that legal action will be taken in case of excessive behavior or violation of rules in the name of New Year celebrations. He said that the police department is setting up a strong vigilance in the town at night and dawn to prevent disruption of law and order. We request you to preserve our cultural traditions and do not send your children out on New Year celebrations and celebrate it happily with your family members under your supervision. Apart from that, strict action will be taken against those who enthusiastically come on the roads and engage in illegal activities, so all parents can take note of this. “Drunk driving is like jail” He clarified that continuous drunk and drive checks are being conducted at the main roads and intersections from the evening of December 31. If it is found that the vehicle has been driven under the influence of alcohol, the vehicles will be impounded on the spot without any negligence and the transport department will be recommended to cancel the driving licenses. He made it clear that no DJ sound systems are allowed. Strict cases will be registered if loud noise disturbs the neighbors, elderly and patients. Begum Pet ACP Gopala Krishna Murthy revealed that legal action will be taken against those who consume alcohol on roads in open places.

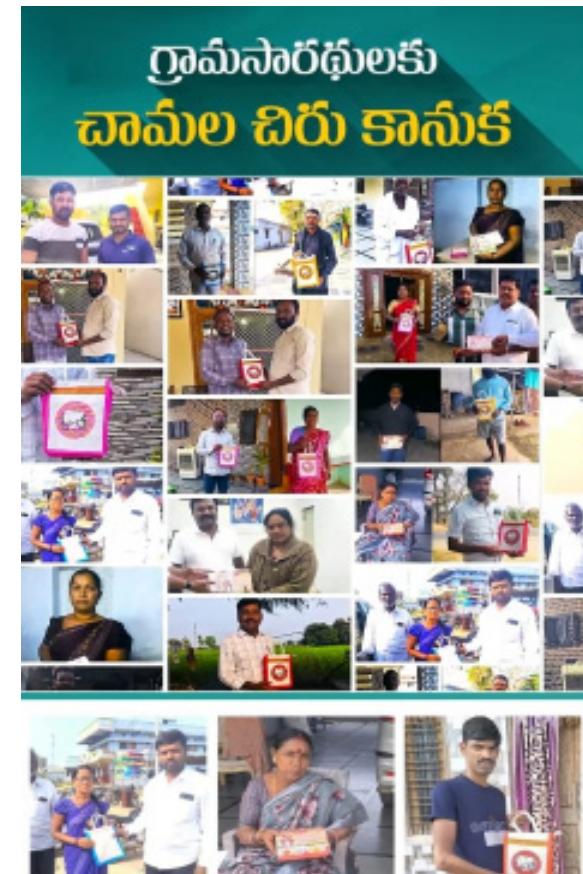


A box of sweets and a gift presented to the 968 Sarpanches who won in the Gram Panchayat elections within the Bhongir Parliament constituency

New Year greetings on his letterhead:

- Bhongir MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy
In the upcoming ZPTC, MPTC, Municipal Council, and City Corporation elections, ensure the victory of Congress party candidates with a huge majority..

Bhongir MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy



““Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhongir District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 31:““Bhongir Member of Parliament Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy congratulated each of the 968 Sarpanches who won as the first citizens of the villages in the seven constituencies under the Bhongir Parliament seat, presenting them with a box of sweets and a small gift along with his greetings on his letterhead bearing his signature. He then extended his heartfelt thanks to each and every one of his constituents on this auspicious occasion of entering the New Year. He stated in a press release that he hopes that, like last year, this year too will see good rainfall, abundant harvests of golden crops, and that the people will live in peace and happiness. He also expressed his wish that under the dynamic leadership of Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the state of Telangana will progress further towards development and prosper with abundant harvests. Bhongir MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy said that the people of Telangana state were impressed by the development works being carried out by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy during the Congress government’s tenure, and that it was gratifying that they had elected the Congress party to power, giving it a majority of seats in the Gram Panchayat elections. He called upon the people to ensure the victory of Congress party candidates with a huge majority in the upcoming ZPTC, MPTC, Municipal Council, and Municipal Corporation elections. He stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the Congress government has prioritized public development and welfare, giving prominence to women. He added that the credit for providing free bus travel to all women in the state and distributing ration cards to all eligible individuals goes to the Congress government. He emphasized that ration cards are essential for every poor person, and that the BRS party did not issue a single new ration card in ten years. He said that only after the Congress party came to power in the state, the government has fulfilled the promises made to the people during the elections in a phased manner. As part of this, he mentioned the implementation of schemes such as the Mahalaxmi scheme providing free bus travel for all

women, ration cards for all eligible people, old-age pensions, Indiramma houses, loan waivers for farmers, and the Rythu Bandhu scheme. He further stated that the Congress government is introducing welfare schemes to enhance the self-respect of women and giving them a prominent place. He added that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy aims to make all women millionaires by providing interest-free loans and creating employment opportunities for the unemployed. Bhuvanagiri Member of Parliament Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Telangana state is progressing towards development, and the government is working in accordance with the aspirations of the people. He urged every Congress worker to act like a soldier to take the development and welfare schemes being implemented by the Congress government to every village, and to once again ensure a resounding victory for Congress candidates in the upcoming ZPTC, MPTC, Municipal Council, and Municipal Corporation elections, leading them to a 100% success rate and completely eliminating the BRS and BJP parties.

Dalit Ratna Award Presented to Katta Bhaskar by Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy



Habsiguda, at Uppal. "Speaking on the occasion, Katta Bhaskar expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Masa Shekhar for his constant support and guidance. He stated that he would continue to stand by Masa Shekhar in all future endeavors. Bhaskar also extended special thanks to the Scheduled Castes Rights Protection Association for recognizing and encouraging service-oriented efforts aimed at empowering Dalits. He affirmed his commitment to continue working for the protection and advancement of Dalit rights. Additionally, he conveyed his sincere appreciation to the state and district leaders of the Scheduled Castes Rights Protection Association for motivating and honoring Dalits who are actively engaged in social service.

Grand Birthday celebration of Corporator Muddam Narasimha Yadav



Secunderabad Cantonment. December 31 (Indian Chronicle): "The grand birthday celebrations of local old bowenpally Corporator Muddam Narasimha Yadav were organised on a grand scale at the corporator's residence Road No. 1 in Mallikarjuna Colony old bowenpally on Wednesday. Vedic pundits blessed him and accorded them a Purna Kumbham welcome. The MLA madhavaram krishna rao was the program Chief Guest of the event. Cake cutting celabاراتions don. On this occasion free eye camp was conducted by Pushpagiri Hospital after that 400 spectacles handed over to patients. A large numbers of party leaders, local women, friends are participated in this programme.

Celebrate the New Year happily...

Follow government regulations...

Stay away from alcohol...

Guidance for the youth: -

Thimmapur New Sarpanch Edla Venkat Reddy



"Thimmapur's new Sarpanch Edla Venkat Reddy extended New Year wishes to the youth." (Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 31): B.N. Thimmapur village Sarpanch Edla Venkat Reddy extended New Year wishes to the people of Thimmapur village and Bhuvanagiri town. On this occasion, he said that young people should not consume alcohol in public places. He advised the youth not to drive on the roads after drinking alcohol and cause accidents, as any unfortunate incident would leave their parents with irreparable grief. He said that no one should be troubled by playing loud DJ music until midnight, and every young person should follow government regulations. The new Sarpanch of Thimmapur village in Bhuvanagiri mandal, Edla Venkat Reddy, advised the youth to celebrate the New Year peacefully at their homes.

New Year greetings to the people of Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district:

- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector... Hanumantha Rao



"(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 31): On the occasion of the English New Year, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao extended his greetings to the people of the district. He wished that the year 2026 would bring auspiciousness to everyone and fill every family with joy and happiness. He wished that all the people of the district would be blessed with health, happiness, and prosperity. He hoped that everyone would move forward with new ideas, goals, and aspirations in the new year and achieve success with greater determination and effort. The Collector wished that the new year would be a year of victory for everyone." District Collector Hanumantha Rao stated that people should not bring bouquets, flower arrangements, or shawls to wish him a Happy New Year.

Grand New Year Celebrations at Rajagruha; Former MLA Putta Madhukar Extends Warm Greetings



"P. S. A S H O K A N " K A R I M N A G A R BUREAU." "Marking a graceful farewell to the outgoing year and ushering in the New Year with optimism and cheer, leaders and cadres of the BRS party celebrated New Year festivities at Rajagruha in Manthani." "On the occasion, former Manthani MLA Putta Madhukar ceremonially cut the New Year cake and distributed sweets among party members. Extend-

his heartfelt wishes, he expressed hope that the New Year would bring peace, prosperity, and happiness to people from all sections of society." "Later, he conveyed advance New Year greetings to BRS constituency leaders, sarpanches, party workers, supporters, and the general public, calling upon everyone to welcome the New Year with renewed enthusiasm and collective spirit.

The development of ITIs and AITIs is possible only with people's rule and a people's government:

- Minister for Labour, Employment, Training and Factories, and Mining, Gaddam Vivek Venkat Swamy

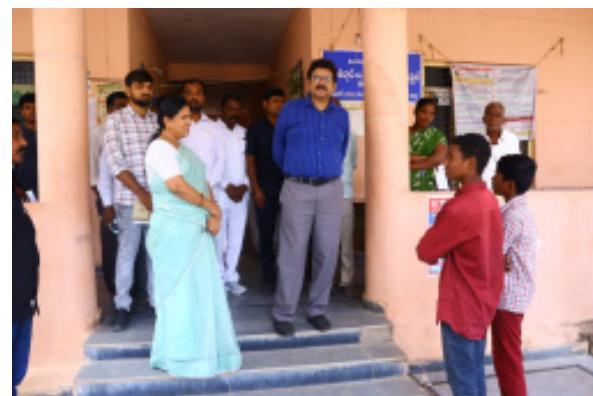


"(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 31): Minister for Labour, Employment, Training and Factories, and Mining, Gaddam Vivek Venkat Swamy said that the development of ITIs and AITIs is possible only with people's rule and a people's government. On Wednesday, the Minister, along with MP Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Government Whip Beerla Ilaiah, Thungathurthi MLA Mandula Samuel, Nakirekal MLA Vemula Veeresham, Miryalaguda MLA Bathula Lakshma Reddy, and Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao, laid the foundation stone for the construction of the ITI and AITI buildings in Addagudur mandal headquarters. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Gaddam Vivek Venkat Swamy said that the people's rule and the people's government are working for the welfare of the people. He said that the 6 guarantees will be implemented for every eligible poor person through the people's government. He said that they are distributing fine rice with the aim that every poor person should eat to their heart's content. He said that they are providing good meals to students in schools and hostels with fine rice so that students can improve their memory and study well. He said that Young India Schools have been established to help students study well. He

said that the government is developing the education sector in many ways to ensure that there are no shortcomings anywhere. As part of Telangana Rising, investment opportunities will be created for unemployed youth through companies, factories, and other organizations, he said. He stated that to work in these companies, one needs to have the necessary skills, and therefore, the existing 65 ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes) will be upgraded, and several new ones will be established in the state, bringing the total to 115 ITI and AITI centers. He added that students will gain employment opportunities through awareness of the various types of development skills emerging through advanced technology. He mentioned that trainers have been appointed to provide quality education to students at the advanced technology centers. He also stated that a monthly subsidy of 2,000 rupees will be provided to poor students undergoing training. Minister Gaddam Vivek Venkataswamy urged students to utilize the advanced technology centers and secure employment opportunities. Additional Collector of Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district Bhaskara Rao, the Market Committee Chairman, newly elected Sarpanches, public representatives, students, and others participated in this program.

Elections SIR, applications received during the Bhoobharathi and Revenue Sadassu programs must be thoroughly examined and resolved:

- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao



"(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 31): Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that the applications received during the Elections SIR, Bhoobharathi, and Revenue Sadassu programs must be thoroughly examined and resolved. On Wednesday, the District Collector reviewed the applications received during the Bhoobharathi and Revenue Sadassu programs at the Atmakur Mandal Tahsildar's office. On this occasion, the District Collector spoke to the concerned Tahsildar and said that the process of registering family members' names related to the current SIR program should be expedited. He also reviewed the applications received during the Bhoobharathi and Revenue Sadassu programs and gave appropriate suggestions and advice for resolving the issues. He said that the measures being taken to resolve the applications received during the Bhoobharathi and Revenue Sadassu programs should

In the Assembly sessions, allocate Rs. 500 crores for the completion of the Baswapuram project.

.. Pay full compensation to the displaced persons...

Complete the project and provide Godavari waters instead of Musi river water: - CPM State Committee member Kondamadugu Narasimha demands

"(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... December 31): CPM



State Committee member Kondamadugu Narasimha demanded that the government allocate Rs. 500 crores in the Assembly sessions to immediately complete the Baswapuram project, and pay full compensation and provide rehabilitation to the villages affected by the submergence and the displaced persons. He suggested that the project be completed to provide Godavari waters to the farmers of this region who are suffering from the polluted Musi river water. Speaking at the CPM Mandal Committee meeting held on Wednesday at Sundarayya Bhavan, Bhuvanagiri, under the chairmanship of District Committee member Dayala Narasimha, Narasimha questioned

why full compensation is not being paid to the submerged villages and displaced persons even though more than 90 percent of the Baswapuram project, which is crucial for irrigation and drinking water in 10 mandals of Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, has been completed. He said it is very unfortunate that this government is not allocating funds for the remaining 10 percent of the project, which was 90 percent completed by the previous government. He questioned what happened to the promises made by the local MLA and the Chief Minister to complete the project immediately after coming to power. He said that the government should allocate 2500 crore immediately and complete the project. He questioned why the house plots allocated to the submerged villages of Lappanaik Thanda and Chowka Thanda were not being distributed by the Alair MLA and the District Collector. He stated that if the Baswapuram project is completed, thousands of acres of land in 10 mandals of the district would receive irrigation water, the farmers would be freed from the toxic waters of the Musi river, and agricultural laborers would get employment. Narasimha warned that the government should respond immediately to complete the project, failing which the CPM party would organize protests and agitations, and would besiege the District Collector's office with the displaced people. Also present at this meeting were CPM Mandal Secretary Pallerla Anjaiah, Mandal Committee members Yedunuri Mallesham, Annampatla Krishna, Konda Ashok, Kondamadugu Nagamani, and Mandal Committee members Siliveru Ellaiah, Pandala Maisaiah, Mote Ellaiah, Kondapuram Yadagiri, and Kalle Lakshminarayana.

When a mission to neutralise a disobedient rocket spurred unexpected sprinting glory

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

My sympathetic boss wasn't idle while I was outrunning the hound of Baskervilles in Hisar. The place may be arid, but it still has enough trees, wheat shoots, and dust to make one feel alive. Apparently, my "desert experience" needed further enrichment. So my boss promptly lined up another "temporary duty". Trouble duty, actually, but who's splitting hairs? I'd just finished my stint at Hisar and was looking forward to the pavilion when my WhatsApp pinged. It wasn't the usual family forward but a derailment letter from headquarters: "Move to Mahajan Field Firing Ranges ASAP." My mission was to neutralise a disobedient rocket that refused to fly.

the Bard almost said, temporary duties never come singly but in battalions. Having barely reached home after four days of travel fatigue, I was to report at the Mahajan field firing ranges in Rajasthan within twelve hours. I painfully noted the lack of a personal helicopter. Thankfully, my bomb disposal non-commissioned officer was a man of rare resourcefulness. He unearthed ancient railway routes, odd, serpentine lines likely last used by the British cavalry, to get us there. After a long, also-poori-fuelled journey, our train screeched into a one-camel railway station at five in the morning. It was pitch-dark. Tanks, BMPs, and trucks slumbered on flatbeds around us. Not a soul stirred. We walked to the tiny station building, shivering in the cold. Soon, a spanking new Scorpio appeared, sent by the rocket unit along with a junior commissioned officer (JCO). The driver sped like a Concorde through the misty desert roads as I kept urging him not to cross seventy. We arrived at the Mahajan camp just as dawn pinked the dunes, jaal trees, scrub bushes, and army trucks completing the desert tableau. At the rocket unit, I was cheerily informed that they hadn't brought any demolition stores. They had dispatched a "begging party" to Ganganagar to borrow some. Until then, I was invited to watch their rocket firing. I obliged. After the exercise, they held a debriefing under a camouflaged shamiana. Officers took turns praising each other and listing "lessons learnt". I waited for someone to highlight the glaring one, never come to field firing without demolition stores, but it never arrived. half past five, the borrowing party

returned, laden with the required explosives. I was summoned to dispose of the rebellious rocket. A small crowd had gathered around the pit where the heavy beast had been lowered. My assistant and I climbed in, set the charges, and used my phone torch to check the connections. We climbed out, attached the detonators to the safety fuze, and shooed away the gawkers. Trucks roared off toward safer dunes. Only one Scorpio remained, ready to whisk us out of harm's way. Once the fuse was lit, we double-checked the junction box and jumped into the Scorpio. We'd barely driven a hundred metres when we saw a white Gypsy ahead, stuck in the sand, engine dead. A few jawans were pushing, a few tying tow ropes, completely oblivious to the ticking clock. I bellowed at them to abandon the vehicle and run. "A Gypsy can be replaced. You can't." They stared for a second before I unleashed my best sergeant-major voice. The desert finally erupted into motion. One unfortunate fellow lagged behind, shuffling like a camel in slow motion. Our Scorpio's bumper nearly grazed him as he staggered along. The JCO beside me was euphoric, clapping and shouting, "Pandian is running! Pandian is running!" I ignored him, preoccupied with the hope that my detonation hadn't misfired. We soon reached the tarmac road, safely outside the debris range. I checked my watch. The explosion should have happened by now. My brain started replaying the procedure: two fuses, a backup charge. Had something gone wrong? I was about to suggest going back when the night sky erupted into a shower of golden sparks. A few seconds later, the comforting boom followed. The JCO pounded my back, jubilant. "Congratulations, Sahib! Even our CO has never achieved this!" He shook his head in disbelief. "No, Sahib. Not even the CO could make Pandian run. In BPET runs, he walks after five steps. Today you made him run a full kilometre in desert sand." By evening, the miracle had spread through the unit grapevine. "Pandian actually ran today!" echoed like breaking news across tents and mess lines. Temporary duty over, I returned to the pavilion, back to paperwork and babugiri. Yet sometimes, in idle moments, my mind drifts back to those two days in Mahajan, the rocket, the desert wind, the scrambling jawans, and the slowest runner in Rajasthan spurred into sprinting glory.

No 'legacy' needed: How CAA certificates are bridging voter registration gap for Matuas in West Bengal



The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s decision to recognise citizenship certificates issued under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as valid documentation for voter registration will be beneficial for the Matua community in West Bengal. Following the release of the draft electoral list after Special Intensive Revision (SIR), Matuas who have recently secured citizenship may now apply for voter inclusion using Form 6, specifically citing their CAA certificate as proof. Many voters faced deletion because they lacked family records in the 2002 electoral rolls. The ECI has clarified that the CAA certificate—which contains comprehen-

sive personal data—is sufficient to bridge this "no mapping" gap and establish eligibility. As per the rule, voters are typically required to show a "linkage" to the 2002 electoral rolls, either through their own name or a family member's record. Many residents, particularly within the Matua community, lack these historical records, putting them at risk of being deleted from the voter list. The ECI has clarified that a CAA certificate is sufficient to establish this linkage. Because the certificate contains verified personal and background data, it serves as a stand-alone document to prove eligibility for the final voter list. The BJP has generally supported the move. BJP leader Jagannath Chatterjee said, "Approximately 70,000 people have already applied for the CAA certificate. The inclusion of these names in the voter list is a victory for refugee rights. For Hindu refugees, the BJP is there like Himalaya to protect them." This follows previous controversy where BJP leader Shantanu Thakur faced criticism for suggesting he would accept the deletion of one lakh Matua names from the rolls in the process of deletion of illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh. "Those who have come after 2014 are normally eligible for the CAA certificate. Also, those who have a CAA certificate will normally have their names in the electoral roll. What is so special about it?" said TMC Spokesperson Aroop Chakraborty.

Congress and VBA announce tie-up for BMC polls; Prakash Ambedkar's party to contest 62 seats

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

After days of discussions and disagreements, the Congress and the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi announced on Sunday that they would fight the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections together.

"Both parties are natural allies with a common agenda of safeguarding constitutional values. The Congress and the VBA, in its earlier form of Bharip Bahujan Mahasangh, had fought elections together before 1999, and the results were that they won the majority of Lok Sabha seats. That tradition was discontinued in the meantime. I am happy to announce that we both have decided to fight the Mumbai elections as an alliance," Maharashtra Congress chief Harshavardhan Sapkal said at a joint press conference held at the state party headquarters. As per the understanding between the parties, the VBA will contest 62 out of the 227 seats in Mumbai. The Congress is also stitching up an alliance with the Left parties in certain pockets of the city. However, Mumbai Congress chief and MP Varsha Gaikwad and Ambedkar were not present at the press conference due to prior commitments. The two parties contested the recent municipal council and municipal panchayat elections together in some districts of Maharashtra. The Congress hopes to consolidate its Dalit vote bank with an alliance with the VBA across the state. In addition, the aggressive ground-level workers of VBA could also be a boost for the Congress. On the other hand, the VBA, which has zero electoral presence in municipal corporations, aims to enter urban local bodies. VBA vice-president Dhairyavardhan Pundkar said the alliance would be beneficial to both parties. "Had two of us formed the alliance earlier, the BJP could not have made the inroads in Maharashtra. But it is better that we have decided to join hands now," he said. VBA spokesperson Siddharth Mokale said the party had given its local units the authority to finalise alliances at their level.



Bengaluru newlyweds cut short honeymoon in Sri Lanka, die by suicide 1,000 km apart

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

A devastating chain of events has unfolded across two states, starting with the death of a 26-year-old woman in Bengaluru, allegedly driven by harassment from her husband and in-laws. Her suicide on Thursday was followed by her husband's death and a suicide attempt by his mother in Nagpur. The woman's death had triggered protests outside her husband's residence in Bengaluru, where her parents and relatives demanded immediate arrests. Police sources said that she had faced rejection and mistreatment from her husband's family, pushing her to take the extreme step.

Following a First Information Report (FIR) over the woman's death, her husband fled to Nagpur with his mother and brother. Thereafter, he died by suicide in Nagpur on Friday, while his mother attempted to end her life at a relative's home. She was rescued and remains hospitalised in critical condition. Reacting to the developments, the deceased woman's mother said, "They realised their mistakes. My daughter showed him so much love; he couldn't have



lived after her death." The couple got married in a lavish ceremony in Bengaluru recently. During their honeymoon in Sri Lanka, disputes erupted after the husband allegedly discovered the woman's past relationship. The arguments forced them to cut short the trip and return home on December 21. Back in Bengaluru, the woman is said to have endured continued humiliation from her in-laws. Relatives claimed that she resisted divorce due to concerns over family honour.

Excise raid during party at pub in Pune's Viman Nagar, items worth over Rs 3.6 lakh seized



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The Maharashtra excise department raided an alleged illegal night party at The Noir pub in Viman Nagar area of

Pune city in the early hours of Saturday. Acting on a tip-off, a team led by Atul Kanade, Superintendent of the State Excise Department, Pune, raided the pub on Airport Road around 5 am. Kanade said, "A party was going on at the pub illegally. Legal action was taken against 52 persons found at the party. They included 42 men and women, who participated in the party. An offence was lodged against ten managers of the pub. Of them, two managers have been remanded to judicial custody by a court." Search is on for the main accused, Amarjeet Singh, the pub owner," said Kanade. The state excise department team has seized furniture, a sound system, a computer, a laptop, about 178 foreign liquor bottles, and other items, all worth Rs 3.6 lakh, during the raid at the pub. In view of several night parties planned for the New Year Celebration, the state excise department has formed 21 flying squads to take action against illegal liquor parties in the city.

Jatayu vulture released in Pench Tiger Reserve, soaring near Anjaneri hills in Nashik

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

A Jatayu (long-billed vulture) that was released in the Pench Tiger Reserve on December 11 reached 38 km away from Anjaneri on Saturday. A Jatayu (long-billed vulture) that was released in the Pench Tiger Reserve on December 11 reached 38 km away from Anjaneri on Saturday. (Express Photo)

The Anjaneri hills near Trimbakeshwar in Maharashtra's Nashik district are known as the birthplace of Lord Hanuman. Named after his mother, the hills hold mythological importance in the Ramayana. It has been a famous habitat for vultures too. In an interesting coincidence, J132, a Jatayu (long-billed vulture) that was released in the Pench Tiger Reserve on December 11 reached 38 km away from Anjaneri on Saturday. Researchers from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) are monitoring the bird and disclosed its interesting journey. This Jatayu has used the Nagpur-Wardha-Yavatmal-Hingoli-Washim-Buldhana-Jalna-Chatrapati Sambhaji Nagar route and spent 15 days



From apartments to global scams: Inside Maharashtra's fake call centre boom



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Fake call centres, once largely confined to metros such as Mumbai and Pune, have quietly spread into Maharashtra's hinterland, operating out of tier 2 cities and industrial townships. Drawn by cheaper real estate, reliable internet connectivity and a steady pool of English-speaking youth with prior BPO experience, these operations are now running global scams far from the scrutiny faced in major cities. For law enforcement agencies, the shift has exposed systemic gaps: weak monitoring of internet services, lax verification of business registrations, fragmented regulatory oversight and limited coordination between the local police and Central agencies. These loopholes, officers said, allow fraudulent call centres to resurface almost as quickly as they are shut down.

Over the past year, the Maharashtra Police have busted several such operations in Igatpuri, Nashik and Aurangabad. A senior IPS officer who has led multiple raids on fake call centres said their growth is largely enabled by unregulated internet access. "These bogus call centres are running because they get internet facilities easily from service providers. There are no restrictions or monitoring agencies overseeing internet services. All that is required is a registered firm. The accused register firms using bogus documents, and no one verifies whether the company actually exists at the address submitted. It is enough to submit a company certificate to the internet service provider to get a connection," the officer said. Concerned by the scale of fraud and the possibility of official complicity, Central agencies have also stepped in. This year, in August and September, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raided two call centres in Nashik and Igatpuri, suspecting the involve-

ment of public servants, including police and bank officials, and arrested several people. Last month, following large financial transactions linked to these cases, the Enforcement Directorate's Mumbai unit initiated proceedings to trace the money trail. An official explained that setting up such operations requires little more than basic infrastructure. "After registering a firm on bogus documents and obtaining a licence under the Shop and Establishment Act from the local municipal authority, operators rent an apartment and equip it with chairs, tables, electricity and an internet connection. From there, they start calling people overseas using VoIP numbers," the official said. With no dedicated authority in India to monitor such businesses, operators often function from small apartments in residential buildings, employing only a handful of people working on laptops, he added. The police broadly classify fake call centres into two categories, financial and non-financial, both of which require basic networking knowledge and prior experience in legitimate call centres. Financial call centres are allegedly involved in high-value frauds, including trading scams, loan and insurance fraud, impersonation of US tax officials, and debit and credit card scams. Victims are lured into fake investments in mutual funds and insurance products, including health and home insurance. Non-financial call centres typically target customers facing software or router-related issues. Operators register with Google AdWords, placing advertisements that prompt overseas customers to call them. Victims in the US, UK and Canada are also targeted for the illegal sale of Viagra and other banned medicines. Communication is carried out using VoIP services. In both models, a partner abroad provides a local address and contact number. For instance, a group targeting US residents will use American contact details in online advertisements to gain credibility, while the operation itself runs from India. The police said the rapid spread of fake call centres in smaller towns is closely linked to the availability of computer-literate, English-speaking youth in semi-urban districts. With growing access to IT courses, BPO training institutes and basic technical education, these regions offer a low-cost workforce that scam operators readily exploit. A senior IPS officer said that nine illegal call centres were busted in Mumbai in 2024. But in spite of heightened vigilance, the number has slightly increased, with 10 such centres being raided this year. "Lakhs of people use the internet, so monitoring each individual or entity is difficult unless there is specific intelligence," the officer said.

Railways in Punjab in 2025: big investment, new trains and revival of stalled links

With a railway budget allocation of Rs 5,421 crore for 2025-26 and projects worth around Rs 25,000 crore underway, 2025 emerged as a decisive year for Punjab's rail infrastructure. The Railways introduced three new train services from the state between June and November, expanded long-distance connectivity through extensions, announced the revival of rail links pending for decades, and pushed ahead with the redevelopment of 30 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat scheme at a cost of Rs 1,122 crore. Minister of State for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu said, "Average annual investment from 2009-14 was Rs 225 crore. However, annual investment only in 2025-26 is Rs 5,421 crore, which is 24 times higher than during the previous Government."

While the announcements marked one of the biggest railway pushes Punjab has seen in recent years, most projects are still at execution stages, making timely completion the key challenge ahead. Three new train services were started from Punjab in 2025, strengthening religious, regional, and high-speed connectivity. The Firozpur Cantt-Hazur Sahib Nanded Weekly Express commenced operations on June 13, departing from Firozpur every Friday and returning to Nanded on Sundays. Shortly thereafter, the Firozpur Cantt-Haridwar Weekly Express was introduced on June 18, with the train leaving Firozpur every Wednesday night and operating the return journey from Haridwar on Thursdays, catering largely to pilgrims. The most significant addition came later in the year with the inauguration of the Firozpur Cantonment-New Delhi Vande Bharat Express on November 8. Operating six days a week except on

Wednesdays, the train became the first high-speed service for the Malwa region. The Vande Bharat has scheduled halts at Dhuri, Barnala, Bathinda, Faridkot, and Patiala in Punjab before entering Ambala in Haryana. A stop at Barnala was added a week after the inauguration, following demands from local residents. The train covers a distance of 486 km in six hours and 40 minutes and is being seen as a major addition to Punjab's railway network, particularly for the Malwa districts, which received their first high-speed train. In regional services, the Intercity Superfast Express, which earlier operated between Moga and New Delhi, has been extended to originate from Firozpur from November onwards. The extended service runs twice a week on Mondays and Fridays, improving direct rail connectivity between Firozpur and the national capital. Apart from new trains, the Railways continued to strengthen connectivity by extending existing long-distance services from Firozpur. The Firozpur-Rameswaram Humsafar Express, inaugurated on October 2, 2018, was extended to start from Firozpur on October 3, 2023. The weekly service departs from Rameswaram on Saturdays and operates the return journey from Firozpur on Tuesdays. Similarly, the Tripura Sundari Express, introduced in July 2016, operates on a weekly basis between Firozpur and Agartala. The extension of this train to Firozpur was also carried out from 2023 onwards, providing Punjab with direct rail connectivity to the northeastern states. Station redevelopment remained a key focus area during the year. Under the Amrit Bharat railway station scheme, redevelopment work is underway at 30 stations across Punjab, expanded from the initially announced 22 stations.

SIR draft nears completion in UP, CM Adityanath hits the ground to review progress



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

At each of these meetings, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, as well as BJP office bearers and divisional in-charges were being called for a review with the Chief Minister himself. At each of these meetings, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, as well as BJP office bearers and divisional in-charges were being called for a review with the Chief Minister himself. (Image: Yogi Adityanath/X)

With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) urging its leaders, including public representatives, to actively participate in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists at the grassroots level, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has hit the ground to personally review progress of the exercise. Having held SIR-related review meetings at the divisional level of the party in Aligarh on Sunday, the Chief Minister visited Moradabad, Ghaziabad and Agra on Monday, sources said. He would be covering at least three more divisions on Tuesday, they added.

At each of these meetings, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, as well as BJP office bearers and divisional in-charges were being called for a review with the Chief Minister himself. He asked them about last minute hitches, if any, and directed that no eligible person is left out and no fake entries are allowed into the system. Aligarh District President, Rajeev Sharma, said public representatives of the party and office bearers from Aligarh, Hathras, Etah and Kannanji were

100 acres of 'encroachments' demolished at Gujarat's Kandla Port



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The Deendayal Port Authority (DPA), formerly known as the Kandla Port Trust, and Kutch (East) Police collectively demolished residential and commercial encroachments, with the operation involving around 40 officers and 500 personnel. (Express Photo) The Deendayal Port Authority (DPA), formerly known as the Kandla Port Trust, and Kutch (East) Police collectively demolished residential and commercial encroachments, with the operation involving around 40 officers and 500 personnel. The Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) and Kutch (East) Police demolished residential and commercial encroachments on 100 acres

of land at Kandla Port on Monday morning.

The demolition was centred around the Mitha Port area, and around 40 officers and 500 personnel were involved in the operation. Officials said that not only were the structures over 100 acres of land "illegal", but were a "threat to national security", with some homes owned by history-sheets. Around 4,000 to 5,000 people lived in this area near the coastline over a 100-acre piece of land valued at Rs 250 crore. "The Mitha Port encroachment is an area with physical and property related encroachments by accused and known bootleggers. The number of crimes related to the Petroleum Act and the Damage to Public Property Act is especially high," said a statement from the police on Monday. For this operation, the authority used around 20 JCBs, 20 Hitachis, 40 loaders, 40 dumpers, and 100 tractors. Further, drones and cameras were used to capture video footage of the entire operation. Speaking to The Indian Express, SP Sagar Bagmar of Kutch (East) said, "The Mitha Port stretch encroachment is right next to the shoreline and is all on port land. Many residents are also on the police list of miscreants whose illegal properties were to be demolished anyway. We have not touched any religious structures as of now." He further added, "These encroachments being on the shoreline was a national security threat and there have been several incidents of pilferage from oil pipelines passing through this area."

Akal Takht pronounces religious sentences against former Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, GNDU V-C Karamjit Singh; Virsa Valtoha allowed to rejoin SAD



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

akal takht Acting Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj announced the decision after a meeting at Akal Takht in Amritsar, the temporal seat of Sikhism. The Sikh clergy Monday pronounced religious sentences (tanhah) against four prominent figures, including former Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh and Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) Vice Chancellor Dr Karamjit Singh.

Acting Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj announced the decision after a meeting at Akal Takht in Amritsar, the temporal seat of Sikhism. Former Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh appeared before the clergy to apologise for the controversial 2015 pardon granted to Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. The Takht held him guilty of wrongly granting the pardon, which was revoked after 23 days, under the political influence of Sukhbir Singh Badal. He has been directed to perform religious penance for this misconduct. The Acting Jathedar also pronounced a sentence for GNDU V-C D Karamjit Singh, directing him to perform volunteer service washing utensils at the Darbar Sahib community kitchen. Furthermore, he has been ordered to distribute 500 copies of a book. This decision stems from a controversy in July regarding Dr Singh's participation in an RSS-linked event in Mysuru. During the event, he reportedly briefed RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on university initiatives, including a PhD course on 'Bharatiya Parampara' and a study linking the Rigveda with Guru Nanak Dev's teachings. The Akal Takht secretariat previously summoned him for expressing views deemed contrary to Gurmat philosophy. In a parallel development, the clergy granted relief to veteran politician Virsa Singh Valtoha. Valtoha, who appeared before the Takht and tendered an unconditional apology, has been permitted to rejoin the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). He was also directed to perform religious voluntary service as penance. Valtoha was expelled from the SAD for 10 years in October 2024.

Rape accused shot in leg during scuffle with police in Ahmedabad

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

A man accused of raping a mentally challenged woman was injured on Monday after suffering a gunshot wound to the leg during a scuffle with officers of the Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) of the Ahmedabad City Police. According to DCP (Crime) Ajit Rajian, the incident took place when the accused allegedly tried to escape the custody of crime branch officials during a reconstruction of the crime scene. The accused is in six days' police remand. A statement by Rajian on Monday afternoon said, "The accused was injured after assaulting police and attempting to escape custody during a reconstruction of the rape offense. The incident occurred between 12:15 pm and 12:30 pm today, while the Crime Branch team was conducting the reconstruction." Regarding the scuffle, the statement added, "The accused allegedly attempted to assault the police team and seize a weapon from Police Inspector Imran Ghasura at the reconstruction site. During the scuffle, a round was fired, which struck the accused in the leg. Additionally, Head Constable Bharat Rathod sustained injuries during the confrontation." The man was arrested last week for the alleged rape of a mentally challenged woman earlier this year. The police said he has an extensive criminal record, with over 16 offences registered against him. He has previously been detained under the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (PASA) twice and has also faced extemal proceedings.

Winter Session of Karnataka legislature begins amid shadow of Siddaramaiah-DKS power tussle; Oppn to raise farmers' plight



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The Winter Session of the Karnataka legislature began in the North Karnataka district of Belagavi Monday as the shadow of a power tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar loomed over the Congress government even as the Opposition BJP-JD(S) alliance looks to corner it. Despite Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, often referred to as DKS, putting up a show of unity and signalling a temporary truce to their power struggle at the instance of the Congress central leadership – they hosted breakfast meetings for each other on November 29 and December 2 – the fault lines in the Congress are likely to re-emerge after the legislature session.

The Belagavi session is expected to see the Opposition question the Congress for allowing the administration of the state to take a backseat amid its internal power struggle besides raising issues like farmers' protests over sugarcane and maize procurements – a crucial issue in northern Karnataka which is heavily dependent on agriculture. The session is expected to be a forum for Siddaramaiah to highlight the decisions taken under his initiative to alleviate farmers' problems and his political agenda focused on social justice for backward and weaker communities in the state. Shivakumar, whose politics is largely Bengaluru-focused, will have lesser prominence. Farmers in distress, Congress has not addressed unemployment. The BJP's Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, who is the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Legislative Council, said on Monday that the party will corner the Congress government on the issues affecting sugarcane and maize farmers as well as teachers who have been protesting against contract appointments.

"The problems of farmers, teachers, and students has

to be addressed. The negligence of farmers and the delay in addressing issues will be raised. We are not looking at the problems of Bengaluru and Mysuru, but we need to address the problems of North Karnataka since the session is being held in Belagavi," Narayanaswamy said on Monday. The BJP has threatened to move a no-confidence motion against the Congress government despite lacking numbers in the Legislative Assembly which has 140 Congress legislators compared to the Opposition's 82. "The legislature session must discuss the major issues in the state. The farmers are in distress. The state government has been negligent. The Congress has claimed that it will address unemployment but it has not done this. The issues of irrigation in North Karnataka must be discussed," said BJP state president B Y Vijayendra. During the session, the Congress government is expected to highlight its support for backward communities and minorities – its core voter base – by introducing new laws. One controversial legislation slated for introduction in the Belagavi session is a Bill against hate speech. The Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025 was approved for tabling in the legislature by the Congress Cabinet on December 4. The new law proposes to "curb and prevent dissemination, publication or promotion of hate speech and crimes, which cause disharmony, hatred in the society, against the person or group of persons, organisations and provide punishment to such crimes." The Bill prescribes a jail term of up to 10 years for repeated offences. The BJP has questioned the Bill, saying it lacks objectivity and is intended to subjectively target its leaders and right-wing activists. "We will oppose the Bill because it does not specify what constitutes hate speech," BJP leader C T Ravi said.

A Bill titled the Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2025, is also set to be introduced in the Winter Session. "It has been observed that unconstitutional practices such as boycotts, imposition of various punishments by extra-judicial bodies such as caste or community panchayats, etc., are still in practice in various communities in the state, resulting in great harassment to individuals or groups in leading their lives with dignity," says the proposed Bill. On account of robust numbers in the Assembly and a marginal majority in the Legislative Council, the Congress government is on a strong footing in both houses to be able to push through bills. Meanwhile, the Opposition BJP and JD(S) lack proper cohesion due to internal differences, making it a challenge for them to effectively pin the government on issues.

Calendar debate resurfaces ahead of Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary, Sikh community calls for definitive resolution from Akal Takht



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh unveils the portrait of Allah Yaar Khan Jogi at Central Sikh Museum, in Amritsar on Tuesday. Akal Takht's directives issued on January 7, 2010, reaffirmed all traditional dates, including Guru Arjan Dev Ji's Shaheedi. As Punjab prepares for the Parkash Purab (birth anniversary) of Guru Gobind Singh, the long-standing debate over the Nanakshahi Calendar has resurfaced, leaving many in the Sikh community uncertain whether to celebrate the Guru's birth anniversary or observe the Shaheedi Saptah—the solemn week commemorating the martyrdom of his four sons and his mother Mata Gujri.

This year, Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Parkash Purab (Poh Sudi Saptami) falling on the seventh day of the waxing moon (Sudi) in the Sikh lunar month of Poh, usually in late December or early January, and is celebrated as a major festival falls on December 27, coinciding with the week of martyrdom, a situation that Sikh scholars say has occurred repeatedly every three–five years after the introduction of a new calendar. There are also alleged attempts to alter the Guru's birth date and permanently set it to a specific day. The Martyrdom week usually starts from December 22.

Sikh academics point out that this overlap is not new. The fixed observance of Shaheedi Saptah in the last week of December, combined with the practice of using the lunar calendar for Gurpurabs and the solar calendar for Sangrands, creates periodic overlaps. This same situation occurred in 2010, 2017 and 2022. In past instances, Sikh leaders have approached the Akal Takht Sahib, the highest temporal authority of Sikhism, seeking clarity or corrections to the dates. The last week of December is traditionally marked to honour the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's elder sons—Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh—as well as the martyrdom of the younger Sahibzadas—Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh—and Mata Gujri Ji. According to the lunar calendar, Parkash Purab falls on Poh Sudi Seven, which is December 27 this year, coinciding directly with Shaheedi Saptah. Sikh scholars emphasise that historically, Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Parkash Purab has always been observed on Poh Sudi Saptami, a date recorded in manuscripts, hukamnamas, and long-standing Sikh tradition. "Confusion began after 1999." Traditionally, Sikh religious dates were determined using two natural time-keeping systems—lunar (Chandramas) for Gurpurabs and solar (Sangrands) for the start of months. There was no confusion for centuries," said the US-based Sikh scholar and legislative expert Gurcharanji Singh Lamba. "But after 1999, with the introduction of the Panchanga-based Nanakshahi Calendar, unnecessary disputes began. It created confusion about Gurpurab dates, Sangrands, and major Sikh historical events." Giving examples, Lamba said the SGPC calendar of 2017–18 placed the martyrdom days of the Sahibzadas between December 22–27, while Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Parkash Purab fell on December 25, 2017, again overlapping with Shaheedi Saptah. "At that time, Akal Takht Sahib had clearly advised SGPC not to change the Guru's birth date," Lamba said. He added that overlap should not cause confusion?"In Sikhism,

there is no sorrow or happiness. The same Kirtan and Ardas are performed during Parkash Purab as well as during the martyrdom days. Even historically, the day Guru Sahib sent his sons toward martyrdom in December 1704 was also his own birthday." Akal Takht's directives issued on January 7, 2010, reaffirmed all traditional dates, including Guru Arjan Dev Ji's Shaheedi: Jeth Sudi 4, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji's Parkash: Poh Sudi 7, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji's Jyoti Jot: Chet Sudi 5, Guru Granth Sahib Ji's Gurdabdi: Katak Sudi 2 and Sangrands: To follow the traditional solar calendar etc. Despite this, Lamba said, "Some groups still try to fix Sikh dates of Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday according to the Gregorian calendar, which cannot align with the lunar-solar system. Poh Sudi Saptami will occur only once each Sikh year and can never permanently fall on a particular date like January 5, which was suggested for Guru's Birthday earlier."

He explained that Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Parkash Purab can naturally fall anytime between the last week of December and early January, depending on lunar movements. Community members say the recurring confusion points to the need for a final and binding clarification from Akal Takht Sahib, preferably adopting one consistent system for all Sikh dates. They note that while Shaheedi Saptah was traditionally observed mainly at historic martyrdom sites through Jorh Melas, in recent decades it has come to be observed more widely and prominently across the community, increasing the need for clarity. "Those repeatedly attempting to disrupt Gurpurab dates are harming community unity," Lamba said. "This issue must be resolved permanently with strict enforcement of Akal Takht Sahib's decisions."

Telangana's fertility rate to fall to 1.5 by 2031-35, says report

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Hyderabad: Telangana is poised to become one of India's most demographically mature states, a status that means there will be a near halt to population growth. Projections indicate its Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is set to drop to 1.5 by 2031-35, based on the 'Population Projections for India and States 2011-35', a recent report by Census of India. The sharp decline, which is accompanied by increased longevity among Telangana's population, is not just a state-level trend. It reflects the national fertility levels highlighted in last month's UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) 2025 'State of World Population' report.

The 1.5 TFR for Telangana is much lower than the 1.9 national TFR mentioned in the UNFPA report, which makes Telangana a key state driving the country's shift towards below replacement fertility. The 'Population Projections for India and States 2011-35' report indicates that Telangana's progress in socio-economic development, access to health, and education is leading to this near halt in population growth. The State's Population Growth Rate, at 7.1 per thousand in 2011-15, a period covering the erstwhile undivided state, is projected to fall to a near-zero rate of 0.3 per thousand in 2031-35. The decline is steady across the years with the rate dropping from 5.4 (2016-2020) to 3.5 (2021-23) and further to 1.7 by 2026-2030. The recent United Nations report noted that the real concern linked to dropping fertility levels is not over-population or underpopulation. The report said the drop in fertility rates reflects the failure to meet the reproductive goals and needs of individuals, showing the preference of many people to either have fewer children or delay the decision to have children. Based on these reports and data,

Thailand-Cambodia clashes reignite; one Thai soldier, four Cambodian civilians killed



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Thailand launched air strikes Monday on its neighbour Cambodia, with both sides trading blame for renewed fighting on their disputed border that has killed four Cambodian civilians and a Thai soldier. Around 35,000 people in Thailand have been evacuated from border areas, the country's Second Army Region said in a statement. Five days of combat between Thailand and Cambodia this summer killed 43 people and displaced around 300,000 on both sides of the border before a truce took effect.

But last month Thailand paused a follow-on deal backed by U.S. President Donald Trump to wind down hostilities, saying a landmine blast at the border had wounded several soldiers. Since then, Cambodian and Thai officials have reported sporadic skirmishes along their frontier, which reigned Sunday and Monday, sending thousands of civilians on both sides fleeing their homes. "The village head told us to evacuate, and given what happened in July, I complied immediately," said farmer Pannarat Woratham who lives just a few kilometres from the border in Thailand's Surin province and evacuated Sunday afternoon to a temple sheltering the displaced. It was the second time the 59-year-old had fled since late July when open combat was waged with fighter jets, missile strikes and ground troops, killing both civilians and soldiers. "Of course many of us thought the conflict was finally over. It shouldn't have happened again like this," Pannarat told AFP. Around 35,000 people in Thailand have been evacuated from areas along the border since the renewed fighting, Thailand's Second Army Region said in a statement. Cambodia's information minister Neth Pheaktra told reporters at least 1,157 families had evacuated to safety in the border province of Oddar Meanchey. Military objectives: Both sides reported a brief skirmish on Sunday, which Thailand's military had said left

Water leak at Paris Louvre Museum damages books at Egyptian antiquities department

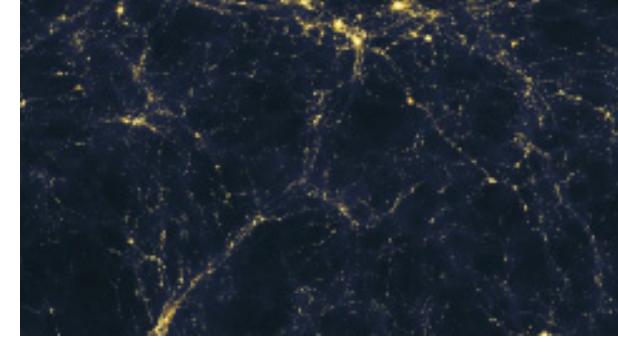
GNS News Agency, Dec 31

A water leak last month damaged hundreds of books in the Egyptian antiquities department at the Louvre, underscoring the deteriorating state of the world's most visited museum just weeks after a daring jewel heist exposed security flaws. Specialist website La Tribune de l'Art reported that around 400 rare books were affected, blaming poor pipe conditions. It said the department had long sought funds to protect the collection from such risks without success. Le Louvre's deputy administrator, Francis Steinbock, told BFM TV on Sunday (December 7, 2025) the water pipe leak concerned one of the three rooms of the library of the Egyptian antiquities department.

"We have identified between 300 and 400 works, the count is ongoing," he said, adding the books lost were "those consulted by Egyptologists but no precious books." He acknowledged the problem had been known for years and said repairs were scheduled for September 2026. Four burglars made off in broad daylight with jewels worth \$102 mil-



lion on October 19, exposing glaring security gaps at Le Louvre. In November, structural weaknesses prompted the partial closure of one of the gallery hosting Greek vases and offices. A report published in October by France's public audit body, known as the Cour des Comptes, said the museum's inability to update its infrastructure was exacerbated by excessive spending on artwork.



University of Oxford researchers reported a roughly 50-million-lightyear-long filament traced by at least 14 galaxies. In particular, the team found the way the galaxies were spinning lined up with the filament, suggesting the entire filament was slowly rotating. Thus the team has claimed it is "one of the largest spinning structures ever found in the universe".

Astronomers map filaments by measuring the positions and distances of many galaxies and then tracing the patterns they form in the sky. Computer simulations have shown similar webs, giving astronomers confidence that these structures arise naturally from small ripples in the early universe and grew under gravity's influence into the vast, connected network we see today. On December 3,

Israel, Qatar and U.S. hold trilateral meeting in New York



GNS News Agency, Dec 31 The United States, Israel and Qatar held a trilateral meeting in New York Sunday (December 7, 2025), a senior White House official told AFP, months after Israeli jets conducted an airstrike in Doha, unsuccessfully targeting Hamas leadership. The White House official confirmed that the meeting had taken place but did not provide any further details.

Two sources told U.S. news outlet Axios it was "the highest level meeting between the countries since the deal

to end the war in Gaza, for which Qatar served as a key mediator." Axios also reported White House envoy Steve Witkoff hosted the meeting, with Mossad spy chief David Barnea representing Israel and an unnamed senior Qatari official in attendance. Qatar, along with Egypt and the United States, helped broker a comprehensive ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which remains delicate as both Israel and Hamas accuse each other of breaching its terms. On Saturday (December 6, 2025), Qatar and Egypt both called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the deployment of an international stabilization force to fully implement the fragile agreement to end the conflict in Gaza.

Speaking at a diplomatic conference in Doha, Qatari premier Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said "a ceasefire cannot be completed unless there is full withdrawal of the Israeli forces (and) there is stability back in Gaza." Axios reported that the main focus of Sunday's meeting was largely "on the implementation of the Gaza peace agreement." The Israeli strike on Doha on September 9 unsuccessfully targeted top Hamas negotiator Khalil al-Hayra and others in the Palestinian militant group.

This hidden addiction keeps us glued to smartphones. Here's how to fix it



Two soldiers wounded. But the fighting escalated early Monday morning. Thai Army spokesman Winthai Suvarree told reporters on Monday that one soldier was killed and eight were wounded in attacks by Cambodian troops near the border. Thailand had launched air strikes against its neighbour in an act of self-defence, he said.

"The Thai air power is being used only against Cambodian military targets, which allows damage to be contained and halts Cambodia's supporting fire that caused Thai casualties," Winthai said at a press conference. "The air strikes are highly precise and aimed solely at military objectives along the clash line, with no impact on civilians." Cambodia's defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata, however, said Thai forces had attacked Cambodian troops in Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey provinces early Monday, accusing Thailand of "firing multiple shots with tanks at Tamone Thom temple" and other areas near Preah Vihear temple. Maly Socheata later told reporters that the Thai military attacked Cambodian forces in Preah Vihear with an F-16 jet at around 9:00 am. She added that Thai military fire in the two provinces had wounded some civilians and burned their homes, while forcing others to flee. A Cambodian journalist was wounded by shrapnel from a Thai rocket in Oddar Meanchey, Neth Pheaktra, the minister, told AFP. A soldier in Preah Vihear said Monday morning that Thai forces were firing shells across the border into Cambodia. He declined to be identified because he was not authorised to speak to the media. Met Measphakey, a spokesman for the Oddar Meanchey provincial administration, said gunfire was reported in the areas of the centuries-old Tamone Thom and Ta Krabei temples. The Thai army also accused Cambodian forces of firing BM-21 rockets towards civilian areas in Buri Ram province, with no casualties reported. Cycles of confrontation: The United States, China and Malaysia, as chair of the regional bloc ASEAN, brokered the cessation of fighting in July. In October, Trump co-signed a follow-on joint declaration, touting new trade deals with Thailand and Cambodia after they agreed to prolong their ceasefire. But Thailand suspended the agreement the following month, and the two sides then traded accusations of renewed clashes in which Cambodia said a civilian was killed. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim urged both sides on Monday to halt the fighting and utilise diplomacy. "Our region cannot afford to see long-standing disputes slip into cycles of confrontation," Anwar said in a statement. The conflict centres on a century-old disagreement over borders mapped during France's colonial rule in the region, with both sides claiming a smattering of boundary temples.

I've been thinking deeply about the forces that keep us glued to our phones. Why do we pick up the phone and become oblivious to time, watching endless streams of reels or doomsrolling down X feeds. I noticed that the real culprit isn't just the algorithmic fine-tuning of social media applications. It's texting. Yes, that quiet, polite, seemingly harmless act we do everyday on our smartphones. Texting via WhatsApp is clearly the hidden engine of our smartphone fixation. It is the thing that keeps the device within arm's reach even when no notification pops up.

We often talk about social media addiction as if the platforms themselves are pulling every string, but when I'm honest with myself, the behaviour that most reliably brings my phone to my hand is the arrival of a text on WhatsApp. Deep down, my brain responds to the text the way it would to someone tapping me on the shoulder. It feels like a social cue that signals me to reply. And because ignoring a cue like that creates friction, I find myself checking more often than I ever intended to. That stress becomes the gateway to all other distractions. I'll respond to the message, yes, but then I'll check one more thing, then another, and before long the entire digital carnival has unfurled itself in front of me.

So, here's how I decided to tackle my own dependency

at its root, not by fighting dopamine loops or deleting apps, but by renegotiating my relationship with the device itself. The first rule was to break my "all-day available" habit. This was making me slave to the machine and keeping me on an 'always ready' mode to respond to an incoming text. Once I broke this habit by enforcing a time-in and a time-out period, I noticed that my nerves felt cooler. This also made me stop nursing the idea of someone waiting for my response. Then, I stopped carrying the phone around everywhere I go. For instance, when I go for a walk or jog, I don't take the phone with me anymore. That gives me roughly forty-fifty minutes of no-device time. This phone-free time has clearly helped me connect deeply with my inner thoughts. Thirdly, I started batching my replies. Instead of responding in real-time, I handle messages in bulk, in focused intervals. At first it felt rude. But the truth surprised me; most people didn't notice, and the ones who did, adapted quickly. Just as we learn a doctor's availability without responding to it, people learn ours as soon as we consistently signal it. To make this batching work, I had to change how I replied. Rather than firing off short, back-and-forth exchanges, I started sending messages that answered the next two or three likely questions. Fewer loose ends means fewer reasons for both parties to reopen the conversation an hour later. And for genuine emergencies, I set up narrow avenues for instant reachability: specific contacts who can get through Do Not Disturb, or a simple rule that if something is urgent, they should call, not text. These three simple rules have helped me be more focused and provide. And most importantly, what surprised me most wasn't the practical change, but the emotional one. When I reduced the constant trickle of digital chatter, my communications were fully developed. Today, with texting via WhatsApp, we have created this illusion of connection that lacks substance. Texting may be the most invisible driver of our smartphone dependency, but once we see it clearly, we can choose a different relationship with it, and with our own minds.

China positive on Putin's India visit; calls for stronger trilateral cooperation



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

China on Monday (December 8, 2025) reacted positively to Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, framing the three countries as an important part of the Global South and said sound trilateral ties are conducive to regional and global peace and stability, besides their own national interests. "China, Russia and India are emerging economies and important members of the Global South," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing in Beijing, reacting for the first time to Mr. Putin's high-profile visit to New Delhi last week and his interactions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Guo said that the three countries maintaining sound relations are not only in line with their own interests but also conducive to regional and global peace, security, stability and prosperity. Mr. Putin's visit was watched here closely, considering Beijing's close and strong ties with Moscow. Responding to a question about Mr. Putin's comments about New Delhi and Beijing ahead of his visit, Mr.

Guo said that China stands ready to work with Russia and India to continue promoting the development of bilateral relations. In an interview ahead of his visit, Mr. Putin had said, "India and China are our closest friends — we treasure that relationship deeply." On India-China relations — currently on a path of normalisation after the Eastern Ladakh confrontation which resulted in a freeze in ties from 2020 until last year — Mr. Guo said China wants to promote sustained and strong ties with New Delhi with a long-term perspective. China stands ready to work with India to view and handle bilateral relations from a strategic height and a long-term perspective, promote sustained, strong and steady development of ties to benefit the two countries and their peoples, and make a due contribution to peace and prosperity in Asia and beyond, he said. Besides terming New Delhi and Beijing as close friends of Moscow, Mr. Putin, in the interview with an Indian news channel, also expressed confidence that the leaderships of India and China are committed to finding solutions to their issues, and Russia has "no right" to interfere in their bilateral affairs. Chinese official media highlighted Mr. Putin's comments on India-China relations. The state-run Xinhua news agency carried his remarks refuting U.S. accusations over India's purchases of Russian oil. For its part, China tops the list of countries purchasing Russian oil and gas, and rejected U.S. calls to halt the imports to penalise Moscow for continuing its war on Ukraine. During his visit, a host of agreements were signed to boost trade and economic ties between the two countries. Both sides also worked out an Economic Cooperation Programme to increase trade volume to \$100 billion by 2030.

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Thailand releases 18 Cambodian prisoners of war as part of ceasefire agreement

Bangkok: Thailand on Wednesday released 18 Cambodian prisoners of war held for five months, fulfilling the terms of a ceasefire agreement the two countries signed to end bitter fighting along their border. The release was stipulated in the ceasefire agreement signed Saturday by the defence ministers of the two countries at the same border checkpoint between Thailand's Chanthaburi province and Cambodia's Pailin province where the soldiers were released.

The repatriation of the 18 Cambodian soldiers was undertaken as a demonstration of goodwill and confidence-building, as well as in adherence to international humanitarian principles, Thailand's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Cambodia's Defence Ministry said the release "creates an environment conducive to peace, stability, and the full normalisation of relations for the benefit of both nations and their people in the near future." The soldiers' release removes a major impediment toward that goal after two rounds of destructive combat over competing territorial claims. Thailand had insisted it was allowed to hold the men under provisions of the Geneva Conventions governing the

rules of war, which says they could be detained until the end of hostilities. The prisoners were allowed visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other rights covered under international humanitarian law, Thai authorities said. Their continued detention was used effectively by Cambodia's government to rally nationalist sentiment in the conflict against Thailand. Wednesday's statement from Cambodia's defence ministry said the government "has remained steadfast in the promise made to the families of the 18 soldiers and the Cambodian people: that no soldier would be left behind." The ceasefire agreement said the soldiers would be freed if the end of combat was sustained for 72 hours after it came into effect at noon on Saturday. The 72 hours passed on Tuesday, but Thai authorities said they needed to evaluate the situation, claiming that 250 Cambodian drones had been active along the border. The two countries had given differing accounts of the circumstances of the men's capture, which took place on the same day the initial ceasefire came into effect at the end of July. Cambodian officials say their soldiers approached the Thai position with friendly intentions to offer post-fighting greetings.

There's something in the Mumbai air



Shabnam Abdul Gaffar Shah, 35, is wheezing. The air around her in the slums of Mumbai's Mankhurd, a few hundred metres from an under-construction metro project, smells of soot and dust. "Everyone in the house – my three children, husband, and I – has been ill for the past month. We went to the doctor. He said, 'Hawa kharab hai (The air is bad).' The cough and cold wouldn't go," she says, sitting just outside her single-room home on a road down which rush schoolchildren, honking two-wheelers, BEST buses trying to navigate dug-up peripheries, and streetside vendors jostling for space in the same chaos. Medical expenses have become a challenge, she says. "Kitni dawa-daru karengé? (How much will we spend on medicines?) Around 15 km away, in Matunga, an area dotted with several top ranking colleges, including Podar and Ruia, professors of Khalsa College are worried about their students who commute by public transport and walk down dusty roads to reach the campus. The construction of high-rise structures to replace old four-storeyed ones is in full swing in the area.

A study by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) in 2023 to find out the sources of air pollution in 10 cities in the State showed that dust contributed to 30% of PM10 pollution in Mumbai. PM is a reference to particulate matter, which can be inhaled, defined by its diameter: 10 micrometres and 2.5 micrometres, for instance. These can enter the lungs and have an adverse effect on health, both immediate and in the long-term, if exposure is constant.

Mumbai's air quality over the past three years has frequently ranged from 'moderate' to 'severe', with PM2.5 and PM10 levels often exceeding safe limits, driven up by vehicular emissions, dust, and winter conditions that lead to stagnation of air. Respirer Living Sciences, a climate tech start-up, released a report this year that stated that Mumbai saw a 2.6% increase in PM2.5 levels from 35.2 g/m³ in 2019 to 36.1 g/m³ in 2024, reflecting a persisting air quality issue for India's financial capital. It added that Mumbai witnessed remarkable improvement in the number of 'good' days, increasing from 164 in 2021 to 184 in 2024. However, the persistence of 'moderate' and 'poor' days in 2022 and 2023 highlighted the presence of localised pollution sources, particularly during construction-heavy periods, it stated. Barely 3 km away, advocate Shweta Mehta stays in a neighbourhood touted to be the next big connectivity hub of coastal Mumbai: Wadala. Located less than 2 km from the upcoming New Cuffe Parade area, where metro, monorail, and key infrastructure projects are coming up, the dust in the area is thick.

Mehta, who lives in an apartment block, says, "Due to poor air quality over the past few months, I have been restricting my parents from stepping out. They have lung-related ailments and I have asked them to stay indoors." She is aware that her ageing parents are beginning to feel frustrated and lonely, with their social life disrupted, but for Mehta, it's a difficult choice. Doctors and lawyers speak out. Dr. Asmita Mahajan, consultant and head of the Department of Paediatrics and Neonatology at Mahim's Fortis Raheja Hospital, feels there should be a pollution lockdown in the city. "When did you last see clear skies?" she says. Until a few years ago, she would see a seasonal spike in the number of children coming to the hospital with allergic respiratory conditions. "Allergic coughs take months to go away. Children with asthma see an exacerbation of symptoms." Until last year, Mahajan says, she used to see two children per week with respiratory problems. It has now gone up to six per week. "There are repeat hospital admissions, especially of children with asthma. Some need hospitalisation and ICU admission too," she says. Dr. Samir Garde, a pulmonologist in Mumbai, says 25 years ago, the leading cause of lung cancer was smoking. Now, many non-smokers contract serious lung diseases, including cancer. He attributes one of the reasons to air pollution. He hopes the government will prioritise public health. Looking at the persistent air quality problem, the Bombay High Court took suo motu cognisance of the matter in 2023. It initiated a public interest litigation plea to address deteriorating air quality levels and rising pollution from construction dust. In October 2023, the court issued detailed orders, including 28 guidelines to be implemented by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) at construction sites. These included mandatory installation of air quality sensors and wa-

ter sprinklers, and placing covers on vehicles transporting construction material. On November 27 this year, the court flagged the sharp decline in the air quality index (AQI) (up to 270, classified as 'poor') and rejected the 'volcanic ash from Ethiopia' theory. Amicus curiae and senior advocate Darius Khambata highlighted the worsening of air quality since 2023 and non-compliance at construction sites. Of nearly 1,000 construction sites in the city, only 400 have installed sensors mandated by the court's earlier order, and 117 of those are non-functional. Moreover, these sensors are yet to be linked to a central monitoring system, he pointed out. The court stressed that Mumbai needed a sustained plan to combat rising pollution and ordered the formation of a committee to ensure strict compliance with existing guidelines for construction sites. It also noted that earlier committees had failed to submit weekly compliance reports since March 2025. The new committee is expected to submit its findings within a week, after which the matter will be heard again on December 15. Data points to this month, BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani announced Project MANAS, in collaboration with IIT Kanpur, to install a hyperlocal sensor-based ambient air quality monitoring system. "What will you do even when monitors are installed? Do we not have enough air quality data already?" says Rakesh Kumar, president of the non-profit Society for Indoor Environment, and former director of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI). He says the real problem is not the unavailability of data for measuring ambient air quality, but translating that data into action.

He also points out that the data is generic. "Let's talk about the transportation sector. You have a mix of vehicles of different vintages. Of the 100 vehicles that are on the road, 50-60 are regularly on the road. Some are there for construction activities: vehicles carrying material and debris. They go to different construction sites. That is the data we need," he says.

He adds that it is necessary to go into granular data on road movement. Banning all construction activities suddenly and implementing curbs under Stages III and IV of the Graded Response Action Plan overnight are knee-jerk reactions, he feels. "We are missing some piece of information. That will not come from ambient air quality measurement," he says. Tuhin Banerji, former scientist at CSIR-NEERI and current coordinator of the non-profit International Center for Climate and Sustainability Action, feels the government knows the solutions but isn't willing to invest in them. "Everyone is only talking about monitoring. Nobody is doing anything about removing these pollutants. There are molecular filters that can selectively remove pollutants from the atmosphere," he says. He gives a list of interventions like electrostatic precipitators to remove particulate matter; WAYU (wind augmentation purifying unit), an outdoor air purifying device developed by the CSIR-NEERI to combat air pollution in high-traffic zones; and Techno Green Yuka Yantra, a patented solution for air quality. He, too, laments "the lack of bureaucratic will" to implement them. People walk at Giraon Chowpatty as city skyline is seen engulfed in smog on December 5, 2025. | Photo Credit: Emmanuel Yogi/Environmentalists have accused authorities of obfuscating crucial data on air quality. Sumaira Abdulali has been tracking air quality for years. As part of her awareness campaign, she used to put out PM2.5 level data every day for over a year. Then, suddenly, in May this year, PM2.5 data was not available on the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) Sameer app, which gives real-time updates on AQI and other parameters. "Till May 2025, all the readings were in red. In fact, in April this year, the PM2.5 level in Kandivali [a Mumbai suburb] was 434, way above the red zone," she says. Abdulali raised the issue of data unavailability with authorities, asked questions for a while, but says she got no answers. "We know that PM2.5 is more dangerous. The structure of your nose can stop PM10. But PM2.5 particles go into your lungs. They can cause all sorts of problems: coughing, wheezing. Long-term exposure can cause cancer," Banerji says. Asked why PM2.5 data was no longer available on the Sameer app, MPCB officials say the data was controlled by the CPCB. "You will have to ask them," says MPCB Joint Director (Air) Satish Padwal. "There has to be one monitoring centre per 10 lakh population. There are excess stations in Mumbai at present," he adds. The Sameer app shows that 23 of the 30 stations were active. Gagrani admits that air quality is a critical public health and governance priority. "Stop-work notices have been issued to 321 sites. We are carrying out road watering, mist spraying, site-wise visits, and urging bakeries to switch to clean fuel," he says. However, experts say mist spraying does not work to curb air pollution. The BMC has deployed 94 flying squads to ensure strict adherence to the 28 guidelines formulated for construction sites. Show-cause notices were issued to the bullet train project and Dharavi redevelopment project, says Ashwini Joshi, Additional Municipal Commissioner of BMC.

What are the concerns over the draft ISI Bill, 2025? | Explained

On September 25, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025. The Bill has been met with strong protests by academicians as well as students of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) who claim that the move is aimed to strip the institute of its academic autonomy by converting it from a "registered society to a statutory body corporate".

What is the significance of the ISI?

The ISI was founded in December 1931 by P.C. Mahalanobis in Kolkata and has since grown into one of India's most prestigious academic and research institutions. The institute was originally registered in April 1932, under the Societies Registration Act of 1860, and later re-registered under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act of 1961. Being a society provided the institute its own memorandum of association, bye-laws, and regulations. Parliament enacted the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959, declaring ISI as an Institution of National Importance (INI). Many scholars link the origin of the institute to the Bengal renaissance and credit the institute with shaping India's planning and policy apparatus. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) was developed at ISI, establishing the foundation of India's official statistical system. Other than P.C. Mahalanobis, the institute has produced legendary scholars such as Professor C.R. Rao and S.R.S. Varadhan. With about 1,200 students and six centres across India, ISI offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Statistics, Mathematics, Quantitative Economics, Computer Science, Library and Information Science, Cryptology and Security, Quality Management Science and Operations Research.

Why are academicians protesting? The primary concern of those opposing the draft Bill is how the ISI's institutional status will change, from a "registered society to a

statutory body corporate". A recent letter by about 1,500 academicians to Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State (Independent Charge) MoSPI, stated that there is no transparent reason that MoSPI should repeal the (1959) Act, abolish the society and introduce a Bill which violates the basic spirit of the agreement between the general body of the society and the government. The letter also states that the move to bypass the society registered under the WB Societies Registration Act to a "statutory body corporate" infringes upon the jurisdiction of the Societies Registration Act and is against the spirit of cooperative federalism. On November 28, hundreds of students and staff of ISI formed a human chain and held a public meeting near the institute's campus on B.T. Road in North Kolkata. Those opposing the draft Bill point out that the governance structure, as in the existing 1959 Act, vested authority in a council with academic representation, and procedural safeguards against government overreach. The proposed 2025 Bill, however, gives power to the Board of Governors (BoG), defined under Section 15 of the Act, which is heavily dominated by government nominees sidelining the authority of faculty and academic stakeholders. Former professor of ISI and chairman of West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation Abhirup Sarkar said that the ISI is a place of doing basic research which is a long-term process where immediate results may not be visible. Since there is a push for a corporate model of funding in the draft Bill, getting funds for basic research projects could be a problem in the future. Section 29 of the proposed 2025 Act deals with 'power to generate revenue' which includes student fees, consultancy services and sponsored research projects among others. Another critical area raised by those opposing the Bill is that all appointments will be controlled by the Union government, through the BoG. Earlier there were 10 representatives from ISI (eight elected, one worker and one scientific worker) out of the 33 representatives on the council, a little less than one-third.

Rupee hits record low of 90: Calculated move by RBI or a sign of losing control?



Last Wednesday, the rupee slipped past the 90 per dollar mark. While this drop is labelled as 'psychologically significant,' the underlying economic factors haven't changed much. Yet a specific set of recent events has added fresh momentum, decisively tipping the scales against the currency. The rupee's rise or fall depends on two main factors: what's happening in the market, and how the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) responds. Some of the major movements in the market that are weakening the rupee include pressure on exports owing to U.S. tariffs; a sudden surge in gold and silver imports adding weight to the ballooning import bill; and most importantly Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out in large numbers from Indian equity. And what is the RBI doing? Till just a year ago, the RBI was firefighting by selling dollars to help arrest the slide of the rupee. But this year the RBI has changed its tactics. They have decided to intervene less and less and let the rupee seek its own level. More than market dynamics, this change in RBI's tack has allowed the rupee to breach the 90 mark. Exports sliding, first exports. The 50% tariff on Indian goods announced by U.S. President Donald Trump has had a tangible, bruising impact. When Indian goods became 50% more expensive for American buyers, demand dropped and exporters earned fewer dollars, creating a scarcity that drove the rupee down.

The damage is visible in recent data. Exports to the U.S. — India's largest partner — fell by over 12% in September and 9% in October this year, dragging total monthly exports down by nearly 12% year-on-year in October 2025. Yet, a wider lens reveals a surprising resilience. Despite the U.S. slump, cumulative exports for the April-to-October period actually rose marginally by 0.5% to \$253.8 billion in 2025, compared to 2024. This divergence suggests that while the U.S. door is closing, Indian exporters are finding windows elsewhere. It is this resilience that leads economists like Dr. Pronab Sen to downplay the panic. 'It's not just the trade deficit with the U.S., it's the overall trade position,' Dr. Sen argues, noting that the export decline is not large because 'we've made up in other countries.' However, historical data offers little comfort for the future. Warning signs for November are flashing red: India's manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) has fallen to a nine-month low, and the new export orders sub-index has slipped to a 13-month low, suggesting the worst of the tariff pain may be yet to come. Imports surging, second imports. While falling exports are a concern, a massive surge in precious metal imports have also played a role in the depreciation of the rupee. In September and October, Indian purchases went vertical. Data shows that gold imports skyrocketed by roughly 200% year-on-year in October to hit nearly \$14.7 billion. Silver imports were even more dramatic, surging by 528% to \$2.7 billion. Despite record-high global prices, importers aggressively stocked up — paying premiums in September and October — driven by both the festive season demand and a domestic flight to safe-haven assets. Dr. Sen diagnoses this specific frenzy not as typical festive consumption, but as a classic 'flight to safety.' 'It's not that we suddenly developed a fascination for gold,' Dr. Sen explains. 'But what we've seen recently is an unexpected surge because people are worried about alternative assets.' He argues that domestic investors, spooked by volatility, are pulling money out of the stock market and parking it in bullion. Economically, this created a 'dollar drain.' To finance these massive purchases, businesses sold rupees to buy dollars, flooding the market with local currency. Thus, the rupee's depreciation was driven less by the tariff hit to ex-

ports and more by this structural trade imbalance — the chronic necessity to spend dollars on imports such as gold and silver. FPI flight

Third is Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) — the global heavyweights who pour money into Indian stocks. By December 3, these investors had pulled out a staggering \$17 billion from Indian equities in 2025 alone (Chart 3). This marks the highest calendar-year outflow in at least two decades, surpassing the sell-offs of 2022 and 2008. When foreign investors leave, they sell rupees to take their dollars home. On this front, 2025 has been exceptionally harsh, accelerating the currency's weakness. These combined forces — stalling exports, surging imports, and fleeing capital — explain why there is immense pressure on the rupee. But they don't fully explain why the rupee breached the 90 mark. As economist Dr. Zico Dasgupta argues, market pressure is merely the fuel; the central bank determines whether to let it burn. 'I would like to distinguish between the deterioration of current account and capital account flows and the slide of the rupee,' Dr. Dasgupta says. 'All three factors that you mentioned have contributed to the deterioration of the current and capital account flows, putting adverse pressure on foreign exchange reserves.' However, he notes that the currency's actual value is a policy decision. 'The slide of the rupee reflects RBI's present policy of maintaining a managed float,' Dr. Dasgupta explains. 'This is in contrast to RBI's earlier policy between mid-2022 and late 2024, when it largely kept the dollar exchange rate unchanged despite a negative pressure on the current account and capital account.'

What did RBI do?

To understand the rupee's current trajectory, it is essential to analyse the central bank's actual market activity. The definitive record of this intervention is found in the Balance of Payments data, specifically under 'Reserve Assets.' In this accounting framework, the signs indicate the direction of flow: a negative figure means the central bank is buying dollars to increase reserves, while a positive figure means it is selling dollars to support the currency. By tracking these net flows from 2022 through late 2025, the data reveals a clear shift in strategy — from active defense to a significant reduction in market intervention. Data confirms this calibration. In previous high-pressure episodes, the central bank aggressively defended the currency, selling over \$30 billion in the quarter ending September 2022 and nearly \$38 billion in the quarter ending December 2024.

By comparison, the RBI's hand is now much lighter. In the quarter ending September 2025, amid similar turmoil, the central bank sold just \$10.9 billion — a significant sum, but far below the 'firefighting' peaks of the past. This reduced intervention signals that the RBI is no longer fighting to hold a specific level, but merely smoothing the inevitable slide. The central bank's calculated gamble is that a weaker rupee will act as a shock absorber, making Indian goods cheaper abroad, and offset the tariff pain. Experts, however, are divided on whether this textbook theory will work in reality. Dr. Sen offers a pragmatic endorsement of the strategy, provided the execution is controlled. 'Is that healthy for the economy? Yes,' Dr. Sen argues, viewing the depreciation as a necessary adjustment. His concern is velocity, not value. 'Sharp jerks will be very disruptive,' he warns. 'But if you gradually let it depreciate and find its own level, then it's fine because people then have time to adjust... to renegotiate contracts.' For Dr. Sen, a slow bleed over three or four months is preferable to a sudden 15% amputation. Dr. Dasgupta, however, is skeptical about the very premise of the RBI's gamble. He points to a troubling post-COVID anomaly: for years, the rupee fell in nominal terms, yet Indian goods didn't get cheaper in real terms due to domestic price hikes. 'Depreciation of the nominal exchange rate does not guarantee real exchange rate depreciation,' Dr. Dasgupta cautions. While he acknowledges that low inflation has recently helped the Real Exchange Rate fall, he remains sceptical that a cheaper currency can overcome the massive wall of weak U.S. demand. 'The negative effect of weak U.S. import demand can negate the positive effect of exchange rate depreciation,' he argues. For Dr. Dasgupta, the slide isn't a solution, but a symptom of 'larger structural problems' that a simple currency adjustment may not be able to fix.

Health security se National security: Why does Centre want to levy cess on tobacco?

Story so far: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Health Security se National Security Cess Bill, 2025 on Thursday (December 4, 2025), kicking off the Centre's reform agenda for Parliament's Winter session. The Bill proposes to levy cess on "machines installed, or other processes undertaken in the manufacture of pan masala" to fund India's 'health and national security'. The Lok Sabha has already passed the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025 and the amended Manipur Goods and Services Tax (GST) Bill, 2025 while the above-mentioned Bill is currently slated for debate and passage. Introduced as a money Bill, the Health security se National security Cess Bill, 2025 need only be passed by the Lok Sabha. The Upper House has 14 days to provide its recommendations on such a Bill which may or may not be accepted by the Lok Sabha.

What does the Bill propose?

Termed the 'Health Security se National Security Cess', the Centre proposes to tax all those people who have machines installed for production of pan masala. The machines include fill and seal machines and any packing machine used to fill pan masala in pouches, tins or other containers. The cess will be decided as per number of pouches (tins or containers) produced by the machine per minute and pan masala weight packed in a pouch, tin or container. It will be collected at the beginning of each month, but no later than the seventh. Those paying the cess can self-declare the machine installed or processes undertaken in their factories producing pan masala. Centre can exempt anyone or any class from this cess, if it deems necessary in public interest. The cess has been classified into four categories based on the number of pouches it produces per minute — upto 500, 501-1000, 1001-1500 and above 1500. Correspondingly based on the weight of pan masala packed in each pouch (varying from 2.5 grams to above 10 grams), the cess varies from ₹101 lakh per month per machine to ₹2.5 crores (approximately). It also criminalises any violations upto 5 years imprisonment. India's tobacco use According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS-2), nearly 42% of men and 14% of women in India use tobacco. Moreover, India amounts to 70% of the world's smokeless tobacco (SLT) users i.e. gutkha, pan masala and among smoked tobacco, bidis are preferred over cigarettes, especially in rural and lower income families. As both SLT and smoked tobacco use increase cancer risk in lung, head, neck, stomach, and pancreas, India ranks first globally in male cancer deaths. Experts found that the economic cost of both SLT and smoked tobacco amounted to ₹1.77 lakh crore in 2016-17. Centre's ban on use of gutkha has more or less remained ineffective as the tobacco industry has ensured wide accessibility of its products via policy interference, pricing tactics, targeted marketing and dense tobacco shop networks. Though WHO has recommended taxing tobacco products at 75% of its MRP, very few have followed through. Also, study has shown that affordability of cigarettes and bidis remain the main hamper. 87% of Indian cigarette vendors sell single sticks, frequently operating near tea stalls, found research. This practice is banned in 88 countries but not in India.

What are the issues raised?

While titled 'Health security se National security', the Bill does not have any provisions to allocate the cess collected to anti-tobacco campaigns/schemes. In Parliament, many MPs raised this policy gap, stating that the increased cess will affect incomes of tobacco farmers and labourers working in beedi rolling factories — mostly women. Opposition MPs also highlighted that the Bill was aimed to fill a fiscal hole in the Centre's coffers due to the discontinuation of 'compensation cess'. Several members also highlighted that the Bill will not curb tobacco usage and only increase its illegal smuggling. Non-BJP MPs shed light that the Bill does not speak of the devolution of cess to States, while non-expenditure of other cess collected by Centre remain at an all-time high. TMC MP Sougata Roy pointed out that the Bill only focused on the machines and not the actual amount produced and decried the criminalisation of any violations. Indirect campaign has been used effectively to advertise their products by these tobacco producing companies, adds Mr. Roy.



Overhaul of Outer Ring Road to come with tough new quality controls



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) finally seems to have found a way to put an end to the recurring problem of contractors laying substandard roads in the city. In a first, B-SMILE has planned to introduce a new mandate requiring contractors to take on 10 years of maintenance liability for the makeover of the 17.01-km Outer Ring Road (ORR) stretch between Silk Board and K.R. Puram. The Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) will increase the Defect Liability Period (DLP), which currently stands at two years. To enhance the durability of the road, the use of Stone Matrix Asphalt (SMA) will be made mandatory.

B.S. Prahallad, Technical Director of B-SMILE, told The Hindu the change is intended to address concerns over contractors using low-quality asphalt, which often leads to potholes and premature road deterioration. "Now, the bid-winning contractor has to develop and maintain the entire stretch for 10 years, which will compel them to use high-quality asphalt. Such a system has never been implemented in Bengaluru, but we felt it is necessary for the ORR, as we intend to develop the stretch to global standards," Mr. Prahallad said, adding that depending on the outcome, the system could be extended to other major stretches as well. However, the newly outlined mandate will require Cabinet approval. Typically, the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru

Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) mandated two years of DLP and three years of maintenance liability. However, almost all asphalt roads would deteriorate early, prompting contractors to carry out repeated patchwork, resulting in a bumpy commute for motorists. To enable long-term maintenance liability, B-SMILE will mandate Full Depth Reclamation (FDR). Mr. Prahallad explained that earlier, contractors could easily claim that road deterioration was owing to a poor sub-base rather than surface quality. Contractors were previously required to carry out only overlay works (surface repairs). "For the ORR, we will ask them to redo everything from scratch, which is FDR. This eliminates the possibility of contractors blaming a poor sub-base," he added. To ensure an additional layer of quality checks, the SPV will also require contractors to furnish documents showing where asphalt components were purchased. The move aims to prevent the use of low-grade asphalt mix. The SPV will mandate the use of VG30 bitumen. Another B-SMILE official noted that the entire main carriageway will not be replaced, which could pose future challenges, such as an uneven road surface. A road sketch document accessed by The Hindu shows that only 4 metres of the 10.5-metre main carriageway will be reconstructed, while the rest will undergo minor patchwork. The service lanes will be fully reconstructed. Mr. Prahallad explained that the ORR sees thousands of visitors daily and is a key IT corridor and major arterial stretch for the city. Therefore, the plan is to upgrade the stretch to global standards. "Not just the roads, but we are also focusing on high-quality, international-standard walkways, cycle lanes, and ducts for cables. This will be a model road," he added. Additionally, B-SMILE will stop awarding the development and maintenance of bus shelters to private advertising agencies and will instead build state-of-the-art bus shelters throughout the stretch on its own. The project is estimated to cost ₹450 crore and is likely to commence in February next year. If all goes as planned, the makeover will be completed by the end of next year. BMRC is also targeting December 2026 for completing the Blue Line Phase 2A between Silk Board and K.R. Puram.

Fossils, genomes clash as scientists debate the mosquito's origins

Mosquitoes have followed humanity to every corner of the world, acquiring a reputation for being one of our least welcome companions. They are carriers of some of the deadliest diseases on the planet, including malaria, dengue, Zika, yellow fever, and West Nile virus, which together claim over a million lives each year. For their ubiquity, however, a fundamental question has lingered: when did mosquitoes first appear? Scientists have believed for decades that mosquitoes were ancient, older than most mammals and perhaps some dinosaurs, already being around 220 million years ago.

But recent findings have challenged this view. In October, a team led by Tommy Lam at the University of Hong Kong published a paper in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) that concluded mosquitoes originated only around 106 million years ago. Their analysis also hinted that the evolution of mosquitoes paralleled that of Plasmodium, the malaria parasite. "The study is quite interesting and is generating a buzz in the mosquito world," said John Soghian, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Calgary. North Carolina State University professor Brian Wiegmann added: "This study is likely to be the source of considerable debate and counterargument in the mosquito evolution community." The mosquito family Culicidae includes more than 3,500 known species divided into two main subfamilies: Anophelinae (malaria carriers) and Culicinae. These subfamilies were thought to have diverged between 180 and 200 million years ago. The fossils, however, told a different story. Fossilised mosquitoes in amber are rare and relatively young. The oldest known specimen is about 100 million years old. Modern-looking forms didn't appear until around 56 million years ago. If mosquitoes existed for 200 million years, older fossils should exist, yet none have been found. The molecular studies that supported the ancient timeline also had misaligned genetic trees, leading researchers to suspect the timeline had been overestimated. To resolve this question, the PNAS study team used large-scale genome data to rebuild mosquito evolution by analysing thousands of conserved genetic markers known as benchmarking universal single-copy orthologs and ultraconserved elements, which change very little over time. Comparing these markers across dozens of species revealed a new evolutionary tree that contradicted some of the field's assumptions. The problem, the researchers argued, lay in how mosquito DNA had been interpreted.

A phenomenon called branch attraction bias had skewed previous analyses, making unrelated groups appear more closely related. In mosquitoes, the effect was especially strong in the genus Anophelinae, whose genomes have shifted from G- and C-rich DNA to A- and T-rich sequences. This shift made Anopheles appear more distantly related than it actually is. To correct it, the team analysed whole genomes from across major mosquito lineages instead of relying on a few mitochondrial genes, accounting for known biases. Still, Dr. Soghian noted a limitation: "Their sampling is heavily biased towards Anopheles and excludes many other mosquito groups," which could make relationships on the evolutionary tree appear closer or more distant than they really are, and lead to inaccurate conclusions about when and how different mosquito lineages diverged.

When the team reconstructed the genetic trees, two versions of mosquito evolution emerged. One matched the two-subfamily hypothesis, dividing mosquitoes into Anophelinae and Culicinae. But the second, called the Anophelinae-Culex sister relationship, suggested that Anophelinae mosquitoes are actually closely related to the Culex group. Based on this, the researchers proposed that Culicinae mosquitoes don't constitute a single, unified lineage but several distinct ones. This reorganisation in turn reshaped the mosquito timeline.

However, Dr. Soghian contended: "Finding the 'root' of an evolutionary tree can be tricky. When organisms have been evolving for hundreds of millions of years, a lot can change in their genomes. Using fast-evolving genes or distant outgroups can easily throw off where we think the root lies, and I think that's what happened here." But Mac Pierce, the first author of the new study and a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Hong Kong, said the confusion may stem as much from long-standing assumptions as from technical bias. "For years, the framework of mosquito evolution wasn't questioned, creating an anchoring bias," he said. "People assumed there were two subfamilies, so mosquito fossils were placed into these by default; these were then used in phylogenetic dating studies as calibrations for the timing of mosquito evolution. Genetic studies that observed conflicting signals assumed that this was just



phylogenetic bias or noise in the data." Dr. Wiegmann also called the new findings into question, however: "The finding of a younger age for mosquitoes isn't defensible given the wealth of evidence that contradicts it." For instance, a 2023 study co-authored by Dr. Soghian used genomic data from 256 mosquito species to place mosquito origins in the early Triassic Period, about 217 million years ago. More recently, two fossils, dating from about 100-120 million years ago, resemble modern species: one similar to Anopheles (reported in September 2025) and the other, the first known fossil mosquito larva (to be published in February 2026). Both findings predate the timeline proposed by the PNAS study. Dr. Pierce however said fossils are difficult to interpret: "They're often misidentified or based on too few traits. One supposed early Anopheles may not even be a mosquito. Since we don't know what early mosquito larvae looked like and similar traits can evolve in unrelated species, even though the larval fossil seems genuine, it likely belongs to an extinct lineage." One way to reconcile the different conclusions, he added, is to "take more genetic data from a wider range of mosquito species, better evolutionary analyses, and a fresh look at old fossils and datasets". The new study also proposed that mosquitoes and malaria parasites evolved together. Different mosquito species transmit Plasmodium to different hosts: Culex mosquitoes spread it to birds and reptiles, Anopheles spread it to mammals. The study estimated that their common ancestor likely arose around 43-46 million years ago, coinciding with the diversification of the Plasmodium parasite, in turn suggesting that mosquitoes and the parasite influenced each other's biology over millions of years. However, Dr. Soghian said, "There isn't strong evidence that Plasmodium shaped mosquito divergence as they describe. Pathogens do influence mosquito evolution today, but the deep-time connection they propose is less convincing." The 2023 study and the new fossil record both place these mosquitoes long before they could have been associated with Plasmodium," Dr. Wiegmann added. "The younger age in [the new study] comes from different assumptions about fossil ages and analytical choices, which led them to a younger hypothesis on the age of mosquitoes." And so the debate continues, even as the new study emphasised that its dataset covers only 14 of the more than 100 mosquito genera and that their analysis is an early step. Expanding it should help clarify how mosquito behaviour, ecology, and disease transmission evolved.

Teacher tries to pass off wife's suicide as heart attack in Sangareddy

Sangareddy: A government school teacher attempted to portray his wife's suicide as a heart attack to avoid legal action in Malkapur village of Kondapur mandal. Srinivas lived with his wife Suchitha (34) and their two sons, and the couple was reportedly facing serious disputes over financial matters.

On Sunday night, unable to cope with the situation, Suchitha hanged herself. Though Srinivas removed her from the noose immediately, he could not save her. Fearing police action, he informed relatives that she had died of a heart attack. The body was shifted to their native village Madhvar in Raikode mandal for final rites.

The case for 'think first, then AI' in classrooms



Almost every evening, tutoring across cities in India spills out into the street. Teens leave with answered question banks, WhatsApp short notes, and now AI-generated replies in their chat windows. Learners and tutors today have more academic support than ever before. Many scientists and academics are worried that while AI programs can improve critical thinking, overuse of them could impair kids' creativity. Scroll through a collegiate WhatsApp or Telegram group. It reveals a recognisable script. "Send GPT answer? Does anyone have a prompt for this assignment? Can AI write my lab report?" Question has changed from "How do I solve this?" to "Which tool will solve this for me?" Linguists and educators regard this as a symptom of a larger shift in how young brains approach situations. Madura (Harvard Medical School) et al. (2023) found AI-driven technologies aid clinicians in decision-making in health care by giving data-driven insights. But, over-reliance on AI tools for decision-making might reduce critical thinking. This is described as cognitive offloading by Evan Risko and Sam Gilbert in 2016; it is the point of changing a task's information processing requirements through physical activity to lessen cognitive demand. Tilting our head to see a rotating image or programming a smartphone to remind us of an appointment are simple examples! Our offloading tendency must be addressed

Psychologists continue to study this aspect of cognitive offloading. It involves using external resources like calculators, Google, and now AI to do mental work. Philosopher Andy Clark, who has extensively examined how people use tools to extend cognition, says this is not terrible. If used wisely, it frees mental space for bigger, more creative challenges. ?There's a catch, and lab tests prove it. According to Adrian Ward and colleagues at the University of Texas, even putting a smartphone lying on your desk diminishes brainpower since a part of your mind is continually rejecting its lure. Imagine outsourcing entire arguments or essay drafts to AI instead of simply data or facts. Students may miss the opportunity to think seriously about challenge and uncertainty every day. Intellectual progress declines with difficulty. Academics, administrations, and parents must address this. At a time when employers want people who can think critically, question assumptions, and creatively define new problems, many students seem to be learning by trusting computers. Our intellectual faculties may be deteriorating quietly and collectively, not because AI is getting smarter. Many scientists and psychologists have recognised the "automation paradox": as machines become smarter, we suffer more when they fail.

Why so? The issue's roots Naturally, blaming only kids is unreasonable. The issue appears systemic. The strong coaching culture in India values faster responses, higher scores, and quickness over the trait of slower, contemplative thinking. More than 800 million Indians use cell phones. Most smartphones have AI. This forces many of us to think: Why struggle when AI models provide a clean answer or essay instantaneously? When selection teams across the board are utilising objective MCQ models to test knowledge and skills, the trend of using such automation tools makes it harder to stop them. Jobs want critical minds, not copycats. Work changes the story drastically. In every hiring panel discussion in Bengaluru or Gurugram, or Mumbai, recruiters and CEOs say they value analytical thinking and creative problem-solving over technical or routine capabilities. The World Economic Forum's "Future of Jobs" survey consistently prioritises these cognitive skills first. Why? Because AI and automation are increasingly commoditising regular, rule-based jobs. Humans will be paid for their ca-

pacity to identify faults in ideas, connect dots in complicated and unclear real-world circumstances, and make ethical, value-based, and long-term decisions. In one way, this could make or break India, which has the world's largest youth population seeking meaningful work. Graduates who excel at AI-powered quick engineering but cannot explain why an answer works or fails in India's complex regulatory or cultural environment can be at risk of falling behind peers in other cities and countries. AI may increase workplace and classroom inequalities. The lesson is clear: Learners who employ AI as a smart thinking companion will thrive. People who believe in these shortcuts could risk stagnation. However, there is another view too, among researchers on the impact of AI. Many of them are not pessimists. If learners are taught to question and challenge AI outputs rather than accept them passively, generative AI can improve critical thinking. A solution matrix is forming from these discoveries. Psychologists and behaviour experts who have studied the phenomenon are providing alternatives to the situation. Here are five ways Indian classrooms can teach critical thinking. Sidestep treating AI as a prophet. Instead, teach pupils to analyse and contest every AI response. Students who fact-check or debate AI-generated content have greater judgment and critical thinking than those who submit it without evaluation, according to research. Schools and colleges can urge students to give AI's answer, but ask them also to analyse its blind spots, such as how AI tools may misinterpret India's federal system or cultural nuances. Look at ways to criticise on language smoothness. 2. Fight, then AI Science stresses "desirable difficulties", which are challenges that force students to work productively and build lasting knowledge. Encourage pupils to generate basic ideas or sketches before consulting AI to test or refine their reasoning. Commands like "Counter this" and "Point out what I missed with Indian examples" can help keep the brain as the principal problem-solver. 3. Ask meaningfully and reflect A key growing talent is "prompt literacy," or formulating queries that provide useful AI responses. More than mechanical talent, it's metacognition: Why am I asking this now? How will I verify? Asking, "What assumptions does this make?" after an AI response can help educators reflect. In other words, create a culture of a mental gym. 4. Human + AI teams, not AI alone Philosophers like Andy Clark propose hybrid human-AI "distributed cognition" systems where AI crunches data and recognises patterns while humans frame, value, and make ethical decisions. The student highlights "what matters locally in rural India" and why it matters, after using AI to summarise a complicated document like a government budget text. This keeps the mind sharp, and the human remains in charge. 5. Protect attention like treasure. Adrian Ward and colleagues found smartphones sap brain capacity and digital distractions impair intense focus. Exams, prolonged reading, and discussions can be "phone-free zones" in schools. Students must train their concentration with no-AI essays and long problem-solving sessions. These zones will help with critical thinking.

Fixes beyond minor tweaks Some cognitive scientists and educators say these metrics are necessary but insufficient. They recommend bolder, systemic root cause reforms: • Rewire assessments: Instead of AI-friendly multiple-choice and written exams, use live oral defences or recorded "think-aloud" explanations, like Finland, but scaled to India. The inherent aversion to automated answers requires fresh reasoning. • AI as adversary: Have pupils disassemble purposefully defective AI-generated "wrong answers," making the machine an intellectual opponent rather than an assistant. • Unplugged pilots: Create "AI-free" streams or batches in elite universities like IITs and see if they outperform AI-assisted counterparts in real-world problem-solving. • Cultural reset campaigns: "Think First India" might inspire parents to reject AI homework help and instructors to promote intellectual struggle as a badge of honour, redefining deep participation as culturally desirable. A positive aspect: The NEP 2020 correctly promotes critical thinking and innovation in India. This is a pivotal moment to redesign systems, culture, and education to value effort, nurture doubts about every process. In essence, make critical thinking the goal again. Do not try outright rejection of AI. However, parents, institutions, and employers must emphasise their right to demand human thinking.

Bakelite, the first synthetic plastic

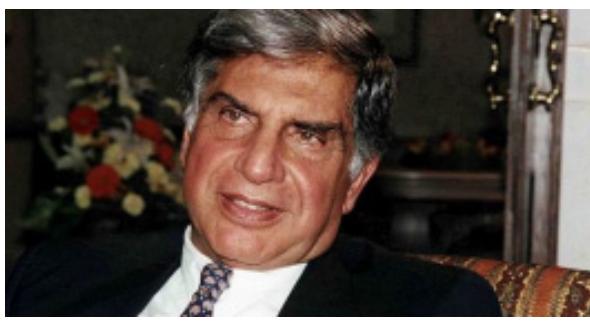
The passage of time, especially that inhabited by humans, has often been named based on the materials we use during that time. The Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages are, for instance, a three-age system that divides human prehistory based on the primary materials in use then. It makes sense as the materials we use helps fashion the tools we create. It is these tools that we then use to shape the world around us. By that definition, we well and truly live in the Age of Plastics now, also referred to as the Polymer Age. While thousands of natural polymers exist, human-made versions are a much more recent phenomenon. Bakelite, the first fully synthetic plastic, was invented only in the first decade of the 20th Century, by Belgian-American chemist Leo Baekeland.

Born in the Flemish city of Ghent on November 14, 1863, Baekeland was the son of a cobbler and a maid. His father, the shoemaker, was against his son's wish for an education and had him apprenticed to a fellow shoemaker at the age of 13. Baekeland's mother, a domestic helper, insisted on her son being allowed to study at a government high school, paving the way for his future success as an inventor. Studying diligently, Baekeland made his way to the University of Ghent by 1880, having acquired a city scholarship. He studied chemistry and physics and found an able mentor in the form of Theodore Swarts. When Baekeland became an assistant professor of chemistry at the age of 24, Swarts saw it as the start of a great academic career. Baekeland, however, was less interested in pure chemistry, and was more drawn towards potential applications. This created some friction between the two. Finds his love

While there were quarrels between Baekeland and Swarts on one side, there was love between Baekeland and Swarts on the other. For Baekeland fell in love with his mentor's daughter Celine and the two got married. As Baekeland won a travelling scholarship for academic study abroad, the young couple left for the U.S. soon after. This same fellowship also allowed him to visit universities in England, Scotland, and Germany. It is interesting to note that as a youngster, Baekeland was enamoured by The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, with this work sparking his lifelong love for America. He became a citizen of the country by 1897 and soon became a notable member of the country's chemical industry. Chandler's helping hand After the fellowship, they settled in New York City and Baekeland found support in the form of Columbia University professor Charles F. Chandler. It was Chandler who

recommended him to a position at a New York photographic supply company, a position that would literally transform Baekeland's life in the years to come. Based on his experience at the photographic house, Baekeland made his first major successful invention while working as an independent consultant. He came up with a new kind of photographic paper that he called Velox. Velox could be enabled in gas-light rather than sunlight, thus enabling images to be developed using artificial light. When George Eastman of the Eastman Kodak Company bought the rights to Velox for \$750,000 (nearly \$30 million in today's money) by the end of the 19th Century, Baekeland had made his fortune. Baekeland, however, had to accept to Eastman's terms of not developing any more photographic technology as part of the sale agreement. "Cakelyzer" was a cake at the fifth anniversary of the Chemical Heritage Foundation's museum opening in Philadelphia. The cake is modelled after an actual object in the museum's collection, a replica Bakelite oven or "Bakelizer", invented by Leo Baekeland. Science History Institute / Wikimedia Commons Turns to polymers The loss to photographic technology turned out to be a gain for the polymer industry as Baekeland, now financially free to pursue a field of his liking, channelled his time and efforts elsewhere. Baekeland, in fact, went after more money when he chose the field of synthetic resins as the problems confronting the field, in his opinion, offered "the best chance for the quickest possible results." By the turn of the century, chemists acknowledged the potential of natural resins and fibres, but made little headway in terms of synthetic substitutes. Baekeland pored over the theory and performed his research in a systematic fashion, documenting the results meticulously. Baekeland tasted success again when he switched his focus from trying to create a wood coating to trying to impregnate wood with a synthetic resin, thereby strengthening it. By controlling the effects of temperature and pressure, while at the same time keeping a tab on the type and proportion of phenol and formaldehyde mixed, Baekeland was able to produce polyoxybenzylmethylenglycolanhydride. When Baekeland said Bakelite could be put to use in a 1000 ways, he meant it! A picture of an advertisement for Bakelite in The Saturday Evening Post of January 1923. When Baekeland said Bakelite could be put to use in a 1000 ways, he meant it!

Remembering Ratan Tata: The quiet titan whose legacy reshaped Indian business — and its conscience



Soft-spoken yet steely in resolve, Ratan Tata, who reshaped the Tata Group while remaining anchored in its century-old ethos of trust, nation-building and compassion, would have completed 88 years today. In an age of flamboyant tycoons, Tata, who passed away on October 9, 2024, stood out — understated, principled and deeply humane — and has left behind a legacy that extends far beyond just balance sheets, and permeating deeply into the imagination of India Inc. Tata's life and career were remarkable and eventful, and his vision and strategic clarity propelled the Tata Group to new heights.

After taking full control of the group, Tata led from the front in globalisation of Indian business houses in the early 2000. The first was the Tata Tea acquisition of Tetley in 2000. Tata then went on an acquisition spree buying as many as three dozen small and big companies. Then came Tata Steel's takeover of Anglo-Dutch steel maker Corus, and the British automobile marque Jaguar and Land Rover by Tata Motors from Ford Motors. However, the group's Corus acquisition faced troubles while JLR became profitable. The integration of Jaguar and Land Rover in the consolidated books of Tata Motors was achieved and the company has not looked back since then. On the domestic front, Tata consolidated the Tata group's stake in various companies. In Tata Steel, the Birlas had more stake than Tata Steel once upon a time. However, Tata Sons increased the stake to 33.19 per cent in the steel maker. Various group companies went in for expansion and acquisition and the group's turnover and market capitalisation rose over the years. Tata Motors, which was earlier known as a commercial vehicle maker, started manufacturing passenger cars during his tenure. Tata took the initiative for the TCS listing on the stock exchange in 2004, which eventually became the second most valuable company on the bourses. He also backed the acquisition of Air India in 2022.

When Ratan was asked if there was some link between his decision to stay a bachelor and the divorce of his parents, he paused to think, then replied, "I have not thought about any link so far, but it is a fact that all the children of my mother are single, none has married. I need to think about it." But there is nothing to show that he would have been anything but a great husband and a wonderful father. The love and affection he bestows on those who are around him leaves little room for any other conclusion." Ratan is quoted as saying. Tata got perilously close to wedlock more than once. "Yet, it is a little unusual that he, his brother, Jimmy, and his sisters, Shireen and Deanna, are all unmarried," writes former IAS officer Thomas Mathew in his biography, 'Ratan Tata: A Life'.

Both Ratan Tata and his brother Jimmy Tata were ragged and humiliated in school by their peers. Ratan recalled that they were made to feel 'conspicuous and out-classed'. After his mother remarried, he said that boys of the school said 'all kinds of things about both of them. Ratan hardly had any friends in Cathedral and John Connon School because his mother and father were separated and his brother and he would always tag along with his father (Naresh Tata), so his friends became their friends. "I hardly ever had any friends [of my own]. Of the three he says he had, Zubin Mehta, the famous orchestral conductor, and his brother, would occasionally come to Tata House. The other friend, Behram Dubash, is now a veteran in the shipping industry and involved in his family construction business," Ratan is quoted as saying. On the Nano car, an expert even

dubbed it as "a monumental marketing blunder." It was a problem that Ratan admitted to as well. When asked about his most memorable day of his life, in an instant he said, "Amongst the happiest and most fulfilling would be the creation of the Nano." It was 'because everyone said that a one lakh car was not possible, and we did that.' In an interview in 2012, Ratan said that the low point for Tata Motors was its failure to leverage the wave of global interest and attention that the Nano had already generated. "The Nano has not realized its potential, largely because it's just being marketed and sold like any other car," he said. 'It's a different car and it has to be dealt with differently,' the book quoted him as saying.

His love for dogs saw him provide a home for the strays in the iconic Bombay House, the headquarters of the Tatas. During the nine-month-long renovation, while the employees of Tata House were briefly shuttled between the headquarters and their temporary office, even the four-legged occupants were taken along. When the renovated building was inaugurated in July 2018, the dogs got a room of their own. It was well-stocked with feeding bowls, chewies, toys, dog biscuits, treats, mattresses and a plush resting area, besides water and food. As a prankster, no one would expect the reclusive, reticent, media-shy Ratan to be a prankster. "But he is one, and incorrigible at that. His age never restrained the child in him. He would play pranks on his colleagues with great delight. During long board meetings, when he discovered that some of the 'old guard' would clandestinely relax by kicking off their shoes, he would kick their shoes as far away as he possibly could." When the 26/11 terrorist attack on the iconic Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai happened, Ratan spent half the night watching and waiting outside on the footpath, pacing between the hotel and the adjoining Gateway of India. Ratan stood on the road looking up in horror, with 'tears in his eyes' as flames engulfed the more-than-a-century-old landmark. He was horrified and told himself, 'I cannot believe the hotel is burning down. It is just not possible.' Tata, who was born on December 28, 1937, joined the Tata group in 1962. After serving in various companies, he was appointed Director-in-Charge of the National Radio and Electronics Company in 1971. In 1981, he was named Chairman of Tata Industries, the group's other holding company, where he was responsible for transforming it into a group strategy think tank and a promoter of new ventures in high-technology businesses.

After taking over as Chairman of Tata Sons in 1991 from the legendary JRD Tata, Ratan Tata was at the centre of many a battle in Bombay House, the headquarters of the Tata group. Pugnacious Tata took on satraps who considered their companies as their personal fiefdoms and they were shown the door one after another. Tata received a B.Arch degree from Cornell in 1962. He worked briefly with Jones and Emmons in Los Angeles before returning to India in late 1962. He completed the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School in 1975.

On the day (October 24, 2016) Cyrus Mistry was sacked as Chairman, Ratan had met Mistry and requested him to step down but the latter had declined. With this introduction, he renewed the request to Mistry to reconsider his decision (not to resign) before the formal meeting started. Mistry ignored the request and attempted to draw Ratan into the proceedings by requesting him to speak. But the effort failed. The chairman emeritus politely declined, stating that he would prefer to be an observer.

When Ratan Tata was searching for a successor, the Parsis in the company, as also the 'traditionalists' in the community, pushed for Noel's appointment as they considered him to be one of them. They contended that it would prevent the break of a more-than-125-year-old tradition of only a Tata, or at least a Parsi related to the founder, heading the group. "Ratan, however, did not have any such concern. For him, only the talent and the values of the person mattered. Religion, community or the region they came from were hardly of relevance. He made it known that he was open to the (selection) committee even considering foreigners if they had the right qualifications," his biography says.

US deal alone insufficient to secure India's long-term trade, export growth: CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee

While valuable, a free trade agreement (FTA) with the US in itself will not be enough to secure India's long-term trade and export growth, according to Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Having concluded agreements with UK, New Zealand, and Oman in 2025, Banerjee said the industry is hopeful 2026 will see a 'broader and more strategic push, both through early conclusion of other key negotiations, including with the European Union, and through effective implementation of already-signed agreements to ensure tangible benefits for exporters, especially Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)."

In an interview with The Indian Express, Banerjee also discussed India's macroeconomic situation, the government's reform push, and the weakening of foreign fund flows into the country. Edited excerpts: 2025 has been a great year for the Indian economy looking at GDP growth and inflation. What is your outlook for 2026 for these key macro indicators?

Recent data point to sustained strength, with real GDP growth exceeding 8 per cent in the first half of the fiscal year, continued expansion in manufacturing and services PMIs (Purchasing Managers' Index), resilient services exports, recovery in rural demand, and steady traction in government capital expenditure. Reinforcing this positive assessment, the latest CII-Business Confidence Index rose for the third consecutive quarter to 66.5 in Q3, up from 66.0 in Q2 and 66.2 in the same quarter last year, marking the highest level in the past five quarters and signalling sustained improvement in business sentiment. What adds to our confidence is the increasingly broad-based nature of growth. Public capex is effectively crowding in private investment, corporate balance sheets remain healthy, and capacity utilisation is gradually improving. The lagged impact of tax reforms, regulatory measures, and monetary easing is beginning to support consumption and investment decisions, even as global conditions remain uncertain.

Looking ahead, India's domestic demand engines, led by investment, infrastructure-driven activity and a strong services sector, are expected to provide stability to growth. At CII, we expect GDP growth in the range of 7.3-7.5 per cent in the current fiscal year, higher than our earlier assessment. This momentum is likely to carry into the next

year as well, with growth expected to remain in a similar range, reflecting the underlying strength of domestic drivers. Inflation, meanwhile, is likely to remain anchored below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target of 4 per cent next year, providing a stable macroeconomic backdrop. Private consumption, led by income tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate cuts, has helped push growth. Do you see domestic demand continuing to grow at the current pace of 8 per cent or more? Urban demand is gradually gaining traction on the back of these measures, aided by improving consumer confidence and stable inflation that has preserved real purchasing power. At the same time, rural demand remains resilient, underpinned by a favourable monsoon that has supported higher agricultural activity, strengthened farm incomes, and improved overall income prospects in rural areas. This combination of strengthening urban consumption and resilient rural demand provides a solid foundation for domestic demand growth.

Looking ahead, as the full impact of GST, repo rate cuts, tax relief and regulatory measures plays out, private consumption is likely to sustain a healthy pace in real terms. While maintaining growth of 8 per cent or more will depend on continued income gains, the underlying drivers of domestic demand remain firmly in place. What about private capex? Companies continue to sit on a lot of cash, make financial investments, as seasonally adjusted capacity utilisation is stuck around 75 per cent. CII's analysis suggests that private capex in India has clearly moved beyond a tentative phase and is gaining momentum, supported by the strength in household consumption that provides a durable demand outlook. An assessment of around 1,600 non-financial firms using CMIE's (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) Prowess database shows that corporate capex rose to about Rs 12.1 lakh crore in FY25, up from Rs 8.1 lakh crore in FY24 and Rs 5.5 lakh crore in FY19, implying a healthy 14 per cent CAGR (compound annual growth rate) since the pre-pandemic period. This points to firms increasingly committing capital to productive assets rather than merely accumulating cash. Strong new project announcements and a moderation in project stalling rates further indicate improving investment confidence and execution discipline. Although overall manufacturing capacity utilisation remains in the mid-70 per cent range,

When should children have their first comprehensive eye examination?



by parents: "Many parents delay this and thereby miss a crucial eye rule." Timely intervention during infancy and early childhood can ensure normal visual development and prevent permanent vision loss. Some eye conditions require early detection to be treated successfully.

He points out that disorders such as amblyopia or "lazy eye," and misalignment of the eyes are treatable only when caught early, and "Delayed detection reduces the window for successful correction." Early screening also lets the doctor assess visual development and rule out serious congenital diseases by evaluating tracking, fixation, pupil reflexes, and eye alignment.

Parents should watch for subtle early signs of vision problems. Dr Prabhu said, "Frequent eye rubbing, squinting, excessive blinking, or holding objects very close to the eyes" can be signs. Other red flags include tilting the head to focus, trouble tracking moving objects, avoiding reading or screen tasks, often complaining of headaches, persistent eye misalignment, or unusual light sensitivity. Undetected vision problems can significantly affect a child's development and school performance. Poor vision may lead to difficulty reading and writing, increased eye fatigue and headaches, and behavioural issues. Children may act out or seem disinterested in class when, in fact, their vision is the issue. Once the initial infant exam is complete, children should have eye checks again at age 3, before school starts, and then every 1 to 2 years after that. For children who wear glasses or have known eye conditions, more frequent monitoring is essential to keep prescriptions up to date and vision healthy.

'I'm not a stereotypical wife and I won't do stereotypical things': When newly-wed Kajol shared her idea of an ideal marriage and how her views changed over time; psychologist weighs in



shared life," he says.

How do ideas of marriage evolve over time?

Dr Dhagdu says the idea of an ideal marriage rarely stays the same. In the early years, couples often imagine romance, freedom, and equality. They hope for shared goals without the weight of societal scripts. "But as years pass, reality brings responsibilities — work, children, finances — and the dream shifts into balance and compromise," he says. "Later in life, marriage is often seen less as passion and more as companionship, stability, and emotional support." Psychologically, it's a journey from idealism to realism to acceptance. This may explain why Kajol, who began with a clear rejection of stereotypes, later spoke of balance — a recognition that traditional and modern roles can coexist and be negotiated between partners. Kajol Kajol and Ajay Devgn got married on 24 February, 1999 (Image: Facebook/Ajay Devgn)

What does it mean when permanence is questioned?

Kajol's expiry-date idea — that marriages might be renewed rather than assumed forever — surprised many. But Dr Dhagdu sees it as part of the evolution of expectations. "Someone who starts their marriage rejecting stereotypes, later accepts a mix of traditional and modern roles, and eventually wonders if marriage should have an expiry date is showing a shift in thinking," he says. "In the beginning, this reflects optimism and independence. Over time, it shows maturity and adaptation. But when the idea of permanence is questioned, it often points to fatigue or disappointment." He adds that this shift is not simply disillusionment: it's a blend of growth and weariness, revealing that ideals change, and expectations can become heavy with time.

How can couples avoid rigid roles without conflict?

For couples who want to avoid rigid marital roles, Dr Dhagdu recommends building a partnership based on fairness, flexibility, and communication. "The healthiest way is not to fight tradition constantly," he says, "but to create a rhythm that feels fair and flexible for both partners." He suggests sharing responsibilities, respecting individuality, and maintaining open communication so that the relationship becomes less about rejecting stereotypes and more about living authentically together. "When responsibilities are shared, individuality is respected, and communication is open, the marriage becomes less about rejecting stereotypes and more about living authentically together," he says. This balanced approach, he believes, eases pressure and deepens connection — a far more sustainable path than extremes, whether traditional or entirely modern.

While weight loss injections may have dominated conversations, experts share how lifestyle habits make or break metabolic stability

This year witnessed the launch of three major GLP-1, or injectable, medications for type 2 diabetes management in India, which also claim to have benefits for those grappling with obesity. The latest addition to the list is Ozempic (semaglutide) by Novo Nordisk, following the launch of Wegovy (semaglutide) in June 2025 and Mounjaro (trizapetide) by Eli Lilly in March 2025.

Dr Vijay Negalur, Head of the Department of Diabetology, KIMS Hospitals, Thane, noted that such injections help control blood sugar and reduce appetite. "These can lower diabetes risk indirectly," he said. While these weight loss injections may have dominated conversations, they also showed how lifestyle habits make or break metabolic stability, with many opening up about their personal experiences. As such, experts advise caution, considering that even such GLP-1 injections may not work unless lifestyle changes are made. Metabolic coach Amit Baruna recently took to Instagram to share a case of a 52-year-old woman whose body was in "survival mode", and even GLP-1 couldn't help her. "She did everything but experienced no fat loss. She used Mounjaro for eight weeks, but there was no fat loss. Her metabolism was not slow; it was literally shut down. The strongest GLP drug needs a stable internal environment to work," said Baruna. So Baruna made the woman stop pursuing lifestyle changes. "We made her stop for two weeks. No intense training. We added 90 minutes of extra sleep to the morning routine. Some walk post-dinner. Targeted supplement. Only then does her metabolism

respond. Not to pressure but to support," said Baruna. This case, as experts have continued to point out, highlighted a less-spoken-about aspect of weight loss drugs: medications alone are not enough. It is important to let the metabolism feel safe and adhere to lifestyle changes to see effective results. Injections may provide a helpful boost for initial weight loss in some, but they are not a complete solution, said Dr Ramen Goel, Consultant Diabetes and Bariatric Surgeon, Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central. "Without changes in diet, exercise, and daily habits, the body often regains weight once the medication stops. Sustainable health needs a long-term lifestyle plan. Medications can support the process, but they cannot replace mindful eating, portion control, and regular physical activity," said Dr Goel, who added that stress needs to be tackled. In non-surgical situations, combining injections with personalised nutrition plans, structured exercise routines, and ongoing monitoring leads to much better results than relying on medicine alone, said Dr Goel. "Patients who adopt these habits tend to keep the weight off and improve metabolic markers like blood sugar and cholesterol," he added.

What helps?

Moderate daily exercise, cutting back on processed and sugary foods, managing stress, and getting seven to eight hours of sleep can all improve insulin sensitivity, said Dr Negalur. "Even small changes, like walking after meals or avoiding late-night snacking, can provide real benefits over time," he added.

Christo Popov clinches badminton World Tour Finals: How France's new star is redefining men's singles and challenging Asia's grip



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

It was a resounding extension of the French immigrant policy, where sport is encouraged as a means of integration into the community for those making the country their new home. Mostly sporty ones picked football, but the Popov family, starting with the shuttle-crazy dad, picked badminton unconventionally and have devoted decades to building the sport's popularity from the ground-up, maxing the scientific support that came their way ahead of the Paris Olympics. Brice Leverdez's shocking upset of Lee Chong Wei had been the last eye-popping headline in French men's singles, but Christo has opened up entire vistas for French shuttle at age 23 with his title at Hangzhou, beating World No 1 and world champion Shi Yuqi in the finals. Christo stayed unbeaten throughout the WFTF week, and unexpectedly raced ahead of giant killing elder brother, Toma Jr.

But much like Alex Lanier, who's had a good run last two years, and beyond the wonder of acknowledging that France will pose a second power to contend with from Europe, even ahead of badminton perhaps in coming years, there's the more enduring battle of styles that could change how badminton looks. Lanier brought physicality to the court; Axelsen has of course leveraged his mighty built and deep understanding of the game to win Olympic titles, but Christo showed he could completely bypass the Asian style. For all his 6-ft-4 massive smashes and booming attack, Axelsen still engaged opponents at the net with delectable dribbles, tumbles and deceptions that the Europeans club under 'net spin.' Christo, playing Anders Antonsen in a crucial pool game, however, took the net completely out of the equation.

Getgoodatbadminton.com, an incisive website that relays badminton content, smartly noted that Christo played only 37 of his 107 exchanges with Antonsen, at the net. Committing to the net or even getting lured into it, makes badminton hyper-focussed as the battlezone of dribbles and counter-dribbles shrinks, and margins of error are minuscule. The highly skilled shuttlers use the net game to dominate

opponents, control rallies and take charge. Christo found a roundabout around the top Dane. It bears repeating that Christo plays very high-quality doubles alongside brother Toma Jr, on the international circuit. And he dipped generously into that repertoire of drives, cross nets and pushes, choosing deep smashes and slices from the back and high lifts and clears to completely keep Antonsen busy at the back court. It was a simple game plan and there's curiosity if it can be repeated over and over, but playing far blocks that pin opponents behind the mid line, and allowing them no sniff of the net, turned out pretty lucrative for the Frenchman.

"It became a battle of power and speed. And his quick cross nets to end a rally helped. Like doubles," getgoodatbadminton.com said in a demystification video of Christo. It needed immense upper body speed to continually keep dispersing the shuttle to the back besides fast footwork, but the French are known to literally amp up their games by reconstructing metrics – increasing power, raising speed, accentuating agility with top-notch fitness work. It's not that Christo is a dummy on skills, he just is versatile and can tailor his game to get rid of whoever is the opponent on the day, thanks to his years playing doubles. France was ecstatic, but badminton is also watching with interest if this is shuttle's equivalent of tennis' baseline slugfests from Roland Garros. If the net is nulled the way he did against Antonsen, then Christo Popov is onto shuttle finding the European counter to Asian stranglehold on this sport.

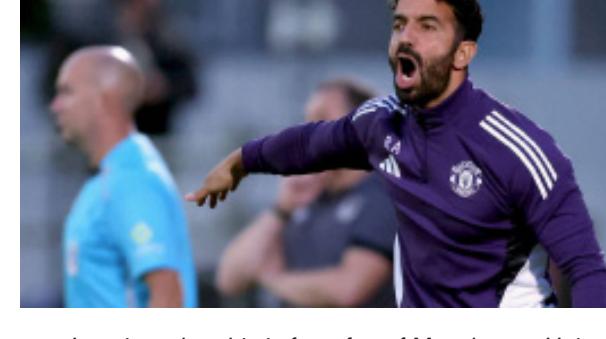
Carolina Marin and Axelsen proved it can be done, but they blended Asian artistry into their physicality and aggression. Christo laid down the challenge that artificial turf once posed to Asian hockey: Can you play all-out power & speed, a full-press at all times, and render the net near-redundant? The French 'Vainqueur' – champion – admitted to L'Equipe newspaper later that this blistering, punishing style took frequent toll. "Normally, when you wake up, you wonder where the pain is going to hit you, where it's going to hurt. This time it wasn't the same question at all. It was more like: what doesn't hurt?" he joked to L'Equipe. "Because you are in pain everywhere." Popov is a pioneer. "We're first ambassadors of the sport in France. Badminton is often overlooked in France or at least not given enough media coverage," he told L'Equipe. "When I was young I was the only one in class playing badminton. Everyone played football or handball because we knew the stars. France was football world champion in 1998, but playing badminton was a bit strange," he recalled. The strangest thing just happened a quarter of century later: a Frenchman won the biggest Tour title on the badminton circuit.

'It's not too clever to say outside': Former Man United midfielder Eriksen slams Ruben Amorim for his "worst in history" comments

GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Former Manchester United midfielder Christian Eriksen has opened up on his stance on coach Ruben Amorim's comments, where the Portuguese criticised the quality of the United side following their horrendous run of two wins in 10 Premier League games. Amorim, who took over the managerial role from Erik ten Hag, had claimed that last season's side was the "worst in history." Eriksen believes the public criticism of the squad from Amorim did not help ease pressure on the players, in what was already a disappointing campaign. "That didn't help. Yeah, that didn't help at all. I mean, that was not... I don't think that helped the players at all," Eriksen was quoted as saying by The Times.

"Some stuff you can say inside and it's not too clever to say outside, to put extra pressure and put an extra label on the players who were already trying to do their best. I don't think that helped at all, no. Then if he's right or wrong, whatever, but I think for us it was a bit of like, 'Oh, here we go again. Another headline,'" said Eriksen. The comments from Amorim come after United were outplayed by Brighton & Hove Albion at Old Trafford in mid-January. Amorim's comments made headlines when he described his side as "maybe the worst" team in the club's 147-year history. He said: "In (the past) 10 games in Premier League, we won



two. Imagine what this is for a fan of Manchester United. Imagine what this is for me. We are getting a new coach who is losing more than the last coach. I have full knowledge of that.

"We are the worst team maybe in the history of Manchester United. I know you [media] want headlines but I am saying that because we have to acknowledge that and to change that. Here you go: your headlines," Amorim had said. Eriksen moved to VfL Wolfsburg on a free transfer. He made 22 appearances under Amorim in his 107 outings at United.

Travis Head backs Jake Weatherald as his opening partner



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

Australian batter Travis Head has backed Jake Weatherald as his opening partner following the South Australian's rough start to his career in the Ashes. Since his test debut in the Ashes opener in Perth, Weatherald's average is under 21 and it has been dragged down by scores of 10 and 5 in the loss against England on a tough pitch in the fourth Test in Melbourne. His career started with a duck in his first innings as Jofra Archer claimed his wicket on the second ball of the first Test. "He showed a lot of glimpses over his first four Tests, and it's not always going to go your way," Head said about Weatherald on Sunday. "There are a lot of guys that have looked like they've been under the pump with the bat who are some of our best in our generation, so it can be a tough way to start your international career. "But I think he's a good enough player to play international cricket." Green under scanner Apart from Weatherald, all-rounder Cameron Green has also come under the scanner. Picked ahead of Beau Webster, who has superior batting and bowling averages in his seven Tests, Green has managed only three wickets in the Ashes at a costly average of 52.66 runs. Once seen as a potential long-term number three, 26-year-old Green was demoted to number seven for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne and has not reached

20 runs in his past four innings. Former Australian captain Mark Taylor told Australian radio that Green had lost some confidence despite his proven talent. "But in this game you've got to keep performing, that's the bottom line and at the moment this hasn't been a great series for him so far," said Taylor.

24-year-old Jerrssis Wadia made headlines on Saturday with his impudent hitting in the Big Bash League clash between Adelaide Strikers and Brisbane Heat. While his team lost by seven runs chasing a target of 180 runs, Wadia's onslaught of 22 runs in his first four balls against Jack Wildermuth is now a talking point from the game.

Coming at number six after Jamie Overton's wicket, Wadia needed no invitation and smashed Wildermuth from the word go hitting three sixes and one four in the first balls. However, he couldn't take his team to the finishing line and got out in the 19th over to Wildermuth after scoring 34 runs in 16 balls.

Wadia is a player of Indian origin with his parents still living in Mumbai. He was part of the Adelaide Strikers U19s programme before Covid struck. He has been a regular part of the South Australian Premier Cricket circuit since the 2022/23 where he has played for Adelaide, East Torrens and Tea Tree Gully. A bowling all-rounder by trade, Wadia was signed as a local replacement player for Alex Carey. Head coach Tim Paine said Jerrssis was a welcome

Indian-origin Jerrssis Wadia smash three consecutive sixes in BBL

'Absolute lottery': Alastair Cook slams MCG pitch after England win Boxing Day Test match in 2 days against Australia

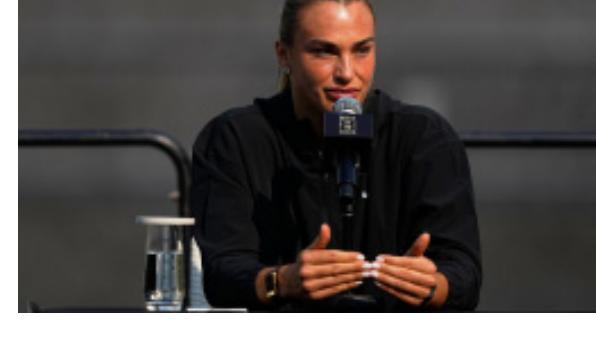


GNS News Agency, Dec 31

and when they get as much as they did here, it becomes almost impossible." "We saw two modern greats of the game — Root and Steve Smith — really struggling to score runs convincingly. Root tried to get it out, but in the first innings made a 15-ball duck and barely laid a bat on it, whereas Harry Brook played in his usual adventurous style and made 41, which was an important innings."

"It was after I made 244 in 2017 that they decided to make the pitch more bowler-friendly. It was the best I ever batted, and yet after watching two days of it, people decided they never wanted to see anything like it again! They didn't change the pitch in Antigua after Brian Lara made 375 and 400 there, so I don't know what that says about my batting..." Cook wrote in his column for 'The Times'. The former opening batter praised Ben Stokes for his role in keeping the team together after being 3-0 down in the Ashes and leading the team to a win at Melbourne. "I was delighted for Joe Root and Ben Stokes, who have waited for so long to win here for the first time, and for all the travelling fans who finally got something to cheer about." "Stokes should take a lot of credit for keeping his side together. It is very easy over Christmas when you are 3-0 down, and the Ashes have gone for things to start to fall apart. So it is a great credit to him and the team that they were able to come out and win here," he wrote.

Aryna Sabalenka on playing Nick Kyrgios in 'Battle of the Sexes' match: 'Don't know what to expect'



GNS News Agency, Dec 31

World number 1 and four-time Grand Slam champion Aryna Sabalenka has called her 'Battle of the Sexes' match against Nick Kyrgios at the Coca-Cola arena in Dubai on Sunday "unpredictable", stating that playing the Australian would be a huge challenge for her. The 27-year-old admitted that she loved to challenge herself and was not sure of what to expect from the match. "This event is really unpredictable. I don't know what to expect, and that's what I love

because this is the feeling that you chase when you play sport. I love to challenge myself, and this is a huge challenge, especially playing against Nick, a guy who is unpredictable and crazy." "It's great training for me and a great message to the girls out there – I hope they will see how strong and tough I am by playing against a guy," the Belarusian said. When asked who was going to win Sunday's exhibition match, Sabalenka had a simple, straightforward answer: "Me." The match will take place in modified rules in which both Kyrgios and Sabalenka will be permitted only one serve per point, instead of two. The latter will also play in a modified court, whereby her side would be reduced by nine percent in comparison with the regulation dimensions. The 'Battle of the Sexes' match would be played over three sets, with a 10-point tiebreaker deciding the winner if it was level after the opening two sets. Former world number 1 Billie Jean King, who played against Bobby Riggs in the 'Battle of the Sexes' clash in 1973, said that there were no similarities between that match and the one between Sabalenka and Kyrgios on Sunday. "The only similarity is that one is a boy and one is a girl. That's it. Everything else, no. Ours was about social change, culturally, where we were in 1973. Mine was really political."

Manager Slot asks Writz to keep going after breaking his goal drought



Liverpool manager Arne Slot believes that midfielder Florian Writz is finding his feet at the club and will keep getting better. The German scored his first Premier League champions in their 2-1 win over Wolverhampton Wanderers. Liverpool signed Writz in June for a reported fee of 100 million pounds (\$135 million), with a further 16 million pounds in potential bonuses. However, after the big money signing, the 22-year-old failed to score in more than 20 appearances for the club before he found the back of the net on Saturday. Slot believes that Writz's contribution has been undervalued due to obsession with statistics. "I'm quite sure it was a relief for him. This I could see after his reaction after he scored the goal – and the same I saw with his teammates. I think they were really happy for him," Slot told reporters. "In football – rightly so, maybe – we mainly get judged on results, and individuals mainly get judged on goals and assists. Sometimes we tend to forget what else there is to do during a game." On Saturday, Fritz latched on Hugo Ekitike's through ball before poking past goalkeeper Jose Sa in the 42nd minute making it 2-0 for his club. "I was confident that I would score one day," said the Germany mid-fielder, who was signed from Bayer Leverkusen in June. "I just know that it will come and I try to keep going like

that." "He's had multiple good games for us but I also feel he gets better and better every single game he is playing for us. He gets fitter and fitter and was getting closer and closer to his first goal," he added. "Then it was not a surprise to me that he scored one today, but he would probably be the first one to understand that one goal is not enough. With this win, Liverpool has entered the top four with 32 points but they sit ten points behind league leaders Arsenal, who defeated Brighton.

Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf dropped from Pakistan squad for T20I series against Sri Lanka



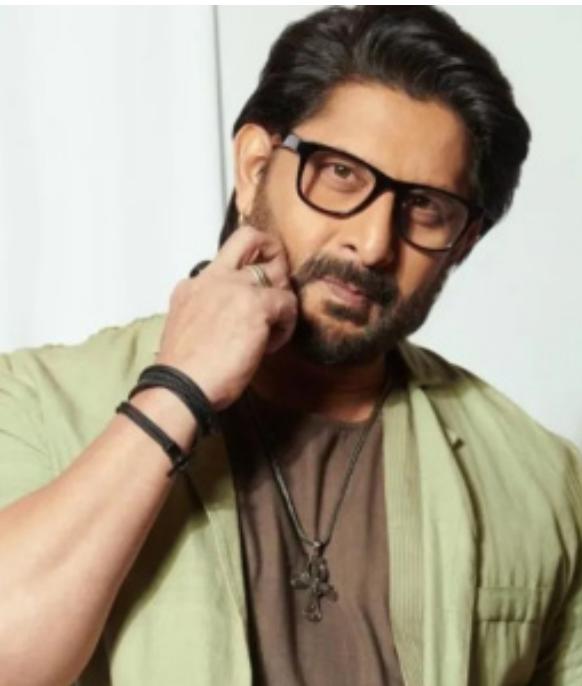
"No doubt strike rate is important in T20 cricket but you have to combine it with a volume of runs," Hesson said. "There's a good reason why our ranking in T20 cricket is as low as it is, because our strike rates from a batting point of view are not high enough. We certainly made some shifts in that last series to play a more expansive game of cricket and probably catch up with the rest of the world, as that is the way the modern game is. However, Hesson acknowledged that the 30-year-old Babar needed improvement on scoring rates, while backing him to make amends. "Babar is one of many who have the ability to make those improvements. And I'm here to work with them and help them. In the last month or so, he's made some really good changes. It's not just a matter of going from 125 to 150, it's a matter of increasing what you can offer because we're no doubt often 30-40 runs short with the bat. So, we need to find a way of getting that."

Pakistan is going to play a three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka. The Men in Green have announced their squad for the tour and have made a few surprise choices. The side has dropped the leading run-scorer in T20Is, Babar Azam, bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf, who are all part of the ongoing Big Bash League in Australia. Additionally, wicket-keeper batter Mohammad Rizwan is also dropped from the team. Interestingly Shadab Khan, who happens to be a part of the BBL team Sydney Thunder,

returns to the side. Pakistan squad: Salman Ali Agha (C), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmad, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salim Mirza, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq

Despite racking up 4429 with an average close to 40, Babar's middling 128.45 strike rate came in the way of a crucial top-order spot in the shortest format in recent times. Earlier in an interview, Mike Hesson also clarified that he had not mentioned that only players with a strike rate north of 150 will be considered for T20Is.

Salman Khan is a 'bad boy', Shah Rukh Khan a 'gentleman', says Arshad Warsi; actor recalls shooting unreleased film with Amitabh Bachchan



stars – for me, it's Dilip Kumar, Shah Rukh Khan, and Amitabh Bachchan. My luck is so bad that I have never worked with Amit ji in my life. We shot for an entire film together but it never got released. The name was Zamaanat. It went through a lot of trouble – shooting started, then paused, and this kept happening. S Ramanathan was its director, he passed away in the middle. I actually realised at that time, Mr B had told me that I should keep doing my shot till I am happy and satisfied no matter what happens." Warsi praised Bachchan's dedication to give his best in every shot. "We took a courtroom shot in Hyderabad. There was a lot of sunlight. There were many people on the stairs with 500-1000 people lying on the road to protest. It was a large scale set. Amit ji had a long speech in that scene." He added, "He gave around 10-12 takes in that shot, and then finally thought one of them was fine. We sat inside after it. A few minutes later, he said that we should do one more. I started smiling, and thought he was joking. But, he was serious, everyone laid down on the road once again, the entire shot happened again." Arshad Warsi has worked with Shah Rukh in Kuchh Meetha Ho Jaye (2005) and is set to collaborate with him in King (2026). Appreciating SRK's work approach and nature, he said, "Shah Rukh knows his work. He has that old school theatre vibe, and has all the lines in his mind. He is one of the most polite and giving actors. It's very nice. I have never seen him raise his voice. I am very fond of him. Even Suhana and Aaryan have been brought up well, great kids. I said yes to King within a second. Shah Rukh has already said that he is the last of the stars and I absolutely believe him. I love him, big fan. He has a lot of dignity."

When the host asked how Salman Khan differs from Shah Rukh Khan, Arshad replied, "Salman is a bad boy. He is one of those quintessential good-looking, bad boy. Shah Rukh is a gentleman, a bit settled. There's nothing wrong with both. Salman is different personally, he is not the same. You can see his aura in public, but personally at home, he is a different person. Cracks a lot of jokes, has fun. Inherently, his entire family is very funny, they have a good sense of humour, like they have come to have fun in life."

Arshad Warsi opened up about his experience of working with Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan. Arshad Warsi opened up about his experience of working with Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan. Arshad Warsi has worked with both Khan superstars, Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan, but his film with veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan never saw the light of day. In a recent interview, the actor revealed that Salman has a 'bad boy' aura publicly, while SRK is a 'gentleman'. Arshad also recalled shooting for an unreleased film with Big B.

During a conversation with The Lallantop, Arshad Warsi recalled shooting the unreleased film Zamaanat with Amitabh Bachchan. He said, "There are genuine

Terry Crews compares Shah Rukh Khan's stardom to Tom Cruise and Cristiano Ronaldo: 'He is a super international star'



America's Got Talent host and Brooklyn Nine-Nine actor Terry Crews recently expressed a desire to be part of an Indian film and spoke about his admiration for superstar Shah Rukh Khan. Crews described Shah Rukh Khan as a truly global star, comparing his level of stardom to that of Tom Cruise and Cristiano Ronaldo.

In an interview with ETimes, Crews shared that people around the world admire what India has to offer culturally.

Describing himself as a big fan of music and dance, he praised Indian cinema for seamlessly incorporating large-scale musical performances, something he noted is largely absent in American films. Crews also went on to laud SRK's stardom, calling him a "super international" star. Speaking about Shah Rukh Khan, Terry Crews said he is looking forward to meeting the superstar, describing SRK as a true example of "Tom Cruise-level Indian talent that has taken over the world." Crews further remarked that Shah Rukh's name and brand are as vast and influential as those of Tom Cruise and Cristiano Ronaldo. Terry Crews' fascination with and admiration for Bollywood is not new. Earlier this month, he also shared a photo with Ranveer Singh, congratulating him on the success of Dhurandhar. He wrote on X, "Me and the great @ranveersingh at @abudhabigp!!!! Congrats

on DHURANDHAR." On the professional front, Terry Crews will next be seen in PAW Patrol: The Dino Movie slated for release in August 2026. As for Shah Rukh Khan, he will next appear in King alongside his daughter Suhana Khan. The film also stars Deepika Padukone, Jaideep Ahlawat, and Abhishek Bachchan in pivotal roles. Directed by Siddharth Anand, King is also expected to release in 2026.

Pratham Mittal joins Shark Tank India 5, calls reality TV 'ruthless': 'You can't be overtly critical...'

separate issue." Talking about his friendship with Aman Gupta, Pratham shared, "Aman is a very close friend, and he helped me feel very comfortable while shooting. He also happens to be my neighbour. Peyush Bansal has been to Masters' Union, so I've known him. I've also been in touch with Ritesh Agarwal in the past. Maybe because they're all from Delhi, like I am, it helped us get along well. People have been incredibly nice. We don't know what kind of companies we see on a given day; it's as much a surprise for us as the audience. Further talking about his decision to be on Shark Tank India, Pratham Mittal said, "Gen Z and Alpha aren't very patient, and climbing the corporate ladder slowly feels like a risk to them. For the young ones in my family, jobs are a backup because they aren't as secure as they once were. To keep up with that, Masters' Union and Tetr are based more on building businesses than mugging curriculum. It's like if an incubator and a college had a baby. One motivation for me for coming on Shark Tank is also so I can talk more about this."

Prabhas calls Zarina Wahab the real hero of 'The Raja Saab'

Mumbai: Prabhas, who will be seen sharing screen space with veteran actress Zarina Wahab in "Raja Saab", revealed that while dubbing for the movie, he used to forget his own scenes as he got too busy watching Zarina's incredible performance. Speaking during the pre-release event of Maruthi's highly-awaited horror comedy, the Rebel Star called Zarina the hero of "Raja Saab". The 'Baahubali' actor shared, "This is a story of a grandmother and grandson. Zarina Wahab played my grandmother in this film. While she was dubbing, I forgot my own scenes and kept watching her scenes. I became a fan of her acting. Along with me, Zarina garu is also the hero of 'Raja Saab'." Talking about his other co-stars in the movie, he said that as Sanjay Dutt appears in a close-up shot on the screen, he eats up the entire scene. Riddhi, Malavika, and Nidhhi are three beautiful heroines, and they will impress you with their performances and screen presence", added the 'Salaar' actor.

Usually, on Shark Tank India, the judges are often seen being very critical of the pitchers. While in the previous season it sparked off controversies, Pratham Mittal aspires to stand out. Talking about the same, he said, "I'm a very soft person. It's very difficult for me to say anything that'll hurt somebody. I think I'll be fine... I might be boring, but that's a

Brigitte Bardot, 1960s sultry sex symbol turned militant animal rights activist, dies at 91



Brigitte Bardot, the French 1960s sex symbol who became one of the greatest screen sirens of the 20th century and later a militant animal rights activist, has died. She was 91. Bruno Jacquier, of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation for the protection of animals, told The Associated Press that she died Sunday at her home in southern France, and would not provide a cause of death. He said no arrangements have yet been made for funeral or memorial services. She had been hospitalized last month.

Brigitte Bardot became an international celebrity as a sexualized teen bride in the 1956 movie And God Created Woman. Directed by her then-husband, Roger Vadim, it triggered a scandal with scenes of the long-legged beauty dancing on tables naked. At the height of a cinema career that spanned some 28 films and three marriages, Bardot came to symbolize a nation bursting out of bourgeois respectability. Her tousled, blond hair, voluptuous figure and pouty irreverence made her one of France's best-known stars.

Such was her widespread appeal that in 1969 her features were chosen to be the model for Marianne, the national emblem of France and the official Gallic seal. Bardot's face appeared on statues, postage stamps and even on coins. Brigitte Bardot's second career as an animal rights activist was equally sensational. She traveled to the Arctic to blow the whistle on the slaughter of baby seals; she condemned the use of animals in laboratory experiments; and she opposed sending monkeys into space.

"Man is an insatiable predator," Bardot told The Associated Press on her 73rd birthday, in 2007. "I don't care about my past glory. That means nothing in the face of an animal that suffers, since it has no power, no words to defend itself."

Her activism earned her compatriots' respect and, in 1985, she was awarded the Legion of Honor, the nation's highest honor. A turn to the far right, however, she fell from public grace as her animal protection diatribes took on a decidedly extremist tone and her far-right political views sounded racist as she frequently decried the influx of immigrants into France, especially Muslims. She was convicted five times in French courts of inciting racial hatred. Notably, she criticized the Muslim practice of slaughtering sheep during annual religious holidays like Eid al-Adha. Brigitte Bardot's 1992 marriage to fourth husband Bernard d'Orme, a onetime adviser to former National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, contributed to her political shift. She described the outspoken nationalist as a "lovely, intelligent man."

In 2012, she caused controversy again when she wrote a letter in support of Marine Le Pen, the current leader of the party — now renamed National Rally — in her failed bid for the French presidency. In 2018, at the height of the #MeToo movement, Bardot said in an interview that most actors protesting sexual harassment in the film industry were "hypocritical" and "ridiculous" because many played "the teases" with producers to land parts. She said she had never had been a victim of sexual harassment and found it "charming to be told that I was beautiful or that I had a nice little ass."

Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot was born Sept. 28, 1934, to a wealthy industrialist. A shy, secretive child, she studied classical ballet and was discovered by a family friend who put her on the cover of Elle magazine at age 14. Bardot once described her childhood as "difficult" and said her father was a strict disciplinarian who would sometimes punish her with a horse whip. But it was French movie producer Roger Vadim, whom she married in 1952, who saw her

potential and wrote And God Created Woman to showcase her provocative sensuality, an explosive cocktail of childlike innocence and raw sexuality. The film, which portrayed Brigitte Bardot as a bored newlywed who beds her brother-in-law, had a decisive influence on New Wave directors Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, and came to embody the hedonism and sexual freedom of the 1960s. The film was a box-office hit, and it made Bardot a superstar. Her girlish pout, tiny waist and generous bust were often appreciated than her talent.

"It's an embarrassment to have acted so badly," Bardot said of her early films. "I suffered a lot in the beginning. I was really treated like someone less than nothing." Brigitte Bardot's unabashed, off-screen love affair with co-star Jean-Louis Trintignant further shocked the nation. It eradicated the boundaries between her public and private life and turned her into a hot prize for paparazzi. Bardot never adjusted to the limelight. She blamed the constant press attention for the suicide attempt that followed 10 months after the birth of her only child, Nicolas. Photographers had broke into her house only two weeks before she gave birth to snap a picture of her pregnant Nicolas. Nicolas' father was Jacques Charrier, a French actor whom she married in 1959 but who never felt comfortable in his role as Monsieur Bardot. Bardot soon gave up her son to his father, and later said she had been chronically depressed and unready for the duties of being a mother. "I was looking for roots then," she said in an interview. "I had none to offer." In her 1996 autobiography Initiates B.B., she likened her pregnancy to "a tumor growing inside me," and described Charrier as "temperamental and abusive." Brigitte Bardot married her third husband, West German millionaire playboy Gunther Sachs, in 1966, but the relationship again ended in divorce three years later. Among her films were A Parisian (1957); In Case of Misfortune, in which she starred in 1958 with screen legend Jean Gabin; The Truth (1960); Private Life (1962); A Ravishing Idiot (1964); Shalako (1968); Women (1969); The Bear And The Doll (1970); Rum Boulevard (1971); and Don Juan (1973). With the exception of 1963's critically acclaimed Contempt, directed by Godard, Bardot's films were rarely complicated by plots. Often they were vehicles to display Bardot's curves and legs in scanty dresses or frolicking nude in the sun. It was never a great passion of mine," she said of filmmaking. "And it can be deadly sometimes. Marilyn (Monroe) perished because of it."

Brigitte Bardot retired to her Riviera villa in St. Tropez at the age of 39 in 1973 after The Woman Grabber. She emerged a decade later with a new persona: An animal rights lobbyist, her face was wrinkled and her voice was deep following years of heavy smoking. She abandoned her jet-set life and sold off movie memorabilia and jewelry to create a foundation devoted exclusively to the prevention of animal cruelty. Her activism knew no borders. She urged South Korea to ban the sale of dog meat and once wrote to U.S. President Bill Clinton asking why the U.S. Navy recaptured two dolphins it had released into the wild.

She attacked centuries-old French and Italian sporting traditions including the Palio, a free-for-all horse race, and campaigned on behalf of wolves, rabbits, kittens and turtle doves. By the late 1990s, Brigitte Bardot was making headlines that would lose her many fans. She was convicted and fined five times between 1997 and 2008 for inciting racial hatred in incidents inspired by her anger at Muslim animal slaughtering rituals. "It's true that sometimes I get carried away,

but when I see how slowly things move forward ... and despite all the promises that have been made to me by all different governments put together — my distress takes over," Bardot told the AP. In 1997, several towns removed Bardot-inspired statues of Marianne — the bare-breasted statue representing the French Republic — after the actress voiced anti-immigrant sentiment. Also that year, she received death threats after calling for a ban on the sale of horse meat. Bardot once said that she identified with the animals that she was trying to save. "I can understand hunted animals because of the way I was treated," Bardot said. "What happened to me was inhuman. I was constantly surrounded by the world press."

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During a conversation with The Lallantop, Arshad Warsi recalled shooting the unreleased film Zamaanat with Amitabh Bachchan. He said, "There are genuine