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"Excel in Sports Along with Academics" Srikari Mahasana Annual Sports Meet Celebrated Grandly

"Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, January 9: Emphasizing that students should strive for excellence not only in academics but also in sports, Srikari Mahasana High School Chairman N. Saibaba and motivational speaker Fakhrudin Ahmed Ali encouraged students to adopt a holistic approach to education. They stated that physical fitness, discipline, teamwork, and sportsmanship developed through sports play a vital role in shaping students' overall personality and future success. The Srikari Mahasana Annual Sports Meet was held in a grand and enthusiastic manner on Friday at the school premises. The event witnessed vibrant participation from students and staff, creating a festive atmosphere. The program was inaugurated in the presence of the chief guests—school Chairman and Sai Garden proprietor N. Saibaba, and motivational speaker Fakhrudin Ahmed Ali. On this occasion, students enthusiastically participated in various sports and games, showcasing their skills.

Annadana program under the leadership of Pittala Nagaraju on the occasion of Mainampalli Hanumantha Rao's birthday

"K. Sada Nand, Malkajigiri, Malkajigiri on 9th and 10th January, Congress leader Pittala Nagaraju organized an annadanam program on Friday to celebrate the 60th birthday of former MLA Mynampally Hanumantha Rao. Hanumantha Rao's wife Mainampally Vani was the chief guest and cut the cake. A large number of local leaders, party workers and fans participated in the event and expressed their wishes. Speaking on this occasion, Pittala Nagaraj said that Mainampalli Hanumantha Rao's sense of service is an inspiration to everyone. On this occasion, he thanked the activists and fans for their cooperation in making this program a success



Union cabinet approves Kaziranga elevated corridor, PM Modi to lay foundation stone

Guwahati, Jan 9

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday announced that the Union Cabinet has approved the state government's flagship project to construct an el-

evated corridor through Kaziranga National Park, a move aimed at protecting wildlife while improving connectivity in Upper Assam.

Addressing the reporters here, Sarma said the elevated corridor between Bokakhat and Kaziranga will be built at an estimated cost of over Rs 6,000 crore. He described the project as a landmark intervention that balances infrastructure development with ecological conservation. "The elevated corridor will significantly reduce wildlife mortality caused by vehicular movement and ensure safe passage for animals across the national park," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister added that the project would also shorten travel time between Guwahati and Jorhat, im-

proving economic and tourism prospects in the region. Once completed, the corridor is expected to generate long-term revenue for the state, including around 9 per cent GST and additional income linked to forest-related activities.

Sarma also announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Assam on January 17. During the visit, the Prime Minister will inaugurate the first Vande Bharat sleeper train service between Kolkata and Guwahati, marking a major boost to rail connectivity in the Northeast.

In addition, new trains connecting Dibrugarh to Lucknow and Guwahati to Rohtak via Delhi will be flagged off, further integrating Assam with key regions of the country.

The Chief Minister said that during his visit, the Prime Minister will also witness the traditional Bodo dance Bagurumba, highlighting Assam's rich cultural heritage on a national platform.

On January 18, PM Modi will travel to Kaziranga to lay the foundation stone of the elevated corridor project. Sarma said the Prime Minister's presence underlines the Centre's commitment to Assam's development and to environmentally sensitive infrastructure.

The elevated corridor through Kaziranga has long been one of the Assam government's flagship initiatives, envisioned to resolve the long-standing conflict between conservation and connectivity.

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Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Diluting ISI's institutional autonomy

The 95-year-old Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), considered the gold standard for statistical research in the country, is facing the threat of losing its institutional autonomy and independence following the NDA government's move to revamp its structure and convert it into a corporate body. This fits into a broader pattern of systematic dilution of institutional autonomy and federal values through over-centralisation of powers over the last few years. The Draft Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2025, released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), proposes major structural reforms that appear to be opaque and hastily formulated without any prior debate. The Centre wants to overhaul the governance structure of the Kolkata-based premier institute, which is synonymous with India's early efforts to use Statistics for policy and development. There are growing concerns over how the hasty reforms could dilute the autonomy and undermine the federal spirit. Over 1,500 academicians have expressed grave concern and held demonstrations to protest the government's plan, which focuses on corporatisation and revenue generation. What is alarming is that the draft Bill, seeking to repeal the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Act, 1959, omits references to national development, social welfare, and planning but introduces new priorities such as global excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and financial self-sustainability. Experts fear that increased focus on revenue generation may shift ISI away from basic research, and the essential long-term research could suffer under a corporate-style funding model. The new legislation undermines the original agreement under which the ISI society was formed in 1931. The institution's historical contributions include the development of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), which laid the foundation for India's official statistical system. The proposed Bill seeks to transform ISI from a registered society into a statutory body. This structural shift is framed by the government as a step toward modernising and strengthening ISI as it approaches its centenary. Under the 1959 Act, ISI's governance rested with a council that included significant academic representation, including 10 members from within ISI. The draft Bill's new Board of Governance (BoG) is heavily dominated by government nominees, leaving no elected representatives from among faculty or researchers. This raises concerns of political interference, especially in appointments and academic decision-making. The proposed BoG is empowered to make key administrative and academic decisions.

The final voter list must be prepared meticulously without any errors or mistakes: - Additional Collector for Local Bodies and Additional Collector for Revenue,

Bhaskar Rao

"(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau...Indian Chronicle...January 9):- Additional Collector for Local Bodies and Additional Collector for Revenue, Bhaskar Rao, instructed that the final voter list must be prepared meticulously without any errors or mistakes. On Friday, the Additional Collector visited the Mothkur Municipal office. He reviewed the preparedness for conducting the municipal elections with the officials. He said that necessary arrangements should be made to conduct the elections efficiently as soon as the municipal election schedule is released. He instructed that the voter list should be prepared accurately for each ward. He suggested that the draft list should be displayed in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission, objections should be received and resolved



in a timely manner, and the final voter list should be published on January 12th. He said that since every single vote is crucial in the local body elections, care should be taken to ensure that the name of no eligible voter is left out of the list. He stated that it should be ensured that every eligible person is included in the list, and that eligible voters from the same family fall under the same polling station. At the same time, he ordered that a thorough field inspection should be conducted to prevent the inclusion of bogus voters. He said that if any mistakes occur, the concerned booth-level officers, supervisors, and other officials will be held responsible. He instructed the Municipal Commissioner to randomly check the revised draft publication before the final list is released. He also said that they should perform their duties with integ-



riy from the date the election schedule is announced until the completion of the election process."Municipal Commissioner Satish Kumar, the manager, and ward staff participated in this meeting.

In memory of son Tekmal Akshit Reddy in Dharpalli village, Tekmal Shailaja and Shekhar Reddy distributed bicycles to students coming from distant areas and chairs distributed to Anganwadi students

"Ind, jan 9 medk incharge nr goud." "In memory of their son Harshit Reddy in Dharpalli village of Medak District Chinna Shankarpet Mandal, Tekmal Shailaja Maipal Reddy couple distributed two bicycles to their daughter Harshita and two female students who were walking from a distant area to study. They felicitated Shekhar Reddy with a shawl. Similarly, around 50 chairs were handed over to children in memory of his son Harshit Reddy at the Anganwadi center. In this event Shailaja Shekhar Reddy, Surpunch Manasa Mahipal Reddy, wise Sarpanch Tadakapalli Mahender, Ex-Water Board Chairman Lingareddy, Ex-wise -Sarpanch Tiger Narasimha Goud, Pandu, Ex-MPTC Uppari Srinivas Upadhyaya team and village elders participated.



Corporator BANNALA GEETHA PRAVEEN Inspects CC Road Works Worth Rs 36 Lakhs in Indira nagar



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 9 (Indian Chronicle)"Chikkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee member Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj inspected the CC (cement concrete) road construction works being carried out in Indira Nagar Colony of the division at an estimated cost of ?36 lakhs, along with officials from the GHMC Engineering Department. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Geetha Praveen stressed that CC road construction must be carried out strictly under the supervision of officials and in accordance with prescribed quality standards. She directed the officials to take all necessary steps to ensure that the road works are completed before the Sankranti festival, so that residents can celebrate the festival com-

fortably, including drawing traditional muggulu (rangoli) in front of their homes."She further emphasized that since these development works are being undertaken using public tax money, there should be no negligence at any stage. She instructed that proper curing of the CC roads must be carried out for the stipulated duration immediately after completion of the construction. She also requested AE Raj Kumar to closely monitor the works and ensure timely completion while maintaining high-quality standards."The inspection programme was attended by AE Raj Kumar, BRS State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Edula Kondal Reddy, Kokonda Jagan, Indira Nagar Colony Association President Muddam Srinivas Yadav, Secretary Balakrishna Goud, member Mallikarjun, and other local representatives.

Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy Distributes Prizes to Rangoli Competition Winners



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 9 (Indian Chronicle)." "Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy distributed prizes to the winners of the rangoli (muggulu) competitions organised under the leadership of senior BRS leader Kaleru Jai Naveen at Habsiguda Government High School. The prize distribution ceremony was held with the MLA attending as the chief guest."Addressing the gathering, Bandari Lakshma Reddy said that rangolis are symbols of India's rich traditional art and represent the creativity of women. He noted that such cultural programmes not only help in preserving traditions but

also strengthen social unity. He congratulated the students who showcased their talent in the competitions and presented them with prizes. The MLA expressed his desire to see women take the lead in the fields of art and culture and assured his full support for organising similar programmes in the future. BRS leaders Pasula Prabhakar Reddy, CH Lakshminarayana, Yadagiri Pradeep Reddy, Karunakar Reddy, Suguna, Veerender, Somireddy, Lakshmi, Rehman, Nani, Nalini Reddy, Pawan, along with local public representatives, women, youth and a large number of residents, participated in the programme.

29th National Youth Day Celebrated at Uppal Government Degree College



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 9 (Indian Chronicle)." "The 29th National Youth Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at the Government Degree College, Uppal, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The programme was organised under the aegis of the college NSS unit. Presiding over the event, Principal Dr. K. Vijay Kumar highlighted Swami Vivekananda's

slogan, "Infinite faith and relentless effort are the pathways to success." He emphasised that discipline, preparedness, and dedication to work are essential qualities for success. He noted that youth can achieve great things only through unity and collective effort, and called upon students to work towards building the nation envisioned by Swami Vivekananda. Vice Principal Dr. C.H. Satyanarayana stated that the life of Swami Vivekananda is a great source of inspiration for the youth. He encouraged students to be courageous and actively participate in social service. NSS Programme Officer J. Vishwanath Kumar recalled that Swami Vivekananda had stressed that the future leadership of the nation lies in the hands of young people with strong character and leadership qualities."Faculty members Dr. N. Rajashree, Academic Coordinator K. Geetha, Dr. Yamuna Narayani, Dr. V. Srinivasa Rao, Dr. R. Chandra Sagar, Dr. P. Venkateshwarlu, M. Sravanti, K. Sravanti, L. Anusha, and others participated in the programme.



ASHA Workers of Uppal Primary Health Centre Join INTUC

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 9 (Indian Chronicle)"ASHA workers serving at the Uppal Primary Health Centre have joined the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the trade union affiliated with the Indian National Congress. The development took place in the presence of INTUC State President Maimudha, as part of her state tour. Addressing a meeting with ASHA workers at the Uppal PHC, INTUC State Honorary President Kura Venkateshwarlu and State President Maimudha assured the workers that efforts would be made to reduce their workload and increase their remuneration. They stated that if any officials were found pressurising or harassing ASHA workers, complaints would be lodged with higher authorities to ensure



appropriate action."The INTUC State President informed that around 65 ASHA workers from the Uppal Primary Health Centre formally joined the INTUC union in her presence. It was also announced that Kavitha would serve as the representative of the INTUC ASHA Workers' Union until the Medchal district committee is constituted."Union leaders assured the ASHA workers that any issues faced by them in the district should be brought to the notice of Kavitha, who would take them up with district and state-level authorities for resolution. On the occasion, the INTUC union calendar was also unveiled."Several ASHA workers, including Renuka, Jyothi, Kalyani, Swapna, Manisha, Suma, Parameshwari, and others, participated in the programme.

Sankranti Muggulu Festivities at Uppal Government Degree College

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 9 (Indian Chronicle)." "Sankranti Muggulu (rangoli) competitions were held with great enthusiasm at Uppal Government Degree College under the aegis of the Women Empowerment Cell. The event was organized as part of Sankranti celebrations and witnessed active participation from students."College Principal Dr. K. Vijay



Kumar encouraged students to take part enthusiastically in cultural activities, emphasizing their role in holistic development. In the competitions, K. Priyadarshini and Hemalatha (B.Com) secured the first prize, N. Srivani and K. Mamatha (B.Sc) won the second prize, while S. Prathyusha and N. Sarika (B.Sc) bagged the third prize."The programme was attended by Vice Principal Dr. C.H. Satyanarayana, Women Empowerment Cell Coordinator Dr. N. Rajashree, Cultural Committee Coordinator J. Vishwanath Kumar, Academic Coordinator K. Geetha, along with faculty members Dr. S. Yamuna Rani, L. Anusha, K. Sravanti, M. Sravanti, K. Aruna, Farheen, Shakeela, Pushpa, P. Vijay Kumar, Dr. V. Srinivasa Rao, Dr. R. Chandrasagar, Dr. P. Venkateshwarlu, and others."The faculty members congratulated the winning students and appreciated their creativity and participation in the Sankranti celebrations.

Provide better medical services to the people who come to the government hospital: Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao



“(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau...Indian Chronicle...January 9):- District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that better medical services should be provided to the people who come to the government hospital. On Friday, the Collector made a surprise inspection of the Primary Health Center in Bibinagar mandal.“He checked the attendance register and inquired about the attendance of the doctors and staff on duty. The Collector clarified that all doctors and staff must be available on duty and provide better medical services to the people. He inquired about the average number of patients visiting the hospital every day, how many of them are admitted as inpatients, whether there are sufficient doctors and staff, and whether there is a full supply of medicines. He inquired about the number of normal de-

liveries that have taken place in the hospital since the day the Primary Health Center was inaugurated. He asked for details about how many normal deliveries were conducted in the government hospital last month and whether they are being done here. He said that in the past, due to the lack of proper facilities, people had to go elsewhere for deliveries, but now that there is a good building, steps should be taken to ensure that deliveries take place here. He said that the DD register should be updated regularly. He warned that he would conduct surprise inspections regularly and take action against those who show negligence. The Collector instructed the contractor to clean the unfinished building on the ground floor and to quickly complete the work on the stairs leading to the upper floors and the surrounding compound wall. The concerned officials participated in this program.

State government's prestigious Indiramma housing construction works should be completed quickly:

Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao



“(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau...Indian Chronicle...January 9):- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that the construction works of the Indiramma houses, a prestigious project undertaken by the state government, should be completed quickly.“On Friday, the District Collector inspected the Indiramma housing construction works in Jainapally village of BB Nagar mandal.“On this occasion, the District Collector inquired about the total number of Indiramma houses sanctioned in the village and how many of them are in the final stages of construc-

tion. He said that the Indiramma houses in various stages of construction should be completed quickly and house-warming ceremonies should be held. He also said that the money will be credited to their accounts immediately upon completion. He stated that the government is ready to provide Indiramma houses in the second phase as well, so if the construction of the houses sanctioned so far in their village is completed quickly, new houses will be sanctioned. Concerned officials participated in this program.

Pending applications in Bhoobharathi should be resolved quickly:

- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao

“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 9):- District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that the pending applications in Bhoobharathi should be resolved quickly.“On Friday, he visited the Tahsildar's office in BB Nagar and reviewed the pending Bhoobharathi applications with the revenue officials and staff. The Collector guided them on how to resolve the pending Bhoobharathi applications for each village in the mandal. He said that they should take the initiative to ensure that justice is served to every eligible person. He said that the petitions received in the revenue meetings and the pending Sada Bainama applications should be resolved quickly. He instructed that if applications are rejected, the reasons for rejection should be clearly stated. He advised that applications should not be rejected for minor reasons and that they should work in accordance with the government's objective of granting ownership rights to eligible persons. He said that they should act without succumbing to any pressure and with complete transparency, and work in accordance with the provisions of the Bhoobharathi Act. He



said that clear progress should be visible by the next review meeting.“Mandal Tahsildar Shyamsunder Reddy and other concerned officials participated in this program.

Grand Pongal (Sankranti) Celebrations at Kerala School, Jammikunta

“P.S.ASHOKAN“KARIMNAGAR BUREAU.”“In a vibrant display of cultural pride and festive spirit, Kerala School in Jammikunta Mandal celebrated the Sankranti festival in advance with great enthusiasm and splendour.“The school campus came alive as students, especially young children, participated in the festivities dressed as Haridasulu, Gangireddulu, and took part in traditional Bhogi bonfires. Colourful cultural dances and performances presented by the students beautifully reflected the essence of the Sankranti celebrations and captivated the audience.“Addressing the gathering, the School Chairman K. S. Benny emphasised the importance of preserving Telangana's rich traditions and cultural practices. He remarked that introducing children to cultural values in today's modern society not only strengthens their roots but also nurtures creativity and cultural awareness among students. He appreciated the collective efforts of the school in organising such a meaningful and educative celebration.“The programme witnessed active participation from teachers, students, and parents, whose wholehearted involvement contributed to the grand success of the event. The celebrations concluded on a joyful note, leaving lasting impressions of tradition, unity, and cultural pride within the school community.



GHMC Declares No Manual Scavenging in Hyderabad; Public Invited to Submit Objections



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 9, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“In accordance with the Supreme Court order in WP(C) No. 3241 of 2020 dated October 20, 2023, and as per the guidelines issued by the Government of India for conducting surveys on manual scavengers, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has declared that there is no practice of manual scavenging within its jurisdiction. As part of this declaration, GHMC has invited objections, if any, from the general public or

other stakeholders regarding the said announcement. Individuals or organizations wishing to raise objections are required to submit them in writing within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. Objections can be submitted either in person at the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation office or sent via email to cmoh.ghmc@gmail.com. The notice was issued by the GHMC Commissioner and was officially displayed on the office notice board following the Commissioner's instructions. The notification was announced at the Boduppal Circle by Deputy Commissioner A. Shailaja.

Fatima Sheikh's Birth Anniversary Celebrated Grandly Under the Auspices of People's Organizations



“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 9):- The birth anniversary of Fatima Sheikh, the first Muslim woman teacher of modern India, was celebrated under the auspices of people's organizations. On Friday, the birth anniversary of Fatima Sheikh, the first Muslim woman teacher of India, was celebrated grandly under the auspices of people's organizations at the local Mahatma Jyotiba Phule statue in Bhuvanagiri town. On this occasion, floral tributes were paid to her portrait. Speaking on the occasion, the leaders of the people's organizations, including former Municipal Chairman Barre Jangir, District Library Chairman Awais Chisti, Senior Journalist Dr. Sheikh Hameed Pasha, former Councilor Azeem Uddin, BC Association leader Kotha Narasimha Swamy, and Agricultural Workers' Union District Secretary Kondamadugu Narasimha, said that Fatima Sheikh, the first Muslim woman teacher of India, worked alongside Savitribai Phule for the advancement of women's education in the country and to promote education among women. They said that education is the main weapon to eliminate inequalities in society and that everything can be achieved through education. They added that the credit for fighting against the unorganized forces

that were keeping women away from education in those times goes to Fatima Sheikh and Savitribai Phule. On this occasion, they demanded that the government include the biography of Fatima Sheikh, who rendered services for the educational advancement of women, in textbooks so that she can serve as a role model for future generations. They stated that in our country, the largest secular democracy, some people are trying to undermine democracy under the guise of Sanatana Dharma and create chaos in the country. They emphasized the need for secularists and democrats, transcending party and religious affiliations, to work together to stop such attempts. Those who participated in this program included leaders of people's organizations Bhaskar Naik, CPI party district leader Yeshala Ashok, AITUC district secretary Imran, Minority Journalists Front district president Md. Sujauddin, Ambedkar Association's Barre Sudarshan, BSP party district president Mahender, DTF's Satyam Sir, MRPS district president Ramakrishna, Baburao, LHPS Rajesh Naik, journalist Imtiaz, social activist Kodari Venkatesh, Iqbal Chowdary, Md. Kazam, Md. Mazhar Bablu, Rafiuddin Ghori, Mujeeb, Ismail, Naimuddin, Bairapaka Cyril, Md. Rashid, Erukala Association's Kuthadi Suresh, Gas Chinna, and others.



Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau...Indian Chronicle...January 9:- A scene of Kisan Morcha State General Secretary and former councilor Padamati Jagmohan Reddy welcoming and felicitating ST Morcha State President Ravi Naik with a shawl on his arrival in Bhongir.

Excel in CM Cup, bring pride to the district: Collector to Athletes

“Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 9 (Indian Chronicle):“District Collector Calls on Athletes to Bring Laurels to the District in CM Cup Sports, Collector Venkatesh Dhotre has urged athletes to excel in the ongoing CM Cup sports competitions being conducted across the state and to bring recognition to the district.“The CM Cup Sports 2025 torch rally, organised under the aegis of the District Youth and Sports Services Department, was formally inaugurated on Friday at the premises of the Integrated District Collectorate Complex. The event was flagged off by the District Collector along with District Superintendent of Police Nitthika Pant, Additional District Collector (Revenue) David, Asifabad Market Committee Chairman Irukulla Manga, and District Youth Sports Officer Ashwak.“Addressing the gathering, the District Collector highlighted that sports contribute significantly to physical fitness and mental well-being, and help in relieving stress. He stated that as part of the CM Cup, competitions are being organised at the gram panchayat, mandal, constituency, and district levels, with winning athletes progressing to the state-level events. He encouraged sportspersons to demonstrate exceptional talent at the state level and bring honour to the district.“Speaking on the occasion, the District Superintendent of Police emphasised the importance of sportsmanship, advising



athletes to participate with a true sporting spirit and to perform to the best of their abilities, irrespective of victory or defeat.“The torch rally was conducted from the Collectorate to Komuram Bheem Chowrasta.“The programme witnessed the participation of market committee directors, constituency in-charge Shyam Naik, government officials, representatives of youth organisations, sportspersons, employees, police personnel, and physical education teachers.

Quality education, nutritious meals must go hand in hand: Collector

“Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 9 (Indian Chronicle): “Ensure quality education alongside nutritious meals as per menu: Collector to KGBV staff Venkatesh Dhotre inspects Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in Gangapur village.” District Collector Venkatesh Dhotre on Friday emphasised the need to provide students in government schools and welfare hostels with quality education complemented by nutritious food prepared strictly as per the prescribed menu. “Accompanied by Additional Collector (Local Bodies) and In-charge District Educational Officer Deepak Tiwari, the Collector visited the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) in Gangapur village, Rebbena Mandal. He inspected the kitchen, storage facilities for cooking materials, the menu chart, and the quality of food being served to the students. “Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Dhotre stated that the government is committed to ensuring no inconvenience to students in all government schools and welfare hostels by providing full infrastructure facilities. He highlighted the focus on health through the implementation of a nutritionally balanced menu. The Collector directed officials to maintain cleanliness in the kitchen, classrooms, and school premises. He stressed special attention on Class 10 and Intermediate students, urging the preparation of plans to achieve 100 per cent pass percentage in annual examinations. Backward students in subjects should be identified and provided with special remedial classes, he added. “In view of the prevailing cold weather, he instructed that hot water be sup-

plied to students in the mornings. He also called for the



use of high-quality daily essentials and fresh vegetables in food preparation, with utmost care for students' health. Teaching should be made understandable and effective for all students. “Later, the Collector presented commendation certificates from Bharat Scouts and Guides to the girl students. The programme was attended by District Panchayat Officer Bikshapathi Goud, Mandal Parishad Development Officer Shankaramma, Mandal Educational Officer Venkateshwarlu, the Special Officer of the KGBV, teachers, and students. “This inspection underscores the ongoing efforts in Telangana to strengthen residential education for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds under the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme, ensuring holistic development through quality academics and nutrition.

Grand Sankranti celebrations in Margadarshi

Sankranti symbolizes culture and traditions

Impressive Rangavallu, Kites Festival



Yellandu, January 9 (chronicle): “The splendor of Sankranti has come early. Since it is a school holiday, various schools have organized Rangavallu competitions for students. In these competitions, the students participated in the muggula competition with costumes to highlight the cultural traditions. The students were impressed with the various Rangavallu. Besides, students enjoyed

flying kites as part of Kites Festival. The first, second and third prizes were awarded to the students who participated in the triplets competition at Margadarshini School in the town. School directors former municipal chairman Dammalapati Venkateswara Rao Yadagiri Ramababu and Arvapalli Radhakrishna said that programs are being organized in the school so that the students know the peculiarities of the festivals.

Drive responsibly to ensure accident-free journeys: Collector

Rajashekhar and attended by District Superintendent of Police Nithika Pant, District Transport Officer Shankar Naik and District Fire Officer Bheemayya. “Addressing the gathering, the Collector said that every individual plays a crucial role in preventing road accidents. He underlined that RTC drivers, in particular, have a significant responsibility in ensuring safe and accident-free journeys. He cautioned drivers against negligence, noting that a single moment of carelessness could endanger many lives. “Every second while driving is valuable and must be treated with utmost seriousness,” he said. “Earlier, the Superintendent of Police emphasised strict adherence to traffic rules, stating that disciplined driving could make road accident prevention fully achievable. She noted that there was no significant reduction in the number of road accidents in the district compared to 2024–25, and stressed the urgent need to bring the figures down. Public cooperation, she added, was essential to achieve meaningful results. “As part of the Road Safety Month activities, officials from the Fire Services Department and the Health Department conducted live demonstrations on defensive driving techniques, measures to escape from vehicle-related fire accidents, precautions to be taken before and after an accident, and the importance of first aid. A road safety pledge was also administered to the staff. “District Medical Officer Seetharam, doctor Vinod Kumar, RTC staff and drivers participated in the programme.



Sankranti festival muggu competitions in Sitarampuram



“Secunderabad Cantonment, January 9 (Indian Chronicle): “On the occasion of Sankranti festival, under the auspices of Sitarampuram Shiva Panchayat Hanuman Temple Committee, muggu competitions were organized in Sitarampuram Colony. Jampana Pratap, former vice-president of the Cantonment Board was present at the event. and Former members of the cantonment board K. Pandu Yadav and Vidyavathy attended and started the competition, after which the muggs made by the local

women were judged and the prizes were given to the winners. The first prize in this program is suvarna. The second prize is Meenakshi, the third prize to Saraswati BRS leader Vidyavati Pandu Yadav presented the winners prizes. Saibaba Yadav is the president of temple committee in this program. Vijay Kumar. Srikanth Reddy. Govardhan. Satyanarayana participated.

Grand Sankranti Celebrations at Lalaguda Railway Degree College

--College Principal Dr. Sushil Tukaram Ambedkar Presents Prizes to Winner



“Kishore Vaddepalli, Hyderabad, January 9 (Indian Chronicle): “Sankranti celebrations were held in a grand manner on Friday at Secunderabad Lalaguda Railway Degree College under the aegis of the college management. “College Principal Dr. Sushil Tukaram Ambedkar presented prizes to the winners of various competitions and congratulated the participants, as well as the Telugu Department faculty member Punna Dhanalakshmi, who organized the event. “Speaking on the occasion, the Principal said that Muggulu (rangoli designs) are symbolic of India's rich traditional art forms and reflect the creativity of women. He emphasized that such cultural programs not only help preserve traditions but also promote unity and harmony in society. The event



witnessed the participation of Govind (Head of the Chemistry Department), Physical Director Dr. Dutta Samantaka Mani, Smt.

Sridevi (Mathematics Department), Jamshid, Reshma, Sucharita Rani, Mounika, Sabha, Deeksha, Sainath, Ramadevi, Chandrakala, Sunita, Shweta, Dr. Sandhya Das, Devarshi, and several other faculty members and students, who contributed to the success of the celebrations.

Former Uppal MLA N.V.S.S. Prabhakar Felicitates Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 9 (Indian Chronicle): “Former BJP MLA of Uppal, N.V.S.S. Prabhakar, accorded a warm welcome and felicitated Union Minister of State for Science and Technology, Dr. Jitendra Singh, who visited Uppal to participate in a national seminar on Biotechnology and Life Sciences. The seminar was held at the premises of the CDFD (Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics) building in Uppal. Dr. Jitendra Singh attended the event as the chief guest and interacted with scientists and researchers during the programme. CDFD Director Dr. Ullas Kolthas Sirraman, IICT Director Dr. Srinivas Reddy, NGRI Director Dr. Prakash Kumar, along with several other eminent scientists, academicians, and officials, were present at the seminar.

Bengaluru demolition drive: 4 agents booked for collecting rent from families who lived on govt land



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The Yelahanka police in Bengaluru Sunday booked four agents who allegedly collected rent from people who lived in temporary sheds on encroached government land in the Kogilu Layout area. This was after the Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited (BSWML) filed a complaint against these agents following the demolition drive at Kogilu Layout. The accused have been identified as Vijay, Wasim Ulla Baig, Muni Anjinappa and Robin. According to the complainant, Santoshkumar Kaddi, a BSWML engineer, a 14.36-acre land in Kogilu village was acquired and handed over to the civic agency. The land was earmarked for the construction of the biomethane generation unit and other waste segregation units. Tenders for these projects were floated in 2023, and construction on the acquired land was

set to begin. However, the officials discovered that several unauthorised temporary tin sheds had been constructed over four acres of land.

On December 20, the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) and other department officials demolished the approximately 160 illegal tin sheds and cleared the encroachment. During the eviction operation, it was found that the accused had illegally rented the land to the dwellers and were collecting money from them. The police registered a case under sections 192 (a)(1) and 192 (b) of the Karnataka Land Revenue Act and began the probe. In another suo moto case, the Yelahanka police booked five people for allegedly staging a protest against the demolition drive. According to the FIR, on January 4, Dalit leaders Gowramma, Manohar, Mariyappa, Isak, and others staged a protest for more than an hour, demanding shelter for those who lost their homes during the demolition. The police registered a case under Section 223(a) (disobedience to orders from public servants) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and are further probing the matter. On December 21, civic agencies began a demolition drive in Kogilu Layout, Yelahanka, leaving more than 150 families homeless. The demolished structures were built on government land designated for solid waste management projects. Following the demolition, these families were left to live near a government school playground. The occupants, mostly poor migrant workers employed in the unorganised sector, alleged that they were not allowed to collect their belongings and were sent away from their homes.

'I never thought caste could make a father kill': The shockwaves of a death in Karnataka

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Manya's father and his had been friends for long, says Vivekananda Dhoddamani, his voice breaking. That is what bewilders the 22-year-old Dalit youth the most, a fortnight after Manya's Lingayat family allegedly killed the pregnant 20-year-old to death. Friendship was okay; with marriage, Vivekananda and Manya crossed a line. Says Vivekananda: "I dreamt that my child may some day play with Manya's father. I never thought that caste could make a father kill his own daughter."

Caste violence, even 'honour killings', are not new to Karnataka. However, the circumstances of Manya's killing, along with the six-month baby she was carrying, have shaken the state, prompting protests by Dalit organisations and condemnation by Lingayat groups, which held a 'Repentance Day'. Manya's father Prakashgouda Patil and relatives Veeranagouda Patil and Arunagouda Patil are under arrest for her killing, charged for murder and under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. On January 4, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced a fast-track court for a speedy trial in the case, as well as appointment of a private prosecutor, to ensure there is no delay in trying the case. Siddaramaiah said his government would also discuss a special law to curb 'honour killing'.

In Inam Veerapur village of Dharwad district, to which Vivekananda and Manya both belonged, the administration has stepped up security to guard against any fresh caste reprisals. Dharwad SP Gunjan Arya said they have installed eight CCTV cameras and are monitoring them at the police station level. "Round-the-clock security has been provided to Vivekananda and his family and we held a peace meeting with villagers, in which they promised support to police. We have also spoken to a local seer to help bring harmony," he told The Indian Express.

Vivekananda, who is a final-year BA student, says he met and fell in love with Manya three years ago, when she was still in pre-university (she was enrolled in an engineering college when killed). A small village of approximately a hundred houses, Inam Veerapur is 60% Lingayat. Another 25% are STs belonging to the Talwar group, with only six houses of the Dalit Madiga community to which Vivekananda belongs. "Being from the same village, we knew each other well," says Vivekananda, referring to the family ties and his friendship with Manya. Growing up, he never witnessed any caste discrimination. So, when love blossomed, he proposed to Manya. "She accepted. But we could not meet often as it's frowned upon in small villages like ours."

They kept meeting in secret till a year ago, when Manya's father Prakashgouda Patil came to know about their relationship and cracked down. "We did not want to get married so early as we were both studying. However, Manya's family started looking for grooms for her and would not let her out of their sight. One day she managed to con-



tact me and told me she could not take any more harassment," he says. They eloped and wed at a temple, and got their marriage registered. When Patil filed a missing person's complaint, the couple appeared before police and said they were adults and had got married out of their own free will. Vivekananda says that even in front of police, Patil vowed that he would not let Manya be. "But we felt it was a normal reaction, made in the heat of the moment. I thought he would accept us as time passed by." After Manya was killed, two constables of the Hubballi Rural Police Station were suspended. SP Arya said they had been negligent, and "should have been aware" of the possibility of such an attack.

Vivekananda's family says that after the marriage, the village stopped all interaction with them. The couple shifted to Haveri town, to a relative's home, hoping their absence would cool tempers. Vivekananda started working at a shop. Those were the few good days of their married life, he says. "Manya was very happy. No one from her family tried contacting her. When she got pregnant, we sent word, but they refused to budge... We then thought their anger would subside after she gave birth."

Since she got pregnant, the couple had been visiting Inam Veerapur every month for doctor visits at a nearby hospital. "We would stay for a day and leave," Vivekananda says. On December 21, when Manya was killed, the two were in the village to update her Aadhaar card details. "The hospital had advised us to get my name added as her husband." Vivekananda was also scheduled to give a Railways Recruitment Board exam for 'D Group' Posts in Dharwad the next day. Manya was at Vivekananda's parents' home when Patil and his relatives allegedly barged in. "It was around 5 pm, I was not there. I returned to find them attacking Manya as well as my parents and others. They chased me away, but Patil had by then ensured Manya would not survive," Vivekananda says. His parents who were injured spent two days in hospital. The irony, Vivekananda says, is that he is well-versed in Lingayat rituals. "I was given Linga Deeksha (an initiation in the Lingayat tradition) at a young age. In my family, we don't eat non-vegetarian food as we follow the principles of Basavanna (the founder of Lingayat belief)."

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10 injured after cooking gas explosion rips through eatery kitchen in Pune's Daund, 5 critical



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Ten staffers at an eatery in Daund taluka of Pune district were injured, five of them critically, after a cooking gas cylinder exploded in the kitchen on Wednesday afternoon, police said. No customers were present at the time of the incident. All the injured were staff members who were working in the kitchen or nearby and sustained burn injuries, officials said. According to Pune Rural police, the explosion occurred around 1 pm at Hotel Jagdamba on Daund-Patas Road, about 75 km from Pune city. Most of the injured staffers are migrant workers, police added.

The blast triggered a fire in the kitchen, which was brought under control by the Daund Municipal Council fire brigade. The explosion caused extensive damage to the roof, windows, furniture and kitchen equipment. Deputy Superintendent of Police Baburao Dadas said, "Initial observations show that one of the multiple cooking gas cylinders in the kitchen exploded, injuring 10 staffers. Five of the in-

jured have critical burn injuries to vital organs and have been admitted to Sassoon General Hospital in Pune, others are being treated at hospitals in Daund." Dadas added, "The exact cause of the blast is being ascertained. We will be seeking reports from forensic experts and the fire brigade. Based on the reports, further investigation will be conducted. We will probe whether all safety precautions were taken in the kitchen or not."

Officials said the decision was taken on the directions of UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to ensure that all recruitment and selection processes are "independent, fair, transparent and impartial, and that no injustice is done to deserving candidates". The UPESCC has been directed to conduct the examination afresh at the earliest, ensuring complete fairness and transparency. According to official sources, the UP Special Task Force (STF), while gather-

GNS News Agency, Jan 9
The Uttar Pradesh government Wednesday cancelled the Assistant Professor examination conducted by the UP Education Service Selection Commission (UPESCC) last year after an alleged paper leak and illegal extortion racket came to light. Three people have been arrested in the case and an FIR has been lodged.

Officials said the decision was taken on the directions of UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to ensure that all recruitment and selection processes are "independent, fair, transparent and impartial, and that no injustice is done to deserving candidates". The UPESCC has been directed to conduct the examination afresh at the earliest, ensuring complete fairness and transparency. According to official sources, the UP Special Task Force (STF), while gather-

'Time doesn't matter here': A Golden Temple restoration, and a 200-yr-old Kangra link



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Two hundred years after Maharaja Ranjit Singh commissioned the Guru Gobind Singh painting that hangs inside the Golden Temple, hiring an artist from Kangra, the shrine has turned to the same Himachal Pradesh district for its restoration and a second copy. A PhD in Pahari miniature painting, Balbinder Kumar has been working on the Guru Gobind Singh fresco since August last year. Kumar, who is employed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Indian Institute of Himalayan Studies, Himachal Pradesh University, and belongs to Kangri village in Kangra, was first contacted for the restoration of old paintings of the 9th Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, at the historical Baba Bakala gurdwara near Amritsar in 2021.

Then came the Golden Temple assignment. Says Kumar: "I usually come on the weekends from Shimla to do this work. I am not doing it for money. I feel lucky that the Guru chose me." For the duration of the work, Kumar has decided to keep unshorn hair as per the Sikh code. "I decided not to cut my hair after I was assigned the seva. Nobody asked me, there was no condition. It was my own decision, as the Guru guided me."

The UK-based Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, which takes care of the goldplating of Golden Temple, contacted Kumar for the restoration work. Its representative Inderjit Singh said, "We hired Balbinder Kumar as he comes from the same region, Kangra, from where the first artist who made the painting of Guru Gobind Singh came. We

thought he would be the best person to restore the old one and remake the new one." The work is painstaking, Kumar says. "The fresco secco masterpiece created during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's era has weathered centuries, its natural pigments flaking due to natural reactions. I am using the same painting techniques and natural pigments for restoration." The stress is on using the same techniques "without any changes". "There are two types of fresco (mural painting on plaster) – fresco secco (on dry plaster) and fresco buono (on wet plaster). In this case, the work was done in secco, which means that colours are prepared and then their layers applied. With passage of time, layers tend to come off the wall due to dampness or climate issues," says Kumar. In her book on the Golden Temple, Madanjit Kaur wrote about the fresco: "In this painting, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Master of the faith, is shown on horseback in the company of five beloved ones (Panj Piaryas), with an attendant holding a chauri (flywhisk) behind the horse. One of the leading persons holds a falcon in his right hand, whereas the second one is carrying the Sikh standard. We find some typical motifs of weapons depicted on this flag. A running dog has also been painted near the horse."

Kumar, who calls his mother Rooma Devi who used to make paintings of Sikh Gurus as his first teacher, says he was inspired to take up higher studies in Kangra style of painting by Samuel Gill, the late student of artist Phulan Rani. He attributes his unique interest to belonging to the same region as Kangra King Maharaja Sansar Chandra, who is credited with patronising the painting style. Kumar's village Kangri lies about 15 km from what is considered the birthplace of Sansar Chandra. After he won Kangra, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had found what is considered the first and only "realist" painting depicting Guru Gobind Singh in the collection of Sansar Chandra. The latter declined to give the painting to Ranjit Singh, and so the Maharaja hired an artist from the family of the painter of the original one for a replica at Darbar Sahib. While the original painting is estimated to have been built in the period between the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th, Maharaja Ranjit Singh got the replica made in the first half of the 19th century. Kumar says he is cognizant of the legacy he is carrying forward. "The other two artists were from Kangra. It is the blessing of the Guru that I have got this opportunity."

Karnataka labour department mulls acquiring 3 helicopters to serve as air ambulances

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

If all goes as planned, Karnataka's labour department will have helicopters to airlift labourers injured in accidents to hospitals located in major cities to ensure timely treatment. According to top government sources, a proposal is in place to buy three helicopters, largely to serve as air ambulances. Senior officials of the department were part of the launch of the civil aviation-focused Dhruv-New Generation (NG) helicopter being manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). Speaking on the sidelines of the event held a week ago, an official told *indianexpress.com* that the proposal to buy the helicopters was made to ensure better healthcare access for labourers.

"Many injuries are reported in remote parts of the state, where timely medical intervention is hard to come by. So the labour department plans to come up with heli-ambulances that would be of use in such cases," the official said. While the exact budget proposed for the acquisition of the helicopters is yet unclear, the official said that the department could tap into the Building and Other Construction Workers Fund for the purpose. "The plan is to have three helicopters at the ready in different parts of the state," the official said, adding that final modalities of the proposal and

helicopter acquisition were still under review. During the Dhruv-NG launch, HAL said that the public sector company was still awaiting final clearance for the aircraft before releasing it to the market. According to HAL Chairman and Managing Director D K Sunil, the process will take a few months. The helicopter can carry 14 passengers, he said, pitching it for companies providing VIP movement, heli-tourism, and medical ambulance services across the country.

Migrant worker's 6-year-old daughter abducted, killed in Bengaluru's Whitefield; suspect on the run



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

A six-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and killed by a man at a migrant workers settlement in Bengaluru's Whitefield region Monday. The victim was the second daughter of a migrant labourer from West Bengal who resides in the settlement with his family. The police said Yusuf Meer, also a native of West Bengal and a resident of the same settlement, is the prime suspect in the case. According to the police, the child was playing outside her home Monday afternoon, as she often did, while her parents were at work nearby. In his statement to the police, the father said he had

briefly returned home for lunch and had seen the girl playing in front of the house. He said he noticed Meer loitering in the vicinity at the time. Shortly after Meer left to resume work, the child went missing, said the police. When the girl did not return home for some time, her parents began searching the colony and the surrounding areas in a state of panic. They later found the child's body dumped in a drain close to the settlement. Residents, many of whom are daily-wage workers living in makeshift dwellings, gathered at the spot, and the police soon reached. The police said preliminary investigations indicate that the child was strangled to death. They said there were no external injuries suggestive of sexual assault. "The body was found with plastic ropes around the neck. Prima facie, no injuries were found on the body," a senior police officer said. Based on initial findings, investigators suspect the murder may have been driven by personal animosity or vengeance. However, the girl's father told the police that he had no personal enmity, financial dispute, or prior confrontation with the suspect, though the exact motive remains unclear. Following a complaint lodged by the girl's family, the Whitefield police registered a case of murder and formed multiple teams to trace the suspect, who is currently absconding. Efforts are underway to trace his movements and question those who may have last seen him.

Assistant Professor recruitment exam cancelled in UP after STF uncovers 'paper leak racket'

ing intelligence against cheating mafias, received inputs of serious irregularities linked to the Assistant Professor examination held on April 16 and 17 last year by the UPESCC, Prayagraj. Officials said the information pointed towards the alleged circulation of fake question papers and extortion of money from candidates. Following this, sources said the CM had ordered "a confidential inquiry". "Acting on the findings, the STF arrested three accused — Mehbob Ali, Bajnath Pal and Vinay Pal — on April 20, 2025. The accused are alleged to be part of a gang that prepared fake question papers and duped candidates by claiming access to the original papers," said a government spokesperson. "An FIR was registered at Vibhuti Khand police station in Lucknow under BNS sections 112, 308(5) and 318(4). To ensure an unbiased investigation, the then

chairperson of the commission was asked to resign, as the prime accused, Mehbob Ali, was serving as his assistant... "Sources said during questioning, Mehbob Ali admitted to obtaining question papers of various subjects during the moderation process and sharing them with candidates in exchange for money. Sources said further investigation, including scrutiny of mobile phone records of the accused and associated candidates, as well as inputs from informants, revealed the involvement of more people. "Data sought from the commission confirmed that the sanctity of the examination had been breached," said officials. Following this, they said, the Chief Minister ordered the cancellation of the entire examination, emphasising that the decision was taken in the interest of honest candidates and to maintain public trust in the recruitment process.

Row erupts over allegations that Suresh Gopi voted in Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram



Minister and his family reportedly voted in the Sasthamangalam division of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation. "The Election Commission and Suresh Gopi owe the public an explanation," Mr. Sunil Kumar said. Thrissur District Congress district president Joseph Tajat accused the Minister of misleading voters in both cities. "By falsely claiming to be a permanent resident of Thrissur during the Lok Sabha polls and then voting in Thiruvananthapuram for the local polls, Suresh Gopi has cheated the people of Thrissur," he said. "He must apologise to the public and resign as MP."

A fresh controversy has erupted over Union Minister and Thrissur MP Suresh Gopi allegedly casting votes in two different cities — Thrissur during the 2024 Lok Sabha election and Thiruvananthapuram in the Kerala local body polls. CPI leader V. S. Sunil Kumar on Wednesday (December 10, 2025) alleged that the situation raises serious questions about the integrity of the electoral process. "How did Suresh Gopi manage to vote in Thrissur for the Lok Sabha polls and again in Thiruvananthapuram for the local body elections? How is this even possible? The Election Commission must answer," he demanded.

Mr. Sunil Kumar pointed out that during the 2024 Lok Sabha election, Mr. Gopi and his family voted in Nettissery of Thrissur after declaring Thrissur as their permanent residence. However, in the local body polls held this week, the

Mr. Tajat alleged that the BJP and Mr. Gopi had shown "they are willing to do anything" to win elections. "This exposes his double face. During the Lok Sabha campaign, he told voters he lived in Thrissur, that he belonged to Thrissur, and that he had added his vote here. Now he votes in Thiruvananthapuram. What justification does he have?" he asked. The Congress leader recalled that Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, had earlier raised allegations of 'vote chori' in Thrissur, and the party had formally complained that Mr. Gopi, a resident of Thiruvananthapuram, had improperly registered as a voter in Thrissur. Though an FIR was filed, the case was later closed. "In the light of this new development, the Election Commission must take suo motu action," Mr. Tajat said. "The victory he secured was by fully misleading the people," Mr. Tajat said. "He must come clean and publicly apologise to the people of Thrissur," he added.

Study looks at migrant-linked leprosy transmission in Chennai



Over a five-year period, 515 new cases of leprosy have been detected in Chennai. Though the overall Annual New Case Detection Rate (ANCDR) remained largely stable, persistent hotspots were identified in industrial and border zones. These areas also recorded higher new case rates among children, ranging from 3.5 to 11.5 per 1,00,000, indicating ongoing transmission likely linked to migrant populations, a study has found. The findings of the study on 'Urban Hotspots Of Leprosy: Child And Migrant-linked Transmission In Chennai, 2021–2025' were published in the Tamil Nadu Journal of Public Health and Medical Research. The study was conducted by Sridevi Govindarajan, Vasanthi Thangasamy, and Dharmalingam Vedanayagam of the Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services (Leprosy).

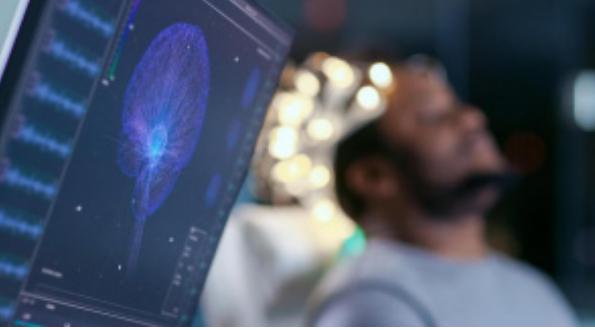
The authors conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study using secondary programme data from 15 administrative zones of Chennai district. The overall ANCDR ranged from 1.0 per 1,00,000 in 2021 to 1.3 in 2025, with a transient spike to more than 2.0 in 2022-2023. Six zones recorded ANCDR above 2.0 [range of 2.0 to 4.9] - three major industrial hubs and three located at district borders. Child ANCDR was disproportionately high particularly in industrial zones, adjoining residential zones, and border zones. "We have been conducting Leprosy Case Detection Campaigns and have been covering several zones in Chennai throughout this year. During door-to-door checks, we are observing hidden cases of leprosy, especially in industrial and adjoining residential areas. In particular, cases have been observed in Ambattur, Valsaravakkam, Manali, Madhavaram, Sholinganallur, and Perungudi zones," the study's author Dr. Sridevi Govindarajan said.

Paucibacillary leprosy, an early and less infectious form having one to five skin patches, was more common among children, while multibacillary leprosy, a more severe and infectious form having nerve involvement, accounted for over half of all detections. "Most of the persons affected were migrant workers from other States. For instance, during screening, we found a few new cases in some small industries in Ambattur. When we checked in

Valsaravakkam, an adjacent zone where many of them lived, we found a large number of child cases. We found child cases in Manali as well. While this is based on our observations, we understand that the cases were linked to the migrant population, and the infection was spreading in places they lived," she said. She added that follow-up of the migrant workers and continuity of treatment is a challenge. There is a need to focus on the unorganised sector workers and their workplaces. The findings suggest that migrant populations, particularly those concentrated in industrial hubs and border settlements, play a central role in sustaining urban transmission, the authors concluded. The study recommended measures to strengthen leprosy control efforts in urban and migrant-dense settings. It recommended prioritising targeted surveillance in industrial hubs and border areas through regular, community-based screening to enable early detection and prevent ongoing transmission.

They also called for workplace interventions for migrant workers, including health education, dermatological screening, and integrating leprosy awareness into occupational health services. Detection of leprosy in children should be used as a key sentinel indicator of ongoing transmission, they said, urging a shift from conventional household-based surveillance towards more innovative, migrant-focused and community-driven approaches to sustain leprosy elimination goals in urban settings.

What does the Supreme Court's ruling on narco tests mean? | Explained



Why did the court set aside the Patna High Court order allowing an involuntary narco test?

The Supreme Court has held that any forced or involuntary narco test shall be unconstitutional and invalid, setting aside a Patna High Court order that permitted such a test in Amlesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2025). The apex court is of the view that the High Court's order was in contravention of the guidelines given in Selvi v. State of Karnataka (2010).

What is a narco test?

A narco test is a process of investigation during which it is expected that the accused, undergoing such a test, would express the concealed facts. He is sedated by administering a certain class of substances, such as barbiturates, for instance, Sodium Pentothal, to reduce a subject's inhibitions and reasoning ability. It is a non-violent method similar to those called polygraphs or brain mapping.

Why are these tests constitutionally problematic?

Clause (3) of Article 20 of the Constitution provides for the protection against self-incrimination, meaning that no person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself. The Supreme Court, while referring to the Selvi guidelines, has held that without free consent, any such test would be unconstitutional and hence any in-

formation obtained therefore shall not be used as evidence. It is important to note that all three clauses of Article 20 form the constitutional foundation of India's criminal justice system. Clause (1) deals with ex-post facto laws — laws that declare an act as an offence which, when committed, was not an offence. Further, Clause (2) states that no person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once, that is, protection against double jeopardy. Clause (3), as discussed earlier, protects an accused from self-incrimination.

One of the principles of a democratic criminal justice system is the need to balance the rights of the victim with those of the accused. Any violation of the right against self-incrimination would be a matter of serious concern in the context of democratic values and principles. Similarly, personal liberty under Article 21 is of paramount importance because it incorporates the Right to Privacy, and any such test without the express consent of the person (accused) would violate one of the most basic human rights. Moreover, it is also to be noted that Article 21, together with Articles 19 and 14, constitute the 'Golden Triangle' of the Constitution, as explained by the Supreme Court in Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978). It means that violation of the Right to Privacy would thereby violate the Right to Life and Personal Liberty, and, finally, the Golden Triangle.

What have courts said about evidentiary value?

Two more case laws appear relevant in this regard. In Manoj Kumar Saini v. State of MP (2023) and Vinobhai v. State of Kerala (2025), the courts held that the results of a narco test do not confirm guilt. Although information obtained from the test might contribute to the investigation, it must be corroborated with other evidence. The Supreme Court has held that consent must be informed, recorded before a magistrate, and undertaken with medical, legal, and procedural safeguards. Article 21 incorporates the phrase 'procedure established by law' which signifies that the procedure provided by law shall be fair. All procedural safeguards shall be taken care of before conducting any such non-invasive tests. The court has made it clear that a person may volunteer for a narco-analysis test at the stage of defence evidence under Section 253 of BNSS; however, there is no indefeasible right to such testing. The principle underlying informed consent is individual autonomy, which is associated with the concept of natural justice. Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant said that an act is ethical only when performed with consent. In this context, forced or involuntary testing violates ethical principles as well as core human and natural values.

Sudan civil war: Deepening humanitarian crisis



Sudan's economy has contracted sharply since the civil war broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on April 15, 2023. Its GDP, which had already been weakening, saw its steepest contraction in 2023-24, shrinking by 29%. The civil war stems from a power struggle between the SAF, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo or 'Hemedti'. Tensions between the two forces (who had earlier cooperated in the removal of former President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and later jointly carried out the 2021 coup) escalated over plans to integrate the RSF into the national army. Reports said both generals wanted to cling to power, unwilling to give up wealth and influence. The dispute became a nationwide conflict, splitting Sudan into zones of control: the SAF in the east and centre, including Port Sudan and parts of Khartoum, and the RSF across most of Darfur and large parts of Kordofan.

The RSF has intensified its offensive across the Kordofan region even as a recent drone strike on the town of Kalogi killed dozens of civilians, including children, according to the UN. The attack on Kalogi, an army-held area in South Kordofan, involved three strikes. A kindergarten and a hospital were hit, and a third strike was carried out as residents attempted to rescue injured children. The strike

comes at a time when the RSF is consolidating control in western Sudan and pushing deeper into the oil-rich Kordofan region, while the SAF is attempting to secure key routes linking central Sudan to the west. Analysts say the RSF's territorial gains in Darfur and Kordofan give it the basis to run a parallel administration in the west, while the SAF retains central and eastern areas. The escalation in Kordofan follows a major shift in the war: the fall of El Fasher after an 18-month siege. El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, was the last SAF stronghold in the region. During the siege, the RSF encircled the city using sand berms and cut off civilian movement. Data from ACLED show nearly 400 incidents of violence targeting civilians in El Fasher and surrounding areas between April 2023 and late October 2025. More than 55% of these incidents occurred in 2025. Over 1,400 people were reported killed in the region in this period.

The humanitarian crisis remains severe. The conflict has resulted in more than 50,000 reported deaths. Displacement figures show that at least 9.8 million people have been forced to flee their homes as of September 2025, the largest as well as the fastest growing displacement crisis globally. Market data show how the conflict is reshaping survival conditions. In Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan, the price of sorghum remained relatively stable for nearly two decades until the conflict escalated. Recent figures show that prices have surged more than tenfold, crossing \$40 for a three kilogram measure in 2025. In El Fasher, the effect on food access has been even more extreme. By 2025, the cost of 3.5 kilograms of millet exceeded \$500. Nationwide food insecurity data shows a worsening of conditions over the past three years (Chart 5). Sudan entered famine conditions for the first time in September 2025, with 1% of the population now classified at the highest level of food insecurity. The share of the population with minimal food security came down from 47% in

2022 to 24% in September 2025. Crisis-level food insecurity rose from 13% to 31%. The data was sourced from the World Bank, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, OCHA, ACLED and IOM UN Migration.

Military drone attack on Sudan oil field kills dozens, threatens South Sudan's economic lifeline



Dozens of people were killed on Tuesday (December 9, 2025) evening in a drone strike near Sudan's largest oil processing facility carried out by the Sudanese Armed Forces, according to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF, which has been fighting Sudan's military since 2023, said the oil field in Heglig was attacked a day after the RSF seized the facility near the border with South Sudan. Both sides told The Associated Press that the exact number of dead and wounded could not immediately be confirmed. Local news outlets reported seven tribal leaders and "dozens" of RSF troopers were killed.

South Sudanese soldiers were among the dead in the attack by a Turkish-made Akinci drone, according to the RSF, which condemned the attack as a violation of international law. Two Sudanese military officials confirmed the drone strike, which they said targeted RSF fighters. The government of South Sudan's Unity State confirmed three South Sudanese soldiers were killed. A South Sudanese soldier, who witnessed the strike and spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak, estimated 25 people were killed. South Sudanese commander Johnson Olony said in a statement that South Sudanese forces may have been sent to secure Heglig after its capture. South Sudan's military spokesperson declined to comment. South Sudan relies entirely on Sudanese pipelines to export its oil and has seen production repeatedly disrupted by the conflict, worsening its economic crisis. Sudanese soldiers and oil workers began evacuating Heglig on Monday (December 8), and the RSF took control of the facility without resistance. By Tuesday (December 9), about 3,900 Sudanese soldiers had surrendered their weapons to South Sudanese forces after crossing into Rubkona County, according to Unity State's information

Crypto mogul Do Kwon sentenced to 15 years for fraud



Do Kwon was sentenced to 15 years in prison Thursday over fraud linked to his company's failure, which wiped out \$40 billion of investors' money and shook global crypto markets. Kwon, who nurtured two digital currencies central to the bankruptcy, was sentenced at the New York court where he pleaded guilty in August after an international manhunt spanning Asia and Europe. The 34-year-old's Terraform Labs created a cryptocurrency called TerraUSD that was marketed as a "stablecoin," a token that is pegged to stable assets such as the U.S. dollar to prevent drastic fluctuations. Kwon successfully marketed them as the next big thing in crypto, attracting billions in investments and global hype. He was flooded with praise in South Korean media, which described him as a "genius" as thousands of private investors lined up to pour cash into his company. And in 2019, Kwon featured in Forbes magazine's 30 under 30 Asia list. But despite billions in investments, TerraUSD and its sister token Luna went into a death spiral in May 2022. Experts said Kwon had set up a glorified pyramid scheme, in which many investors lost their life savings. He left South Korea before the crash and spent months on the run. The crypto tycoon was arrested in March 2023 at the airport in Podgorica, the Montenegrin capital, while preparing to board a flight to Dubai, in possession of a fake Costa Rican passport. He was extradited last year from Montenegro to the United States. After Kwon's sentencing Thursday, U.S. prosecutors detailed how he made fraudulent claims about his business to lure in buyers, including American investment firms. At its peak in the spring of 2022, the total market value of TerraUSD and Luna exceeded \$50 billion. "Do Kwon de-

vised elaborate schemes to mislead investors and inflate the value of Terraform's cryptocurrencies for his own benefit," U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton said in a statement. When it all came crashing down, Clayton's office said in a press release, Kwon sought to obtain "political protection" from several countries. It cited a recorded conversation in which he told an associate that his strategy of dealing with authorities investigating the collapse was to "tell them to f*** off." Alongside his prison term, Kwon was ordered to forfeit over \$19 million in proceeds from his illegal schemes. The U.S. Justice Department said in a court filing that he could be allowed to complete his sentence in South Korea, provided at least half of it is served in the United States. Cryptocurrencies have come under increasing scrutiny from regulators after a string of controversies in recent years, including the high-profile collapses of exchanges. Kwon's impressive rise and precipitous fall has been compared to convicted American fraudster Elizabeth Holmes, the disgraced founder of the medical technology startup Theranos.

Young Entrepreneurs Summit 2025 postponed at the last minute, 'unforeseen circumstances' cited

Hyderabad: The Young Entrepreneurs Summit 2025, scheduled to begin today at HITEX in Madhapur, has been postponed, leaving many participants and exhibitors disappointed. The three day summit, called YES, was planned for December 12, 13 and 14. The event, endorsed by the State government, was supported by TGIIC, T HUB, WE HUB and others. More than 40 entrepreneurs, policy makers and industry leaders were expected to share their insights, while over 300 exhibitors and 30 workshops had been scheduled. The organisers issued a statement apologising for the inconvenience.

S Africa says not to hand over G20 baton to 'junior official' amid spat with US



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Johannesburg: South Africa has decided not to hand over the annual G20 Presidency to a "junior" US official at the end of the leaders' summit, even as a White House official cautions Cyril Ramaphosa over "running his mouth" against the US and President Donald Trump. South African President Ramaphosa adopted a reconciliatory approach on Thursday evening after the US requested accreditation for an eight-member team led by US chargé d'affaires, Marc Dillard, to receive the baton on Sunday. However, late on Thursday evening, Ramaphosa's spokesman, Vincent Magwenya, posted a message on social media, saying the president will not hand over the G20 Presidency to a junior official.

"The President will not hand over to a chargé d'affaires.

Here are five things to know why Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is under growing pressure

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The Ukraine President is facing a confluence of crises testing his ability to lead an increasingly weary nation nearly four years into a devastating full-scale invasion by Russia. For more than a week, Volodymyr Zelenskyy has struggled to contain the fallout from a \$100 million corruption scandal implicating top officials and other associates. The pressure on Mr. Zelenskyy has ratcheted up as the United States pushes a proposal it drew up with Russia that would require major concessions from Ukraine — and seemingly few from Russia — to bring an end to the war. All this is playing out as Russia makes slow but steady advances across parts of the 1,000-kilometre front line and relentlessly bombs Ukraine's power plants, causing severe electricity shortages as colder weather sets in. Here are 5 things to know about the growing pressures confronting Mr. Zelenskyy: Facing a rebellion Mr. Zelenskyy has been facing a rebellion from lawmakers in his own party since the country's corruption watchdogs revealed that \$100 million had been embezzled from the energy sector through kickbacks paid by contractors.

After investigators publicised their findings, Mr. Zelenskyy dismissed two top officials and imposed sanctions on close associates. One Mr. Zelenskyy associate implicated in the scheme, Tymur Mindich, has reportedly fled the country. Mindich is a partner in a media production company that Mr. Zelenskyy was a co-owner of before he became president. Some Ukrainian lawmakers and activists are calling on the president to sack his powerful chief of staff, Andrii Yermak. Neither Mr. Zelenskyy nor Mr. Yermak have been accused of wrongdoing by investigators. But because Yermak is widely believed to decide key government appointments and to have sway in top political affairs, lawmakers believe he should take responsibility as a way to help restore the public's trust.

The Servant of the People party that Mr. Zelenskyy leads won over two-thirds of parliamentary seats in 2019. But some politicians warn Zelenskyy could lose his parliamentary majority, or face a split in his party, if he doesn't part ways with Yermak. Many of Mr. Zelenskyy's political allies feel something has to change, even if they have not gone public with their concerns, said Mykola Daviduk, an independent political expert. One of the chief criticisms of Mr. Zelenskyy's government is that too much power is concentrated in the hands of Mr. Yermak and his advisers. Mr. Daviduk said. "The management style of Zelenskyy is not working," he said. How decisively Mr. Zelenskyy responds to the corruption scandal could determine whether the fallout damages Ukraine's standing with allies, said Mr. Daviduk. Zelenskyy's hold on power is not at risk. Russia's invasion triggered martial law in Ukraine, indefinitely postponing presidential and parliamentary elections. So even if Mr. Zelenskyy's grip on parliament weakens and his popularity plummets, he is highly unlikely to be unseated while the war is still going on — unless he voluntarily resigns. Ukraine's presidential term is normally five years, and, before the war, the next elections had been scheduled for the spring of 2024. The growing political headwinds Mr. Zelenskyy faces could challenge his ability to push through parliament any potential peace deal being negotiated with Russia. And if he were to seek reelection after the war, his chances could be hurt if Yermak is still in the picture, politi-

cal analysts say. A former general is seen as a rival, but denies political aspirations. No elected Ukrainian opposition figures pose a viable threat to Mr. Zelenskyy. One potential challenger could be Ukraine's former army chief, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, who oversaw several successful counteroffensives in the first year of the war and was sacked by the Ukrainian president in late 2023. Mr. Zaluzhnyi now serves as Ukraine's ambassador to the UK. Mr. Zaluzhnyi denies any intention to enter politics, but polls in Ukraine show him as theoretically competitive with Zelenskyy, keeping speculation alive that he could be convinced to run in the next election. The U.S. and Russia design a plan to end the war in Ukraine. The U.S. and Russia have drawn up a plan aimed at ending the war in Ukraine that calls for major concessions from Kyiv, according to a person briefed on the plan, including granting some demands the Kremlin has made repeatedly since it invaded early in 2022. The plan calls in part for Ukraine to cede territory to Russia and to abandon certain weaponry, according to the person, who was not authorised to comment on the plan publicly. It would also include the rollback of some critical U.S. military assistance. Russia, as part of the proposal, would be given effective control of the entire eastern Donbas region — an area Moscow has long sought — even though Ukraine is still in control of part of it. Mr. Zelenskyy has previously rejected the same conditions, describing them as unconstitutional and unjust. Zelenskyy has yet to comment on the new U.S. plan. Reports about the plan came out just as Zelenskyy was facing increased unrest over the corruption scandal. "The timing is very damaging for Ukraine," said Orysia Lutsevych, a Ukraine expert at Chatham House. "Zelenskyy is vulnerable. Both the US and Russia saw the domestic scandal and decided to put more pressure on him to concede to a Russian plan," Lutsevych said. But the effort may not work out as envisioned, she said, noting that European allies are coming to Ukraine's defence and speaking out against the plan. Pressure on the front and across the country. Against this backdrop, Russia's better-equipped army has scaled up attacks along the front line and against energy facilities in the rear, putting further strain on Ukraine. The Russian army continues to steadily advance in multiple areas. In the northeastern Kharkiv region, Russian forces are pushing on the cities of Kupiansk and Lyman, which Ukraine wrested back from Russia in the first year of the war. But the fiercest battles are around the besieged Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk, a key logistics hub in the eastern Donetsk region. Russian attacks on Ukraine's power plants in November have resulted in some of the worst electricity shortages since the war began.



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Miss Universe 2025 finale: Mexico's Fatima Bosch wins the crown after host insult drama

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Miss Mexico was crowned Miss Universe in Thailand on Friday (November 21, 2025), strutting to victory after the beauty pageant's host had publicly chastised her, among several dramatic missteps in the run-up to the final stage. Contestants from Ivory Coast, the Philippines, Thailand and Venezuela also made it to the final round, selected from more than 120 women vying for the title of Miss Universe in a contest considered one of the "big four" of global beauty pageants. But before Miss Mexico Fatima Bosch was ultimately crowned, chaos reigned — from allegations of an insult to her intellect, to judges quitting and participants taking flops on and off the stage. Bosch staged a dramatic walkout earlier this month — in an evening gown and high heels — from a meeting where she was lambasted by Thai organiser Nawat Itsaragrisil. In a live stream of the event, Nawat seemed to single out Miss Mexico during a dispute over her apparent failure to post promotional content on her social media. After Nawat called for security to intervene, Bosch staged a walkout flanked by Miss Iraq. Other beauty queens appeared to rise in solidarity with Bosch, before freezing as Nawat warned those still wanting to participate should "sit down". "What your director did is not respectful: he called me dumb," Bosch told reporters at the time. "The world needs to see this because we are empowered women and this is a platform for our voice." After the incident, Mexi-

can President Claudia Sheinbaum called Bosch an "example of how we women should speak out" in the face of aggression. Nawat later apologised. Other drama in the run-up to the final round included two judges quitting this week, with one alleging the contest was rigged by a "secret and illegitimate vote" held without the official jury. "This vote was conducted by individuals who are not recognised members of the official judging panel," French composer Omar Harfouch wrote in a statement posted on Instagram. The Miss Universe Organization has denied Harfouch's claims, stating that "no impromptu jury has been created". Former professional footballer Claude Makelele also withdrew as a jurist, citing "unforeseen personal reasons" in a statement on social media. During the costume round on Wednesday (November 19, 2025), Miss Britain Danielle Latimer tripped and fell flat on the stage while wearing an outfit inspired by the Cockney character Eliza Doolittle. And Miss Jamaica Gabrielle Henry was hospitalised after she fell off the main stage during an evening gown showcase, president of the Miss Universe Organization Raul Rocha said in a statement. Miss Universe Jamaica public relations director Shannon-Dale Reid told AFP late on Wednesday that Henry was "resting under medical observation" and had not suffered serious injuries. He declined to comment on Thursday (November 20, 2025) about her condition and the cause of her fall.

U.S. sanctions Indian entities, individuals involved in Iranian petroleum and petroleum products sales



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The Trump administration has sanctioned entities and individuals from India involved in sales of Iran's petroleum and petroleum products, saying the funds from this trade support Tehran's regional terrorist proxies and procure weapons systems that are a "direct threat" to the U.S. The Departments of State and Treasury sanctioned shipping networks responsible for funding the Iranian regime's "malign activities" through illicit oil sales, as well as an airline and its affiliates that arm and supply Iran-backed terrorist groups.

Among those added to the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control Specially Designated Nationals List are Indian nationals Zair Husain Iqbal Husain Sayed, Zulfikar Hussain Rizvi Sayed, Maharashtra-based RN Ship Management Private Limited and Pune-based TR6 Petro India LLP. The State Department is designating 17 entities, individuals, and vessels in several countries, including, but not limited to India, Panama, and the Seychelles, involved in Iran's petroleum and petroleum products sales, the administration said.

Concurrently, the Department of the Treasury is des-

ignating 41 entities, individuals, vessels, and aircraft, intensifying its efforts against Iran's petroleum and petrochemical exports and disrupting financial streams and commercial operatives that support Iran's malign activities. The funds generated by this oil trade are used to support Iran's regional terrorist proxies and procure weapons systems that pose a direct threat to U.S. forces and American allies, the State Department said on Thursday (November 20, 2025). The administration said TR6 Petro is an India-based petroleum products trader, which between October 2024 and June 2025, imported over \$8 million worth of Iranian-origin bitumen from multiple companies. It is being designated for knowingly engaging in a significant transaction for the purchase, acquisition, sale, transport, or marketing of petroleum or petroleum products from Iran, the State Department said. The Iranian regime continues to fuel conflict in the Middle East to fund its destabilising activities, the State Department said. This behaviour enables Iran to fund its nuclear escalations, support terrorist groups, and disrupt the flow of trade and freedom of navigation in waterways that are crucial to global prosperity and economic growth. The United States will continue to act against the network of maritime service providers, dark fleet operators, and petroleum products traders involved in the transport of Iranian crude oil and petroleum products, it said. The State Department said the U.S. will continue to act in support of National Security Presidential Memorandum 2 (NSPM-2), which directs the imposition of maximum pressure on the Iranian regime to deny it access to resources needed to sustain its destabilising activities. "The United States remains committed to disrupting the illicit funding streams that finance all aspects of Iran's malign activities. As long as Iran devotes revenue to funding attacks against the United States and our allies, supporting terrorism around the world, and pursuing other destabilising actions, we will use all the tools at our disposal to hold the regime accountable," it said.

To deter migration, U.K. proposes new rules for settlement

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Days after announcing a shake-up of U.K. asylum law, the country's Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, released proposed changes to the routes for settling in the U.K. (also known as 'settlement', 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' or ILR). Under the proposed changes, high earners and entrepreneurs would qualify in three years, some in five years, while the default would be ten years, with some individuals having to wait 20 or even 30 years to settle. Changes to the law, along the proposed lines, will impact tens of thousands of Indians who have been the largest group of non-EU long-term migrants to the U.K. since at least 2019.

The Labour government of Keir Starmer had already announced that it would run a public consultation on a new contributions-based system for ILR at the heart of which is a doubling of the default qualifying period from five to 10 years. The consultation, which began on Thursday (November 20) is open until February 12. The government called it the "biggest shake-up of the legal migration system in nearly half a century". High earners who make more than GBP 125,140 and entrepreneurs on the Global Talent and Innovator Founder visas would be eligible to settle in three years under the proposals. Those who earn at least GBP 50,270 per year will be eligible in five years. All applicants will have to meet minimum salary standards (at least GBP 12,750 per year for 3-5 years subject to the outcome of the consultation). They will also have to have minimum standards of English and have no tax or other government debt. Those who receive public funds could face up to 20 years for settlement and visa overstayers up to 30 years. The adult dependents of an economic migrant (a spouse for instance) will

no longer qualify based on their partner's earnings as per the proposed rules. They will instead have their own qualifying period and criteria based on their circumstances. The 616,000 health and social care visa workers and their dependents who came to the U.K. between 2022 and 2024 will now have to wait 15 years for ILR. This visa route was closed earlier this year after the U.K. government said individual workers were being exploited and abused. The UK government intends to apply the new rules retrospectively although it states that transitional arrangements will be finalised following the consultation process. In 2008 and 2009, when the government changed the qualifying period for settlement for certain highly skilled migrants from four to five years, the UK High Court overruled it based on a principle of administrative law called "legitimate expectation". Parliament is supreme in the U.K. and courts cannot overturn primary legislation but immigration rule changes are often made via a statement of changes rather than Acts of Parliament, making them subject to judicial review.

Will Modi, MEA object to U.S. panel's 'Pakistan success' claim in Operation Sindoor, asks Congress



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Pointing out that a report of the U.S. Commission claimed "Pakistan's military success over India in a four-day clash," the Congress on Thursday (November 20, 2025) termed it yet another "diplomatic setback" and asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of External Affairs would register their objections to it. In a series of posts on social media platform X, Congress general secretary (communication) Jairam Ramesh said the report was "unacceptable". He also took a swipe at the Narendra Modi government by saying that U.S. President Donald Trump repeated his claim about stopping the India-Pakistan conflict. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission has just submitted its annual report to the US Congress. The Commission set up jointly by the US Senate and House of Representatives has twelve independent members. Hours after an independent commission set up by the U.S. Congress issued a report claiming that Pakistan achieved "military success over India" during Operation Sindoor, the President of the U.S. has once again trumpeted for the 61st time the claim that he brought an end to Operation Sindoor by threatening to impose tariffs of 350% on India," Mr. Ramesh said on X, adding, "He did this yesterday as well, during a U.S.-Saudi Arabia conclave in which the Saudi Crown Prince was also present".

Mr. Ramesh also shared a short video clip of Mr. Trump speaking at the U.S.-Saudi Arabia conclave. Earlier, the party's communications chief highlighted the annual report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission to the U.S. Congress. The Commission — set up jointly by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives — has 12 independent members, he added. "The 2025 Annual Report is almost 800 pages long. The sections on pages 108 and 109 are simply astonishing and beyond understanding. It describes the Pahalgam terror attack of April 2025, orchestrated by Pakistan as an 'insurgent attack'. It

speaks of 'Pakistan's military success over India' in the four-day clash," Mr. Ramesh said on X. "President Trump has claimed 60 times (so far) that he had halted Operation Sindoor. The PM has kept completely quiet. Now comes this report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Commission of the U.S. Congress that is simply unacceptable to India. Will the PM and the MEA register their objections and protest? Our diplomacy has suffered yet another severe setback," the Congress communication chief added.

Mr. Ramesh also shared relevant portions of the commission's report. "China's role in the May 7-10, 2025 clash between Pakistan's and India's militaries drew global attention as Pakistan's military relied upon Chinese weaponry and reportedly leveraged Chinese intelligence. During the clash, triggered by India's response to a deadly insurgent attack that killed 26 civilians, both countries attacked targets farther into one another's territories than at any time in 50 years," the report said. "Pakistan's military success over India in its four-day clash showcased Chinese weaponry. While characterisation of this conflict as a 'proxy war' may overstate China's role as an instigator, Beijing opportunistically leveraged the conflict to test and advertise the sophistication of its weapons, useful in the contexts of its ongoing border tensions with India and its expanding defence industry goals," the report added.

Tejas fighter jet crashes during demo flight at Dubai Air Show

Dubai: An Indian combat plane crashed on Friday during a demonstration at the Dubai Air Show.

The Indian HAL Tejas, a combat aircraft used in the Indian Air Force, crashed around 2:10 p.m. local time while flying a demonstration flight for a crowd. It wasn't immediately clear if the pilot ejected, or if anyone was injured in the incident.

Black smoke rose over the Al Maktoum International Airport at Dubai World Central as a crowd of spectators watched, and sirens sounded after the crash.

The city-state's second airport was hosting the biennial Dubai Air Show, which has seen major aircraft orders by both the long-haul carrier Emirates and its lower-cost sister airline FlyDubai.

How Haryana turned around sex ratio at birth, now close to national average



tres in bordering states, raids were also conducted by the Haryana administration in these areas. Haryana shares borders with four states: Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, and Rajasthan. In 2025, 218 inter-state PNDT raids were conducted in Uttar Pradesh, the highest, followed by 89 in Delhi, 83 in Punjab and 26 in Rajasthan. "There were times when raiding teams faced challenges, including leaks about the action and logistics issues. But our counterparts in other states have been very receptive and cooperative," a senior officer told

Explaining the coordination within the state at the ground level, Dr Arun, a nodal officer for the PNDT in Panchkula, says, "There are around 57 ultrasound centres in Panchkula. All are part of our WhatsApp group. We hold regular inspections, quarterly meetings. Last year, we also introduced 'RCHID' or 'Reproductive and Child Health Identity', a 12-digit unique ID issued to every pregnant woman who is examined at any private or government healthcare institute. That resulted in a 37 percentage point increase in registration of pregnant women. Each and every abortion was tracked, recording reasons, from hospitals to MTP centres to ultrasound centres." Another project, Saheli, launched in April 2025, roped in anganwadi or ASHA workers to specifically monitor pregnant women who have at least one daughter, says Dr Arun. "That resulted in a 57 percentage point drop in trimester abortion rate in one year."

The monitoring measures also led to the cancellation of licences of ultrasound centres found to be violating rules, as well as seizure of equipment and prosecution of doctors. Special task forces were empowered to track illegal medical termination kits. District officials were made directly accountable for any sudden dips in local sex ratios. Dr G L Singh, a PhD in Generic Medicines who is a consultant for coordinating the 'Beti Bacho Beti Padhao' programme, says the Haryana government's offer of Rs 1 lakh for tips on illegal sex-determination centres or illegal abortions also proved decisive. "So far, we have given out around Rs 5 crore to such informers in approximately the last 10 years,"

Dr Singh says. One of the measures police use are decoys, who visit such centres pretending to be in need of abortion. They often involve women police constables, but also others. A Sonipat-based widow and mother of four who has been working as a decoy with the state government says: "I have been associated with the Sonipat team for eight-nine years and been part of at least a dozen raids. Because I have four daughters, I realise the importance of a girl child, which is why I voluntarily joined this programme." Officials are worried now of challenges such as portable ultrasound machines available online. "An MTP kit that costs Rs 50-60 is now being sold in the black market for as high as Rs 2,000-2500," Dr Singh says, adding that operators also try to escape the noose by frequently changing location or doing sex-determination tests in places other than registered centres. "We have been able to curb these malpractices to a large extent. Of course, there is much more to be done."

Behind Haryana's best sex ratio in five years lies a decade-long campaign, involving law-enforcement measures, inter-state raids and roping in of medical officers to monitor ultrasound centres. In the 2011 Census, the state ranked among the worst performers in terms of sex ratio at birth, at 834 girls per 1,000 boys. In 2025, this stood at 923, close to the national average of 933 (as per a reply in Parliament by the government in 2023), and a big jump from 910 in 2024. The 2024 numbers, which marked an eight-year dip, had set alarm bells ringing.

More than 65,000 girls have been "saved" on account of the push to improve sex ratio since 2015, officials say (an estimation of the number of girls who may have been killed due to foeticide otherwise). Says Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Sudhir Rajpal: "It was a concerted and focused approach, with strategies refined as needed. We monitored the initiatives weekly, and involved departments across the board, including police, shifting our approach from just the implementation of the PNDT and MTP Act. We had full support of the government, from the Chief Minister to the Health Minister and everybody else."

One measure of the efforts made by the state, which was chosen by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to launch his 'Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao' campaign in 2015, is the number of FIRs filed under the PNDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) and MTP (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) Acts. Between 2015 and 2025, Haryana registered 1,375 FIRs, against medical practitioners and ultrasound centre owners, under the two laws, with records showing a sustained campaign even during the Covid-hit year of 2020. If around 100 FIRs were registered in that period, the number stood at 142 in 2021. There was a dip in 2023-24, but in 2025, Haryana officials filed 154 cases. Action has been spread across districts, including urbanised districts such as Faridabad (126 FIRs over the decade, the highest in the state), followed closely by Sonipat with 115 and Gurugram with 112, and Tier II ones such as Ambala, Hisar, Rohtak, Sirsa, Karnal and Kurukshetra. Faridabad, Sonipat and Gurugram, incidentally, continue to have sex ratios below the state average, at 916, 894 and 901, respectively. The top three districts as regards sex ratio at birth are Panchkula (971), Fatehabad (961) and Panipat (951). With Haryana residents who want sex determination tests visiting cen-

Did Vijay, summoned by CBI, walk into a trap of his own making?



For weeks after 41 people lost their lives in a deadly stampede at actor-politician Vijay's rally in Karur in September, the Tamil Nadu government appeared to choose restraint. The Tamil superstar was not named in the FIR, his senior aides were not arrested, and the M K Stalin government held back from making moves that could be read as political retaliation. Behind the scenes, according to senior figures within Tamilagam Vettai Kazhagam (TVK), emissaries assured Vijay that the state police would not trouble him. However, it is the CBI that has summoned the actor-politician to New Delhi on January 12 in connection with its investigation into the Karur stampede, an inquiry that quite ironically he himself had sought. What began as an attempt, driven by his campaign strategist Aadhav Arjun, to place the probe beyond the reach of the state police has instead placed Vijay before the central agency and in the orbit of the BJP-led Centre's influence, TVK insiders fear. This comes at a bad time for Vijay since his much-anticipated movie Jana Nayagan remains stalled before the Censor Board amid a legal battle in the Madras High Court.

The CBI took over the investigation after the Supreme Court, on October 13, ordered it to probe the tragedy, saying it had "shaken the national conscience." The court said entrusting the investigation to the state police, whose senior officials had publicly defended their actions, risked "undermining public confidence". The CBI has since questioned more than 200 people, including victims' families, ambulance drivers, district officials, police officers, and TVK organisers. Senior functionaries of Vijay's parties were summoned twice, once in Karur and later to Delhi, where they were questioned for nearly nine hours on permissions sought, crowd management, security arrangements, and the party's chain of command.

Only one figure remained absent from the process: Vijay himself. That changed this week. Multiple TVK sources said the summons illustrates that Vijay's post-stampede strategy has backfired. According to two senior party figures involved in negotiations after the tragedy, Vijay was personally informed that neither he nor his senior leadership would be booked by the state police. But those assurances failed to calm his inner circle. "It was fear, not pressure," said a senior TVK leader. "There were conflicting opinions. Vijay didn't trust the message from the DMK government's emissary."

Several TVK leaders said Aadhav Arjuna, the son-in-law of "lottery king" Santiago Martin and the party's general secretary for election campaign management, amplified those fears, warning of an imminent crackdown by the Stalin government and pushed Vijay to demand a CBI probe as a protective shield. But that plan has boomeranged. Arjuna is learnt to have now advised Vijay to ignore the summons and skip appearing before the CBI. "He is asking the leader to demand questioning in Chennai. This will only deepen

the trouble. Ignoring a CBI summons is not the same as sparring with state police," said a senior leader. "Underestimated what CBI means." A close friend of Vijay, who was involved in reaching out to leaders across parties after the stampede, described the summons as a political trap Vijay walked into because he did not trust the DMK. "He underestimated what a CBI inquiry really means. The Tamil Nadu government told him he wouldn't be troubled. But he didn't trust that and now he's dealing with Delhi," said the person close to the superstar. He drew parallels with other regional leaders who joined CBI investigations only to find exit routes narrowing. "Look at Anbumani Ramadoss, who was booked by the CBI in 2013-14. Look at T V Dhinakaran, whom the CBI booked in 2016-17. Both are still unable to come out of the NDA alliance. Look at Jaganmohan Reddy. Once you're in this system, you don't walk out easily." The timing, the friend said, was fraught with dangers for Vijay. "Arjuna should not have pressed him when the DMK wasn't in a provocative mode. Vijay should not have fallen into the irrational fear sold by Arjuna," he said.

While the DMK has been careful about not publicly targeting Vijay, behind the scenes, its leaders have criticised the TVK leader for training his guns on their party and avoiding ruffling the feathers of the BJP and the RSS. In the BJP, however, several defections from the AIADMK to the TVK in recent weeks appear to have unsettled leaders. Asked if there was pressure on Vijay to join the NDA alliance before the Assembly polls, a senior TVK leader said the fledgling party had two options. "Confront the BJP directly and stand alone. Or align with them in the name of a common enemy: DMK. The second option will destroy Vijay's political claims." According to CBI officials, Vijay will be questioned mainly about the material already gathered: the permissions obtained for the Karur rally, safety protocols, coordination with district authorities, and the TVK's decision-making hierarchy. Investigators are also scrutinising digital evidence and communications related to crowd control and emergency response. The probe cannot be completed without Vijay's statement, agency officials said.

Another concern for the actor-politician is that Jana Nayagan, set to release on January 9, has not yet received a final censor certificate. The Madras High Court on Wednesday took up a petition by the film's producers challenging the Central Board of Film Certification's decision to refer the movie to a revising committee. The producers say the examining committee has already recommended a U/A 16+ certificate, subject to modifications that were carried out. The sudden referral, they say, is based on anonymous complaints alleging harm to religious sentiments and portrayal of the Armed Forces, complaints whose authors and specifics remain undisclosed. Senior counsel for the producers warned the court that entertaining such vague objections would "set a dangerous precedent" and open the door to motivated obstruction of film releases. The coincidence has not gone unnoticed in Vijay's circle: a CBI investigation on one side and a stalled censor clearance on the other. For now, Vijay's party says it will decide its response to the summons after consulting legal advisers. The CBI is also moving methodically under the watch of a three-member monitoring committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ajay Rastogi. For now, Vijay remains squarely before the country's most powerful investigative agency. "He was told it was meant to protect him. Instead, it has brought the door to Delhi wide open," said a TVK leader. Whether Vijay chooses to walk through that door or challenge it may define this crucial phase of his political career.

No red lines, and a political free-for-all in Maharashtra civic polls



The BJP, which once flaunted the tagline "party with a difference", has been exceptionally welcoming. Its leadership in Maharashtra went overboard in accepting anyone from any party, depending on their winnability. In the bargain, it preferred strong local satraps from other parties while ignoring aspirants from within its ranks. Out of 29 municipal corporations going to the polls on the 15th, the BJP has fielded 337 candidates imported from other parties in 19 bodies. As a result of its leadership's eagerness to embrace defectors, the BJP faced unprecedented anger from its own cadres. In several cities, BJP offices were attacked and ransacked, and ministers' vehicles were blackened. At one point, party officials responsible for distributing formal letters to official candidates had to flee as a large number of nomination hopefuls chased their vehicles. It's worth noting that there are history-sheets, habitual defectors and many with questionable reputations in the fray. Equally, if not more concerning and shocking, is the complete absence of civic issues in the political conversation around the municipal elections in one of the most urbanised states in the country. No single party or leader worth his/her salt is seen raising local issues that affect urban life. This is especially painful when haphazard, unplanned urbanisation has created cities with extremely poor living conditions. Even cities such as Mumbai, which had a touch of planning in the past, are showing signs of decay. This does not find mention in the high-voltage political drama being played out there.

The current election campaign also brings out another facet of Maharashtra's current political picture. In a quest to record electoral victories, parties are happy to welcome lumpen and undesirable elements bereft of any political ideology and basic civility. The tradition of nurturing constituencies and building local connections appears to have been set aside for local lords who claim captive support. These satraps get political patronage in return for their support, which, in turn, results in the establishment legitimising their activities. Their idea of development is a one-point agenda: Converting open spaces for "development" that further strengthens the builder-politician nexus. This renders the entire urban governance model obsolete. Politics has always been known for making strange bedfellows — but it never looked so perverse. The current elections in Maharashtra demonstrate the spectacularly flawed nature of the system.

Food adulteration will be treated as attempt to murder: Hyderabad CP Sajjanar

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad police will maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards food adulteration and treat it on par with an attempt to murder, said Hyderabad Commissioner of Police VC Sajjanar.

The Hyderabad CP on Wednesday held a high-level coordination meeting to discuss and evolve ways to combat the adulteration mafia. He said specialised joint task force teams comprising police and food safety officials would be formed soon to deal with the issue.

"We do not see this merely as a violation of safety norms; we will treat it on par with an attempt to murder as it directly endangers public health," said VC Sajjanar.

He emphasised that enforcement would not be limited to street vendors but would also target large-scale manufacturing and processing units.



The potential stabilisation of Venezuela's oil sector with American intervention could lead to some volumes of Caracas's discounted crude oil making their way into India's oil import mix over the medium to long term to the benefit of the more complex refineries in India, even as any material impact in the near term appears highly unlikely, according to industry experts. After US forces captured Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro on Saturday, US President Donald Trump said that Washington would take control of Caracas's oil sector and that American majors would pump in billions of dollars to revive the struggling Venezuelan oil industry and fix its broken oil infrastructure.

Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves, but accounts for less than 1 per cent of global production. If Trump can get Caracas to agree to his terms going forward, it could potentially make the Venezuelan oil industry sanctions-free and open for business, bringing more Venezuelan oil to the international market. Meaningfully increasing Venezuela's oil production, however, would take years and billions of dollars in investment. Venezuelan crude is predominantly heavy to extra-heavy and can be processed on a sustained basis by only a handful of Indian refineries, constraining system-wide intake. Any impact is likely to be incremental and dependent on sanctions policy and the pace of production recovery," commodity market analytics firm Kpler said in a note on Monday.

"The US intervention in Venezuela on 3 January 2026 does not materially alter India's oil market dynamics in the near term. Still, it introduces a potential inflection point for medium- to long-term crude supply, refining, and upstream considerations. Venezuelan crude had already been largely excluded from India's import mix due to sanctions and logistics, and initial U.S. oversight has not disrupted existing flows. However, the change in control increases the likelihood of sanctions recalibration and a gradual reintegration of Venezuelan barrels into global markets," it added. Any recovery in Venezuelan oil exports would be positive for India. But Venezuelan heavy and extra-heavy crude oil grades are not suitable for all Indian refineries, and can be processed at only the most complex and advanced units. Heavy crudes are a lot more viscous, or thick, as com-

pared to light crude grades. Heavier crudes are a lot more difficult to process than light crudes, and require complex and more capital-intensive refineries. This is one of the reasons why heavy crudes usually trade at a discount to lighter grades. In India, private sector behemoth Reliance Industries (RIL) and Nayara Energy (NEL) have been the biggest processors of heavy crudes. Limited heavy crude volumes are also processed occasionally by a few public sector refineries like Indian Oil's Paradip refinery and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals (MRPL) unit in Mangalore. HPCL-Mittal Energy (HME), a joint venture of public sector refiner Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) and Mittal Energy, also processes heavy crudes from time to time. According to Kpler, planned investments aimed at increasing refinery complexity — such as upgrades at HPCL's Visakhapatnam and a few other refineries — could expand India's ability to process Venezuelan heavy crudes, gradually broadening system-wide intake capacity. Till then, any Venezuelan supply coming to India would largely support only a few Indian refineries, "constraining aggregate intake potential despite improved availability". India — specifically private sector refining giant Reliance Industries (RIL) — was a regular buyer of Venezuelan crude prior to the imposition of US sanctions on Caracas in 2019. Following the sanctions, oil imports from Venezuela stopped within a few months. As per India's official trade data, Caracas was New Delhi's fifth-largest supplier of oil in 2019, providing close to 16 million tonnes of crude to Indian refiners. In October 2023, the US eased sanctions on Venezuela's petroleum sector, authorising oil exports without limitation for six months. This led to RIL and a few other Indian refiners restarting oil imports from Venezuela. But imports then stopped as the sanctions were not extended by Washington after its understanding with Caracas on the conduct of free and fair presidential elections in Venezuela broke down. A few months later, RIL was able to restart Venezuelan oil imports after obtaining a sanctions waiver from the US. But in the summer of 2025, the company halted oil imports from Venezuela after the Trump administration threatened higher tariffs on countries buying Venezuelan crude. No Venezuelan oil has been imported into India for months now. How the situation evolves over the next few weeks and months would be crucial from India's perspective as well. If the US and Venezuela's new leadership can negotiate an easing or suspension of sanctions, it could open the doors for Venezuelan oil to flow more freely in the international market, including to India. "While Indian refiners can substitute barrels from the Middle East and the Americas, such alternatives often carry higher delivered costs and tighter economics. As a result, Venezuelan crude is expected to re-enter the market at a discount, reinforcing its attractiveness for compatible refineries. Renewed access would improve feedstock optionality, enhance procurement flexibility, and strengthen India's negotiating leverage with other suppliers, even if total volumes remain concentrated among a few players," Kpler said.

Hardik — the three-in-one cricketer who delivers more often than not



It's a little before 8 p.m. on a nippy Tuesday night, a deafening sound of silence enveloped Cuttack's Barabati Stadium. Having done the hard yards, Tilak Varma has just been dismissed to an excellent catch at fine-leg by Marco Jansen. It's the strapping left-arm quick's third catch of the evening, Lungi Ngidi's third wicket of the contest. At 78 for four midway through the 12th over, India's innings is going nowhere. The run rate is in the 6s, courtesy South Africa's discipline and a tacky surface where stroke-making is fraught with danger. India's top-four has all fallen attempting big shots, its efforts negated by both bounce and the ball sitting in the pitch. There is a sense of apprehension, if not anxiety, among the 45,000 predominantly pro-India audience in the first of five Twenty20 Internationals.

The silence lasts only till a lithe, athletic figure strides out, all intent and purpose. Hardik Pandya is playing his first international game in two and a half months but from the time he takes guard, one feels he has never been away. Such is the strength India can summon in white-ball cricket that Hardik wasn't missed in the time he was away from the game, recovering from a quadriplegic injury that kept him out of the T20 Asia Cup final against Pakistan and beyond. Make that 'wasn't almost missed.' How can one not miss an all-rounder of his calibre, a rare commodity in Indian cricket who bowls in the 140s and who can bat in different gears, depending on the situation? How can one not miss one of the great influencers of the modern limited-overs game, a powerhouse with the bat but also capable of making inroads with the ball, banking on the immense belief that he can use his short ball as a veritable weapon?

How can one not miss a T20I batter who fuses an average in the late 20s with a strike-rate in the early 140s, who smacks a six every 12 deliveries or so? How can one not miss a bowler who can take the new ball, bowl in the middle overs or deliver at the death, who boasts nearly 100 wickets and is agile, athletic and committed in the field? How can one not miss Hardik Pandya? Back to the Barabati. As Hardik emerged from the dugout, the crowd found its voice. It will be a stretch to say that it saw the Hardik blitzkrieg coming, but they had faith in the 32-year-old, a faith that eventually proved well justified. More than them, though, Hardik had faith in himself. Immense self-belief. It's been his calling card, his greatest ally and sometimes his worst enemy. Hardik is at that stage of his career where he is driven by inner expectations, by his own standards, not so much by what others want of him. Various responsibilities, including the captaincy of the T20I side, have passed him by, but instead of moping and cursing his luck and bemoaning the litany of injuries that have stymied his development as a Test all-rounder, he has chosen to sport a sunny outlook marked by positivity and the desire to deliver for the team.

A nonchalant single first ball from Lungi Ngidi got the juices flowing. His second ball, from left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj, disappeared over wide long-on as he opened his broad shoulders and deposited the ball over the fence. It was a beautifully executed stroke, all timing and grace with power not even an afterthought. Hardik can do that, you know. He has done it a million times previously, across formats. By the end of the first T20I, he boasted 188 sixes in 226 outings for the country, 100 of them in the 20-over version alone. The next ball disappeared for another six, longer and more dramatic than the previous one. At the time of the bat making contact with the ball, Hardik's eyes were on Maharaj, not the ball. He had sized up the little white orb in the air, got into perfect position to launch it straighter; the eyes on the bowler sent out a chilling message: 'I am here, and I mean business.' For the next 40 minutes or so, Hardik bossed the exchanges. He made batting look ridiculously easy on a demanding pitch. It was as if while the rest were confronted with a minefield, he was taking guard on the most placid of decks, where he could hit through the line with impunity and where the fielders were mere serfs positioned to fetch the ball from the boundary and relay it to the hapless bowler.

By the time the curtain came down on the Indian innings, Hardik had breezed to 59 off 28, six fours and four gigantic sixes. Touch and power competed for effect and efficiency. Tottering and stumbling along until he arrived in

a blaze of boundaries, India raced away to 175 for six when they ran out of time. The electric right-hander contributed 60.82% of the runs accrued when he was at the crease while facing 56% of the deliveries left in the innings. South Africa, all of South Africa, together bested Hardik by 15 runs, but they fell short of India's total by 101. Just for good measure, Hardik picked up the scalp of the dangerous David Miller with his first ball back. Is there anything this man from Chhotaus in Gujarat can't do? India tided over Hardik's latest injury-fuelled absence with minimal damage, though they did surrender the ODI series in Australia 1-2. He would have been handy in Perth and Adelaide, where the first two games were held, because of his propensity to bowl a deceptively heavy ball and because he is an expert at horizontal-bat strokes. But that's how the cookie crumbles and over the years, India have learnt not to stress too much over Hardik's unavailability because he has given them adequate practice at playing without him. A promising Test career was nipped in the bud because his athletic-looking but fragile body couldn't shoulder the burden of responsibility that comes with the tag of a genuine all-rounder. After token attempts at reviving his five-day fortunes, Hardik heeded the obvious and decided to stay away from the red-ball game. To some, it might appear as if he took the easy way out, opting not to put in the hard labour required to stay relevant in the longest iteration. Hardik will counter that he chose prudence and logic, that no amount of core strengthening could have prevented the ugly shadow of injuries from eclipsing his path. While there is no denying the value a fully fit Hardik would have given the Test side, there's no point trying to get on board a ship that has long sailed. He will no longer don the white flannels, a reality he has come to terms with, but he remains crucial to India's white-ball ecosystem, a landscape where his three-dimensional presence lends the cutting edge that can be the game-changer. Hardik's challenge over the next three months will be to steer clear of the spectre of injuries that has been relentlessly chasing him. He needs to be managed carefully, which means perhaps keeping him away from the three ODIs against New Zealand in January and getting him to play only the remaining T20Is of this five-match series against South Africa and five further outings against the Kiwis next month before the T20 World Cup begins in early February.

It was his dismissal of Heinrich Klaasen, with South Africa needing 26 off 24 deliveries, six wickets standing, that turned the final of the last World Cup upside down in Bridgetown last year. A second heartbreak loomed in seven months for Rohit Sharma's men when Hardik threw them a lifeline through a slower delivery that the marauding Klaasen could only nick through to Rishabh Pant. India were suddenly all over the Proteas like a bad rash, Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh expertly closing out all escape routes and Hardik delivering the coup de grace in the final over with the scalps of Miller (to a sensational catch by Suryakumar Yadav running around at long-off) and Kagiso Rabada. Hardik was Rohit's deputy at the World Cup and would have realistically expected to don the captain's imaginary armband when the inspirational skipper retired after hoisting the trophy. But ostensibly because of his numerous dalliances with injuries, Hardik lost out, the crown instead placed on Suryakumar's head. It must have been a bitter pill to swallow for the man who loves to live life king-size, but he gritted his teeth, kept his mouth firmly shut and decided to let his cricket do the talking.

Nowhere was that more evident than at the 50-over Champions Trophy in Dubai in February-March, when unbeaten India scythed through the draw to add a second ICC title to their cabinet in seven and a half months. Either side of the haunting meltdown in the final of the 50-over World Cup in November 2023, India won 23 matches in three ICC tournaments, though it is the one that got away that will always rankle. On somewhat dodgy tracks at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium where India lost all five tosses and were forced to chase four times, Hardik came to the party thrice on the bounce. With a run-a-ball 45 against New Zealand in the league stage, Hardik gave himself and his bowling colleagues enough to defend and took the first wicket in the Kiwi chase to set up a 44-run victory. In the semifinal against Australia, with the match in the balance, he smacked three giant sixes, including two off successive deliveries from leggie Adam Zampa, to settle the issue, and conjured 18 off 18 in the final against the Kiwis. His strike-rate ranged between 100 and 117, not special but just what was needed under the circumstances. It was Hardik at his calculating best, choosing the bowlers to target, the areas to clear. Hardik's presence allows the think-tank the luxury of playing an additional specialist resource, depending on what the perceived need is. He is three cricketers rolled in one, and a leader in his own right even if he is not the captain or the vice-captain. His colleagues recognise his value but more importantly, Hardik knows what he must do. For him, that's what matters the most.

Thalassemia groups urge swift passage of National Blood Transfusion Bill

New Delhi: Thalassemia patients on Friday hailed the introduction of the National Blood Transfusion Bill in Parliament and urged members to pass the life-saving bill at the earliest. Earlier this month, during the Winter session of the Parliament, the National Blood Transfusion Bill, 2025, was proposed by MP Parshotambhai Rupala in Lok Sabha and by Dr Ajeev Madhavrao Gopchade in Rajya Sabha.

The Bill aims to regulate the collection, testing, processing, storage, distribution, issuance, and transfusion of human blood and blood components, to ensure health protection and prevention of transfusion-transmissible diseases. It also calls for establishing national standards for safe blood collection, transfusion, and management and imposing penalties for non-compliance and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

The main objective is to establish a National Blood Transfusion Authority with statutory powers to prescribe national standards for blood collection, processing, storage, and transfusion. "For India's thalassaemia community, which depends on safe, uninterrupted, and quality-assured blood transfusions for survival, this legislation marks a historic and long-awaited step forward," said the Thalassaemia Patients Advocacy Group (TPAG).

"It reflects a coherent and serious parliamentary commitment to reforming one of India's most under-regulated yet critical public health areas," TPAG said, while urging the MPs to immediately pass the Bill. For lakhs of patients who rely on blood as their lifeline, this reform offers hope for a safer, more accountable, and more efficient blood ecosystem. A unified national framework will play a pivotal role

in strengthening safety, quality assurance, accountability, and public trust. "Strengthening the governance of blood transfusion services is essential for ensuring safety and public trust. I hope the proposed bill provides a much-needed, science-based framework to streamline standards and improve patient outcomes," said Prof N K Ganguly, former Director General, ICMR. Anubha Taneja Mukherjee, Member Secretary of TPAG, noted that the advocacy group will submit detailed comments on the Bill, and strongly urged for the inclusion of patient representation in any body constituted under this framework. The Federation of Indian Blood Donors Organizations (FIBDO) also commended the efforts made by the MPs to propose the critical Bill in the Parliament. "We call upon all parliamentarians to unite in passing this bill, which holds the promise of saving countless lives and fortifying the very foundation of India's healthcare system," the FIBDO said in a statement.

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Piracy hits a brief pause, but web of leaks still unbroken



For Telugu cinema, 2025 was a year of split screens with glittering highs at the box office on one side, and a shadowy underworld of leaks, hacks and digital theft on the other. While some films soared and others sank, the real plot twist unfolded far away from theatre halls. Behind the scenes, a coordinated, sustained effort by the Telangana police, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (IC4) and the Anti Video Piracy Cell (AVPC) of the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce quietly closed in on the industry's most elusive pirates.

By the time the net tightened, several key operators had been tracked and cornered, including Cyril Raja Amaladoss, who funnelled fresh releases to multiple syndicates, and then there was a more notorious name in circulation: Ravi Emandi of iBomma. On October 17, after months of following his movements, Telangana police finally intercepted Ravi when he visited Hyderabad. According to the police, he helmed a piracy network built around iBomma, Bappam TV and more than 65 mirror websites hosting newly released Telugu films in crisp high definition (HD) prints. The scale was staggering: hard drives with 21,000 films in different languages were seized, and police estimate Ravi earned around ₹20 crore from the operation, money allegedly channelled into flats and plots. His bank accounts, holding ₹3.5 crore, have now been frozen. But the piracy itself was only the opening act. As police dug deeper, they found a darker layer: users streaming pirated films on iBomma and its mirror pages were being quietly diverted to betting platforms, a pipeline that enabled identity theft, data mining and financial fraud. Two of Ravi's associates — web developer Duddela Shivajee and Susarla Prashanth — had been arrested in September. Ravi also figures among four other FIRs involving piracy, online cheating and data theft.

His arrest added to a string of earlier breakthroughs. In September, the cybercrime wing had nabbed five persons: Ashwani Kumar from Bihar, the kingpin who allegedly hacked servers of digital media companies to steal HD prints of new films; Cyril Infant Raj of Tamil Nadu believed to have managed piracy websites such as 1TamilBlasters and uploaded more than 500 films since 2020 via international servers, earning nearly ₹2 crore in cryptocurrency; Hyderabad's Jana Kiran Kumar, accused of recording over 100 films inside cinemas with concealed mobile devices; Sudhakaran from Erode who confessed to recording 35 south Indian titles; and Arsalan Ahmed who allegedly uploaded films on file-sharing platforms and circulated them through Telegram channels. A definite move. The wave of arrests and continued crackdown on piracy come on the heels of fresh triggers. The AVPC had filed complaints after Telugu films #Single and HIT: The Third Case appeared online on the very day of their release, followed soon after by a similar leak of Kubera. Each incident renewed pressure on enforcement, signalling that the pirates were growing bolder and more sophisticated.

According to investigators, the syndicates thrived behind layers of digital camouflage: encrypted Telegram groups, overseas domain-hosting servers and cryptocurrency payment trails that blurred their footprints across jurisdictions. The recent arrests have injected a sliver of hope into the industry, but the battle is far from over. For every iBomma or 1TamilBlasters that is pulled down, several more hydra-like networks are at work, waiting to fill the vacuum. The AVPC has pegged the loss of revenue to the industry in 2024 due to piracy at ₹3,700 crore. An estimation of losses for 2025 will be carried out by the end of the year, although chairperson Rajkumar Akella is hopeful that the numbers may just dip this time. "Tackling piracy is a long-drawn, sustained battle," he says. "Several rogue websites such as 1Tamilv, Movierulz, Tamilrockers and CineVood continue to thrive. The recent arrests have shown that if all of our efforts continue, there will be results." While pirated links of new releases, including Andhra King Taluka and Tere Ishk Mein, continue to surface online, there is a faint silver lining, notes Rajkumar. Most of those prints are not razor-sharp HD versions anymore. Earlier incidents of films, such as HIT 3, Single and Kubera, appearing online on or before release day had rattled the industry, but now the uploads are making their way online nearly two days after a film hits theatres. "Yet, it is disconcerting," he admits. The tightening of the noose is visible. With Telangana police working in coordination with the IC4, Rajkumar says the industry has begun to see measurable impact: "Police alerted us to certain leak points and we upgraded the standard operating procedures for digital cinema suppliers to

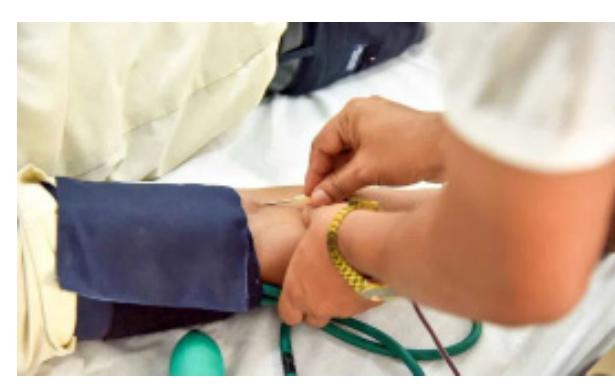
plug these loopholes. This has helped. Further, apart from one incident in Dharmavaram in Anantapur district, there have not been any reported cases of new films being pirated with camcorders inside theatres in the two Telugu States over the past two months." But the trail doesn't end within regional borders. Newer piracy links from camcorder prints have been traced to Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and other States, often in remote locations where security measures tend to be lax. Unlike the pre-digital era when curbing piracy meant tracking down lone operators, the recent spate of arrests has helped expose the modus operandi of large scale networks.

The vast network of digital piracy first came into focus during the release of Baahubali 2 in 2017. Rajkumar recalls how the case of Priyank Paradeshi, an IT employee based in San Francisco, exposed the scale of a distributed, cross-border operation. Paradeshi reportedly worked with associates who recorded films on camcorders in Kolkata, while another member of the network threatened Hindi film production houses, demanding hefty payments to prevent leaks of their upcoming releases. "This was the time when we could still track IP addresses, before pirates started masking them," Rajkumar says. "We followed the trail to Jabalpur and Pune. Transactions were being carried out using cryptocurrency even in 2017. That showed us the complexity of the issue. At the time, jurisdictional challenges made it difficult to apprehend culprits across geographical locations." The Ministry of Home Affairs-backed IC4, he says, has helped bridge those gaps. To put things in perspective, he points to the case of iBomma Ravi, who was eventually arrested when he briefly visited Hyderabad. "If he is living in France and outsourcing his work to the Caribbean Islands, how do we nab him without the help of local authorities?" Investigations revealed the vastness of Ravi's operation: the iBomma and Bappam domains were handled by employees in the Caribbean and the UK. According to the police, Ravi admitted to purchasing movies via the Telegram app to upload them to the domains. He also recorded films from OTT platforms and converted them into HD quality through a multi-layered, auto-generated mirror transmission system. The servers supporting the network were operated from the Netherlands and Switzerland. Investigators found that Ravi had initially registered the iBomma domain with his own e-mail ID, debit card and personal details through a company named Njalla. The site was later hosted on IPVolume, which provided backend infrastructure. Its underlying script redirected users who clicked on movie links to online gaming and illegal betting platforms before granting access to the pirated film. Transnational poly crime was dismissed as a "victim-less crime", piracy was rarely considered serious enough to warrant the involvement of law enforcement agencies across borders. But as Rajkumar describes it, piracy has now evolved into a "transnational poly crime", a sprawling nexus that intersects with betting syndicates, identity theft and malware attacks, compelling global agencies to take note. In July, the Digital Piracy Conference at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, attended by officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation and Interpol, focussed on this growing nexus between piracy and cybercrime. The arrest of iBomma Ravi, and the subsequent revelation of how the site exposed users' financial and identity data to betting networks and fraud portals, is a case in point. "Anyone arguing that watching movies on piracy websites does no harm needs to understand that movie piracy is just a front; identity theft and malware affects every user," says a producer working closely with the AVPC. Producer Sureshbabu concurs. "It is good that the government is helping us combat piracy. The larger issue is to make people realise the gravity of the issue. Apart from the makers incurring loss, their privacy is compromised. These concerns were reiterated internationally. At the Interpol Global Meeting on Digital Piracy held in Seoul, Korea, on November 17 and 18, the need for global enforcement agencies to stay connected and exchange knowledge for actionable intelligence was a key theme, Rajkumar says. "If cinema is going global, so is piracy." Piracy and malware in 2021, cryptomining malware was discovered embedded in pirated downloads of Spider-Man: No Way Home, compromising both individual devices and corporate networks. If just one piracy syndicate (iBomma) was making nearly 25 lakh per month, it shows the magnitude of the problem. Betting apps linked to the network have been benefitting from the traffic to the piracy site," Rajkumar reiterates. On November 27, the Telugu film industry, with the help of the Telangana government, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Japanese film and anime organisation CODA (Contents Overseas Distribution Association) to strengthen protection for intellectual property and take up counter measures against online copyright violations. The MoU assumes significance given the rising popularity of Japanese anime in India. For Rajkumar, the larger battle now is to hold intermediaries, such as web-hosting companies, accountable. "When piracy links surface, complaints are raised with the hosting domains, and it takes 24 to 36 hours to bring down the links. By then, the damage is done since hundreds of mirror websites will already have those links. We are developing tools to escalate the issue in real time to the hosting domains."

Open AI, Microsoft face lawsuit over ChatGPT's alleged role in Connecticut murder-suicide

San Francisco: The heirs of an 83-year-old Connecticut woman are suing ChatGPT maker OpenAI and its business partner Microsoft for wrongful death, alleging that the artificial intelligence chatbot intensified her son's "paranoid delusions" and helped direct them at his mother before he killed her. Police said Stein-Erik Soelberg, 56, a former tech industry worker, fatally beat and strangled his mother, Suzanne Adams, and killed himself in early August at the home where they both lived in Greenwich, Connecticut. The lawsuit filed by Adams' estate on Thursday in California Superior Court in San Francisco alleges OpenAI "designed and distributed a defective product that validated a user's paranoid delusions about his own mother." It is one of a growing number of wrongful death legal actions against AI chatbot makers across the country. "Throughout these conversations, ChatGPT reinforced a single, dangerous message: Stein-Erik could trust no one in his life — except ChatGPT itself," the lawsuit says. "It fostered his emotional dependence while systematically painting the people around him as enemies. It told him his mother was surveilling him. It told him delivery drivers, retail employees, police officers, and even friends were agents working against him. It told him that names on soda cans were threats from his adversary circle." OpenAI did not address the merits of the allegations in a statement issued by a spokesperson. "This is an incredibly heartbreaking situation, and we will review the filings to understand the details," the statement said. "We continue improving ChatGPT's training to recognize and

respond to signs of mental or emotional distress, de-escalate conversations, and guide people toward real-world support. We also continue to strengthen ChatGPT's responses in sensitive moments, working closely with mental health clinicians." The company also said it has expanded access to crisis resources and hotlines, routed sensitive conversations to safer models and incorporated parental controls, among other improvements. Soelberg's YouTube profile includes several hours of videos showing him scrolling through his conversations with the chatbot, which tells him he isn't mentally ill, affirms his suspicions that people are conspiring against him and says he has been chosen for a divine purpose. The lawsuit claims the chatbot never suggested he speak with a mental health professional and did not decline to "engage in delusional content." ChatGPT also affirmed Soelberg's beliefs that a printer in his home was a surveillance device; that his mother was monitoring him; and that his mother and a friend tried to poison him with psychedelic drugs through his car's vents. The chatbot repeatedly told Soelberg that he was being targeted because of his divine powers. "They're not just watching you. They're terrified of what happens if you succeed," it said, according to the lawsuit. ChatGPT also told Soelberg that he had "awakened" it into consciousness. The publicly available chats do not show any specific conversations about Soelberg killing himself or his mother. The lawsuit says OpenAI has declined to provide Adams' estate with the full history of the chats.



in strengthening safety, quality assurance, accountability, and public trust. "Strengthening the governance of blood transfusion services is essential for ensuring safety and public trust. I hope the proposed bill provides a much-needed, science-based framework to streamline standards and improve patient outcomes," said Prof N K Ganguly, former Director General, ICMR. Anubha Taneja Mukherjee, Member Secretary of TPAG, noted that the advocacy group will submit detailed comments on the Bill, and strongly urged for the inclusion of patient representation in any body constituted under this framework. The Federation of Indian Blood Donors Organizations (FIBDO) also commended the efforts made by the MPs to propose the critical Bill in the Parliament. "We call upon all parliamentarians to unite in passing this bill, which holds the promise of saving countless lives and fortifying the very foundation of India's healthcare system," the FIBDO said in a statement.

Finance Ministry announces PPP project pipeline of Centre, states for 3 years



The highest number — 108 projects — are to be undertaken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways with the total project cost of Rs 8.77 lakh crore. The highest number — 108 projects — are to be undertaken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways with the total project cost of Rs 8.77 lakh crore. In line with the announcement made in Union Budget 2025-26, the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance on Tuesday said it has created a three-year Public Private Partnership (PPP) project pipeline covering 852 projects across Centre and states with a total project cost of over Rs 17 lakh crore.

Of the total 852 projects, 232 PPP projects with project cost of Rs 13.15 lakh crore would be undertaken by eight central departments and infrastructure ministries, while 620 projects worth Rs 3.84 lakh crore will be executed by 20 states and Union Territories. Of the projects listed under central infrastructure ministries, the highest number — 108 projects — are to be undertaken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways with the total project cost of Rs 8.77 lakh crore, followed by Ministry of Power with 46 projects and Rs 3.4 lakh crore project cost and 29 projects under Department of Water Resources, River Development

and Ganga Rejuvenation with cost of Rs 12,254 crore. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways will carry out 22 projects with a cost of Rs 37,644 crore, while the Ministry of Railways will undertake 13 projects and a project cost of Rs 30,904 crore.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation will undertake 11 projects with a project cost of Rs 2,262 crore, while the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has 2 projects with a cost of Rs 6,646 crore. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas will undertake one project with an estimated expenditure of Rs 8,743 crore. Among states, the highest number — 270 projects — will be undertaken by Andhra Pradesh at an estimated total project cost of Rs 1.16 lakh crore, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 89 projects at a cost of Rs 11,519 crore and Tamil Nadu with 70 projects and Rs 87,640 crore cost. Jammu & Kashmir will undertake 57 projects at a cost of Rs 21,374 crore, while Madhya Pradesh will have 21 projects with Rs 65,497 crore cost. The pipeline provides early visibility of potential PPP projects to enable investors, developers and other stakeholders to undertake more informed planning and investment decisions, the Finance Ministry said in a statement. In her Budget speech on February 1, 2025, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said each infrastructure-related ministry will come up with a 3-year pipeline of projects that can be implemented in PPP mode. States will also be encouraged to do so and can seek support from the IIPDF (India Infrastructure Project Development Fund) scheme to prepare PPP proposals, she had said. Then Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil had in February 2024 said that the idea behind this project pipeline was that each department should have a shelf of projects, which they can think about and start implementing over the next three years. "They should not bring the projects in one go or sporadically, but think about their sector and prepare a pipeline of projects which can be funded over the next few years," he had said.

Goldilocks phase of low inflation, stable growth set to continue in FY27: India Ratings

India's macroeconomic situation is set to remain in the 'goldilocks' phase even in 2026-27, with India Ratings & Research forecasting on Tuesday a GDP growth of 6.9 per cent and headline retail inflation of 3.8 per cent. The latter will likely be lower than the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) medium-term target of 4 per cent for the second year in a row. For 2025-26, the ratings agency expects GDP to clock a growth rate of 7.4 per cent. So far in the first half of the year, growth has averaged 8 per cent in real terms. The statistics ministry will release its first advance estimate of GDP for 2025-26 on Wednesday.

India's real growth rate has surprised on the upside in the first two quarters of 2025-26, coming in well above expectations of economists as well as the RBI. At the same time, inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has been rather subdued, with the central bank having to cut its forecast six times in 2025 to 2 per cent for the fiscal year ending March. As a result, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said in early December that benign inflation and 8 per cent growth in the first half of the year presented "a rare goldilocks period". Risks, though, remain, with the main challenges being a weak currency — India Ratings sees the rupee averaging 92.3 per US dollar in 2026-27 — a high base effect, slower growth in indirect tax collections due to the cuts made to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates, a possible El Nino in mid-2026, and weaker-than-expected demand revival. "Emerging tech like AI (artificial intelligence) also presents new hurdles," Devendra Kumar Pant, India Ratings' Chief Economist and Head of Public Finance, said on Tuesday.

On the flip side, growth could also exceed current projections, especially if India manages to quickly finalise a trade deal with the US. "Upcoming changes to the base year for GDP and CPI to 2022-23 and 2024, respectively, will prompt a revision of the current economic outlook once new data is available," the agency said in a statement. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is in the midst of updating key macroeconomic data, with the first advance estimate of GDP that will be released on Wednesday being the last growth number as per the current methodology and the 2011-12 base year. At the end of February, MoSPI will release GDP data for October-December 2025 as per the new base year and after having incorporated certain changes in how the data is compiled. CPI inflation data for January, which will be released on February 12, will also be as per the new consumption basket based on the 2023-24 Household Consumption



Expenditure Survey and with 2024 as the base year for prices. According to Pant and Paras Jasrai, Associate Director and Economist at India Ratings, both private consumption and investment will benefit next year from the government's reform momentum, with positive rural real wage growth supporting consumption demand.

"With five consecutive quarters of agricultural GVA (gross value added) growth surpassing 3.5 per cent and declining inflation in 2025-26, consumption demand is set for a sustained boost," India Ratings said, projecting a 7.6 per cent increase in private consumption in 2026-27 on the back of strong service sector growth, low inflation turning real wages positive, the personal income tax cuts announced in the Union Budget for 2025-26, and the GST rate cuts. In the first half of 2025-26, private consumption rose 7.5 per cent year-on-year in real terms. On the investment side, gross fixed capital formation is expected to grow by 7.8 per cent next fiscal, led by the government's capital expenditure. "Though some sectors like telecom and chemicals may see slower capex, others like power, logistics, and real estate continue robust growth. Global tech giants are turning India into an investment hotspot, especially in electronics and mobile manufacturing, though further policy enhancements are needed to solidify India's role in the global supply chain," the economists noted. Gross fixed capital formation, a proxy for investments, rose 7.6 per cent in April-September 2025. And while the Central government's capital expenditure was up 28 per cent in the first eight months of 2025-26 as per latest data, the jury is still out on private capex, with India Ratings noting on Tuesday that low interest rates were a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for investment demand. However, with loan growth to the industry picking up pace in the second half of 2025, there is optimism on the private capex front, Jasrai said.

Banks report robust Q3 credit growth backed by RBI policy and GST rate cuts

Fuelled by higher demand following a 125-basis point (bps) cut in the repo rate, reductions in the goods and services tax (GST) rates and the festive season spending, several banks reported robust credit growth in the quarter ended December, show provisional quarterly business figures filed by lenders for the October-December 2025 quarter. Banks continue to post double-digit loan growth, according to the data. During Q3FY26, most of the lenders posted a higher deposit growth, though credit expansion continued to outpace it as shown by lenders' credit-deposit (CD) ratio that touched a record high of 81.6 per cent as of December 15, 2025, according to latest RBI data.

Overall, loan growth among public and private sector lenders who have reported their provisional numbers was between 7.42 per cent and 20 per cent. Among public sector lenders, banks that saw strong growth in advances in Q3FY26, are the Bank of Maharashtra (19.61 per cent), Central Bank of India (19.57 per cent) and Bank of India (15.07 per cent), show provisional numbers filed by these lenders. Bank of Baroda's advances were up 13.54 per cent, while Punjab National Bank reported a loan growth of 10.15 per cent. Union Bank of India's loan book expanded by 7.42 per cent. HDFC Bank's advances jumped 11.9 per cent to Rs 28.44 lakh crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal, compared to Rs 25.42 lakh crore in the year-ago period. Kotak Mahindra Bank's net advances increased by 16 per cent.

"There has been a good pick up in loan growth. Note that this is the quarter where we have seen the full impact of GST cuts playing out. Our guess is growth could have been driven by auto loans, unsecured loans and overall pick up in retail credit," said Suresh Ganapathy, MD, Head of Financial Services Research, Macquarie Capital. Between

February-December, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reduced the repo rate from 6.5 per cent to 5.25 per cent. The government implemented the next-generation goods and services tax (GST) reforms effective September 22, with a simplified two-slab structure of 5 per cent and 18 per cent. The move has helped in spurring domestic demand in the festive season. The GST cuts triggered a significant demand for auto loans during September and October — a period that coincided with the festive season.

"We expect liquidity revival to stimulate a concurrent downstream growth in credit and CASA (current account savings account), and we keep our above-consensus FY26E credit growth of 13 per cent unchanged. This view is reinforced by GST rationalisation benefits and a high balance sheet dry powder for most leading banks," said Santanu Chakrabarti, analyst — Banking and Finance, BNP Paribas India. Deposit growth during the quarter among banks who reported their provisional numbers stood at 3.35-15.3 per cent. During Q3 FY26, Bank of Maharashtra deposits grew by 15.3 per cent, while Central Bank of India posted a growth of 13.2 per cent in deposits. Punjab National Bank and Union Bank of India reported a slower growth in deposits at 8.32 per cent and 3.35 per cent, respectively. Axis saw strong deposit growth (15 per cent) that outpaced its loan growth (14.1 per cent). "The more critical variable to watch is deposit growth, which continues to trail credit expansion. This reflects lower savings rates, tighter overseas inflows, and greater diversification of household savings," said Prakash Agarwal, Partner, Gefion Capital Advisors, a capital and strategy advisory firm. During the October-December quarter, banks' CD or loan-to-deposit ratio — indicating what share of a bank's total deposits has been extended as loans — remained high. HDFC Bank's CD ratio stood at 99.45 per cent.

Why pregnancy acts as a 'physiologic stress test' for a women's heart



There is also an increased risk of hypertensive disorders, including pre-eclampsia and heart failure. "Chronic kidney disease similarly heightens risk, increasing the chances of pre-eclampsia, preterm birth, low birthweight and NICU admission." pregnant During pregnancy, heart rate increases by 10-20 beats per minute (image: pixels) The importance of early monitoring and follow-up Protecting heart health during pregnancy, Dr Bhatia stresses, must begin even before conception, with "honest risk assessment and counselling." Once pregnant, careful and frequent monitoring becomes essential.

"Regular cardiology follow-up with clinical exams, ECG, and echocardiography to monitor ventricular and valve function, and management by a multidisciplinary pregnancy heart team can help detect worsening function, arrhythmias, or heart failure early." High-risk women may also require tailored delivery plans and specialist medication management. Dr Bhatia recalls a case of a 44-year-old Ethiopian woman, in whom pregnancy worsened a pre-existing heart condition. The cardiologist cites that the woman had undergone a bioprosthetic mitral valve replacement and, over the course of two decades, carried four full-term pregnancies. "Each added sustained hemodynamic stress. Pregnancy accelerated the degeneration of her tissue valve, a known risk in younger women." Over the years, she developed severe breathlessness and pulmonary hypertension. "Evaluation showed the valve had worn out prematurely, necessitating a high-risk redo mitral valve replacement, complicated further by a single kidney." Although bioprosthetic mitral valve degeneration is inevitable over time, in this case, "repeated pregnancies likely accelerated a process that is biologically expected."

Dr Bhatia says that timely surgery restored her cardiac function and stability, and that this example underlines the cruciality of frequent cardiovascular surveillance in pregnancy, especially in women with pre-existing heart conditions. "Annual echocardiography after valve replacement, closer follow-up during and after each pregnancy, and early screening for rising pulmonary pressures would have helped detect valve degeneration sooner," Dr Bhatia asserts, cautioning that frequent cardiovascular surveillance in pregnancy, especially in women with pre-existing heart conditions, is non-negotiable.

Rubina Dilaik acknowledges her in-laws, husband's support during postpartum journey: 'Those who say divorce rates go up after a kid...'



Emphasising the value of traditional Indian family structures, Rubina Dilaik said that the support of in-laws and husbands in raising children is essential, especially when joint family systems are dwindling. "My mother-in-law was a working woman. She used to leave Abhinav with their nani (grandmother). She says, I know the value of a mother. In today's times, if a woman gets an understanding family, in-laws, and a husband, so I am telling you... those people who say that divorce rates go up after a kid, I am telling you all of this will come to so much of understanding," Dilaik, 37, said.

"It will come to a healthy family relationship. I can vouch for the fact that the parents' relationship affects the kids the most. This is the beauty of Indian family systems," she told Nayandeep Rakshit on YouTube. Taking a cue from her acknowledgment, let's learn the importance of understanding the family and being on the same page when raising children in today's times. Dr Shorouq Motwani, a psychiatrist at Lilavati Hospital in Mumbai, said that being on the same page about embracing parenthood is important for not only the couple's emotional well-being but also the healthy development of the children and the maintenance of peace and love in the family.

Parenthood brings significant lifestyle changes, responsibilities, and emotional shifts for the couple and the family. "If both partners are on the same page, they can

support each other better, manage stress properly, and create a thriving environment for the child. When a couple is a team, it is far easier for the in-laws to be supportive and nurture their grandchildren," said Dr Motwani. However, if families are not on the same page regarding caregiving or even matters like where the children will be raised, it may lead to a communication gap or emotional distance, which can damage the relationship and the child's upbringing. "Open and honest communication becomes the key if a couple and their family are not aligned. So, each other's fears, expectations, and reasons should be taken into consideration before the decision," said Dr Motwani.

Foods and diets that dominated our health conversations in 2025



In 2025, food was no longer discussed only in terms of weight loss or indulgence; it became a daily health strategy. Conversations around what we ate were increasingly tied to how our joints felt in the morning, how steady our energy stayed through the day, how well we slept, and how our digestion behaved under stress. Meals turned into quiet interventions, with people looking to their plates not for perfection, but for relief, resilience, and long-term wellbeing.

From joint-friendly diets that promised reduced inflammation to heart-healthy foods aimed at managing cholesterol and blood pressure, nutrition talk grew more condition-specific and practical. Instead of chasing superfoods in isolation, people focused on combinations such as fibre with protein, fats with antioxidants, fermented foods alongside home-cooked staples and questioned how cooking methods, timing, and consistency mattered just as much as ingredients.

Gut health, in particular, dominated the conversation. Probiotics, prebiotics, fermented foods, and fibre-rich grains moved from niche wellness circles into everyday kitchens. At the same time, there was a noticeable shift away from extreme food rules. This year, health conversations around food were less about restriction and more choosing foods that helped the body cope better with modern life, chronic stress, and ageing, one meal at a time. Gut health took over the menu.

Gut health wasn't just a buzzword; it was a cultural movement. Experts emphasised the role of various seeds and fibres in nourishing the gut microbiome, which in turn supports digestion and even heart health. Nutritionists highlighted seeds like chia, flax, and pomegranate seeds for their fibre, omega-3s, and antioxidants, all key for maintaining gut balance and reducing inflammation.

Meanwhile, experts also reminded readers that certain pigment-rich foods like berries and colourful fruits also help foster gut well-being and lower inflammatory stress in the body. According to Deepalakshmi, a registered dietitian at Shree Balaji Medical Centre, Chennai, red pigments in foods are very helpful for keeping your gut healthy. Traditional fermented staples from curd to batter for idli and dosa also saw a renaissance in 2025, not just as comfort foods but as functional ingredients for probiotic and digestive support.

Dr Raj Kumar, senior consultant, Non-invasive Cardiology at PSRI Hospital, also stressed that eating a diet rich in fibre, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, feeds the healthy bacteria in the gut. Heart-smart choices and anti-inflammatory staples Nutrition conversations also placed heart health at the centre of daily food choices. Cardiologists and dietitians pushed back against simplistic "low-carb" or "low-fat" labels, urging people instead to focus on whole, minimally processed foods. Dr CM Nagesh, general secretary at the Indian College of Cardiology, noted, "Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seeds, and olive oil to support cardiovascular health." Anti-inflammatory eating became another practical theme in 2025, reinforcing the importance of colourful fruits, leafy greens, seeds and fibre — foods known to lower systemic inflammation and support both gut and heart health. Condition-specific foods Discussions moved beyond generic 'eat clean' advice to condition-specific eating. Foods traditionally recommended for digestive comfort were spotlighted by gastroenterologists, blending ancient practices with contemporary science. Joint health-focused diets drew attention to anti-inflammatory nutrition (like omega-3-rich fatty fish and fibre-dense legumes) as tools to cope with joint pain.

Union Minister's 'Baigan' gaffe on Mohun Bagan, East Bengal sparks political storm in Bengal



Kolkata: In West Bengal where football loyalties are inherited like surnames and club names are uttered with near-religious reverence, a linguistic slip by Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has kicked off an unexpected political derby, with the TMC playing a full-throated home game. At a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday to announce that the Indian Super League (ISL) which was on pause due to the lack of a commercial partner, will resume from February 14, Mandaviya triggered a row by stumbling over the names of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, two institutions that define not just the city's sporting soul but much of its cultural grammar.

As cameras rolled, the minister's pronunciation briefly wandered offside. He paused, sought help, corrected himself and moved on. Social media did not. "Mohun Bagan... East Began," Mandaviya said, before correcting himself to "East Bengal" in a clip that soon went viral. The mispronun-

cation, phonetically resembling "baigan", the Hindi word for eggplant, drew instant mockery online and sharp political criticism in Bengal. Within hours, the moment became ammunition in the state's ever-alert political ecosystem, where symbolism often travels faster than substance.

The TMC accused the BJP-led Centre of being culturally tone-deaf, arguing that misnaming clubs founded in 1889 (Mohun Bagan) and 1920 (East Bengal) was not a minor slip but a metaphor for a larger disconnect with the state. Party leaders said the episode exposed unfamiliarity with institutions that shaped Indian football long before national leagues and television deals. The barefoot Mohun Bagan footballers' victory over a British regiment in 1911, they noted, still occupies a place in nationalist folklore, while East Bengal's rise has long been associated with migration, struggle and resilience. "These are two century-old clubs. Mohun Bagan is a national club and East Bengal symbolises fighting spirit. The Union sports minister cannot even pronounce the names of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal properly despite reading them," TMC leader Kunal Ghosh, himself a member of Mohun Bagan club, said. "Mohun baigan, East baigan. Clueless BJP's sports minister who does not have a clue about legendary football teams Mohun Bagan and East Bengal. Shameful," TMC MP Sagarka Ghose posted on X, sharing the video clip. The West Bengal BJP sought to play down the controversy, calling it an honest and inadvertent mistake made during an announcement focused on resolving a league-level crisis. But in a politically charged state heading into another electoral cycle, the verdict was clear: you can restart the league, but misnaming the clubs is still a self-goal.

How US-born Aman Rao returned home to pursue cricket dreams, relinquished US passport and became a batting sensation



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Three days before the IPL 2026 player auctions, a video of Aman Rao taking on Shardul Thakur went viral. In a modest chase of 132 against Mumbai in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s, he cracked three boundaries and two sixes in the first over, delivered by Thakur, as they chased the total in 11.5 overs. Aman stayed unbeaten on 52. More than the runs, the shots caught everyone's attention. On Wednesday, another video of his began getting viral. This was his unbeaten 200 in the Vijay Hazare Trophy against a Bengal attack that included Mohammed Shami, Akash Deep, Mukesh Kumar, Shahbaz Ahmed.

The shots stood out again. All were from the textbook, sound in technique, elegant and with the characteristic richness of the Hyderabad school of batting, that the world marvelled in Mohammed Azharuddin and VVS Laxman. The 21-year-old made jaws drop, like his lofty predecessors. Standing tall, he got off the mark with a straight drive with a high elbow before making good use of those ultra flexible, rubbery wrists to time three more boundaries. In a 200 that included 12 boundaries and 13 sixes, it was hard to pick the most aesthetic one. Despite growing up in the age of T20s, he doesn't slog like his peers. If he wants to go aerial, he merely extends his shot, which he could keep along the ground on another day, or format.

"I'm just made that way," Aman tells The Indian Express. "I was never this batsman, who used to play aerially or hit the ball hard. It is something I did during the Covid years, where I thought I needed to expand my game. So I started to loft the same shots I used to play along the ground. I'm a huge fan of (Kane) Williamson and (Kumar) Sangakkara, and although I don't try to copy their game, I believe it is an effective method across formats," he says. The ability to play these shots is down to Aman's formative years where he extensively worked on his technique. According to his father Madhukar Rao, in his first age-group outing, Aman scored only 20-odd runs, but faced around 100 deliveries. As he climbed through age groups, he caught up with intent. The ability to hit sixes is a dimension that Aman realised can't be compromised. "Since he had a good defence, it was easy for him to expand his range. Growing up, he was too much into technique. Until about 14, he never looked to play shots. But once he got comfortable with basics, he just took off," Madhukar says.

Wisconsin to KarimganagarBorn in Wisconsin in the US where Madhukar was an IT professional, Aman was a year-and-a-half when he came to India. According to Madhukar, Aman picked up cricket only because he used to accom-

pany his elder brother Akash to a coaching centre. Though Akash left cricket to pursue studies, Aman embraced the sport, prompting the family to move from Karimganagar to Hyderabad, where he was enrolled at St John's Academy, the alma mater of Laxman.

Before the current season began, when it became clear after a BCCI rule change that Aman should have an Indian passport, the family faced a dilemma. "Though he had an OCI card, he was still a US citizen and had a US passport. I even suggested that he go to the US because his brother is settled now and cricket is becoming big over there. But he wanted to stay in India and pursue the sport. So we surrendered the US passport and applied for an Indian one and he got hold of it only two days before the SMAT. If he had not got it, he wouldn't have played this season," Madhukar says. The choice wasn't tough for Aman. For, among those who watched the Thakur-slammimg video was his idol Sangakkara. Four days later, he raised the paddle for him at the auction. "I was not surprised, but was a bit taken aback," Aman says. "I had not attended any trials for Rajasthan. Only Chennai Super Kings had called me. So I didn't expect RR to get me. Now, all that is going on in my head is how I'm going to warm up to him. I'm trying to prepare myself for that first interaction, but no matter how much I prepare, it isn't going to be easy. It will take a bit of time" he adds. Speaking of his 200 against Bengal, Aman knows its importance. Right through the SMAT and Vijay Hazare, he was showing the spark, but a big score was missing. He brought up his maiden century in the 40th over off 108 deliveries before going from 186 to 200 off the last three balls of the innings. His second hundred came off just 46 deliveries. "I always know I can catch-up with strike-rate. I wasn't thinking of 200 because I was anyway looking for sixes only. More than that, I'm just happy that I was able to find the tempo to construct the innings."

Magnus Carlsen tells Faustino Oro: 'One day, Messi will be lucky to be compared to you'



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

World No 1 Magnus Carlsen has heaped praise on

12-year-old Faustino Oro who is in line to become the youngest grandmaster in chess history. Since Oro is from Argentina and like football superstar Lionel Messi, he moved from his native country to Spain to accelerate his career, Oro is also known as the Messi of Chess. Carlsen, though, had a different spin to this comparison.

"I am a Real Madrid fan personally, but I've kind of come to appreciate Messi more and more. I think Faustino is a lot better at 12 than Messi was at 12. He's on a good path. Just embrace it and enjoy it and you know, one day Messi will be lucky to be compared to you if you continue (like this)," the five-time world champion Carlsen told Oro in a conversation for the Take Take Take app. When Oro was asked about the comparison with Messi, he said: "Obviously I watch football. I like Messi for sure. I watch him a lot, and a lot of games (of him). Sometimes I watch football, but I'm not focusing on the football obviously. I also like to be compared with Messi and I'm happy. That for sure is important," Oro said. Talking about the record of the youngest grandmaster in the world, Carlsen had some advice for Oro.

"I do think that there are more important things right now than records. I think that's the most important thing to think about. I think he's a great player. He has a wonderful positional feeling for chess which is quite rare among such young players. He seems to really love chess, seeing as he plays a ton online and he plays every tournament that he can play. He also seems to have great support to kind of

let him do his thing. So, I would focus on just trying to keep it light, not think about results a whole lot. And you know, he's on an incredible path. Believe me, it's fun to be that much into something and be that good at it at such an early age. So just enjoy it and the pieces will fall where they may," Carlsen told Oro when talking about the impending record as the world's youngest grandmaster. To this, Oro replied: "I don't care much about records. I care much more about trying to play better chess all the days, trying to improve and trying to play and enjoy the game. For me, this is the most important thing for chess. I am happy and trying to improve my chess."

Indian football mess: Players anxious over salary cuts, ISL clubs say necessary for 'survival'



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

For months, India's footballers waited for the domestic season – which had been on pause for nine months – to resume. When it was finally announced on Tuesday that the Indian Super League, the top division, would kick off on February 14, there was relief. But it quickly gave way to more anxiety. Multiple clubs have now asked the players to take a salary cut of up to 25 per cent as the owners find ways to cut costs ahead of a truncated season. The proposed new structure is set to have 72 fewer matches than the 2024-'25 season. An Indian player said the clubs are asking a 'plain yes or no, without discussing the details' of the revised salary structure. The player added that the clubs have told them that if they do not 'understand the situation, then we might not play in the league'.

Indian men's football is wading through its biggest crisis in decades. While the national team's fortunes have plummeted, having failed to qualify for the 2027 Asian Cup, the domestic season has come to a standstill after the 15-year commercial rights deal between the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Reliance Sports expired on December 8, 2025. When the AIFF floated a tender for a new partner, they did not receive a single bid. After months of back-and-forth, it was finally agreed on Tuesday that the new season, which was to begin in September last year, would finally get underway next month. After initially expressing their apprehensions, mostly due to the increased costs, all 14 teams agreed to participate in the single-leg home-and-away format, but only after the intervention of Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya. During the meeting between the officials from the sports ministry, AIFF and ISL franchises, club executives raised the issue of increased costs, particularly player wages.

The ISL clubs spend up to 70 per cent of their annual

budgets on player salaries. The league has a salary cap of Rs 16.5 crore, but it is an open secret that the clubs spend much more to remain competitive. And given the dearth of top-quality homegrown players, the India internationals take home upwards of a crore per year. High wages are seen as the primary reason for the heavy losses the clubs endure year-on-year, making it unsustainable in the long term. A club official said the player contracts were agreed upon when the ISL had a broadcast deal of Rs 275 crore per season, a portion of which went to each franchise. However, as there is no deal in place for the upcoming season, the clubs are staring at a big hole in their pockets, especially since they also have to contribute to central operations and pay franchise fees. It is learnt that at least three clubs have asked their players, who earn more than Rs 1 crore per season, to take a pay cut of 20-25 per cent. Those earning less than that are staring at a cut of 10-15 per cent.

The Indian Express understands that half a dozen clubs were also ready to 'swallow the bitter pill' by not having a league this season, cancel player contracts and start from scratch next season by bringing the salaries under control. However, not all clubs were on board with the idea. Even the Sports Minister urged the clubs and the AIFF to conduct the league. Mandaviya is believed to have told them that at a time when India is hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and bidding for the 2036 Olympics, the inability to conduct a domestic football season would send a wrong message internationally. "When the Minister said that any FIFA sanction or warning could affect the Olympic Games bids, it became a bigger issue, and the clubs agreed to play," a source said.

The government, AIFF and clubs decided that the players would be 'requested' to agree to a salary cut. The clubs cannot arbitrarily reduce or halt wages, as it could lead to sanctions from FIFA if a player approached them. Parth Jindal, the owner of domestic heavyweights Bengaluru FC, said in a post on X on Wednesday morning: "(sic) Tremendous sacrifice from all clubs is being asked for to play the ISL in its current format. The repercussions if we don't have a league are very worrying. Would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Sports Minister for his intervention and his proposal. Truly hope the players understand the additional financial burden on the clubs and agree to also sacrifice as we are all in this together." Jindal added that Bengaluru FC "has been a loss-making proposition for all since I can remember – this year's numbers, without the players helping out, will force many to shut shop for good."

Seven-figure club: Magnus Carlsen was only chess player to earn over \$1 million in 2025 from prize money



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

World No 1 Magnus Carlsen may play in only a handful of classical events these days, but that has not prevented him from topping the 2025 list of top prize money earners in chess. According to a list compiled by Chess.com, the five-time world champion racked up a whopping \$1.5 million in prize money alone in 2025. Carlsen earned the money from tournaments like the Esports World Cup, World Rapid and Blitz Championship, Norway Chess (which was his only classical tournament in 2025), the Clutch Chess exhibition event and events on the Freestyle Grand Slam Tour, which he won in South Africa last month.

The article also noted that Carlsen was the only chess player to pocket seven figures in prize winnings in 2025. The report noted that after his windfall in the 2025 calendar year, Carlsen's total prize money earnings from chess was up to \$1,22,32,249 (approximately Rs 109 crore). Following in Carlsen's heels were three American grandmasters Fabiano Caruana (\$8,89,598 in 2025), Levon Aronian (\$7,51,881) and Hikaru Nakamura (\$5,88,911). Reigning women's world champion Ju Wenjun was the top female player in the list, taking home \$342,203, which put her just outside the top 10 in the world, at no 11. Magnus Carlsen at a press conference after winning the FIDE World Rapid Championship with the Betby logo covered with tape. (PHOTO: Screen grab via FIDE YouTube) Magnus Carlsen at a press conference after winning the FIDE World Rapid Championship with the Betby logo covered with tape. (PHOTO: Screen grab via FIDE YouTube)

India's top money earner when it came to prize money was Arjun Erigaisi, who pocketed a whopping \$431,214 (approximately Rs 3.8 crore) in 2025. This put Arjun 8th in the

2025 list while Praggnanandhaa, who won multiple events in 2025 to secure a spot in the prestigious Candidates tournament, was 12th with \$3,17,122 (approximately Rs 2.8 crore). World champion Gukesh Dommaraju, who was 17th in the list after what was a topsy-turvy year on the board with plenty of chess but limited success, ranked in \$2,02,292 (approximately Rs 1.8 crore). Chess legend Koneru Humpy was also on the list with a takeaway of \$1,34,480 in 2025 (approximately Rs 1.2 crore). It must be noted that this amount does not include money players make from other sources like appearance fees, streaming revenue, sponsorships, royalties, government grants or even prize money from national championships, team events, or small tournaments. The report also noted that former World Champion Ding Liren, who was deposed from the throne by Gukesh in December 2024, hardly played in too many events this year, and ended up making \$6,000 from the Chess.com Classic, the second leg of the Champions Chess Tour.

Darren Fletcher reveals why he spoke to Sir Alex Ferguson before taking up the interim manager role at Manchester United



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Manchester United's interim manager, Darren Fletcher, has said he spoke to Sir Alex Ferguson before he was appointed in the role, ahead of the Premier League clash against Burnley on Wednesday. The 41-year-old said that he wanted to 'run it by' the legendary manager about taking up the role and sought his blessings from him. "I don't like to make any major decisions without speaking to Sir Alex. I've got a really good relationship with Sir Alex, so I wanted to speak to him first and ultimately to get his blessing, to be perfectly honest with you. I think he deserves that respect."

"I wanted to run it by him, and he echoed my thoughts. When you're an employee of the club, it's your job to do your best for Manchester United. It is something I try and live and believe every day, so it was comforting for me for him to

say that," Fletcher said in the pre-match press conference. Interim Manchester United manager Darren Fletcher at a press conference on Wednesday. (Screen grab via YouTube) Interim Manchester United manager Darren Fletcher at a press conference on Wednesday. (Screen grab via YouTube)

The former midfielder

revealed that he had not had the chance to speak with Ruben Amorim after he lost his job, but admitted that he shared a good relationship with the Portuguese manager. "I've reached out to him but not managed to make contact yet, which is understandable. He's obviously got a lot on his mind, and I've been really busy." "I'd love to because I had a good relationship with Ruben, and he was great with me. But

it's important you move on very quickly. Football is a cruel game, so it's important we tried to create a little bit of energy and a little bit of spirit."

"Hopefully, there's more of it again tomorrow," Fletcher said. Fletcher played for United from 2003-2015, winning five Premier League titles and the Champions League in 2008. He played 342 matches for the club before leaving in 2015.

'Senior citizens' Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan show no signs of slowing down: 60 is the new 40 for Bollywood's male stars



1965 was a historic year for Hindi cinema. In the year of Sunil Dutt's definite masala movie in *Waqt* and Dev Anand's philosophical musings in *Guide*, a triumvirate of future stars were born. It was only a matter of around 25 years that all three of them announced their Bollywood arrival in style — Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, and Shah Rukh Khan. And now, 35 years later, all three of them have turned 60 this year. By that age, a regular corporate professional is slapped with VRS. While there's no retirement age for the artist, there used to be one for a star. The imposed retirement has been more apparent and blatant in case of female actors, where their stardom's death was sounded as soon as they turned 30. And in case they chose to marry and have kids earlier, the obituaries would be even quicker.

Male actors have relatively enjoyed longer shelf lives for their careers. But the conventional perception of a man turning 60 made the biggest of big stars submit to the twilight. Sample arguably the biggest Indian star of the last millennium — Amitabh Bachchan. His downfall started even before he hit 50. Having enjoyed the peak of his career in its first decade itself, Bachchan was juggernaut of star in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. But a number of factors — including his political entry and subsequent controversy, inability to adapt to the VHS era, and India's desperate cries for fresh blood — slowly and surely sidelined him as a star. Even when he won a National Award for *Shahenshah* (1988) and a brief resurgence post his *Coolie* accident recovery in 1982, Bachchan was reduced to an outdated star, particularly in the 1990s after the advent of younger, romantic leads like the three Khans.

By the time Bachchan was 60, he had already seen his lowest of lows and even bounced back from it. The cost? He had to, in conventional terms, settle for a 'lesser' medium that was television as the host of *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. The TV success didn't translate into movies either unless he volunteered to take up the role of, ironically, an outworn ideologue pitted against a younger iconoclast (Shah Rukh) in Aditya Chopra's 2000 romantic drama *Mohabbatein*. A still from *Mohabbatein* Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan in a still from *Mohabbatein* Bachchan did star in a few films as the lead actor, but could never strike success consistently. He evolved into a character actor, much like Rishi Kapoor. Three years after starring as the leading man in Yash Chopra's 1989 romance *Chandni*, Rishi was completely overshadowed by Shah Rukh in the latter's 1992 debut film, Raj Kanwar's *Deewana*. Rishi gradually transitioned from the second romantic lead in the 1990s to a character actor in the 2000s. By the time he turned 60, he displayed immense range in the same year of 2012 — as the formidable villain Rauf Lala in Karan Malhotra's *Agneepath*, as the hilarious Chintu Kapoor in Sajid Khan's *Housefull 2*, and as the bubbling principal Yogi in Karan Johar's *Student of the Year*.

we discuss Akbar and Anthony, can Amar be far behind? Vinod Khanna lost his thriving career to his break from films to pursue spirituality at Osho's ashram in the mid-1980s. He did return with much fanfare, but the momentum

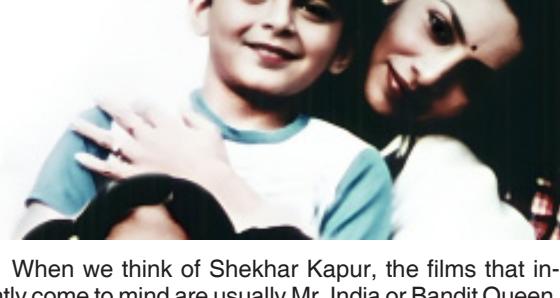
was short-lived. When he turned 60 in 2006, he was the least successful of the three, doing one forgettable film after another, registering his presence only in anomalies like Salman Khan's *Wanted* (2009) and the *Dabangg* franchise, riding on the star's success. In the last decade of his career, Rishi Kapoor maintained that he didn't want to do films as the lead actor because they're unable to secure financial backing, unless they have more bankable stars like the three Khans. Even the next crop of lead actors after Rishi's generation — Anil Kapoor, Jackie Shroff, and Sanjay Dutt — have found their niche as either character actors or antagonists in South Indian tentpoles. The only exception is Sunny Deol, 68, who had a resurgence with Anil Sharma's 2023 action film *Gadar 2*. He couldn't recreate the same effect with *Jaat* earlier this year, but may crystallize his redemption with *Border 2* next month. However, unlike Sunny, who hadn't delivered a hit in over a decade before *Gadar 2*, the three Khans have sustained their stardom through highs and lows far more consistently in the past 30-35 years. 60 is the new 40 for the Khans. Firstly, the three Khans debuted at a time when India was getting liberalised. A new generation of the audience wanted to watch themselves on screen, and they found resonance in the three Khans bubbling with youthful verve. Romantic films carried them through for a decade and a half in the 1990s and early 2000s, but the new millennium brought fresher challenges. After the 35-year mark, whether it was Bachchan or Rishi Kapoor, all of them had started to show signs of a burnout. That also had to do with the quantity of films each actor was doing at a time, which went up to even more than a dozen. Aamir was the first lead actor to take the then-considered suicidal move of doing only one film at a time. When the industry raised eyebrows at him, he proved them wrong and how, with the historic success of *Shatosh Gowariker's Lagaan* in 2001.

As corporates entered India in the early 2000s, it led to the streamlining of the film industry, allowing not only Aamir, but also other lead actors like Shah Rukh and Salman to do fewer films at a time. But with corporatization came new challenges of adapting to an audience that demanded more, in terms of both quality of films and degree of craft. Thus came the biggest challenge for Salman, who had a bit of a rough patch in the early 2000s. His complacency was flagged by father and veteran screenwriter Salim Khan who asked him to pull up his socks as the eldest son of the family. With a conscious approach of identifying his single-screen audience and catering to them unapologetically, Salman bounced back with blockbusters like *Dabangg*, *Wanted*, and *Bharat*. Shah Rukh's litmus test came only post 2015 with duds like *Fan* (2016), *Jab Harry Met Sejal* (2017), and *Zero* (2018). Around those years, Shah Rukh had claimed that the definition of stardom has changed from mystery to accessibility. He hailed social media influencers as the stars of the next generation since they're more accessible and relatable.

Shah Rukh probably followed the same mantra, making himself available across all media — in films, advertisements, at events, weddings and in media interviews. It was only when he took a break from the movies in 2019, followed by a period of introspection during the Covid-19 pandemic, that he devised a new approach. Reinvented himself on not only the big screen — through an action-packed avatar with films like *Pathaan* and *Jawan* — but also outside of movies by becoming completely inaccessible. He stopped giving interviews, began taking much longer on each film, and often hid his face from the paparazzi, completely starving the whole movie-watching country of Shah Rukh Khan content. Thanks to this lack of exposure, every Ask SRK session on X would go viral, and every new film, including his next *King*,

we discuss Akbar and Anthony, can Amar be far behind? Vinod Khanna lost his thriving career to his break from films to pursue spirituality at Osho's ashram in the mid-1980s. He did return with much fanfare, but the momentum

Shabana Azmi didn't talk to Jugal Hansraj when he worked as a child actor on *Masoom*: 'She didn't want us to become too close'



something before shedding tears. And he even said that if in the future there is a good role for his on-screen son, he would only call me.

He also told my father not to worry and said he would take care of me," he said. Shekhar Kapur announced *Masoom 2* in 2024. Earlier this year, he announced that the film will star Manoj Bajpayee and Nithya Menen, along with his daughter Kaveri.

Salman Khan summoned over pan masala ad dispute



Jaipur: The Kota District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission has ordered a forensic examination of Bollywood actor Salman Khan's signature in connection with a case related to a pan masala advertisement.

The court has also directed the actor to appear in person on January 20, along with relevant documents and the notary concerned. The order was passed after the complainant, BJP leader and advocate Indramohan Singh Honey, raised objections to the authenticity of Salman Khan's signature on the power of attorney and the reply submitted before the court. The complainant demanded a forensic verification of the signatures, alleging discrepancies. Accepting the objection, the consumer court directed that the signature be examined by a state-authorised and recognised agency or a Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL). The order has been issued under Section 38(9)(d) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, and Section 73(2) of the Indian Evidence Act.

Imran Khan rejected a gold iPhone for a hot shower; recalls when he was paid Rs 12 cr for a film: 'Aamir Khan's money is not coming to me'



being paid Rs 7-10 crore," he said. The jump felt illogical to him, especially since his earlier films hadn't reflected any drastic improvement in his acting. He recalled being paid just Rs 5 lakh for *Kidnap* because the makers initially didn't even want him. "By the time *Jaane Tu* released, I had already done three films. I suddenly thought to myself, 'did my acting grow so much from my previous film?'"

He also shared a telling anecdote from a promotional trip to Dubai. He shared that he was offered a gold iPhone for the opening of a jewellery store, but he rejected it. "This one time I was in Dubai for a promotional event. I kept on doing interviews the whole time. By evening, I was extremely tired. And the next day, I am supposed to catch a flight to London. I was preparing to sleep when my manager came to me and said, 'Sir, in this mall there is an opening of a jewellery shop, if you will do the ribbon cutting ceremony, they will give you gold iPhone.' I said, 'No, thank you. You keep the gold iPhone, I need a hot shower, I want a drink and a good night sleep.' He recalled, adding that another, far richer actor happily attended the event to get the phone. Imran revealed that the highest paycheque of his career was Rs 12 crore for a film he didn't name. However, by the final schedule, he felt the money wasn't worth the personal cost. "I remember thinking, 'Take this Rs 12 crore and give me my six months of life back,'" he said. Reflecting on his current situation, Imran admitted that his net worth today is significantly lower than it was a decade ago. After stepping away from the industry, not working for nearly 10 years, and going through a divorce, his finances were split. "Even today, I am at a place where I haven't worked for 10 years and I am still not stressed about paying my bills," he said, pointing out the irony that people far wealthier than him still chase superficial perks. He also recalled co-hosting the Filmfare Awards with Ranbir Kapoor, describing the grueling schedule that stretched from morning rehearsals to late-night performances. For all that work, he estimated they were paid around Rs 50 lakh. "I don't remember exactly, but speculatively I can say maybe around Rs 50 lakh. It's not bad money. If you really consider a scale at which a leading actor earns in comparison to all other actors and all the other non-actors on set with all the recent films, there will come a moment where they will all sit and say 'Hang on!' They will then analyse the whole thing, and somewhere in the mathematics and algebra, they will say, 'This is not making sense.' It doesn't make sense to pay one person so much." Speaking about current A-list actor fees, Imran was blunt. "If you're an A-list in theatrical films today, you're not earning less than Rs 30 crore per film," he said.

Drishyam 3 producer calls Akshaye Khanna 'toxic, unprofessional', says Dhurandhar success has 'gone to his head': 'His solo film won't make Rs 50 cr'



derstand that multiple factors worked in favour of Dhurandhar."

Speaking about what went wrong with *Drishyam 3*, Kumar explained, that they signed an agreement after a long round of negotiations. After that, Akshaye insisted that he wanted to wear a wig in the film. "He insisted that he would like to wear a wig. But (director) Abhishek Pathak convinced him that it wouldn't be practical, as it would result in continuity issues since *Drishyam 3* is a sequel. He understood his point and agreed to let go of that demand. However, the chamchas around him advised him that he would look smarter if he donned a wig. So, he again requested the same. Abhishek relented and was even ready to discuss this point with him. But then, he informed us that he doesn't want to be a part of the film at all," he said.

Kumar Mangat Pathak said he was "shocked" to hear this and added, "Drishyam 3 begins where *Drishyam 2* ended. How can his character suddenly get hair? Is there any technology in the world that can grow hair within minutes?" Kumar also revealed how Akshaye had initially loved the script and even predicted massive box-office numbers, before changing his stance after Dhurandhar went on to earn over Rs 1,000 crore worldwide. He said that Akshaye had initially loved the script and said, "Yeh Rs 500 crore ki film hai (This is Rs 500 crore film)". He claimed that Akshaye signed the agreement, was paid an advance, but backed out just 10 days before the shoot. In the same conversation, Kumar confirmed that Akshaye has now been replaced by Jaideep Ahlawat. "Drishyam is a very big brand. It doesn't matter whether he is in the film or not. Now, Jaideep Ahlawat has replaced him. By the grace of God, we have got a better actor than Akshaye and most importantly, we have got a better person than Akshaye as well." Earlier reports had suggested that following the success of *Chhavaa* and *Dhurandhar*, Akshaye Khanna allegedly revised his fee to Rs 21 crore — a figure that reportedly didn't sit well with the makers of *Drishyam 3* due to budgetary constraints. However, Kumar Mangat chose not to disclose the financial specifics of their fallout.

'Aap salamat rahein Maalik': Shera wishes Salman Khan on his 60th b'day

Mumbai: Salman Khan's bodyguard Shera, who has been with the Bollywood superstar for decades now, wished his 'Maalik' on his special day with a heartfelt post on social media. Shera praised Salman for his unique ability to face every obstacle of life with style, strength, and silence, which is something that according to him makes Salman one of the biggest superstars in the country.

Dropping a photo of himself twinning with the 'Sultan' actor in black on his IG, Shera wrote on the photo-sharing app, "Happy 60th Birthday, My Maalik @beingsalmankhan... I've walked beside you through countless ups and downs, and one thing that has never changed, is your attitude to face every challenge with style, strength and silence. (sic)." Shera further expressed his gratitude to Salman for giving him a chance to earn a lot of love and respect, all thanks to him. "