





# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Challenges galore for Nirmala Sitharaman ahead of Union Budget

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

The government will have to weigh exchange rate realities into Budget forecasts, potentially conservatively estimating both revenue and subsidy costs. Whether Sitharaman opts for a contingency buffer in the Budget to accommodate currency volatility, or leans on structural measures to stimulate exports, will be closely watched by markets and policymakers alike. Trade is the big issue on the horizon in a world with fast-changing alignments due to US President Donald Trump's maverick economic policies. Given the inordinate delay in finalising the trade pact with America, the Budget will now have to provide support for export-led industries, which could face tough times ahead.


## Gaddam Ravikumar meets Director Trivikram Srinivas

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):“Kapunaadu State Vice President and actor Gaddam Ravikumar paid a courtesy visit to renowned film director Trivikram Srinivas on Monday. During the meeting, Ravikumar discussed various films with the director and conveyed his congratulations, recalling the movies directed by Trivikram Srinivas. He also enquired about the director's upcoming projects. Vaireddy was also present on the occasion.


## Resolve Issues in Uppal Bhagayat, Construct Sports Complex and Community Hall: Parameshwar Reddy Urges HMDA Commissioner

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):“Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy has urged the HMDA Commissioner to immediately resolve the long-pending issues in the HMDA layout at Uppal Bhagayat. On Monday, Parameshwar Reddy met HMDA Commissioner Sarfaraz Ahmed and submitted a representation highlighting the problems faced by residents of the area. He stated that roads in HMDA Layout Phase 1 and Phase 2 at Bhagayat are in a severely damaged condition. The drainage system has also become problematic in several localities due to the absence of proper outlets. He further pointed out that several basic civic amenities are yet to be provided. Despite long-standing demands, essential facilities such as a sports complex and a community hall have not been constructed in the layout so far. In addition, recent pipeline works undertaken by the Water Works Department have further damaged the existing roads, causing inconvenience to residents. Parameshwar Reddy requested the HMDA Commissioner to take immediate steps to address all these issues and undertake necessary development works at the earliest. The Commissioner responded positively to the representation, assuring appropriate action.


## Concluded MPR Cricket Tournament: Uppal Constituency Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Presents Prizes to Winners




“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):“The MPR Cricket Tournament concluded successfully at the Ramantapur Chinna Cheruvu area under the leadership of Ramantapur Division President Mohammed Rafiq. Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy attended the event as the chief guest and presented prizes to the winners. In the tournament, the Asif Team emerged as winners, while the Naeem Team secured the runners-up position. Cash prizes of ₹21,000 and ₹11,000 respectively were presented to the winning and runner-up teams by Parameshwar Reddy. He also congratulated the organizers, especially Mohammed Rafiq, for successfully conducting the tournament. Addressing the gathering, Parameshwar Reddy said that when players step onto the field with complete focus, forgetting the outside world, the world itself begins to watch them. He emphasized that parents should encourage sports and stated that games have no barriers of caste or religion. He added that success comes only to those who practice with dedication and perseverance. He further said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy envisions steering youth away from addiction and towards sports, and with this objective, significant funds have been allocated to the sports sector in the state budget. He noted that youth often take wrong decisions due to anger over small issues, and sports teach them how to handle both victory and defeat. Parameshwar Reddy criticized the previous government for neglecting sports in Telangana and stated that after the Congress government came to power, sincere efforts are being made to develop sports across the state. He said Telangana is set to become a sports hub soon, with the Chief Minister formulating a dedicated sports policy to encourage athletes. He also mentioned that playgrounds in the Kapra Division of the Uppal Constituency are being developed with a special allocation of ₹9 crore. The program was attended by Mohammed Tofiq, Jaleel Pasha, Aakarapu Arun, Kandi Shravan Reddy, Upender Reddy, Angala Sandeep, Poosa Sattaiah, Gangaputra Bhaskar, Mogili Lingam, Laghusani Srinivas Goud, Balayya Babu, Samuel, Muttala Jangaiah, Seemakalla Jangaiah, Sandhya Rani, Gayatri, Ambika, Mohammed Naeem, Bullet Ashok, Wazir Baba, Mahesh, Surya, Icon Madhu, Swamy, Zangir, Thota Shankar, Gupta Prasad, and several others.



## Congress Leaders Submit Representation to Officials Over Civic Issues



“Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, January 19: “Acting on the directions of Uppal Assembly Congress In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, Congress leaders from Nacharam met officials and submitted a representation highlighting various civic issues. “Under the leadership of former Floor Leader and senior Congress leader Guntuka Krishna Reddy, the delegation met Nacharam Circle DC Nithyanand and Executive Officer Ramesh. Former Ward Committee Members and senior Congress leaders Guntuka Shekhar Reddy, along with youth leader Balu Yadav, were part of the delegation. “The



Congress leaders brought to the officials' notice several problems faced by residents in Nacharam and HMT Division colonies, including poor road conditions, drainage issues, waste being discharged into lakes, and the resulting mosquito menace and foul smell. They also highlighted issues in the Market Yard and conveyed the concerns and suggested works put forward by local residents. “The officials responded positively to the representation and assured the leaders that pending works would be completed at the earliest. They also gave assurances regarding the initiation of new works to address the identified problems.

## The aim of the Congress government is to make crores of women millionaires




“Secunderabad Cantonment. January 19 (Indian Chronicle):“Cantonment MLA Sri Ganesh stated that the Congress government's goal is to make one crore women millionaires, and the government is taking steps in that direction. The Congress party had promised interest-free loans to women's self-help groups during the elections. Accordingly, as part of reimbursing the interest paid on loans taken by women's self-help groups during the previous government's tenure, a program to distribute checks worth Rs. 1,74,43,938 to women's self-help groups in the Cantonment constituency was organized on Monday by MEPMA officials at the Multi-Purpose Function Hall in Marredpally. Cantonment MLA Sri Ganesh attended the program as the chief guest and, along with



Cantonment Civilian Nominated Member Banuka Narmada and other officials, distributed the checks to the women. After the check distribution, the MLA said that the Congress government is working with the welfare and development of women as its goal, and that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is committed to women's empowerment and is ready to develop women in all sectors. He said that if women's self-help groups want to start any business, they can contact him, and he will speak to the banks and provide support for their businesses. He said that the woman is the light of the house, and if women are happy, families will develop, and thereby the state will also develop. MEPMA officials Prakash, and others are participated in this program.

## Free Eye Examinations by Vasan Eye Care Hospitals



“Indian Chronicle: Vasan Eye Care Hospitals, located near Gangaram Bus Stop in Chandanagar division, conducted an awareness program on the importance of eyesight and eye examinations, under the supervision of Telangana Medical Director Rathna Kumar, GM Naveen, and Operations Managers Abhilash and Sandeep. “On this occasion, the management of Vasan Eye Care Hospitals stated that, recognizing the importance of eyesight as the most vital of all senses, they are conducting free eye examinations until February 18th for Navata Transport drivers, Volvo drivers, Ola and Uber auto drivers, and media representatives who serve as information bridges in society. They urged everyone to utilize this facility. Navata Transport drivers, Volvo drivers, Ola and Uber auto drivers, and others participated in this awareness program.





Kalanilayam Cultural & Social Organisation, Hyderabad successfully organised a cultural programme titled “Sankranti Natya Bala” on the occasion of Sankranti at Telangana Saraswatha Parishat, Abids, Hyderabad. “The programme featured an impressive Bharatanatyam recital by 8-year-old young dancer K. Nithyashree, who captivated the audience with her graceful movements, expressive abhinaya, and rhythmic precision, drawing appreciation from art lovers and cultural enthusiasts alike. The performance was presented under the guidance of Dance Master Dhasarat, whose training and mentorship were widely appreciated. “The event was organised as part of Kalanilayam's continuous efforts to promote Indian classical arts and encourage young talent. Celebrating its 25 years of service, the organisation reaffirmed its commitment to preserving and propagating India's rich cultural heritage. “Several cultural dignitaries, artists, and well-wishers attended the programme and appreciated the initiative taken by Kalanilayam in providing a platform for budding artists. “The organisers expressed their gratitude to Dance Master Dhasarat, guests, supporters, parents, and media representatives for making the programme a grand success.

## Akarapu Arun Patel Attends Salivahana Kummara Sangham New Year Calendar Launch as Chief Guest



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):“The New Year calendar of the Salivahana Kummara Sangham was formally launched on Monday under the leadership of Sangham President Narasimha. Congress Uppal Assembly Youth Congress President and Venkat Reddy Division youth leader Akarapu Arun Patel attended the event as the chief guest. Speaking on the occasion, Arun Patel highlighted the historical significance of the Salivahana community



and explained the importance of clay pots in daily life and traditional culture. He stressed that the development of the Kummara community requires a dedicated building to meet their social and organizational needs. “Arun Patel assured that he would bring this matter to the notice of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Uppal Assembly Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy. He also promised to make efforts towards allocation of suitable land by the government for the construction of a Kummara Sangham building. The programme was attended by Honorary President Srimanth Srinivas, General Secretary Dharam Kumar, Treasurer Ramesh, leaders of the Kummara Sangham, and several other community representatives and leaders.



## Central Government Schemes Should Be Utilized Effectively

### BJP Member Sangiseti Ravindra Sagar



\*\*\*\*\*Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, January 19: \*\*\*\*\*BJP leaders have called upon the public to effectively utilize the welfare schemes introduced by the Central Government, emphasizing that these initiatives are designed to strengthen the economic and social security of the poor and middle classes. As part of this effort, zero balance accounts under the Post Office scheme were opened for 200 beneficiaries at the BJP Mallapur Shakti Sai Nagar Division office. "The programme was conducted under the leadership of Medchal-Malkajgiri District Council Member Sangiseti Ravindra Sagar, who personally bore the expenses for opening the accounts. This initiative aimed to promote financial inclusion and ensure that every eligible citizen gains access to formal banking facilities." Addressing the gathering, Sangiseti Ravindra Sagar said that the Central Government has introduced several welfare schemes such as bank accounts for the unbanked, insurance coverage, pension schemes, and direct benefit transfers to support the underprivileged sections of society. He urged people to link their bank accounts with government schemes to receive benefits directly, without intermediaries, and to build a habit of saving for a secure future. "He further stated that the Post Office Zero Balance Account scheme is especially beneficial for daily wage workers, women, and low-income families, as it enables them to access government benefits, savings options, and financial services without any minimum balance requirement." The event witnessed the presence of BJP state leaders Brahmachari, Ramana, and Patel; division leaders Rajeshwar, P. Lingam Goud,



Vemula Srinivas, Mukesh Sagar, and Shashidhar Sagar; Division Women President Sabita Yadav; Secretary Punyavati; Utkuri Sandhya; along with several other BJP leaders and party workers, who actively participated in making the programme a success.

## Parallel Development in Suburban Areas: Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy

### Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy visits colonies under the erstwhile Peerzadiguda Municipal Corporation



\*\*\*\*\*KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):\*\*\*\*\*Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy stated that suburban colonies will be developed on par with the GHMC limits. He recalled that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had merged the city outskirts into the GHMC with this very objective. "It is known that Sri Sri Nagar and a few other colonies, which earlier fell under the Peerzadiguda Municipal Corporation, have now been brought under the Uppal Division. In this context, residents of Sri Sri Nagar colony met Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy and Uppal Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy and formally invited them to visit the colony. Responding to the invitation, Parameshwar Reddy and Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy visited the colony on Monday. Speaking on the occasion,

Parameshwar Reddy assured that the colonies merged into the division would also be developed on the lines of Uppal. He said efforts would be made to provide roads, drainage, drinking water, and other basic infrastructure facilities. The programme was attended by DE Vennela Goud, AE Raj Kumar, presidents Manjom Thadom and Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Srinivas Reddy, Satti Reddy, Lokesh, Ranga Reddy, Nagesh, Gallayya Obul Reddy, Gajjala Venkat Reddy, Ram Reddy, Pratap Reddy, Madhavarai Basireddy, General Secretary Aruru Kishore Kumar, Vice Presidents Mohammed Imamuddin, Treasurer Srinivas and Appanna, Executive Members Dr. V.A. Jyothi, P.N.V.R.K. Murthy, K. Srinivas, M. Bharat Kumar, G. Shyam Sunder, Advisors G.V. Pullarao, and local residents R. Ramesh, P. Swamy, Mallikarjuna Rao, Mall Reddy, Lakshminarayana, Krishnanna, Venkat Subba Rao, and Sampath, among others.

## Vemana Jayanti Celebrated by Telangana Praja Samskruthika Kendram – Spurthi Group

\*\*\*\*\*NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 19, (INDIAN CHRONICLE): "Telangana Praja Samskruthika Kendram Spurthi Group organised a programme titled "Vemana Padyalaku Neerajanam" on the occasion of the 659th birth anniversary of people's poet Vemana. The event was held on January 19, 2026, at 11 am at the organisation's office premises.



The programme was coordinated by Spurthi Group representative Godugu Yadagiri Rao. Floral tributes were first paid to the portrait of poet Vemana by Peoples Welfare Trust representative Uday Bhaskar and Spurthi Group leader Shivanna Narayana. Speaking on the occasion, Yadagiri Rao said Vemana, as a non-Brahmin poet, liberated Telugu from rigid Sanskritised expressions and brought it closer to the common people. He explained that Vemana composed nearly 6,000 poems in simple Telugu using the Ataveladi metre, making profound philosophical ideas accessible to the masses. He alleged that orthodox forces of that period destroyed many of Vemana's compositions as they could not tolerate his progressive ideas. Despite this, Vemana's verses survived orally among the people and continued as living

folk songs. He further stated that British officer C.P. Brown later collected Vemana's poems from the public and translated them into English, introducing his work to the world. He criticised attempts to distort Vemana's image by portraying him as immoral or insane, calling such claims false and asserting that Vemana was a great poet and social reformer. Later, Uday Bhaskar rendered Vemana's poems through song. Shivanna Narayana, Srinivasa Rao, G. Srinivasulu, Jayaraj, G. Siva Ramakrishna, Sharada and Venkateswara Rao recited and sang Vemana's verses and explained their meanings. Speakers observed that Vemana's rational and scientific outlook, expressed nearly 400 years ago against superstition and social evils in the language of the people, remains a source of pride for Telugu society. The programme concluded with participants offering floral tributes to the portrait of Vemana. Those who attended included K.K. Unnikrishnan, N. Srinivas, Shobha, Gausia, Sharada, Uday Bhaskar, Jayaraj, Shivanna Narayana, Venkateswara Rao, G. Siva Ramakrishna, G. Srinivasulu and Srinivasa Rao.



## Remove water hyacinth from HMT Lake in High Court Colony: Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen

Provide relief to people from mosquito menace: Appeal to Zonal Commissioner



\*\*\*\*\*KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):\*\*\*\*\*Chilkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee Member, Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj, on Monday met Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta at her office and submitted a representation seeking immediate removal of water hyacinth from the HMT Lake in High Court Colony. The corporator stated that the lake has been completely choked with water hyacinth, leading to severe mosquito breeding and causing serious hardship to local residents. She urged the authorities to take immediate steps to clear the water hyacinth and provide relief to the public from the mosquito menace. "Speaking to the Zonal Commissioner, Bannala Geetha Praveen recalled that earlier the Entomology Department used to remove water hyacinth once every three months and regularly conduct anti-larval operations. However, since September, such measures have not been taken, and the Entomology Department



has not been visiting the lakes. For the past six months, neither anti-larval programs nor periodic removal of water hyacinth has been carried out, resulting in an alarming increase in mosquitoes. She said that after 5 pm, residents are unable to even step out of their homes due to the mosquito problem and demanded immediate action. "Responding to the representation, Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta assured that steps would be taken at the earliest to remove the water hyacinth and implement all necessary measures to ensure that the public does not face any inconvenience. "BRS Party state leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Eddula Kondalareddy, Kokonda Jagan, Muddham Srinivas Yadav, Balakrishna Goud, MD Shafi, MD Hanif, Shyam, Balu, Sakinala Chandu, and others were present at the meeting.

## State accords top priority to development, welfare schemes: Minister

\*\*\*Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 19 (Indian Chronicle)\*\*\*The State Government is according the highest priority to overall development and the effective implementation of public welfare schemes, said Jupally Krishna Rao, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Excise, and District In-Charge Minister. "Speaking on Monday in Kagaznagar, the Minister participated in foundation-laying ceremonies for several development works along with District Collector Venkatesh Dotre, Superintendent of Police Nitika Pant, Legislative Council Member Dande Vithal, Sirpur MLA Palvai Harish Babu, Additional Collector (Local Bodies), District In-Charge Education Officer Deepak Tiwari, District Forest Officer Neeraj Kumar, Kagaznagar Sub-Collector Shradha Shukla, Additional SP Chittaranjan, and Market Committee Chairman Suddala Devayya. "Addressing the gathering, Minister Jupally Krishna Rao stated that the government is simultaneously pursuing development initiatives and welfare programmes, with special emphasis on schemes that directly benefit the public. He highlighted key initiatives including free bus travel for women, the Gruha Jyothi scheme, subsidised LPG cylinders at ₹500, and interest-free loans for women self-help groups. He also assured that concrete steps are being taken to strengthen education and healthcare infrastructure across the



district. "Legislative Council Member Dande Vithal commended the District In-Charge Minister for his efforts in securing approvals for a government hospital building and the sanctioning of Indiramma housing units. He noted that the government is placing people's welfare at the forefront by implementing multiple programmes at the grassroots level. "Sirpur MLA Dr. Palvai Harish Babu announced that a 100-bed hospital has been sanctioned for Kagaznagar and that ₹18 crore has been allocated for improving urban infrastructure. He further expressed satisfaction over the sanction of ₹35 crore to ensure a permanent drinking water supply for the town.

## Everyone must follow traffic rules and reach home safely – Malkajgiri ACP S. Chakrapani

### ‘Arrive Alive Campaign–2026’ road safety awareness programme held at Uppal Ring Road



KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):\*\*\*\*\*As part of the 'Arrive Alive Campaign–2026', launched by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy with the objective of reducing road accidents in the state, a road safety awareness programme was conducted on Monday at the Uppal Ring Road. Malkajgiri ACP S. Chakrapani attended the programme as the chief guest, along with Uppal Police Station Inspector K. Bhaskar, Traffic Inspector Nagaraju, Admin SI Madhav Reddy, SIs



Chiranjeevi and Madhu, and traffic police personnel. On this occasion, officials explained the importance of adhering to traffic rules to motorists and created awareness on measures to prevent road accidents. They especially stressed that wearing helmets and seat belts is mandatory for road safety. "Auto drivers and car drivers participated in the programme and took a road safety pledge. Officials appealed to the public to strictly follow traffic rules and ensure they reach their destinations safely.

## Medchal-Malkajgiri DRO directs speedy disposal of Prajavani petitions

\*\*\*\*\*NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 19, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):\*\*\*\*\*Haripriya, District Revenue Officer of Medchal-Malkajgiri district, directed officials of all departments to examine and dispose of petitions received during Prajavani without delay. Speaking at the Prajavani programme held on Monday at the district collectorate conference hall, the DRO, along with Law Officer Chandravathi, received 67 petitions from applicants across various parts of the district. She said people approach the administration with great effort and expense, trusting that their grievances will be resolved, and it is the collective responsibility of officials to uphold that trust. The DRO instructed officials to take up petitions immediately and ensure there is no delay at any stage of scrutiny. She also directed departments to clear long-pending petitions on a priority basis and asked departments with a high number of pending cases to deploy special staff for faster redressal. She further instructed that in cases where petitions are rejected, officials must clearly explain the reasons for rejection to the applicants. Details of action taken on each petition should be updated online promptly, she added. "District officials from various departments and others were present at the programme.





# Development and Welfare Projects Launched Across Medchal District



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 19, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“The Government Chief Whip of the Legislative Council, Dr. Patnam Mahender Reddy, participated in several development and welfare programmes, laying foundation stones and inaugurating new buildings across Medchal district. As part of the Indira Mahila Shakti celebrations held at Aliabad, Dr. Mahender Reddy distributed sarees to 18,506 women belonging to Indramma Sri Shakti Self-Help Groups. Of these, 5,258 women were beneficiaries in Aliabad, 6,592 in MC Pally, and 6,656 in Ellampally. He stated that earlier, interest-free loans



amounting to Rs. 2.33 crore had been provided to women within the Aliabad municipal limits and urged them to make effective use of the welfare schemes being implemented by the government. He encouraged women to actively participate in the upcoming municipal and local body elections by contesting from the reserved seats and aspiring to hold political positions. He also informed that in Medchal district, sewing machines worth Rs. 45 lakh had been distributed to 900 poor minority women, reaffirming the government's commitment to minority welfare. He appealed to poor and minority women to utilise government schemes to achieve economic self-reliance. In the Medchal Assembly constituency, development works worth Rs. 40 crore were initiated across three municipalities. Foundation stones were laid for projects worth Rs. 9.43 crore in Ellampet Municipality, Rs. 15 crore in Aliabad, and Rs. 15 crore in Mooduchintalapally. Dr. Mahender Reddy also inaugurated the newly constructed MRO office building at Mooduchintalapally, built by a voluntary organisation, along with the Medchal Mandal Tahsildar office and the Joint Sub-Registrar office. The programme was attended by MP Etela Rajender, MLA Chamakura Malla Reddy, Medchal-Malkajgiri district Additional Collector Vijayender Reddy, Keerasa RDO Rajesh, Deputy Collector Mokshitha, Mooduchintalapally MRO Idrees, Medchal MRO Bhupal, District Minority Welfare Officer Kanthamma, District DRDO Sambasiva Rao, concerned municipal commissioners, and other officials.

# Photojournalist Vidyasagar passes away suddenly due to heart attack

-TWJF expresses condolences



“(Manduva Srisailam... Hyderabad... Indian Chronicle... January 19):“Senior photojournalist M. Vidyasagar passed away on Monday due to a heart attack. Vidyasagar, who resided in Suraram, had worked as a photojournalist for several daily newspapers and had retired. He was 62 years old. Vidyasagar is survived by his wife, two daughters, and a son. Telangana Working Journalists Federation (TWJF) State Convener Mamidi Somaiah expressed his sorrow and offered condolences on the untimely demise of photojournalist Vidyasagar. He prayed for the peace of his soul and extended his deepest sympathies to his family members.

# Prabuddha Bharat International (Ambedkarites Global Network) will organise the 250th weekly floral tribute programme in honour of Dr B.R. Ambedkar on January 25, 2026, at Ghatkesar



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 19, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“On the occasion of the landmark 250th weekly programme, the Prabuddha Bharat International team invited Malkajgiri Member of Parliament Etala Rajender to attend as the chief guest. He accepted the invitation and assured that he would attend the programme. During the meeting, Mekala Das and Dr Meesala Mallesh felicitated Etala Rajender with a shawl. The programme will be attended by Anugu Sudarshan



Reddy (former MPP), Mekala Das, Dr Meesala Mallesh, Kaleru Ramoji, Meesala Arun Kumar, Bandari Ramdas, Bikshapathi, Balanagaram Ganesh Goud, Balanagaram Suresh Goud, C. Anand, E. Vishnu and others. The organisers stated that the programme aims to widely propagate Dr B.R. Ambedkar's ideals of equality, justice and social justice among the people. They appealed to Ambedkar followers and the general public to attend in large numbers and make the event a success.

# Praja Varadhi Daily 2026 Calendar Launched

Role of Praja Varadhi in Public Service is Commendable: Malkajgiri ACP S. Chakrapani



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 19 (Indian Chronicle):“The 2026 calendar of Praja Varadhi daily newspaper was formally launched by Malkajgiri Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) S. Chakrapani in a dignified ceremony. The event was attended by Praja Varadhi Editor Gyarampalli Shivaji, senior journalist of Uppal constituency Vaddepalli Kishore, Uppal Police Station Inspector K. Bhaskar, SIs Hanuman Naik and Chada Samata Reddy, ASI Venkat Reddy, and other police personnel. Speaking on the occasion, ACP S. Chakrapani praised Praja Varadhi for bringing public issues to light in an impartial manner and for consistently standing with the people. He stated that newspapers play a crucial role in highlighting public problems, addressing social issues, and safeguarding democratic values. He expressed his hope that Praja Varadhi would continue to remain a strong voice for the people in the future. Addressing the gathering, Praja Varadhi Editor Gyarampalli Shivaji said that the newspaper would continue to uphold public trust by delivering news with honesty and integrity, and reaffirmed that the publication would keep working in the interest of society.

# Ghatkesar Residents Demand Solution to Water Crisis and Early Completion of Railway Flyover



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 19, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Former Ghatkesar Sarpanch Abbasani Yadagiri Yadav submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner Vani, seeking immediate resolution of drinking water problems and road connectivity issues in Ghatkesar 6th Circle under the Uppal Zone of Greater Hyderabad. Speaking on the occasion, Yadav stated that the water supply allocated in the past was insufficient to meet the present needs of the rapidly growing town. Due to population increase, the existing drinking water resources are no longer adequate, and authorities must ensure proper supply to meet current demand. He demanded immediate resolution of water problems in several localities, including Gandhi Nagar, Balaji Nagar, Dwaraka Nagar, EWS Colony, Patel Nagar, Sona Colony, Vemana Nagar, Medapati Nagar, Sushanth Nagar, Kondapur Sanghamitra Colony, Dattatreya Nagar, Parameshwara Nagar, NSC Nagar Colony, Prashanth Nagar, and areas of old Ghatkesar village such as Buggabhai, Brook Bond Colony, Sai Nagar, Teachers Colony, Maruti Nagar, KLR Nagar, Shivareddy Guda, Maisamma Gutta Colony, Sunshine Park Phase I and II. He also highlighted the long-pending issue of the Ghatkesar Railway flyover, stating that delays in its completion have caused severe hardship to commuters and vehicle owners for several years. He urged the authorities to remove obstacles on both sides of the flyover and restore smooth vehicular movement at the earliest. Yadav further demanded that at least before the Gattu Maisamma Jathara, BT roads should be laid on both sides of the flyover to allow district buses to operate through the town. He also raised concern over the



delay in road widening from Yennampet Crossroads to Madhavareddy Bridge to a width of 100 feet, despite earlier instructions to issue TDRs to landowners. Even after repeated representations to HRDCL officials, there has been no response from the concerned Commissioner, he said. He appealed to the authorities to consider public needs and complete the stalled flyover works immediately, ensure BT roads on both sides, facilitate bus services, and enable residents to celebrate the Gattu Maisamma Jathara without inconvenience. Later in the day, a dharna was staged at the GHMC Ghatkesar Circle 6 office with the participation of around 250 people. Large numbers of women, colony association presidents, and public representatives took part in the protest, demanding swift action on the pending civic issues.

# Congress party saw the trailer in the sarpanch elections

We'll show the movie in the municipal elections. Former MLA Pilot Rohit Reddy at the party joining event.



“Vikarabad, Tandur (Indian Chronicle 19, Jan) Former MLA Pilot Rohit Reddy launched the BRS party's campaign for the Tandur municipal elections. Several leaders and workers, including former councilor Gaddal Parimal Ravinder, joined BRS in his presence. Rohit Reddy claimed the party would win the chairman seat, criticized the Congress government, and urged voters to support BRS candidates in the 36 wards. Former library chairman Raju Goud and other leaders also spoke, asking voters to elect BRS candidates with a huge majority. The meeting was attended by party leaders Narendar Goud, Veerender Reddy, Rajappa Goud, Mohammad Shabbir, Intiaz Baba, Abdul Saleem, Anuradha, Shakuntala, workers, ward residents, women, and youth in large numbers.





## SEC orders probe after controversy erupts in Maharashtra over ink that is ‘not indelible’



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

A huge controversy erupted on Thursday over allegations that the ink applied on voters' fingers during the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections could be wiped off easily, prompting the Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) to order a probe and announce that marker pens will not be used in the upcoming Zilla Parishad elections. "The State Election Commission has decided to probe into the ink used in the marker pens. The probe will cover the ink quality and the videos that were circulated throughout the day. The probe into videos is to ascertain whether the ink on the finger was applied while voting or in a mischievous way," State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare told Waghmare said the SEC would revert to the traditional method of applying ink in the Zilla Parishad polls. "We will use the traditional ink used in Lok Sabha and Assembly polls," he said.

The controversy erupted after Opposition leaders alleged that voters at several polling booths were being marked with marker pens instead of indelible ink, and that the ink was being erased easily using acetone or sanitiser. The issue escalated further after Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray accused Waghmare of "openly siding" with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance and demanded his suspension. The SEC, however, refuted claims that the ink could be erased easily, ordered a probe into the complaints, and warned of action against those "creating confusion" during the civic elections.

Amid allegations and counter-allegations, SEC officials held a press conference to clarify their position. Waghmare said that the same ink that has always been used was being applied and that no new substance had been introduced. He said the SEC has been using this ink in marker pen form since 2011. "The ink takes about 10 to 12 seconds to dry after being applied. During this time, the voter is still inside the polling booth. Once it dries, it cannot be removed. This is the same ink used by the Election Commission of India. If double voting takes place, action will be taken against the presiding officer of the polling booth," Waghmare said. Adding that a false narrative was being spread, the SEC said, "Voters also have a responsibility of not trying to rub off the ink. If the ink is removed before it dries, it is the voter's fault. A criminal case can be registered against such voters." Waghmare added that videos circulating on social media would be investigated and action would be taken against those spreading misinformation. He also blamed the voters for confusion over polling booth locations, saying voters should have checked their booth details and names online in advance. The issue was first raised publicly by MNS chief Raj Thackeray after he cast his vote in Dadar. "People come out, wipe the ink, and go back inside to vote again. Then they come out, wipe it again and re-enter. Is this what the government calls development," he asked, alleging that the system was being misused to benefit the ruling Mahayuti alliance. Speaking to reporters later, Thackeray claimed the ink could be wiped off with sanitiser, making repeat voting possible. "The entire system is working to ensure the victory of those in power. This is not how

free and fair elections are conducted," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said he had also received reports of ink being washed away. "This is shocking," the former Chief Minister said, accusing Waghmare of siding with the ruling alliance and demanding his suspension. Maharashtra Congress Legislative Party leader Vijay Wadettiwar alleged that the marker pen used to apply the ink was sub-standard and could be easily wiped off. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and MLC Anil Parab echoed the concern, saying, "There is no need for sanitisers also; the ink can be wiped away without that too." Yuva Sena leader Sainath Durge claimed that he could wash off the ink using Dettol. "I think this is a serious issue and raises the possibility of bogus voting. This is the reason why we have been speaking about it," he said. Opposition parties said they had received similar complaints from booth-level workers and voters and demanded immediate intervention by the Election Commission. "Even a small lapse can damage people's trust in the voting process," an Opposition leader said.

In a statement, the SEC said attempting to create confusion by wiping off the ink applied on voters' fingers was an offence. "If any person is found attempting to vote again after wiping off the ink on their finger, appropriate legal action will be taken," it said. The SEC added that even if someone attempted malpractice by removing the ink, the voter would not be able to vote again due to other safeguards. "After a voter casts their vote, an official record of the voting is maintained. Therefore, merely wiping off the ink does not make it possible for a voter to cast vote again. Instructions to remain vigilant in this matter have once again been issued to all officials," the statement said. The Commission also reiterated that following orders issued on November 19, 2011, and November 28, 2011, marker pens have been used to apply ink during local body elections. As per these orders, the ink must be applied clearly and rubbed three to four times on the nail and the skin above it. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the Opposition's concerns about foul play even before polling has concluded in the corporation polls reflect a defeatist mindset. He said the Opposition appears to be trying to establish a narrative to justify their potential loss ahead of the results. After exercising his vote in his hometown Nagpur, Fadnavis, scratching his finger marked during voting, said, "I have also been marked with a marker, is it getting erased?... If there are issues related to machines or marker pen, the Election Commission should look into it and use something else; they can use oil paint if they want. The elections should be impartial. But creating a ruckus on everything and raising questions is very wrong." "In a democracy, there should be free and fair polls... Unfortunately, some Opposition leaders, unsure of their performance, are setting the narrative. I would think they are trying to pre-empt the poll results to justify their failure in advance," the CM said. Referring to the SEC's clarification, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said, "I spoke to Suresh Kakani (SEC official) about it. He said that the same ink has been used for several years. This time, instead of directly from bottle, they used it from marker. I think the SEC is vigilant to avoid bogus voting." Acknowledging concerns, Shiv Sena minister Sanjay Shirsat said, "I think this is happening for the first time. It is true that the marker ink is being wiped away... Hence, not everywhere, but in some places, there is a possibility of bogus voting. I think poll officials should be vigilant."

BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde said, "If there is problem with ink, poll officials should be held responsible. It is unfair to hold BJP responsible for the same." Leaders from ruling alliance partners Shiv Sena and the NCP also raised concerns. State Women's Commission chairperson and NCP leader Rupali Chakankar demanded a probe into complaints of ink removal and bogus voting and said she had written to the State Election, seeking action.

## Hooda counters Saini's Haryana Governance Model: 'Industries fleeing, debt mounting, fiscal health poor'



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday sought to counter Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini's projecting "Haryana Governance Model" as a roadmap for Punjab's revival, stating 1,446 factories in Haryana either closed down or relocated since 2018-19 and accused the BJP-led state government of not being able to curtail their migration. Hooda also pointed at Haryana's growing debt, poor ranking in NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index, and NCRB's report on increasing corruption to drive a point home. Addressing a gathering at the BJP's first-ever Maghi mela political conference in Muktsar on Wednesday, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini projected the "Haryana Governance Model" as a roadmap for Punjab's revival in the run-up to the 2027 Assembly elections in the state.

"Punjab is not just our neighbouring state, it shares a blood relationship with Haryana," Saini had said, adding, "Haryana loves Punjab and wants to see it flourish." Hooda, on the other hand, alleged that the condition of the industrial sector during the BJP's rule has become extremely worrying. "As per data released recently, 1,446 factories in Haryana have either closed down or relocated since 2018-19. The Reserve Bank of India provided this information based on data from the Annual Survey of Industries released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. This migration is leading to increased unemployment, economic decline, crime and migration in Haryana," the former Haryana chief minister said. Further explaining the figures, Hooda said, "The industrial sector in Haryana has declined by 12.2 per cent in the past 5 years, because the ruling BJP government is not paying any attention to it. In contrast, the Congress government established six new IMTs (HSIIDC industrial areas) during its tenure. The Congress also brought major industries like Maruti, Asian Paints, NTPC, Reliance, Honda, IOC, Panasonic, Yokohama and Denso to the state. The Congress government also approved the rail coach factory and an international airport." "The BJP government is only focused on event management and propaganda, which is far removed from the ground reality. Today, even economists and intellectu-

als have lost faith in the BJP government because Haryana's economic situation is alarming. From 1966 to 2014, the state's total debt was Rs 60,000 crore, which has now increased to more than Rs 5 lakh crore," the senior Congress leader pointed out. "In the NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index, Haryana ranks 14th among 18 states. A Debt-to-GSDP ratio of over 31 per cent indicates the state is trapped in a deep debt cycle. According to the NCRB report, corruption cases have increased by 187 per cent in the past three years. Haryana has reached the sixth position in corruption. All reports indicate that the BJP has failed on every front," Hooda alleged.

## Two arrested for murdering pension beneficiary over loan repayment demand in Adilabad

GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Adilabad: Two persons were arrested on Thursday for allegedly murdering a social security pension beneficiary after she demanded repayment of a loan a few weeks ago. Two mobile phones were seized from them.

SP Akhil Mahajan, in a statement, said Mohammad Farooq and Bassi Ramesh, both from Indervelli, were apprehended for their involvement in the murder of Imrana Zabeer, who was initially reported missing but was later found dead under suspicious circumstances in the Mavala mandal centre on November 26. During the course of interrogation,

Farooq and Ramesh confessed to committing the crime. Farooq admitted to killing Imrana by smothering her when she insisted that he repay a loan of Rs 8.80 lakh and eight tolas of gold he had borrowed from her. He disclosed that he took the assistance of Ramesh to commit the offence at her house when she was alone.

The two revealed that they later buried the woman's body in the forests of Maharashtra to cover up their act, transporting the body in a rented car on the same night. Police had registered a missing case based on a complaint from the woman's sibling and taken up an investigation.

Investigating officials found that financial transactions led to the murder, following which the two were nabbed. Adilabad DSP L Jeevan Reddy and other police officials were present.

## State govt jobs only for Punjabis, Rs 10L interest free loan for youths: Badal



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal Thursday said that if Akali Dal forms government in 2027, the youths will get Rs 10 lakh interest free loan and all farmers without tubewell connections will get it. Addressing the party's annual conference in Takhtupura, Moga, Thursday, Badal said, "My government will stop Punjab's water from flowing into Rajasthan, and state government jobs will be open only for Punjabis, unlike the ruling AAP that gives jobs to outsiders." The SAD, once an indomitable force in Punjab's political landscape but now fighting an identity and survival crisis, has already started announcing doles and freebies to woo voters.

Badal added, "We don't need to give guarantees like the Congress and AAP who never fulfilled them as Punjabis trust our word. We have always implemented what we say like giving free power to farmers and introducing novel social welfare schemes like old age pension, aata-daal, Shagun and SC Scholarship." Announcing that the SAD would further expand its pro-farmer and pro-poor policies, Badal said that free tubewell connections would be given to all left out farmers. He said since Punjab waters were flowing into the Rajasthan canal unlawfully and Punjab alone has claim over it under the Riparian principle, the SAD government would stop this flow and divert these waters to the fields of Punjab farmers. He said that pipes would be in-

## Make revenue deficit grant at minimum level of Rs 10k cr annually: Sukhu to Sitharaman



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Sukhu also apprised Sitharaman about the revised formula proposed by the state for horizontal devolution for increasing the weightage for the criteria of Forest and Ecology. Sukhu also apprised Sitharaman about the revised formula proposed by the state for horizontal devolution for increasing the weightage for the criteria of Forest and Ecology. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Thursday apprised Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman about the memorandum and additional memorandum submitted to the 16th Finance Commission, urging her to make the Revenue Deficit Grant (RDG) at a minimum level of Rs 10,000 crore annually for Himachal Pradesh.

Sukhu, who called on Sitharaman at her office in New Delhi, stressed a realistic assessment of the RDG of States revenues and expenditure projections during the award period of the 16th Finance Commission. The central government provides Revenue Deficit Grants, a financial aid, to the states under Article 275 of the Constitution, as per the recommendations of the Finance Commission, to meet the gap in their revenue accounts after tax devolution, ensuring states can meet essential spending needs like welfare and administration.

Discussing fiscal issues of the state, whose debt has increased over Rs 1 lakh crore, the chief minister sought

stalled to ensure that canal water reaches the tail ends.

Adding that government jobs in the state would be open to Punjabis alone, he said that any industry seeking government subsidies would also have to employ 75 per cent Punjabis on its rolls. He added that like Road Tax reprieve given to tractors by former CM late Parkash Singh Badal, motorbikes would also be exempted from this tax. "Sewa Kendras will be reopened and a commission would be established to probe all fake cases registered by the AAP government. Those responsible for implicating innocents in the false cases will be proceeded against as per law," he said. Badal also announced the establishment of 16 medical colleges in each district of the State and reservation of 50 per cent of all seats for poor and deserving students who would be provided education in the medical as well as veterinary colleges free of cost. "AAP promised this but did nothing. We will make this a reality," he said. He announced establishment of a Skill university with a capacity of training 50,000 youth in which "corporates would be brought on board to impart training as per their needs so that the youth could be appropriately absorbed in the industry".

Commenting on CM Bhagwant Mann's alleged "sacrilege video", Badal said Mann had "committed a heinous sacrilege against the Guru Sahiban and appealed to the 'Maha Purakhs' to take notice of it." "I have seen the video. It is shocking what is being done by a person sitting on the CM's chair. The Maha Purakhs in our society should take note. Those like Baljit Singh Daduwal and Dhian Singh Mand who defamed the SAD on this sensitive issue should also explain why they are silent now," said Badal. He said that the sacrilege incidents started occurring in Punjab in 2015 after the entry of AAP into the state in 2014. "These were started to divide the Sikh community and defame the SAD", he added. "The AAP government is even trying to frame me in a false case but I will never be cowed down by such tactics. The Guru Sahiban have taught us to fight against tyranny and I will continue to speak fearlessly against the anti-people and anti-Punjabi policies of this corrupt government," he said.

the Centre's support to strengthen the financial condition of Himachal Pradesh. Sukhu strongly pleaded for creating a separate "Green Fund", with an earmarked annual allocation of Rs 50,000 crore for hill states, with them being the Green Frontiers and Lungs of North India, keeping in view the ecological services being provided by them. Sukhu also apprised Sitharaman about the revised formula proposed by the state for horizontal devolution for increasing the weightage for the criteria of Forest and Ecology. He said snow-covered-cum-cold desert areas above tree lines should be included, along with very dense forests and moderately dense forest areas, for their symbiotic relationship. Sukhu stressed reframing the Disaster Risk Index developed by the 15th Finance Commission, pleading that the Himalayan regions cannot be equated with other areas of the country. "The state was deprived of adequate resources for its disaster relief despite facing heavy natural disasters." He urged for a separate DRI for hill states, considering their unique indicators and demanded a separate allocation for hill states. The chief minister requested Sitharaman to extend support to Himachal by allowing additional borrowing of two per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), stating "steep reduction in the RDG over the past few years has severely constrained the fiscal space available to the state".

Taking up the issues of apple growers with the Union Finance Minister, Sukhu urged her to impose a 100 per cent import duty on apples and enforce a seasonal ban on imports to protect Himachal's apple economy. Seeking urgent intervention against the rising influx of foreign apples, Sukhu demanded inclusion of apples under a 'Special Category', an import ban during the peak production season from July to November, and quantitative restrictions on imports. The chief minister flagged concerns over duty concessions to apples from New Zealand, stating "It hurts local orchardists." Sukhu questioned the BJP's silence on the issue and urged the Opposition party in Himachal to raise growers' concerns at the Centre.

## Story of indelible ink & why it is at centre of Maharashtra civic polls row



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

The purple mark on a voter's finger is a familiar sight during elections in India. Known as indelible ink, it is meant to show that a person has already voted. During the municipal corporation elections in Maharashtra held on Thursday, this routine step has turned into a subject of controversy with Opposition parties alleging that what should be indelible is easily coming off, alluding that this allows for scope of electoral malpractice. What is indelible ink? Indelible ink is applied to a voter's finger after voting. Its only purpose is to ensure that no one votes more than once. The mark is supposed to stay on the finger for several days and should not come off easily. When did India start using it? India began using indelible ink in 1962, during its third general election. To ensure that people do not vote more than once, the Election Commission of India decided to mark voters' fingers with ink. The method worked and has remained in use ever since.

What is the ink made of?

The ink contains silver nitrate, which reacts with the skin and light to leave a dark mark. The stain fades only as the outer layer of skin wears away. The ink also contains a dye to make it clearly visible.

Who makes the ink?

All indelible ink used in Indian elections is made by

Mysore Paints and Varnish Limited, a government-owned company in Karnataka. The company began supplying election ink after scientists at the National Physical Laboratory developed the formula in the early 1960s. Today, the same ink is supplied to several other countries as well. This ink is procured by the Election Commission of India which distributes it to respective states.

How is the ink applied?

The ink is applied to the left index finger usually across the nail and the skin at its base, where it is harder to remove. It may be applied using bottles, brushes or marker pens. Polling staff are instructed to apply the ink only after a voter has cast the ballot. In the election in Maharashtra marker pens that dispense this ink were used rather than the ink being directly brushed on the nails.

How long should it last?

Normally officials say that the mark on the skin should be visible for three to four days, and the stain on the nail may last two to four weeks. How long it stays can vary depending on the skin and whether the ink was applied properly.

Why is there a controversy in Maharashtra?

During the municipal corporation polls, some voters and Opposition parties have claimed that the ink applied after voting is coming off easily. Videos shared on social media show ink marks being wiped off with sanitiser or nail polish remover, especially where marker pens were used. This triggered political reactions with Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray accused the government and election authorities of weakening safeguards against voting malpractices.

What do election authorities say?

Election officials including State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare have said that even if the ink is removed, other checks in the system prevent a person from voting again. They have also claimed that the use of marker pens for local body elections has been allowed since 2011.



# Karnataka Congress seeks explanation from Rajeev Gowda amid demands to expel him for verbally abusing woman officer



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

gowdaBoth parties demanded strict action against Rajeev, who lost his maiden election in 2023, when he was the Congress candidate from the Shidlaghatta constituency in Chikkaballapur district.Amid demands to expel him for allegedly verbally abusing Shidlaghatta City Municipal Council Commissioner Amrutha Gowda, the Karnataka Congress issued a showcause notice to Rajeev Gowda on Thursday for violating party discipline.

The Congress leader from Shidlaghatta was booked by the police a day earlier on the officer’s complaint, which was filed after an audio clip of Rajeev purportedly abusing her for removing an allegedly illegal banner was leaked to

the media.The incident snowballed into a major controversy, with the Opposition BJP and JD(S) attacking the state government, claiming that the law and order situation had deteriorated in the state. Both parties demanded strict action against Rajeev, who lost his maiden election in 2023, when he was the Congress candidate from the Shidlaghatta constituency in Chikkaballapur district. The showcause notice, issued by Congress working president G C Chandrashekar, said the leaked audio clip broadcast in the media showed him “abuse” the woman officer, using expletives”, which embarrassed the party. It sought an explanation from him within a week, failing which disciplinary action would be initiated against him.

Groups such as the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) have condemned Rajeev’s conduct. In a statement, NFIW said that his threats to set fire to the municipal office and incite riots caused visible emotional distress to the officer. It urged the home department to launch legal proceedings against him, without yielding to political pressure.The NFIW also called on the Congress to expel Rajeev, arguing that he displayed “feudal arrogance” and undermined the dignity of women officers with his conduct. “The party should not allow any political maneuvering in this matter,” it added.On Wednesday, the Karnataka State Commission for Women wrote to the Chikkaballapur superintendent of police demanding legal action against the Congress leader.

# Karnataka now urges Centre to address Bengal gram ‘price collapse’

GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Farakka BDO office, Special Intensive Revision, SIR,The crop is cultivated in 14 of the 31 districts in Karnataka in an area spanning 9.24 lakh hectares.Bengaluru, January 15: The Karnataka government Wednesday asked the Centre to intervene to arrest the ‘price collapse’ of Bengal gram in the state.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that despite a Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 5,875 per quintal announced for the crop, prevailing market prices were significantly below MSP.At Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs), “prices ranged from Rs 4,260 to Rs 5,813 per quintal,” the letter states, adding that “in several markets, farmers are being forced to sell their produce (at) Rs 800-Rs 1,200 (per quintal) below MSP, even before peak arrivals have begun.”

This was of particular concern as the harvest of Bengal gram intensifies between January and March, the chief minister said, adding that “there is a genuine apprehension of further price collapse, aggravating rural distress”.“This

price erosion is not merely a market aberration, it is a human crisis,” Siddaramaiah said in the letter. He has urged the Union government to “immediately accord approval for procurement of Bengal gram under the Price Support Scheme (PSS)” and direct central nodal agencies such as the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India and the National Cooperative Consumers Federation of India Ltd to operationalise procurement centres in the state.The crop is cultivated in 14 of the 31 districts in Karnataka in an area spanning 9.24 lakh hectares. This is the fourth time in the last three months that the Karnataka government has petitioned the Centre to address anomalies in procurement prices for crops. Following an unrest of sugarcane farmers in November, the Karnataka government had submitted a memorandum to the Centre saying that the sugarcane pricing issues rose from “central policy levers”. Weeks later, Siddaramaiah had urged the Centre to procure maize and green gram in order to resolve the crisis caused by a steep crash in their prices. In the first week of December, Siddaramaiah, in another letter to the Centre, highlighted delays in approving MSP procurement for toor dal.

# How casting a vote in Thane became needlessly difficult



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Like every other election, we downloaded our voter slips online. Mine showed DAV Public School as my polling station — barely three minutes from home. Confident, I walked in with the slip in hand, only to be told my name wasn’t on the list.“It’s not here,” the staff said. I showed them the slip. “Ye Vidhan Sabha ka hai (This is for Assembly polls),” they replied. “No,” I insisted. “I downloaded it this weekend. My polling station was different during the Assembly elections.”

I was asked to check wards 5 and 7. Moving from ward to ward, hoping your name might appear somewhere, is hardly practical. Around the same time, another woman from my building faced the same issue. She gave up after

a few minutes. I stayed.Soon, a local leader’s aides arrived. I explained the situation. They downloaded the slip themselves. It matched mine. Since I wasn’t leaving, one staff member made a few calls. Five minutes later, the mystery was solved: my actual polling booth was in Patlipada, four kilometres away. A screenshot arrived on WhatsApp. The name on the slip read ‘Hina Khandelaval’. The spelling was off, but my EPIC number matched. I took a rickshaw and went.At the booth, I was told my photo was not available in their records. A woman on duty asked two young men sitting nearby if they knew me. They obviously didn’t. After showing my voter ID and another government ID, a marker pen was used to ink my finger and I was finally allowed to vote.But the confusion didn’t end there.

Voters in Thane have to cast four votes. Yet there were only three machines. One machine required two votes, divided by pink and white sections. Most people were unsure. No one had done this before. Senior citizens struggled. One elderly man took ten minutes to finish voting. When he finally did, the room burst into applause.My husband faced a similar ordeal. His slip showed Neelkanth Palms, but his booth was actually at DAV School, thankfully it was only a few minutes walk. A staff member outside Neelkanth Palms explained that many residents were affected.After finally casting my vote, I called my mother-in-law to recount my ordeal and urged her to stay back and ask officials to locate her ward. She had just reached home after spending 30 unproductive minutes at the polling station.

# BDO office ransacked, official documents set on fire as anti-SIR protest turns violent in Bengal’s Uttar Dinajpur district



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

A mob protesting against SIR hearings ransacked the Block Development Office (BDO) and attacked police personnel in Chakulia in West Bengal’s Uttar Dinajpur district on Thursday. The mob also brought out files, furniture and other documents from the BDO office and set fire to them.According to sources, enumeration forms related to the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls are likely to be destroyed in the incident.“People are angry. It’s a mass outburst. When people have filled out forms, why are they being called for hearings? In every booth, 70 to 80 people are being called for hearings. The figure for the Assembly constituency is in thousands. How

many times shall we show you the papers? The protest of these people is justified,” said TMC Chakulia MLA Minajul Arfin Azad.

“Our boys have agitated. If they (the Election Commission of India and the BJP) do not understand, we will agitate again. If need be, we will go to Delhi and protest,” added Azad.Jobi Thomas, Superintendent of Police, North Dinajpur district, said, “Some agitators blocked the road in front of the Chakulia BDO office. We tried to lift the blockade, but the public was agitated and attacked the police. We did lathicharge to disperse the mob. They attacked the BDO office as well and ransacked it. Six police personnel, including the inspector in charge, are injured. Two of them are hospitalised. After BDO filed a complaint, we lodged an FIR and started investigating the case. So far, 10 persons have been detained.”The incident comes a day after a BDO was assaulted in Farakka under Murshidabad district. An anti-SIR mob allegedly led by TMC leaders had barged into the BDO’s office and assaulted him. They threw chairs at him and tried to ransack the room.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) intervened in the incident and sought a report from the District Election Officer, who is also the District Magistrate, and directed him to file a First Information Report.Meanwhile, Farakka BDO Junaid Ahmed filed a complaint against unknown persons for ransacking his office. Later, two people were arrested in the incident.

# Pune man arrested for murder escapes from police custody by pushing constable away



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

A man arrested in a murder case escaped from police custody in the Sinhagad Road area in Pune city on Wednesday, the police said, identifying the accused as Aniket Mahesh Waghmare, 26, a resident of Hingne Khurd.A team from the Baner police station arrested Waghmare and his aide Tushar alias Sonya Sharad Patole, 24, of Karve Nagar, on January 11 in connection with the murder of Aditya Ganesh Bhagat, 22, who was a resident of Indrayani Nagar in Bhosari.

# ‘Supernatural fire trick’ used to rob women of gold ornaments, 5 arrested in Chandigarh



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Five members of a gang that used a fake ‘supernatural’ fire trick to rob unsuspecting women were produced before a Chandigarh court on Thursday and remanded in a two-day police custody. They were arrested by the District Crime Cell (DCC) of the Chandigarh Police on Wednesday.The arrests have led to the solving of two jewellery-snatching cases registered at Manimajra and Sector-34 police stations.

Kanwardeep Kaur, Senior Superintendent of Police, Chandigarh, said in one of the cases, which is registered at the Sector-34 police station, complainant Om Kumari, a resident of Sector 45, alleged that three persons stopped her on the way in May 2025. They started talking to the victim and suddenly used a fire trick to snatch her mangalsutra, earrings and ring.In the second such case, registered at Manimajra police station, complainant Sunita, 40, a resident of Sector 20, Panchkula, stated that on July

23, 2025, she had gone to Manimajra market for shopping. At around 3.50 pm, while walking from the bus stand towards Old Ropar Road, two boys started walking alongside her and engaged her in conversation. They then used the same fire trick and managed to snatch her gold earrings and flee.The police said they recently received a tip-off that the accused were roaming in Chandigarh to sell the looted jewellery and were looking for fresh victims in Sector 45 and Industrial Area. Acting on it, two police teams were formed.Thereafter, three accused were apprehended from Sector 45C in connection with the Sector 34 case. Meanwhile, two more were arrested near the cremation ground in the Industrial Area in connection with the Manimajra case.

Inspector Jaspal Singh Bhullar of DCC said the arrested accused have been identified as Jilani, 46, resident of Shiv Colony, Ludhiana; Ramjaan, 36, resident of Anand Parvat, New Delhi; Hasmodin, 45, resident of Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh; Zahid, 24, resident of South Delhi; and Alam, 33, resident of Hapur district, Uttar Pradesh.The police have recovered stolen gold jewellery, including a mangalsutra, a pair of earrings and a ring from the Sector-34 case, and another pair of gold earrings from the Manimajra case.The Chandigarh Police said the gang deliberately targeted uneducated women. The accused first engaged them in conversation about family issues to gain confidence. To intimidate the women and exploit their fear of supernatural powers, they often performed a fire trick by spitting sodium on their palm, which ignites on contact with moisture. The victims were then asked to remove their jewellery and place it on the ground, and were told to go home without looking back.

# ECI appoints Anindita Mitra as new Punjab Chief Electoral Officer



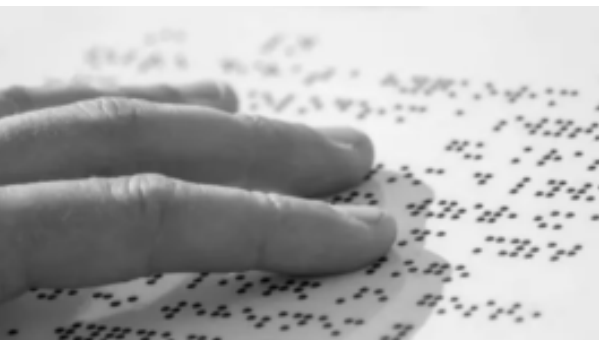
GNS News Agency, Jan 19

The Election Commission of India (ECI) Thursday appointed Anindita Mitra, a 2007 batch IAS officer, as Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Punjab, replacing Sibin C, who is proceeding on central deputation.Rahul Sharma, Principal Secretary, ECI, made a communication in this regard to K A P Sinha, Chief Secretary, Punjab, in a letter dated January 15. The ECI letter asked Sinha to ensure that Anindita

Mitra assumes charge of the office of the CEO, Punjab, immediately. This has to be sent to the Commission within a week, it said.

nha, requesting that it may be re-published in the state gazette.The Punjab Government had furnished a panel of three IAS officers for the post of the state chief electoral officer.Anindita Mitra holds a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Computer Science from Guru Ghasidas University, Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh). She cleared the UPSC Civil Services Examination in 2006 (results declared in 2007), securing All India Rank 8, and topping among women candidates that year.She has held several important positions in Punjab and on deputation. She served as Municipal Commissioner of Chandigarh from August 2021 to August 2024. During this period, she also held roles, including as CEO of Chandigarh Smart City, and focused on Swachh Bharat initiatives, safai workers’ welfare, and urban development.She currently serves as the Administrative Secretary for Higher Education and Languages, and, additionally, for School Education in the Government of Punjab. She also holds an additional charge as Managing Director, Punjab Infrastructure Development Board.

# Visually challenged voters cast ballots despite absence of Braille instructions



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

brailleWagh, who works at B J Government Medical

College and Sassoon General Hospital, said despite challenges he has been voting for the past 34 years.Despite the low turnout till Thursday afternoon, several visually challenged persons ensured that they cast their vote, despite lack of instructions in Braille.Whether it was 58-year-old visually challenged Sakina Bedi, spokesperson of National Federation of the Blind, or Ravi Wagh, president of Blind Cricket Association, they were able to exercise their franchise.Visually impaired voters can bring a companion to assist them but with accessibility measures like Braille ballots and EVM markings they are encouraged to vote on their own. EVMs have Braille markings next to voting buttons (numbers that are embossed in Braille next to each candidate button) and accordingly a visually impaired voter can then feel these and press the button that corresponds to the candidate they want to elect.

# AI hype reversal could bring back FIIs to India creating huge upside

New Delhi: A reversal of the artificial intelligence (AI) hype could bring India back into focus for large global investors, a report said on Thursday.The report from Bay Capital said “much of the global AI infrastructure build-out is debt-funded,” echoing risks last seen in the telecom-fibre boom.

It also cited a finding that despite \$30–40 billion in enterprise investment into generative AI, 95 per cent of organisations are getting zero return.“India’s market com-

position — viewed today as a disadvantage in the AI-obsessed investment landscape — may prove optimal” when the AI hype ends.“India’s under-indexing to a potentially hyped theme creates asymmetric upside when capital markets return to fundamentals,” the report said.It noted that India has limited direct exposure to AI infrastructure such as semiconductor manufacturing and hyperscale data centre ecosystem. Though India may not be building foundational AI infrastructure, i



# Al Qaeda scales up tech enabled operations as it eyes pan-India footprint



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

New Delhi: Al Qaeda has been using high-end technology to carry out operations in India, which has made investigations more challenging. Probe agencies have found that servers are being hosted in multiple countries to carry out propaganda and radicalise the people. An Intelligence Bureau official stated that the outfit is targeting the entire country and seeks to disseminate content to every corner of India. Unlike the Islamic State, which has decided to target people down South only, Al-Qaeda has bigger plans. The official added that the idea behind the outfit is to proceed slowly and steadily, without engaging in any major operation. The operations are very low, so the detection is very hard.

Investigations clearly suggest the scale at which the outfit is operating, and the trends are extremely dangerous. Recent investigations show that Al Qaeda has set up its servers in Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and Pakistan. Each one of these servers is being used to deliver content to the Indian audience, another official said. While tracking down these servers has been a major challenge for the security agencies, the scale at which the outfit is using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for its India operations is more worrying.

Officials pointed out that the outfit has been exploiting AI to spread its ideology, recruit, and also carry out disinformation campaigns against India. It has been using the available open source AI tools. The use of deepfakes has gone up considerably. AI is used to digitally create the faces of former leaders such as Osama Bin Laden and Anwar Al-Awlaki to deliver the latest messages. Following the death of these persons, Al Qaeda has struggled to find a leader for their cadre. For long, this had slowed down their operations, and the worst department to be hit was radicalisation and recruitment. Those who were being targeted by the outfit did not show much interest, as the group did not have an inspirational leader.

Experts say that the use of deepfakes largely solves this problem for the outfit, as it appears to be working for them when it comes to radicalisation and recruitment. The expert also added that this is something that the Indian agencies must watch out for, as the technology is being used in a very dangerous manner. Worse, it is working well for the outfit, the experts also warn. Al Qaeda in the Sub-Continent (AQIS) was created with the specific task of expanding operations in India. However, that plan never took off as was intended. Since the last couple of months, the activity of this group has gone multi-fold online. It appears to be targeting a much wider audience than the Islamic State has been doing in India. Intelligence assessments suggest that Al Qaeda has a much wider audience in India compared to all other terror groups. This is largely due to the founder of the terror group, Osama Bin Laden. He still is a hero figure for many, and this is what is being exploited majorly by the outfit for its operations in India, an Intelligence Bureau official said. When it comes to India, it has been taking a calculated approach. The intention is to penetrate as deeply as possible into society. The next step would be to plan the attacks and then execute them, another official added. For the Indian agencies, the biggest challenge would be to deal with this outfit and handle the scale at which it is using technology.

# Elon Musk-led X disables Grok’s objectionable image generation after global outrage



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

New Delhi: After facing significant global backlash, the Elon Musk-led X social media platform on Thursday disabled Grok’s objectionable image generation feature. The artificial intelligence-enabled chatbot Grok will no longer be able to generate objectionable images of women, regardless of whether the user has a premium account.

“We have implemented technological measures to prevent the Grok account from allowing the editing of images of real people in revealing clothing such as bikinis. This restriction applies to all users, including paid subscribers,” the platform’s safety account said in a post on X. xAI faced heat from several countries over Grok’s “Spicy Mode” feature, which allowed users to create sexualised deepfakes of women and children using simple text prompts such as “put her in a bikini” or “remove her clothes.” Multiple countries either blocked access to the chatbot or launched their own probes.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) sought an action-taken report from xAI, and the Attorney General from the US state of California launched an investigation into the developer of Grok. Further, a coalition of 28 civil society groups on Wednesday submitted open letters to the CEOs of Apple and Google, urging them to ban Grok and X from their app stores amid the surge in sexualised images. Now, X has also restricted the ability to generate and edit images to paid users. Earlier, Grok had limited the generation of such images only to paid users. “Image creation and the ability to edit images via the Grok account on the X platform are now only available to paid subscribers,” X said, stating that it “adds an extra layer of protection by helping to ensure that individuals who attempt to abuse the Grok account to violate the law or our policies can be held accountable”.

The platform also noted that it will take action to remove high-priority violative content, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and non-consensual nudity. Appropriate action will be taken against accounts that violate the rules. In December, the IT ministry had asked X to “remove or disable access, without delay, to all content already generated or disseminated in violation of applicable laws”. The ministry had also directed X to enforce its terms of service and AI usage restrictions, and take “strong deterrent measures”, including suspending or terminating accounts that used Grok to create sexually explicit images of women and children. X reportedly removed nearly 3,500 pieces of obscene content and sexually explicit images generated using Grok’s image generation capabilities in India. The platform also identified and barred about 600 users who had misused the AI chatbot to generate sexually explicit images.

# Japan FM Motegi, EAM Jaishankar to hold Strategic dialogue on Indo-Pacific, AI cooperation



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

With growing concerns over tensions with China and little hope of the Quad Summit in the near future, Japan’s Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi is expected to discuss strengthening India-Japan ties in the Indo-Pacific during talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Delhi on Friday (January 16, 2026).

The two Ministers will hold the 18th Japan-India Strategic Dialogue and discuss taking forward the Japanese initiative for a “Free and Open Indo Pacific” (FOIP) and co-operation on Artificial Intelligence, semiconductor technology and innovation. The visit by Mr. Motegi is his first to India since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi won party elections and formed a new coalition in November 2025, although he had visited in 2019 during his previous tenure as well. Ms. Takaichi, whose popularity has surged in the past few months, is expected to call snap polls in February in order to consolidate her position, and is expected to make the announcement to dissolve the lower house of parliament as early as next week.

Mr. Motegi, who is travelling to India at the end of a 9-day tour that included Israel, Palestine and Qatar, will share notes on the situation in Iran as well as the Gaza Peace Proposal. In addition, he is travelling to India to the Philippines, where he and his Philippines counterpart Theresa Lazaro signed two defence agreements, including one for reciprocal military access and another to fund patrol boats for the Philippines in the South China Sea, and is likely to discuss concerns over Chinese movement in the region with Mr. Jaishankar as well. “The Secretary and I also confirmed the importance of the Japan, Philippines, U.S. trilateral cooperation in the face of an increasingly severe strategic environment,” Mr. Motegi said in a joint news conference in Manila on Thursday (January 15, 2026).

During talks on Friday (January 16, 2026) in Delhi, Japan is keen to hold the 2nd of round of talks between senior officials on economic security, and begin a B2B private sector dialogue on the issue, said officials aware of the agenda for talks. The Japanese government is concerned over the economic impact of its 2-month long spat with China over comments by Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi, where she said a Chinese takeover of Taiwan would pose an “existential” threat to Japan. Beijing retaliated to what it called a threat of action by freezing tourism and trade ties and banning imports of Japanese seafood. Last week, the Chinese government also stepped up restrictions on the import of Japanese chemicals used for semiconductors and other goods it labelled “dual-use”, which the Japanese government spokesperson called “absolutely unacceptable and deeply regrettable.”

At the same time, India-U.S. tensions over trade and other issues over the past year have held up the Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Quad Summit, for which U.S. President Donald Trump was expected to visit India in 2025. No dates are being discussed for the next Quad Summit at present, government and diplomatic sources officials confirmed, although Quad working groups on Counter-terrorism (CTWG) and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Cooperation were held in December 2025. The two Ministers are expected to discuss Japan’s participation in the upcoming Artificial Intelligence (AI) Summit in Delhi on February 19-20, which Japan’s specially-designated “IP & AI Strategy” Minister would attend and would set up a separate Japan-India AI Strategic Dialogue, officials told The Hindu. They would also go over progress on the “FOIP” agenda that includes development of infrastructure in India’s North Eastern States, through the “Act East Forum” and the India-Japan “Kizuna” Dialogue, set to be held in Shillong next month, the officials said.

# Iran cut off from world as Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warns protesters



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Iran was largely cut off from the outside world on Friday (January 9, 2026) after authorities blacked out the internet to curb expanding protests, with phone calls not reaching the country, flights cancelled and online Iranian news sites only intermittently updating. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accused protesters of acting on behalf of U.S. President Donald Trump, saying rioters were attacking public properties and warning that Tehran would not tolerate people acting as “mercenaries for foreigners”. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei dismissed Mr. Trump as having hands “stained with the blood of Iranians” as supporters shouted “Death to America!” in footage aired by Iranian state television. State media later repeatedly referred to demonstrators as “terrorists,” setting the stage for a violent crackdown like those that have followed other nationwide protests in recent years. Protesters are “ruining their own streets ... in order to please the president of the United States,” Mr. Khamenei said to a crowd at his compound in Tehran. “Because he said that he would come to their aid. He should pay attention to the state of his own country instead.”

“Punishment for protesters” Iran’s judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei separately vowed that punishment for protesters “will be decisive, maximum and without any legal leniency.” There was no immediate response from Washington, though Mr. Trump has repeated his pledge to strike Iran if protesters are killed, a threat that’s taken on greater significance after the U.S. military raid that seized Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro. The protests that began over soaring inflation in the Islamic Republic late last month have spiralled into the biggest for three years, with unrest reported in every province and rights groups documenting dozens of deaths. Iran’s fragmented external opposition factions called for more protests on Friday (January 9, 2026) with Reza Pahlavi, exiled son of the late ruling

shah, telling ?Iranians in a social media post: “The eyes of the world are upon you. Take to ?the streets.” Mr. Trump, who bombed Iran last summer and who last week warned Tehran it could come to the protesters’ aid, said on Friday (January 9, 2026) he would not meet Pahlavi and was “not sure that it would be appropriate” to back him. The images published by state ?television overnight showed what it said were burning ?buses, cars and motorbikes as well as fires at metro stations and banks. It accused the People’s Mujahedin Organisation, an opposition faction that splintered off after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and also known as the MKO, of being behind the unrest.

A state television journalist standing in front of the ?fires on Shariati Street in the Caspian Sea port of Rasht said “this looks like a war ?zone — all the shops have been destroyed”. Iran has quelled far bigger bouts of unrest before, but it now faces a graver economic situation and intensifying international pressure with ?global sanctions over its nuclear programme reimposed since September. A French diplomatic source on Friday said Iran should show maximum restraint towards protesters. The protests have not yet approached the scale of nationwide demonstrations in late 2022 over ?women’s rights following the death in custody of a Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, but they pose the biggest internal challenge to the authorities since then. The authorities have attempted a dual approach — describing protests over the economy as legitimate while condemning what they call violent rioters and cracking down with security forces.

Khamenei addresses Trump “Last night in Tehran, a bunch of vandals and rioters came and destroyed a building that belonged to the state, to the people themselves, just to please the heart of the president of the United States,” Mr. Khamenei said, urging Mr. Trump to “manage your own country”. While the initial protests were focused on the economy, with the rial currency losing half ?its value against the dollar last year and inflation topping 40% in December, they have morphed to include slogans directly against the authorities. Protesters have chanted slogans including “Death to ?the dictator” and praising the former monarchy that was toppled in 1979. The extent of support inside Iran for ?the monarchy or for the MKO, the most vocal groups among émigré Iranians, is disputed. Most of the demonstrators seen in videos viewed by Reuters, many of which it has been unable to verify, have been young men. Iran blocked off the internet overnight. Reuters reporters trying to place phone calls to Iran from abroad were unable to do so on Friday. At least six flights between ?Dubai and Iranian cities scheduled for Friday were cancelled, the Dubai Airport website showed.

# Iran's army vows to protect public property as Tehran seeks to quell growing unrest



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

The Iranian army said on Saturday ( it would safeguard strategic infrastructure and public property and urged Iranians to thwart “the enemy’s plots”, as the clerical ?establishment steps up efforts to quell the country’s biggest protests in years. The Iranian military statement came after U.S. President Donald Trump issued a new warning to Iran’s leaders ?on Friday (January 8, 2026), and after Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday (January 10, 2026) declared: “The United States supports the brave people of Iran.” Unrest ?continued overnight. State media said a municipal building was set on fire in Karaj, west of Tehran, and blamed “rioters”. State ?TV broadcast footage of funerals of members of the security forces it said were killed in protests in the cities of Shiraz, Qom and Hamedan. Authorities continued to impose an internet blackout. A witness in western Iran reached by phone said the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) were deployed and opening fire in the area from which they were speaking, declining to be identified for their safety. The Iranian military operates separately to the IRGC - an elite force tasked with defending Iran’s Islamic Revolution and which authorities have deployed to quell previous unrest. Both forces are commanded by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In a statement published by semi-official news sites, the military accused Israel and “hostile terrorist groups” of seeking to “undermine the country’s public security”. “The Army, ?under the command of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, together with other armed forces, in addition to monitoring enemy movements in the region, will resolutely ?protect and safeguard national interests, the country’s strategic infrastructure, and public property,” it said. The protests have spread across much of Iran over the last two weeks, beginning in response to soaring inflation, but quickly turned political with protesters calling for clerical rulers to step down. Authorities have accused the U.S. and Israel of fomenting the “riots”.

Iranian rights group HRANA said it had documented 65 deaths including ?50 protesters and 15 security personnel as of January 9. The ?Norway-based human rights group Hengaw said more than 2,500 people had been arrested over the past two weeks. In a country with a history of fragmented opposition to clerical rule, the son of the last shah of Iran who was toppled in the 1979 Islamic revolution has

emerged as a prominent voice abroad spurring on the protests. Pahlavi says goal is to prepare to ‘seize city centres’ In his latest appeal on the X ?social media platform, U.S.-based Reza Pahlavi said: “Our goal is no longer merely to come into the streets; the goal is to prepare to ?seize city centres and hold them.” He also called on “workers and employees in key sectors of the economy, especially transportation, and oil, and gas and energy”, to begin a nationwide strike. Mr. Trump said on Thursday he was not inclined to meet Mr. Pahlavi, a sign ?that he was waiting to see how the crisis plays out before backing an opposition leader. Mr. Trump, who bombed Iran last summer and warned Tehran last week the U.S. could come to the protesters’ aid, issued another warning on Friday, saying: “You better not start shooting because we’ll start shooting too.” “I just hope the protesters ?in Iran are going to be safe, because that’s a very dangerous place right now,” he added. Protesters on sanctions on Iran Some protesters on the streets have shouted slogans in support of Mr. Pahlavi, such as “Long live the shah”, although most chants have called for an end to rule by the clerics or demanded action to fix an economy hammered by years of U.S. and other international sanctions and pummelled by the 12-day war in June, when Israel and the U.S. launched air strikes on Iran. A doctor in northwestern Iran said that since Friday, large numbers of injured protesters had been brought to hospitals. Some were badly beaten, suffering head injuries and broken legs and arms, as well as deep cuts. At least 20 people in one hospital had been shot with live ammunition, five of whom later died. On Friday, Mr. Khamenei accused protesters of acting on behalf of Mr. Trump, saying rioters were attacking public properties and warning that Tehran would not tolerate people acting as “mercenaries for ?foreigners”. The Revolutionary Guards’ public relations office said three members of the Basij security force were killed and five wounded during clashes with what it described as “armed rioters” in Gachsaran, in the southwest. Another security officer was stabbed to death in Hamedan, in western Iran. ?The son of a senior officer, Brigadier General Martyr Nourali Shoushtari, was killed in the Ahmadabad area of Mashhad, in the northeast. Two other security personnel were killed ?over the past two nights in Shushtar, in Khuzestan province. The protests pose the biggest internal challenge in at least three years to Iran’s clerical rulers, who look more vulnerable than during past bouts of unrest amid a dire economic situation and after last year’s war. The leaders of France, Britain and Germany issued a joint statement on Friday condemning the killing of protesters and urged the Iranian authorities to refrain from violence. Authorities have described protests over the economy as legitimate while condemning what they call violent rioters and cracking down with security forces. Iran’s clerical establishment ?has weathered repeated past bouts of unrest, including student protests in 1999, over a disputed election in 2009, against economic hardships in 2019, and the 2022 Woman, Life, Freedom protests.

# Oil prices drop 3% after Trump comments on Iran

Oil prices plunged on Thursday (January 15, 2026) after fears over instability in Iran were eased by comments from U.S. President Donald Trump. West Texas Intermediate dropped 3.0% to \$60.16 per barrel while Brent crude was down 2.93% to \$64.57, after Mr. Trump said he had been told the killings of protesters in Iran had been halted. In a surprise announcement at the White House, the U.S. President added that he would “watch it and see” about threatened military action. “They’ve said the killing has stopped and the executions won’t take place — there were supposed to be a lot of executions today and that the executions won’t take place — and we’re going to find out,” he said. Mr. Trump had repeatedly talked in recent days about coming to the aid of the Iranian people over a crackdown on protests that rights groups say has left at least 3,428

people dead. Concern that the situation could restrict supplies of crude had caused oil prices to rise around 1.5% on Wednesday (January 14, 2026). “Oil prices dropped... on comments from U.S. President Donald Trump that Iran would refrain from any further killing of protesters, watering down fears of a looming supply shock in energy markets,” said Kyle Rodda of Capital.com. Iran makes up 3% of global oil production, analyst Michael Wan of financial group MUFG noted this week. Mr. Wan said on Thursday (January 15, 2026) that Mr. Trump’s latest comments “come even as the United States has redeployed some personnel in Qatar and other American bases from ongoing geopolitical tensions and possible Iranian threats to target those locations”.



# U.S. imposes sanctions on Iran over crackdown on protesters



The United States on Thursday (January 15, 2026) imposed sanctions on five Iranian officials it accused of ?being behind the crackdown on protests and warned it was tracking ?Iranian leaders' funds being wired to banks around ?the world, as U.S. President Donald Trump's administration ?increases pressure on Tehran. The U.S. Treasury Department in a statement said it imposed sanctions on the Secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security as well as Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and law enforcement forces commanders, accusing them of being architects of the crackdown. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, in a ?video on Thursday (January 15, 2026), said Washington's message to Iran's leaders ?was clear: "U.S. Treasury knows, that like rats on a sinking ship, you are

# Trump says Iran pitched negotiations after U.S. leader threatened action for protester crackdown



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

U.S. President Donald Trump said Iran reached out to the U.S. and proposed negotiations after his threat to strike the Islamic Republic over its bloody crackdown on protesters, a move coming as activists said on Monday (January 12, 2026) the death toll in the nationwide demonstrations rose to at least 544. Iran had no immediate reaction to the news, which came after the Foreign Minister of Oman — long an interlocutor between Washington and Tehran — travelled to Iran this weekend. It also remains unclear just what Iran could promise, particularly as Trump has set strict demands over its nuclear program and its ballistic missile arsenal, which Tehran insists is crucial for its national defence.

Meanwhile, on Monday (January 12, 2025), Iran called for pro-government demonstrators to head to the streets in support of the theocracy, a show of force after days of protests directly challenging the rule of 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iranian state television aired chants from the crowd, who shouted "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!" Mr. Trump and his national security team have been weighing a range of potential responses against Iran, including cyberattacks and direct strikes by the U.S. or Israel, according to two people familiar with internal White House discussions who were not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The military is looking at it, and we're looking at some very strong options," Mr. Trump told reporters on Air Force One on Sunday (January 11, 2026) night. Asked about Iran's threats of retaliation, he said: "If they do that, we will hit them at levels that they've never been hit before." Mr. Trump said that his administration was in talks to set up a meeting with Tehran, but cautioned that he may have to act first as reports of the death toll in Iran mount and the government continues to arrest protesters. "I think they're tired of being beaten up by the United States," Mr. Trump said. "Iran wants to negotiate." He added, "The meeting is being set up, but

# 'Take over institutions, help is on the way,' Trump tells Iranian protesters



U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday (January 13, 2026) doubled down on his threat of intervention in protest-hit Iran, telling protesters that "help is on its way", a day after he claimed that Iranian officials had reached out to Washington for talks amid ongoing protests and a security crackdown in the Islamic Republic. "Iranian patriots, keep protesting — take over your institutions. Save the names of the killers and abusers. They will pay a big price," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post. "I have cancelled all meetings with Iranian officials until the senseless killing of protesters stops. Help is on the way," he added, without explaining what kind of "help" he is offering.

On Monday (January 12, 2026), Mr. Trump said in another social media post that he would impose 25% tariff on Iran's trading partners. "Effective immediately, any country doing business with the Islamic Republic of Iran will pay a Tariff of 25% on any and all business being done with the United States of America. This Order is final and conclusive," Mr. Trump said. Iran's main trading partners are China, Turkey, the UAE and Iraq. Turkey and the UAE are close American allies. Mr. Trump, who joined Israel in bombing Iran in June 2025 during the 12-day war, had earlier threatened to attack Iran again if protesters were killed. "If Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue. We are locked and loaded and ready to go." Mr. Trump

frantically wiring funds stolen from Iranian families to banks and financial institutions around ?the world. Rest assured, ?we will track them and you."

"But there's still time, if you choose to join us. As President Trump has said, stop the violence and stand with the people of ?Iran." The unrest in Iran started with protests over ?soaring prices before turning into one of the biggest challenges to the clerical establishment since the ?1979 Islamic Revolution. The U.S.-based HRANA rights group says it has so far verified the deaths of 2,435 protesters and 153 ?government-affiliated individuals. Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene on behalf of protesters in Iran, where the clerical establishment has cracked down hard on nationwide unrest since December 28. "The United States stands firmly behind the Iranian people in their call for freedom and justice," Mr. Bessent said in the statement. "Treasury will use every tool to target those behind the regime's tyrannical oppression of human ?rights." The Treasury also imposed sanctions on 18 people it accused of involvement in laundering the proceeds ?of Iranian petroleum and petrochemical sales to foreign markets as part ?of "shadow banking" networks of sanctioned Iranian financial institutions. Thursday's (January 15, 2026) action is the latest move targeting Tehran since Mr. Trump restored his "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran, which includes efforts to drive its oil exports to zero and help prevent Tehran ?from developing a nuclear weapon.

we may have to act because of what's happening before the meeting. But a meeting is being set up. Iran called, they want to negotiate." Iran's parliamentary speaker warned on Sunday (January 11, 2026) that the U.S. military and Israel would be "legitimate targets" if America uses force to protect demonstrators. More than 10,600 people have been detained over the two weeks of protests, said the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which has been accurate in previous unrest in recent years and gave the death toll. It relies on supporters in Iran cross-checking information. It said 496 of the dead were protesters and 48 were with security forces.

With the internet down in Iran and phone lines cut off, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the toll. Iran's government has not offered overall casualty figures. Those abroad fear the information blackout is emboldening hard-liners within Iran's security services to launch a bloody crackdown. Protesters flooded the streets in the country's capital and its second-largest city on Saturday (January 10, 2026) night into Sunday morning. Online videos purported to show more demonstrations Sunday (January 11, 2026) night into Monday (January 12, 2026), with a Tehran official acknowledging them in state media. Fear pervades Iran's capital. In Tehran, a witness told the AP that the streets of the capital empty at the sunset call to prayers each night. By the Isha, or nighttime prayer, the streets are deserted. Part of that stems from the fear of getting caught in the crackdown. Police sent the public a text message that warned: "Given the presence of terrorist groups and armed individuals in some gatherings last night and their plans to cause death, and the firm decision to not tolerate any appeasement and to deal decisively with the rioters, families are strongly advised to take care of their youth and teenagers." Another text, which claimed to come from the intelligence arm of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, also directly warned people not to take part in demonstrations. "Dear parents, in view of the enemy's plan to increase the level of naked violence and the decision to kill people... refrain from being on the streets and gathering in places involved in violence, and inform your children about the consequences of cooperating with terrorist mercenaries, which is an example of treason against the country," the text warned. The witness spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity due to the ongoing crackdown. The demonstrations began December 28 over the collapse of the Iranian rial currency, which trades at over 1.4 million to \$1, as the country's economy is squeezed by international sanctions in part levied over its nuclear programme. The protests intensified and grew into calls directly challenging Iran's theocracy.

said on January 2. Ali Larjani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, had responded to Mr. Trump, saying "U.S. interference in this internal matter would mean destabilizing the entire region and destroying America's interests".

What began as a protest by traders over falling currency and hyperinflation has spread into a nationwide protest in Iran. The authorities have imposed an internet shutdown, and cracked down on what they call "rioters and terrorists" on Saturday. State media have reported that dozens of security personnel were killed by "rioters", while Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has warned of a stern response. According to Norway-based Iran Human Rights, at least 648 people were killed during the protests. The White House said on Monday that Mr. Trump is pursuing diplomacy as a first resort but remains "unafraid" of deploying military force. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, in an interview with Al Jazeera, said the government was in talks with the protesters and the internet was shut down only after "we confronted terrorist operations and realised orders were coming from outside the country". In response to Mr. Trump's threats, he said: "We are prepared for any eventuality and we hope Washington will choose a wise option. It doesn't matter which option they choose, we are ready for it."

Meanwhile, the European Parliament has banned Iranian diplomats and other representatives as EU leaders condemned Iran's security crackdown. "Those who defy the dangers in the streets and the political prisoners who continue to be held need more than just solidarity," EU Parliament speaker Roberta Metsola wrote to the members of parliament. "The ban applies to the Parliament's premises in Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg." The EU's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas has signaled expanded sanctions against Iran. While responding to the EU Parliament's decision, Mr. Araghchi said: "More than two years of Genocide in Gaza that has claimed the lives of 70,000 Palestinians has not led the European Parliament to take any real action against Israel.

# Iran closes its airspace to commercial aircraft for hours as tensions with U.S. remain high



Iran closed its airspace to commercial flights for hours without explanation early Thursday (January 15, 2026) as tensions remained high with the United States over Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests. The closure ran for over four hours, according to pilot guidance issued by Iran, which lies on a key East-West flight route. International carriers diverted north and south around Iran, but after one extension, the closure appeared to have expired and several domestic flights were in the air just after 7 a.m. Iran previously shut its airspace during the 12-day war against Israel in June and when it exchanged fire with Israel during the Israel-Hamas war. However, there were no signs of current hostilities though the closure immediately rippled through global aviation because Iran is located on a key East-West route for airlines.

"Several airlines have already reduced or suspended services, and most carriers are avoiding Iranian airspace," said the website SafeAirspace, which provides information on conflict areas and air travel. "The situation may signal further security or military activity, including the risk of missile launches or heightened air defence, increasing the risk of misidentification of civil traffic."

Iran, in the past, has misidentified a commercial air-

craft as a hostile target. In 2020, Iranian air defence shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 with two surface-to-air missiles, killing all 176 people on board. Iran, for days, adamantly dismissed allegations of downing the plane as Western propaganda before finally acknowledging it. Iran briefly shuts Tehran Airspace amid U.S. tensions, protests; flights rerouted The airspace closure came as some personnel at a key U.S. military base in Qatar were advised to evacuate. The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait also ordered its personnel to "temporary halt" going to the multiple military bases in the small Gulf Arab country. U.S. President Donald Trump made a series of vague statements on Wednesday (January 14, 2026) that left unclear what American action, if any, would take place against Iran. In comments to reporters, Mr. Trump said he had been told that plans for executions in Iran have stopped, without providing many details. The shift comes a day after Mr. Trump told protesters in Iran that "help is on the way" and that his administration would "act accordingly" to respond to the Islamic Republic's deadly crackdown. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also sought to tone down the rhetoric, urging the U.S. to find a solution through negotiation. Asked by Fox News what he would say to Mr. Trump, Mr. Araghchi said, "My message is: Between war and diplomacy, diplomacy is a better way, although we don't have any positive experience from the United States. But still, diplomacy is much better than war."

The change in tone by the U.S. and Iran came hours after the chief of the Iranian judiciary said the government must act quickly to punish the thousands who have been detained. Activists warned that hangings of detainees could come soon. The security forces' crackdown on the demonstrations has killed at least 2,615, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported. The death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalls the chaos surrounding the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

# What is futuristic marine and space biotechnology? | Explained



The story so far: Futuristic space and marine biotechnology research focuses on using underexplored environments, such as the deep oceans and outer space, to develop new biological knowledge, materials, and manufacturing processes. Marine biotechnology involves studying microorganisms, algae, and other marine life to discover bioactive compounds, enzymes, biomaterials, food ingredients, and biostimulants. These organisms have evolved to survive high pressure, salinity, low light, and nutrient-poor conditions making them valuable for industrial and climate-resilient applications. Space biotechnology, meanwhile, studies how microbes, plants, and human biological systems behave under microgravity and radiation. This includes microbial biomanufacturing for food, materials, and life-support systems, as well as research on astronauts' microbiomes to develop health and probiotic interventions for long-duration missions.

Why does India need them?

India's long coastline of over 11,000 km and a vast Exclusive Economic Zone of over 2 million sq. km give it access to rich marine biodiversity and biomass. Yet its share of global marine outputs remains low, indicating significant untapped potential. Investing in marine biomanufacturing can unlock new sources of food, energy, chemicals, and biomaterials, while reducing pressure on land, freshwater, and agricultural systems. Similarly, space biotechnology is critical for India's long-term ambitions in space exploration, enabling safe food production, human health management, and biological manufacturing in extreme environments. Together, futuristic marine and space biotechnology can strengthen India's bioeconomy, enhance strategic autonomy, and position India as a leader in next-generation biomanufacturing.

Where does India stand today?

India's domestic production of marine biomass such as seaweed remains modest, with an annual cultivated output of around 70,000 tonnes. As a result, India continues to import seaweed-derived components such as agar, carrageenan, and alginates for use in food, pharmaceuti-

cals, cosmetics, and medical applications. Targeted initiatives under the Blue Economy agenda, the Deep Ocean Mission, and, more recently, the BioE3 are pushing the sector toward integrated marine biomanufacturing, linking cultivation, extraction, and downstream applications. A small number of private players, such as Sea6 Energy and ClimaCrew, along with ICAR–Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute and state-led initiatives such as the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference, are exploring pathways to scale marine biomass into high-value ingredients, and bio-based products. In space biotechnology, ISRO's microgravity biology programme is conducting experiments on microbes, algae, and biological systems to study food production, life-support regeneration, and human health in space. Research on microbial behaviour and astronaut microbiomes is gaining relevance as India prepares for longer-duration human spaceflight missions. However, private-sector participation is limited as these technologies are still nascent.

What are other countries doing?

The European Union funds large-scale programmes on marine bioprospecting, algae-based biomaterials, and bioactive compounds, supported by shared research infrastructure such as the European Marine Biological Resource Centre. China has rapidly expanded seaweed aquaculture and marine bioprocessing integrating deep-sea exploration with industrial applications in food, pharmaceuticals, and biomaterials. Other countries with vast marine resources such as the United States and Australia also support marine biotech initiatives. In space biotechnology, the U.S. leads through NASA and the International Space Station, where research on microbial behaviour, protein crystallisation, stem cells, and closed-loop life-support systems informs drug discovery, regenerative medicine, and long-duration human missions. The European Space Agency, China's Tiangong programme, and Japan's JAXA conduct experiments on plant growth, microbiomes, and biomaterials generation in microgravity.

What next?

Marine and space biotechnology remain relatively unexplored frontiers, where early movers are likely to gain lasting strategic and technological advantages. India's rich and diverse marine ecology positions it well to emerge as a leader in marine biotechnology. Similarly, India's ambitions as a space-faring nation require the development of biological technologies that account for the genetic, nutritional, and health profiles of Indian populations, rather than relying solely on externally developed solutions. The primary risk lies in slow and fragmented progress in research and development. A dedicated roadmap that defines timelines and outcomes for marine and space biotechnology would help align investments, coordinate institutions, and channel resources more effectively.

# Internet shutdown in Iran as protests mount; Trump warns of U.S. action

A nationwide internet blackout was reported in Iran on Thursday night (January 8, 2026) with internet access and telephone lines cut out after demonstrators in Tehran and elsewhere joined a protest called by the country's exiled Crown Prince. Protests sparked by Iran's ailing economy have swept the country and turned into a significant challenge for its theocracy. The death toll mounts from a crackdown by authorities after 12 days of economic protests. CloudFlare, an internet firm, and the advocacy group NetBlocks reported the internet outage, both attributing it to Iranian government interference. Attempts to dial landlines and mobile phones from Dubai to Iran could not be connected. "Live metrics show Iran is now in the midst of a nationwide internet



blackout. The incident follows a series of escalating digital censorship measures targeting protests across the country and hinders the public's right to communicate at a critical moment," NetBlocks said in a statement on social media. Trump says U.S. will hit Iran 'very hard' if protesters are killed U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday (January 8) threatened to take severe action against

Iran if its authorities "start killing people" who are protesting in the country, where an economic crisis has led to mounting civil unrest. "I have let them know that if they start killing people, which they tend to do during their riots — they have lots of riots — if they do it, we are going to hit them very hard," Mr. Trump said during an interview with conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt. The protest represented the first

test of whether the Iranian public could be swayed by Iran's exiled opposition leader Reza Pahlavi, whose fatally ill father fled Iran just before the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Demonstrations have included cries in support of the shah, something that could bring a death sentence in the past but now underlines the anger fuelling the protests that began over Iran's ailing economy.



# Quarrying crisis in Tamil Nadu’s Uthiramerur leaves residents in distress



If one were to have a bird’s eye view of Uthiramerur taluk in Kancheepuram district, it would possibly be a canvas of grey with small patches of green. However, it was not like this in the not-so-distant past. A vast portion of the land known for its kuda olai system of election and bewitching temple architecture is “greying”, thanks to a large number of granite quarries and crushing units. Almost every tree and plant, roads, mud on the roadsides, and crops in the fields have turned grey in and around villages including Siruthamur, Pazhaveri, Arungundram, Pazhaya Seevaram, Alanjeri, and Thirumukkudal, thanks to quarrying and stone crushing units that make M-sand. On a cloudy, still afternoon in November, the roads around these units feel eerie, and the trees seem frozen as if petrified.

Estimates show that close to 60 villages in this region are affected by quarrying, and there are around 80 quarries. According to a mapper, data from the National Remote Sensing Centre show that in 2005-06, a total of 4.21sq. km. was under mining in the erstwhile Kancheepuram district. The area increased to 33.13 sq. km. in 2015-16, but this figure includes some sand mining areas too. The district also saw a reduction in land under paddy, with quarrying being a major cause.

Farmers at Alanjeri said a proposed quarry (Kori as they call it) that they were protesting against had fenced off land where a channel bringing water from a hillock runs through. “The channel, constructed by the Rural Development Department, used to carry water to our irrigation tank wherein two wells that meet our drinking water needs are situated. The water gets contaminated by quarry dust and if the water does not fill up the Alanjeri tank, a chain of 10 other tanks won’t get water. We used to grow three crops of paddy a year. Now, we struggle to grow one crop,” said V. Balakrishnan, a farmer. The village only has Dalit farmers and they claim the first quarry in their village is located on Panchami land unknowingly sold in bits and pieces to others. “We have been petitioning the Collector for several years to stop the operation of the quarry and not allow a second one to come up. The new one lies on the route of the annual procession of our village deities Theni Amman and Palani Amman. They won’t allow us to take a detour even,” said Vijayakumar, another farmer. Farmers lead the battle

C. Devaraj of Arungundram said his father Chinnappaiyan was the first to die in an accident caused by the heavy vehicles carrying stones from a quarry. “He was one of the first to protest against the quarry operations in the area. It was in November 2003.” In one village, the panchayat president refused to pass a resolution against the quarries since he himself owned one. “The quarries are so close to each other in some cases that we have no space for our animals to graze,” he added. Last year, farmer leaders from several villages joined to stage a hunger strike seeking relief to Rajendran, a farmer whose land could not be cultivated, with the well drying up because of quarry operations. “We were denied police permission even to use chairs for the protest,” said Harikrishnan of Pazhaveri. Mr. Rajendran said it was 12 years since his well dried up. “I have been holding up against the quarry operators and managing with the income from milch animals. If I approach elected representatives, they tell me to sell off the land handed down by my forefathers. I don’t want a car or air-conditioner; I want to grow crops on my land and pass it onto my son to grow food for the people,” he said. Farmer leader Manavalan said public hearings for new quarries are not held in the village or nearby, but in places where quarry owners muster enough supporters to out-number those opposing them. “Last year, a public hearing for a quarry witnessed very angry exchanges between farmers and an IAS officer. We told him to travel with us by bike without a helmet to feel the kind of dust we inhale from the trucks carrying the stone without cover. People are getting asthma and wheezing. The quarries do not follow basic rules like sprinkling water regularly to prevent the dust from flying,” Mr. Harikrishnan added. Up in arms: Farmers at Alanjeri say a proposed quarry that they are protesting against has fenced off land where a channel bringing water to the irrigation tank runs through. They used to grow three crops of paddy a year, but struggle to grow even one now. Up in arms: Farmers at Alanjeri say a proposed quarry that they are protesting against has fenced off land where a channel bringing water to the irrigation tank runs through. They used to grow three crops of paddy a year, but struggle to grow even one now. | Photo Credit: B. Jothi Ramalingam

The village roads running around the taluk are like a dirt patch for the mighty trucks that carry blue metal and stones. “Since the vehicles are always overloaded, they cannot stop as soon as they should. We shudder to send children to school as accidents keep happening. We are waging a continuous battle with the trucks. Two bridges across Palar River, connecting Pazhaya Seevaram and Thirumukkoodal and are Avalur and Walajahbad, have a continuous flow of vehicles on all days, except on Sundays,” said Premkumar of the BJP, which has been holding protests in the area, calling for restriction in the timing for the trucks to ply. Farmers have been demanding that the timing of the trucks be regulated so that students can travel safely.

Quarries and stone-crushing units are a major source of fugitive dust, a significant environmental concern that arises at nearly every stage of the operation. Dust is emitted during unloading of raw materials, crushing, screening, conveying, and storing of finished products. As stones are broken, shaken on vibrating screens, transported along conveyor belts, and stored in open stockpiles, fine particles — particularly stone dust — become airborne. A 2023 study in the International Journal of Health Sciences and Research found that prolonged exposure to silica dust significantly impairs lung function among stone quarry workers in South India. The researchers observed that lung impairment was the highest among loaders, followed by stone grinders, drillers, blasters, and stone cutters. The problem is particularly acute with fine materials, like stone dust, which are easily carried by the wind and can linger in the air for long. Dust from stone quarries not only affects the workers on site but also people living nearby. Poornima Prabhakaran, Director, Centre for Health Analytics Research and Trends at Ashoka University, said that though the dust particles released from quarries are relatively large, they are hazardous to human health. Prolonged exposure to high dust levels can lead to respiratory problems, silicosis, and skin or

eye irritation, she added.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has outlined stringent guidelines for stone-crushing units. They include the requirement for full enclosure around crushers and screens to contain dust at the source. Additionally, units must install fine-mist water sprinklers to dampen dust particles, along with bag filters and dry dust-extraction systems to capture airborne dust. Conveyor belts are to be fully covered to prevent dust from escaping, and discharge points must be fitted with telescopic chutes to control dust release when materials are transferred. Stockpiles of crushed material should either be kept wet or covered to reduce dust dispersion, ensuring that emissions are minimised and air quality is preserved within and around the crusher zones. S.M. Shiv Nagendra, a professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, and an expert in air quality monitoring, said the carrying capacity of areas near quarries should be assessed. He noted that quarrying close to residential areas contributes significantly to pollution. The CPCB guidelines also mandate that internal roads be paved to prevent dust resuspension; wind-breaking walls and foggers be installed; and accumulated dust cleaned regularly. Units must also recycle water used for suppression and conduct ambient air monitoring to ensure the control of particulate emissions. While industries are required to implement continuous real-time air quality monitoring, quarries are not bound by the same regulation. However, even with these monitoring systems in place, they may not fully capture the extent of the pollution. Mr. Nagendra pointed out that current air quality monitoring stations measure pollution only in a one-kilometre radius, leaving out the full extent of pollution affecting surrounding areas.

In July 2025, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) to enforce stricter standards for granting or renewing Consent to Operate (CTO) for quarrying and mining units in the State, after several units came under the scanner for violations. It ruled that quarrying activities should not continue unless penalties for past environmental violations were fully paid. These violations included failure to maintain safety distances, inadequate fencing and greenbelt development, insufficient dust control measures, and exceeding the approved extraction limits. The NGT instructed the TNPCB to require water sprinkling, greenbelt development, black-topped roads, and equipment enclosures before granting CTO. It also recommended that greenbelt development begin at the application stage to ensure saplings are ready when operations start.

G. Sundararajan of Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation, called for the identification of quarry clusters and a third-party audit of the Cumulative Impact Assessment to evaluate the effect on groundwater and air quality. He also pointed to other States, like Telangana, which use satellite imagery to monitor sand mining and storage in near real-time and suggested that Tamil Nadu adopt a similar approach. A channel brings water from a hillock to the Alanjeri tank. The water gets contaminated by quarry dust. If the water does not fill up the tank, a chain of 10 other tanks will not get water. A channel brings water from a hill-ock to the Alanjeri tank. The water gets contaminated by quarry dust. If the water does not fill up the tank, a chain of 10 other tanks will not get water. | Photo Credit: B. Jothi Ramalingam

A senior hydrogeologist, who preferred to remain anonymous, said the lack of a proper law to govern mining and groundwater extraction is the main reason for the current situation. The management of groundwater is governed by a mere government order: MS 142. A draft Tamil Nadu Groundwater (Development and Management) Act has been drawn up, but is yet to be enacted. Mining is a major subject in this Act because mining for coal or sand or rock will affect groundwater extraction. In Neyveli, the groundwater level, which used to be at 6 feet, is now at 35 feet-40 feet with continuous mining, he said.

He said there is regulation only at the individual mine level now. Nobody is seeing the larger picture, and this is leading to environmental damage. An ecologist said that when people keep scooping stuff out of the quarries, the surrounding groundwater level will go down. In the long run, the nature of the soil will change owing to water loss. This will lead to gradual desertification, the kinds of plants able to grow on such a soil will change, and farmers will have to change their crops. Food crops will vanish. One day, the soil, instead of becoming grey, will go “bald” and will not be able to grow anything.

No alternative to M-sand A former government official who had worked in Kancheepuram said the district administration was seized of the matter and there were times when up to 30 quarries had been shut down. “The quarry owners have been warned to keep the truck tops closed with tarpaulin and instructed to carry only the permitted load. The TNPCB is the one that has the larger role in controlling the quarries,” he said. However, without the quarries, construction activities and road laying in and around the city would come to a standstill. “Give us an alternative material to M-sand, gravel, and blue metal. As river sand cannot be mined, the administration has no other option but to allow rock mining,” he pointed out. The District Environmental Engineer of Kancheepuram acknowledged the complaints and representations about the pollution from stone quarries. “We have received representations forwarded from the Collectorate. They have sought a report, and we are starting work on it,” he said.

## Gold and silver prices stay volatile this week amid strong US data and global cues

New Delhi: Gold and silver prices remained volatile this week amid signs of some ease in global trade order, fading expectations of a December rate cut by the US Federal Reserve, and a stronger dollar index. According to the Indian Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA), the price of 24-carat gold closed at Rs 1,22,653 per 10 grams on Friday, up Rs 221 against Monday’s price of Rs 1,22,432. Meanwhile, the price touched a week-low at Rs 1,21,691 on Tuesday and a high at Rs 1,23,388 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Silver price ended the week at Rs 1,51,129 per kilogram, down Rs 3,804 from Monday’s price of Rs 1,54,933 per 10 grams. “Gold experienced a healthy correction this week but continues to maintain a strong bullish framework. COMEX gold closed at \$4,079.5, while MCX gold settled around Rs 1,24,191, finding support precisely on the multi-month rising trendline,” said Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money.

# Uranium found in breastmilk of lactating mothers, more studies expected in other states



: A recent study has revealed alarming levels of uranium (U238) in the breastmilk of lactating mothers across several districts in Bihar, raising serious health concerns for their infants. Researchers from multiple institutions have found that uranium exposure through breastmilk could pose significant non-carcinogenic health risks to infants.

Speaking with ANI, Dr Ashok Sharma of AIIMS Delhi, who is a co-author of the study, said, “The study analysed breast milk from 40 lactating mothers and found uranium (U-238) in all samples. Although 70% of infants showed potential non-carcinogenic health risk, the overall uranium levels were below permissible limits and are expected to have minimal actual health impact on both mothers and infants. The highest average contamination occurred in Khagaria district and the highest individual value in Katihar district. While uranium exposure may pose risks such as impaired neurological development and reduced IQ, breastfeeding should not be discontinued and remains the most beneficial source of infant nutrition unless clinically indicated.” The study showed that: 70% of the infants had HQ > 1, indicating possible non-carcinogenic health risks from uranium exposure through breast milk. Uranium exposure in infants may affect: Kidney development, Neurological development, Cognitive and mental health outcomes (including low IQ and neurodevelopmental delay) if long-term exposure continues.”

“However, based on the observed uranium concentrations in breast milk samples (0-5.25 ug/L), the study still concludes that the actual impact on infant health is likely low, and most uranium absorbed by mothers is excreted primarily through urine, not concentrated in breast milk. Therefore, breastfeeding remains recommended, unless a

## Auramine in Indian food: why a banned dye keeps returning | Explained



India continues to face recurring episodes of chemical adulteration in food, particularly through the use of non-permitted synthetic dyes. One of the most persistent among them is auramine O, a bright yellow industrial dye banned under Indian food-safety regulations. Recent inspections by state food-safety departments, academic studies and even everyday observations such as unnaturally bright yellow chickpeas sold in public have again uncovered its presence in sweets and savoury items. This concern is not new, India has dealt with multiple waves of dye-related adulteration for nearly four decades, from metanil yellow in turmeric, rhodamine B in cotton candy and curry masala, Sudan dyes added to spices, Argemone oil mixed with mustard oil, calcium carbide used to ripen fruits, urea added to milk to thicken, mineral oil mixed with edible oils to chalk powder added to flour revealing systemic vulnerabilities in both regulation and awareness. Auramine’s re-emergence is part of this larger pattern.

What is auramine?

Auramine O is a synthetic yellow dye extensively used in industry, including textile and leather processing, printing inks, paper manufacturing, and certain microbiological staining procedures. It has a vivid colour and is inexpensive, but Auramine O is not approved for use as a food colour in India, the European Union, the United States, or most other regulatory jurisdictions. Toxicological research has linked its ingestion to a range of health risks, including liver and kidney damage, enlargement of the spleen, mutagenic effects that can alter genetic material, and potential carcinogenic outcomes. Animal studies have consistently demonstrated organ lesions and disruptions in metabolic processes even at relatively low doses of exposure. Reflecting the seriousness of these findings, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies auramine as a substance that is possibly carcinogenic to humans.

How does auramine enter food?

Despite longstanding prohibitions, auramine continues to enter the food chain largely due to its easy availability and low cost. Industrial-grade colours are sold informally in local markets, and small-scale sweet makers or street vendors often rely on these unlabelled powders because they provide a bright, appealing yellow that mimics saffron, turmeric, or permitted synthetic colours. In many cases, producers remain unaware of regulatory restrictions or view enforcement as sporadic and avoidable. During festive seasons when large quantities of brightly coloured sweets, snacks, and fried items are produced the use of inexpensive colourants tends to spike, raising the likelihood of auramine contamination.

What have earlier investigations in India shown?

Findings from different regions consistently show that dyes such as auramine, metanil yellow, rhodamine B, and malachite green appear in certain samples of sweets, savoury snacks, condiments, and pickles. These violations are particularly common in unorganised food sectors, where oversight is limited and ingredients are often procured through informal supply chains. Regulatory challenges compound the problem. India’s food production landscape is dominated by micro and small enterprises, many of which operate with limited technical knowledge of safe manufacturing practices. While the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, provides stringent provisions against adulteration, enforcement remains uneven due to variations in laboratory capacity, staffing, and surveillance systems across states. In several toxicology reports, long-term ingestion of non-permitted dyes including auramine -- has been linked

clinical indication suggests otherwise,” he said Dr Ashok also said that such studies will be conducted in other states to know about the presence of heavy metals. “We are under the process of examining the heavy metals in other states and their impact on human health which is a need of the hour.” The study, conducted on 40 randomly selected lactating women from various districts of Bihar, involved quantification of U238 in breastmilk. All samples tested contained uranium, with the highest levels observed in the Katihar district. Health risk assessments showed that infants are particularly vulnerable due to their limited ability to eliminate uranium from their bodies. The study estimates that 70 per cent of the infant population analysed could experience non-carcinogenic health effects from exposure. Uranium, a naturally occurring radioactive element, is commonly found in granite and other rocks. It can contaminate groundwater through natural processes and human activities such as mining, burning coal, nuclear industry emissions, and the use of phosphate fertilisers. On further studies to identify the presence of pesticides, environmental pollutants in breastmilk Dr Ashok said, “the article does address future directions, and pesticides are included in their plans. From the study’s discussion and conclusion sections, this investigation focused on uranium (U-238) in breast milk; our previous work had already identified arsenic, lead, and mercury in breast milk. We further highlight the need for continued biomonitoring of toxic contaminants, including environmental pollutants such as pesticides in breast milk, to better understand infant exposure risk.

“The World Health Organisation (WHO) sets a provisional limit of 30 micrograms per litre (ug/L) for uranium in drinking water, while some countries, such as Germany, have adopted stricter limits of 10 ug/L. In India, uranium contamination has been reported in an estimated 151 districts across 18 states, with 1.7 per cent of groundwater sources affected in Bihar. Globally, elevated uranium levels have been observed in countries including Canada, the United States, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Bangladesh, China, Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, and the lower Mekong Delta region. Though prior global studies have shown high uranium concentrations in groundwater, clear clinical symptoms among exposed populations have not been consistently observed. However, the current research underscores the urgent need to monitor U238 in Bihar to assess and mitigate potential health risks to mothers and their infants.

to physiological degeneration, organ pathology, and genetic damage in animal studies. Yet, despite repeated crack-downs, the recurrence of auramine in food samples indicates that economic incentives and supply-chain fragility continue to override compliance.

What is the global context?

The concerns surrounding auramine are not unique to India. Historically, several countries encountered similar issues in the mid-20th century, when industrial dyes including auramine were occasionally used in foods before emerging toxicological evidence prompted universal bans. Today, regulators in the U.S., EU, and East Asian nations classify auramine strictly as an industrial dye, and its presence in consumables triggers product recalls and import alerts. In recent years, isolated reports of auramine contamination have surfaced in turmeric consignments, pickles, and brightly coloured sweets across parts of South Asia and Africa, underscoring its global status as a prohibited and hazardous additive.

Why are these violations significant for India today?

Despite improvements in food safety systems, the wide variety of street foods, festival sweets, and locally prepared snacks in India can sometimes increase exposure to products that may contain industrial dyes, largely because these items often move through complex and informal supply chains. Children who tend to consume a disproportionate share of brightly coloured foods are at increased risk of long-term harm. Recurrent contamination erodes consumer trust and creates pressure on regulatory authorities to strengthen surveillance. The continued detection of auramine also highlights structural challenges related to informal manufacturing, limited awareness of safety standards, and the affordability gap between permitted and non-permitted colourants.

What steps are being taken?

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) periodically intensifies sampling, surveillance, and enforcement efforts, particularly during festive seasons when colour adulteration peaks. Several states have launched targeted drives against illegal colourants, leading to seizures of unlabelled dye packets and prosecution of violating units. Alongside enforcement, awareness programmes for small food manufacturers and street vendors are being expanded to encourage safer manufacturing practices. There is also a push to strengthen laboratory infrastructure and develop rapid testing kits that can detect industrial dyes at the point of sale. What lies ahead?

Eliminating auramine from the food chain will require a multilayered approach. This includes tighter regulation of chemical markets selling industrial dyes, sustained community-level education for small manufacturers, broader deployment of easy-to-use testing tools, and stronger penalties for chronic violators. Consumer education especially regarding the risks associated with unnaturally bright foods will also be crucial.

## 9 in 10 SMBs in Hyderabad adopt AI as digital transformation accelerates: LinkedIn stud

Hyderabad: Small and medium businesses (SMBs) in Hyderabad are leading India’s AI adoption wave, with 9 in 10 SMBs (91%) already investing or planning to invest in AI solutions, according to new LinkedIn research.

At the same time, 91% of decision-makers expect business growth over the next year, signaling a sector focused on smarter systems, skilled talent, and trusted digital platforms.

The study highlights that AI is central to SMB strategy in Hyderabad. 57% of SMBs say AI and automation are critical to staying competitive, 52% view operational efficiency as key to protecting margins, and 51% prioritize securing future-ready talent for survival.



# Trump’s 25% Iran tariff: Not much India impact given low trade volume



“Effective immediately, any country doing business with the Islamic Republic of Iran will pay a tariff of 25 per cent on any and all business being done with the United States of America. This order is final and conclusive,” Trump said in a post on Truth Social, without providing further details. There was no official documentation from the White House of the policy on its website, nor information about the legal authority Trump would use to impose the tariffs, or whether they would be aimed at all of Iran’s trading partners.

While the fresh tariffs could primarily impact China, which is Iran’s largest trade partner, India, too, has had longstanding trade ties with Iran and considerable investment in Iran’s port infrastructure. However, sanctions on Iran due to its nuclear programme have already weakened trade ties with India over the years. In New Delhi, which already faces 50 per cent US tariffs, the assessment is that India is not going to be affected much, with bilateral trade volume minimal as compared to other countries like China — it was \$1.6 billion in 2024-25, and is estimated to touch \$1.2 billion in 2025-26. Iran is not even among India’s top 50 trading partners.

“For India, Iran does not even figure in the top 50 global trading partners. Last year, India’s total trade with Iran was \$1.6 billion, which is approximately 0.15% of India’s total trade,” said government sources. “India’s trade value with Iran is expected to further go down, given external economic factors,” the sources said. There is no official documentation from the White House of the policy on its website, nor information about the legal authority President Donald Trump would use to impose the tariffs (File photo). There is no official documentation from the White House of the policy on its website, nor information about the legal authority President Donald Trump would use to impose the tariffs (File photo). In 2024, Iran’s total imports were about \$68 billion, of which its leading partners were UAE (\$21 billion), China (\$17 billion), Turkiye (\$11 billion), EU (\$6 billion). India’s share was only \$1.2 billion.

However, India’s exporters of low-margin products, particularly tea and rice, are set to come under strain. Tea exporters said Iran has traditionally been a strong market for Indian orthodox tea, and the tariffs could exacerbate the restrictions that they are facing in other markets, such as Pakistan and Russia, which were once large markets for Indian tea. Data showed that the top export items to Iran included cereals worth \$757.52 million, tea, coffee, and spices worth \$70 million, animal fodder worth \$71 million, and fruits and nuts worth \$55 million in 2024-25. Declining

# RBI proposes reopening urban co-operative banks’ licenses; favours large credit societies

Two decades after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stopped granting licenses for new urban co-operative banks (UCBs), the central bank has proposed reopening the licensing window. The move would favour granting UCB licenses to co-operative credit societies. Considering the fact that most of the failures of UCBs have been of smaller banks, if licensing is resumed for UCBs, it may be prudent to license only large co-operative credit societies, the RBI said in a discussion paper. “A large co-operative credit society will have a longer track record. It would have established its governance and put in place sound management practices,” it said.

Credit societies are regulated by the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, and not by the RBI. They can accept deposits only from its members and lend only to its members. They can’t issue cheques payable to the public or offer full banking services like online fund transfer.

It has been two decades since the licensing of UCBs was put on hold by the RBI as it was found that a large number of the newly licensed UCBs became financially unsound within a short period. The High-Powered Committee on Urban Co-operative Banks — led by R Gandhi — recommended UCB licenses only for financially sound and well-managed co-operative credit societies having a minimum track record of five years. “Five years may be too short a period to judge the performance of a co-operative society. Hence, active operations for at least 10 years and a good financial track record of at least five years are desirable from a co-operative credit society to apply,” the RBI note said. To analyse the financials, assessed capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) should not be less than 12 per cent and the net non-performing assets (NNPA) ratio should not be more than 3 per cent at the time of grant of license to the eligible applicant, it said. However, the paper listed several factors against granting new UCB licences. “Capital raising remains a problem. The distinct characteristics of shares of UCBs, in terms of refundability and their linkage to borrowing, add to the volatility of such capital and undermine the concept of capital as a loss absorber for the entity. This also challenges the very concept of perpetuity of share capital,” it said.

It said that the concept of one member one vote, regardless of shareholding, has been a deterrent in attracting growth capital into the sector and resolution of weak banks. “The principle of entry and exit of shareholders at face value does not provide any incentive to investors and makes buying shares of a co-operative bank an unattractive investment proposition,” the paper said.

Though there have been amendments to Banking Regulation Act, 1949, multiple legal challenges to these amendments and related RBI circulars in various courts have slowed the process of strengthening governance in UCBs. “Analysis of UCBs whose licenses were cancelled during the period 2020-25 reveals many instances related to governance failure or management fraud, especially in small UCBs,” the RBI said. Directors on boards and senior management in UCBs are often found to lack adequate domain knowledge and expertise. Often, UCBs are being penalised for director related lending which is prohibited, the paper said.

As on March 31, 2025, the number of UCBs totalled 1,457, comprising 838 tier 1 (57.52 per cent), 535 tier 2, 78

trade

Official data shows that India and Iran had direct bilateral goods trade worth nearly \$1.6 billion in FY25, dramatically lower compared to pre-Covid levels when the total trade stood at nearly \$15 billion, largely driven by crude imports from Iran, which stopped in early FY20. Iranian crude exports to India in FY19 stood at \$12 billion, while exports also neared \$4 billion in FY19. This was despite Iran being thrown out of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) banking system in 2011, as both countries managed trade via a Vostro account. A Vostro account is typically maintained by a domestic bank on behalf of a foreign bank, in the domestic currency, to facilitate settlement of cross-border transactions. India has not imported any Iranian oil since May-June of 2019 when the sanctions waivers given by the US to India and a few other countries, allowing them to import the otherwise sanctioned Iranian crude, expired. Iran used to be India’s second-largest crude oil supplier before New Delhi significantly cut oil imports from Tehran between 2012 and 2015, amid targeted US sanctions against Iran.

Then, following the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — inked between Iran and the US, UK, France, Germany, China, Russia and the European Union, international sanctions on Iran’s petroleum sector were eased. This led to Indian refiners ramping up oil imports from Iran from early 2019, and Tehran reclaimed its position as a top source of crude for India within a few months. But in 2018, the first Trump administration walked away from the JCPOA, leading to re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran, forcing India to wind down and stop imports of Iranian oil by the summer of 2019. As the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed product-specific sanctions in 2019, India-Iran trade was further curtailed. India’s investment in Chabahar port Beyond trade, India has considerable investments in the Chabahar port due to its strategic importance. The port serves as the closest route to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe, amid strained ties with Pakistan. According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India has already supplied port equipment worth about \$24 million to develop the Chabahar Port until 2024.

In 2018, an Indian company, India Ports Global Limited, through its wholly owned subsidiary, India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone, took over the operations of Chabahar Port, and in 2024, IPGL signed a 10-year contract with the Ports and Maritime Organisation of Iran for equipping and operating the Shahid Beheshti Terminal of Chabahar Port. “The grant assistance for the supply of equipment has been enhanced to \$120 million. India has also committed to providing a Line of Credit of \$250 million in rupee equivalent for the development of Chabahar Port. Since 2018, the port has handled over 450 vessels, 1,34,082 TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent) of containerised cargo and more than 8.7 million tons of bulk and general cargo,” the MEA has said. World reactions China warned of counter measures against Trump’s decision. “There are no winners in a tariff war, and China will firmly safeguard its own legitimate and lawful rights and interests,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said. Japan and South Korea, which agreed on trade deals with the US last year, said they are closely monitoring the development. With Agencies



tier 3 and six tier 4 UCBs. In terms of deposits, tier 1, tier 2, tier 3 and tier 4 UCBs constituted 11.3 per cent, 30.6 per cent, 34.4 per cent and 23.8 per cent respectively of the total deposits of the sector. As of FY25, 52 per cent of UCBs held deposits of below Rs 100 crore constituting 5.6 per cent of deposits while 7 per cent of UCBs held deposits of above Rs 1000 crore constituting 62.5 per cent of the deposits, the RBI paper said. The total aggregate assets of the UCBs were Rs 7.38 lakh crore, and total deposits Rs 5.84 lakh crore as on March 31, 2025 as compared to Rs 4.35 lakh crore and Rs 3.55 lakh crore respectively in 2015. The asset quality of UCBs — measured by gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio — was 6.2 per cent as of March 31, 2025 with net NPA at 0.7 per cent and provisioning coverage ratio at 90.1 per cent. The comparative figures for 2015 were 6.02 per cent, 2.66 per cent and 57.7 per cent respectively.

# Foxconn-HCL semiconductor JV named India Chip Private Limited

New Delhi: Electronics manufacturing services giant Foxconn and HCL Group have named their semiconductor joint venture as India Chip Private Limited, a regulatory filing said on Wednesday.

Foxconn has already infused USD 3,72,00,000, about Rs 312 crore, in the JV for its 40 per cent stake and may invest up to Rs 424 crore in the semiconductor firm.

In a supplementary explanation regarding the name of the newly established joint venture company, as announced on October 1, 2024, the Foxconn regulatory filing on Wednesday showed that the name has been firmed up as India Chip Private Limited.

HCL Group had submitted the proposal to the Uttar Pradesh government in the name of Vama Sundari for seeking land allocation.

The UP government’s Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) has allocated around 48 acres of land for the JV’s outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) for the display driver integrated circuit.

# Social media is abuzz with the ‘20-second thyroid morning protocol’, internal medicine expert breaks down the routine



Have you been struggling with a sluggish metabolism, cold intolerance, and slow weight loss despite eating a healthy and clean diet? Well, social media seems to have a diagnosis — the ‘20-second thyroid morning protocol’ to regulate or ‘switch on’ the thyroid gland, which is known to drive the body’s metabolism. This includes movements that reduce early-morning stress, loosen stiff muscles, and improve blood flow, such as slow shoulder rolls, deep nasal breathing, or gentle heel drops.

When someone eats far less than their body needs, it triggers a stress response. Cortisol levels rise, and the thyroid-adrenal axis slows down. “Instead of losing weight quickly, people often feel more tired, bloated, mentally foggy, and may even gain weight. This happens because the body is trying to conserve energy, not because of a lack of willpower,” said Dr Amit Saraf, director, internal medicine, Jupiter Hospital, Thane. Adding that when calorie intake suddenly drops, the body reduces the conversion of precursor hormone T4 (thyroxine) into the active hormone T3 (triiodothyronine) to save energy, he elaborated: “In simple words, this mechanism helped humans survive famines in the past, but today it leads to a sluggish metabolism.”

Dr Saraf said that any calming mobility routine helps settle the nervous system, which indirectly supports thyroid function. “They are useful, but they shouldn’t replace structured medical care,” said Dr Saraf. Short routines can help with morning fatigue, but not by directly “switching on” the thyroid, he added.

So, what can be included?

Breathing exercises combined with light mobility work well, said Dr Saraf. “A minute of nasal breathing along with shoulder and neck stretches can relieve morning tension. Eating a nutritious breakfast with protein soon after waking also helps stabilise metabolism throughout the day,” said Dr Saraf.

What is your message for those trying to lose weight while managing thyroid issues? Don’t starve your body, urged Dr Saraf. “Sustainable weight loss comes from balanced eating, regular activity, and good sleep- not extreme dieting. When the body feels properly nourished, the thyroid functions more efficiently, and long-term results improve significantly,” said Dr Saraf.

# Ashish Chanchlani swears by boron for bone health: experts reveal if this trace mineral is actually a ‘miracle’ supplement



In a recent conversation, YouTuber and fitness buff Ashish Chanchlani mentioned taking boron supplements for bone health. “Boron helps you with your bone health. People often overlook boron,” he told Soha Ali Khan on Mashable India. So, we decided to ask an expert about what the supplement is all about. Boron is a trace mineral found in foods like nuts, fruits (especially raisins and prunes), vegetables, and legumes.

Dr Mrinal Prakash, consultant orthopaedics and joint replacement, KIMS Hospitals, Thane, said it helps the body use minerals such as calcium, magnesium, and vitamin D more effectively, which supports bone health. “Supplements are often advertised for joint health, bone strength, and hormonal balance. In sufficient amounts, boron may help maintain bone density and joint function,” explained the expert. Adding that some studies suggest it reduces calcium loss through urine and may support bone strength, especially in older adults, Dr Mrinal continued: “Boron also seems to enhance the availability of testosterone and estrogen, which is why people often take it for hormonal health. Emerging evidence indicates that boron might influence in-

flammation levels (like C-reactive protein), which could be important for joint comfort.”

Does boron help with arthritis or joint pain?

Boron is not a cure for arthritis, but it may play an indirect role.” By supporting bone metabolism and potentially lowering mild inflammation, some people notice an improvement in joint stiffness. However, it should be viewed as a supportive nutrient, not a replacement for medical treatment or physiotherapy,” asserted Dr Mrinal. Taking too much can lead to issues. “High doses over time may result in nausea, digestive discomfort, headaches, or skin irritation. In very large amounts, boron can be toxic and may affect kidney function. The upper limit for adults is generally set at 20 mg per day; it’s best to stay well below this unless a doctor advises otherwise,” said Dr Mrinal. Kidney disease: The kidneys filter boron; impaired kidney function can lead to toxic buildup. Hormone-sensitive conditions: Since boron can raise estrogen and testosterone levels, people with conditions like endometriosis or certain types of breast or prostate cancer should be very careful. Pregnancy/nursing: Pregnant and breastfeeding women should consult a doctor before taking boron. Multi-supplement users: Those already taking several mineral blends should avoid self-prescribing to prevent unintentional overconsumption.

Is supplementation necessary for most people?

For most people, getting boron from food is enough. “A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains usually provides sufficient boron for bone and joint health,” said Dr Mrinal. So, boron can support bone and hormonal health when taken in proper amounts, but it is not a miracle supplement. Dr Mrinal emphasised that long-term skeletal health relies much more on overall nutrition, regular weight-bearing exercise, and medical advice than on any single nutrient.

# Suniel Shetty’s emotional moment with son Ahan offers insight into why early career failures hit so hard: ‘There’s always turmoil in our lives’



Early career failures can hit hard, affecting confidence and identity. Suniel Shetty shared his emotional experience with Ahan’s debut film struggles, while an expert explains how young adults can rebuild self-worth and resilience.

Career setbacks can be emotionally destabilising, especially when they arrive early and publicly. For many young adults, the failure of a first major attempt, whether a job, business, exam, or creative pursuit, can trigger self-doubt, anxiety, and a prolonged period of emotional turmoil. Actor Suniel Shetty recently offered a rare and emotional glimpse into what such a phase can look like within a family. While attending an event in Mumbai to launch a song from Border 2, Suniel appeared alongside his son Ahan Shetty and the film’s team. During the event, the actor, who was part of the original Border, became visibly emotional and broke down while speaking about his son’s journey.

Talking about Ahan landing his second film, Suniel said, “It is his second film aur itni badi film milna... Bahut hi responsible film hai (Getting such a huge film... it is a big responsibility). When Ahan was doing the film, maine tabhi unse kaha tha ke (I told him), ‘Ahan, it is not just uniform. Remember this.’” His voice choked as he spoke, underlin-

ing the weight he associates with responsibility, legacy, and second chances. Suniel also addressed the period following Ahan’s debut film Tadap, which failed to make an impact at the box office. Reflecting on that phase, he said, “After his first film, there was a little break in (his life and career). You know, there’s always turmoil in our lives. Sab bolte hain ke Suniel Shetty ka beta hai kaam toh bahut hi milta hai (Everyone says that he is Suniel Shetty’s son, so he must be getting a lot of work).” He pushed back against the assumption that proximity to success automatically shields someone from struggle. Continuing, Suniel added, “But somewhere or the other, there’s a lot that Ahan went through in life. But I am happy that he got Border 2 as his second film. Usse badiya film nahi mil sakti. And I just pray that he has done justice and the film works for all of us.”

But why do early career failures tend to hit young adults so hard psychologically?

Sonal Khangarot, licensed rehabilitation counsellor and psychotherapist, The Answer Room, tells indianexpress.com, “Early career failures hit young adults hard because, at this stage, work is closely tied to identity, self-worth, and the sense of ‘becoming someone.’ Psychologically, young adults are still consolidating their self-concept, so professional setbacks are not experienced as isolated events but as evidence about who they are and what they’re capable of.” Validation from work often substitutes for internal validation, she adds, making failure feel like a personal inadequacy rather than a situational outcome. “Social comparison intensifies the impact, as peers’ visible successes reinforce feelings of falling behind. Even when told that more opportunities will come, the emotional brain prioritises present threat over future reassurance, interpreting failure as a risk to stability, belonging, and personal growth rather than just a professional hurdle,” notes Khangarot.

Healthy ways for individuals to rebuild confidence and identity after a career disappointment Khangarot states, “Career setbacks can deeply disrupt confidence and identity, especially when work is closely tied to self-worth. Rebuilding requires emotional processing, separating identity from outcomes, and restoring a sense of agency. With supportive reflection and time, disappointment can be integrated as a growth phase rather than a defining personal failure.”



# Maharashtra men’s and women’s teams reach Senior National Kho Kho Championship final



Hyderabad: Defending champions Maharashtra and last year’s runners-up Odisha entered the women’s final, while Railways and Maharashtra reached the men’s final in the 58th Senior National Kho Kho Championship at Kazipet Railway Stadium in Hanamkonda on Wednesday.In the closely contested men’s semi-final on Wednesday night, Maharashtra narrowly defeated Kolhapur with a score of 29-27.

Indian team captain Pratik Rawal of the Maharashtra team scored six points with skydives and played for two crucial minutes, while Shubham Utekar scored eight points. For Kolhapur, Mazhar scored 8 points, and Rajyavardhan Patil played for 1.30 and 1.20 minutes in two turns.In the other semi-final, defending champions Railways easily de-

feated Odisha with a score of 25-17 to enter the final. International player Ramji Kashyap of the Maharashtra team scored 6 points and played for 2.30 minutes, while Rahul Mandal scored 4 points and played for 2.14 minutes, leading Maharashtra to the final.In the women’s semi-final, Maharashtra defeated Delhi 27-6. Indian captain Priyanka Ingle put up an all-round show for the winners. She played for 4.50 minutes and also scored two crucial points. Supporting her, Ashwini Shinde contributed with a timing of 2.10 minutes.

In the other semi-final, Odisha defeated the Airport Authority of India with a score difference of 27-19 to reach the final. For Odisha, Ranjita Bari scored 6 points and played for 1.40 minutes, playing a key role in the team’s victory. Archana Pradhan from Odisha played for 3.20 minutes.Earlier, in the pre-quarterfinal, Andhra Pradesh shocked host Telangana 28-21 in the men’s pre-quarterfinal.Telangana lost due to the defenders not performing as expected, lack of coordination among the players, excessive fouls during chasing, and failed strategies.Defenders G. Sudheer and B. Naresh each played two minutes, while T. Nirikshan and N. Rakesh scored four points each. Kiran from the Andhra Pradesh team played a key role in the team’s victory with his all-round performance, played two minutes and 1.5 min. of timing along with four crucial points. Rammohan and Narasayya also performed well and contributed to the Andhra team’s victory.

## A village of 3240 throws up India’s first U-19 World Cup hero

By evening, U-19 hero Henil Patel’s family in Gujarat’s Juiwa village had lost its voice. Phone calls had been pouring in from relatives, friends and acquaintances since the first of the five wickets the medium pacer grabbed in the opening fixture of the U-19 World Cup against the USA, which India won by six wickets. His father Dilip’s words stagger, laughter and hurrahs crackle in the background, like its festival. Dilip, his voice withering from hysteria, politely asks: “Baad mein baat kar sakte hain, bhai?” He says he is tired of phone calls and visitors. And snaps the phone with whistles shrieking in the background, before the revelries resume and would probably leap into the night.

A video from a local television channel before Henil left for the World Cup shows what Henil means to Juiwa, some 15 kilometres away from the textile city of Valsad, but with a mere population of 3240 people. Almost the entire village has assembled in his modest house. He reluctantly leaves his house, through a smokescreen of confetti. He poses with a long line of relatives and friends before squeezing into a silver SUV. The only video that shows as many people assembled was during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit three years ago to lay the foundation of a water supply scheme.

It was just around the time that the boy who idolises Dale Steyn took trials in a camp organised by the Gujarat Cricket Association at the Bulsar District Cricket Association’s ground. Remembers Jayesh Malka, a former first-class cricketer and one of his former coaches: “I was impressed by his build. He looked strong for a 15-year old, as teens from the villages usually are. He was energetic and had a natural, repeatable action. So we took him, and he did the rest. He was a hardworking boy, always bowling, always looking to learn new things.” BDCA vice-president Dharmin C Desai says he has never seen him lazing around. “He is always doing something, batting or bowling or fielding, or talking to a coach,” he says.

The other enduring image of Henil that comes to Desai’s mind is his love for father. “If he is there at the ground, he always takes blessings from the father. Before every game, he talks to him. He has said that he got the love of the game from his father, who always encouraged him, though they didn’t have a sportsman in the family or he didn’t always have the financial resources to support him,” he says.Dilip worked in a private company, says he didn’t have many connections, but kept supporting him. “I didn’t have any VIP connections, or knew how things worked. I told him just to work hard, and he did that. He was fully committed to the game,” he says.

The sacrifices found its rewards in Bulawayo. Henil swung the ball both ways, from a long run-up and smooth action, the wrists flicking dextrously at the point of release

## Aman Mokhade’s 138, Darshan Nalkande’s 5/48 powers Vidarbha into Vijay Hazare Trophy final with 6-wicket win over Karnataka

GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Karnataka’s Devdutt Padikkal and Vidarbha’s Aman Mokhade walked into the first Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025–26 semi-final at Bengaluru’s CoE ground, separated by 78 runs at the top of the tournament run charts.

On Thursday, it was the latter who emerged with both the numbers and the result. While Padikkal, the tournament’s leading run-scorer with 721 runs coming into the game, was dismissed for four, Mokhade’s decisive 138 off 122 balls not only took him past the left-hander but also helped Vidarbha seal a place in the final by six wickets.Chasing 281 runs, Vidarbha lost Atharva Taide early when he was dismissed for six in the fourth over by Abhilash Shetty. The onus then fell on Mokhade and Dhruv Shorey to rebuild. The pair negotiated an incisive opening burst from Shetty and Vidwath Kaverappa, with runs hard to come by early on as they focused on strike rotation and minimising risk.Mokhade and Shorey brought up their 50-run stand in the 17th over as Karnataka searched for a second breakthrough. That wicket finally came in the 24th over when Shetty returned to dismiss Shorey for 47, ending a 98-run stand.However, Mokhade, who had reached his half-century one over earlier, kept things steady, balancing caution with timely aggression, ensuring the required run rate never rose to alarming levels.

Karnataka were further hampered when Vijaykumar Vyshak had to leave the field after suffering a concussion. His replacement, Manvanth Kumar, struggled to make an impact, allowing Vidarbha to seize the initiative.Ravikumar Samarth, who played all his cricket with Karnataka for a

decade from 2013–14 to 2023–24, joined Mokhade in the middle, and the pair built steadily on the platform. With leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal unable to extract sufficient purchase from the surface, Karnataka were forced to rely on their pacers.On an easing pitch, Mokhade and Samarth continued to chip away at the target with minimal risk. Mokhade brought up his hundred in the 35th over with a leg-glance for four off Vidyadhar Patil. The right-hander opened up after reaching the landmark and, in the company of Samarth, upped the ante under the lights. Mokhade eventually fell with 27 runs still needed, which were knocked off by Samarth and Rohit Binkar.Earlier, a 113-run fourth-wicket stand between Karun Nair and wicketkeeper-batter KL Shrijiith formed the bedrock of Karnataka reaching 280 all out after 49.4 overs. The pair rebuilt the innings from 74/3 in contrasting but complementary styles.

Nair stayed largely orthodox, trusting his defence and focusing on strike rotation, while Shrijiith provided the release with more audacious strokeplay. The contrast was evident in the 28th over when Shrijiith reverse-swept Dubey for a boundary.Vidarbha’s excellent new-ball bowling set the tone. Yash Thakur and Nachiket Bhute created sustained pressure, with the biggest blow coming in the fourth over when Padikkal fell for four to a lovely outswinger from Thakur.Despite the platform laid by Nair and Shrijiith, Vidarbha found a way back through Darshan Nalkande, who finished with 5/48 from 10 overs, removing Nair for 76 to bring an end to the decisive partnership.Brief Scores: Karnataka 280 all out in 49.4 overs (Nair 76, Shrijiith 54; Nalkande 5/48) lost to Vidarbha 284/4 in 46.2 overs (Mokhade 138, Samarth 76 not out) by six wickets.

## FIDE announce major overhauls to Circuit path for Candidates qualification, to merge next two cycles into one



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

FIDE, the International Chess Federation, has announced a comprehensive overhaul of its Circuit Rating system, one of the pathways to the prestigious Candidates Tournament, for the upcoming 2026-27 cycle. The most important update is the merger of the next two years into a single, unified circuit. This replaces the previous annual cycle, which saw Fabiano Caruana and R. Praggnanandhaa secure their Candidates 2026 spots through the 2024 and 2025 circuits, respectively.

FIDE’s statement reads, “For the first time, the FIDE Circuit will operate over a two-year cycle. Instead of an annual ranking, results from the 2026 and 2027 seasons will be combined into a single Circuit ranking. A player’s final score will be calculated as the sum of their twelve highest event scores achieved across the two-year period, or all event scores if fewer than twelve are available.”Newly introduced balance rules place a firm emphasis on classical chess. When a final score is calculated from eleven or

## ‘Kuldeep and Jadeja are world class bowlers’: Daryl Mitchell backs India tweakers to come good

GNS News Agency, Jan 19

Even though India’s spin duo of Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav failed to make much of an impact in the 2nd ODI in Rajkot on Wednesday, New Zealand’s Daryl Mitchell said that the Indian tweakers will come good. “Kuldeep and Jadeja are world class bowlers. They find ways to put pressure on us and they’re some of the best spinners going around. We were lucky enough to build partnerships and find ways to put pressure on them. I’ve also seen them tear through teams in the past,” Mitchell said.Mitchell, the player of the match for his 131\*, helped guide the Kiwis to a 7-wicket series-levelling win on Wednesday, also opened up on how he prepared for the tracks of the Indian subcontinent.

“There’s been plenty, plenty mornings in the marquee down in the South Island in Lincoln on some prepared dusty wickets to try and find ways to come up with game plans in this part of the world,” Mitchell told reporters.“That’s the stuff that a lot of people don’t see...the work that you put in, away from the shiny lights and the TV, but it’s always nice I guess when you get the rewards from that. I just love playing for my country, I love travelling the world and playing international cricket and I am very lucky to do that across all three formats,” Mitchell added.The batter has been in a red-hot form against India in their backyard, having notched up scores of 130, 134, 84 and 131 not out in the last four outings. In the subcontinent, he has scored 1,457 ODI runs at 56.03 with five centuries and six fifties. From 15 matches in

twelve events, no more than four of those may be rapid or blitz tournaments. Furthermore, to promote participation in stronger fields, limits are placed on events with smaller turn-outs. For scores based on eleven results, no more than seven events can have fewer than 50 participants; for twelve results, the limit is eight. These thresholds are proportionally reduced for scores based on ten or fewer tournaments.

Eligibility for Candidates qualification via the Circuit now requires a minimum of eight eligible tournaments. Of these, at least five must be standard classical time-control events. Depending on the total number of tournaments counted, a specific minimum of these classical events must also have had 50 or more participants. Notably, events where a player scores zero points can still count toward meeting the participation requirements.To highlight performance in large open events, a new Open Circuit sub-ranking has been created. This ranking will only include tournaments with over 50 participants, and top performers within it will earn qualification opportunities for elite FIDE competitions like the Total Chess Tour, strengthening the link between open tournaments and the top-level pathway.

Further technical adjustments include revising how tournament strength is calculated; the average rating will now be based on the top twelve players instead of the top eight. The minimum average rating for rapid and blitz events to be Circuit-eligible has been lowered from 2700 to 2650. The Total Chess World Championship Tour is now formally integrated into the Circuit, with its results counting toward scores. Finally, bonus scoring for the World Championship match runner-up has been recalibrated, with its coefficient reduced to 1.5 to better balance match performance against consistent tournament results.



India, he has garnered 801 runs at 66.75 with three tons and as many fifties. In Pakistan, he has 576 runs in 12 matches at 48 with two centuries and two fifties, whereas he’s yet to play ODIs in Sri Lanka.“(For) us as New Zealanders, we don’t grow up on these surfaces, we grow up on bouncy, grassy wickets and the nature of playing international cricket is you have to find ways to adapt your game,” he said.“I’m comfortable with how I want to go about my batting in these conditions, trying to find ways to put the bowlers under pressure. Whether that’s using feet, sweep (shot), using the crease, there are different ways that you try and find ways to put pressure on them (opposition),” he said.“For me, it’s been a learning process over several years now,” Mitchell added.

## Javelin star Sachin Yadav to get training machine made famous by Germans



GNS News Agency, Jan 19

World Athletics Championships fourth-place finisher Sachin Yadav’s wish for a javelin training machine will soon be fulfilled with the Mission Olympic Cell approving its procurement.The Javelin Throwing Machine, modelled along the lines of the Kraft Trainings Gerät (KTG), used by German athletes over the years, will be installed at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

The throwing machine develops javelin-specific strength and release speed through weighted sled throws. The machine has a sled attached to it, which weighs 3.8 kilograms and it can be loaded with as much as 10kg for a maximum weight of 13.8 kg. Athletes can push the sled at an upward angle.Uwe John, the only athlete to throw over 100 metres and Neeraj Chopra’s former coach, was one of the first to use the machine in the 1980s in Germany.India had earlier become the third country, after Germany and China, to have such specialized equipment when a machine similar to the Kraft Training Gerät was installed by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) at the Netaji Subhas

## Senior Kho Kho nationals in Kazipet: RSPB, Maharashtra clinch titles; top players honoured

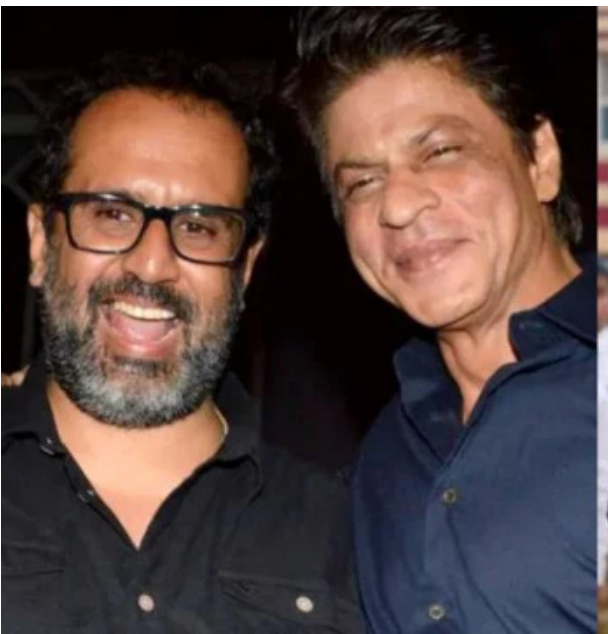
Hyderabad: In high-octane finals, defending champions Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) and Maharashtra clinched titles in men’s and women’s categories respectively in the 58th Senior National Kho Kho Championship at the Railway Stadium in Kazipet, Telangana, on Thursday.

While Railways (Men) registered victory for the second time in a row, Maharashtra (Women) clinched the title for the fifth consecutive time.In the Women’s category, Maharashtra defeated Odisha by a slim margin of one point in a tightly contested 23-22 match. In the Men’s category, Railways triumphed over Maharashtra in a thrilling 26-21 final with several nail-biting moments.Both Railways (Men)

and Maharashtra (Women) had won the 57th Senior National Kho Kho Championship held at Puri, Odisha, from March 31 to April 4, 2025. Interestingly, both Odisha and Maharashtra won silver in the women’s and men’s categories for the second time.In the women’s final, Maharashtra displayed excellent defence with Sandhya Survasse holding on to the mat for 2:30 minutes, while Kho Kho World Cup captain Priyanka Ingle held her ground for 2:00 minutes. Ingle was also outstanding in attack, scoring 10 points in total. Archana Pradhan of Odisha executed excellent defensive manoeuvres in the final match.In the men’s final, Pratik Waikar of Maharashtra stayed on the mat for 1.55 seconds, giving an excellent defensive display,



# Anand L Rai reflects on Zero’s failure: ‘I couldn’t incorporate Shah Rukh Khan’s stardom into the character’



Shah Rukh Khan’s 2018 film Zero was a major box office debacle. Following the failure of the Anand L Rai directorial, the superstar even went on a four-year hiatus. The film also starred Katrina Kaif and Anushka Sharma in lead roles. In a recent interview, Anand opened up about the reasons behind Zero’s failure despite Shah Rukh Khan’s stardom, and revealed that he and the actor nevertheless enjoyed the process of working together. In a conversation

with Galatta Plus, Anand L Rai admitted that he made the mistake of not incorporating Shah Rukh Khan’s stardom into the character he played in Zero. “The problem with Zero was that, that man..that superstar came to me with so much of love and me being me, I never understood that it’s not an actor director who was going to make a story. There was a superstar attached, his image is there, which I have to understand and get in the film. I was working with an actor, a big actor. I realised much later that there is an image that I had to take care of,” he said.

Anand added, “When you say that my films are without the baggage of a star, somewhere I agree that maybe I am unable to incorporate that stardom in my characters. At times, people want to see their stars in a character, but a part of the star should also be there, which I was unable to do. I was floating, those bearings were not there, they were moved.” However, Anand L Rai recalled that the entire process of shooting Zero with Shah Rukh Khan was a rewarding experience for both him and the superstar. “But, was I enjoying the journey? I was. More than me, Shah Rukh was. Later on, that was more scary. One of us should have stopped and said, ‘Hello, it’s not just actor director, there is a star.’ He never brought it in front of me, I never understood that and somewhere I lost that thing. Maybe, things would have been different!” he shared. Zero was written by Himanshu Sharma and produced by Colour Yellow Productions, in collaboration with Red Chillies Entertainment. The film also featured Abhay Deol, R Madhavan, and Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub. Made on a reported budget of Rs 200 crore, the 2018 film was a major box office failure, earning around Rs 180-190 crore worldwide.

# Ramesh Sippy reveals Sholay’s budget swelled from Rs 1 crore to Rs 3 crore: ‘Newspapers declared the film a flop’

Sholay completed 50 years this August, and about three months after its anniversary, the makers re-released the film across India—this time with its original ending, the one in which Gabbar dies. What is celebrated as a phenomenon today once faced the same scrutiny that many big-budget films face even now. Conversations about Sholay’s budget were similar to the chatter around the budgets of films like Akshay Kumar’s Bade Miyan Chote Miyan and Ram Charan’s Game Changer. Trade experts back then were convinced that a film with such a massive budget would destroy the industry and disrupt livelihoods. Many even declared that it would be a flop from which the makers would never recover their investment. And when the film finally released, it seemed that way. The opening weekend was silent.

Ramesh Sippy was shocked and was prepared to change the climax again—this would have been the third version. But the writers, Javed Akhtar and Salim Khan, remained confident that the film would eventually break records, and they were right. Recalling those days, director Ramesh Sippy told Siddharth Kannan: “Newspapers declared Sholay a flop. They wrote that the investment was too high, that the makers would never recover it. They even claimed that such expensive films would destroy the industry. If filmmakers continued spending like this, the industry would sink. But five weeks later, they took back their words and admitted they were wrong.” He also revealed the film’s budget: “The film’s initial budget was Rs 1 crore, but we ended up making it for Rs 3 crore. Rs 1 crore then is equal to about Rs 100 crore today.” When the film failed to create buzz during its opening weekend, the rest of the industry celebrated. “The industry was happy. They said, ‘Good that the big film didn’t work.’” Ramesh Sippy



explained: “This was the discussion among distributors, exhibitors, and producers. They thought the film would destroy them. People thought we were crazy to make something so expensive.” just as many films today undergo major changes due to censor board interventions, Sholay faced similar challenges. “I had to reshoot the climax because of the censor board,” he recalled, adding, “They said, ‘Sanjeev Kumar is playing a police officer—how can he take someone’s life?’ According to them, he couldn’t kill Gabbar; Gabbar had to be sent to jail.”

“This was during the Emergency. You couldn’t argue with anyone. If the censor board ordered a change, you had no choice. I had to return to Bangalore and shoot the climax all over again.” What Ramesh Sippy couldn’t do 50 years ago, he has finally done now by restoring the original ending in the re-release. “In the re-release, we will show you the original ending. I felt terrible when they asked me to change it. Why should the censor tell me how to make my film?”

# Richa Chadha says ‘people displayed cruelty’ towards her during her vulnerable phase, betrayed her: ‘Mai bikau nahi hu’



Richa Chadha, who made her Bollywood debut with Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye! (2008), shot to fame with Anurag Kashyap’s Gangs of Wasseypur (2012), followed by Fukrey (2013) and its sequels in 2017 and 2023.

Richa Chadha, who made her Bollywood debut with Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye! (2008), shot to fame with Anurag Kashyap’s Gangs of Wasseypur (2012), followed by Fukrey (2013) and its sequels in 2017 and 2023. For many fans, she remains synonymous with her popular character Bholi Punjabi. She further cemented her place as a powerhouse performer with acclaimed projects like Masaan and Heeramandi. But, after embracing motherhood and welcoming her daughter Zuni with her husband, actor Ali Fazal, Richa stepped away from the spotlight for nearly two years.

Now, as she returns to work, the actor has shared a deeply emotional note on Instagram, revealing that her hiatus was caused not only by pregnancy and postpartum re-

covery but also by “deep professional betrayals.” Richa Chadha posted a series of photos and videos featuring her daughter and loved ones who have stood by her over the years. The actor wrote, “On Sunday, I went back to work after nearly 2 years. As much as I would have liked to get back sooner, my body, my mind wasn’t ready at all. But other than these tangible issues, I have had to deal with deep professional betrayals from close quarters.” She continued, “I have learnt that in the industry, a rare few have ethics and courage. Most people operate from such deep-seated inferiority complexes and scarcity mentality that they never mean what they say. They’re never happy — like dementors, they suck all joy out of life.” In another note, Richa reflected on the treatment she received during her most vulnerable phase: “Those that have displayed cruelty towards me during my most vulnerable phase perhaps never received adequate love in their own lives. I forgive, but I NEVER forget. Please bear this in mind should you cross my path. You know who you are.” One of her posts included an image of Goddess Kali with the caption, “Are you scared? Good.” Richa Chadha also shared a picture of the women who have supported her — Shabana Azmi, Dia Mirza, Divya Dutta, Urmila Matondkar, Konkona Sen Sharma, and Vidya Balan — thanking them for their unwavering presence. “If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes amazing support to help the mom — because Mommy doesn’t remember who she was before the baby was born. The mental recovery took longer than I hoped,” she wrote. She went on to reflect on how social media has evolved, noting that Instagram — once a place for random, casual posts — has become a content-driven marketplace. “Everyone tells you to post more, create more ‘content,’ but I am not employed by SM. I have a life. And I have been so afraid to share the littlest snippet from it, lest I receive podcast invites to ‘talk about it,’ with cameras zooming in on every tear.” He added, “I miss the days when IG used to be a place where you uploaded photos of what you ate and other mundane things.”

Critiquing the commodification of personal struggles online, Richa wrote: “

# Actor’s superstar dad left him when he was 5; Aamir Khan took Taare Zameen Par from him, now he is Bollywood’s most admired



In the film industry, not everyone arrives with the same kind of luck or destiny. Some, like Shah Rukh Khan, seem to be propelled from the very beginning by a circle of people rooting for their success. Others—Manoj Bajpayee, Pankaj Tripathi, Rajpal Yadav—grind through decades before receiving the recognition they deserve. Then there are star kids like Hrithik Roshan and Ahaan Panday, who become overnight sensations, and star kids like Khushi Kapoor, who keep delivering film after film yet still wait for that resounding nod of audience acceptance.

And in the middle of these extremes came an actor in 1997: Akshaye Khanna. A star kid himself, the son of the legendary Vinod Khanna—once considered Amitabh Bachchan’s only real competition—Akshaye didn’t burst onto the scene with instant success. But he quietly carved his own space, and nearly three decades later, he’s finally receiving the respect and admiration that always seemed destined for him. 2025 has been a watershed year for Akshaye Khanna. His performance in Dhurandhar is being celebrated but it is his dance to the Fa9la song that has enamoured fans, taken over social media and turned him into ‘national crush’. Akshaye Khanna dances to Fa9la in Dhurandhar. Akshaye Khanna’s viral moment to Fa9la song in Dhurandhar.

How Akshaye became a viral sensation

First, his chilling turn as Aurangzeb in Chhava caught the industry’s eye. Then came Dhurandhar’s Rehman Dakait, where his performance outshone even Ranveer Singh. At 50, he has become the unexpected star of his generation—by sheer craft, not noise. Despite nearly 30 years in cinema, Akshaye’s filmography is surprisingly lean: just 48 films. He’s never been the actor seen hopping between interviews or courting publicity. In fact, he often disappeared for long stretches, but it wasn’t a voluntary decision. “For me, not working is the hardest part of being an actor. It is depression time,” he told Mid-Day. “I’m the opposite of someone who looks forward to six months off. But destiny played its cards—I ended up taking forced breaks, not by choice. It’s very hard when you aren’t getting material you connect with.” Born into film royalty, Akshaye always knew he wanted to become an actor. “I just knew it,” he once told Simi Garewal. His journey began in his teens. After school, he joined HR College—where he promptly flunked out. His parents sent him to a boarding school in Ooty for classes 11 and 12, after which he began

working. “I’m not well-educated,” he admitted candidly. Though Vinod Khanna left the family to join Osho when Akshaye was just five, the acting spark in him came from observing his father. “I spent a lot of time on his sets. That influenced me a lot. I have stage fear,” he said. Akshaye debuted in 1997 with Himalaya Putra, produced by his father. The film didn’t succeed, but it gave Vinod Khanna hope that his son had talent worth betting on. Dil Chahta Hai Akshaye Khanna, Aamir Khan and Saif Ali Khan in a still from Dil Chahta Hai.

To his credit, Akshaye followed it up with powerful performances in Border (1997), Taal (1999), Dil Chahta Hai (2001), Hungama (2003), LOC Kargil (2003), Hulchul (2004), and Race (2008). These roles cemented his reputation, even as several of his promising films were abruptly shelved. He was signed by Feroz Khan for a film that later went to Fardeen Khan. Farhan Akhtar shelved Voice From the Sky to make Don 2. Akshaye was also supposed to do Taare Zameen Par, which Aamir Khan eventually took over. Narrating the incident, he told Mid-Day: “Amole Gupte told Aamir, ‘I want to narrate this script to Akshaye.’ Aamir said, ‘I won’t recommend it unless I hear it.’ He ended up liking it so much that he took it up. He told me at Mehboob Studio.”

Vinod Khanna left family, career for Osho when Akshaye was 5. Akshaye’s childhood was unconventional. His father, then at the peak of his stardom, left everything behind to join Osho in the United States. “When dad went to the Ashram, I was five. I didn’t understand what was happening,” he told Simi Garewal. “But I had a happy, secure childhood.” He elaborated: “I believe in being self-centred for your own life. Unless you’re happy, you can’t make others happy. I terribly missed my father, but I had a secure childhood.”

Despite the distance, he maintained strong relationships with both parents. “Something in him moved very deeply to take that decision,” he said of his father joining Osho. “He stayed with it. He only returned because of the situation around Osho in the US.” On Osho himself, Akshaye admitted, “I love Osho. I’ve watched multiple videos and read a lot about him. I have deep respect for him.” He lost both his parents within two years—his father in 2017 and his mother in 2018. Today, Akshaye is 50 and single. Though rumoured to have dated a few well-known actresses, including Karisma Kapoor, he has never confirmed anything. “Love is extremely important,” he told Simi Garewal. “I would love to have someone in my life, but I don’t. I like people who are alive. I never had a serious relationship; maybe I am scared of getting hurt.” When asked if this stemmed from his parents’ relationship? “It could be subconscious,” he admitted. “I have issues with commitments and vows. How can you tell someone you’ll love them the same thirty years from now?” Speaking to Hindustan Times, he added: “I don’t see myself getting married. I’m not marriage material. Marriage changes everything. I want full control over my life—you can’t have that when you share it with someone.” Up next, Akshaye Khanna will be seen in the Telugu film Mahakali and Drishyam 3—a career resurgence no one saw coming, except perhaps those who always believed he was one of the most underrated actors of his generation.

# Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt’s daughter Raha runs holding her mom’s hand at airport, fans call her ‘Mini Diva’.

Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt are set for another family vacation, as they do every December. The actor couple was spotted at the Mumbai airport on Friday with their adorable daughter Raha Kapoor. Their latest paparazzi appearance has once again left fans in awe of Raha. In clips going viral, the little one is seen running while holding her mother Alia’s hand. While Ranbir donned an olive green co-ord set paired with a white t-shirt and shoes for the outing, Alia, on the other hand, wore a casual outfit — a white top, light blue jeans, sliders, and she completed her look with a brown bag. In the video, Raha is spotted in a cute beige co-ord set with a pair of super cool white sunglasses.

Several fans reacted to the heartwarming family moment and dropped lovely comments on social media, with most of them in awe of Raha. A fan wrote, “Omg Raha mini Diva.” Another person commented, “Raha with sunglasses on!” “Raha running inside haha,” a third comment read. A user wrote, “This family is so adorable.”

At the Red Sea International Film Festival recently, Alia Bhatt opened up about how her little daughter Raha Kapoor has now turned three. Reflecting on her life before and after having a child and how things change, she shared, “Now Raha has her own relationship with the paparazzi, and is old enough to ask me where I am going, and when I will be back.” The actor was honoured with the Golden Globes Horizon Award at the fifth edition of the film festival



in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, on the work front, both Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor didn’t have any releases this year. Alia will next be seen in YRF’s Alpha, the next instalment of their spy-verse. The movie also features Sharvati, and is set to hit the theatres in April 2026. On the other hand, Ranbir is currently shooting for Nitesh Tiwari’s Ramayana, in which he will be playing the role of Lord Ram. It also stars Sai Pallavi and Yash. The actor couple also has Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s Love and War in the pipeline, along with Vicky Kaush

# Dhurandhar actor Madhavan says he makes note of critics who prematurely write off films: ‘They use words like disaster...’

People knew that Dhurandhar was releasing, but no one anticipated it would become such a blockbuster. Many trade experts predicted that despite its long runtime and soaring ticket prices, the film would open big because of its strong content. But even before these predictions surfaced, actor R Madhavan was convinced that Aditya Dhar was headed for massive success.

The movie released on December 5 to mixed reactions, yet Madhavan had “been there, done that” and felt certain about how things would play out. He had witnessed a similar scenario during the release of Rang De Basanti—a film that initially faced skepticism but went on to dominate the box office and is now considered one of the most impactful films of its era. It won a National Award and was India’s official entry to the Golden Globes and the Oscars that year. Madhavan, who has played the role of Ajay Sanyal in Dhurandhar, revealed that he makes note of critics who prematurely write off films.

“I note down people who call it ‘the end.’ Some critics genuinely review a film—they’re either very new or very seasoned and understand what reviewing means. But there are others who, on the day of release or even before it, use words like ‘disaster’ in their headline. That reduces their relevance for us. As actors, we dream of moments like this—when people dismiss a film at first and are then shocked by its success,” the actor-filmmaker told Pooja Talwar. Madhavan recalled the atmosphere around Rang De Basanti nearly two decades ago. “I remember when Rang De Basanti was about to release, several distributors backed out. After the first show, they said, ‘This film is too long, not our kind of movie, we can’t carry this.’ Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra was sitting near the TV, his head between his knees, in Delhi. He said, ‘After this, I’ll have to go back to my village. I don’t understand anything beyond this—I can’t make a better film.’ He was distraught. Aamir, Ronnie Screwvala—we were all in the same room.” He added: