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New Year Greetings To The CM, Appeal For The Development Of The District

"Indian Chronicle" kumram bheem, Asifabad District Report, Jade Srinivas, January 03. "Kumram Bheem Asifabad District DCC President Atram Suguna, DCC President Vishwa Prasad, and MLC Dande Vittal extended New Year greetings to Telangana CM Revanth Reddy. Expressing their greetings on behalf of the people of the district, they asked for high priority to be given to the development of the district. Since a large population lives in villages in the district, they appealed to construct roads from mandals to villages."

Revanth: Won't allow any injustice to TG

Hyderabad, Jan 3 Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy made it clear that Telangana will draw water from Jurala in case the departments concerned failed to give permission to take water from Srisailam back waters for the Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme (PRLIS). "We will see who will obstruct Telangana. God gave an opportunity to me to become CM. I vow to God, I will not allow anyone to do injustice to Telangana," Revanth said. Giving reply to the short discussion on 'Krishna river waters' in the Legislative Assembly on Saturday, the CM said the government thought that it would prepare an action plan after the debate on the Krishna waters. But Opposition leader K Chandrasekhar Rao did not come to the House. It proved that the BRS leaders have a dismissive attitude towards the Assembly discussions, Revanth commented. The CM said the BRS party demanded the government for a debate on the Krishna waters even in the BAC meeting. KCR also said earlier that they would skin the government if they conducted a special Assembly session on Krishna waters. However, KCR did not come to the Assembly, he said. "We thought that KCR has been in politics for 45 years and he may give valuable suggestions. I thought to ask KCR as to why he committed a mis-



take with regard to Krishna waters? Whether it is intentional or due to a misleading suggestion," the CM said. Revanth Reddy said that Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy gave a detailed power-point presentation on Krishna waters. The dispute is not only between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana but also with Karnataka. "We have to fight for our rights with Karnataka as well," he said.

The CM said Telangana got 490 TMCs of Krishna waters allocation for 24 projects in the united Andhra Pradesh state.

Major Setback to CPI (Maoist): 20 Cadres, Including Top Commanders Deva and Raji Reddy, Surrender Before Telangana DGP

"Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 3 (Indian Chronicle)" "Hyderabad, January 3, 2026: In a significant blow to the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), 20 underground cadres, including senior commanders Badse Sukka alias Deva (PLGA Battalion Commander and Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee Member) and Kankana Raji Reddy alias Venkatesh (Telangana State Committee Member), surrendered before Telangana Director General of Police B. Shivadhar Reddy on Saturday. The surrendered group handed over a substantial cache of 48 firearms—including AK-47s, INSAS rifles, SLRs, two LMGs, barrel grenade launchers, and advanced weapons such as a US-made Colt rifle and an Israel-made Tavor assault rifle—along with over 2,200 rounds of ammunition and Rs 20.30 lakh in cash. Describing the development as the "death knell" for the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) battalion and the near-collapse of the Telangana State Committee, DGP Shivadhar Reddy noted that only one senior functionary now remains underground in the state committee. Deva, carrying a combined bounty of Rs 75 lakh across multiple states, is regarded as a ruthless strategist involved in major attacks, including the 2013 Jhram Ghati ambush. The surrender, the largest arms handover



in recent times following intensified operations, entitles the cadres to a total reward of approximately Rs 1.81–1.82 crore under the Centre and state's rehabilitation policy. Interim relief of Rs 25,000 has already been provided to each. DGP Reddy reiterated appeals to remaining Maoist cadres to renounce violence and join the mainstream, assuring full protection and support for reintegration. A press conference was held later in the day to provide further details.

Special thanks to the people's government for fulfilling the dream of owning a home for the poor: - Government Whip MLA Beerla Ailaiah

"(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 3):- Telangana State Government Whip and Alair MLA Beerla Ailaiah, in the 7th Assembly session held on Saturday, expressed his gratitude to this people's government, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy for fulfilling the dream of owning a home for the poor. He said that in the previous government, former Chief Minister KCR had constructed double-bedroom houses haphazardly in low-lying areas on government lands, and these houses remain unusable to this day. He cited the example of Vangapalli in Yadagirigutta mandal, where the double-bedroom houses built in a low-lying area without proper facilities are now unusable. He also mentioned that former Chief Minister KCR had adopted Vasalamarri village in Turkapalli mandal and promised to develop it, but in the process of laying a road from his farmhouse to Yadagirigutta, about a hundred people in Vasalamarri village lost their homes. He added that under this people's government, and under the leadership of Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, 150 houses have been provided to them. He thanked the people's government for providing approximately 3700 houses in the Alair constituency. He said that in the recently held local body elections, a promise was made to the people to provide new Indiramma houses, and since the Alair constituency has a large population of SCs, STs, and minorities, he requested that another two thousand houses be provided. They requested the minister to provide an opportunity to those who, with joy, started constructing houses on their own land under the Telangana state people's government's Indiramma Housing scheme, and completed the construction up to the basement and pillars, but whose construction was halted because the work was not technically captured in photographs. They also requested that proper investigations be conducted for some poor people who are living in rented houses



but whose reports from officials state that they are living in slab houses, resulting in them not receiving houses, and that Indiramma houses be provided to them. They stated that it was because of the Indiramma Housing scheme and other schemes provided by our people's government that they were able to win 70% of the Sarpanch positions in the local body elections in the Aleru constituency, and requested that Indiramma houses be given to eligible poor people to fulfill their dream of owning a home.

Passenger Awareness Programme Conducted by RPF & GRP at Secunderabad Station Ahead of Festivals

"Indian Chronicle, Secunderabad, January 03: "In view of the forthcoming festival season and the anticipated rush of passengers, the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) jointly organized a Passenger Awareness Programme at Secunderabad Railway Station on Friday. During the programme, passengers were educated on important safety precautions to be followed while travelling by train. Officials advised passengers to avoid accepting food from strangers, not to carry unnecessary valuables, and refrain from sitting at the doorways of coaches, as such practices may lead to serious accidents. Passengers were also informed about the Railway Toll-Free Helpline Number 139, which can be used for immediate assistance and emergency support."

Major Blow to Maoists: 12 Naxals, Including Key Leader Mangdu, Killed in Fierce Sukma Encounter

Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 3 (Indian Chronicle) "Sukma (Chhattisgarh), January 3, 2026: In a significant victory for security forces, 12 Maoists were neutralised in a fierce gunbattle in the dense forests of Sukma district on Saturday morning, delivering a severe setback to left-wing extremism in the Bastar region. Acting on precise intelligence about Maoist movement in the Kistaram area, joint teams of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) launched a search operation. The encounter erupted around 8 am when Maoists opened fire on the advancing forces, leading to intense exchanges that lasted several hours. Among the slain Maoists was senior leader Mangdu (also referred to as Sachin Mangtu or Mangdu), secretary of the Konta Area Committee and a Divisional Committee Member (DVCM) carrying a substantial government bounty. His elimination is considered a major blow to the CPI (Maoist)

outfit in the region, with police sources indicating that several key commanders linked to previous attacks, including the killing of Konta ASP Akash Rao Girepunje in 2025, have now been neutralised. Security personnel recovered a large cache of modern weapons from the encounter site, including

AK-47 rifles, INSAS rifles, explosives, and revolutionary literature. In a separate operation in neighbouring Bijapur district, two more Maoists were killed, bringing the total toll to 14 across the two encounters. Combing operations continue in surrounding areas amid reports of blood trails, suggesting the possibility of additional casualties among fleeing Maoists. This operation marks one of the largest anti-Naxal successes in recent times and aligns with intensified efforts to eradicate Maoism ahead of the central government's March 2026 deadline. No casualties were reported among security forces.

Voter Roll Mapping: 70% Target Set in Telangana



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE): As part of the Special Summary Revision of the Electoral Roll, Telangana Chief Electoral Officer Sudarshan Reddy instructed all Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to complete at least 70 percent of the voter list mapping process within the stipulated deadline.

Addressing district collectors through a video conference from the Secretariat on Saturday, the Chief Electoral Officer said the voter list prepared since 2002 must be mapped and updated in line with the 2025 electoral roll. He directed officials to set daily targets to ensure speedy progress—30 to 40 entries per day for Booth Level Officers (BLOs), 300 to 400 for supervisors, 3,000 to 4,000 for AEROS, and 30,000 to 40,000 for EROs. He emphasized that BLOs must conduct door-to-door field

verification and personally verify voter details. He also instructed that field-level inspections should be carried out for every polling station during the mapping process to ensure accuracy and transparency. The process should be completed efficiently and without delay, he added.

The Chief Electoral Officer further advised that additional manpower and computer infrastructure may be arranged wherever necessary, including support from political parties, to facilitate smooth implementation. He reviewed the progress of the mapping exercise constituency-wise and interacted with EROs to understand the challenges faced during implementation. Assuring full cooperation, he stated that the Chief Electoral Officer's office would remain available at all times to provide guidance and assistance.

From Medchal-Malkajgiri district, Additional District Collector Vijayender Reddy participated in the video conference and assured that the district administration would strictly follow the instructions and complete the targets within the prescribed timeframe.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Opening nuclear power sector

Reforms in the nuclear energy sector have been long overdue. Decades of state monopoly have stymied its growth. Nuclear power, considered a clean, carbon-free source of energy, is crucial if India wants to decarbonise without slowing economic aspirations. The government's ambition to reach 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047 cannot be met by public investment alone. Allowing private participation could unlock capital, speed up project execution and bring in operational efficiencies that government entities often struggle to guarantee. Delays and cost overruns have plagued multiple reactor projects. Competition and accountability could help overcome those structural bottlenecks. After a prolonged delay, a new beginning has now been made with Parliament passing the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025, allowing private players to enter the sector. This is a landmark legislation signalling a major shift for a sector which has so far been tightly controlled by the state. The move is also in sync with the efforts to accelerate the expansion of atomic energy as part of India's long-term energy transition. However, the government must address the concerns regarding safety norms, liability and accountability in a privatised nuclear regime. Under the new law, private companies would need to obtain licences to operate nuclear power plants, while foreign firms can participate through partnerships with Indian companies. The new legislation seeks to repeal the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010. In doing so, it removes long-standing legal barriers that restricted nuclear power generation and related activities to government-owned entities.

Massive Influx into TRS(D) Party in Komaram Bheem District: Key Leaders Join Amid Grand Welcome

“Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 3 (Indian Chronicle)“Kagaznagar: In a significant boost to the Telangana Rakshana Samithi Democratic (TRS(D)) Party, a large number of prominent leaders and activists formally joined the party at a well-attended event held at the Minority Function Hall in Kagaznagar Mandal, Sirpur (T) Assembly constituency. The joining ceremony was led by party founder Narala Satyanarayana, who warmly welcomed the new members by draping them with party scarves. He was joined by state general secretary Todeti Shankar Goud and state women's general secretary



Todeti Swarupa Latha. Among the key appointees announced on the occasion are:“- Upari Nagesh as Komaram Bheem Asifabad District President“- Durgam Maruti as District General Secretary“- Madavi Swarup as District Principal General Secretary (Women's Wing)“- Erpula Lakshmi as District Women's President“- Bhairongi Satish Goud as Asifabad Assembly Constituency In-charge“- Kadari Srinivas as State Assistant General Secretary“- Rate Ravinder as State General Secretary, Student Wing“- Eraveni Venkatesh as District Assistant General Secretary“- Gade Suresh as District Vice President“- Nagose Mondi as District Treasurer“- Singam Nagesh as District President, Farmers' Wing“- Mohammed Kabir Ahmed as District President, Minority Wing“Speaking at the press meet for print and electronic media, party founder Narala Satyanarayana hailed the development as commendable, noting that leaders from both assembly constituencies in Komaram Bheem district, as well as from the erstwhile Adilabad district, have assumed responsibilities at state and district levels.“He urged every member to work tirelessly to strengthen the party in the region in the coming days, emphasising that dedicated efforts would be rewarded with greater responsibilities and higher positions.“Those who work hard for the party's growth will be honoured with prominent roles,” he asserted.“Satyanarayana announced that TRS(D) will contest the upcoming MPTC, ZPTC, Municipal Corporation, and GHMC elections. He highlighted that massive joinings are taking place across all 33 districts of Telangana, reflecting people's desire for change.“The Telangana Rakshana Samithi Democratic Party has emerged as an unstoppable force in the state and will soon establish itself as an alternative political power,” he declared, adding that the party is committed to achieving power with the goal of building a social Telangana rooted in Bahujan ideology.“The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from a large number of women and youth.

Osmania University Arts College Celebrates Savitribai Phule Jayanti as 'Women Teachers' Day'

“Indian Chronicle OU January 03: The University College of Arts and Social Sciences, Osmania University, celebrated the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule as 'Women Teachers' Day' on Saturday. In accordance with the Telangana Government's directives, the event was organized with great dignity by the Arts College Women Empowerment Cell (WEC). The celebrations began with professors, administrative staff, research scholars, and students offering floral tributes and garlanding the portrait of Savitribai Phule.“Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Maya Devi, Chairperson of the Women Empowerment Cell, described Savitribai Phule as a revolutionary pioneer who fought relentlessly against exploitation and social oppression. She highlighted Phule's monumental role in providing education to the marginalized sections of society, especially women, and urged the younger generation to carry forward her legacy of social reform.“Dr. Konda Nageswara Rao, Vice Principal of the Arts College, lauded Savitribai Phule's resilience in the face of immense personal attacks and social boycotts while pursuing her mission of universal education. He further suggested that the revolutionary ideals found in the book Gulamgiri (authored by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule) should be incorporated into the academic syllabus to sensitize students toward social justice.“The event was well-attended by a distinguished gathering, including



Vice Principal (Hostels) Dr. Balu Nayak, Women Empowerment Cell Co-Chairperson Dr. C. S. Swathi, Academic Coordinator Dr. P. Swathi, and OU Foreign Relations Director Prof. Vijaya. Other notable participants included OU NSS Coordinator Dr. Challamalla Venkateswarlu, Arts College PRO Dr. Ch. Parandamulu, Prof. Ramulu, Prof. Indira, Prof. Krishna Kumar, Dr. Altaf Hussain, Dr. Namrata, D. R. Samson, A. R. Srinath, P. Linga Reddy, Aparna, and several other staff members and students.

Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy inaugurates Ramantapur Pedda Cheruvu beautification works



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 3 (Indian Chronicle):“Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy, along with Habsiguda Corporator Kakkireni Chaitan Harish, on Friday inaugurated the beautification works at Ramantapur Pedda Cheruvu, being taken up at a cost of ?1.60 lakh. Later, the MLA and the Corporator also launched floodwater drain construction works in Srinivasapuram division, being carried out with an estimated expenditure of ?1.48 crore.“Speaking on the occasion, MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy stated that adequate funds are being allocated for the beautification and development of all lakes in the Uppal constituency. He said that he has brought the need for lake development to the attention of the Legislative Assembly and emphasized the importance of preserving water bodies for the future.“Corporator Kakkireni Chaitan Harish said that development works in the division are progressing at a rapid pace. He instructed the officials to strictly ad-



here to quality standards while executing the beautification works and assured that necessary initiatives are being taken to address public issues effectively.“Officials including DE Nagamani, AE Saikiran, and Sanjay Patel were present at the event. BJP General Secretaries Chelloju Ellachari, Chinthakindi Praveen, Gaddam Sai Kiran, Dharam Venkatesh Gupta, Konderu Sravanti, Puchula Ashok, G. Haribabu, and TRS leaders Pasula Prabhakar Reddy, Dr. B.V. Chari, Kaleru Jainavin, Gudi Madhusudan Reddy, Jelli Mohan, and Erelli Ravinder Reddy also participated. Local residents Annam Raghava Reddy, Jaipal Reddy, Rangareddy, and others attended the programme.

Ramanthapur Division Congress President Mohammed Rafiq Visits Indira Nagar Colony



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 3 (Indian Chronicle):“At the invitation of the Rehmania Masjid Committee, Ramanthapur Division Congress Party President Mohammed Rafiq on Saturday extensively toured Indira Nagar Colony as part of the “Prajalavadaku Palana” (Governance at the People's Doorstep) programme, along with Electricity Line Inspector Sarayya and power department staff. The programme received an overwhelming response from local residents, who shared their grievances and concerns. Members of the Masjid Committee brought several key issues to his notice, including the need to replace hazardous electric lines ahead of the holy month of Ramzan, laying of roads at the earliest, resolving drinking water problems, and taking preventive measures against mosquitoes and seasonal diseases by ensuring daily fogging and spraying. Speaking on the occasion, Mohammed Rafiq assured the Masjid Committee members that he would bring all the issues to the attention of Uppal Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy and also discuss them with the concerned officials to ensure permanent solutions. The programme was attended by PCC representative



Mohammed Taufiq, Indira Nagar Rehmania Masjid Committee President Mohammed Farid, General Secretary Mohammed Anwar, Mohammed Chand, Sattar Bhai, Mohammed Zekriya, Mohammed Khadeer, Mohammed Mohsin, Mohammed Mateen Shakeel Marna, Shafi, senior Congress leaders Pusa Sattaiah Besta, Bhaskar, Gayatri Goud, Sunitha Yadav, Best Ashok, Laghasani Srinivas Goud, Narasimha, Mohammed Nayeeb, Buggapati Paramesh, Suri, Icon Madhu, Swami Sai, and others.

Annadanam Organised for Ayyappa Devotees at Chengannur



NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“During the Mandala-Makaravilakku season, a large number of Ayyappa devotees travel to Sabarimala, with devotees from the Telugu-speaking states forming a significant portion. To serve these pilgrims, an Annadanam (free food distribution) programme was organised at the Chengannur Railway Station area

in Kerala. The programme was conducted under the leadership of Raju Guruswamy, with arrangements made by the Mahasastra Seva Sangham Trust, Hyderabad. Traditional Telugu-style food was served to Ayyappa devotees arriving from various regions on their way to Sabarimala. Speaking on the occasion, Regalla Satish Reddy, Chairman of Dhammaiguda Kapra Sai Mala Ayyappa Swamy Temple, stated that organising Annadanam for Telugu devotees travelling from Hyderabad to Sabarimala is a commendable service. He noted that such initiatives strengthen unity among devotees and preserve cultural traditions while serving pilgrims from different states. Regalla Satish Reddy participated as the chief guest in the Annadanam programme along with his group of disciples. Guruswamy including Gaddamidi Bal Raju, Mahender Venkat Reddy, Asirreddy Ramesh, Basava, Srinivas, Durgaprasad, Chanda Shekhar, Mahesh, Sami, and others actively took part in serving food to devotees from various states. On this occasion, Raju Guruswamy was felicitated in recognition of his efforts and service to Ayyappa devotees.

Dr. Parandamulu Ch Appointed as Arts College PRO

“Indian Chronicle OU January 03: In a significant move to strengthen university communications, Prof. C.

Kaseem Principal of the University College of Arts and Social Sciences at Osmania University, has appointed Dr. Parandamulu Ch as the Public Relations Officer (PRO). Dr. Parandamulu is an academician who has serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology from 13 years. Beyond his academic credentials, he brings extensive media expertise to the role, having worked as a journalist

for several major print media organizations before joining the faculty at Osmania University.“The announcement of his appointment has been received with great enthusiasm across the campus. Faculty members, administrative staff, research scholars, and students gathered to congratulate Dr. Parandamulu on his new role. His colleagues from the journalism fraternity also expressed their appreciation, noting that his dual experience in education and media will be a major asset to the institution. Dr. Parandamulu ch thanked the Principal for the responsibility and expressed his commitment to enhancing the college's public image.

New Service Committee Unanimously Elected for Uppal Motati Reddy, Munnuru Kapu Cremation Ground



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 3 (Indian Chronicle):“A new service committee for the management of the Motati Reddy and Munnuru Kapu cremation ground located in the Uppal Market area was unanimously elected on Saturday in the presence of community elders and members.“The meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere at the Laxmi Reddy Colony Community Hall in Uppal. A large number of community members attended the meeting and, through mutual understanding and consensus, unanimously elected the new committee.“The following office-bearers were elected: President: Mekala Hanumanth Reddy“Vice Presidents: Nayabu Venkatesh, Mekala Dayasagar Reddy“General Secretary: Giri Ramakrishna“Treasurer: Goni Prabhakar Reddy“In addition, honorary advisors and executive committee members were also unanimously selected. Members from both groups who attended the meeting congratulated the newly elected committee members and expressed their best wishes. They emphasized that the development and maintenance of the cremation ground should be carried out with unity, transparency, and efficiency.“It was expressed with optimism that the newly elected committee will serve with dedication and public cooperation for the next three years. Representatives of the Motati Reddy and Munnuru Kapu communities extended their heartfelt congratulations to the new committee.



My Journey by Godugu Yadagiri Rao Unveiled



Leelavathi, who sang *Aa Challani Samudra Garbham* captivating the audience. While speaking on the occasion, Padmavathi stated that Yadagiri Rao had vividly portrayed scenes from his childhood to the present day in his own distinctive style. She appreciated his efforts in encouraging many others to write and help publish their works, calling it a commendable contribution to literature and society. *Dhara?* newspaper editor Roja Rani introduced the book and said "My Journey" would serve as a guiding light for many readers. She noted that the author had movingly described his childhood experiences with his mother, the hardships he faced, and the difficult circumstances of his life. She added that the book helps readers understand how he

shaped his life, developed a spirit of struggle, and learned to face challenges. Referring to the author's eight published books, she said they contain profound literary value and urged readers to understand them and apply their essence to contemporary society. She emphasized that "My Journey" should be read, studied, and practiced by all. Eminent lyricist Jayaraju formally released the book. Speaking on the occasion, he said he was delighted to attend the launch of Yadagiri Rao's book and recalled his earlier visit to the area. He observed that it was commendable that people with progressive values, discipline, and an eco-friendly way of life resided there. Jayaraju spoke at length on the distinction between gods created

by humans and nature, which created humanity. He said man-made gods possess human-like desires, ornaments, and needs, whereas nature provides equal opportunities to all. He stressed that worshiping nature was more meaningful, but warned that the environment was now facing destruction. Corporate forces, he said, had turned everything into commodities — food, water, and even air. Land had long been exploited, and humanity now faced a grave threat to its survival. Any resistance against this destruction, he asserted, was an act of self-preservation, and everyone bore a serious responsibility in this regard. He praised Yadagiri Rao for continuously contributing to this struggle and extended his congratulations. Guest speakers G.

Ramulu, Bhoopathi Venkateswarlu, and Komati Ravi shared their long association with the author and expressed hope that his efforts would yield greater results in the future. Speakers Rashid, C.H. Leelavathi, Ramachandra Murthy, V.B. Acharyulu, and Gagan Kumar also addressed the gathering. Author Godugu Yadagiri Rao, in his address, thanked everyone for their encouraging words and support. He requested readers to read his book and share their feedback. Later, Jayaraju felicitated Yadagiri Rao and his wife Challa Leelavathi with handloom shawls. Yadagiri Rao reciprocated by honouring Jayaraju, Ramulu, Bhoopathi Venkateswarlu, and Ravi. Padmavathi was honoured by Challa



Leelavathi, while Roja Rani was felicitated by Sharada with handloom shawls. A Buddha idol was presented to Jayaraju as a memento. The book's printer, Naveen, was also honoured with a handloom shawl. Spurthi Group leader Rahim delivered the vote of thanks. Participants at the event included Gagan Kumar, Shivanna Narayana, Balu, Nagesh, Venkatadri, Sivarama Krishna, Gousia, Sharada, J. Raghava Rao, Prabhakar, Gummadi Hariprasad, Gopi, M. Jaggaraju, Sarojini, C.H. Prasad, Sitarama Murthy, P. Mallesham, H.V. Swamy, Venkateswarlu, Ailayya, Madhavi, Jayaraj, Parthasarathi, and others.

Pastors Pray for Blessings on Bandari Laxma Reddy and Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 3 (Indian Chronicle):"On the occasion of the New Year, pastors from various churches of Chilkanagar Division visited the Chilkanagar Division Corporator's Office and extended New Year greetings to BRS Party State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj and Chilkanagar Division Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen."During the visit, all the pastors gathered at the corporator's office and offered special prayers, seeking the blessings of Lord Jesus Christ upon Uppal MLA Bandari Laxma Reddy and Corporator

Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj. The leaders were felicitated with shawls, followed by a cake-cutting ceremony to mark the New Year celebrations. The pastors also expressed their heartfelt gratitude to MLA Bandari Laxma Reddy for his generosity and kindness in distributing new clothes and Christmas gifts to pastors every year on the occasion of Christmas. They conveyed their sincere thanks and wished that the blessings of Lord Jesus Christ remain with him always."Pastors Gona Phillips, Jerusalem Mattayya, Manohar, Jacob Raju, Nathaniel, Immanuel, Teju Mai, and others from the Chilkanagar Division participated in the program.

TGSRTC BC Employees Observe Savitribai Phule Jayanti at Jeedimetla



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):"On the occasion of the 195th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule, India's first woman teacher and a pioneering social reformer, a commemorative programme was organised in front of the TGSRTC Jeedimetla Depot under the aegis of the TGSRTC BC Employees Welfare Association. The event was attended by GHMC Division Presidents Puppala Bhaskar and Pole Srikanth as chief guests. They paid floral tributes to the statue of Savitribai Phule and remembered her immense contribution to women's education, social equality and justice. Speaking on the occasion, they urged people to carry forward her ideals of promoting education among women, ensuring equality and strengthening social justice in society. Several leaders and members of the association participated in the programme, including State Leader Madar, Regional Secretary Machini Krishna, Depot President Kola Raju, Secretary Muddam Mahesh Yadav, Working President Mallesh Mudiraj, and women leaders Geetha, Kavitha, Umadevi and Rajeshwari, along with other members. The programme concluded with a collective call to uphold and spread the progressive values championed by Savitribai Phule.

Medical Camps for Persons with Disabilities Scheduled in Komaram Bheem Asifabad District This January

Government Hospital, Asifabad 4 09/01/2026

Orthopaedic Disability Hospital, Asifabad 5 12/01/2026

Government Hospital, Asifabad 6 12/01/2026

Blood Disorders (Sickle Cell Anaemia, Thalassemia, Haemophilia)

Government Hospital, Asifabad 7 12/01/2026

Eligible persons are advised to first undergo preliminary disability screening at their nearest Primary Health Centre (PHC) and book a slot before attending the camp. Participants must carry the disability screening certificate issued by the PHC when attending the camp."The District Rural Development Agency urges all residents of Komaram Bheem Asifabad district to make full use of this valuable opportunity to avail disability assessment and certification services."Sd/- District Rural Development Officer DRDA, Komaram Bheem Asifabad

Asifabad 8 08/01/2026

Intellectual Disability

Government Hospital, Asifabad 9 08/01/2026

Visual Impairment Hospital, Asifabad 10 08/01/2026

Government Hospital, Asifabad 11 08/01/2026

Locomotor Disability Hospital, Asifabad 12 08/01/2026

Medical Camps for Persons with Disabilities Scheduled in Komaram Bheem Asifabad District This January

"Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 3 (Indian Chronicle):"Under the directions of the District Collector, Komaram Bheem Asifabad, the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) has announced the organisation of special Sadaram medical assessment camps for persons with disabilities in January 2026."These camps aim to facilitate disability assessment and certification for various categories of disabilities. The detailed schedule is as follows:"Sl. No. Date Type of Disability Venue 1 06/01/2026 Locomotor Disability Government Hospital, Asifabad 2 07/01/2026 Visual Impairment Government Hospital, Asifabad 3 08/01/2026 Intellectual Disability Government Hospital, Asifabad

Movement Activists to Launch Relay Hunger Strike on January 4: Dommati Kiran Kumar Rao

"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):"Movement activists are set to launch a relay hunger strike from January 4 at the Acharya Jayashankar premises in Alwal, under the Malkajgiri Assembly constituency, to press for the resolution of long-pending issues related to the Telangana movement. Movement Activists Forum Media Convener Dommati Kiran Kumar Rao stated that the protest programme is being organised as per the directions of the Forum's State President, Dr. Cheema Srinivas Rao. He said the hunger strike is aimed at drawing the attention of the government to the problems being faced by movement activists who played a key role during the Telangana statehood movement. Kiran Kumar Rao said that despite repeated representations, several genuine demands of movement activists remain unresolved. Through this relay hunger strike, the Forum seeks justice, recognition, and appropriate measures from the government. He clarified that the protest would be conducted in a peaceful and democratic manner. Leaders and executive members from various districts across the state are expected to participate in the hunger strike and extend solidarity. The organisers have appealed to movement activists, supporters, and well-wishers to attend the protest camp in large numbers and ensure the success of the programme. The relay hunger strike will be carried out in phases with participation from activists representing different districts, reflecting unity and collective resolve to safeguard the rights and dignity of movement activists.



Sri Venkateswara-Padmavathi Kalyana Mahotsavam Held in Kapra Division



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):"A Sri Venkateswara-Padmavathi Kalyana Mahotsavam was held at Villa No. 73 in Tirumala Shivapuri Colony, under the Kapra Division limits. Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy attended the event and participated in the rituals with devotion. The MLA participation followed an invitation from M.A. Shankar Colony

Vice President and JAC Kapra Division Convener. The religious programme was organised with traditional customs and witnessed active participation from devotees. Kapra Division BRS Party President Naveen Goud, Nalla Radhakrishna, other BRS party leaders, devotees, and local residents were present at the event. The programme concluded peacefully amid devotional fervour.

Construction Debris Cleared as Part of Swachh Surveykshan Drive in Kapra



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):"As part of the Swachh Surveykshan schedule, construction and demolition waste dumped in vacant spaces along roadsides and public parks is being systematically removed across Kapra. During the cleanup operation at Padma Rao Nagar Kapra Park, construction debris was cleared to restore cleanliness and ensure public safety. The drive was carried out under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Srihari, along with DE-Solid Waste Management Ravi, Sanitary Supervisor Sudarshan, Jawan Ramakrishna, and SFA members Vasanth, Ashwin Prasad, Sanjeev, and Anjali. Members

of the Anjali Welfare Association actively participated in the programme, including Association President Shivaraj, Secretary Srihari, and other members, extending support to the sanitation teams. Officials stated that the removal of construction waste from public spaces is a key component of the Swachh Surveykshan initiative, aimed at improving urban hygiene, preventing illegal dumping, and enhancing the overall cleanliness of residential areas. Such drives will continue in other localities to maintain a clean and healthy environment for residents.



Nadiminti Srinivas participated in the Savitribai Phule birth anniversary celebrations

... Indian Chronicle Jan 3: In Jadcherla town center, "Savitribai Phule's birth anniversary celebrations were grandly organized. Former ZP Vice Chairman Kodugal Yadiyah and National Dhobi Reservation National Convener Nadiminti Srinivas participated as chief guests. On this occasion, Nadiminti Srinivas said that all girls in society should take Savitribai Phule as their role model and reach great heights. He said that Savitribai Phule was a person who lived and died for society. "He stated that women should excel in all fields, and that improving the living conditions of women is possible only through education. He said that Savitribai Phule waged a tireless struggle in society and was a great social reformer who worked for the spread of education among the down-trodden and weaker sections. D. Krishnaiah, Karate Srinivas, Daggula Balraj, Jangir Basha, Rangayya, Kongali Mohan, Raj Shekhar Yadav, Godugu Narasimha, Anjaneyulu Mestri, and others participated in this birth anniversary program.



Potholes Filled in Ward No. 9 of Kaghaznagar Following MLC Dande Vittal's Directions

Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 3 (Indian Chronicle) "Shramadhaan was undertaken in Ward No. 9 of Kaghaznagar following the directions of MLC Dande Vittal of the erstwhile Adilabad district, to address public inconvenience caused by potholes on the road. Acting on the MLC's instructions, the potholes were filled on Saturday under the leadership of Yusuf Khan, bringing relief to local residents who had been facing difficulties due to damaged road conditions.

Telangana Celebrates 195th Birth Anniversary of Savitribai Phule with Grand Event in Medchal-Malkajgiri



NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE): "Under the directive of the Telangana State Government, the 195th birth anniversary of the eminent social reformer and India's first female teacher, Savitribai Phule, was celebrated with grandeur at the District Collectorate's Prajavani Auditorium in Medchal-Malkajgiri district. The event also marked a special tribute on National Women's Day, highlighting the crucial role of women in education and social reform. During the ceremony, thirteen distinguished women educators from across the district were felicitated in recognition of their exemplary contributions to teaching, empowerment of girl children, and community development. The awards aimed to honor teachers who have made a significant impact on promoting education among underprivileged sections of society. The event was graced by senior officials, including the District Education Officer, the District BC Welfare Officer, the District GCDO, and leaders from various teachers' associations. They spoke about Savitribai Phule's pioneering efforts in advocating girl child education, her courage in challenging social norms, and her enduring legacy that continues to inspire educators and reformers across India. During the program, participants highlighted the importance of continuing Phule's mission in modern times. Speeches emphasized the need for inclusive education, gender equality in schools, and the empowerment of women through knowledge. Cultural programs and short presentations depicting the life and achievements of Savitribai Phule added a vibrant touch to the celebration, engaging students, teachers, and attendees alike. The ceremony concluded with a call to action for the community and educators to uphold the values and vision of Savitribai Phule, ensuring that education remains a powerful tool for social transformation and women empowerment in Telangana.

State Election Officer Sudarshan Reddy instructed that the voter mapping process should be completed as per the target



Mandava Srisalam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 3): On Saturday, State Election Officer Sudarshan Reddy held a video conference with District Collectors, Election Returning Officers, and Assistant Returning Officers regarding the voter mapping process, providing guidelines to ensure the mapping is completed as per the target. He instructed that the voter mapping process should be expedited and completed within the next 12 days as per the set target. He stated that the voter mapping process should be undertaken. He instructed the officials to ensure that booth-level officers visit every house and complete the mapping. He also instructed that measures should be taken to ensure that booth-level officers have identity cards. On this occasion, District Collector Hanumantha Rao, Additional Collector for Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao, Revenue Divisional Officer Krishna Reddy, and other concerned officials participated in this video conference.

Joint Vehicle Checks by Kushaiguda-Neredmet Police



NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 3, (INDIAN CHRONICLE): "Kushaiguda and Neredmet police conducted extensive joint vehicle inspections on Wednesday evening at the Sainikpuri X Road. A total of 25 police personnel participated in the operation. During the checks, police thoroughly verified vehicle documents and identified 15 vehicles that did not have valid or required papers. Vehicles found violating traffic rules were seized as per regulations. Police advised motorists to carry all mandatory vehicle documents and strictly follow traffic rules. They also stated that such vehicle inspection drives would continue in the coming days to ensure road safety and maintain law and order.

Ramagundam Police Commissionerate Intensifies Bank Security Measures through Comprehensive Inspections in Godavarikhani



Urban Bank, Municipal Office "Bank of Maharashtra" "Indian Bank (formerly Allahabad Bank), Markandeya Colony "Gayatri Bank, Lakshmi Nagar " "Indian Overseas Bank, Lakshmi Nagar " "Multiple ATM centres within the jurisdiction" " Additionally, inspections were conducted at other banks by SI Anusha along with the crime party staff. Both government and private banks, as well as ATM centres, were thoroughly checked. "As part of preventive measures to curb criminal activities, the CI instructed bank officials to ensure that alarm systems are fully functional and that high-resolution CCTV cameras are installed and operational. The functioning status of CCTV systems was verified, and recorded footage and photographs were examined. The CI emphasized that CCTV surveillance plays a crucial role in identifying offenders in the event of crimes and in detecting suspicious individuals loitering around banks and ATM premises. "Addressing bank officials, the CI stressed that CCTV cameras must be mandatorily installed for security purposes and that the entire bank should be comprehensively covered. He further advised strict monitoring of strong rooms, adequate deployment of security guards, proper lighting arrangements, and the elimination of any security lapses through robust safety measures. "The CI also instructed bank authorities to sensitize customers to remain vigilant and to promptly inform bank staff if any individual is noticed behaving suspiciously or staying unusually long inside the bank. Customers were further advised to be educated on necessary precautions while withdrawing and carrying cash from banks. "The Ramagundam Police Commissionerate reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring public safety and strengthening security systems in financial institutions through continuous monitoring and preventive policing initiatives.

Savitribai Phule: A Beacon of Women's Empowerment and Social Awakening.



P. S. A SHOKAN " KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. " "Former ZPTC member Moola Sarojana Purushottam Reddy stated that Savitribai Phule, revered as India's first woman teacher and a pioneering social reformer, earned enduring recognition as a great humanitarian for dedicating her life to educating women and awakening social consciousness among them. "Speaking as the chief guest at the Savitribai Phule Jayanti celebrations held on Saturday at the Manthani Girls Junior College, she highlighted Savitribai Phule's monumental contributions to social reform. She recalled that Savitribai courageously promoted widow remarriage and played a decisive role in eradicating the social evil of child marriage, at a time when such reforms demanded exceptional bravery. "Moola Sarojana Reddy urged everyone to strive collectively to realize the ideals and vision of Savitribai Phule. She noted that by establishing several schools, Savitribai Phule significantly enhanced educational awareness among women and laid a strong foundation for women's empowerment through education. "On the occasion, essay-writing competitions on the theme of Savitribai Phule were conducted for students. Lecturers Jhansi, M. Sridevi, Sabitha, and Mounika were felicitated with shawls in recognition of their services. "Later, Moola Sarojana Reddy felicitated the prize winners of the competitions with shawls and presented mementos. "First Prize: B. Sri Lalitha (HEC, First Year) " "Second Prize: Srinidhi (MPC, Second Year) " "Third Prize: K. Abhinaya (HEC, Second Year) " "The programme was attended by Student JAC leader Bejanki Digambar, college lecturers B. Sridhar Rao, R. Tirumal, L. R. K. Rajeshwara Reddy, C. H. Nagesh, along with student union leaders and a large number of students, making the event a meaningful tribute to the legacy of Savitribai Phule.

Why do I seem to get sick as soon as I take time off?

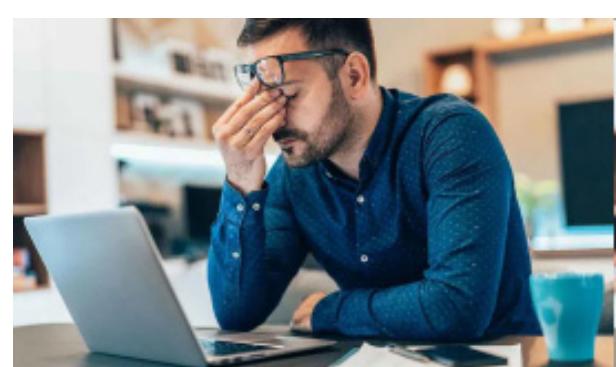
GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Melbourne: You've been hanging out for a break, getting through the busy last weeks of work or class. You're finally ready to relax. And then tiredness descends, you feel the tickle in your throat, and you realize you're getting sick. Why does this always seem to happen just in time for a holiday or the weekend? Some call this the let-down effect or leisure sickness. But is it real? While you may hear about leisure sickness online and anecdotally, studies on this phenomenon are very limited and often not well designed. So let's take a look at the evidence – and what you can do to stay healthy. Leisure sickness is a term coined by Dutch researchers in a 2002 study. It refers to people who are seldom ill during the working week but get sick relatively often on weekends or holidays. The researchers surveyed 1,893 people and found roughly 3% reported leisure sickness. Symptoms typically included headaches, tiredness, colds and flu, muscle pain and nausea. People were more likely to develop infections on vacation rather than weekends, and symptoms were most common during the first week of their holiday.

However, this research relied on people's recall, and memory can be unreliable. The definition of leisure sickness was also vague. For example, one person's idea of "seldom" and "relatively often" may differ from another's. Another 2014 study investigated "let-down headaches" by asking 22 participants who regularly experienced migraines to keep a diary of their stress levels and migraine onset. It might seem counter-intuitive, but reducing stress seemed to trigger the migraine. When they recorded a reduction in stress on one day, they typically developed a migraine within the next 24 hours. If work was the stressor, this could mean a pattern of migraines on their days off. Some evidence suggests strokes are also more common on weekends than weekdays in some groups. There is no clear cause, but the study authors suggested strokes could be triggered by lifestyle changes on weekends.

So, what's going on?

The lack of quality research on leisure sickness means we don't fully understand its potential causes. But there are some theories. People often travel during vacations, and sit in enclosed, crowded spaces such as planes, increasing their exposure to germs. Travel to distant locations can also expose us to strains of germs we're not immune to. On holidays we may also drink more alcohol, which can reduce immune function. And we may be pushing our body to do things we don't normally do, putting stress on it. Another theory is that being busy at work makes us distracted and less likely to pay attention to symptoms. On leave, symptoms such as muscle pain or a headache may become more obvious – and we can't blame it on work. So we may notice sickness more.



But isn't relaxing good for your health?

There is a complicated relationship between stress and the immune system. Stress activates the sympathetic nervous system and makes our bodies release hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. Chronic stress can mean our cortisol levels are sustained at high levels. Over time, this reduces how well our immune cells respond to infection, so we are more likely to get sick if we come into contact with viruses or bacteria. But in the short term, both adrenaline and cortisol can actually enhance how well some parts of the immune system work. This means acute stress can temporarily improve our resistance to infection, which is why we may feel busy and stressed but not fall sick. Cortisol's anti-inflammatory properties can also relieve pain. But when the acute stress stops – for example, when we finally get a chance to rest – there may be a sudden transition. We no longer benefit from the temporary immune boost or cortisol's pain relief. So this is when we might fall sick, and feel symptoms such as headaches and muscle pain.

How can I avoid getting sick?

There's still a lot we don't understand about how or why leisure sickness might happen. But we know staying active, getting enough sleep and eating a healthy, balanced diet – even when you're busy – can help boost your immune system. One Finnish study examined more than 4,000 public employees who were physically inactive. It found those who took up regular exercise, particularly vigorous exercise, were less likely to take sick leave than those who remained inactive. Given the link between chronic stress and multiple chronic diseases, it is also sensible to manage your workplace-related stress. There is good evidence that meditation, mindfulness and relaxation techniques can help reduce stress. There are also steps you can take to reduce the risk of respiratory infections on vacation, so you get to enjoy the whole holiday. Consider keeping up to date with flu and COVID boosters, and taking other precautions, such as wearing an N95 mask on planes and in airports.

'HoD shouldn't visit Jadavpur University till probe ends': Bengal Minorities Commission on hijab row after visit



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

In connection with the recent hijab-related controversy at Jadavpur University, the West Bengal Minorities Commission has recommended that the Head of the Department of English, Saswati Haldar, should not visit the campus until the inquiry into the matter is completed. A seven-member team of the Minority Commission visited the university on Tuesday and met Vice-Chancellor Chiranjib Bhattacharjee, Pro Vice-Chancellor Amitava Datta, and Registrar Selim Box Mandal. The panel sought details of the steps taken by the university to prevent "such incidents".

Commission chairperson Ahmed Hasan Imran told "The university has formed a fact-finding committee. We have asked them to look into the matter as the committee is expected to submit its report within 30 days. Meanwhile, we have also asked the university to inform us about the steps taken during this period." He added, "We have stated that, in the meantime, the HoD who targeted the girl for

wearing the hijab, and who also asked several irrelevant questions, should not be allowed to enter the university until the investigation is over, as she may influence the investigation."

According to Imran, the commission also interacted with the student and her parents. "The parents and the girl are very scared and need counselling. We asked the university why counselling was not arranged earlier. The Vice-Chancellor has assured us that the matter will be looked into," he said. Meanwhile, Vice-Chancellor Chiranjib Bhattacharjee, in a statement, said, "I appeal to all stakeholders of Jadavpur University to reaffirm our shared commitment to inter-faith harmony and the dignity of diversity. Founded on the ideals of learning, reason, and public service, our university has long stood as a meeting ground for cultures, languages, beliefs and ideas. Such plurality is not incidental to our legacy; it is our long-nurtured strength." The statement further said, "We urge every member of our community to articulate differences through dialogue, empathy, and restraint, and to reject prejudice, provocation and misinformation in all forms. Academic freedom flourishes only in an environment of mutual respect, where disagreement is guided by civility and compassion for each other. Let us ensure that our conduct within and beyond the campus reflects the values we stand for." Meanwhile, according to sources, the HoD submitted a report on Monday to the Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor, giving a detailed chronological account of the events of that day. The student had alleged that she was asked to partially remove her hijab by an invigilator during an examination, and was asked irrelevant questions about it, on December 23.

'Don't think New Year will bring good news, waiting for what SC says': Sweety Bibi, her 2 kids lose hope in Bangladesh

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

As the year draws to a close amid changed ties between India and Bangladesh, hope is thinning for 33-year-old Sweety Bibi and her two sons, Qurban, 6, and Imran, 12. Confined to a house in Chapainawabganj district of Bangladesh, Sweety is waiting for a verdict that could decide whether she and her children will ever return to their home in Birbhum, West Bengal. The next hearing in her case is listed before the Supreme Court of India on January 6. A separate hearing is scheduled at a district court in Chapainawabganj on January 11.

"We cannot leave this house. Twenty-four hours a day, we are confined here. We know what is happening in Bangladesh. The situation is not good," Sweety told The Indian Express over the phone from Chapainawabganj. "As an Indian, I am scared. My country and Bangladesh are not on good terms now. We are fast losing hope of returning."

It has been over six months since she, her children, and Danish Sheikh were picked up by Delhi Police and subsequently "pushed back" into Bangladesh after being declared illegal infiltrators. On December 5, Danish Sheikh's wife Sunali Bibi — who is pregnant — and her son were brought back to India following a flag meeting between the BSF and the Bangladesh Border Guards, acting on a Supreme Court order. The rest of the group, however, remained behind. "I don't think this New Year will bring good news for us," Sweety said. "The next hearing at the Supreme Court is on January 6. We are waiting for that day. Let us see what the highest court says about us." "Just like Sunali, we were detained in Delhi where I worked as a garbage collector. Like her, we were labelled Bangladeshi citizens and pushed into this country. Like her, we hid in bushes and tried to return, but BSF stopped us," she said. The group, she recalled, spent seven days on the streets of Dhaka before reaching Chapainawabganj, where they were arrested by Bangladeshi police and jailed under the Passport Act and the Foreigners Act.

"Like her, we spent three months in jail before getting bail here. Me and my sons suffered the same way. But she was brought back, and we are confined in this house," Sweety said. The house belongs to one Faruk Sheikh, who was entrusted with their custody by a Bangladeshi court after bail was granted on December 1. Since then, Sweety and her children have not been allowed to step out. "It has been a long time since we last spoke properly. The fate of my sister and her two children is now in the hands of the



court," said Amir Khan, Sweety's brother.

Mofizul Islam, a Birbhum-based social worker who assisted the families in Bangladesh and has since returned to Bengal, fears the consequences of any adverse order. "I am in touch with her over the phone. What can I say to them? If the Bangladesh court passes a sentence, they may be sent back to jail again," he said. All documents proving their Indian citizenship have been placed before the court, according to Samirul Islam, chairman of the West Bengal Migrant Welfare Board and Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP. "We are hopeful that the highest court of the country will allow them to be brought back home, just like Sunali. All relevant papers showing that they are residents of Bengal have been submitted," he said. The chain of events began on June 18, when Sunali Khatun, her husband Danish, their eight-year-old son from Paikar village in Birbhum, and Sweety Bibi with her two sons from Dhitora village, were picked up by Delhi Police, under the jurisdiction of the K N Katju Marg police station. On June 26, all of them were "pushed back" to Bangladesh after being declared illegal immigrants. On August 21,

Bangladeshi police arrested them in Chapainawabganj and sent them to jail after producing them before a local court. On September 26, a division bench of the Calcutta High Court directed that six members of the two Birbhum families, including Sunali, be brought back to West Bengal within four weeks. On October 3, the senior judicial magistrate of the Chapainawabganj district court declared both families Indian citizens based on Aadhaar cards and West Bengal residential addresses, ordering their "pushback" to India. Yet, months later, Sweety and her sons remain across the border, waiting.

Rs 91 lakh haul exposes Lawrence Bishnoi-linked extortion racket in Rajasthan and Punjab

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Sri Ganganagar police Thursday claimed to have uncovered a major extortion racket linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, with investigators saying the crackdown led to discovery of an interstate network. Police said that based on intelligence inputs, a team intercepted a car on Sri Vijaynagar Road on the night of December 29, a development that allegedly led to the unearthing of a wide extortion network operating from Jodhpur to Punjab.

Four people — Kuldeep Kumar (50), Aman Kumar (20), Ramswaroop (38) and Manish Bishnoi [AGE] — have been arrested, with police saying two more will be arrested Thursday. Police have also seized Rs 91 lakh in cash. According to an officer, their questioning led to significant revelations, prompting senior police officers from Sri Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Jodhpur and Bikaner to join the investigation. This is the first time the Rajasthan Police have tracked a money trail back to the Bishnoi gang. Superintendent of Police Amrita Duhan said: "The gang, some of whose members operated from abroad, would threaten businessmen and extorted crores of rupees. Acting on specific inputs, Raisinagar police intercepted a vehicle that was owned by a city tailor but driven by the three men, none of whom could give any satisfactory explanation on why they were carrying such a large sum of money. A search of the car led to the recovery of three bags containing Rs 91 lakh," the officer said. According to police, the money was being sent to Raisinagar and further to Punjab, with the three men acting as couriers. As the probe widened, several suspects were rounded up from Punjab and Rajasthan. Meanwhile, as investigators from other police units descended on Raisinagar, entry to the police station was restricted. Police said other agencies, including the Income Tax Department, could join the questioning. According to SP Duhan, one of the suspects,



Kuldeep, had claimed that he was on his way to Jodhpur on the instructions of his son Yogesh, who in turn was acting on the directions of a resident of Punjab's Abohar, Sahil Bishnoi. Yogesh has been detained, and investigators claim that Bishnoi had links with Arzoo Bishnoi, a close aide of Lawrence Bishnoi, whom he had met through his cousin Akshay. According to police, neither Kuldeep nor Yogesh had any criminal antecedents. Meanwhile, Sahil Bishnoi, Akshay Kumar and Arzoo Bishnoi are suspected to be key operatives of the Bishnoi gang, with police saying further raids and seizures are expected over the next few days. Police said this is the first time the Rajasthan Police has traced a money trail of a major organised crime syndicate. "Earlier, gang members were arrested for shootings or threats, but this is the first time the police have successfully reached and disrupted the money trail," she said. Police said the gang used USDT cryptocurrency to move money through channels in Sri Ganganagar, Hanumangarh and Raisinagar.

More Mumbai Metro lines to open in 2026: Mira Bhayandar, Thane to get connectivity finally



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

In 2025, the highly anticipated Mumbai Metro Aqua Line, which runs from Aarey to Cuffe Parade, was inaugurated. This new line provides the city with an additional public transport option alongside the local railway system, and it is part of a broader network of planned metro lines for Mumbai. A wide range of infrastructure projects is currently underway in Mumbai and the surrounding MMR region. The year 2026 is set to continue this trend, with several lines scheduled to open. Specifically, portions of four lines and an extension are expected to be inaugurated, with two of the openings anticipated in the first month of the year. Other significant projects, including tunnels and bridges such as the Thane-Borivali twin tunnels and the Eastern Freeway, will take a bit longer to complete.

With only four stations, the phase one opening of Line 9 is of tremendous importance. Extending Line 7, which runs from Andheri to Dahisar East, to the suburbs of Mira Bhayandar, the four stations, set to open soon, will take it from the Dahisar East end to Kashigao. It will introduce a metro line and network along 4.5 km at the outskirts of Mumbai. Commuters from Mira Bhayandar will have access to both lines that converge at Dahisar East and head towards Andheri. They can use Line 7 to reach the Western Express Highway (WEH) and Line 2A to get to DN Nagar. Additionally, interchanges with Lines 1 and 3 (Aqua Line) will be accessible. A total of 4 of the 13 stations are ready, ending at the Subhash Chandra Bose Stadium in Bhayandar. Checks by the Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety (CMRS) began in December, said an official from the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA), and the back-and-forth over the final stamp of approval continues. CMRS evaluations assign points for rectification until an ideal is achieved. An opening initially teased for December has been postponed to January 2026. Although the current code of conduct may delay the grand inauguration of the line, the exact opening date remains uncertain. In the coming months, the MMRDA also hopes to make the remaining portions of the line ready up to the Subhash Chandra Bose Stadium in Bhayandar.

Line 2 B is currently undergoing CMRS testing, and five of its stations are nearly ready for passenger service. However, the section of the line that stretches from Mandale in the far eastern suburbs to Diamond Garden in Chembur may attract fewer passengers due to its limited interconnectivity with other transportation networks. The

current out-of-order monorail intends to meet the line at Chembur station (tentative name), one stop after Diamond Garden. The only public transport line connected to the 5.3-km stretch will be the Mankhurd railway station on the Harbour line, which will open the network to commuters in the eastern suburbs. When complete, the 23.6-km line will enhance the city's east-west connectivity. It begins at DN Nagar, then goes into Bandra, then towards Kurla, onto Chembur, and finally to Mankhurd.

The second phase of Line 2B is also expected to begin in mid-2026. The stations to open will be on the other end of the line, linking DN Nagar till Saraswat Nagar in Khar. The line connecting Mumbai to Thane will open to the public in 2026, with two-thirds of it operational. An MMRDA official said the first section of the line in Thane is expected to open by March. This initial 10.5-km stretch will run from Cadbury Junction to Gaimukh. It includes Line 4A, which is a short 2.7-km extension from Kasarvadavali, the current endpoint of Line 4, to Gaimukh.

In September 2024, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis praised the trial runs on this stretch and committed to completing the initial stations by the end of 2025. However, an MMRDA official explained that the design of the stations, featuring a crimped, wavy top, can be executed only by a single vendor and a single machine, which is causing delays. Over the next six months, the goal is to operationalise the next 10 km of the line. This expansion will extend the working stations from Gaimukh in the north to Gandhi Nagar in Vikhroli. The entire line is expected to be fully operational by 2027, ultimately reaching Wadala. A crucial 15.3-km metro line that runs along the Jogeshwari-Vikhroli Link Road (JLVR), the MMRDA aims to get the entire Line 6 operational by mid-2026. The line begins at Swami Samarth Nagar in Andheri West, runs along the east-west corridor in Andheri East, Saki Vihar Road, Powai, and Kanjurmarg, intersects the WEH and EEH, and ends at Vikhroli. The design of the station at Mahakali Caves will be influenced by the caves.

Due to constraints, the line includes several standout features. In many spots, it will be the third level of transport, towering over a flyover and the road below. The tallest line: its highest pillars reach 29.5 metres. Issues with the metro car depot at Kanjurmarg have also necessitated inspection and maintenance provisions along the lines. "As work on the Kanjurmarg depot and the complications around it continue, we are building 8-lane inspection pit lines alongside. A few stations also have pocket lines on the sides, so scheduled maintenance and inspections of the underside of the cars can continue. These will make it possible to open the entire line in 2026, even if frequency will be restricted to every 6 minutes," said the official. The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) plans to complete the 'missing link' on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway by March and open it to traffic. Skipping the Lonavala section, the link will cut the Khopoli to Kusagaon section to 13.3 km, reducing travel time by 30 minutes. The missing link consists of two tunnels through the hills, two cable-stayed bridges, and a viaduct. Minor works remain, and an MSRDC officer assured that they would be completed by March.

Punjab Assembly special sessions against BJP-led Centre come under attack from Opposition MLAs, say they're unable to raise issues of their constituencies

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Punjab Assembly special sessions against BJP-led Centre come under attack from Opposition MLAs, say they're unable to raise issues of their constituencies. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann speaks during the special session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha, in Chandigarh, Tuesday. Ever since the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government assumed office in Punjab in 2022, it has held special sessions of the Vidhan Sabha largely to attack the BJP-led Centre and its policies. In its latest such exercise, the fifth special session held on December 30, the Assembly adopted a resolution against the Centre's Viksit Bharat-G Ram G scheme, which dismantled the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

All five special sessions convened so far have carried confidence motions and resolutions directly criticising the BJP or the Centre. However, the Opposition has trained guns on the AAP Government for organising single-day sessions and not allowing them to raise issues of their constituencies. Leader of the Opposition Pratap Singh Bajwa, BJP state president Sunil Jakhar, and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal have questioned the need to repeatedly bypass regular Assembly sittings in favour of special sessions, especially when the outcomes remain largely symbolic. The first special session, convened in June 2022, saw a confidence motion as AAP alleged that at least 10 AAP MLAs were approached by the BJP under its "Operation Lotus" with an offer of Rs 25 crore to each of them in a bid to topple the six-month-old Punjab government. A subsequent special session was called over the Bhakra Beas Management Board's (BBMB) decision to release Punjab's share of water to Haryana. Holding the Centre responsible, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann accused it of favouring BJP-ruled Haryana at the cost of Punjab's farmers. The resolution was aimed at positioning the Punjab government as a defender of farmers' interests while sharpening its confrontation with New Delhi. In September 2025, another special session was convened in the aftermath of floods triggered by heavy rainfall. The role of central agencies, particularly the BBMB, came under scrutiny, with the Assembly adopting a resolution blaming the Centre's negligence for the losses suffered by Punjab. A separate special session on November 24 marked the 350th martyrdom anniversary of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur. It was held at Sri



Anandpur Sahib instead of the Vidhan Sabha complex, a first for the state.

The December 30 session brought the focus back to employment and welfare. The Assembly unanimously passed a resolution alleging that the Centre was "snatching away the rights of the poor, Dalits and labourers" by phasing out MNREGA through the VB-G Ram G Act. Mann described the legislation as anti-Dalit and anti-poor. While the Congress and SAD supported the resolution, the BJP dismissed it as an attempt to shield corruption. Congress member Sukhpal Singh Khaira raised it in the House on Tuesday that the special sessions were becoming the order of the day and the legislators were not able to raise the issues faced by their constituencies. The standoff, in the past, had also sharpened Centre-state tensions spilling over into an unprecedented confrontation between the chief minister and former Governor Banwarilal Purohit that eventually reached the Supreme Court. Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa accused the government of wasting money on special sessions and not organising regular sessions. Mann accused Bajwa of going against the "rights of poor and Dalits and calling this session a wastage of money." Kanchan Vasdev is a Senior Assistant Editor in The Indian Express' Punjab bureau. She is a highly experienced journalist with 22 years of expertise covering high-stakes politics, governance, and social issues in Northern India. Professional Background Role: Primary reporter covering the Punjab Chief Minister's Office (CMO), government policies, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leadership in the state. Experience: She previously worked with The Tribune an

Instagram birthday wish turns fatal: Karnataka man stabbed to death by his ex-girlfriend's brother, fiancé

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

A 21-year-old man in Karnataka's Chikkamagaluru district was allegedly stabbed to death Wednesday for uploading a birthday wish post on Instagram and WhatsApp using the photos of his former girlfriend, whose wedding was scheduled with another man. The police have arrested the woman's brother, fiancé and two others in the case. The deceased was identified as Manjunath, a resident of the Tarikere taluk in the Chikkamagaluru district. The accused are the woman's brother Kiran, her fiancé Venu, Appu and Manu, all residents of the Tarikere town. The police said Kiran called Manjunath over the phone to meet him near an underpass road Wednesday night. According to the FIR,

around 7.45 pm, Venu confronted Manjunath for wishing her on social media using her photos and said that if he wanted to marry her, he could approach the family members. Manjunath allegedly told him that he would not marry her. Kiran allegedly attacked Manjunath with a knife for using his sister's photo and stabbed him multiple times before leaving the place. Manjunath was taken to the Tarikere government hospital and later to Shivamogga for treatment. However, around 12.10 am Thursday, he succumbed to injuries. The police registered a case under sections 352 (intentional insult with the intent to provoke a breach of peace or another offence) and 103 (1) [murder] of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita (BNS) and arrested the accused.

Out in the cold: Data reveals dearth of homeless shelters in Bengaluru



At 12.40 a.m. on December 26, near K.R. Market in the heart of the city, a small crowd began gathering around a goods vehicle. Four men were distributing blankets. The temperature was 16 degrees Celsius. Beneath the Mysuru Road flyover, several people had taken shelter, wrapping themselves in blankets or gunny bags to protect themselves from the biting cold. A beat police officer stationed there said two homeless people had died under the flyover within just four days.

The Bengaluru City Police data revealed that the city witnessed the deaths of more than 15 homeless people over the last 40 days, who were sleeping on the streets, all registered as Unnatural Death Reports (UDR). Police stations such as Malleshwaram and City Market, areas with major transport hubs, hospitals, and markets, have recorded four deaths each. Although the State has housing schemes, there is nothing exclusively for homeless people who lack or have lost documents such as Aadhaar cards. Although the State has housing schemes, there is nothing exclusively for homeless people who lack or have lost documents such as Aadhaar cards. |

While there is no confirmed direct connection, Bengaluru police say such deaths generally increase during winter, and this year has seen more, possibly due to the drop in temperature. Notably, December recorded temperatures as low as 13 degrees Celsius in Bengaluru, according to the India Meteorological Department. C. Vamsi Krishna, Joint Commissioner of Police (West), told *The Hindu* that such deaths occur during winter as well as extreme summer conditions, according to the number of UDRs registered. "Deaths might not be directly connected to the weather, but it may exacerbate existing health conditions, leading to fatalities. These homeless people mostly lack access to warm clothes and other safety gear," he said.

Arvind Kasthuri, Professor in the Department of Community Health at St. John's Medical College, explained that the drop in temperature in Bengaluru is unlikely to cause hypothermia leading to deaths, but it can aggravate underlying health conditions and result in serious situations. "In Bengaluru, falling temperatures, combined with usual factors such as poor air quality and the consumption of low-quality food and water, can prove fatal for people with health issues," he added. However, many NGOs have stepped in this winter, distributing blankets, food packets, and other healthcare essentials, along with individual donors. In areas such as Yeshwantpur and Vidyaranyapura in north Bengaluru, a few police officers and civil defence personnel have also contributed by providing winter essentials and food to the homeless. Many NGOs have stepped in this winter, distributing blankets, food packets, and other healthcare essentials, along with individual donors.

Under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), a central scheme, civic bodies are required to create infrastructure and enrol homeless people. However, the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the newly formed corporations have done little. Although shelter homes conduct bi-weekly surveys of homeless people to increase enrolment, NGOs running these homes say there is little support from civic bodies, pointing to scarce fund allocation. On the other hand, many homeless people are reluctant to join shelter homes, which social activist R. Kaleemullah attributes to underlying "fear" and a feeling of being in an "open jail". He also pointed to the existence of "social divisions" within shelter homes. Although the State has housing schemes, there is nothing exclusively for homeless people who lack or have lost documents such as Aadhaar cards, leaving gaps in the central scheme.

Battling weather, stink, stray dogsWhen *The Hindu* travelled across the city to review the conditions faced by homeless people and how they are coping with plummeting temperatures, most had sought shelter under flyovers, near religious institutions, transport hubs, hospitals, and, dangerously, under old trees. Near K.R. Market, hundreds have taken refuge under the flyover. However, the place itself is uninhabitable. Many sleep in corners of bus stops that stink, often surrounded by leftover food. "They don't move from here, and many have been living here for years because they work at the market in the mornings and sleep under flyovers at night. Many people give them daily essentials, some just to make videos of themselves giving, but it still helps the poor," said Mohammad Shafeeq, an autorickshaw driver. Homeless people, constantly exposed to harsh weather, also face mental health challenges. A police beat officer added that fights sometimes break out under the influence of alcohol. Many quarrel over "their place to sleep" and even over blankets.

Meanwhile, a group arrived in a goods autorickshaw to distribute blankets, prompting several men and women to rush towards it. Mohammad Irfan, a mechanic and president of the Al Qaswa Feed and Care Foundation, said they distribute basic accessories to help people cope with the cold across central and south Bengaluru. "We don't raise funds. We pool a portion of our salaries and buy these essentials for the homeless," he said. Bala said he earns ₹100 to ₹200 a day by helping traders carry vegetable bags at

the market, which he spends on food. "On lucky days, some traders pay ₹50 instead of ₹20. I save that for liquor. I sleep here itself. I don't go anywhere," said Bala, who is originally from Mandy.

As the night progressed, near Vani Vilas Hospital, a few more people had taken shelter near a bus stop, sleeping on the ground. A man from West Bengal, who refused to reveal his name, said, "The bench becomes colder at night, so we sleep on the footpath." When asked why he did not join a shelter home, he replied, "People ask us to move there, but I don't want to go because I am free here. Those who went there told me inmates fight unnecessarily." Mohan (name changed), manager of a shelter home run by an NGO that operates four other such centres across the city, said people who have separated from families or run away from home usually join shelters on their own. "Very rarely do we see homeless people involved in rag-picking or begging joining shelter homes," he added. Human rights activist T. Narasimhamurthy said he had encountered homeless women who feared being pushed into the flesh trade. "They are often traumatised and groped on the streets, yet feel safer in open spaces than in shelter homes," he said.

Around Adugodi, NIMHANS, Koramangala, Madiwala, and HSR Layout, homeless individuals were mostly found sleeping alone rather than in groups. For those sleeping alone, stray dogs pose a major threat. NGOs running shelter homes said that while ground realities remain unchanged, the BBMP and new corporations have limited themselves to inspections and reprimanding managers. Only 48 shelters instead of 120. Under the NULM policy, civic bodies are responsible for ensuring basic infrastructure such as water supply, sanitation, safety, and security for the homeless. This reporter visited four shelter homes, most of which lacked basic facilities such as adequate lighting, proper beds, water, and sanitation.

The policy mandates that each shelter cater to 50 or more people, barring exceptional situations, yet barely any shelter has more than 40 beds. As per policy requirements, Bengaluru should have at least 120 shelters. Currently, there are only 48 shelters: North City Corporation (12), South City Corporation (7), Central City Corporation (16), East City Corporation (6), and West City Corporation (7). The scheme mandates four types of shelters — for men, women, families, and special shelters for the mentally challenged, physically challenged, and recovering patients. Bengaluru has no special shelters. The policy also mandates systematic third-party surveys to assess shelter needs at appropriate locations. Although surveys are conducted, there has been no expansion of shelter homes since 2023, nor any strategic planning. For instance, shelters in Yeshwantpur are always full and need more shelter homes, yet there are only two in the area. In contrast, Mahadevapura and nearby localities have over six shelters, with occupancy rarely exceeding 50%. A GBA official told *The Hindu* that the Health Department has agreed to provide space in some hospitals to set up shelters, and a few new homes have been commissioned and are expected to become operational soon. "A foundation called Aaladamara has expressed interest in setting up a special shelter home, and the file has been moved," the official added.

The scheme's mandate goes beyond building shelters, as it requires ensuring that no one is deprived of a safe and secure roof. Agencies running shelters are responsible for identifying homeless persons and persuading them to move into shelters. Despite this, a 2023-24 third-party survey identified 1,329 homeless people. Agencies say they conduct biweekly surveys, but many homeless people resist relocation and sometimes even become violent during persuasion attempts. Narasimhamurthy said the civic body must explore alternative solutions in such cases. "They barely consult activists or social workers to brainstorm ideas or implement schemes effectively. There is general negligence," he said.

Challenges in running shelter homesIn many centres, beds haven't been replaced for three to four years. Pest control is needed to eliminate bedbugs, but we haven't received funds even for small works, surveys, or logistics for health camps," a shelter home manager said on condition of anonymity. He further said that funds, including salaries for staff, have not been sanctioned to several shelter homes for the past two years. There are also issues with local residents opposing shelter homes. A GBA welfare wing official admitted that funds had not been released for some shelters. "These shelters needed fresh work orders after contracts ended, but they continued operating without them, so bills were not cleared," he said. When asked about the lack of follow-up, the official acknowledged delays from former zonal offices as well. Vulnerability, mental health, and solutionsAkshay Hakay Machhindra, DCP, Central Division, said homeless people are highly vulnerable to crimes such as theft and robbery and sometimes even become accused unintentionally.

Homeless people, constantly exposed to harsh weather, also face mental health challenges. "Extreme weather discomfort can increase psychological distress, especially in people with pre-existing anxiety, depression, or trauma-related disorders. Those with poor coping mechanisms are particularly affected," said Suresh Bada Math, Professor of Psychiatry at NIMHANS. While these concerns are serious, solutions lie in civic bodies taking greater interest in and empowering their welfare wings. Narasimhamurthy stressed that Human Rights Commissions exist to address such issues and should take note of poor scheme implementation and ensure accountability. "Women are often traumatised and groped on the streets, yet feel safer in open spaces than in shelter homes" T. NarasimhamurthyHuman rights activist"Very rarely do we see homeless people involved in rag-picking or begging joining shelter homes" Mohan (name changed), manager of a shelter home

were sent to Jabalpur for further examination, officials said. According to officials from the veterinary department, food poisoning and improper diet have caused the deaths. Teams from the veterinary and forest departments, as well as the wildlife wing, have been monitoring the area for the past four days after being alerted by residents. Veterinarian Dr Manisha Chauhan, who conducted the post-mortems, said symptoms of food poisoning were found in the parrots, with no indicators of bird flu. People often unknowingly feed birds food that proves fatal to their digestive systems, she said. Veterinary extension officer Dr Suresh Baghel said rice and small pebbles were found in the stomachs of dead birds. Prima facie, the deaths seem to be linked to improper feeding, he said, citing pesticide exposure from feeding in sprayed fields and water from the Narmada.

200 parrots die of food poisoning in MP's Khargone district

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

At least 200 parrots have died on the banks of the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone district due to food poisoning, officials said on Friday (January 2, 2026). The carcasses were found in the last four days near an aqueduct bridge on the riverbank in the Badwah area, and a post-mortem report has ruled out bird flu as the cause, they said. Some parrots were alive during rescue operations, but the toxicity of the food was so severe that they died shortly thereafter. District wildlife warden Tony Sharma said. The deaths triggered panic in the area after a suspected bird flu scare, but veterinary examinations found no trace of the infection. Forest department officials have banned feeding near the aqueduct bridge and deployed staff at the site for strict enforcement. Viscera samples from the birds

Swiss face arduous task of identifying victims of deadly bar fire



information is so terrible and sensitive that nothing can be told to the families unless we are 100 percent sure," he said. What caused the blaze was unclear. Swiss authorities said it appeared to be an accident rather than an attack.

Some accounts from survivors and footage broadcast on social media suggested that the ceiling of the bar's basement may have caught fire when sparkling candles got too close. Residents of Crans-Montana, which has the distinction of being not only a popular draw for skiers, but also golfers, were stunned by the inferno. Many knew victims and some said they were lucky not to have been there themselves.

Hundreds of people stood in silence near the scene as they came to pay their respects to the victims on Thursday night. "You think you're safe here but this can happen anywhere. They were people like us," said Piermarco Pani, an 18-year-old who, like many others in the town, knew the bar well. Dozens of people left flowers or lit candles on a makeshift altar at the top of the road leading to the bar which police had cordoned off. Some cried, others quietly hugged one another. Behind the cordon, the bodies of some victims still lay in the bar, police said, as they pledged to work around the clock to identify everyone who succumbed to the blaze. Kean Sarbach, 17, said he had spoken to four people who escaped from the bar, some with burns, and that they had told him the flames had spread very quickly. Elisa Sousa, 17, said she was meant to be there but ended up spending the evening at a family gathering instead. "And honestly, I'll need thank my mother a hundred times for not letting me go," she said at the vigil for the victims. "Because God knows where I'd be now."

Indore water contamination: Infant born after 10-year wait dies; family rejects government compensation



A child born after 10 years of fervent prayers and vows died within days due to water contamination that has claimed several lives in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city. An eerie silence prevailed in an alley in the Marathi Mohalla of the Bhagirathpura area, where six-month-old Aryan Sahu lived with his family. A simple act of diluting packaged milk with water cost the baby his life and plunged the Sahu family into unbearable grief.

The family claims it has rejected the government's compensation for the death of the child, who was born after 10 years of prayers and vows. The government has announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh each to the families of the deceased persons. Residents have claimed that 15 people died due to the vomiting-diarrhoea outbreak caused by contaminated drinking water in Bhagirathpura over the last year, with Aryan being the youngest among them. The health department, however, has not confirmed this claim and said only four deaths occurred in the outbreak.

Talking to PTI on Friday (January 2, 2025), Aryan's grandmother, Krishna Sahu, said, "We have not taken any compensation from the State Government so far. Our child is gone. Will the compensation bring him back to life? Money is not greater than a child." According to the family, Aryan died on December 29, 2025. She said, "Her daughter gave birth to Aryan after 10 years of prayers and vows." The entire family prayed for his birth and made a vow at Hussain Tekri Dargah. My prayers were answered, but I never imagined that the baby would leave us so soon," she said in tears. Krishna Sahu said the child was healthy and had put on five kgs. He played in his mother's lap. One day, he suddenly started suffering from diarrhoea and, on a doctor's advice, we started with medicines at home. His condition, however, worsened, and he was taken to a hospital, where doctors declared him dead," she said. "Due to insufficient breast milk, the infant was given packaged milk and milk powder mixed with water from the municipal tap," she added. Mr. Sahu alleged that the water was contaminated and proved fatal for the child.

Anita Sen, a neighbour, said, "There is a one-month-old girl, a four-year-old child, and a 10-year-old girl in my house. Now the government should ensure that no mother is robbed of a child due to contaminated water." More than 1,400 people have been affected by vomiting and diarrhoea in Bhagirathpura over the past nine days. According to the health department, 272 patients were admitted to hospitals in the area till Thursday (January 1, 2025), of whom 71 have been discharged. At least 32 patients currently hospitalised are undergoing treatment in intensive care units, it was stated.

Why does India need climate-resilient agriculture? | Explained

Climate change is real, and for India to continue meeting domestic food demands, agriculture needs to cope with the increasing unpredictability of the weather, declining soil health, and growing air pollution.

What is climate-resilient agriculture?

Climate-resilient agriculture uses a range of biotechnology and complementary technologies to guide farming practices and reduce dependence on chemical inputs, while maintaining or improving productivity. These tools include biofertilizers and biopesticides, and soil-microbiome analyses. Genome-edited crops can be developed to withstand drought, heat, salinity, or pest pressures. In parallel, AI-driven analytics can integrate multiple environmental and agronomic variables to generate locally tailored farming strategies.

Why does India need CRA?

India is an agricultural nation with a rapidly growing population, which places increasing pressure on the need for higher and more reliable farm productivity. Yet around 51% of India's net sown area is rainfed, and this land produces nearly 40% of the country's food, making it especially vulnerable to climate variability. Conventional farming methods alone may not withstand the rising stresses of climate change, for instance, recent modelling suggests that by the end of the century, yields of staple crops like rice could fall by 3-22%, and in worst-case scenarios by more than 30%. Climate-resilient agriculture offers a suite of technologies that can enhance productivity while protecting environmental health. It can also reduce India's reliance on food imports and strengthen the country's strategic autonomy in the food sector.

Where does India stand today?

The impact of climate change on agriculture has been known for a long time. In 2011, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) launched a flagship network project 'National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture'. For enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of farmers to climate variability, location-specific climate resilience technologies such as system of rice intensification, aerobic rice, direct seeding of rice, zero till wheat sowing, cultivation of climate resilient varieties tolerant to extreme weather conditions, in-situ incorporation of rice residues, etc., have been demonstrated under the project in 448 climate-resilient villages. The National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture has been formulated to enhance agricultural productivity, especially in rainfed areas, focusing on integrated farming, water use efficiency, soil health management, and synergising resource conservation. More recently, the BioE3 policy also positioned CRA as a key thematic area for the development of biotechnology-led solu-



tions. India has a strong scientific capacity for CRA, supported by ICAR, DBT, IARI, and a growing private-sector biotechnology ecosystem. Several technologies relevant to CRA are already commercialised, especially biofertilizers, biopesticides, and microbial soil enhancers.

Leading companies such as Biostadt, IFFCO, GSFC, NFL, and IPL Biologicals supply bio-inputs that improve soil health and reduce chemical dependence. India also has an expanding digital agriculture sector, with agritech startups offering AI-enabled advisories, precision irrigation, crop health monitoring, and yield prediction tools.

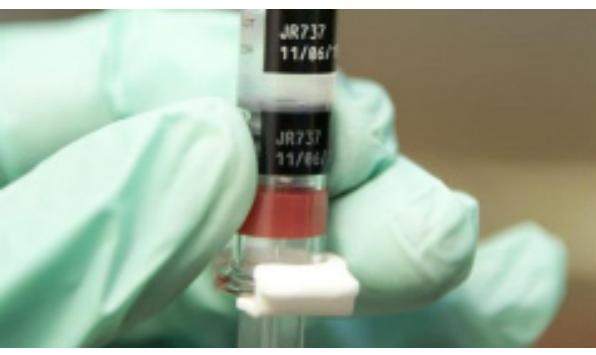
What are other countries doing?

The U.S. integrates CRA into federal policy through the USDA Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) initiative, investing billions in climate-smart practices. CRA is embedded in the EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy, both aiming to reduce chemical inputs and enhance sustainability. China's CRA strategy centres on climate-tolerant crop breeding, large-scale water-saving irrigation, and agricultural digitalisation. Brazil leads in tropical climate-resilient crop development, driven by EMBRAPA's biotechnology research.

What is the way forward?

India faces several risks in scaling CRA, including low adoption among small and marginal farmers due to limited access, awareness, and affordability, and quality inconsistencies in biofertilizers and biopesticides that undermine trust in biological alternatives. The rollout of climate-resilient seeds remains slow, with the adoption of new tools such as gene editing still emerging and uneven distribution across States. Further, the digital divide limits the reach of precision agriculture and AI-based decision tools. These challenges are compounded by ongoing soil degradation, water scarcity, and accelerating climate volatility, which may outpace current adaptation efforts. Fragmented policy coordination further risks slowing progress.

U.S. vaccine panel upends hepatitis B advice in latest Trump-era shift



An advisory panel appointed by the Trump administration's vaccine-skeptical health secretary voted Friday to stop recommending that all newborns in the United States receive a hepatitis B vaccine. The move to end the decades-old recommendation is the panel's latest contentious about-face on vaccine policy since its overhaul by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. earlier this year. U.S. health authorities previously recommended all babies, not just those born to mothers believed to have hepatitis B, receive the first of three vaccine doses just after birth. The approach aimed, in part, to prevent transfers from mothers who unknowingly had hepatitis B or had falsely tested negative, and had virtually eradicated infections of the potentially deadly liver disease among young people in the country. After delaying the vote by a day, the panel on Friday passed its new recommendation for "individual-based decision-making," in consultation with a health care provider, when children are born to mothers testing negatively for the disease. The decision to vaccinate at birth should "consider vaccine benefits, vaccine risks, and infection risks."

The new recommendation was immediately condemned by several medical groups who noted widespread shortcomings in U.S. maternal health screening as well as the possibility of infections from others. "This irresponsible and purposely misleading guidance will lead to more hepatitis B infections in infants and children," American Academy of Pediatrics President Susan J. Kressly said in a statement. The vote was 8-3. Trump-appointed officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are expected to formally adopt the recommendations at a later

date. The panel also voted to recommend that babies who are not vaccinated at birth wait at least two months to get the initial dose, and that blood tests be done to measure antibodies before a second dose. Panel overhaul: After becoming health secretary, Kennedy sacked every member of the once-staid Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), replacing them with figures whose vaccine-skeptical views track more closely with his own. It has since set to work on reviewing prior recommendations -- already tweaking advice on Covid-19 and measles shots. Medical experts fear the push could further contribute to declining vaccination rates in the United States. The panel on Friday also began a broader review of the childhood vaccination schedule, and sparked further controversy by allowing testimony from lawyer Aaron Siri, a close Kennedy associate known for spreading unfounded theories on the subject. While U.S. President Donald Trump vocally supports Kennedy's policies, some in the Republican Party have pushed back, notably Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy. Medical doctor Cassidy condemned the ACIP decision on Friday, noting the original recommendation was never "a mandate" to get the jab. CDC officials "should not sign these new recommendations and instead retain the current, evidence-based approach," he said on X. Cassidy's expression of alarm, like his prior statements against Kennedy, provoked criticism after he provided the key vote to confirm the health secretary in February. The United States had urged universal vaccination at birth against hepatitis B since 1991, advice also recommended by China, Australia and the World Health Organization. But several ACIP members argued Friday's decision would align the United States with other economically developed countries such as France and Britain. The repercussions of the ACIP's vaccine recommendations are broad because federal guidelines often dictate whether vaccines are paid for by health insurance companies in the United States, where a vaccine can cost hundreds of dollars. But the committee's influence is waning amid withering criticism from the U.S. scientific and medical community, with Democratic-led states announcing they will no longer follow its recommendations. Ahead of the vote, Dr. Cody Meissner, one of the few dissenting voices on the advisory committee, urged his colleagues not to change the current recommendations. "Do no harm is a moral imperative. We are doing harm by changing this wording," he warned.

Winds of change in music

As Chennai prepares to immerse itself in yet another music season, the decision of the Music Academy — one of the city's premier institutions — to invite music director A.R. Rahman to inaugurate its 99th annual music conference and concerts reflects a significant shift from its prior view on music. 'Isaignani' Ilaiyaraaja, who blends Carnatic ragas with folk and western classical music, inaugurated the music festival of the Academy in 2017. Changes have caught up with the sabhas in many ways. Even the language of performance is no longer an issue. Singers who once chose Telugu or Sanskrit compositions of the Carnatic Trinity and keerthanas in other languages to showcase their vidwat at the Music Academy now frequently opt for Tamil songs as the main item, or even for the ragam-tanam-pallavi.

A variety of factors has ushered in this shift. The old-timers who traced their roots to the composite Thanjavur region along the Cauvery, or to the courts of Ramanathapuram, Ettayapuram, and villages in Tirunelveli — once the living links between past and present — have almost vanished from the scene. The musical landscape is now dominated by a new generation groomed in Chennai and they are cosmopolitan in outlook. Though the majority are still Brahmins and follow the conventional kutcheri format on stage, their professional lives extend well beyond its boundaries. Their work is marked by collaborations with artistes from other genres, experiments with new forms, and performances for new and diverse audiences. In the age of the Internet, they no longer relate to Carnatic music solely as a sacred, bhakti-oriented art. Tradition and sampradaya, as a result, cannot be interpreted in the old ways. Carnatic music is a full-time profession today. When artistes collaborate across genres they do so not just for popularity but with commitment and understanding.

Among the new experiments is Band Cooum, comprising singer Susha, violinist Shreya Devnath, and percussionist Praveen Sparsh — each with a strong Carnatic background — along with parai artistes Deepan and 'Rocket' Raji (Rajendran) of the Friends Kalai Kuzhu troupe. The members of A Carnatic Quartet — featuring violinist Shreya Devnath, mridangam artiste Praveen Sparsh, nagaswaram player Mylai Karthikeyan, and thavil player Jeevanantham — have explained how collaboration and exchange of ideas have enriched their playing and deepened their understanding of music. The Chennai Sangamam, organised by the DMK government headed by M. Karunanidhi (2006-11) and



driven by MP Kanimozhi, also facilitated encounters between Carnatic and folk artistes, and took Carnatic concerts to public parks. Vocalist Sanjay Subrahmanyam, in his memoir *On That Note*, recalls how he once resolved to be a purely classical singer even as others — including P. Unnikrishnan, Bombay Jayashri, and Nithyasree — were breaking barriers between Carnatic music and cinema. Yet, he too eventually sang for films. After the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid expansion of digital platforms, audiences no longer feel compelled to attend live concerts; they can simply listen from home. This has pushed artistes to tailor their concerts and collaborations to suit an invisible, dispersed audience. Sid Sriram balances careers as playback singer and Carnatic vocalist, as did K.J. Yesudas before him. Almost all the singers of the Quarantine From Reality, a popular music programme produced by Subashree Thanikachalam, were Carnatic vocalists. Puritans who look down on other musical forms often forget that Papanasam Sivan, celebrated as the Tamil Tyagaraja, had a long and successful innings in cinema as a composer. G.N. Balasubramanian, a trendsetter in Carnatic music, acted and sang in films. M.S. Subbulakshmi and N.C. Vasanthakokilam too had notable film careers. In his book, *A Southern Music: The Carnatic Story*, T.M. Krishna notes that the first major change that Rahman brought to cinema was the quality of sound, whether local or instrumental. His arrival coincided with leaps in technology that transformed how film music was produced and experienced. "Elements of Carnatic music have appeared throughout the history of South Indian film music..." he writes. "Rahman and his successors have at times used Carnatic ragas as superficial sources of melodies."

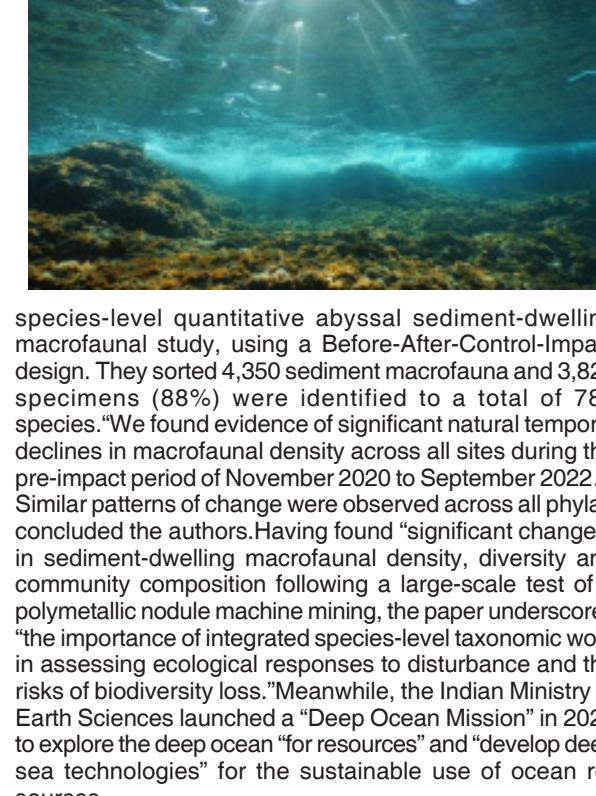
Commercial deep-sea mining is killing marine life

Deep beneath the sea thrives a massive mining industry that extracts cobalt, sulfides and polymetallic nodules (layers of iron and manganese hydroxides) from thousands of metres under the ocean. Now a group of researchers got together to understand the impact of mining projects on marine life. In the latest edition of *Nature*, they reported their findings of before and after scenarios of a large-scale test of commercial deep sea machine mining on the abyssal plain of the eastern Pacific Ocean. The depth of mining was 4,280m beneath the sea, and the project recovered over 3,000 tonnes of polymetallic nodules.

The scientists created a species-level sediment-dwelling macrofaunal dataset to assess fauna and biodiversity for two years before and two years after test mining. They found that the density of macrofauna (relatively large invertebrates such as annelid worms, peracard crustaceans and molluscs) decreased by a staggering 37% within the mining tracks and a 32% reduction in species richness.

The growing deep-sea mining industry prioritises nodules mining with a focus on a six-million-tonnes area of the central Pacific Ocean called the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ). This zone possibly holds over 21 billion tonnes of nickel, cobalt and copper-rich polymetallic nodules, said the paper. For test project, the largest of its kind, the collector tracked over 80km of abyssal seafloor of the CCZ, within a 27x24km test field recovering over 3,000 tonnes of nodules using a riser-pipe. This was done in October 2022 by the Nauru Ocean Resources (a wholly owned subsidiary of The Metals Company) and the company AllSeas. The scientists created a dataset, over two years, of the large

species-level quantitative abyssal sediment-dwelling macrofaunal study, using a Before-After-Control-Impact design. They sorted 4,350 sediment macrofauna and 3,826 specimens (88%) were identified to a total of 788 species. "We found evidence of significant natural temporal declines in macrofaunal density across all sites during the pre-impact period of November 2020 to September 2022... Similar patterns of change were observed across all phyla," concluded the authors. Having found "significant changes" in sediment-dwelling macrofaunal density, diversity and community composition following a large-scale test of a polymetallic nodule machine mining, the paper underscores "the importance of integrated species-level taxonomic work in assessing ecological responses to disturbance and the risks of biodiversity loss." Meanwhile, the Indian Ministry of Earth Sciences launched a "Deep Ocean Mission" in 2021 to explore the deep ocean "for resources" and "develop deep sea technologies" for the sustainable use of ocean resources.



Kyiv's clear message to New Delhi: Not a single Ukrainian drone sent to Pakistan



"I nearly escaped the jaws of death a few days ago when a Shahed landed near my apartment," a friend from Kyiv texted me, barely two weeks after I left the city. Her message was not unusual. In today's Ukraine, people have learned to identify the threat not by sight, but by sound. They know the whirring of a reconnaissance quadcopter, the low growl of a Russian Orlan-10, or the menacing chainsaw-like buzz of the Iranian-origin Shahed kamikaze drone. The sky tells its own story every night and Ukrainians have learned to read it for survival.

Almost four-years into the full-scale invasion by Russia, one unmistakable transformation defines this war: its high-tech, drone-driven nature. To use a cliché; it was described as the weapon of David in the battle between David vs Goliath. Drones are no longer the preserve of militaries alone; they are part of everyday vocabulary. The residents of Kyiv can distinguish which direction a loitering munition is coming from. Residents instinctively move away from windows when they hear the now-familiar mechanical hum overhead. I became particularly interested in the subject because nearly six-months ago, my own native region was pulled into the shadow of drone warfare. From May 7-10, in the tense days following the 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack, India and Pakistan exchanged drones across the border. For four nights, sleep became impossible for many of us who had direct or indirect connection with the border areas. Most of the damage occurred after the drones were shot down, when high-velocity debris fell and struck the surrounding buildings. I knew a few families whose rooftops were torn open, whose windows shattered, whose children woke in terror at sounds they could not comprehend. And yet, to be precise, what unfolded was not drone warfare in the true sense as it was merely a glimpse, a faint and unsettling preview of what the future may hold. Luckily, no one was injured or died as a result of drones. Following Russian President Putin's State visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly prepares to welcome Ukrainian President Zelensky to India. In view of this, Kyiv has conveyed a message to New Delhi with striking clarity. I was told in Kyiv by a senior official in the Ukraine military investment portfolio, who knew the exact details, was categorical: no Ukrainian drone has ever been supplied to Pakistan. "Like many countries, including Pakistan, Islamabad had expressed a letter of intent in earlier years to buy UAV technology and this is where the matter stands." But the official insisted that the conversations never materialised into any export, transfer, or co-production.

In their telling, at no point did Ukraine's drone industry, or its political leadership, authorise the sale of military-grade UAVs to Pakistan. This assertion becomes particularly important, especially in light of reports during Operation Sindo alleging that Pakistani forces were being supplied with drones originating from Ukraine. This claim has circulated but remained difficult to independently verify. This assurance helps put into perspective the complexities of a defence industry that, especially after 2022, has become one of the world's most scrutinised. It is a fact that the Ukrainian battlefield experience has ignited global interest, as drones have arguably emerged as the single most transformative instrument of warfare in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For countries like India, where drone production is expanding rapidly in the private-public space, the implications are particularly

significant or important to factor in. No other weapon system has risen to prominence as swiftly, nor reshaped battlefield calculations as dramatically. With each passing month, refinements in drone technology, from first-person-view kamikaze units to long-range strategic systems, have redrawn the contours of the conflict. What might have once been a lopsided confrontation, given Russia's overwhelming superiority in tanks, armour and infantry numbers, has been fundamentally altered.

For Ukraine, a country facing a far larger military adversary, drones, I was told, became not just tools of war but equalizers as innovations that offset traditional disadvantages and, in many instances, turned vulnerability into tactical advantage. By now, across the world, everyone has seen how the tanks without the support of drone are a sitting duck targets of the cheap drones. But the game is constantly evolving. What struck me most was not just the machines themselves, but the concepts behind them, the understanding that a remotely operated device can both eliminate an enemy position and save a wounded comrade without risking another human life. Ukrainian units now routinely deploy drones to reach injured soldiers trapped under fire; the small machine hovers low, providing cover or creating a diversion until the wounded man can climb on and be pulled to safety. In a war defined by distance and precision, even rescue has become unmanned. But nothing has transformed the battlefield as dramatically as FPV (First-Person View) kamikaze drones. Piloted through video goggles, they are cheap, fast, and lethally precise. For as little as USD 300-500, an FPV drone can destroy equipment worth millions like a tank, an artillery piece, or an armored vehicle. Ukraine now manufactures these drones on an industrial scale, producing tens of thousands each month and training specialised drone strike brigades to operate them. And then there are the long-range deep-strike drones, capable of travelling 600-1,000 km or more. These are the systems that have shaken assumptions about distance and safety, reaching deep into Russian territory.

If Russia's advantage is industrial mass, Ukraine's answer has been ingenuity. Drone production has multiplied several times over, driven by volunteers, private companies, diaspora support, and a wartime State that views drones as the equaliser. From small quadcopters costing a few hundred dollars to heavy long-range strike drones capable of hitting refineries inside Russia, Ukraine has built a diverse, layered drone ecosystem. While Moscow has reportedly carried out missile and drone attacks on Ukraine's power grid and cities in past winters and ahead of this winter, Kyiv has stepped up drone attacks on oil depots, airfields and other targets inside Russia. Entire swarms, sometimes six or seven drones at a time, are launched with the understanding that most will be intercepted. The intent is that even if several are knocked out by air defence, one or two may break through to strike their intended targets. This logic of saturation is now central to modern warfare. On 10 November 2024, this became the basis of one of the largest drone assault on Moscow since the start of the war took place as an estimated 70 drones launched toward the Russian capital. A similar pattern played out during the India-Pakistan skirmish in May, when both countries deployed surveillance drones to probe and map each other's air-defence readiness. The objective was not merely to gather intelligence but to understand how many systems would be activated, how quickly they would respond, and whether a concentrated wave of drones could penetrate the defensive grid. In many ways, the Ukrainian-Russian battlefield, high-tech, adaptive, and drone-saturated, offers a glimpse of what future conflicts elsewhere in the world may increasingly resemble. In the end, from my own sleepless nights during the India-Pakistan drone exchanges to the conversations in Kyiv, one lesson stands out: drones may dominate the skies, but it is human ingenuity and clarity of intention that ultimately define their meaning. From Kyiv's standpoint, that meaning is unmistakable which is defence, survival, and a refusal to be broken.

Ocean warmed by climate change fed intense rainfall, floods that killed over 1,600 in Asia: Study

The rapid study by World Weather Attribution focused on heavy rainfall from cyclones Senyar and Ditwah in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka starting late last month. The analysis found that warmer sea surface temperatures over the North Indian Ocean added energy to the cyclones. Floods and landslides triggered by the storms have killed more than 1,600 people, with hundreds more still missing. The cyclones are the latest in a series of deadly weather disasters affecting Southeast Asia this year, resulting in loss of life and property damage. "It rains a lot here but never like this. Usually, rain stops around September but this year it has been really bad. Every region of Sri Lanka has been affected, and our region has been the worst impacted," said Shanmugavadivu Arunachalam, a 59-year-old schoolteacher in the mountain town of Hatton in Sri Lanka's Central Province. News in Frames | An island ravaged by a cyclone After the fall: Uprooted trees line the damaged buildings in Gampola town following the landslide. A drenched prince: Muddy floodwaters partially submerge a Buddha statue in Kelaniya following Cyclone Ditwah. Grit through grief: In Kandy, people sift through the wreckage for survivors and possessions after landslides. Desolate outlook: Amid the debris of a landslide in Gampola, Kandy, a woman holding a child observes the damage to a temple. Precious cargo: People carrying pets and other possessions make their way through a flooded street in Wellampitiya following heavy rain. Rescue mission: Evacuation under way in Kotmale, Nuwara Eliya, for Indian passengers with the help of Sri Lankan authorities. Photo: Indian Air Force-X via ANI. Picking up pieces: People salvage belongings from a flooded house after flash floods in Wellampitiya on the outskirts of Colombo. For a spot of sun: Flood-hit residents collect their belongings from railway tracks in Kandy after drying them. On the edge: A damaged house perches dangerously at a landslide site in Warathenna, Kandy. Heartwarming gesture: Helping hands assist an elderly man across a flooded street in Wellampitiya.

Sea surface temperatures over the North Indian Ocean were 0.2°C Celsius higher than the average over the past three decades, according to the WWA researchers. Without global warming, the sea surface temperatures would have been about 1°C Celsius colder than they were, according to the analysis. The warmer ocean temperatures provided heat and moisture to the storms. When measuring overall temperatures, the world is currently 1.3°C Celsius warmer than global average during pre-industrial times in the 19th century, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "When the atmosphere warms, it can hold more moisture. As a result, it rains more in a warmer atmosphere as compared to a world without climate change,"



said Mariam Zachariah, with the Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College London and one of the report's authors. Using tested methods to measure climate impacts quickly, The WWA is a collection of researchers who use peer-reviewed methods to conduct rapid studies examining how extreme weather events are linked to climate change. "Anytime we decide to do a study, we know what is the procedure that we have to follow," said Zachariah, who added that they review the findings in house and send some of their analysis for peer review, even after an early version is made public. The speed at which the WWA releases their analysis helps inform the general public about the impacts of climate change, according to Zachariah. "We want people everywhere to know about why something happened in their neighbourhood," Zachariah said. "But also be aware about the reasons behind some of the events unfurling across the world."

The WWA often estimates how much worse climate change made a disaster using specific probabilities. In this case, though, the researchers said they could not estimate the precise contribution of climate change to the storms and ensuing heavy rains because of limitations in climate models for the affected islands. Climate change boosts Asia's unusually heavy rainfall. Global warming is a "powerful amplifier" to the deadly floods, typhoons and landslides that have ravaged Asia this year, said Jemilah Mahmood, with the Sunway Centre for Planetary Health, a Malaysia-based think tank that was not involved with the WWA analysis. "The region and the world have been on this path because, for decades, economic development was prioritised over climate stability," Mahmood said. "It's created an accumulated planetary debt, and this has resulted in the crisis we face." The analysis found that across the affected countries, rapid urbanisation, high population density and infrastructure in low-lying flood plains have elevated exposure to flood events.

Parties make last-minute push as campaigning ends



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

With campaigning for the zila parishad and block samiti elections ending on Friday, political parties in Punjab intensified their last-minute efforts to woo voters ahead of Sunday's polling. A total of 1.36 crore rural voters – about 63.5 per cent of Punjab's total electorate (2.14 crore) as per the 2024 Lok Sabha rolls – are eligible to cast their votes. AAP ministers and MLAs remained focused on comparing the party's performance since 2022 with previous governments, while SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal continued to emphasise the development works undertaken during former CM Parkash Singh Badal's tenure. BJP's state leadership, including working president Ashwani Sharma, highlighted central schemes, asserting that key funding for Punjab's rural works has come from the Union government. AAP's final-day outreach

On Friday, cabinet ministers Aman Arora and Harbhajan Singh ETO campaigned in the Jandiala Guru area of Amritsar, while Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema addressed meetings in his constituency, Dirba. Cheema told voters, "Opponents mocked us when we promised 300 units of free power, but today more than 90 per cent households are getting zero bills. We have given thousands of jobs, and we continue to deliver on our promises."

However, the campaign saw controversy on Thursday day after Sangrur MLA Narinder Kaur Bharaj alleged during a rally in Jhaneri village (Bhawanigarh) that an independent candidate – allegedly involved in selling poppy husk and liquor – had earlier sought help from AAP functionaries to evade cases and was now contesting against the party's candidate. "Such people will only engage in hooliganism if elected," she said in her speech. The BJP reacted sharply, sharing her video on its Facebook page with the caption: "MLA admits her people are selling drugs. If the govern-

ment is saving culprits, how can drugs end?" Development grants resurface Villagers in Thui (Nabha block, Patiala) posted a video thanking the Punjab government for releasing Rs 50 lakh each to 149 villages where Guru Tegh Bahadur had visited, and gurdwaras have come up in those places. Though the scheme was announced earlier to mark the 350th martyrdom year of the Guru, the thanksgiving video has been shared by AAP Punjab on its social media handle while the rural poll campaign is going on. Apart from these, sources indicated that many villages are being promised development grants if AAP candidates win by large margins. SAD focuses on Parkash Singh Badal's legacy Sukhbir Singh Badal, campaigning in Gidderbaha on Thursday and in Bathinda and Ferozepur on Friday, reiterated that the "maximum development in Punjab happened under Parkash Singh Badal." He told voters that Badal ended waterlogging in Gidderbaha and launched welfare schemes such as free atta-dal and free power for tubewells. Calling for support to SAD candidates, he said, "Voting in masse for SAD will be a true tribute to Parkash Singh Badal." He also attacked the Congress governments of the past six decades, challenging them to name "one major work" they did for Punjab. BJP highlights illegal mining, central schemes BJP working president and Pathankot MLA Ashwani Sharma campaigned across rural areas of his constituency on Thursday and Friday. He said the BJP was receiving "immense support", adding that illegal mining remained a core issue. Sharma cited posters in parts of Anandpur Sahib – represented by AAP minister Harjot Singh Bains – where locals have demanded action against rampant mining. "The government must answer on real issues," he said. Throughout the campaign, Opposition parties accused the ruling AAP of misusing official machinery. A viral audio clip allegedly involving Patiala SSP Varun Sharma on rural polls also became contentious. Poll details Punjab has 23 zila parishads with 357 constituencies, of which elections will be held in 342. Fifteen candidates – 12 in Tarn Taran and three in Amritsar, all from AAP – have already been elected unopposed. A total of 1,265 candidates are contesting the remaining seats. In the 2,863 constituencies across 154 block samitis, 181 candidates have been elected unopposed: 98 (Tarn Taran), 63 (Amritsar), 17 (Hoshiarpur), 2 (Malerkotla) and 1 (SBS Nagar). Except for one independent in SBS Nagar, all are from AAP. Polling will be held for the remaining 2,682 seats, where 8,314 candidates are in the fray. In total, 196 candidates across both tiers have been elected unopposed, while 9,579 remain in contention.

The inspections will include mining sites, stone crushers, hot mix plants, and tyre pyrolysis units. The Commission also ordered that the Sarpanch of Khanak and local villagers be made part of these inspection teams to ensure transparency and community involvement. The Commission highlighted the significance of tyre pyrolysis units, which operate by heating old tyres at 350–600°C in the absence of oxygen to extract useful by-products," Commission's spokesperson Dr Punit Arora said. In compliance with an earlier order dated August 19, HSPCB and the Mining Department submitted detailed reports on November 17. According to these reports, mining activities being carried out by Haryana State Industrial & Infrastructure Development

Haryana rights panel orders stringent action, joint raids on mining and pollution in Bhiwani



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

The Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) has taken significant action in response to complaints alleging illegal mining, air pollution, and unauthorised operation of industrial units in Khanak village of Bhiwani district. The Commission has directed multiple departments to intensify monitoring and initiate strict enforcement against the deteriorating air quality in the region. The Full Commission – comprising chairperson Justice Lalit Batra and members Kuldip Jain and Deep Bhatia – has directed the Haryana State Pollution Control Board (HSPCB) and the Bhiwani Mining Department to conduct regular, random inspections across Khanak and surrounding villages.

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Corporation (HSIIC) in Khanak since December 2016 are operating within legal parameters, with no evidence of illegal mining. Joint inspections and continuous monitoring have confirmed adherence to environmental safety measures.

Air quality data recorded between November 5 and 12 shows that although the Khanak region experiences dust-related pollution, Bhiwani city reported even higher AQI levels on most days, often falling into the 'very poor' category. The findings suggest that the pollution issue extends beyond the mining belt and affects the wider district. The Commission reviewed additional environmental initiatives reported by authorities. Under the GRAP Stage-III guidelines, several units have been temporarily shut down, and their three-phase electricity connections have been disconnected for violations. Two major projects – planting 2,080 saplings along the Tosham-Hisar Road and deploying three truck-mounted anti-smog guns – have been approved at the district level and forwarded for final sanction. Both initiatives will be funded through the Environment Compensation (EC) Fund," Dr Arora added. Officers stated that most stone crushers and all tyre pyrolysis units are either closed or complying with the regulations, he said. Despite official closure directives, the Commission has noted that complaints alleging clandestine operation of tyre pyrolysis plants, stone crushers, and hot mix plants persisted. In response, the HHRC has instructed the deputy commissioner, superintendent of police, regional officer of HSPCB, and subdivisional magistrate and deputy superintendent of police of Tosham to ensure rigorous enforcement. Authorities must deploy adequate police force and form joint enforcement teams to conduct surprise raids. Any machinery, vehicles, or materials found operating in violation of closure orders are to be seized immediately," the Commission ordered. "Due to the seriousness of allegations and the findings so far, senior officers from the HSPCB, Mines and Geology Department, district administration, and local monitoring authorities have been directed to submit a comprehensive compliance report. The next hearing is scheduled for February 17, 2026," Dr Arora said.

BJP to fight 140-150 seats, Sena on 80-90 seats; to contest as Mahayuti

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

The BJP and the Shiv Sena will contest the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections together as alliance partners and have reached an agreement on seat-sharing, state BJP president Ravindra Chavan said on Friday. Highly placed sources in both parties hinted that the BJP is likely to contest 140-150 seats, while the Shiv Sena may field candidates in 80-90 seats. The BMC has a total of 227 seats. Other parties, including the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Republican Party of India (Athawale), will be part of the Mahayuti alliance.

"The upcoming local body elections will be contested under the Mahayuti banner," Chavan said, addressing the media in Nagpur. He said the decision was taken at a meeting convened by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule and himself. An identical decision was taken at the BJP's core committee meeting held separately, he added. The Mahayuti will contest as one for all other major municipal corporation polls, including Thane. "The details regarding the seat-sharing formula will be mutually decided by top state leaders with alliance partners," Chavan said. The development comes after more than a month of acrimonious clashes between the BJP and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena. "Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Fadnavis, development remains an integral aspect of governance in Maharashtra. We believe that to push development, we have to collectively contest the polls," Chavan said. The municipal corporation elections, including those



for the BMC, are likely to be held in January 2026, according to Chavan. However, this will depend on how the Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation matter plays out before the Supreme Court. Unofficially, sources indicated that the BJP and Shiv Sena would show flexibility and strike a consensus through give-and-take. Initially, the BJP had signalled its intent to contest at least 150 seats, while the Shiv Sena was seeking not fewer than 100. It is now believed that the BJP would settle for 140 to 150 seats and the Shiv Sena for 80 to 90 seats. In the 2017 BMC polls, the undivided Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray and the BJP contested the BMC polls separately. The Shiv Sena won 84 seats, and the BJP 82. Post elections, they formed an alliance in the BMC. For the upcoming BMC polls, the BJP has resolved to wrest control from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT).

Why is Mumbai experiencing so many water cuts even as lake levels are at 3-year high

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Over the past 10 days, at least three major water cuts have been implemented across Mumbai, starting with an 18-hour disruption affecting Kandivali and Borivali pockets between December 4 and 5. This was followed by a 15 per cent water suspension, which impacted more than half of Mumbai, including 17 wards, from December 8 to December 9. These ongoing water cuts have occurred despite the water stock in the seven lakes supplying water to Mumbai being at a three-year high. As of Friday, December 12, the total stock in these lakes reached 11.99 lakh million litres, or nearly 83 per cent of their total capacity. In comparison, last year, the stock on the same day was 78 per cent, and in 2021, it dropped to 75.11 per cent. Despite the above-average rainfall leading to increased lake levels, Mumbai is experiencing these water cuts, which senior civic officers attribute to ongoing augmentation works. What has caused recent water cuts? According to senior officers from the BMC's hydraulic department, the isolated water cuts have been planned to commission new water channels across several parts of the city.

"Several new water tunnels have been laid to replace the century-old water mains supplying water to the city. However, the tunnels cannot be commissioned without the connections. Consequently, several isolated cuts have been planned to make connections to these new channels. For instance, the first water cut was implemented between December 1 and 2 around Chembur area to facilitate connections to the new Amar Mahal tunnel. Later, between December 8 and 9, the removal of an old 100-year-old main from the Tansa channel was carried out," an officer from the civic hydraulic department explained. Regarding the current water suspension in three wards of Mumbai, officials stated that cross-connection work for transferring the water supply from Upper Vaitarna to Vaitarna is underway. "Since we were observing the festive season in the previous months, we had to plan all our water connections in this month to prevent any disruptions. As a result, several water cuts are being implemented in parts of Mumbai," said a BMC officer. "These essential development projects aim to improve and augment the water supply in Mumbai. However, emergency works may also be initiated in response to sudden issues, such as pipe bursts," the officer added.

How will the new connections aid water supply?

Mumbai's water demands are met by seven lakes – Tulsi, Vihar, Bhatsa, Tansa, Upper Vaitarna, Middle Vaitarna, and Modak Sagar. Water from these lakes situated in the



suburbs of Mumbai or neighbouring districts of Thane and Nashik is supplied to the city through a labyrinth network of water conveyance systems. However, most of the water channels were laid decades ago with many laid in the British era. To replace the aging infrastructure, the civic body is undertaking projects to construct new water conveyance tunnels. Unlike the older tunnels, the new ones have larger diameters and can transport greater volumes of water at maximum efficiency.

"Considering the rising water demands of the city, all the new water tunnels are significantly wider than their predecessors to enhance carrying capacity. The primary goal of these projects is to augment and improve the water supply in Mumbai," an officer told The Indian Express. In addition to the ongoing connection works, the BMC is also enhancing several existing water channels. Among the tunnel projects nearing completion are the Amar Mahal to Parel water tunnel in Trombay and a water tunnel linking Ghatkopar to Powai, officers said. The BMC has also planned a new project involving an 8.7 km-long conveyance tunnel that will connect the upcoming sewage treatment plant (STP) at Dharavi with the BMC's water filtration plant at Bhandup.

The need to increase water supply is Surrounded by seas, Mumbai relies solely on the monsoon to cater to its potable water demands. During the four months of the monsoon, the catchment areas of the seven lakes, which have a collective capacity of 14.47 lakh million litres, get replenished. Currently, the city's water resources are able to supply only 3,950 MLD daily, as against the actual demand of 4,505 MLD. As the region experiences an increase in heatwave days during the summer, leading to faster evaporation, coupled with population growth and delayed monsoons, the municipal body is struggling to meet Mumbai's water needs.

Kolkata Metro expansion: Why Railways couldn't take forward the Barrackpore-Kalyani metro corridor

GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Kolkata Metro Barrackpore Kalyani Metro Corridor Update: In recent years, Kolkata Metro has expanded at a remarkable pace. While the network grew only from 28 km between 1972 and 2014 – a span of 42 years – it added another 17 km from 2014 to 2025, reaching a total of 45 km. However, several metro projects in the 'City of Joy' continue to face delays, largely due to land acquisition challenges. Amid this progress, an interesting question arises: why did the Ministry of Railways – under which Kolkata Metro operates – decide not to move forward with the Barrackpore-Kalyani metro corridor even after completing the survey? Barrackpore-Kalyani metro route

During the ongoing session of Parliament, Lok Sabha MP Partha Bhowmick asked Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw whether there are any plans to extend the Kolkata Metro up to Kalyani, AIIMS to improve connectivity for the people of Barrackpore. In his response, Vaishnaw stated that a survey for a new metro corridor from Barrackpore to Kalyani had indeed been conducted, but the project could not be taken forward due to low traffic projection. "Survey for new metro corridor from Barrackpore to Kalyani was carried out but the project could not be taken forward due to low traffic projection," he said. He further added that Kalyani is an existing station of Indian Railway Network on Sealdah-Ranaghat section. Presently, four metro corridors covering a total of 52 km are under construction in and around Kolkata. Of this, nearly 20 km is stalled due to land acquisition and utility-shifting issues pertaining to the state government, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed in a



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written statement in the Lok Sabha on December 10.

Anish Mondal is a business journalist with over nine years of experience. He writes on diverse subjects such as Infrastructure, Railways, Roadways, Aviation, Politics, Market, Parliamentary affairs, Corporate earnings, General and International news etc..



US firm & NTPC to team up, fuel India's thorium ambitions



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Chicago-based Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE), only the second American company to have bagged an export licence from the US Department of Energy to sell nuclear technology to India in nearly two decades, will partner NTPC Ltd, the country's largest power utility, in the development of thorium as an alternative to uranium for fueling nuclear reactors. The Board of state-owned NTPC is learnt to have cleared a minority equity investment in CCTE in a strategic early stage participation effort in this niche area, which could potentially mark another step toward closer cooperation between India and the US on atomic energy at a time when bilateral trade relations are still in a limbo.

The NTPC stake infusion proposal is subject to clearances from the Ministry of Power. The minority investment by NTPC, sources said, is aligned with its objective of setting up 30GWe (giga watt electric) of atomic energy capacity by 2047 and exploring an entry into the nuclear fuel cycle in a way that it aligns with India's broader strategic objectives in the nuclear sector. Queries sent to NTPC on the issue did not elicit a response. The move also signifies the government's plan to explore the deployment of a thorium-based fuel for India's existing fleet of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs), which could, in turn, help buttress the country's energy and fuel security. Earlier in December, Parliament had passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025, which marked a major shift in how India's tightly-controlled nuclear power sector will be governed in the coming years.

For the first time, the legislation enables private players to enter the operations side of this critical sector, including the possibility of foreign participation in the future. It also envisages a role for private entities in areas such as fuel management, which had remained under tight public-sector control for decades. The advantage with the thorium fuel produced by the Chicago-based company is that it can be shipped to India and directly loaded on to PHWRs. Thorium, the radioactive metallic element named after the Norse god, has been a long-standing hope for India's true energy security. It has been touted as an alternative to uranium since 1954 by India's policymakers because it's more abundant, produces lesser amounts of long-lived radioactive waste (that have a long half-life) and potentially lowers the proliferation risk.

For India, which has little uranium reserves but has abundant deposits of thorium, the latter has been part of a long-term strategy for reducing dependence on imported nuclear fuels. CCTE's founder and CEO Mehul Shah is of Indian origin. While thorium deployment has been predicated on the idea of new reactors being designed in the last leg of India's 3-stage nuclear programme to run on this fuel, which could entail reconstructing the country's nuclear power fleet from the ground up, Shah and his company have approached this differently as part of Clean Core's broader research of advanced nuclear fuel cycles, whereby it has created a new type of fuel that blends thorium with a more concentrated type of uranium named HALEU (high-assay low-enriched uranium). This can then be used in India's pressurised heavy-water reactors that make up the bulk of the country's existing fleet.

Clean Core's new fuel, called ANEEL or Advanced Nuclear Energy for Enriched Life, can be potentially deployed in the country's PHWRs at scale. The combination of thorium with small amounts of enriched uranium and the promise of its use in existing or new PHWR reactors promises to enhance India's energy security by using domestically available thorium, and improving safety and proliferation resistance. It could also significantly reduce nuclear

waste. Additionally, the new fuel promises cost savings by delivering greater energy output within existing safety margins and lowering the operating costs of current reactors. CCTE is learnt to have figured in assurances extended by the Department of Atomic Energy and the country's nuclear regulator, the AERB, to the US between March and May 2025, and a licence was granted to it in August from the US DOE. Earlier, on March 26, the DoE had cleared New Jersey-based Holtec International's application for specific authorisation with respect to the restrictive regulation that is referred to as "10CFR810" (Part 810 of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954) for transfer of technology to Indian entities.

According to nuclear scientist Anil Kakodkar, given that India is able to build large PHWR capacity with imported uranium as fuel, the country has the possibility of using this reactor capacity for conversion of thorium to fissile uranium through irradiation of thorium along with HALEU uranium fuel combination in the country's PHWRs at scale. This enables the launch of the thorium phase (the third phase of India's three-stage nuclear programme) earlier, without having to wait for build-up of required fast breeder reactor capacity in the second phase. PHWRs comprise the first phase of the 3-stage programme. The used fuel from these PHWRs, the mainstay of India's nuclear power programme, can then be recycled to set up additional power generation capacity, including through the new-age molten salt reactors or MSRs (nuclear fission reactor with molten salt as coolant or fuel). This will enable faster energy independence from imported nuclear fuel, Kakodkar told A former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, he is now Chancellor of the Homi Bhabha National Institute and Chairman of the Rajiv Gandhi Science & Technology Commission.

Thorium itself is not a 'fissile' material like uranium, which means that its atoms are not inherently unstable enough for an extra neutron to easily split the nuclei and release energy. But it is classified as 'fertile', and can soak in neutrons and transform into the fissile material uranium-233, which can then be split to release energy. The Department of Atomic Energy's 3-stage power programme envisages a pathway to utilising India's abundant thorium reserves – found in coastal sands on the beaches of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, and in the inland riverine sands of Jharkhand and West Bengal – to generate electricity. The second stage of the 3-stage plan involves the Fast Breeder Reactors or FBRs, where operational progress has been slow. Given the impediments being faced in the large-scale deployment of FBRs, Kakodkar said a solution lies in looking at fuel cycle options instead of reactor options and that India needed "to be able to establish, as early as possible, self-sustaining (or near enough) thorium based nuclear power generation capacity sufficient enough... This, in turn, requires reactor capacity large enough to convert the required quantity of fissile uranium from thorium in time." Indian policymakers have long considered thorium an alternative to uranium because it's more abundant, produces lesser amounts of long-lived radioactive waste and potentially lowers the proliferation risk. India has little uranium reserves but abundant deposits of thorium, mostly on the beaches of Kerala and Odisha.

Delays in FBR deployment is bad news for India's nuclear programme, given that these reactors envisaged the use of recycled fuel while breeding much more fissile fuel. By irradiating thorium along with HALEU in the country's pressurised heavy-water reactors (which use heavy water as a coolant and moderator) at scale, one can make up for delays in the second stage, Kakodkar said. The world over, most leading nuclear players such as the US, Russia, France and South Korea specialise in building light water reactors or LWRs, where normal water is used as coolant and moderator. While the SHANTI Act opens the door for LWR-based imported reactors to be set up, leveraging existing PHWRs does present itself as an important diversification from the import risk. Pressurised heavy-water reactors are said to be more suited to handling thorium because heavy water – an isotope of water that has an extra neutron on the hydrogen atom – absorbs fewer neutrons during the fission process, increasing the efficiency of the fission reaction by allowing more neutrons to be absorbed by the thorium. Currently, there are over 45 PHWRs operating worldwide: 19 in India, 17 in Canada, three each in Argentina and South Korea, and two each in China and Romania, according to International Atomic Energy Agency data.

Stock market in 2026: Earnings, US trade deal, and stability in focus



2025 was a turbulent year for the Indian stock market as it battled high valuations, geopolitical uncertainties, global policy uncertainty due to the US tariffs, a rapidly weakening rupee, and persistent foreign investor outflows. The benchmark Nifty 50 and Sensex, however, remained resilient in the face of these challenges, with the former ending at 25,938.85 on Tuesday, up 9 per cent in the year – and this is after a correction of around 18 per cent earlier in the year. Both indices broke their all-time highs in November on the back of a rally led mostly by the financial sector and a few big companies. For 2026, expectations are higher, with hopes pinned on a further uptick in earnings growth, strong macroeconomic fundamentals, and the Indian and US governments finalising a long-overdue free trade agreement. Kotak Securities expects the Nifty 50 to rise over 12 per cent to 29,120 points in 2026, while global capital markets firm Jefferies' target implies a potential upside of 9 per cent to 28,300 points. "Supported by lower inflation, tax reforms, and easier monetary policy, we believe Indian equities are set to be in a stronger position in 2026. Consensus forecasts point to 10 per cent growth in FY26 and 16 per cent in FY27 (14 per cent for large caps)," HSBC analysts said in a note earlier this month. "Valuations are now more reasonable, with India's premium over other emerging markets back to normal levels. We also anticipate more foreign flows as funds look to diversify beyond AI-focused sectors in Asia." The positive outlook for Indian stocks is despite the rupee's weak performance against the US dollar in recent months, deterring foreign portfolio inflows – and, in turn, further weakening the rupee. The rupee has fallen around 5 per cent in 2025, with the exchange rate breaking past the 90- and 91-per-dollar marks in December before the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) intervened to stem the rot. On Tuesday, the rupee ended at 89.79 per dollar.

Following the rapid decline in the second half of 2025, analysts now believe the rupee is undervalued compared to peers. A key metric they point to is the rupee's real effective exchange rate, or REER, which measures the exchange rate not against one particular currency but 40 of them after adjusting for the level of inflation in the respective countries. And India's 40-currency REER on a trade-weighted

basis stood at 97.51 in November. An REER number below 100 indicates a currency is undervalued. The extent of the rupee's decline in recent months can be understood by the fact that the REER in November 2024 was 108.03, which suggested the rupee was overvalued by around 8 per cent against the basket of 40 currencies. Since then, not only has the rupee fallen, India's domestic inflation has also plummeted to all-time lows. Going ahead, the REER is seen stabilising due to positive macroeconomic conditions, among other factors. One of these factors is seen to be an agreement over a trade deal being reached between India and the US. The two countries have been at it for the better part of a year and while relations had cooled dramatically after the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff on India for its import of Russian arms and energy, talks subsequently regained momentum. An FTA is seen leading to a resumption of foreign inflows into India, which would strengthen the rupee, market participants said. "FPI exposure remains the lightest in history. The structural domestic bid is intact. India's long-term story has been reinforced with a slew of reforms. Thus, in our view, Indian equities appear set to reverse their worst performance relative to EM (emerging markets) in 31 calendar years," Morgan Stanley's Ridham Desai and Nayan Parekh said in a report in November, adding that they had a 13 per cent upside in the Sensex in 2026 as their base case. While Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out Rs 1.6 lakh crore (\$18.22 billion) on a net basis in 2025 from Indian stocks, domestic investors have more than made up for it.

6 fruits that do not raise blood sugar levels when consumed mindfully



– Apples, especially with the skin on, provide fibre and polyphenols that slow digestion and lower blood sugar spikes.

– Avocados are technically fruits that are rich in healthy fats and fibre, which help stabilise glucose.

– Blueberries are packed with antioxidants that improve how your cells respond to insulin.

– Grapefruit contains naringenin, a natural compound that improves insulin action.

– Whole oranges, not the juice, offer both fibre and vitamin C and are low on the glycemic index.

– Even green apples are a good low-sugar option that can reduce cravings without causing a sugar crash, said Dr Ghody. blood sugar Here's what to consider about blood sugar Does this mean fruit is completely safe for diabetics? It is all about balance. Dr Ghody said that people with insulin resistance or diabetes should stay away from fruit juices and dried fruits, as these quickly raise blood sugar. "However, whole, fresh fruits, especially those high in fibre and lower on the glycemic index, can be included in moderation. Pairing fruit with protein or fat can also help minimise glucose spikes," said Dr Ghody. So, fruit is not the enemy. "When you choose wisely and eat mindfully, certain fruits can be part of a smart diet that supports healthy blood sugar levels," said Dr Ghody.

'Kam se kam bata dena chahiye tha': When Neena Gupta found out she was replaced from a movie through Instagram



Neena Gupta revealed how she discovered through Instagram that she had been replaced in a film role. Neena Gupta revealed how she discovered through Instagram that she had been replaced in a film role.

In the unpredictable world of show business, even seasoned actors face moments that test their emotional resilience. Veteran actor Neena Gupta recently shared one such moment on a talk show, recounting how she discovered she was replaced in a film through Instagram. "So meri ek movie ke liye mujhe bulaya aur bula 'karna hai, karna hai, you have to do, you have to do'. I said okay, okay," she began. The makers had even started discussing dates and payment with her. But then, she continued, "Thode din ke baad maine dekha Instagram mein... ek meri umar ki ac-

tress unke office mein ja rahi hai." Her suspicions were confirmed when she discovered that the role had been given to someone else. "Pata chala ki meri jagah usko le liya hai," she said. Neena didn't hold back and decided to address the matter directly. "I wrote him a message, I said, 'Kam se kam bata dena chahiye tha. Theek hai, aapka mind change ho gaya... You think wo actress better rahegi role ke liye." To the filmmaker's credit, he responded sincerely. "He said, 'Sorry, maine galti ki. I should have told you.' And now we are friends, aisa kuch nahi hai." But the emotional sting of being replaced, especially without communication, is hard to ignore. According to Srishti Vatsa, a counselling psychologist, such moments require a balanced, emotionally intelligent response."

Acknowledging your shortcomings is important because it puts you in a growth mindset and helps you manage emotions when facing setbacks," says Vatsa. Rather than slipping into self-doubt or shame, Vatsa advocates for realistic self-assessment. "It means being aware of your limitations without judging yourself. This self-awareness enables you to reassess your skills and potential realistically. You can focus on improvement rather than perfection." She adds that being open to help and collaboration is crucial during such phases. "Accepting your weaknesses is not about failure but about developing resilience and a stronger sense of self." Neena's calm confrontation, without burning bridges, offers a lesson in grace.

Short weekend getaways from Mangaluru for a quick escape

Mangaluru, the port city of Karnataka, has an impressive geographical profile. Not only is it blessed with beaches, forests, waterfalls, and hill drives, but it is also close to many gorgeous nearby locations. The city offers plenty of short, refreshing getaways. Whether you're craving cool mountain air, quiet coastal towns, or spiritual calm, several destinations lie just a few hours away—ideal for a spontaneous weekend break. Known for its misty hills and coffee estates, Coorg is a classic weekend retreat that balances nature, culture, and slow travel. It's ideal for couples and nature lovers looking to unwind.

Distance & travel time: ~135 km | 4–5 hours Must visit: Abbey Falls, Raja's Seat, coffee plantations, Dubare Elephant Camp. Mangaluru is also known as the Scotland of India (Image: Unsplash)2. Chikmagalur

Chikmagalur offers sweeping hill views, trekking routes, and plantation stays. It's quieter than Coorg and perfect for travellers seeking greenery without heavy crowds. Distance & travel time: ~165 km | 5–6 hours

Must visit: Mullayanagiri Peak, Baba Budangiri, coffee estates, Hebbe Falls

3. Udupi A laid-back coastal town, Udupi combines spiritual heritage with easy access to the beach. It's ideal for a short, low-effort weekend break from Mangalore. Distance & travel time: ~60 km | 1.5–2 hours

Must visit: Sri Krishna Temple, Malpe Beach, St. Mary's Island, Kaup Beach. Mangaluru is situated on the Arabian Sea coast, offering beautiful beaches like Malpe Beach (Image: Unsplash)

4. Bekal

Bekal is best known for its sea-facing fort and uncrowded beaches. It suits travellers who want coastal views without the bustle of bigger beach destinations. Distance & travel time: ~70 km | 2 hours

Must visit: Bekal Fort, Bekal Beach, and nearby backwaters

5. Sakleshpur

Set in the Western Ghats, Sakleshpur is a quiet hill destination with monsoon greenery, plantation homestays, and scenic viewpoints. Distance & travel time: ~140 km | 4–5 hours

Must visit: Manjarabad Fort, Bisle Viewpoint, railway bridge trek6. Kudremukh Kudremukh is a paradise for trekkers and outdoor enthusiasts, known for rolling grasslands and protected forest landscapes. Distance & travel time: ~95 km | 3–4 hours Must visit: Kudremukh Peak trek, Laka Dam, forest trails mangalore Bahubali Statue is a massive 57-foot monolith carved from a single granite rock, built around 981 AD by Chavundaraya, representing Jain ideals (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

7. Dharmasthala

A major pilgrimage centre, Dharmasthala, also attracts visitors for its serene setting and spiritual calm amid forested surroundings. Distance & travel time: ~75 km | 2.5 hours

Must visit: Dharmasthala Temple, Bahubali statue, Netravathi bathing ghat

8. Gokarna



Gokarna blends temple-town charm with relaxed beaches, making it a peaceful alternative to more crowded coastal destinations. Distance & travel time: ~235 km | 6–7 hours Must visit: Om Beach, Kudle Beach, Mahabaleshwar Temple, beach trek trail

mangalore Agumbe, the biodiverse village in the Western Ghats, is also known as the "Cobra Capital of India" due to its high King Cobra population (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

9. Agumbe

Often called the "Cherrapunji of the South," Agumbe is ideal for monsoon lovers, sunset seekers, and rainforest explorers. Distance & travel time: ~100 km | 3–4 hours Must visit: Agumbe Sunset Point, Barkana Falls, rainforest walks

10. Kasaragod

Just across the Karnataka-Kerala border, Kasaragod offers forts, backwaters, and hill escapes without heavy tourist traffic. Distance & travel time: ~50 km | 1.5 hours Must visit: Chandragiri Fort, Ranipuram Hills, backwater stretches Curated For You

FAIFA urges rollback of tobacco excise hike, warns of smuggling risk

New Delhi: The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA) on Friday urged the government to roll back the notified excise rates on tobacco products and revise them to revenue-neutral rates, to disincentivise smuggling, and support domestic agriculture. A stable taxation framework, FAIFA noted in a statement, is necessary to sustain farmer incomes, protect employment across the value chain, and align economic policy with long-term public health goals. The Ministry of Finance notification 'Chewing Tobacco, Jarda Scented Tobacco and Gutkha Packing Machines (Capacity Determination and Collection of Duty) Rules, 2026' has imposed an excise duty of Rs 2,050-Rs 8,500 per 1,000 sticks, depending on cigarette length, effective February 1.

Fan experiences, lack of a Test No. 3, political instability – the messes, on and off field, that need cleaning up



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

I hope the suits who run sports remember this: the game does not breathe in boardrooms, it breathes in the stands. In 2025, two moments laid bare how far fans have slipped down the priority list — both ending in tragedy: a stampede in Bengaluru, then chaos in Kolkata. There were other times when the disregard was less dramatic but just as telling. In Ahmedabad, those trying to catch the India-South Africa T20 action chased water instead. In Delhi, they were lathi-charged for wanting to see Kohli. At the India Open, badminton was watched from broken, filthy chairs. The list is endless. Sport survives because people call in sick at work, spend their last rupee on costly flights and match-day tickets (laying hands on them is another task!) and raise their voices from the stands. The least they deserve is drinkable water, clean toilets, sturdy seats and dignity.

No more fiascosWith the hosting rights of the 2030 Commonwealth Games in the pocket, and an active bid for the hosting rights of the 2036 Olympics, India is actively trying to place itself as a favourable sporting destination. However, the memories of the last time India hosted a big international event in the form of the 2010 Commonwealth Games remain fresh. A recent incident at the World Para Athletics Championships in New Delhi, where two coaches were bitten by a stray dog led to further embarrassment. The Messi GOAT tour fiasco in Kolkata only added to that, effectively implying that there are visible gaps when it comes to India's management of big-scale events. The 2026 Badminton World Championships are scheduled in August and will be hosted in New Delhi; one can only hope that there is no moment there that turns into another tale of embarrassment.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be the biggest till date with 48 teams, but with the Donald Trump administration imposing partial or total travel bans on citizens of several participating countries, there is uncertainty over who would be allowed in, whether they are fans or officials of national football federations. People from Iran and Haiti, two countries that have qualified for the tournament, are banned from entering the United States. Others like Senegal and Ivory Coast face additional travel restrictions. This will be the first World Cup co-hosted by three countries – the US, Canada and Mexico – which don't see eye to eye on all matters. How they and individual US host cities, as well as the federal government, welcome the world would be looked at with interest. A team that had not been beaten at home since

'Too many World Cups, so it's little bit of an overkill': R Ashwin urges ICC to follow FIFA's pattern to hold marquee event once in 4 years



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

R Ashwin on too many World Cups2025 had the Champions Trophy tournament for the men and the ODI World Cup for the women while 2026 will host both the Men's as well as the Women's T20 World Cups. (AP)Ravichandran Ashwin urged the International Cricket Council (ICC) to reconsider their scheduling, saying that nowadays every year has a marquee tournament like a World Cup and a Champions Trophy which are there mainly because of revenue generation. 2025 had the Champions Trophy tournament for the men and the ODI World Cup for the women while 2026 will host both the Men's as well as the Women's T20 World Cups.

"The ODI format has become redundant and to top it, ICC needs to see how they are conducting these World

Cups. Every year, there is an ICC tournament for revenue generation pattern, but look at how FIFA is doing it. There are leagues (EPL, La Liga, Serie A, Bundesliga) happening and they do their World Cup once in every four years. The World Cup has value as it's a marquee tournament. (But in cricket) too many bilaterals, too many formats, too many World Cups, so it's little bit of an overkill," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel 'Ash Ki Baat'.

While many like the legendary Sachin Tendulkar have suggested a split-innings format for one-dayers to revive them, Ashwin said that having just one 50-over event, the World Cup every four years, could also be a possible option. "If you really want to make ODI cricket relevant, then just play these (T20s) leagues and play ODI World Cup once in four years. So when people turn up for events, there will be sense of expectation. (Otherwise) I feel it (ODI cricket) is going towards slow death," he said. Ashwin had also opined that the ODIs might struggle once established stars like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retire from it, adding that the format was once amazing that produced a player like Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who knew how to control the innings as required by the game then. "...Dhoni (would) take singles for 10-15 overs before he went berserk at the end. You don't have players like that (Dhoni) anymore. There isn't any requirement to play like that, as you are playing with two new balls and five fielders inside circle," said Ashwin, asserting that modern ODIs are either a 'BashaThon' or a tale of collapse if the wicket happens to be slightly difficult," he said.

Todd Murphy is hopeful for spinners having a big role in Sydney Test



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Australian off-spinner Todd Murphy is hopeful of spinners having a role in the fifth and final Test of the Ashes 2025-26 series at Sydney Cricket Ground. Spin hasn't played much of a role in the ongoing series, with pacers dominating the proceedings right from the Perth Test. The SCG has historically favoured spinners. While England have sidelined their frontline spinner, Shoaib Bashir, in the four Tests so far, Nathan Lyon too has had only a limited role to play for Australia. However, with Lyon out due to injury and the Sydney Cricket Ground being a favoured venue for spin-

ners, Murphy has reasons to believe that he might have a big role to play in his debut home Test. "I don't think going into the series there was ever that planning or idea that spin wouldn't play a role. I think it's sort of just been how it's eventuated. I think it'll evolve from year to year. Next year it could be completely different," said Murphy. Murphy has picked 22 wickets in seven Tests thus far, all of which have come away from home. He also understands that Lyon will always be a first-choice spinner for Australia at home. "(When I made my debut) I probably understood back then it was never going to be linear for me. I was never going to keep my place in the team when Nathan came back and I was always going to have to go back through Shield cricket and keep developing. At that stage I was only 23 so I still felt like I had a long way to go to be at my best. I still feel like I'm trying to discover that as well and continuing to get better. It's been a couple of years there where I've just been working away and trying to find the best version of myself," he said. Speaking about the conditions at SCG, he said: "I think it definitely can spin. We've played on some BBL wickets here where it has taken spin. I've only played a couple of Shield games and don't think it's ever done anything extraordinary out there. I don't think recently it's been massive spin but there's still been a big part of the game that spin played."

Stuart Broad heaps praise on Josh Tongue: 'Has done himself the world of good being on this Ashes trip'



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

India failed to reach the WTC Final last year and are placed 6th on the table in the current cycle. Four Tests in Sri Lanka and New Zealand, and one at home against Afghanistan, will be plenty to show if India can improve to be as good in whites as they are in blues. For 27 years since 1996, India's premier Test batting greats at No. 4 were guarded with utmost surety by their immediate predecessors. Grafters of assured mind, wrists and feet, the likes of Rahul Dravid and Cheteshwar Pujara, were products of the domestic game that now lies in bits and pieces. Devoid of a dependable system, the Ranji Trophy cannot immediately produce a clone to fill India's great No. 3 void anymore.

Even as the top Test nations grip with the falling standards of the No.3, India seems the least equipped in their transition. They have drafted four men in their last nine games under a new captain, and the most recent home debacle only protracted this specific woe. With a largely dormant first semester ahead, India will have time on their hands to prepare and zero in on a No. 3, but will one resounding name emerge from India's domestic wilderness? This one is less looking forward to, more watch in mild amusement. Nothing screams the confluence of the American political right and a combat sport that caters to that spectrum wholeheartedly more than a bevy of mixed martial art title fights on the lawn of the White House.

The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), whose president Dana White campaigned for Donald Trump, will be holding a fight event with some of the best fighters in the world clamouring over each other to be a part of the event under the eyes of the American president. In a year filled to the brim with a FIFA World Cup, a T20 World Cup, a Commonwealth and an Asian Games, as well as multiple World Championships, nothing like a little break from serious sport to watch modern-day gladiators appease their ruling overlords in 2026. When Kedar Jadhav, former India batter, screamed "Ghar ma ghusi ne maris" in Gujarati when his former team Chennai Super Kings beat Gujarat Titans a few years back in the IPL final in Ahmedabad, it brought a smile. Hope floated that the cricket commentary in various regional languages would also take the next step beyond amusement and offer insightful commentary. They – be it Tamil or Bhojpuri – have certainly catered to the people who aren't that comfortable with English or Hindi, but the real letdown has been the English and Hindi commentary over the years. Will 2026 change that? Some of the players who joined the commentary world in the last decade have been more or less disappointing. It's time they move beyond parochialism and mind-numbing clichés. This is not to say that they need to get too serious and 'boring'. A look at Pakistan's A Sports, fronted by Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis, can be a good example of how to marry fun with insight.

'Could not walk for two days': Stefanos Tsitsipas reveals why he considered retiring from tennis in 2025



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

Former Australian Open and French Open finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas has said that he considered retiring from tennis due to a serious back pain in 2025. The 27-year-old said he was left petrified about his future after he could not walk for two days, following his loss at the 2025 US Open. "I would ask, 'Can I play another match without pain?'" I got really scared after the US Open loss (to Germany's Daniel Altmaier). I could not walk for two days. That's when you reconsider the future of your career," the Greek said.

inclusion in the playing XI in the Adelaide Test. A four-wicket haul in the second innings of the Adelaide game, followed by a total of seven wickets in Melbourne, Tongue has 12 wickets in two Tests of the series. Former England fast bowler Stuart Broad said Tongue should have played more Tests in the series, and England missed the trick by not including him in the Gabba Test. While evaluating England's pace bowlers, Broad also said Tongue has done himself a world of good in this tour. "Tongue should have played more. He was the Player of the Match in Melbourne and you look now and think did England miss a trick not playing him, certainly at The Gabba and maybe even at Optus Stadium in the first Test," Broad said to Sky Sports. "He exposes a full length, has got Steve Smith out three times in Test cricket and twice in county cricket, and bowls with a slightly different angle: wider of the crease, but can move the ball away. He needs protecting in the sense that he is going to bowl bad balls, so you need someone in the bowling attack that will defend and hold an area, but Tongue has done himself the world of good being on this trip," he added. Yet to make his T20I debut, Tongue was included in England's provisional squad for the upcoming ICC 2026 T20 World Cup, set to take place in India. England will lock horns with Australia at Sydney Cricket Ground for the fifth and last Test of the tour. The Test will start on 4 January.

Sabalenka wants rematch of "Battle of Sexes" showdown vs Kyrgios: 'I love revenge'



Sabalenka-Kyrgios showdown faced backlash, with some calling it a "money grab" while others said it did little to promote the women's game. But Sabalenka felt that the exhibition tennis game was important. "I think it's really important for tennis to keep it interesting, keep it fresh, keep it new, keep it fun," she said. "I am happy that I was able to challenge him, make him work and make him physically get tired and mentally get tired. I felt really excited to see a man getting tired and going for his full game. It was a really cool experience," added Sabalenka.

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"I'm most excited to see how my actual training responds with regard to my back. My biggest concern was if I could finish a match," he added. Tsitsipas said that his biggest goal for the upcoming year was to ensure he finished matches and did not have to withdraw due to injuries. He also said he wished to win the United Cup for 2026, before the Australian Open. "My biggest win for 2026 would be to not have to worry about finishing matches. It makes great feedback knowing you had a pre-season without pain – I hope it stays that way. I want to deliver for 2026 and the United Cup. I went to actually visit one of the best sports doctors in the world, and he so far is promising to heal me. I'm hoping this stays for 2026." "The thing that I'm most excited about is trying to see my actual training that I've been putting in the last couple of weeks and how it responds in regards also to my back, because my biggest concern has been: can I actually finish a match?" "I put in the work. The most important thing is full belief that I can come back to where I was. I will try everything to do that," he said. Tsitsipas will represent Greece in the United Cup, with the team grouped with Great Britain and Japan, who will have the likes of Emma Raducanu and Naomi Osaka. The tournament will run from January 2-11, ending a week before the start of the Australian Open, which begins on January 18.

R Ashwin worried about future of ODI cricket after Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli retire



from it, former India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has stated. It is a sentiment that has been expressed by a number of former players, with the number of matches being played in the format, particularly involving the top sides, also dwindling in recent years. "I am not sure about future of ODI after 2027 World Cup. I am a little worried about it. Of course, I am following Vijay Hazare Trophy but the manner in which I followed SMAT, I am finding slightly difficult to follow," Ashwin, India's second highest Test wicket-taker of all time with 537 scalps, said on his YouTube channel 'Ash Ki Baat'.

Ashwin said that he feels Test cricket will continue to have its space even in the age of T20s, but he is not sure if fans want to see too much ODI cricket at the expense of either. "Also, we need to know what audience wants to watch. I feel Test cricket still has space but ODI cricket, I truly feel (it) doesn't have the space," said Ashwin, who also took 156 wickets in 116 ODIs. "Look, Rohit and Virat came back to Vijay Hazare Trophy and people started watching it. We have known that sport is always bigger than individuals but at times these players (Ro-Ko) need to come back to make the game relevant," he observed.

"Vijay Hazare Trophy (national one-dayers), of course, is a domestic competition that not a lot of people follow, but they did (so now) because Virat and Rohit were playing. Even then, what happens when they stop playing ODIs?" he wondered. The lack of ODI cricket is also something that has resulted in Kohli and Rohit playing the Vijay Hazare Trophy, with chief selector Ajit Agarkar stating that the two veteran players may need to play in the domestic 50-over competition earlier in the year due to the bilaterals being played in the format dwindling in recent years. Both Rohit and Kohli retired from Test cricket earlier this year and T20Is after winning the T20 World Cup last year, making the ODI format the only one they are active in.

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The One-Day International format could struggle once established stars like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retire

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Media barricaded at the back, fan clubs in front in Bollywood: Paparazzi say stars have created a 'jhoothi duniya'

There has been a lot of debate around paparazzi culture in the Hindi film industry, especially after Jaya Bachchan's scathing remark against photographers over their behaviour and presence. Recently, Varinder Chawla, a Bollywood paparazzo with over 25 years of experience, spoke about the issue and admitted that while paparazzi have their own contacts, they are often called by PR teams to events to create a crowd. Speaking to *Hindi Rush*, Varinder said, "Earlier, when I used to work with my father, we used to get invitations for events, and even today we get invitations for events like trailer launches, parties and more. However, when celebrities step out to do interviews, we get a tip-off. However, we don't get tip-offs for their every outing."

He added, "For airport spotting, we have teams active 24/7. This includes the private airport of Mumbai. Our boys have sources from inside the airport who tell them about which celebrity is coming and going. So to say we are called everywhere by the PR is wrong. There is a paparazzi culture, and our boys have even learned the car numbers of actors." PR teams call photographers to show crowd and to make actors happy. Varinder spoke about how PR teams of actors often call many photographers who are not associated with known paparazzi brands just to show a crowd at venues. "I went to an event recently, and I saw so many photographers there that I asked the PR, 'Who are they?' Because the PR had told me that only limited media was invited. But the PR told me that he needed 60 people at the venue, so he called those photographers and filled the space with them." He added, "Actors have to understand that their PR team isn't just calling the limited four paps but so many others, and they don't even know who they are. Whether they are YouTubers or somebody else, and then they pass bad comments on actors."

Fan club crowd preferred over journalists Talking about how actors prefer fan club crowds over journalists because they like hearing good things about themselves, Varinder said, "In today's time, if there is a trailer launch or any other event, when media is invited, you will see people from the fan clubs at the back. They want shor-sharab of fan clubs to make the actor happy. Then why are they calling senior



journalists? They don't even let journalists ask questions and the fan clubs just make a lot of noise for the actor and then leave." SRK's *Jawan* trailer launch had media barricaded at the back and fan clubs in front

Journalist Hina Kumawat spoke about Shah Rukh Khan-starrer *Jawan*'s trailer launch and how the fan club crowd was placed in front while the media was seated at the back and were not allowed to ask questions. "They had put barricades during the *Jawan* trailer launch, where the media was placed behind, and none of the journalists were in front. The people from the fan clubs were sitting in the front." Journalist Vickie Lalwani spoke about the paid culture in the Hindi film industry, where even crowds are bought. He said, "This paid culture is here to stay. Earlier I used to think only politicians call people to listen to their lectures, but now even stars call such people and even media houses. During interviews, the 200 people sitting in the audience are all paid. Take any platform, nobody from that 200 crowd of audience will ask discomforting or tough questions." Heena added, "During the promotion of a film, the makers do a package deal with the PR in which the PR promises to bring 60 media, but what they don't tell the makers is that 40 from that 60 is paid media."

Akshaye Khanna scolded Mukesh Chhabra when he first proposed Dhurandhar: 'I don't even live in Mumbai'



said. "It didn't matter whether it was Danish Pandor, Rakesh Bedi, Akshaye Khanna or R Madhavan. Even the smallest casting idea was done meticulously," he added. Mukesh revealed that he had big ideas for the film's casting, which even made director Aditya Dhar think he was crazy. The makers initially did not believe that Akshaye Khanna would say yes to the film, given how selective the actor is with his projects. "I said, Akshaye paaji will do it. And then we all jumped on it," Mukesh said.

Mukesh went on to reveal Akshaye Khanna's reaction when he first proposed the film to him. "I honestly hadn't watched *Chhaava* then. But I called him. Unhone pehle mujhe daanta [He first scolded me]. He said, 'Paagal ho gaya hai kya [Have you gone crazy]?' I asked him to at least hear me out once," he said.

Akshaye Khanna kept smoking while listening to Dhurandhar's script. Mukesh shared that after persistent efforts, Akshaye finally agreed to meet him and director Aditya Dhar and even drove himself to their office. "I asked him to come to the office. He said, 'Main toh yahan rehta hi nahi hoon. Bol kahan aana hai (I don't even live here. Tell me where you want to meet me)?" Recalling the meeting and the moment Akshaye agreed to do the film, Mukesh said, "He came and sat for four hours. He quietly listened. He kept smoking. When we finished, he said, 'F**k, it's very good'. Then he said, 'Well done, yaar. Bada maza aayega.' Despite Akshaye's reassuring response, the makers remained uncertain for the next couple of days. However, their doubts were finally cleared when Akshaye called and confirmed his willingness to be part of the film. "He called me and said, 'Let's do it, bro,'" Mukesh recalled. After Dhurandhar's success, Akshaye has already moved on to his next project. He is set to make his Telugu debut as the film *Mahakali* director Puja Kolluru posted behind-the-scenes photos with the actor from the sets of the film. She posted a selfie with the actor and they both are seen smiling for the camera in the sunny weather. *Mahakali* is a part of the superhero universe PVCU, which includes films like *Hanuman*, *Jai Hanuman* and *Adhira*. In September, the makers had shared Akshaye's look from the film as *Shukracharya*.

TV actor Arjun Bijlani's father-in-law passes away at 73



ing. He was 73 and is survived by his son Nishank and daughter Neha.

Speaking to *Hindustan Times*, the family member shared details of the incident, saying, "He was fit and fine and was getting ready for dinner when he suddenly suffered a stroke. He was immediately rushed to Bellevue Hospital, where he was put on a ventilator. The entire family is in shock, especially since Neha and Arjun had met the family shortly before flying out. It was completely unexpected, and we are still trying to come to terms with the loss." Arjun and Neha returned to Mumbai on Tuesday soon after receiving the devastating news, cutting short their vacation to be with the family during this difficult time.

Those close to the family revealed that Arjun shared a particularly close bond with his father-in-law, especially after losing his own father at a young age. Rakesh Chandra Swami was said to have been a strong emotional support system for the actor, making the loss deeply personal and painful for him. Videos from the funeral have since surfaced online, showing Neha visibly heartbroken and inconsolable as she bid her final farewell to her father. The visuals have drawn an outpouring of condolences and messages of support from fans and members of the television industry, who have been expressing solidarity with the Bijlani family during their time of grief.

Stranger Things 5 finale ending explained: What happened to Eleven and the Hawkins gang, fan theories decoded

Stranger Things 5 finale was finally released on Netflix on New Year's eve. The episode 8 titled 'The Rightside Up', subdivided as Vol.3, is already the highly talked-about discussion on social media. A straight closure was given for other main characters, but the 2-hour finale has also left several fans wondering about what happened to Eleven aka El towards the end. While some presumed her dead in the series finale, others have various fan theories to justify she is alive. The last episode of *Stranger Things* 5 started with Eleven, Kali, Hopper, and Murray splitting to storm the Hawkins Lab, while the rest of the party goes to the radio tower. When they are inside the Void, El, Kali, and Max confront Henry's complicated history in the Creel house. However, Vecna's having none of it.

Lieutenant Akers ends up murdering Kali when Hopper doesn't reveal Eleven's location. After Kali's death, Eleven joins everyone else in the Abyss for the big finale action scene. Joyce is the person who finally kills Vecna, beheading him with an axe. The ending was similar to the beginning of *Stranger Things* – a Dungeons & Dragons game. But this time, its Holly and her friends playing it. Mike, Will, Lucas, and Dustin move on, leaving their childhood behind. But, what happened to El? The series leaves Eleven's fate open-ended. Did she sacrifice herself to destroy the Upside Down? While it might look that way at the end, Mike isn't sure. He theorizes that the real El might have slipped away through Kali's magic powers. We see the last shot of El with a waterfall behind it, just like El and Mike planned. The Duffer brothers left El's fate for the viewers to decide. The final episode of *Stranger Things* 5 received mixed reactions from fans on social media. On one hand, a section of people was disappointed with the ending as several characters were underutilized. And on the other, some fans were satisfied with the happy goodbye. A lot of theories related to Eleven's fate have surfaced on Reddit and X. "This episode was essentially the ending to season 1. Some kid(s) go missing. The group tries to find them and eventually rescues them from a different planet/dimension. Eleven does some cool mind magic stuff. Faces the big bad guy, fakes her death and lets the rest of the party live their lives unimpeded without her," a fan posted on Reddit. "Yeah, it was a decent ending, it wasn't extremely bad like all the content creators were fear mongering about, but it wasn't



super crazy & unpredictable either, it is bittersweet none of the characters will ever have Eleven in their lives ever again but it makes sense, she was a mysterious anomaly that appeared in their lives, a stranger thing that all the guys only got to experience in their lives by pure happenstance & coincidence. And she disappeared & left in the same vein," another fan theory read. Several fans also speculated that the ending has left room for a prequel or sequel of the series. "10/10 ending. Gave everyone beautiful endings, the upside down + abyss is gone, they're all grown up on their own path, and (possibly) left room for either a sequel or a prequel. Thank you Duffer Brothers for an incredible 9 years. #StrangerThings5 #StrangerThings," a user tweeted. While sharing a clip of the climax scene, a fan of Eleven's character wrote on X, "I was never ready for this.. #StrangerThings5." "el is definitely dead the like we saw Kali die in here hands #StrangerThings5," another fan mentioned. A fan also felt that Eleven might have finally found happiness, living somewhere far away. "I hope that she might be still alive and somewhere living her life in a place with new people. She may even have found her happiness there," the person tweeted.

Ikkis movie review: Agastya Nanda-Dharmendra film is a solid start to 2026, a war film that's deeply anti-war



Ikkis movie review: "Ikkis," responds a young soldier when asked his age by a senior officer, his face thickly smeared by birthday cake. Twenty-one, when you come properly of age. Second Lt Arun Khetarpal did not live to be 22: he fought with his last breath on that climactic December day of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, becoming the youngest Army officer to be awarded a Param Vir Chakra. Rather than just a straight-up war film about a young man's exemplary courage, Ikkis is also an exploration of the harrowing fallout of conflict. And that makes Sriram Raghavan's latest, co-written by him, Arijit Biswas and Pooja Ladha Surti, stand out from the overwhelmingly jingoistic, disturbingly violent features of the past few years.

Yes, soldiers are trained to kill, and dying for their country is part of the job description, but the battlefield in Ikkis, while stained red with human blood, stays away from gratuitous violence. The nobility of men who have spent their lives in the armed forces is a key feature of this film, sometimes going overboard with it. But if you ask me what I'd prefer: watching the feeling of bhaichara amongst a visiting Indian and a group of Pakistanis in the former's old house in a village on the other side of the border, or men taking pleasure in flaying limbs, the choice is a no-brainer. The running-to-go Arun (Agastya Nanda) is sent off to his first war by his father Retd Brigadier Madan Khetarpal (Dharmendra) and his mother (Suhasini Mulay) in the way faiji families

do: with an encouraging pat on the back, keeping fear in check. The training, under the beady eye of the Lt Colonel (Rahul Dev), experienced Risaldar Sagat Singh (Sikander Kher), along with mate Capt Vijendra Malhotra (Vivaan Shah), is briskly conducted, with Arun learning to love his tank, which he is ordered to take into battle at Basantar, a border village overrun by Pakistani tanks.

The martyred Khetarpal's exploits are well documented in war records, making you wonder how 'real' were the portions that show the budding romance between the fresh-faced soldier and a pretty young lady (Simar Bhatia). The film splices scenes of the battle, with those of Madan's re-tracing his son's final route, guided by his Pakistani host Brigadier Khwaja Mohammad Naseer (Jaideep Ahlawat), who is nursing a long-held, heartbreaking secret. You may be reminded of a few great American war films — Oliver Stone's trilogy, Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* — in Sriram Raghavan's determined anti-war strain, which runs right through the 142-minute narrative. The spoils can be counted, but no one really wins: the human losses are on 'both sides', and both Madan and Naseer are indelibly marked by that tragic face-off. The back-and-forth between the timelines is distracting, a couple of the cuts calling attention to themselves. And while Dharmendra's presence is poignant, this being his last film — I teared up in a few places, especially when he speaks of the once-unified 'watan' and 'mitti' — he is held back by his halting dialogue delivery, and pace. Nanda's slightly unformed mien works well for his newbie-ness. Bhatia is good as the spirited girlfriend; of the ensemble which constitutes the battalion, Kher leaps out. But this film belongs as much to Ahlawat who, as always, steals every scene in the way he melds long-held regret and resilience, and in the way he goes about making amends. A solid start to 2026, Ikkis is a war film which makes you feel in a way that movies these days are not either able to or want to: the two ISI men who are following the two generals' car are only doing their job, as are the men who go into battle, intent upon saving their countrymen. Ikkis movie cast: Dharmendra, Agastya Nanda, Jaideep Ahlawat, Sikander Kher, Vivaan Shah, Suhasini Mulay, Rahul Dev, Ekavali Khanna, Simar Bhatia, Avani Rai, Deepak Dobriyal, Aranilkis movie director: Sriram Raghavan Ikkis movie rating: 3 stars

Abhishek Bachchan celebrate in New York; Karisma Kapoor manifests 'love and faith'



Bollywood stars Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan welcomed the New Year in New York, where they were holidaying together. A picture of the couple from their US vacation recently surfaced online and quickly went viral. Known for keeping their personal life private, the couple surprised fans by graciously posing for a photograph with a fan. For their outing, the duo opted for cozy winter ensembles. Aishwarya wore a fuzzy jacket paired with a black hat, while Abhishek kept it casual in an all-black outfit, accessorised with striking red glasses. Another celebrity couple ringing in the New Year in New York was Dhurandhar star Ranveer Singh and his wife, Deepika Padukone. A video of the couple making modaks with celebrity chef Vikas Khanna also surfaced online. Prior to this, Ranveer and Deepika were spotted attending a Backstreet Boys concert in the city. As the year drew to a close, several Bollywood celebrities travelled abroad to welcome 2026, with many choosing not to disclose their exact locations. Actors including Shilpa Shetty, Triptii Dimri, Hrithik Roshan and Karisma Kapoor shared glimpses of their New Year celebrations on social media. Without revealing where she was, Karisma Kapoor shared a picture on Instagram, captioned, "Love, hope, and faith!" Meanwhile, Shilpa Shetty posted a video reflecting on her year, offering fans a glimpse into moments that didn't make it to social media earlier.