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## Telangana Cyber Security Bureau, Tollywood join hands to combat film piracy

The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) and the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce (TFCC) on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen action against digital film piracy. They agreed to establish a structured, technology-driven, and coordinated framework to combat digital film piracy and online copyright violations, particularly affecting the Telugu film industry. The MoU was signed by Shikha Goel, Director, Telangana Cyber Security Bureau, and Daggubati Suresh Babu, President, Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce, in the presence of B. Shivadhar Reddy, Director General of Police, Telangana.

## No proposal to trifurcate GHMC, HMDA to raise Rs 5,000 crore fresh loan: Minister Sridhar Babu

*The Telangana government has no immediate plan to trifurcate the GHMC, Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu told the Assembly. He said GHMC has not taken fresh loans in a year, while HMDA is seeking Rs 5,000 crore in new funding.*

From Our Staff Reporter  
Hyderabad, Jan 5

The Congress government has no immediate proposal to trifurcate the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu told the Telangana Assembly on Monday. However, he disclosed that the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) is currently seeking fresh loans amounting to Rs 5,000 crore from debt market and nationalised banks.

Replying to a question by BRS deputy floor leader T Harish Rao in the Assembly, Sridhar Babu informed the House that the GHMC's outstanding debt stood at Rs 4,707.81 crore as of the end of December 2025. He stated that no fresh loans were obtained by GHMC in the last 12 months. He informed that the present Congress government focused on debt restructuring to manage existing liabilities.

The State government had recently merged 20 municipalities and seven municipal corporations within Outer Ring Road limits into GHMC. Necessary amendments were made to the Telangana Municipalities Act and GHMC Act in the Assembly as well.



## Zero tolerance for Chinese Manja in Hyderabad, says Police Commissioner

From Our Staff Reporter  
Hyderabad, Jan 5

Police V. C. Sajjanar said on Monday that there will be zero tolerance for Chinese Manja, which is already banned in Telangana.

He said that Chinese Manja is a silent killer that has caused serious injuries and even deaths of pedestrians, two-wheeler riders, birds, and animals.

Hyderabad police have formed special teams to curb its illegal manufacture, storage, transport, and sale.

"Any person found manufacturing or selling Chinese Manja will face strict legal action, which will be taken very seriously. If you see anyone using Chinese Manja, please stop them and create awareness about its dangers. Be a responsible citizen and inform the police about its sale. A timely intervention can prevent a tragedy. Let us celebrate the kite festival safely and humanely," the Police Commissioner said in a post on 'X'.

The Chinese Manja has left four motorcyclists, including a constable and a student, injured over the last week. They sustained grievous neck injuries.

A 29-year-old man was injured by the glass-coated nylon thread while riding past a theatre in Saidabad on December 30. T. Ashok was rushed to a hospital.

A day earlier, the deadly string nearly proved fatal for a food delivery executive at Shamsheergunj. The abrasive thread wrapped around Mohammed Jameel's neck, causing a deep wound. Jameel was rushed to a private hospital, where he had to undergo a procedure involving 22 sutures to close the wound.

On December 26, Jashwanth Reddy, a B.Tech student, suffered severe neck injuries under the Keesara police limits while riding his bike. He, too,



was admitted to the hospital.

Shivraj, a constable attached to the Langer Houz traffic station, was injured on December 25 when the synthetic string got entangled around his neck while he was riding on the Tilaknagar-Narayanguda flyover.

The recent incidents highlight how the use of Chinese Manja or nylon/synthetic thread for kite flying is continuing unabated despite the ban by authorities.

Cyberabad police have already issued a public advisory warning against the use and sale of nylon and Chinese Manja, describing it as a serious threat to human life, animals and birds.

In 2024, an Army jawan was killed after his throat was slit by a Chinese Manja in Hyderabad.

The 30-year-old died as Chinese Manja slit his throat when he was riding a scooter on Indira Reddy Flyover.

The state government had issued orders in 2016 imposing a total ban on Manja to save birds as well as for the safety of humans.

The environment, forests, science and technology department had issued orders imposing a ban on procuring, stocking, selling and use of Manja.

## Tickets for R-Day 2026 events available through Aamantran app: Official

New Delhi: Tickets for the Republic Day celebrations in 2026 can now be purchased through the Aamantran mobile app, the Ministry of Defence announced on Monday. In a post on social media platform X, the Ministry of Defence said the app will facilitate ticket purchases for key events associated with the Republic Day celebrations, including the Republic Day Parade on January 26, the full dress rehearsal of the Beating the Retreat ceremony on January 28, and the Beating the Retreat ceremony on January 29.

## Kavitha announces new party; promises to return to Telangana Legislature as political force

From Our Staff Reporter

Hyderabad, Jan 5

Kalvakuntla Kavitha turned emotional during her last speech in Telangana Legislative Assembly on Monday and declared that Telangana Jagruthi, which she is heading, will be turned into a political party.

The daughter of former Chief Minister and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) president K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) alleged that she suffered utter humiliation in the party.

Kavitha, who quit BRS after being suspended from the party and also sent her resignation as a Member of the Legislative Council in September last year, made her last speech in the House. She urged the Council Chairman to accept her resignation.

Kavitha, who had floated Telangana Jagruthi, a cultural organisation, during the Telangana movement, announced that Telangana Jagruthi would be turned into a political party now.

She vowed to return to the Legislature as a new political force. "A new political platform is coming up in the State. It will work for students, unemployed and all other sections," she said.

Appealing to people to bless her, she stated that she came out for them after snapping all ties with the paternal home due to the humiliation she had to suffer.

She announced that Telangana Jagruthi will contest the next elections. "It will definitely emerge as a major political force. I am going out from the Legislature as an individual but will return as political force," she said.

Kavitha alleged that individuals around her father KCR conspired against her and she was politically sidelined and finally sent out.

She also alleged that ruling Congress party was trying to cash in on the rift within the BRS.

On the allegation by Congress leaders that she quit BRS due to dispute over assets, she said that her fight is for self-respect and not assets.

She claimed that restrictions against her started when she organised Bathukamma after formation of Telangana State in 2014. She said curbs were imposed



on her individual freedom.

"I worked in the party with all sincerity. I discharged whatever responsibility was given to me. I was targeted for raising questions," she said.

She also remarked how could there be democracy in the State when the party itself lacks internal democracy. "The party has completely humiliated me. It did not stand with me when I was fighting ED and CBI," she said referring to her arrest by the Central agencies in Delhi excise policy case.

Kavitha alleged that BJP got her arrested out of political vendetta against KCR.

She said she questioned corruption in the party and in the government. She claimed that from construction of Telangana martyrs' memorial to building of district Collectorate, there was corruption in all the works. She stated that Siddipet Collectorate was washed away in just one rain.

The former MP said she fought in the party for pension to those who participated in Telangana movement and alleged that BRS never gave the due recognition to the martyrs.

KCR's daughter said BRS never bothered about 'water, funds and jobs', the slogan with which Telangana movement was launched.

Kavitha said when allegations were made against KCR over Kaleshwaram project, not a single big leader from the party came out in his defence. "That's why I organised a press meet to speak out on the issue and named the corrupt," she said.

## 2 villages evacuated after gas leak at Andhra sparks inferno



## Gas leak at ONGC site in Andhra village; no loss of life

Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema, Jan 5

A gas leak at an ONGC well here in Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema district operated by its production contractor sparked an inferno on Monday, leading to the evacuation of two villages within a four-km radius.

However, no deaths or casualties have been reported so far, an official of the Maharatna public sector company said. "The fire occurred due to a gas

pipeline leakage at the Mori-5 well, which is operated by Deep Industries Ltd as part of production enhancement operations," an ONGC official told PTI. Residents of neighbouring Irusumanda and Lakkavaram villages were evacuated to safer locations. The number of evacuees is not immediately available. Around 10 fire tenders are currently at the site battling the fire, which is within 200 km from the greenfield capital city of Amaravati.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu inquired

# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Indore tragedy, a national shame

It is a macabre irony that Indore, long hailed as India's cleanest city and a role model for urban sanitation, is in the grip of a serious public health emergency following an outbreak of waterborne bacterial disease that has left at least ten people dead. The sewage-contaminated drinking water was the culprit for the diarrhoea outbreak. Leakage in the main drinking water supply pipeline has exposed thousands of residents in the Bhagirathpura area to a public health hazard. The crisis has exposed serious lapses in water supply monitoring and civic accountability. The first signs of trouble emerged last month when residents noticed an unusual foul smell, bitter taste and visible discolouration in the municipal drinking water supplied to the locality. Despite repeated complaints to civic authorities, no immediate corrective action was taken. Soon after consuming the contaminated water, large numbers of people began experiencing vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration and high fever, triggering panic and a rush to nearby hospitals. This is clearly the outcome of administrative negligence, and the Madhya Pradesh government should not shy away from taking strict action against officials at all levels. The sorry state of affairs has compelled the National Human Rights Commission and the State High Court to intervene. The troubling truth is that the authorities tasked with protecting the health of citizens swung into action only after lives were lost. The Indore deaths have sparked an uproar and put the BJP government on the defensive. The 'double-engine' governments in Delhi and MP have woefully failed on this front. The malaise of water contamination, however, is not confined to Indore; it's a nationwide phenomenon. The disease outbreaks due to water-borne bacteria have been reported from several cities, including Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Kochi and Bhopal, in the past two years. They are a grim reminder that a piped supply is not an assurance against contamination.

### Congress Leader Extends Support to an Affected Family Anil Provides Financial Assistance



"Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, January 5: "Hari, a resident of New Bhavaninagar Colony, Mallapur, has been suffering from a kidney-related illness for the past few days. Standing in support of the affected family, senior Greater Congress leader Nemali Anil Kumar came forward to help." Based on information received from Mallapur Congress workers, Nemali Anil Kumar visited Hari's family on Sunday and inquired about his health condition. During the visit to their residence, he personally handed over financial assistance of ₹10,000 and offered words of encouragement to the family." With the



support of Uppal Congress In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, Nemali Anil Kumar assured the family that he would make efforts to secure appropriate government welfare schemes for them." Mallapur senior Congress leaders Sheikh Akbar, Mallapur Congress Party Joint Secretary V. Srinivas, senior Congress leader Koyalakonda Rajesh, NSUI President Bataraju Rahul, Yaseen, and others participated in the programme.

### Corporator Shanti Initiates Cleaning Works at HMT Nagar Lake Bund Using Personal Funds



"Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, January 5: "Nacharam Corporator Shanti Saizen Shekhar stated that steps are being taken to create a pleasant and walking-friendly environment along the lake bund on the Indiranagar side of the HMT Nagar Pedda Cheruvu. Is-

sues such as overgrown weeds and malfunctioning streetlights had been causing inconvenience to local residents." The locals brought these problems to the notice of Nacharam Division Corporator Shanti Saizen Shekhar. Although the corporator had earlier instructed the concerned officials, no effective action was taken. Keeping in view the difficulties faced by the public, the Nacharam Division Corporator personally initiated a cleanliness drive on Sunday at her own expense, removing accumulated garbage, heaps of soil, and unwanted weeds from the lake bund." Local residents who come there for walking expressed their happiness over the initiative. The corporator also assured that necessary steps would be taken soon to repair and restore the streetlights along the lake bund." BRS Party state leaders Saizen Shekhar Chandrashekhar, Azeem, Bhanu Aunty, Zakir, Aleem, Shanawaz Zaheer, Farooq, Anji Yadav, Anjad, Ahmed, Aleem, Farooq, and others participated in the programme.

### CMRF a Boon for Poor and Middle-Class Families: Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle): "Congress Party Uppal Constituency In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy stated that the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) has become a major support system for poor and middle-class families." He said that under the Congress government, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy is ensuring that medical bills under CMRF are cleared promptly for all eligible beneficiaries. As part of this initiative, CMRF cheques were distributed to beneficiaries from the Uppal constituency on Sunday. On this occasion, cheques were handed over as follows: Rs. 2 lakh to Prameela, Rs. 60,000 each to Satthu



Kanna, G. Satyanarayana, and Nitish Srivani. Parameshwar Reddy personally distributed the sanctioned cheques to the beneficiaries. Several leaders participated in the programme, including Ramanthapur Division President Mohammed Rafiq, Tummala Devi Reddy, Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Garika Sudhakar, Lingam, Poojari Hanumanthu, Ma Shetty Raghavendra, Kusangala Satish Mudiraj, Talari Nursing, Narasimha, Kishan Naik, Nayeem, Harish Reddy, and other party leaders.

### BJP Senior Leader Gaddam Saikiran Unveils Vishwakarma Sangham New Year Calendar



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle): "The Vishwakarma Sangham New Year-2026 Calendar Unveiling Ceremony was held in a grand manner under the aegis of the Vishwakarma Sangham. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) senior leader Gaddam Saikiran attended the programme as the chief guest and formally unveiled the calendar. Speaking on the occasion, Gaddam Saikiran stated that the services rendered



by the Vishwakarma community towards the nation's development are invaluable. He emphasized that preserving the traditions and cultural heritage of the Vishwakarma community is the responsibility of everyone. He expressed hope that the newly released calendar would serve as a good omen for the community in the coming year." A large number of Vishwakarma Sangham leaders, elders, and youth participated in the programme and made it a grand success. Several speakers called upon the Vishwakarma community to move forward with unity, prosperity, and a commitment to development.

### Ramanthapur Congress Division President Mohammed Rafiq Tours Old Ramanthapur



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle): "Ramanthapur Division Congress Party President Mohammed Rafiq conducted a door-to-door visit in Old Ramanthapur on Monday as part of the "Praja Prabhuvtam" (People's Government) programme, which is receiving an enthusiastic response from the public in Ramanthapur." Emphasizing that public welfare is the primary objective of the government, Mohammed Rafiq personally visited every household and assured residents that the Congress party is committed to development and welfare-oriented governance. During the interaction, residents of Old Ramanthapur brought to his attention issues such as the need for underground drainage, drinking water problems, and the early construction of proper roads. Speaking on the occasion, Mohammed Rafiq stated that he would bring all these issues to the notice of Uppal Congress Party

### CM Relief Fund: A Boon for the Poor – Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle): "Chikkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee member Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj personally handed over a cheque of ₹48,000 sanctioned from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) to Indira, a resident of Prashant Nagar Colony in



the Chikkanagar Division. Indira was recently admitted to a hospital due to a minor illness and has since recovered and returned home. To help meet her hospital expenses, the CMRF assistance was provided. Corporator Geetha Praveen, along with BRS party leaders, visited Indira's residence and formally presented the cheque. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Geetha Praveen stated that Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy is personally monitoring all CMRF applications in the constituency and is taking special initiative to ensure that deserving and affected families receive financial assistance in higher amounts wherever possible. She also assured Indira that she could approach her at any time if further support or assistance is needed. Indira expressed her heartfelt gratitude to MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy and Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen for their timely help and support. The program was attended by BRS State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Edula Kondal Reddy, Muddham Srinivas Yadav, Beerappa Gadda Balu, Chinna Mudiraj, Sai Goud, and other party representatives.

### Indiramma housing works in various stages should be completed quickly: Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao

"(Mandava Srisailam.. Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle.. January 5):- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that the Indiramma housing works, which are in various stages of completion, should be completed quickly. The District Collector inspected the Indiramma housing construction works in Basanthapur village of Rajapet mandal on Monday. On this occasion, the District Collector inquired



about the total number of people in the village who have received Indiramma houses. He asked how many houses have been completed and how many are in the final stages. He said that all the housing works should be completed quickly. He instructed the concerned officials to take the initiative to provide bricks and sand at a lower price to those constructing Indiramma houses in the villages. He said that the beneficiaries should complete the house construction works quickly and perform house-warming ceremonies. He inquired whether the money had been deposited up to the extent of the completed construction work. He instructed the Panchayat secretaries to frequently inspect the Indiramma housing construction works and ensure that the beneficiaries complete the house construction works quickly. Concerned officials participated in this program.

In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy and discuss them with the concerned officials to ensure that the problems are addressed and permanent solutions are implemented at the earliest. The programme was attended by TPCC representative Mohammed Tofiq, Mallikarjuna Devasthanam Chairman Nam Raji Reddy, Poosa Satyiah, Mogili Lingam, Bestha Bhaskar, Angala Sandeep, Mahila Congress President Sandhya Rani, Gayatri Goud, Tabbassum Begum, Muthyala Ravi, Sumanth, Raj Kumar, Shivasadan, Raghavere Reddy, Bugga Paramesh, Chinna, Mohammed Nayeem, Chotu Bhai, Bablu Goud, Shivarak, NSUI Sai, Aravind Yadav, MD Shafi, MD Siddiq, MD Riyaz, and several other party leaders and activists.

### Sheikh Chand Pasha extended New Year greetings to Commandant Ramakrishna

"(Serilingampally, January 5: Congress party senior leader Sheikh Chand Pasha extended New Year greetings to Kondapur Division Police Battalion Commandant Ramakrishna, Assistant Commandant Rehman, Satyanarayana, and other staff and officers. Several officers and leaders participated in this program.

Care must be taken to ensure there are no errors in the voter lists... Voter details for each ward are crucial: Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Additional Collector for Local Bodies, Bhaskar Rao

"(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle.. January 5):- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Additional Collector for Local Bodies, Bhaskar Rao, stated that precautions must be taken to ensure there are no errors in the voter lists, and that the voter details for each ward are crucial, as this process is very important for conducting the elections. On Sunday, the Additional Collector visited the Bhuvanagiri, Aleru, and Yadagirigutta municipalities and, as part of the 2nd general municipal elections, inspected

the draft voter list at the office. He instructed the concerned officials to immediately resolve any complaints received regarding changes or additions to the draft voter list. He visited the special counter set up in the office to receive objections and complaints from the public regarding the draft voter list and inquired about the details. He instructed the concerned officials to conduct an inquiry and resolve these objections on a daily basis. He also directed them to prepare an action plan for the upcoming elections and make all necessary arrangements in advance. The Municipal Commissioner, Manager, and staff participated in this program.

# College principals should strive to achieve 100 percent pass rate in the Intermediate examinations:

Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao



“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 5):- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that college principals should strive to achieve a 100 percent pass rate in the Intermediate examinations. A review meeting on the district's Intermediate examination results was held on Monday in the mini meeting hall. Speaking on the occasion, the District Collector said that since the government is giving high priority to education, teachers should provide quality education in the same direction. He said that minimum facilities such as lighting, benches, fans, and drinking water should be provided in all examination centers in the district. He instructed that lab mate-

rials should be kept available for practical examinations. He stated that CCTV cameras should be installed in the examination centers. As the examination time is approaching, he said that special classes should be arranged for weaker students to ensure that every student passes. He emphasized that teaching should be done in a way that children can understand. He said that efforts should be made to ensure that more students achieve a 100 percent pass rate this year than last year. He urged the college principals to strive to make the district stand first at the state level. He ordered the R&B engineers to complete any problems or repairs in the colleges within 20 days. “District Intermediate Officer Ramani and college principals participated in this program.

## Road Repairs Undertaken in Venkat Reddy Nagar Division by Aakarapu Arun Patel



ply and drainage lines had been dug up in these colonies and left unattended by the concerned departments. As a result, the roads were severely damaged with numerous potholes, causing significant inconvenience to the local residents. The colony residents brought the issue to the notice of Aakarapu Arun Patel. Responding promptly, he spoke with the concerned officials and ensured that road repair works were taken up on Monday. The potholes were filled and the damaged roads were restored. Residents of Venkat Reddy Nagar and Vasavi Nagar colonies expressed their special gratitude to Aakarapu Arun Patel for addressing the issue immediately and facilitating the repairs. Speaking on the occasion, Arun Patel stated that he is committed to resolving public issues as soon as they are brought to his notice. Officials from the Water Board, municipal staff, and local residents participated in the programme.

## Applications received in Prajavani should be resolved immediately:

Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao



## Collector directs field verification, speedy redress of Prajavani petitions

sought action against those who encroached on government land in the village outskirts. • Sogala Somayya from Ankusapur village in Kagaznagar mandal requested a survey to accurately measure and demarcate boundaries of his patta land, which is being shown as smaller in records. • Kampela Lalitha from Kagaznagar town urged the release of insurance benefits following the death of her son, a construction worker. •

Mareshetty Venkayya from Edulawada village in Asifabad mandal asked for his cultivated land to be updated in online records. • Ram Tenki Ammu Bai from Chirrakunta village in Asifabad mandal demanded patta rights for the agricultural land under her possession. •

Sudheer Mistry from Durga Nagar in Kagaznagar mandal applied for sanction under the Indiramma Housing Scheme. • Chanda Karunakar from Elkappal village in Pencikalpet mandal sought government land allocation for constructing an Indiramma house. Addressing the gathering, Collector Dhotre emphasized that every petition received through Prajavani must be examined on the ground, resolved promptly through coordinated efforts among officials, and petitioners provided with assurance of fair action. The programme was attended by concerned officials and others. Such initiatives continue to strengthen direct public interaction with the administration in the district.

## Village in Crisis: Residents Demand Immediate Removal of Illegal Belt Shops and Scrap Yards in Kistampet



“(Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 5 (Indian Chronicle)) Kistampet (Tandur Mandal, Mancherial District) – In a strong show of unity, villagers and affected families of Kistampet Gram Panchayat have submitted a memorandum to Panchayat Secretary Uday and Sarpanch Sarla Thirupathi, urging the immediate removal of illegal belt shops and scrap dealers operating within the village limits. The residents allege that these unauthorized liquor outlets, commonly known as belt shops, and nearby scrap yards are fuelling a vicious cycle of addiction, crime, and social decay. According to the memorandum, intoxicated individuals, particularly the youth, are resorting to nighttime thefts from homes. Stolen goods are then sold to local scrap shops, with the proceeds used to purchase more liquor from belt shops, trapping many in a downward spiral. This unchecked activity is leading villagers, especially the younger generation, astray,” the memorandum states, highlighting growing concerns over rising thefts, family disruptions, and moral decline. The petitioners have called for swift action to dismantle these operations and relocate them far from the

village. The memorandum was presented collectively by concerned citizens, and several others from the community. Local authorities have yet to respond publicly, but the incident underscores broader issues with illegal belt shops across rural Telangana, which continue to pose challenges to law enforcement and community well-being. Residents hope for prompt intervention to restore peace and safety in Kistampet.

## Dignity Homes Delivered: Double Bedroom Beneficiaries Extend Heartfelt Thanks to Sub-Collector in Kagaznagar



“(Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 5 (Indian Chronicle)) In a heartwarming gesture, beneficiaries of the Double Bedroom (2BHK) housing scheme today visited the local Sub-Collector's office to personally convey their gratitude to Sub-Collector Shraddha Shukla. The beneficiaries expressed profound appreciation to Madam Shraddha Shukla for her instrumental role in facilitating the allocation of these dignity homes. Speaking on the occasion, they also extended thanks to MLA Harish Babu and former MLA Koneru Konappa, the District Collector, and the Kagaznagar Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO) for their efforts in making the scheme a reality under the previous government. The event highlighted the transformative impact of the housing initiative on underprivileged families, providing them with secure and dignified living spaces. Such expressions of gratitude underscore the scheme's success in empowering the poor and fulfilling long-standing aspirations for home ownership in rural and semi-urban Telangana.

## Awareness Seminar on the Harmful Effects of Drugs Held at Ramanthapur Zilla Parishad High School



“(Kishore Vaddepalli, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle)) Under the aegis of Prajavani Voluntary Organization, an awareness seminar on drug abuse and its adverse effects was organized on Monday at Ramanthapur Zilla Parishad High School. The

programme was conducted with the participation of students and teachers. The seminar was attended as chief guests by Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkat Rao, Mount Fort Organization Director Varghese, Intelligence Circle Inspector Ramavath Ravi, CPM District Leader Komati Ravi, Primary School Headmistress Renuka, and ZPHS High School Headmistress Jayalatha. Speaking on the occasion, the guests explained that various forms of narcotic substances are easily available in society today. They elaborated on the types of drugs, their identifying features, and the serious problems and consequences that arise due to addiction. They urged students to stay away from drugs and focus on education and a healthy lifestyle. On this occasion, students, teachers, and members of Prajavani Voluntary Organization took an oath to stay away from drugs. Additionally, Class 10 students were provided with guidance, tips, and study material to help them prepare effectively for their upcoming examinations. The programme was attended by Prajavani Voluntary Organization Secretary Gosula Vijay Kumar, Raju Goud, Ravindra Rao, Anugula Kiran Kumar, Goli Krishnayya, Raghu Prakash, Pilli Venkateshwarlu, Bheeshmachari, Kumaraswamy, and others.

## Constitute District and Division Committees: PCC Chief Mahesh Kumar Goud



“(Kishore Vaddepalli, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle)) Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President Mahesh Kumar Goud has directed that district and division-level party committees be constituted at the earliest in Medchal-Malkajgiri district. He emphasized that strengthening the party before the forthcoming GHMC and municipal elections is essential and said this can be achieved only through a strong organizational structure. Medchal-Malkajgiri District Congress Committee President Thotakura Vajresh Yadav, Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress in-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, and Kukatpally Assembly Constituency Congress in-charge Bandi Ramesh met the PCC chief on Monday and conveyed New Year greetings. During the meeting, Mahesh Kumar Goud discussed party organization in the district, the formation of committees at the division level, and other key organizational matters.

## Dignity Homes Delivered: Double Bedroom Beneficiaries Extend Heartfelt Thanks to Sub-Collector in Kagaznagar

“(Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 5 (Indian Chronicle)) In a heartwarming gesture, beneficiaries of the Double Bedroom (2BHK) housing scheme today visited the local Sub-Collector's office to personally convey their gratitude to Sub-Collector Shraddha Shukla. The beneficiaries expressed profound appreciation to Madam Shraddha Shukla for her instrumental role in facilitating the allocation of these dignity homes. Speaking on the occasion, they also extended thanks to MLA Harish Babu and former MLA Koneru Konappa, the District Collector, and the Kagaznagar Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO) for their efforts in making the scheme a reality under the previous government. The event highlighted the transformative impact of the housing initiative on underprivileged families, providing them with secure and dignified living spaces. Such expressions of gratitude underscore the scheme's success in empowering the poor and fulfilling long-standing aspirations for home ownership in rural and semi-urban Telangana.



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## Retired employees urge Governor to redress pending pension, medical grievances

“Taj Khan, Kaghaznagar, January 5 (Indian Chronicle)“The Telangana State Government Retired Employees Association, district unit, has submitted a formal representation to the Governor of Telangana, highlighting several unresolved issues affecting pensioners and urging immediate government intervention.“In the memorandum dated January 5, 2026, the association expressed deep concern over the prolonged delay in addressing key demands raised as far back as 2022. Despite repeated appeals to authorities, including the Chief Minister and Finance Department, no significant progress has been made, causing hardship to thousands of retired employees.“The primary demands outlined in the representation include:1. Implementation of Pay Revision Commission benefits from 2024 for pensioners, including clearance of pending arrears, enhancement of pensions for those retired before April 1, 2022,

and restoration of commuted pension portions.“2. Immediate release of Dearness Relief (DR) on pensions.“3. Enhancement of medical facilities, including fixed medical allowance and issuance of new health cards.“4. Provision of additional pension benefits for those above 75 years of age, along with other age-related enhancements.“The association emphasised that these issues have been pending for years, leading to financial and health-related difficulties for elderly pensioners who dedicated their careers to public service.“The memorandum was signed by key office-bearers, and other members.“Such representations underscore the growing frustration among retired government employees across Telangana, who continue to seek timely fulfillment of promised welfare measures in their post-retirement years. The association has appealed for swift action to alleviate the concerns of this vulnerable section of society.

## ARREST OF AUTO MOBILE (BIKES) THEFT GANG BY MIYAPUR PS



“Indian Chronicle Jan 5: The Sleuths of Miyapur Police Station have made strenuous efforts and apprehended Automobiles (Bikes) theft gang who committed multiple bike Offences in Cyberabad Commissionerate and Sangareddy Dist.“Accused Details: 1: N a l a m Durga Srinivas Sai Kiran age 23 yrs, R/o. Narayanapuram, Rajamahendravaram, AP. 2: Gottapu Leela Sai, age 21 yrs, R/o. Narayanapuram, Rajamundry, AP.“(Accused 1 and 2 were arrested by Miyapur Police)“3: Puramsetti Vijay Siva Sai Prasad, age: 25 yrs, R/o. Jaggampeta, East Godavari, AP( Arrested by Anakapally District Police)g 4: Geddam Praveen @ Bunny age: 25 yrs, R/o Devaguptam Kasi Peta, Allavaram, East Godavari. AP(Absconding)“Facts of the case: On receipt of a complaint about theft of KTM DUKE motorcycle from his residence the staff of Miyapur Police worked out on the clues, identified the above motorcycle offenders gang and apprehended the accused.“Criminal Background of the accused: The accused Nalam Durga Srinivas Sai Kiran, Gottapu Leela Sai, Puramsetti Vijay Siva Sai Prasad and Geddam Praveen @ Bunny hails from Rajamundry, Andhra Pradesh and are close associates. They have a criminal background. Sl. No Accused Name No. of Previous Cases No. of offences, 1 Nalam Durga Srinivas Sai Kiran Attapur PS (2024) 10“2 Gottapu Leela Sai Rajamundry ““Modus Operandi: In order to earn easy money, Nalam Durga Srinivas Sai Kiran hatched a plan to commit theft of highend bikes from parking areas during night hours within the Cyberabad Commissionerate and Sangareddy district. KPHB (11), Ameenpur (3), Chandanagar (3), Gachibowli

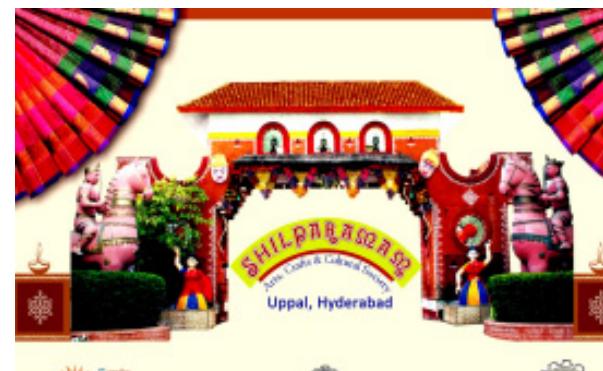
(2) Miyapur (1) and RC puram (1).“As per their plan, the accused intended to start a second-hand spare parts wholesale shop at their native place. The accused persons came from their native place, visiting the colonies during night hours, and committing theft of high-end motorcycles parked in front of residential houses, apartments, or shops, by breaking the locks. The accused are changing the engine numbers and chassis numbers for not identifying its original owner.“SEIZED ITEMS: 1. Bikes (21)“2. Tool Kit(1) (to use remove the stolen bike spare parts) 3. One Letters set (to make the engine and chassis number).“Good Work: The case was successfully detected and the accused were apprehended by the Crime Staff of Miyapur Police Station, under the supervision of Madhapur DCP Riti Raj, IPS, Madhapur Addl. DCP Uday Reddy, and Miyapur ACP Ch. Y. Srinivas Kumar.“APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC: The general public is hereby advised to take necessary precautions to safeguard their two-wheeler. They are also advised not to park vehicles outside their houses and to ensure the installation of CCTV cameras in their residential premises. Whenever vehicles are parked outside, they should be parked only in authorized parking areas. It is further advised to remain vigilant and report any suspicious movement or activity immediately to the nearest police station or by dialing 100.“The following staff members who played a key role in detection and arrest will be suitably rewarded for their commendable efforts. Miyapur SHO P. Shiva Prasad, Miyapur DI G. Ramesh Naidu, DS Narsimha Reddy D. HCs Chandra Shekar, N. Prem Kumar, Ch. Yadaiah, PCs A. Subhash Chandra Bose, E. Mallikarjun, N. Purna Chander, M. Swapna WPC.

## Arrive Alive initiative gains momentum in Cyberabad



“Cyberabad: The Arrive Alive 2026 initiative took a step forward with the launch of the Arrive Alive 2026 tabletop calendar, signalling the transition from vision to action through a mission-mode roadmap for road safety in Telangana. The programme is being advanced under the leadership of Director General of Police B. Shivadhar Reddy, with support from senior police leadership across the State.“As part of the campaign, representatives of Arrive Alive met Cyberabad Commissioner of Police Dr. M. Ramesh, IPS, and Jt. CP Dr. Gajara Bhupal, IPS., on Monday. The interaction focused on strengthening technology-led interventions and collaborative approaches to improve road safety outcomes.“A key highlight of the visit was a test ride conducted by the CP Cyberabad in the AI-enabled Traffic Law Compliance Vehicle (TLCV), which is designed to assist enforcement agencies in monitoring traffic violations and enhancing public safety. Arrive Alive, the organisers said, is not merely a campaign but a commitment to families and to saving lives, reflecting Telangana's resolve to make road safety a shared responsibility.

## Thematic Handicrafts Exhibition Begins at Uppal Mini Shilparamam



### THEMATIC EXHIBITION

Sponsored by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. Implemented by AP Productivity Council, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad  
From 06<sup>th</sup> January 2026 to 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at Mini Shilparamam, Uppal, Hyderabad  
(From 12:00 P.M to 8:00 P.M)  
Richly crafted textiles designs and handicraftsmanship are Presented from all the States  
Enjoy the splash of colours, rhythm of dance beats and joy De vivre merge at Mini Shilparamam, Uppal, Hyderabad (Telangana)  
Daily Variety of Cultural Programmes in the Evenings  
A Golden Opportunity not to be missed

## “Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh Inaugurates India’s First Integrated RAS Trout Farm in Hyderabad



Press Information Bureau Hyderabad 05-01-2026, Hyderabad  
Government of India Committed to Supporting Innovation in Fisheries Through various Schemes specifically designed for Fisheries : Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh

Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying and Panchayati Raj, Rajiv Ranjan Singh, on Monday inaugurated SmartGreen Aquaculture's India's first Integrated Recirculatory Aquaculture System (RAS) trout farm at Ranga Reddy district, Hyderabad.

Addressing the gathering, the Union Minister described the project as a path-breaking milestone for the fisheries sector, stating that it “goes beyond imagination” and demonstrates the transformative power of technology in aquaculture.

Highlighting the significance of the initiative, Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh said that the successful cultivation of trout a cold-water species in Hyderabad proves that any fish species can be produced anywhere in India with the adoption of the right technology.

He emphasized that temperature-controlled aquaculture systems can overcome traditional geographical and climatic limitations, opening new possibilities for fisheries development across the country.

The Union Minister reaffirmed the Government of India's commitment to innovation in fisheries, stating that the Ministry has consistently supported such initiatives and will continue to provide assistance through various schemes and funding mechanisms. He assured that full

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 5 (Indian Chronicle):“A Thematic Handicrafts Exhibition will be organized at Uppal Mini Shilparamam from January 6 to January 15, under the joint auspices of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and the Andhra Pradesh Productivity Council.“The exhibition will showcase a wide range of traditional and handcrafted products, including Cheriyal paintings, earthen pottery, bobbin lace, bamboo baskets, paintings, Kalamkari sarees, dress materials, spices, incense sticks, Dhokra metal crafts, artificial jewellery, embroidered bags, jute bags, and many other handicraft items for visitors.“In addition, cultural programmes will be held every evening as part of the exhibition.“Special Officer, Shilparamam, G. Kishan Rao, IAS, appealed to the public to visit the exhibition in large numbers and make it a grand success.



support would be extended for the promotion of RAS and other advanced aquaculture technologies, noting that entrepreneurs adopting these systems are playing a crucial role in strengthening both the fisheries and agriculture sectors.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by G. Kishan Reddy, Hon'ble Union Minister of Coal and Mines; S. P. Singh Baghel, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying and Panchayati Raj; George Kurian, Hon'ble Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying and Minority Affairs; Vakiti Srihari, Hon'ble Minister for Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, Fisheries, Sports & Youth Services, Government of Telangana.“

## Women's development and respect are increasing in Telangana state due to women's canteens:

- Telangana State Government Whip and Alair MLA Beerla Aliaiah

“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 5):- Telangana State Government Whip and Alair MLA Beerla Aliaiah, speaking in the Assembly on Monday, said that women's development and respect have increased in Telangana state due to women's canteens. He said that since many devotees visit Yadagirigutta, a famous pilgrimage site known as Telangana Tirupati, he requested Minister Seethakka to establish women's canteens there. He said that this would lead to the economic development of women in and around Yadagirigutta, and therefore requested the government to establish women's canteens. He said that because our people's government has given high priority to women, they received a 70% majority in the Sarpanch elections. He said that providing free RTC bus facilities, making women owners of petrol pumps, and giving them paddy procurement centers has increased women's self-respect. He said that compared to the last 10 years of rule, in these two years of our government's rule, women have supported us with the feeling that Congress is their family. He said that the interest-free loans that were neglected by the previous government have been given in three installments by our government, and this will strengthen women economically. They are under the impression that the Indiramma sarees will only go to women's self-help groups in the villages, but they requested that the sarees be given to all women, from 18-year-olds to 90-year-old elderly women. They said that the previous government distributed sarees worth 60 rupees, which hurt the self-respect of women, and requested that our government distribute these valuable sarees, woven by weavers, to all eligible women. They expressed their happiness that they would be wearing the saree sent by their brother Revanth Anna from their mother's home.



## Will double rural job from 100 to 200 days if BJP voted to power in Bengal, Rs 3 Lakh housing aid: Suvendu Adhikari



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Asserting that the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) will be in the opposition bench after the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Friday said that the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process is an indicator of what is likely to happen in the upcoming polls. "Trinamool Congress will become an opposition party in West Bengal in April," Adhikari said, while addressing BJP's 'Parivartan Sankalp Sabha' (resolution for change meeting) at Chanchal in Malda district. "Bihar ki jeet hamari hai, ab bangal ki bari hai" (the victory in Bihar is ours, now it is Bengal's turn), he added.

Adhikari claimed the TMC had rigged votes and used Bangladeshi infiltrators to win the 2024 elections, but the BJP would ensure their defeat in 2026. "By rigging votes, looting booths, and using the votes of Bangladeshi infiltrators, the gap between us and them in the 2024 elections was 4 million (40 lakhs). However, in the first jolt of the SIR, 5.8 million (58 lakh) names have been removed. More names of Rohingya and infiltrators will be removed from the voter list," he said. "You have seen the trailer in Delhi of what the SIR is going to be. The TMC's second-in-command is already saying they don't accept this voter list. After February 14, everyone in the TMC will be saying the same thing," Adhikari added. Assembly elections in West Bengal are due in the first half of this year. The Calcutta High Court had granted permission for this BJP meeting, but with certain conditions.

While addressing the gathering Adhikari mentioned: "Despite the court's order, the TMC tried to block our meeting. I have held 104 meetings with the court's permission, and we will continue to fight." Adhikari criticized the TMC government, alleging corruption and misuse of funds meant for welfare schemes. He said that the money meant for the 100-day work scheme, toilet construction, and the Awas Yojana has been looted. He further claimed that "these funds have even reached the hands of Bangladeshi infiltrators". The senior BJP leader has promised to extend the 100-day work scheme to 200 days and provide Rs 3 lakh for building houses under the Awas Yojana if the party comes to power in West Bengal. "If the BJP takes office in the state, the number of working days under the central government's 100-day work scheme (MGNREGA) would

be doubled to 200 days. Additionally, he assured that the allocation of funds for building houses under the Awas Yojana would also be increased to 3 lakhs. When the BJP comes, there will be a real change in the lives of the poor," he said.

Adhikari also promised better welfare schemes for the people if the BJP comes to power in Bengal, saying that the TMC is spreading lies that the 'Lokkhir Bhandar' scheme of the Mamata Banerjee government for giving monetary support to women will be stopped by the party. "Keep your 100-day work cards ready; bring the BJP to power, and you will get 200 days of work. There are only four months left, do not worry. In 2024, with the chant of 'Jai Jagannath,' a BJP government was formed in Odisha. This time, there will be a change in Bengal as well," the BJP leader said. Suvendu Adhikari designated West Bengal as "the homeland for Bengali Hindus" and referred to the attack on Malda Uttar BJP MP Khagen Murmu in Jalpaiguri in October last year to state that the party cannot allow such spilling of blood to continue on the soil of the state. Khagen Murmu of the BJP is the MP for the North Malda Lok Sabha constituency. "He went there to provide relief, not to seek votes. Khagen Murmu's blood shall not go in vain," Adhikari said. "Sanatan Hindus have united in two places in this state – North Malda and Nandigram. If Sanatanis come forward inspired by North Malda, the BJP will win not 200, but 220 seats," he added. Adhikari referred to attacks on Hindus during the anti-Waqf Amendment Act violence in Murshidabad in early 2025, stating that the "need of the hour" was to "unite the Hindus statewide". He drew parallels between the killings of the father-son duo, Chandan Das (40) and his father Hargobind Das, in the violence-hit Samserganj area of Murshidabad district in April last year and that of Dipu Chandra Das in Bangladesh in December, criticizing the TMC's handling of such incidents. He also referenced the historic conquest of "Anga-Banga-Kalinga", targeting the TMC on multiple fronts.

Suvendu Adhikari, now a key BJP leader, previously oversaw TMC operations in Malda and Murshidabad for over 3 years. While TMC struggled to gain traction in Malda, Adhikari successfully turned Murshidabad into a TMC stronghold. Adhikari who has become the face of Bengal BJP defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the last elections and is now targeting Malda and Murshidabad for BJP in 2026. Suvendu Adhikari also fired back at TMC's Malda district president Abdur Rahim Bakshi, who had earlier threatened to block his entry into the district. Adhikari recalled his past association with Bakshi, saying, "

When I was a TMC observer, Rahim Bakshi used to open my car door. Now, I'll ensure he's defeated." Challenging Bakshi's defeat in Malitipur, he said, "I don't know who will win in Malitipur. But I will not let Rahim win. If TMC nominates him in Malitipur, I will ensure his defeat. I know the mantra of how to defeat him. In this district, the fight will be between the Left-Congress alliance and the BJP. We are leading in six seats here. I hope we will get two more."

## SHRC directs Thane Collector to pay compensation to man whose plot was acquired for govt project

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC), the commission in its order mentioned that it had earlier asked the collector to conduct a fact-finding inquiry into the matter and submit a report. The Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) last month directed the Thane Collector to pay compensation to a Kurla resident whose plot was allegedly acquired for a government project but was not paid compensation. The order was made available on Thursday.

The complainant, Mohd Shaikh, approached the commission stating that his property bearing Plot No. 111 at Maji Balyani in Kalyan Taluka comprising his house and shop were taken up for the Mumbai-Vadodara Ramay Alignment. He alleged that since he was not paid any compensation, he was left without any source of income following which he approached the MSHRC. The commission in its order by chairperson Justice AM Badar mentioned that it had earlier asked the collector to conduct a fact-finding inquiry into the matter and submit a report. The order mentioned that the collector neither carried out the inquiry nor appeared before the commission. The commission mentioned that in the instant case in absence of rebuttal by the Collector, Thane to the averment made in the complaint it needs to be held that property of the complainant is compulsorily acquired by the state without payment of any compensation. The order further mentioned that it needs to be ordered to the Collector, Thane to pay fair compensation to the complainant as per the existing law viz. The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013.

## Monthly aid of Rs 1,500 for woman domestic workers: Sena UBT-MNS BMC poll promise

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

On the last day of nomination withdrawals, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) on Friday jointly held a workshop to lay out a detailed set of promises for the January 15 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, with a Rs 1,500 monthly assistance for registered women domestic workers, on the lines of the Ladki Bahin scheme, as the centrepiece of their pitch. The workshop was addressed by Sena UBT MLA Aaditya Thackeray and MNS' Amit Thackeray, who jointly presented what they described as their roadmap for Mumbai.

The event was held just hours before the deadline for withdrawal of nominations, a timing that underlined the alliance's attempt to project unity and clarity as the campaign enters its final phase. Announcing the Rs 1,500 monthly payment for women engaged in domestic work, Aaditya Thackeray said, "This is about the self-respect of Mumbai's working women. We are not starting schemes only for elections. Once we are in power, we will implement this." He added that women from the Koli community would also be supported through 'Ma Saheb Kitchen', where meals would be provided at Rs 10. The Sena (UBT)-MNS alliance also promised major relief on property tax. Homes up to 700 square feet would be exempted from the levy, compared to the current exemption for houses up to 500 square feet. "We want to reduce the financial burden on ordinary Mumbaikars," Thackeray said. Employment and youth welfare was also a key part of the presentation and as a part of which the alliance announced a self-employment assistance scheme under which young men and women would be given financial help ranging from Rs 25,000 to Rs 1 lakh to start small businesses. Mini sports complexes in every municipal ward were also promised. "Every young person in Mumbai wants work. We have to support them to stand on their own feet," Aaditya Thackeray said. On education, the alliance said junior colleges would be started in municipal schools so students can continue their studies after Class X. Schools under different boards would be opened by the civic body, with Marathi made compulsory. "Marathi will have its rightful place in Mumbai's education system,"

Thackeray said. The alliance promised free or low-cost parking at BMC-owned parking facilities and said redeveloped buildings would follow a one-flat-one-parking norm. BEST bus fares would be reduced and simplified into flat slabs such as Rs 5-10 and Rs 15-20 to make public transport affordable. The leaders also stressed pedestrian facilities, promising better footpaths and protection of open spaces. "Footpaths are not optional. Citizens must get safe space to walk," Aaditya Thackeray said. A climate action plan aimed at improving air quality and reducing pollution was also part of the agenda. "Mumbai has to breathe freely. We cannot ignore the environment anymore," he said. Among other promises announced were 100 units of free electricity, efforts to keep water charges stable, improved power supply in eastern and western suburbs through BEST, crèches in every Assembly constituency, international-standard public toilets, and a new cancer hospital in Mumbai with a focus on early detection. Speaking at the workshop, Amit Thackeray said, "There is too much arrogance in power today. This election is about breaking that arrogance and bringing the focus back on Mumbai and its people." Aaditya Thackeray also spoke about Mumbai's status as the country's financial capital and said the alliance would push for control over around 1,800 acres of land held by the Mumbai Port Trust. A party functionary said the promises made by Amit and Aaditya were concentrated on the BMC and was focused on briefing the candidates workers to use it for the campaigning.

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## Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narvekar lands in controversy after Oppn demands criminal case



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Maharashtra Congress on Friday demanded a criminal case against Assembly Speaker Rahul Narvekar over a video in which he is allegedly threatening opposition candidates while they are filing nomination papers. The State Election Commission (SEC) on Thursday wrote to Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) commissioner Bhushan Gagrani seeking a report on the complaints filed by candidates against Narvekar.

"Narvekar's conduct is objectionable and amounts to a violation of the Model Code of Conduct, a criminal case should be registered against him. Further, as many as 70 officers and employees from his office are actively participating in the election campaign of candidates who are his relatives, cases should also be registered against all of them

for violating the Model Code of Conduct and strict action should be taken," said Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal. The video that has surfaced on social media shows Narvekar purportedly saying, "How can you have police protection and still want to protest here? I will have to remove your protection tomorrow." Narvekar is then heard instructing one of his colleagues to call the joint commissioner of police (protection), Mumbai, and saying, "On what grounds have you been given police protection? There should be no security for you. You don't deserve it."

Earlier, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut claimed CCTV footage linked to filing of nominations on December 30 at the RO office had gone missing. "This is a very serious matter. What answer will Rahul Narvekar give me? His political journey began in the Shiv Sena. As per my information, CCTV footage after 4 pm (on December 30) has been removed. How can the Assembly Speaker's CCTV footage go missing," Raut asked. Another former MP Haribhau Rathod too claimed that Narvekar objected to his presence when he had gone to file his son's nomination in Colaba for the civic polls. Narvekar rejected the charges levelled by the Opposition parties and insisted it was his responsibility to take note if any individual tried to pressure others, but denied any wrongdoing. "When I accompanied BJP's official candidates to the returning officer's office, some people gathered outside and were creating a scene. I requested the police to warn them. I know nothing more about the incident," Narvekar said. He denied any role in the missing CCTV footage, saying, "If I was not there, how will I appear in any footage? Such baseless allegations have no meaning."

## 'Ever seen dead walking the ramp?': TMC's Abhishek kicks off 'Abar Jitbe Bangla' yatra with EC poser



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Friday started his month-long 'Abar Jitbe Bangla' (Bengal Will Win Again) yatra from Baruipur of West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, targeting the Election Commission over the issue of "flesh-and-blood" people being declared dead in the draft voter list during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in the state. With the state headed for the Assembly elections in three months, the three-time Diamond Harbour MP's statewide yatra is being seen as an attempt to reach out to voters and galvanise the party's rank and file. Addressing the rally in Baruipur, the 38-year-old MP, nephew of TMC supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and seen as the party's second-in-command, made three persons allegedly declared dead in the draft voter list walk the "ramp", saying, "We may question why we got this ramp made. It was built to make these three ghosts walk. Have you ever seen the dead walk the ramp? They are flesh-and-blood citizens of Bengal, cruelly declared dead by the EC just because they dared to vote against the BJP's anti-Bangla tyranny." The names of the three who walked the "ramp" were revealed as Manirul Mollah and Maya Das of Metiabruz and Harekrishna Giri of Kakdwip in the district.

Banerjee added, "It's not just three or four cases. There are at least 24 people in South 24 Parganas who are alive but were shown as dead in the draft voter list. The conspiracy to disenfranchise the people of Bengal stands exposed. As long as we are there, we will not allow a person's right to vote to be taken away." These people (BJP and EC) defame Bengal by claiming it is full of the Rohingya and Bangladeshi. When I asked Gyanesh Kumar (Chief Election Commissioner) how many Bangladeshi and Rohingya were removed from the electoral rolls in the state he started pointing fingers at me. I told him to put his finger down, telling him 'you are nominated and I am elected,' the TMC leader told the gathering.

He further said, "Here, people are dying and Gyanesh (Kumar) is expecting we would go to meet him with flowers. This is TMC. This time I went to Delhi but what will they do Smt Mamata Banerjee goes there next time?" Setting the tone for the upcoming Assembly polls, he said, "This election is not just to defeat them but to teach these anti-Bangla people a lesson. Nearly 1.36 crore people are being forcibly summoned (for SIR hearings) by sending notices. If the BJP has enmity with us, let them send notices to me and other

Trinamool leaders. How dare they send notices to people like this? They have declared a war against the people of Bengal without winning Bengal." Hinting at visiting the EC's headquarters in the national capital again on the alleged flaws in the SIR process, the MP said, "I left the people who were in the field today, people who were on both sides of the road when we came from Patuli. If one third of them go to Delhi, Gyanesh Kumar and (Union Home Minister) Amit Shah will be washed away. They won't be seen." Over the next one month, the TMC leader will hold roadshows, public meetings and community interactions across the state as part of the 'Abar Jitbe Bangla' yatra, a party leader said.

## Navi Mumbai set to get its first IMD observatory; enhance coverage of region, Raigad district

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Officials said that while the METAR services for aviation has been made functional at Navi Mumbai, work is underway to establish a full fledged traditional observatory alongside the aerodrome meteorological station (AMS). Officials said that while the METAR services for aviation has been made functional at Navi Mumbai, work is underway to establish a full fledged traditional observatory alongside the aerodrome meteorological station (AMS). (Express Photo) Tucked within the Navi Mumbai International Airport premises, Navi Mumbai is set to get its first India Meteorological Department (IMD) weather observatory in what seeks to enhance weather observations and forecasts for the extended Raigad district. The region's first observatory is being developed as an ancillary to the IMD's newly launched aerodrome meteorological station (AWS), which was operationalised on December 25 when the airport commenced commercial operations.

While the aerodrome station involves monitoring of equipment on the airport runway and publishing of METAR that facilitates smooth aviation services, the upcoming observatory will be equipped with traditional equipment such as wind profilers and automatic weather stations to provide accurate local forecasting and readings for entire Raigad district.

Launched in December 2025, the AMS is situated inside the premises of the Navi Mumbai International Airport allowing IMD officials to track data and generate a Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR) which enables pilots to make informed decisions during landing and takeoff. According to officials, the METAR furnishes details pertaining to the visibility along the runway, temperature, atmospheric pressure, wind speed and directions amongst other weather observations which are crucial for the take-off and landing of aircraft.

Bikram Singh, director of IMD Mumbai, told, "The METAR report being generated at the Navi Mumbai aerodrome station is crucial for aviation purposes to ensure safe takeoff and landing situations. We look at various parameters ranging from wind speed to visibility which can impact flight services. The METAR product generated at the



station is shared with the Air Traffic Control, who further share this crucial information with the pilots to ensure that they can make an informed decision." Singh said that while the METAR reports are published every 30 minutes, other reports crucial to aviation services ranging from terminal aerodrome forecast (TAF), aerodrome warning and SIGMETs are generated by the Aerodrome Meteorological Office (AMO) situated at the Mumbai airport in Santacruz.

Officials said that while the METAR services for aviation has been made functional at Navi Mumbai, work is underway to establish a full fledged traditional observatory alongside the aerodrome meteorological station (AMS). At present, there are two observatories in Mumbai, in Colaba and Santacruz each, while the next IMD observatory is situated in Ratnagiri district. The lack of an IMD observatory for the Navi Mumbai region has been subject to criticism. After the IMD drew flak for failing to issue timely alerts for heatwave when 14 people died of heatstroke while attending a rally, an automatic weather station (AWS) was opened in Kharghar. But, a dedicated observatory for the region was missing.

To bridge the gap, the weather bureau is now constructing a observatory which seeks to boost forecasting in the region. "With the opening of the aerodrome station, we are already generating daily observations for the region. After Mumbai, the next IMD observatory lies in Alibaug. This new observatory will not only support aviation services but also provide enhanced forecasting for Navi Mumbai and Raigad district," said an official from the IMD aerodrome station.

## Salon owner arrested in Vasai for playing 'Kashmir banega Pakistan' song; it was an 'accident', he says

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

alon owner arrested in Vasai for playing 'Kashmir banega Pakistan' song; it was an 'accident', he saysThe residents confronted him over the incident and subsequently called the police. The Naigaon police in Maharashtra's Vasai arrested a salon owner Thursday after a song containing pro-Pakistan slogans was allegedly played out loud on a speaker in his shop. A video of the incident was widely circulated soon after, triggering public outrage.

Officers identified the accused as Abdul Rahman Shah, 25. According to the police, the incident took place at a hair salon on December 31 in the Chinchoti area of Vasai East, where local residents recorded a video in which the song "Kashmir Banga Pakistan", being streamed from a device, is heard. The residents confronted him over the incident and subsequently called the police.

While Shah claimed in the video that the song got

played accidentally, the protesting residents alleged that it kept playing for more than a minute. They said that even if it was played accidentally, he should have stopped it as soon as he heard the lyrics. The police said that during routine patrolling in the area, officers heard the song praising Pakistan being played loudly inside the salon. When they entered inside, they found that the owner was playing the YouTube song 'Kashmir Banega Pakistan' on a Bluetooth speaker. The police said the song was played at a high volume and contained content that was against India's sovereignty, unity and integrity, with the potential to create communal tension. Based on a complaint filed by the patrolling officer, the Naigaon police registered a case under Section 197(1)(d) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for acts prejudicial to national integrity. Shah was subsequently arrested. The police said further investigation is underway to ascertain whether the act was deliberate and if similar content had been played earlier.

## Chase rulers on streets, force them to flee like in Lanka, Bangla, Nepal: JJP's Ajay Chautala

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) president Ajay Singh Chautala remarks asking youths to "pull rulers from chairs, chase them down on streets, beat them and force them to flee the country like in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal" has sparked a political controversy in Haryana, with leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accusing him of inciting unrest. Addressing a gathering in Mahendragarh on December 28, Chautala — the father of former Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala — urged people to rise against those in power, saying that change often comes when citizens take to the streets.

"Elders and young friends, now there is a time for a change. And you will bring this change. You and we all together will bring a change, then it will come," he said, adding the time has come for them to organise and unite. "When that opportunity comes, just like in our neighbouring countries, in Sri Lanka the way youths overthrew the government there and forced them to flee overnight; just like youths in Bangladesh overthrew the government there and forced their rulers to flee the country; just like in Nepal, youths there mobilised and not only thrashed them on streets but also forced them to leave the country overnight," Chautala said. He said similar treatment needs to be meted out to the "rulers" here. "The same way these rulers will have to be dragged from their chairs, chased down on streets, beaten and forced to leave the country and then we will be able to get rid of the misgovernance," Chautala said.

The remarks drew a backlash from the BJP, a former ally of the JJP, which termed the language used by Chautala as "inappropriate and dangerous in a democratic system". Haryana BJP chief Mohan Lal Badoli termed Chautala's remarks as "illogical, shameful and aimed at creating an atmosphere of anarchy". He said that the "JJP leader had lost faith in the democratic system" and claimed that "Chautala's comments reflected political frustration". Badoli further said that "Chautala should apologise to the people of the state for his remarks".

Badoli accused Chautala of being "unable to accept" what he described as the "BJP's model of good governance" and alleged that the JJP leader was "trying to incite chaos in the state and the country". He also said that "references to situations in countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh



and Nepal were an attempt to provoke people and destabilise democratic order". Taking a dig at Chautala's political legacy, Badoli remarked that "such statements had hurt the dignity of former deputy prime minister Devi Lal". The BJP state president also accused Chautala and his family of having ruled in the past by dividing society along caste lines. He said "the JJP leader was unable to accept Haryana's development trajectory and the growing popularity of Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini". Haryana Cabinet minister Anil Vij said, "The remarks indicate that Chautala has no faith in India's democratic system and that he has lost confidence in his own political party". He alleged that "Chautala was trying to provoke the youth after admitting political helplessness, and said such statements reflected desperation rather than constructive opposition". Earlier, Chautala had also lashed out at the Congress, alleging it is working as a B team of the "rulers". "The responsibility of the main opposition party which you gave to the Congress and that is working as its B team. I am not saying this. Every single person is saying this in Haryana," Chautala said. He said the same people who gave maximum power to (former chief minister) Bhupinder Singh Hooda and the Congress in Rohtak are today saying that if anyone destroyed things the most, it is the father-son duo, alleged Chautala. The BJP and JJP had joined hands to form government in Haryana in 2019. The alliance ended ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, after which the two parties emerged as direct political rivals, frequently targeting each other over governance, leadership and public credibility. Since the split, the JJP has positioned itself as a vocal critic of the BJP government, while the BJP has accused the JJP leadership of opportunism and irresponsible politics.

## Nestle employee shot dead in Punjab's Moga; at least 15 rounds fired, say police



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

A man who was on his way to work at the Nestle plant in Punjab's Moga district was allegedly shot dead early on Saturday, the police said. The victim, identified as Umarseer Singh, was in his late thirties and was travelling in his Maruti Swift when he was killed at Bhinder Kalan village, the police added. Prima facie, at least 15 rounds were fired by unidentified assailants who arrived in a car, Jaswarinder Singh, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dharamkot), told The Indian Express. "The victim was driving his car and going to

his duty at Nestle when the assailants rained bullets at his car," said the DSP.

Nestle employee shot dead in Punjab's Moga; at least 15 rounds fired, say police 15 rounds were fired by unidentified assailants who arrived in a car. Sources said that the deceased was also an active Congress worker and the leader of a local labour union. Local villagers blamed village-level political rivalry for the killing. Umarseer's family protested outside Dharamkot police station with his body, demanding the immediate arrest of all the accused. Nestle employee shot dead in Punjab's Moga; at least 15 rounds fired, say police The victim, identified as Umarseer Singh, was in his late thirties. Congress leader and former Dharamkot MLA Sukhjeet Singh Kaka Lohgarh joined the protest. Blaming the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government for "deteriorating law and order" in Punjab, he said: "CM Bhagwant Mann should resign immediately. He has failed to run this government. The police response today was too delayed, and they reached the spot very late. The protest will continue till the accused are arrested." DSP Jaswarinder stated that there was heavy fog at the time of the incident. "We are trying to identify the accused at the earliest," he said.

## From Commonwealth gold to Cabinet: Minister Shreyasi Singh's blueprint to 'send 10 Bihar athletes to 2036 Olympics'

Nationally acclaimed shooter and two-time Jamui BJP MLA Shreyasi Singh is the youngest minister in Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Cabinet. Singh, who is the daughter of former Union minister the late Digvijay Singh, currently holds the Sports and IT portfolio in the state. She speaks to The Indian Express on her vision for sports infrastructure in Bihar, plans for grassroots talent promotion and ways to bridge the rural-urban divide in the IT sector. Excerpts:

What steps has the Bihar government taken to build sports infrastructure, and what is the plan for reviving the Moin-ul-Haq Stadium in Patna?

Shreyasi Singh: We have already built an international-level sports stadium at Rajgir, Nalanda. We have also set up the Sports University of Bihar there, making us the seventh state in the country to have such a university. We have also received a grant for it from the University Grants Commission (UGC). Besides, Rajgir is a Centre of Excellence for sports like wrestling, weightlifting, archery and hockey. As we move forward, we are developing more Centres of Excellence and academies. We are also getting a cricket stadium in Rajgir, which has nearly completed construction and is ready to go. We have a national-level facility with eight badminton courts in Bhagalpur, which is one of the best facilities in India. Our achievements in the field of sports are less advertised. As a sportsperson myself, I understand the importance of good sports infrastructure. We have already recorded our presence at the national level by hosting some national and international events in the last three years. For Moin-ul-Haq Stadium, we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Bihar Cricket Association (BCA). The stadium's revamp is on top of my priority chart as the Sports Minister.

Why has the expansion of major stadiums been slow, especially around Patna, and how is the department managing budget constraints while planning new infrastructure?

Shreyasi Singh: We are building stadiums and raising sports infrastructure in several districts in a phased manner. There are nine commissionerates in Bihar – one Centre of Excellence in Rajgir, and eight more Centres of Excellence will be opened for eight different Olympic or Asian Games-level sports in different parts of the state. If we do not have roads or good connectivity for people or goods, spending an equal amount on sports stadiums would not be fair to public welfare. When we compare the sports budget before 2020 with the last budget, the five-year sports budget has gone up by almost 600 per cent. It is still lower than expected, but the growth shows our commitment. We have allocated Rs 400 crore for the infrastructure in Rajgir. Bihar is also one of the only states in the country that has implemented playground or khel-maidan projects at the panchayat level, and we are planning to create youth clubs at the panchayat level to promote sports on a larger scale. We also have the Mashal Yojna, which is helping us identify talent at the grassroots level and nourish and enhance it. We have successfully completed the talent-identification stage.

How will the planned sports academies function in terms of training, accommodation and education for athletes?

Shreyasi Singh: We are looking at opening several academies where children can be nurtured through skill training. Their accommodation and lodging will be taken care of, and their education will also be managed so that no child is left behind because they are into sports. Alongside these academies and Centres of Excellence, we want to enhance sports science. It is a field that is very new to the world and to India. Since the sports department is only one and a half years old, we want to get on with this trend early and introduce sports science so that it is not a new concept when an athlete goes outside Bihar. Sports science includes recovery, rehabilitation, nutrition, mental fitness, strength and power training.

As a sportsperson yourself, what changes have you observed in Bihar's sports culture over the last decade?

Shreyasi Singh: I have seen change first-hand. In 2008-09, when I won my first international medal and returned from Finland, athletes from Haryana and Delhi were received by their respective federations, but nobody came from Bihar. It was disheartening. But by 2018, when I won the Commonwealth Games gold medal, the difference was huge – Bihar celebrated that medal in the chowks and chaurahas like it was their own, with no dearth of stages, opportunities, felicitations, VIPs or sponsorships. In 2011, at the National Games in Jharkhand, Bihar barely had athletes and returned with zero medals. But in the recent National Games in Uttarakhand, we returned with a record 11 medals and had around 250-300 athletes. The graph of sports in Bihar is going up. We may not yet be at the world level or among the top states, but work is happening in the right direction, and we need to take it forward. I have seen this change throughout my athletic career.

What schemes are currently running under the Sports Department, and how are they being monitored?

Shreyasi Singh: There is a weekly review of all schemes. Since the department is new and has only been functioning for one and a half years, the policies are recent.



Bihar Sports and IT Minister Shreyasi Singh, who is a nationally acclaimed shooter, opens up about investing in the state's sporting infrastructure, nurturing young talent, and opening AI Centres of Excellence.

We have schemes to identify grassroots talent, provide scholarships to national and international athletes, and route athletes to Centres of Excellence for performance enhancement. We also have the Medal Lao, Naukri Pao Yojna through which medal-winning athletes can avail government jobs. Within one and a half years, 84 athletes are now working with the Sports Department. That itself is a win. Other than the Youth Panchayat Club that is going to be developed, there is no new policy immediately upcoming, but regular review is essential.

What barriers do women athletes in Bihar face, and how do you aim to address them?

Shreyasi Singh: A woman is fighting a social battle, not a professional one. Every time she steps out or voices her opinion and someone tries to silence her – at home or work – she is fighting that battle. In sports, the differentiation has reduced significantly. Women receive equal pay in lawn tennis, cricket, and government scholarships, and thanks to many great women athletes, that gap has been bridged. But social challenges remain.

My doors are always open for women athletes to have closed-door conversations about issues they may be comfortable discussing only with a woman. The way forward for women's security and empowerment is when women are directly attached to the main stimuli of any work. That inclusion needs to happen. In the Sports Department, if not as coaches, then women can be included at the support-staff level, which itself ensures women's safety, security and empowerment.

By 2036, what level of sports representation do you envision for Bihar?

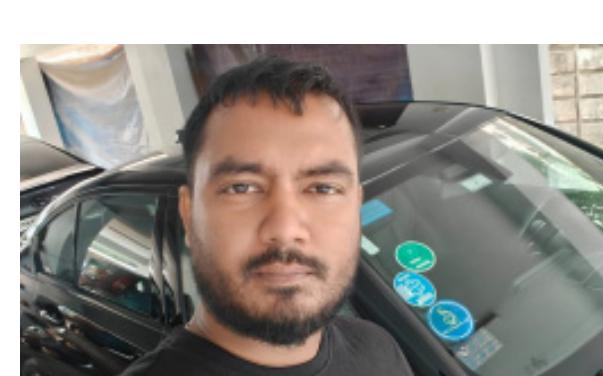
Shreyasi Singh: When the map of India is drawn at every Olympic Games, states like Tamil Nadu and Haryana have numbers next to their names, but Bihar used to have a big zero. In 2024, in both the Olympics and Paralympics, the number changed to one – we have para-athletes Shailesh Kumar and Sharad from Jamui. By 2036, I hope to add a zero to that number – at least 10 athletes from Bihar should represent India at the 2036 Olympic Games.

How will Bihar bridge the urban-rural divide in the IT sector?

Shreyasi Singh: By decentralising the Information Technology (IT) department to the gram level. IT parks, AI Centres of Excellence and software technology parks (STPs) need to move beyond Patna to tier-2 cities. Most people working across the Indian IT sector, from lower levels to the top, are Biharis. While there may be a dearth of information technology in Bihar, that is not because Biharis don't have intellect. What we are aiming at is to establish IT parks, AI Centres of Excellence and STPs, and generate employment for all those Biharis who would like to stay and work in the state. Primarily, we need to work on giving employment to Biharis, and by creating that infrastructure, we are also opening our doors to anybody else in India who wants to come and work. Job opportunities are going to be open, and the IT sector is and will be mostly private. It is the backbone of Bihar's economy, and everything that is digitalised is handled by the IT department. So now it is time to go into privatisation with the government's support, and that is what we are looking at. Yes, our responsibility is to give back to the land we come from, but if there is a private job opening, it will be open to the world. We have a single-window policy for investors. Patna airport has been upgraded due to increased demand, and we now have two more fully functioning airports – Purnea and Darbhanga. Even the Deoghar airport (in Jharkhand) benefits Bihar.

Now Bihar is opening AI Centres of Excellence. What is the idea behind this move?

Shreyasi Singh: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is booming worldwide. I am grateful to the honourable chief minister that, in the first Cabinet meeting after the elections, it was decided that three AI Centres of Excellence will be opened in Bihar so that the state can grow alongside global trends, and have its IT Department flourish via AI technology. These centres will focus on fields like art, agriculture, and education. Since AI is vast, we cannot dictate specifics. We must keep the doors open and engage with the market. Bihar today has one of the best IT systems possible, given our infrastructure and economic strength.



properly," he said. Realising the sensitivity of the situation and the likelihood that misunderstandings may crop up later, Mollick decided to record their interaction during the drive. "She was heavily intoxicated and not in her senses, so for my own security, I started recording. Her phone had died and she wanted to speak to her mother. I called her up and gave the phone to the young woman, but the mother was offended and she asked to speak to me. I assured her that I would drop the young woman home safely, and said I would give her a call five minutes before reaching the destination so that she could come and receive her," he said.

Upon arrival, the young woman was unable to even operate the door of her building. Mollick stepped out, unlocked the door for her, and waited until she was safely inside before driving away.

When the video of the encounter went viral, an overwhelmed Mollick called his mother to share the news. Her response was thought-provoking. "When I told her of the praise I was receiving, she just said, 'Why are people praising you? What else are you expected to do? Dropping her home safely was your duty, not an extraordinary feat!'" he said, adding that her reaction kept him grounded. Mollick's story resonates deeply because it silently speaks about the shifting atmosphere in Kolkata following last year's RG Kar incident when a young, woman doctor was raped and murdered in the city. "As a citizen of Kolkata, I always felt the city was very safe, but what has happened in the last two years totally changed the scenario. The trust has gone. I can't do much about it, but what I can do is this: I talk to those who get into my car and make them comfortable so that they feel safe," Mollick said. "Sadly, we are living in a world where doing the right thing has become remarkable. In this incident in particular, the woman wasn't fully conscious, so I just had to tolerate her tantrums and ensure her safety, which I did. That's my duty," he added.

With a younger brother to educate and a father who is working as a security guard, Mollick decided to drive a cab for a living, relying on the Maruti Alto he had bought on a loan. "I thought, I know driving. It will be independent work. I had no time to develop any skills any further, and I wanted to do something that could help me earn money immediately," he recalled. The incident that put him in the limelight took place around 10.30 pm on Christmas Eve this year. An inebriated young woman, about 18-19 years old, booked his cab for a long journey from South Kolkata to the northern fringes of the city near the airport. Though she started the journey with a male friend, he disembarked at a Metro station just minutes into the trip, leaving Mollick alone with the young woman who was in a vulnerable state. "As her safety was in my hands, I knew I had to drop her home

# China taxes condoms, contraceptive drugs in bid to spur birth rate



GNS News Agency, Dec 5

China removed a three-decade-old tax exemption on contraceptive drugs and devices from January 1 in new steps to spur a flagging birth rate. Condoms and contraceptive pills now incur value-added tax of 13%, the standard

rate for most consumer goods. The move comes as Beijing struggles to boost birth rates in the world's second-largest economy. China's population fell for a third consecutive year in 2024 and experts have cautioned the downturn will continue.

China exempted childcare subsidies from personal income tax and rolled out an annual childcare subsidy last year, following a series of "fertility-friendly" measures in 2024, such as urging colleges and universities to provide "love education" to portray marriage, love, fertility and family in a positive light. Top leaders again pledged last month at the annual Central Economic Work Conference to promote "positive marriage and childbearing attitudes" to stabilise birth rates. China's birth rates have been falling for decades as a result of the one-child policy. China implemented from 1980 to 2015, and rapid urbanisation. The high cost of childcare and education as well as job uncertainty and a slowing economy have also discouraged many young Chinese from getting married and starting a family.

# Trump says U.S. will intervene if Iran violently suppresses peaceful protests

GNS News Agency, Dec 5

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday (January 2, 2025) said that if Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, the United States of America will come to their rescue. "We are locked and loaded and ready to go," he said in a Truth Social post. Iran Supreme Leader adviser Larijani says Mr. Trump should know that U.S. interference in Iran protesting issue is equivalent to chaos across entire region.

Mr. Trump's comment follows the deaths of several people as Iran's biggest protests in three years over economic hardship turned violent across multiple provinces. People walk past closed shops, following protests over a plunge in the currency's value, in the Tehran Grand Bazaar in Tehran, Iran, on December 30, 2025. The clashes between protesters and security forces mark a significant escalation in the unrest that has spread across the country since shopkeepers began protesting on Sun-



day over the government's handling of a sharp currency slide and rapidly rising prices. Iran's economy has struggled for years since the U.S. reimposed sanctions in 2018, after Mr. Trump withdrew from an international nuclear agreement during his first term.

# Don't need treaty with Dhaka to push back 'illegal immigrants', says Himanta



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday (January 1, 2026) said his government would not wait for a repatriation treaty between India and Bangladesh to intensify the pushback of "illegal immigrants" under a new policy framework. He exuded confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would form the government for the third consecutive time in the State and continue with its agenda of development and safeguarding the interests of indigenous peoples. Mr. Sarma said some 2,000 foreigners who stayed illegally in Assam were pushed back over the past few months. They included 18 sent across the India-Bangladesh border on Wednesday (December 31, 2025).

"If the eviction of foreigners from 1.45 lakh hectares of government land was the hallmark last year, 2026 will be marked by the number of foreigners expelled," the Chief Minister told journalists during the customary New Year interaction. He thanked the Centre for playing an active role in the pushback. Mr. Sarma attributed the drive to the revitalisation of the Immigrants' (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, with a standard operating procedure for swift action, allowing the District Commissioners to issue orders for suspected foreigners to leave within 10 days, or order expulsion within 24 hours if they cannot prove citizenship. Undocumented migrants leaving via eastern border tripled in 2025 compared to 2024, government data show.

"We are not talking about a repatriation treaty (with Bangladesh), and we don't need it. Just pushing back will be the new way to deal with foreigners," he said, announcing the government's resolve to intensify the identification and deportation of such people over the next five years. The Chief Minister said he was confident that Assam would be able to evict 10,000 to 15,000 foreigners every year from 2026. He said that the Assam Accord of 1985 has no guidelines on how "illegal immigrants" are to be driven out following detection. "People declared foreigners were kept at a designated jail under detention, but they managed to walk out on bail earlier," he said. Signed in August 1985 between the Centre and organisations spearheading the anti-foreign-

ers' agitation from 1979 to 1985, the Assam Accord prescribed March 25, 1971, as the cut-off date to detect and deport "illegal immigrants", irrespective of their faith. The Centre and the Assam government decided that a person would lose the right to live in India after being declared a foreigner. The Supreme Court also said the district commissioner has the authority to order the expulsion of such people," Mr. Sarma said.

'Developed State' The Chief Minister said Assam has been recognised as the fastest-growing State in the country. "India's growth rate between 2020 and 2025 was 29%. Assam's growth rate during the same period was 45%. We are heading towards becoming a developed State," he said, adding that the per capita income increased at a rate of 54%.

"These are not tall claims, but data provided by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The growth is evident from investments in major projects, such as the ₹27,000-crore Teta semiconductor plant, the ₹10,601-crore fertilizer plant in Namrup, and a ₹3,200-crore thermal plant at Chapar," he said. Mr. Sarma outlined a slew of infrastructure projects which include the 32 km elevated corridor near Kaziranga National Park, estimated to cost ₹6,957 crore and scheduled to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 17 or 18. The Prime Minister is also expected to lay the foundation stone of the proposed railway line and allied infrastructure from western Assam's Kokrajhar to Bhutan's Gelephu. Another mega project in the pipeline is the ₹22,000-crore twin-tube tunnel under the Brahmaputra River connecting Gohpur on the northern bank to Numaligarh on the southern bank. "This was initially a road project, but the Prime Minister advised us to add railways," the Chief Minister said. Justice for Zubeen Mr. Sarma said Assam, despite the growth chart, was left poorer in 2025 by the death of cultural icon Zubeen Garg.

"Our government is committed to ensuring justice for his family. We will appoint a special public prosecutor, assisted by a team of three to four criminal lawyers, on January 12. The government will also approach the Gauhati High Court to set up a special court exclusively for the case, aimed at expediting proceedings and ensuring transparency," he said, lauding the Special Investigation Team (SIT) for filing the charge sheet without delay. Garg died on September 19, 2025, while swimming in the sea a day before he was scheduled to perform at a cultural festival in Singapore. On January 14, a Singapore court is likely to open a coroner's inquiry into his death. On the recent killing of Tripura student Anjel Chakma in Uttarakhand's Dehradun, the Chief Minister said people in mainland India should be educated about the northeast to avoid such incidents in the future. The culprits should be booked and given severe punishment, he said.

# India, Pakistan exchange lists of nuclear installations, prisoners



Continuing an over three-decade practice, India and Pakistan on Thursday (January 1, 2026) exchanged a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral pact that prohibits the two sides from attacking each other's atomic facilities. The exchange of the list came even as the ties between the two countries remain under deep freeze following four-day military hostilities last May. The two countries also exchanged a list of prisoners under the consular access agreement signed on May 21, 2008. "Pakistan and India exchanged the lists of their respective nuclear installations pursuant to the agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India signed on 31st December 1988," Foreign Office spokesman Tahir Andrabi said at the weekly press briefing. He said that the list of nuclear installations and facilities was handed over to the representative of the Indian High Commission in the Foreign Office. Mr. Andrabi said that both countries also exchanged the lists of prisoners in each other's custody through diplomatic channels. "The gov-

ernment of Pakistan today handed over a list of 257 Indian prisoners, including 199 fishermen and 58 other civilians in Pakistan's custody, to the High Commission of India in Islamabad," he said. Andrabi said that sharing the list is consistent with the bilateral agreement, and the two countries are obliged to exchange the list of prisoners twice a year, at the start of January and July.

# How language became a battleground in Assam



and layered histories, making rigid categorisations reductive," the study observes.

The study underlines the decisive role of colonial policies in shaping linguistic hierarchies. British administrators classified and ranked languages through censuses and surveys, transforming fluid identities into rigid categories. The imposition of Bengali as the language of administration in 19th century Assam marginalised Assamese speakers in courts and government employment. When Assamese later regained official status, the balance shifted, fuelling resentment among Bengali speakers, particularly in Bengali-majority regions such as Cachar. According to the study, language became closely tied to access to power. Official recognition translated into employment opportunities, control over land records and political influence. Communities that felt excluded came to view language policy as an existential threat. In Cachar, where Bengali speakers formed an overwhelming majority, the enforcement of Assamese was perceived as cultural domination. In the Brahmaputra Valley, concessions to Bengali speakers were seen as undermining Assamese identity.

The study notes that the violence of 1961 reflected both popular anger and institutional failure, with the Centre and the Assam government underestimating the depth of the crisis. Interim measures such as the Shastri Formula failed to address underlying tensions. Political parties were divided, bureaucracies were paralysed, and sections of the media, particularly newspapers published from Calcutta, were accused of aggravating the situation.

Beyond communal binaries The study rejects the notion that the movement was communal in nature. Protesters on all sides included Hindus, Muslims and tribal groups, underscoring that language solidarity often cut across religious lines. This, the authors argue, exposes the limitations of narratives that frame the conflict as Hindu versus Muslim or indigenous versus migrant. It also draws attention to smaller linguistic communities whose concerns were marginalised as Assamese and Bengali groups competed for dominance. Tribal languages, the study notes, faced the risk of gradual erosion amid the larger struggle. The authors conclude that the fault lines exposed in 1961 continue to shape contemporary debates around citizenship, belonging and indigeneity, particularly in the context of the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The lesson, they argue, is that imposing monolingual solutions in a linguistically diverse society is a recipe for unrest.

# Iran government building attacked as top prosecutor responds to protests

GNS News Agency, Dec 5

A government building in southern Iran was attacked on Wednesday (December 31, 2025), authorities said, as the country's top prosecutor warned of a "decisive response" to any attempt to create instability after days of economic protests. Spontaneous protests, driven by dissatisfaction at Iran's economic stagnation, began on Sunday (December 28, 2025) in Tehran's largest mobile phone market, where shopkeepers shuttered their businesses, and have since drawn in students across the country.

"A portion of the provincial governors' office door and its glass were destroyed in an attack by a number of people," said Hamed Ostovar, the head of the judiciary in the city of Fasa, as quoted by the Justice Ministry's Mizan agency, without specifying how the attack was carried out. The attack came after the country's prosecutor general said the protestor's economic concerns were legitimate, but warned action would be taken if necessary.

"Peaceful livelihood protests are part of social and understandable realities," Mohammad Movahedi-Azad told state media. "Any attempt to turn economic protests into a tool of insecurity, destruction of public property, or implementation of externally-designed scenarios will inevitably be met with a legal, proportionate and decisive response." His comments came days after the Mossad intelligence agency of Iran's arch-foe Israel posted on social media that it was "with you on the ground" in a message to Iranian protesters. Posting on its Persian-language X account, the spy agency encouraged Iranians to "go out into the streets together". Iran, which does not recognise Israel, has long accused it of conducting sabotage operations against its nuclear facilities and assassinating its scientists.

Fighting for food The rallies have since built momentum, with students at 10 universities in the capital and in other cities, including Iran's most prestigious institutions, joining in on Tuesday (December 30, 2025).

The vice-president of the University of Tehran, Mohammad Reza Taghidoft, told the Iranian Students' News Agency that four students were arrested on Tuesday (December 30, 2025) and released overnight. Nevertheless, the protests remain limited in number and concentrated in central Tehran, with shops elsewhere in the sprawling metropolis of 10 million people unaffected.

Before the attack in Fasa, Iranian media had not reported any new protests on Wednesday (December 31,



2025). Iran's economy has been in the doldrums for years, with heavy U.S. and international sanctions over Tehran's nuclear programme weighing heavily on it.

The currency, the rial, has also plunged in recent months, losing more than a third of its value against the U.S. dollar since last year. Some basic necessities are becoming unaffordable for a portion of the population, which has been suffering from international sanctions against Iran for decades. "Everyone here is fighting for a scrap of bread," said one protester interviewed Tuesday (December 30, 2025) by the daily newspaper Etemad. Last-minute bank holiday Schools, banks and public institutions were closed on Wednesday (December 31, 2025) for a bank holiday, with officials saying the directive was due to the cold weather and the need to save energy. The capital's prestigious Beheshti and Allameh Tabatabai universities announced that classes would be held online throughout next week for the same reason, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

The authorities have not linked the bank holiday to the protests. Tehran is experiencing daytime temperatures in the low single digits, which is not unusual for the time of year. Weekends in Iran begin on Thursdays, while this Saturday marks a long-standing national holiday. Iran is no stranger to nationwide protests, but the latest demonstrations have not come close to the last major outbreak in 2022 triggered by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a young Iranian woman. Her death in custody after being arrested for allegedly violating the strict dress code for women sparked a wave of anger across the country.

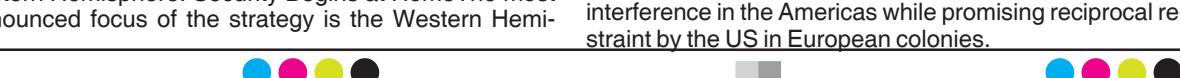
Several hundred people were killed, including dozens of members of the security forces. There were also widespread protests in 2019, sparked by a sharp increase in the price of petrol.

# America turns inward—what Trump's new National Security Strategy means for the world, and India

I just finished reading all 33 pages of America's latest National Security Strategy, published on December 4 and formally submitted to the US Congress. This annual document is not just a routine bureaucratic exercise; it is a window into how Washington sees the world and how it intends to engage with it. Read against the backdrop of the intense geopolitical churn of the past year, the document clearly signals a recalibration—if not a quiet retreat—of America's global ambitions under the Trump administration.

At the outset, one striking conclusion emerges: the United States appears to have adjusted itself to a transformed geopolitical environment. The tone is pragmatic, transactional, and inward-looking, markedly different from earlier strategies that spoke the language of global leadership, a rule-based order, and collective responsibility. A region-wise reading of the document—covering the Western Hemisphere, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—reveals how Washington's priorities have shifted. The Western Hemisphere: Security Begins at Home The most pronounced focus of the strategy is the Western Hemisphere, particularly Latin America. Here, the US identifies three primary threats: illegal migration, drug trafficking and transnational crime. This emphasis aligns closely with President Trump's domestic political narrative and explains his recent remark, on December 19, that he does not rule out the possibility of war with Venezuela.

The document also sends a clear warning to "non-hemispheric competitors"—a thinly veiled reference to China—to stay out of the region. In invoking this stance, the US appears to be dusting off an old doctrine with modern intent: Latin America is once again being defined as America's exclusive strategic backyard. This reassertion suggests that Washington's global engagement will now be selective, beginning with the protection of its immediate neighbourhood rather than distant theatres. Europe occupies an interesting and somewhat unexpected space in the strategy. The document makes an explicit reference to the Monroe Doctrine, first articulated in 1823 by President James Monroe, which warned European powers against interference in the Americas while promising reciprocal restraint by the US in European colonies.



## Let food be thy medicine: on nutrition and diet in oncology



Diet and nutrition form the foundation of good health and longevity. Our diets play a dual role when it comes to health and disease: a balanced diet preserves health and lowers the risk of non-communicable diseases, while a consistent nutrient-rich diet during cancer treatment upholds healing, recovery and energy levels.

**Diet's role in oncology** For individuals undergoing cancer treatment, nutrition becomes far more than a matter of general wellness—it becomes a vital component of healing. Cancer and its treatments place immense stress on the body, resulting in higher needs for energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals. Adequate nutritional intake supports tissue repair, maintains immune function, preserves healthy body weight, and enhances the body's ability to tolerate and recover from medical therapies. When these needs are unmet, patients face a greater risk of malnutrition and cancer cachexia, a serious condition marked by involuntary weight loss, muscle wasting, weakness, and reduced physical capacity. In addition, cancer-related fatigue is a common, distressing symptom experienced by patients. This fatigue often persists regardless of rest or sleep. Nutrient-dense foods, help stabilise energy levels by reducing inflammation, preserving muscle mass, and maintaining metabolic balance. Thus, nutrition plays a both supportive and a therapeutic role—in helping patients cope with both the physical strain and emotional challenges associated with cancer and its treatments.

Surgery, radiation and chemotherapy can create substantial nutritional challenges. While they increase the body's energy and protein needs, they also often cause side-effects that result in reduced food intake. Radiation therapy can affect healthy tissues around the tumour, especially in the head, neck, abdomen, or pelvic regions. Side-effects may include fatigue, loss of appetite, mouth sores, difficulty swallowing, diarrhoea, constipation, and progressive weight or muscle loss. Chemotherapy raises the body's nutritional requirements. However, side effects such as nausea, vomiting, mouth ulcers, altered taste, diarrhoea, constipation, and fatigue often make it challenging to consume enough food and patients may require other forms of feeding (tube, enteral or parenteral nutrition). Surgical treatments increase nutritional demands during the healing process. Depending on the surgery, patients may initially require liquid diets, texture-modified foods, or small frequent meals. Some patients may require enteral feeding: enteral or tube feeding is a method of delivering liquid nutrition via a tube directly into the stomach, when a person is unable to eat or swallow safely by mouth, or parenteral (intravenous) feeding. Cancer care recognises diet as a pivotal part of the treatment process. Therapeutic diets are designed to maintain nutritional status, support metabolic functions, address disease-related symptoms, minimise side-effects of treatments, and speed up overall recovery. These diets are planned by trained dietitians in collaboration with oncologists and are tailored to meet the unique needs of each patient.

Two important therapeutic diets frequently used in oncology include: High-protein diet: During chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery recovery, the body requires more protein to repair tissues, maintain muscle strength, and support immune function. A high-protein diet helps counteract muscle loss, promotes wound healing, and enhances patients' resilience during treatment. Neutropenic diet: Patients with low white blood cell counts, usually due to chemotherapy-induced neutropenia, are at increased risk of infections. A neutropenic diet emphasises hygienically prepared, well-cooked foods that minimise exposure to harmful microorganisms.

Early identification of nutritional risks and timely dietary intervention can significantly improve outcomes. Ideally, nutritional screening should begin at diagnosis and the pa-

tient should be optimised prior to treatment commencement (pre-habilitation). Nutrition care must always be individualised. Factors such as cancer type, treatment modality, stage of disease, side-effects, and cultural food preferences should be considered. Dietitians play a crucial role in providing evidence-based guidance by following established nutrition protocols such as those from the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism and the Indian Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition. During treatment, patients should consume culturally familiar, easy-to-digest foods; eat small, frequent meals; maintain adequate hydration; increase protein intake to support muscle mass; follow a balanced diet to meet nutrient and fibre needs; and ensure strict food safety, especially if immunocompromised.

Daily diet dictates health Diet, nutrition and lifestyle changes are life-long partners to good health. We live in a world that is saturated with fast foods, sugared drinks, processed foods and unhealthy snack choices. These, alongside a reduction in wholesome home-cooked meals, has tilted the balance towards the rise of non-communicable diseases. It is imperative, therefore, to increase our knowledge about the role of diet on our health.

Several scientific reviews note that a Mediterranean type of diet lowers cancer risk (by reducing oxidative stress, preserving cellular health and lowering obesity incidence) through a high intake of fibre, antioxidants, and healthy fats (mono-unsaturated fats: polyphenols and oleocanthal source through olive oil, and nuts and omega fatty acids through fish). The mechanism of action is reduction in oxidative DNA damage which is the central driver of carcinogenesis. Additionally, several Indian spices (such as turmeric, ginger, cumin and coriander) are rich in bioactive compounds (including curcumin and gingerols) that display anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties and are also known to modulate key signalling pathways. Contrastingly, diets high in processed meat, refined grains and added sugars, in the absence of fibre-rich foods, can increase cancer risk. While choosing an extra serving, opt for vegetables, fruits, whole grains, pulses, nuts and seeds that unlock the protective power of fibre, vitamins and minerals. These foods support a healthy gut microbiome, strengthen immunity, reduce inflammation and support a healthier body weight, thereby lowering obesity-related cancer risk (breast, colorectal, endometrial, renal and pancreatic cancers). In summary, for a healthy diet and lifestyle: increase intake of wholegrains, vegetables, fruits, lentils, beans, nuts and seeds; reduce fast foods, red and processed meats; limit sugar-sweetened drinks and alcohol; quit tobacco; maintain a healthy body weight and remain consistently physically active. Dietary guidance for patients during treatment

Choose culturally familiar foods : Diets based on rice, millets, lentils, vegetables, and fermented foods are nutritious and easy to digest.

Eat small, frequent meals : When appetite is poor, smaller meals eaten more frequently help maintain energy levels without overwhelming the digestive system.

Stay well hydrated : Patients should drink at least two litres of fluids daily unless medically restricted.

Increase Protein intake : Protein-rich foods—such as paneer, eggs, lentils, milk, curd, nuts, and lean meats—help preserve muscle mass.

Maintain balanced nutrition : Including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, and protein ensures that the body receives vitamins, minerals, fibre.

Prioritise food safety : Immunocompromised patients (low white blood cell counts) need to adopt stringent hygiene measures. Looking ahead, both for our health and the planet's, the EAT-Lancet Commission proposes a "universal healthy reference diet" that is largely plant-based, environmentally sustainable and capable of preventing diet-related non-communicable diseases. Every bite we eat is our first medicine: the choice towards good health can be made from well within the confines of our kitchens, and the time to make this choice is now. (Dr. Rama R. is associate professor & head, department of epidemiology, Cancer Institute (WIA). r.rama@cancerinstitutewia.org; Dr. Parvathy K. is dietitian, department of dietetics, Cancer Institute (WIA) diet@cancerinstitutewia.org; Dr. Mahalakshmi Rangabashyam Shetty is consultant, The Head and Neck Clinic & professor of practice, department of medical sciences and technology, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. mranagabashyams@iitm.ac.in)

## Swiss investigators believe sparkling flares atop wine bottles ignited fatal bar fire



Swiss investigators said on Friday (January 2, 2026) that they believe sparkling flares atop Champagne bottles ignited the fatal fire at a ski resort when they came too close to a crowded bar's ceiling. Forty people were killed, and another 119 were injured in the blaze as it ripped through the busy Le Constellation bar at the ski resort of Crans-Montana while revelers were celebrating New Year's Eve, authorities said.

Among the crowd was Axel Clavier, a 16-year-old from Paris, who said he felt as if he was suffocating inside the Swiss Alpine bar where moments before he had been ringing in the new year with friends and dozens of other people. The teenager escaped the inferno, which broke out early Thursday (January 1, 2026), by forcing a window open with a table. But about 40 other partygoers died, including one of Clavier's friends, falling victim to one of the worst tragedies in Switzerland's history. Many of the wounded were in their teens to mid-20s, police said.

Mr. Clavier told The Associated Press that two or three of his friends remained missing hours after the disaster. Late Thursday (January 1, 2026), mourners left candles and flowers in an impromptu memorial near the bar. Hundreds of others prayed for the victims at the nearby Church of Montana-Station. Pope Leo sent a telegram on Friday (January 1) to the bishop of Sion to express condolences and pray that "the Lord will welcome the deceased into His abode of peace and light, and will sustain the courage of those who suffer in their hearts or in their bodies." On Instagram, an

account filled up with photos of people who remained unaccounted for, with their friends and relatives begging for tips about the whereabouts of the missing. "We have numerous accounts of heroic actions, one could say, of very strong solidarity in the moment," Valais regional government head Mathias Reynard told RTS radio on Friday. He lauded the work of emergency officials on the day after the fire but added "in the first minutes it was citizens — and in large part young people — who saved lives with their courage."

Mr. Clavier, the Parisian teenager, said he didn't see the fire start, but did see waitresses arrive with Champagne bottles with burning sparklers.

Two women told French broadcaster BFMTV they were inside when they saw a male bartender lifting a female bartender on his shoulders as she held a lit candle in a bottle. The flames spread, collapsing the wooden ceiling, they told the broadcaster. One of the women described a crowd surge as people frantically tried to escape from a basement nightclub up a flight of stairs and through a narrow door.

Another witness speaking to BFMTV described people smashing windows to escape the blaze, some gravely injured, and panicked parents rushing to the scene in cars to see whether their children were trapped inside. Gianni Campolo, a Swiss 19-year-old who was in Crans-Montana on vacation, rushed to the bar to help first responders after receiving a call from a friend who escaped the inferno. He described a scene of people trapped on the ground, severely injured and burned. "I have seen horror and I don't know what else would be worse than this," Mr. Campolo told TF1. The severity of the burns has made it very difficult to identify bodies, bringing fresh agony for families who now must hand over DNA samples to authorities. In some cases, wallets and any ID documents inside turned to ash in the flames. Emanuele Galeppini, a promising 17-year-old Italian golfer who competed internationally, is officially listed as one of Italy's missing nationals. His uncle Sebastiano Galeppini told Italian news agency ANSA that their family is awaiting the DNA checks, though the Italian Golf Federation on its website announced that he had died.

## Hou Yifan on chess, life beyond the board and why winning was never everything



new career... How did you find that transition?

It is not difficult. I am just following my heart to make the decision at the moment I want. Let us say I know that chess is part of my life, but I also understand that my life could not be lived only with chess. That is why I felt like, you should remember first you are a human, then you are a chess player. The world is huge, right? It is not just a chessboard and the pieces. I do not want, you know, when you visit a place, when you think about something, when there are some stories, you connect only with chess. I know some of the others may not be like that, and I fully respect them, but I enjoy this kind of lifestyle more.

Do you remember when you made that decision? Was lack of motivation after winning successive World titles a factor?

A bit, but I think I didn't really reach my maximum potential. My rating could have been higher. I just thought that I should get a certain education and explore. Maybe that had also something to do with my family background. But I didn't think making such decisions were hard because I always kept in mind that if I wanted, I could come back to the chess world at any time. I normally do not regret what I did. So I enjoy who I am right now, pretty much. But at the same time, I have to admit, yes, if I spent those years on chess, I believe I should have been stronger; my peak should have been at least a bit higher. Win-win situation: Hou believes the Global Chess League is 'very important for the chess world', not least because of the opportunity it offers women and juniors.

Why international relations?

I am interested in diplomacy. So I thought that international relations, when it connected with geopolitics and negotiations, maybe there was something in common. But later I did my Masters in public policy. Now I am working for the physical education department. And I am actually applying for my PhD in neuroscience. I know it is a little cross-field. The subject I want to research is the connection between the brain and chess patterns. If you wanted to find something scientifically connected with chess, this is one of the obvious parts. As a chess player, I felt such research could be beneficial to the players, too.

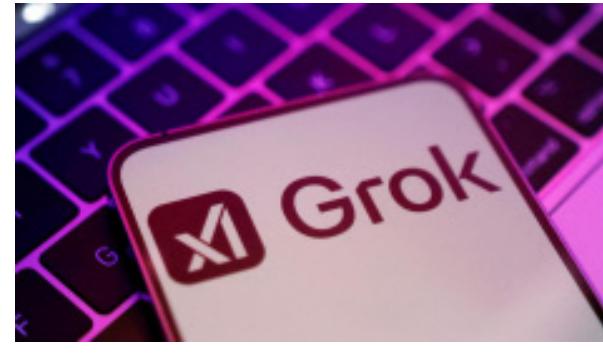
How do you look back at your first World title?

The first title is always more meaningful and exciting. It was something special for me. More so because I broke the [32-year-old] record of Maia Chiburdanidze as the youngest champion. And she was a legend who inspired a lot of girls. But I didn't really aim for the record, but the coach and my team kept telling me about it. I thought, OK, if I can try, that is good, but that is not easy, to be honest, because most of the players, if you want to achieve it at 16 or 17, it means you study chess for about 10 years. So that is why I thought D. Gukesh was amazing, because to win in the open section at a very young age is even much more difficult. Before my World Championship, I had played a rapid match with Anatoly Karpov in China, and he said I could win the World title. Coming as it did from a legend, it was very inspiring. In 2011, you beat Koneru Humpy in the match to defend your World title. That match was the toughest. Not just rating-wise, Humpy was at her peak. She had a very good home preparation, because I remember most of the games, after the opening, I was really in trouble. But I think I was lucky, I tried my best to fight back in the middle game.

Are you surprised that Humpy hasn't won the classical World Championship yet?

Yes, she is one of the strongest players not to have won the World title. But she still has chances. She is playing the next Candidates, isn't she?

## IT Ministry orders X to 'audit' and cease morphed pictures of women in Grok chatbot



sibility" for the content on their platforms. Mr. Vaishnav also pointed out that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on IT had recommended a strict law for obscene content on social media. The IT Ministry had sent an advisory earlier this week to all social media platforms directing them to proactively take down "obscene" and "pornographic" content.

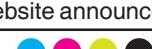
Javed Akhtar slams his AI generated video: I am seriously considering to report



Veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar said a viral video claiming he "turned to God" is AI-generated and fake. He warned of legal action, saying such content harms reputation, and may approach cyber police against those responsible and sharing it.

New Delhi: Veteran writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar penned a note on his social media on Friday and said the viral video where he claims he "turned to God" is generated by artificial intelligence and he is considering to report the person responsible for it. In a note on his X handle, the lyricist claimed such fake news are responsible for damaging reputation and credibility.

"A fake video is in circulation showing my fake computer generated picture with a topi on my head claiming that ultimately I have turned to God. It is rubbish," he wrote. "I am seriously considering to report this to the cyber police and ultimately drag the person responsible for this fake news and those few who forward it to the court for damaging my reputation and credibility," he added. This is not the first time such AI-generated content of celebrities have surfaced on the internet. Earlier morphed videos and pictures of actors including Rashmika Mandanna, Kangana Ranaut, Katrina Kaif and Akshay Kumar among others, have also surfaced on the internet.



# There can only be one goal in the Candidates: to play for first place



control.

On him being more consistent as a player these days is not that I play different openings or completely changed my way to study chess. Something is just clicking right. Chess is also a very mental game. It is really also just being in the right mindset, to just feel confident about your moves and just trust your calculations. Once you are in the right mindset, things might just click. And right now that is a good phase for me. On playing against fellow-Germans in tournaments like the World Cup and Grand Swiss it is always very tough. I don't like playing against the other Germans. It is quite tough for me. I have known everybody more or less since childhood. And I don't really enjoy playing against them, but it is also part of the process. At the Grand Swiss, I also had to play this game against Vincent, which turned out to be quite decisive for the tournament. And there I just got lucky in the end. We are all professionals and we have to play against each other from time to time if that is the pairing. On playing at the World Cup without having the pressure of qualifying for the Candidates on the one hand, less pressure can be helpful, but on the other, it can also be bad because I was lacking motivation to prepare for as many hours as I did during the Grand Swiss. Sometimes it can be helpful because you are not so stressed and you just feel like you can play freely. But sometimes it can also have some opposite effect, like you are not as motivated as your opponent. But one thing is clear: many favourites got knocked out at the World Cup. It is normal for the (knock-out) format, but it also shows that the general strength of chess players is very high and that everybody can beat everyone. On large number of fans coming to watch the World Cup in Goalt is always great to see interest in chess. There have been many fans waiting outside the playing venue, which is great. In Germany, too, interest has also increased in the last few years, but it is nowhere close to this level. Yes, it is a bit unusual for a chess player. We usually are a bit shy, introverted and do not interact too much with people. Here, you are kind of forced to give autographs and do pictures or something, but it is quite nice. There are so many fans. At the end of the day, that is what you want: for the sport to grow and have a good fan base. So it has been great. The interest is huge in India. It is clearly one of the biggest countries in the last few years. They won the last Olympiad with a huge performance, and they have the current World champion. On becoming a professional chess player in Germany in Germany, I had to finish school anyway, and then after school, I took a one-year break along with one friend of mine who was also Grandmaster with a 2600 rating, so also a very strong chess player. We both finished school at the same time, and we both played chess for one year. But then we both went on studying, because it is still the normal thing to do in Germany. Also, I have three older sisters who all went studying, so for me, it was just not even really a question. I was sure at some point I was going to study. I never really dreamt of becoming a chess professional at that point. Okay, I always kept playing chess. I already had a rating of 2600 when I started studying. Once I finished studying, I told myself, okay, if not now, there will be no choice anywhere else to become a chess professional. Either now or never, because if you start a job, you can't be a chess professional at the same time. Also, when I finished my bachelor's degree, it was COVID time, so there was no way to even play chess. Actually, it was kind of nice I could still study online, so I could still do that. After finishing my master's thesis, I just felt it was the perfect time to focus on chess. So I have been doing that for three years, and I guess for the moment, I am definitely going to continue playing chess professionally. I am still not sure if I am going to do it for my whole life, but for now, of course, it is going really well, especially this year, so I am very happy about that.

## Telangana's expanding infra shaping it to reach \$3 trillion goal: Governor at Global Summit-2025



representatives of global technology majors, pharma and other employment intensive fields. He said the State's development roadmap aligned with the national mission of Viksit Bharat, envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and built on inclusive growth, sustainability, and innovation. "Strong infrastructure and progressive governance place Telangana firmly on this path."

He reminded that Governments acted as stewards of the people and accountability would strengthen confidence. Telangana's vision was defined by clear milestones and consistent progress. "Learning from the past is essential for building the future. Telangana's development reflects this understanding through its pursuit of justice, prosperity, and unity," the Governor said. Foresight and determination had enabled the State to convert plans into tangible outcomes, shaping a model of growth that benefits society as a whole. "As the world takes note of the opportunities emerging in Telangana, I stand here with firm conviction to say: Telangana will fulfill its mission of becoming a 3 trillion dollar economy by 2047," he said. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy said a decade after formation of Telangana, the government was trying to make Telangana the country's most developed State and one of the best in the world. "We asked experts to tell us what we can achieve by 2047, when India will celebrate its 100th year of Independence? This is how Telangana Rising 2047 was born," he said. After asking people what they wanted, the government consulted experts and officers of the Central Government, ISB and NITI Aayog. The State was fortunate that leaders from all sectors business, corporate, policy, diplomats, government and experts have all come here. "Today and tomorrow, we will keenly listen to all your ideas and feedback," he said.

## Pankaj Tripathi-backed comedy-drama show to return for season 2

The first season was released on YouTube on November 27 with Gulshan Devaiah, Manoj Pahwa, Seema Pahwa, Girija Oak Godbole and Neha Dhupia playing pivotal roles. The show tells the story of a dysfunctional family that decides to go to therapy together. Speaking about the show, Pankaj, who has co-produced it with Ajay Rai, said, "The phenomenal response to Perfect Family has been heartwarming. As this was my debut production, seeing the audience embrace the story and its message means a lot. I am happy to extend my support for the next season as well. The love and encouragement from viewers have motivated us to plan Season 2, and we look forward to bringing an even more impactful chapter to them."

## European nations set to discuss tightening of migration rules



European leaders will call for a toughening of migration policies on Wednesday (December 10, 2025) in a move critics say bends to pressure from far-right groups and harms basic human rights protections for vulnerable people. Ministers from 27 EU member nations are meeting in Brussels to discuss countering migrant smuggling, with a keynote speech by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. In Strasbourg, France, representatives from the Council of Europe — 46 countries from Iceland to Azerbaijan — are expected to debate making deporting migrants easier for signatories to key treaties.

Denmark was part of a nine-nation attempt last year to curtail the power of the European Court of Human Rights, the independent legal arm of the Council of Europe. Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland argued that the court's interpretation of rights obligations prevented them from expelling migrants who commit crimes. That effort ultimately failed, but support for its basic tenets has since grown. The European Court of Human Rights handles complaints against the Council of Europe, under the European Convention on Human Rights, including many cases involving

migrants and asylum-seekers. The intergovernmental organisation is not an EU institution and was set up in the wake of World War II to promote peace and democracy. Centrist and left-wing parties across Europe are coalescing around the idea of tougher migration policies as a way to blunt the momentum of far-right politicians exploiting discontent over immigration.

The Prime Ministers of Denmark and the U.K. published an op-ed in the Guardian newspaper on Tuesday (December 9, 2025) calling for tightening migration controls to deny entry to those seeking better economic opportunities, as opposed to fleeing conflict. "For decades, citizens in our countries have demanded action. So we are acting — not to exploit these issues and stoke grievances as some do, but to find real solutions," wrote Mette Frederiksen and Keir Starmer. "The best way of fighting against the forces of hate and division is to show that mainstream, progressive policies can fix this problem."

Illegal border crossings into the EU were down 22% from January to October this year, according to Frontex, the EU's border and coast guard agency. The agency recorded 152,000 unauthorised border crossings in the first 10 months of the year. Most migration to Europe happens legally, by air, with some immigrants overstaying tourist visas. The EU has spent billions of euros (dollars) to deter irregular migration, paying countries in Africa and the Middle East to intercept migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. At the same time, European nations facing labour shortages and an ageing population are in desperate need of more workers and have been investing in programs to attract and train foreign workers. The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Alain Berset, said ahead of the Strasbourg meeting that the European Convention on Human Rights was "the final safeguard of individual rights and freedoms across our continent." "The convention's future and Europe's direction are inseparable," he added.

## Indian applicants of H4, H1B visas in a quandary as US consulates reschedule physical interview dates

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Thousands of US work and dependant visa aspirants who came to India for H4, H1B visa stamping have been told that their physical interviews have been rescheduled. The job aspirants are receiving personal email messages from the US Consulate officials about shifting the date for physical interviews to March, April and May effectively putting their careers at risk. The affected Indians have taken to social media to share their plight and are reaching out to journalists.

"I'm currently in India and recently got done with my biometric appointment on December 5. My consular appointment was supposed to be on December 15 which got rescheduled to March 2026. I am supposed to fly back on January 1, if I don't go I might lose out on my job. I'm trying to reschedule my appointment but there are no slots available. Please help!" wrote one aspirant on social media. There are a slew of such social media posts but the number of affected applicants could not be ascertained. H4 Visa applicants have also been affected. "Just 1 day before, we completed biometrics for H4. Today morning, we are given a good morning surprise that your appointment is cancelled and moved to 5 months later. Now, what a mother will do without her nine year child who is in US, and she came to India for appointment," wrote one affected applicant.

The US Embassy in India, on December 9, put out a statement advising the aspirants. "If you have received an email advising that your visa appointment has been rescheduled, Mission India looks forward to assisting you on your new appointment date. Arriving on your previously scheduled appointment date will result in your being denied admittance to the Embassy or Consulate," says the



message. Left in a quandary are families in the two countries. "I have finished my biometric appointment. The new consulate appointment has been moved five months away, it is not feasible to stay in this country as we have our jobs, family, pets, and assets back in the US. Kindly advise on the options to expedite the interview appointment?" wrote another worried woman about the changed date. Some of the applicants had their interview slots shifted beyond five months according to information shared by the father of a woman applicant. "My daughter, for instance, came to India for stamping. Biometric was done on December 8. All of a sudden, the physical interview, which was scheduled for December 18, has been rescheduled post April. Jobs are at stake now. It's understood that all interviews scheduled post December 15 have been rescheduled," shared a parent in Hyderabad. The Hindu has reached out to the US Consulate in Hyderabad. The story will be updated as and when more information is available about this ongoing development.

## U.S. backs Japan in dispute with China over radar incident



The United States has for the first time criticised China for aiming radars at Japanese military aircraft during a training exercise last week, incidents that the Asian neighbours have given differing accounts of amid escalating tensions. The run-in near Japan's Okinawa islands comes after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi triggered a dispute with Beijing last month with her remarks on how Tokyo might react to a hypothetical Chinese attack on Taiwan. China claims democratically governed Taiwan and has not ruled out using force to take control of the island, which sits just over 100 km (62 miles) from Japanese territory and is surrounded by sea lanes that Tokyo relies on.

"China's actions are not conducive to regional peace and stability," a State Department spokesperson said late on Tuesday (December 9, 2025), referring to the radar incident. "The U.S.-Japan Alliance is stronger and more united than ever. Our commitment to our ally Japan is unwavering, and we are in close contact on this and other issues." China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Japan, late on Tuesday (December 9), scrambled jets to monitor Russian and Chinese air forces conducting joint patrols around the country. The Chinese fighter jets aiming their radars at the Japanese planes on Saturday (December 6) was the most serious run-in between the East Asian militaries in years. Such moves are seen as a threatening step because it signals a potential attack and may force the targeted plane to take evasive action. Tokyo blasted the moves as "dangerous". Beijing, however, said that the Japanese aircraft had repeatedly approached and disrupted the Chinese navy as it was conducting previously announced carrier-based flight training east of the Miyako Strait.

Speaking to reporters in Taipei on Wednesday (December 10), Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said China's drills

## Family members worry about safety of fishermen jailed in Bangladesh

Several fishermen's families are worried about the safety of their dear ones, who have been stranded in Bangladesh for the last two-and-a-half months. The fishermen who belong to Konda Rajupalem village of Bhogapuram mandal, Vizianagaram district, went fishing on boats from Visakhapatnam on October 13, 2025.

The fishermen — including Maripalli Chinnappa, Surada Appalakonda, Maripalli Praveen, Ramesh, Chenna Appanna, Seetayya, Appanna, and Ramana — crossed the international waters and were caught immediately by the Bangladesh Coast Guard on October 22, 2025.

Speaking to The Hindu here, Kondarajupalem Sarpanch Surada Chinna Rao and Vadaballija Community Sankshema Sangham president Parimella Vasu urged the government to take necessary steps to bring them back safely to their native places.

## SEBI to sharpen tech, AI oversight to stay ahead of market risks: Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey



he said, underscoring the need for forward-looking regulation. To this end, SEBI has strengthened its regulatory framework while also deploying AI-driven tools and new cyber-security measures. Pandey highlighted Sudarshan, an AI-based model that identifies fraudsters impersonating investment advisers and research analysts on social media platforms to mislead investors. Another AI-powered system, R(AI)DAR (Regulatory AI-driven Advertising Reviewer), monitors and analyses advertisements issued by asset management companies to flag potential mis-selling and regulatory violations.

The regulator has also introduced a sentiment analysis system for corporate announcements, which helps identify disclosures that qualify as "material" and enables timely surveillance alerts. Pandey said SEBI is currently developing an AI-driven inspection tool for cyber health checks, which will analyse cyber audit reports, identify gaps and classify market entities based on their risk exposure. In addition to these measures, SEBI has been working to improve its broader technology architecture. He pointed to the introduction of instant verification of UPI IDs and bank accounts as a step aimed at preventing cyber fraud. These measures come after the market regulator has taken steps to make market infrastructure institutions (MIs) such as exchanges, depositories, and clearing corporations more accountable in a recent circular. "To ensure security, we have mandated external independent evaluation of MIs and their statutory committees every three years, alongside internal evaluations," Pandey said. BSE Managing Director and CEO Sundaram Ramamurthy also addressed the gathering, where he highlighted how the Sensex has seen a 13 per cent compounded annual growth rate since its inception in 1986, compared to the 9-10 per cent of other major global stock indices such as Hong Kong's Hang Seng and the US' Dow Jones Industrial Average.

With investor participation widening and markets becoming more technology-driven, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is sharpening its focus on upgrading its technological framework to enable more effective and proactive supervision, SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Thursday. Speaking at an event to mark the 40th anniversary of the BSE Sensex, Pandey said the regulator was strengthening both its technological and regulatory architecture to safeguard market integrity amid a rapidly diversifying investor base. "As participation widens and the investor base becomes diverse, our focus has also been on strengthening technological and regulatory architecture to uphold integrity," he said. Pandey outlined the regulator's key priorities, which include continuous improvement in corporate governance standards, promotion of sustainable finance and long-term value creation, encouragement of innovation with investor protection at the core, and responsible use of information and data in market operations and supervision. The changing landscape of the market, especially with the integration of AI, brings complexities alongside efficiencies, the chairman said. "The next frontier thus lies in anticipating risks before they surface,"

## Govt reprimands X over Grok AI generating objectionable pictures of women, seeks response within 72 hours



content which contains nudity, sexualisation, sexually explicit or otherwise unlawful content". The notice said that due to Grok's actions, X was not adequately adhering to provisions of the Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021, and the Bharatiya Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, particularly in relation to obscene, indecent, vulgar, pornographic, paedophilic, or otherwise unlawful or harmful content which are potentially violative of current laws.

The ministry has asked X to "strictly desist from the hosting, displaying, uploading, publication, transmission, storage, sharing" of such content, and any failure to do so could lead to the company losing its legal immunity from hosting third-party content. Users on X are increasingly tagging Elon Musk's AI chatbot Grok to generate sexualised and objectionable images of women without their consent, raising fresh concerns over AI misuse and platform safeguards. In several instances, users have replied to photos of women, often taken from public posts, and prompted Grok to alter their appearance by adding revealing clothing or creating suggestive visuals, which the AI-bot has promptly done. The AI-generated images appear publicly in the same threads, exposing the women to harassment without their approval or knowledge. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi had earlier written to Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw raising concerns over the misuse of Grok AI to generate such images of women. "There have to be guardrails put in place by features like Grok so that they do not violate women's dignity. Big tech firms need to take the onus," she said. "It is not just limited to sharing photos through fake accounts but are also targeting women who post their own photos. This is unacceptable and a gross misuse of an AI function," she said, adding that Grok was enabling such behaviour by adhering to such requests.

Vaishnaw told reporters that the issue makes a strong case for the government's intervention, and added that the ministry was considering a law to regulate AI content on social media. "The Parliamentary Committee has recommended a strong law for regulating social media. We are considering it," he said. In October, The Indian Express had reported how AI-generated clips and pictures of actors were widely available on platforms like Instagram and X, with the platforms seemingly failing in their responsibility to curb the spread of such content, jeopardising the safety and dignity of women, which could create barriers to their participation in digital spaces. In December, the IT Ministry had issued an advisory to online platforms, including social media companies, asking them not to host obscene, or vulgar content, calling for "greater rigour" in adhering to provisions of the law. The ministry has also directed platforms to carry out an immediate review of their internal compliance frameworks.

This is being viewed with "grave concern," as it could violate the dignity, privacy and safety of women and children, "normalising sexual harassment and exploitation in digital spaces, and undermining the statutory due diligence framework applicable to intermediaries operating in India," the IT Ministry said. The IT Ministry has directed X to submit a detailed action taken report within 72 hours, covering specific technical and organisational measures adopted by X in relation to Grok AI, the role and oversight exercised by its India chief compliance officer, and action taken by the company against offending content, users and accounts. It has also directed the company to undertake a comprehensive technical, procedural and governance-level review of Grok AI, including its prompt-processing, output generation, and image handling and safety guardrails, "to ensure that the application does not generate, promote or facilitate

## Nifty hits fresh all-time high, crosses 26,328; Sensex rises 0.67%

Indian indices closed higher on Friday, with the benchmark Nifty50 closing at a fresh record high, supported by optimism over strong third-quarter corporate earnings. The NSE's Nifty50 rose by 0.70 per cent, or 182 points, to end at an all-time high of 26,328.55, surpassing its previous record high closing mark of 26,216.05 on September 26, 2024. The 50-share index also hit a record intraday high of 26,340 on Friday. It had previously touched an all-time intraday high of 26,325.8 on December 1, 2025.

The BSE Sensex gained 0.67 per cent, or 573.41 points, to close at 85,762.01 on Friday. The 30-share index finished the session near its record closing high of 85,836.12, achieved on September 26, 2024. "Markets extended their gains on Friday and reclaimed record-high levels, marking a strong start to the New Year. Sentiment was supported by positive sector-specific developments, particularly stronger auto sales trends and an improving demand outlook across cyclical sectors," said Ajit Mishra – senior VP, Research at Religare Broking Ltd. Sectoral participation was broad-based, with all sectors except FMCG contributing to the advance. Energy, realty and metal stocks emerged as the top performers. "The Nifty extended its uptrend for the third consecutive session, breaking out of a symmetrical triangle pattern on the daily chart. It touched a fresh all-time high of 26,340, aided by broad-based short covering," said Nilesh Jain, head – Technical and Derivatives Research Analyst (Equity Research), Centrum Broking Ltd. Turnover on the NSE's cash segment was robust, rising 28 per cent over the previous session, reflecting heightened market participation.

"Nifty has now convincingly surpassed the previous swing-high barriers at 26,236 and 26,325, signaling a strong breakout from its earlier consolidation zone. With the index entering uncharted territory, the near-term upside opens toward 26,500 and beyond," said Nandish Shah – deputy VP, HDFC Securities. On the downside, immediate support has shifted higher to around 26,100, which is likely to act as a near-term cushion on any dips, he said. Broader market strength remained evident, with the Nifty Midcap100 advancing 1.01 per cent to close at all-time high of 61,365.90, while the Nifty Smallcap100 was up by 0.72 per cent to 17,832.05 at market closing on Friday. Market breadth stayed firmly positive for the third straight session, with an advance-decline ratio of 1.93 on the BSE. The Bank Nifty advanced 0.74 per cent to end at an all-time high of 60,150.95. Among the NSE lot, companies that gained the most included Coal India Ltd (7.15 per cent), NTPC Ltd (4.56 per cent), Hindalco Industries Ltd (3.53 per cent), Trent Ltd (2.39 per cent) and the State Bank of India (2.12 per cent). "We expect this positivity to continue into next week, supported by several companies announcing their pre-quarterly business updates," said Siddhartha Khemka – head of research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

## Zohran Mamdani sworn in as New York City's mayor — with a touch of Assam silk



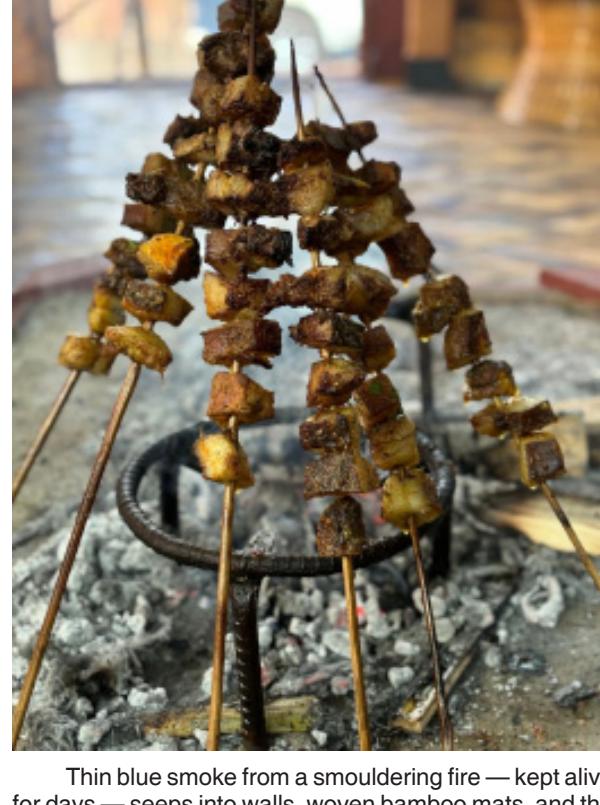
of his Instagram post. Mamdani swearing in New York Attorney General Letitia James administers the oath of office to mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani (Source: The New York Times via AP)

Next to Mamdani, wife Rama Duwaji and Gen Z's favourite First Lady of New York, turned heads in a vintage Balenciaga woolen coat with an asymmetrical funnel neck, paired with wide-legged shorts from The Frankie Shop. The look was pulled together with Miista's pointed lace-up boots. Funky sculptural earrings and gold bracelets from New York Vintage were her accessories of choice. The power couple was styled by fashion editor and stylist Gabriella Karefa-Johnson for the swearing-in and public inauguration ceremony outside City Hall. For the inauguration, while Mamdani kept it modest in a tailored black suit paired with a burgundy silk tie, Duwaji chose toasted-brown separates from Renaissance Renaissance, a label by Palestinian-Lebanese designer Cynthia Merhej. She completed her look with a woolen funnel-neck coat in coffee brown, with faux-fur embellishments at the cuffs and the hem, styled with statement boots and burnished silver hoops. Duwaji's look drew a fair share of online criticism, especially after her Miista boots were recognised to be worth upwards of 600 dollars. Standing next to a Democratic Socialist husband whose entire campaign was hinged on providing affordable and accessible resources to the citizens of New York, she faced flak for her accessory of choice. During a recent conversation with The Cut, Duwaji had opened up about the criticism surrounding her fashion. "It's nice to have a little bit of analysis on the clothes because, for instance, during the general-election night, it was nice to send a message about Palestinians by wearing a Palestinian designer," she said.

Decoding the outfit: Like the rest of his campaign, Mamdani ensured there was a touch of India with him on stage. For the momentous occasion, he chose a black velvet suit paired with a white shirt, but it was his herringbone tie by designer Kartik Research that caught the internet's eye. The custom accessory, embroidered in gold with four petal flowers, added a touch of understated chic elegance to the mayoral ensemble.

The label was founded by Kartik Kumra, a Delhi-based semi-finalist for the LVMH prize in 2023. "The tie is cut in an Eri silk fabric from Assam," the designer said in the caption

## From hearth to plate: The smoked meat traditions of northeast India



"Every village I travelled to in the hills has its own method, but the philosophy is the same: smoke gives life to the ingredient long after the season ends," says Lahkar. What began as an environmental adaptation gradually turned into a food and cultural identity. The idea was never to create a culinary impact; it was food security.

The smoking traditions of northeast India share deep similarities with Southeast Asian cuisines rather than with mainland India. Many communities in the northeast trace their ancestry to Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic groups who migrated from southern China, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia thousands of years ago. They carried with them preservation techniques such as smoking meat over hearths, fermenting bamboo shoots, pickling with salt or ash, and making dried meat stocks — techniques still common across China's Yunnan, Myanmar's Chin and Kachin regions, northern Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.

For example, in China's Yunnan province and Myanmar's Chin Hills, pork is smoked above hearths and later cooked in simple broths and stir-fries. In Laos and northern Thailand, dried or lightly smoked meats and fermented bamboo shoots are a part of everyday cooking. These techniques closely mirror those found in Naga, Mizo, Khasi, and Assamese kitchens. Smoked pork The reliance on local ingredients, often difficult to find elsewhere, made wider recognition difficult.

Despite its depth, the northeastern cuisine has remained largely absent from mainstream conversations. The northeastern states — Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur, and Sikkim — rarely feature in popular menus. Geography played a major role. Long before modern connectivity, the region remained on the margins of cultural exchange. Political isolation further reinforced this distance, limiting culinary and commercial interaction with the rest of the country. "While dishes like biryani, dosa, butter chicken, among others, gained popularity, northeastern cuisine remained rooted in local culture, with a huge lineage of indigenous food practices," says Saikia.

The reliance on local ingredients, often difficult to find elsewhere, made wider recognition difficult. Social factors also shaped perceptions. Much of India's food history is intertwined with religion and caste, where ideas of purity shaped diets. Food choices in the northeast, however, were guided more by ecology than theology. Over time, this created a quiet culinary divide. While much of India experimented with spices, the northeast refined the art of preservation.

Media representation compounded the gap. Indian food narratives in films, television, and popular writing have long prioritised Mughlai, Punjabi, and South Indian cuisines, leaving northeastern traditions largely invisible. The issue was never taste; it was visibility and access. That invisibility is now beginning to shift. Northeastern cuisine is finding a niche in Indian metros, with chefs, home cooks, and pop-up kitchens introducing diners to dishes like smoked pork with bamboo shoots. These flavours challenge the idea that Indian food must be spice-heavy.

In New Delhi, Hornbill has been a pioneer. Founded in 2015 by Khevito Elvis Lee, the restaurant opened at a time when food from the northeast was barely part of the city's culinary conversation. A few Naga restaurants existed, but they were not budget-friendly, says Lee, who previously worked with Taj, Marriott, and Holiday Inn. His aim was simple: to make good Naga food accessible to students and professionals working in BPOs. Today, Hornbill has evolved into a family dining space, while continuing its tradition of a 10 per cent discount for students. "Northeastern food has become quite popular over the last few years. Thanks to major festivals back home, people from many states get to experience the tradition and cuisine," says Lee, adding that many customers started visiting them after attending the Hornbill festival in Nagaland. "They wanted the same flavours they had enjoyed there."

Smoked pork with Axone (fermented soybean), smoked pork with Anishi (dried yam leaves), and pork ribs are among the most popular dishes. Migration has also shaped this exchange. Students and professionals moving to mainland cities have introduced the cuisine and colleagues to these flavours, spreading the cuisine among different groups — one circle at a time. A broader shift in the Indian palate has also helped. BBQ and grilled dishes are now mainstream, and these flavours naturally blend with smoked cuisine. "Earlier, the biggest barriers were awareness, communication, and availability of ingredients," says Lahkar. "But today, more restaurants explore northeast flavours, and supply chains are improving. With the right storytelling, we can showcase smoked dishes across India without hesitation." In Mumbai, northeast food curator Gitika Saikia launched Gitika's PakGhor in 2014, seeing the absence of the cuisine as an "opportunity to create an identity" for it.

## BCCI tells KKR to release Mustafizur Rahman; will allow replacement if needed, says secretary Devajit Saikia



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Three-time Indian Premier League (IPL) champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have been instructed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to release Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman. The board's secretary Devajit Saikia has said that it will allow KKR to pick a replacement player if they need. "Due to the recent developments that are going on all across, BCCI has instructed the franchise KKR to release one of their players, Mustafizur Rahman of Bangladesh, from their squad," Saikia told the news agency ANI. "BCCI has also said that if they ask for any replacement, BCCI is going to allow that replacement."

## Podium to playground: How big medals fuelled excellence in javelin, shooting, badminton

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

At just 12, Misti Karmakar's days began before dawn. By 3.30 am, she was on her bike, pedalling 4 km through the silent streets of West Bengal's Malda, a javelin in tow, to write her story in the morning sky. Raising an athlete daughter was a struggle for Sanjay Karmakar, a hawker at the Malda railway station. On a good day, he would earn Rs 500; just enough to feed the family and keep hope flickering. But when it came to Misti's future, there would be no compromise.

"She comes from a very modest background but is rich in talent," says Misti's coach Asit Pal. A former 400m runner, Pal spotted Misti during the pandemic lockdown and convinced Sanjay to let him coach his daughter free of cost. "And I made him a promise — to make Misti an 'India' athlete," Pal says. "Like Neeraj Chopra." On the face of it, this is a typical Indian sport story. But Misti, now 16, has emerged as one of the faces of a storm brewing in Indian sport.

An analysis by The Indian Express of participation trends since 2019 in some of the major sports revealed that when champions rise, a wave unfurls. There has been a multifold spike in the participation numbers — driven by women athletes — from 2019 to 2025, noticeably in disciplines where Indians have emerged as world beaters. The true impact of India's Olympic and World Championship medals is seen beyond the podium, across the country's sprawling geography. From a badminton dream nurtured inside a no-frills academy to a budding javelin thrower from the atolls of Lakshadweep to a shooting prodigy from a chemical cluster in Gujarat. The participation in the National Javelin Day, to commemorate Neeraj's Tokyo Olympics gold medal in 2021, has grown sevenfold in just three years — from 700 in 2022 to 4,974 in 2025. In the javelin competition at the junior national championships, there has been a 90% growth (75 in 2023 to 143 in 2024) among men and a staggering 125% among women. The spike is more pronounced in shooting, the only other sport where India has won an individual gold medal after Independence — Abhinav Bindra's historic feat at the Beijing Games in 2008. From 8,011 participants at the National Championships in the pre-pandemic year of 2019, the number surged more than 100% to 16,951 in the ongoing 2025 edition. The growth is most visible in the air rifle and air pistol events, where India has amassed Olympic, World Championships and World Cup medals — from 3,825 air pistol competitors at the National Championships in 2019 to 6,703 in 2024; and in air rifle, up from 2,817 in 2019 to 4,835 in 2024. Inspired by Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's pathbreaking results, India's premier junior ranking badminton tournament, the Krishna Khatan Memorial, has witnessed a 100% increase in the U-19 men's doubles; from 104 in 2012 to 208 in 2022. Similarly, at the Rajasthan State Ranking tournament, the entries went up from 517 in 2022 to 893 last year, a 70% increase.

Talking of how big medals boost participation numbers, Lalit Bhanot, the chairman of the Athletics Federation of India's Planning Commission, gives the example of javelin. Kashinath Naik's bronze medal at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, he told The Indian Express, showed "there was javelin talent in India... (Neeraj) Chopra, of course, really boosted the popularity of javelin by becoming the Olympic gold medallist and that can be seen in the increasing number of athletes who throw over 80 metres." In men's javelin, 80 m is considered an elite performance threshold. In 2023, two years after Chopra's Olympic gold, India had six throwers who crossed that mark — the same as Finland, seen as the event's powerhouse. At September's World Championships, India had four javelin throwers, more than any other country.

Two years ago, a research by The Indian Express of India's Asian Games contingent revealed that the female-male percentage ratio among the medal winners was 43:57. It pointed to a shrinking gender gap when it comes to sporting success. Two decades ago, the ratio was approximately 36:64 and in the 2018 edition, it stood at roughly 40:60. From 2019 to 2024, the participation of women in junior national javelin championships skyrocketed from 31 to 137, a staggering 125% spike. Among the seniors, women's javelin throw has recorded a 70% increase in participation at the inter-state tournament, while the men's numbers remained stable. While women's participation in shooting is still almost 46% less than men, it is rapidly catching up and growing faster in most events. This is evident from the 111% rise in 10 m air pistol — from 1,033 in 2019 to 2,181 last year — and almost 90% increase in 10 m air rifle, from 1,075 in 2019 to 2,038 in 2024.

In weightlifting, too, there has been an increase in women's numbers across all categories. "My observation is women are more disciplined and driven," says national weightlifting coach Vijay Sharma, who has been in Mirabai Chanu's corner for the last decade. "When you have more to prove and better will-power, the chances of you succeeding increase automatically." The surge in women's participation is apparent even beyond the disciplines identified by



the sports ministry as a high priority. For instance, according to the All India Football Federation, the number of women players has grown from 8,683 during 2016 to 2020 to 37,829 from 2022 to 2025. The launch of a women's league in 2016, the emergence of players such as Manisha Kalyan, the first Indian to have played in the UEFA Champions League for women, and occasional eye-catching results, leading to the national team qualifying for the 2026 Asian Cup — first time in 23 years — are seen as the reasons for this surge.

In archery, for instance, the numbers in senior men's participation at the national championship have been declining year-on-year, and the spread of the sport isn't as wide as athletics, badminton or shooting — 65% of the archers are from half-a-dozen states in western and northern India. The bigger worry, however, is in wrestling, the only sport where India has won a medal in each of the last five Olympics. The sport, thrown into turmoil following the allegations of sexual harassment against its former president, Brij Bhushan Sharai Singh, has witnessed a steep fall in participation numbers at the National Championships. In men's freestyle, for instance, there were 284 entries at the 2019 National Championships. That number fell to 190 in 2023, when the protests against Brij Bhushan began, and slumped further to 136 last year. Similarly, in women's wrestling, the entries fell from 234 in 2019 to 94 in 2023 and a marginal increase of 124 in 2024. In Greco-Roman style, too, the numbers dropped from 264 in 2019 to 133 in 2024. A Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) official said this happened because of "internal problems". At the National Championships earlier this month in Ahmedabad, the total number of participants in men's freestyle, Greco-Roman and women's freestyle categories were 'approximately 750' — the same as pre-Covid and pre-protests years. The federation official says, "We had two National Championships in the aftermath of the protests, one held by the WFI, which wasn't recognised by the government, and another by the ad-hoc body which the Indian Olympic Association formed. Because of that, the participation numbers fell sharply. This year, we were back to normal since most of our internal issues are sorted."

## Sjoerd Marijne reappointed India women's hockey coach ahead of World Cup qualifiers

New Delhi: Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne was on Friday reappointed as the chief coach of India's women's hockey team, five years after guiding the side to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics, following which it endured a difficult transition phase.

Marijne replaces Harendra Singh, who resigned in December last year after the team's overwhelming results and allegations of a "high-handed coaching approach." The 51-year-old Marijne, associated with the team from 2017 to 2021, will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Also returning to the Indian hockey set-up is South African Wayne Lombard, who will once again serve as scientific advisor and head of athletic performance.

"It's great to be back. After 4.5 years, I return with fresh energy and a clear vision to support the team's growth and help the players achieve their full potential on the world stage," Marijne said in a Hockey India release. Marijne, credited for building a cohesive unit that celebrated collective success, quit after the Tokyo Games citing family reasons. During his tenure, India also broke into the top 10 of world rankings. Vila, a former Argentina midfielder, represented his country at the 2000 and 2004 Olympics and has been involved in coaching for over two decades. Lombard will be supported by Rodet Yila and Ciara Yila, both serving as scientific advisors. After the Tokyo high, the team faced a challenging transition as key players like injury-hit captain Rani Rampal, Vandana Katariya and Deep Grace Ekka retired. The women's team failed to qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics but won bronze medals at the 2022 Commonwealth Games and the 2023 Asian Games.

## What Ishan Kishan can learn from Rishabh Pant's fate? Carry the sword, but don't forget the shield



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

Rishabh Pant is a compulsive risk-taker, a perpetual rollercoaster rider and an enigma who toggles between "stupid, stupid, stupid" and "superb, superb, superb". He is a special batting talent with an uncanny knack for frustrating coaches and selectors. Recently, during the South Africa Test series that India lost, the wicket-keeper cum stand-in captain, true to his reputation, had coaches pulling their hair out after he played the kind of stroke that clearly indicated brain-fade. There were repercussions. As collateral damage, his Test misgivings resulted in him not making it to the T20 World Cup that starts at home next month. And it's been said that his place in the ODI team too is in doubt.

That's life for batsmen living on the edge. They take calculated risks and also gamble to ace odds. These batting buccaneers keep burying the good old ethos of batting to build their own creed. That bargain comes with consequences, as Rishabh would have realised. But then he can't help it; he is a compulsive stroke-maker. Rishabh belongs to the Cult of Speed and is not too different from the early die-hard fighter jocks taking to the skies to break the sound barrier. Historians say those pioneer aviators would opt to crash and die rather than slow down or eject out. Rishabh isn't alone. There is a growing tribe of young players in world cricket who keep pushing the envelope, never compromising on their ultra-aggressive batting approach. England has a couple — Harry Brook and Jamie Smith. Australia used to have one in Sam Konstas. In India too the youngsters are joining the Carefree Club. The Next Big Batsman, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, the 14-year-old who hit the first ball he faced in IPL into the stands, is the poster boy of this entertaining brand of batting and is expected to be a role model for other potential members of this Cult.

Interestingly, the wicket-keeper who has taken Rishabh's place, Ishan Kishan, is also not too different from him. Same skill-set, similar temperament, both in their late 20s; Ishan also loves courting danger. But is Ishan a better bet than Rishabh or is this the case of the former being more suited for T20s and latter for Tests? Not quite, this is

a curious case. Both wicket-keepers have represented India in all formats. They have had many glorious days where they have been hailed as daredevil heroes. And also an equal number of off-days, if not more, when they are painted as villains for dancing down the track only to miss the ball or getting out to a hideous hoick. Their incredible highs notwithstanding, both have been periodically written off. But they have, without fail, kept bouncing back to prove the world wrong. So how did the weighing scale swing towards Ishan during the T20 World Cup selection meeting? Recency bias, maybe.

Towards the end of 2025, few of Rishabh's bouts of brain-fade coincided with Ishan's purple patch domestically. Fate timed their dramatically fluctuating fortunes such that Rishabh's dip came just around the time Ishan was riding the wave. In a few months' time, the trend could change but as of January 2026, Ishan's stock is up.

About six months back, the Rishabh script was peaking. During the England tour, when he had walked to bat with a fractured toe, he was called the warrior who could do no wrong. Before that, he had scored 2 hundreds, 3 fifties. Finally, he was showing consistency, even though he had batted like he had always done. Obviously, pre-meditation was part of his on-the-crease batting routine. Commentators took punts on when he would charge out of the crease — mostly it was on the second or third ball he faced but once it was the first one too. India were winning, Rishabh was calling the cards perfectly. In England, it all looked charming, but against South Africa, Rishabh's luck ran out and it started to get ugly. Recency bias would set in and Rishabh would suffer the same fate as other frustratingly talented players. Had Rishabh not messed up against South Africa in Tests, he might have even made it to the World Cup team. In the last edition that India won, the wicket-keeper had played a few useful hands, including a blinder against Pakistan on those dodgy American pitches. Even after Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli had gotten out, he continued to go for his shots, scoring 42 from 31 balls to be the team's top scorer. He was in a similar situation against South Africa in Tests, but this time he couldn't hit out of trouble. Rishabh's career trajectory should be a lesson for other batsmen on speed. They need to know that batting greats with long careers don't get caught in the risk-reward conundrum. Ishan needs to decide if he wants to be the next Rishabh or the greatest wicket-keeper who could smash the ball, Adam Gilchrist. Closer home, Virender Sehwag too was a carefree batsman but when he went to battle, he carried both — a sword and a shield.

## Hockey India League: Soorma HC remain goalless, winless as Ranchi Royals prevail 2-0 with goals from Rutuja, Sakshi



GNS News Agency, Jan 5

They huffed, they puffed and — for a third straight match — couldn't break their opponents' house down. Soorma Hockey Club's start to Women's Hockey India League went from bad to worse as they suffered a hat-trick of defeats and are yet to score a goal after 12 quarters of hockey that has seen them make 87 circle entries in all.

And it was again of their own doing. Soorma had a golden opportunity to score via a Penalty Stroke and take the lead at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro

Turf Stadium in Ranchi on Friday night. But Penny Squibb failed to convert from the spot, thanks to a great save by goalkeeper Madhuri Kindo, and Soorma found themselves chasing the match shortly after. Excellent field goals by Rutuja Dadaso Pital (30') and Sakshi Rana (54') gave Royals their second win in three matches. Defences were on top in the first quarter as both sides hardly made any errors or gave away good chances to their opposition. Royals held more possession in the beginning, however Soorma made 10 circle penetrations in the first 15 minutes of the contest. In the 25th minute, Royals committed a foul inside the circle, giving away a stroke. The missed opportunity would come back to haunt Soorma very soon. With seconds left in the first half, Royals took the lead after Agostina Alonso played a powerful pass into the circle from midfield and Rutuja cleverly deflected it into the net. In the 34th minute, Maria Ortiz came teasingly close to increase the advantage for the Royals as she did well to beat her marker and unleash a low-driven shot towards goal, but the ball struck the post. In the 54th minute, Royals eventually increased their advantage with a goal of the season contender. After receiving a clever reverse pass from Rutuja, Sakshi unleashed a powerful strike from a tight angle into the top right corner of the goalpost that left Savita unmoved.

## Hockey India League returns: Five things to look forward to — From Harmanpreet Singh's backup to India's goalkeeper depth

GNS News Agency, Jan 5

After some teething issues in the rebooted Hockey India League, the tournament returns with some improvements and overcoming off-season hurdles. With UP Rudras pulling out of the league hours before the auction, Hockey India had to step in and take ownership of a franchise — a team that has been named HIL Governing Council — to avoid last-minute embarrassment. There were concerns about foreign players' availability as well, which were largely addressed (top Dutch players will be absent) to ensure the quality of matches remains high. But a lot of attention will be on Indian players trying to leave a good impression on head coach Craig Fulton, who'd be looking to expand the talent pool.

### 1) India's depth

Fulton is left with a daunting task of managing a core group that has to contend with playing World Cup and Asian Games separated by less than three weeks. While World Cup medal has eluded Indian hockey for decades now, Fulton can't afford to lose focus on Olympic qualification at stake from Asiad. The head coach will need more than just one settled squad to tackle these twin challenges and HIL will give him an idea of who among the second string can take a step forward.

### 2) Harmanpreet's workload

The Indian captain continues to remain the fulcrum of the national team, shouldering the goalscoring burden along with leadership and marshalling defence. 2025 saw him struggle with multiple niggles, and when he was absent, India didn't appear the same force. In the last HIL, Jugraj Singh stepped up for eventual champions Bengal Tigers and finished as the leading goal-scorer. And Indian hockey needs to see more drag flicking options emerge from HIL; the likes of Amandeep Lakra, Sanjay, Arai Jeet Singh all have the chance to throw their names into the mix.

### 3) Attention on Harendra

Having been part of the women's auction last year, Ranchi Royals have moved Harendra Singh to the men's setup where he is now the head coach. The man who has

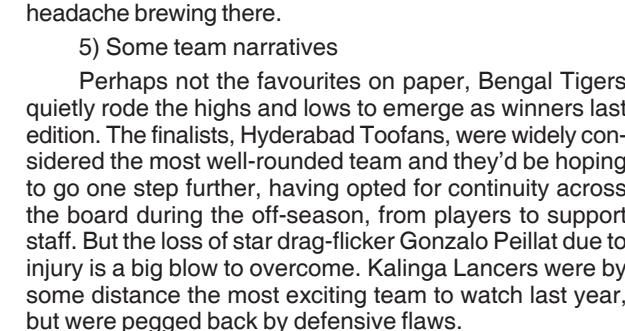
donned many hats in Indian hockey, will start the HIL under the recent cloud of his exit from India women's team after reports of falling out with players. While always regarded as a players' coach, Harendra has some image rebuilding to do as he takes up a new challenge.

### 4) Goalkeepers line-up

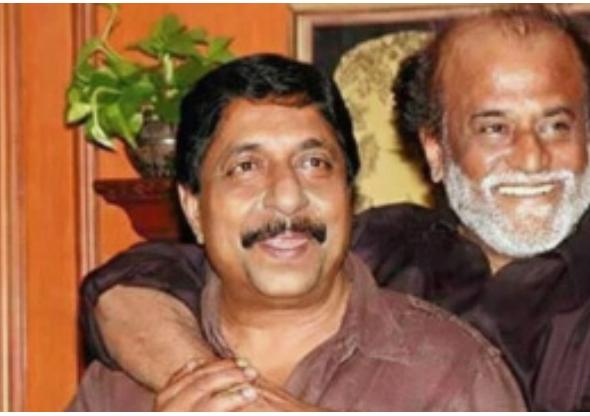
India enter their first major tournament year without PR Sreejesh in goal, and the competition for the spot between posts is a fascinating stage. While Krishan Pathak and Suraj Karkera have been Fulton's first two choices, the strong performances by Pawan and Mohit HS at the recent Sultan Azlan Shah Cup would've given head coach plenty to ponder. Throw into the mix the emergence of Prince Deep Singh — regarded as a Sreejesh replica and having impressed at the Junior World Cup under the legendary coach's tutelage — and Bikramjit Singh, there is a selection headache brewing there.

### 5) Some team narratives

Perhaps not the favourites on paper, Bengal Tigers quietly rode the highs and lows to emerge as winners last edition. The finalists, Hyderabad Toofans, were widely considered the most well-rounded team and they'd be hoping to go one step further, having opted for continuity across the board during the off-season, from players to support staff. But the loss of star drag-flicker Gonzalo Peillat due to injury is a big blow to overcome. Kalinga Lancers were by some distance the most exciting team to watch last year, but were pegged back by defensive flaws.



## Rajinikanth's lost love, the woman whose Rs 500 gave wings to his acting dreams: 'She vanished one day'



GNS News Agency, Jan 3

across the institute's advertisement and told him, 'You should go and study there. You are so talented; you shouldn't waste it by not trying.' He immediately refused, pointing out that his job was his family's only source of income. He had a large family, and they lived in a small house. One of my friends had seen his house once. But she (his lover) kept insisting, mentioning that he had a bright future in cinema. She kept encouraging him, saying, 'Don't worry about the money; I'll somehow arrange it for you.' Due to her persistent encouragement, he finally agreed," Sreenivasan added.

ICYMI | Who is Riya Shibu, the 21-year-old producer of Vikram's actioner, now winning hearts with her performance in Nivin Pauly's Sarvam Maya?

Despite the risk, particularly since he didn't know where the money would come from, Rajinikanth finally joined the institute. "Initially, she was the one sending him the money. It was only after that, I think, that the situation arose where his friends had to send money." While he was pursuing the dream inspired by her, tragedy struck Shivaji Rao when she vanished from his life completely. The actor-filmmaker added, "What happened was that one day she completely disappeared from his life without a trace. I think, or rather Rajinikanth believes, her family found out about her relationship with a poor man like him. So they took her away to a place where he wouldn't even have her address. With tears in his eyes, Rajinikanth told Devan, 'I really hope to see her at least once in this lifetime.' Although it's easy for her to find Rajinikanth, she might have moved on with her life. She might be afraid that meeting again could disrupt their lives and cause problems."

'Why hasn't she come for me?'

Devan himself once shared the story with Manorama News, revealing her name was Nirmala and that she was an MBBS student. Mentioning that Rajinikanth left Bengaluru with the Rs 500 she had given him, Devan stated that, upon noticing no contact from Nirmala, Rajinikanth rushed back, looking for her. "However, no one knew where she had gone. Though the actor went to her house, it was locked. The neighbors too didn't have any idea about the family. All they could say was that Nimmie's family had moved to a different place." Devan quoted Rajinikanth as telling him, "Today, I am an actor; yet she hasn't come looking for me. It is my Nimmie (Nirmala) whom I look for whenever I go, be it the Himalaya or America. I look for her in the crowds. Devan, why hasn't she come for me? Why doesn't she want to see me, even after I have achieved all these?"

Mentioning that Rajinikanth originally narrated this story to Malayalam actor Devan, with whom the superstar worked in the iconic gangster movie Baashha (1995), Sreenivasan told Kaumudy, "It was almost like a sequence straight out of a movie. One day, a girl tried to enter through the back door of the bus in which he worked as a conductor. Seeing this, he asked her to enter through the front door. An argument broke out between them over that. However, eventually, they fell in love." During those days, Shivaji Rao often acted in plays during his free time. "One day, he told her that a play, in which he was also performing, was being staged that evening and invited her to see it. She went and was amazed by his performance. Subsequently, she came

## Tisca Chopra says 'Bollywood is afraid': 'They

keep making the same film with new twist'



With Dhurandhar on a box office rampage, the film has become the most talked-about release of the moment. While opinions remain divided over its politics, there seems to be near-unanimous agreement on one front—the film is undeniably well-made. Its success has once again sparked the familiar debate around why certain films rake in crores while others struggle to find an audience. Some have credited its out-of-the-box storytelling, while others have applauded the sheer bravery of its vision. Amid these discussions, actor Tisca Chopra, without directly naming Dhurandhar, weighed in on Bollywood's growing fear of taking creative risks.

Speaking to Bollywood Bubble, Tisca remarked, "The problem is that we are watering the fruits and not the roots, which is writing. The work has become extremely shallow. I am not saying one can't do commercial or comedy cinema, but it starts from the writing. You need to give time to your writers and freedom to brainstorm ideas. We don't nourish writers." She added, "We are very afraid. Nobody wants to take a chance. We keep doing the same thing with a little twist. The audience is not entertaining it anymore. Whenever you bring something new with conviction, people accept it."

Echoing similar sentiments, several prominent actors and filmmakers, including Hrithik Roshan, Ram Gopal Varma, and Sudhir Mishra, publicly praised Dhurandhar and director Aditya Dhar's craft. Filmmaker Sudhir Mishra wrote on X, "By the way, Dhurandhar is a well-made film. Aditya Dhar is extremely skilled. The acting is terrific. The most difficult thing in filmmaking is a director's ability to make the

## In a post-Dhurandhar world, Sriram Raghavan stages an anti-war rebellion with Ikkis

Nobody understands the cost of war the way a soldier does. Hindi cinema has long avoided this truth, preferring pageantry over consequence, bravado over reckoning. In that sense, Ikkis arrives like a correction. Sriram Raghavan's first venture into the war genre is, in essence, a refusal of it. He cares not for what war offers, only for what it takes. Two moments, in particular, carry this conscience. In one, a soldier lies dead while a radio beside his body plays "Unko Yeh Shikayat Hai." The song does not rise to mark tragedy; it, in fact, simply continues. The indifference is devastating. Life does not pause to acknowledge the fallen. Later, another ordinary radio announces a ceasefire. There is no victory speech, no swelling score. Men erupt into movement: laughing, dancing, clutching one another. This is a rare vision in contemporary Hindi cinema. Where films often show soldiers yearning for the battlefield, Raghavan shows what it truly means to stand on one: to want nothing more than to survive it, to leave it behind, to wish future generations never have to endure it, to go home.

Homecoming very much defines the film. Brigadier Madan Lal Khetarpal (Dharmendra) returns to Lahore for the centenary celebrations of his college. Born in Sargodha, in what is now Pakistan, he traverses landscapes scarred by history, visiting his ancestral home, now inhabited by a Pakistani family. The casting of Dharmendra is itself a layered self-aware statement: he, too, was born into a land later torn apart by Partition, carrying memories of childhood, first loves, and schooldays all stolen by a tragedy that left scars both intimate and collective. His presence resonates further because he was last of a generation of superstars, (alongside the likes of Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand, and Raj Kapoor), whose life bore witness to that violence, thus infusing their cinema with a consciousness that weighed grief and humanity equally. With his passing, we have lost that living bridge to a world beyond divisions. Ikkis emerges, in this sense, at a precise moment, where the old guard fades, and the new guard, led by films like Dhurandhar,

envisions a naya Bharat.

So, if Madan Lal experiences that not much has changed (like the tree in the backyard of the house, he once called home), yet so much has, and despite it all, he feels equally at home (as even Jaideep Ahlawat's character, Brigadier Nisar, tells his daughter, "he is home"), his grandson, Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal (Agastya Nanda), also witnesses a similar realisation. While serving in the 1971 Indo-Pak war, as he reaches Pakistan in his tank, the 21-year-old is struck by how strangely similar the land looks to his own homeland. It instantly recalls the craftsmanship of someone like Yash Chopra, (who returned again and again to the tragedy of Partition in his art), and that crucial point in Veer-Zaara, when Veer sings a proud anthem of his homeland, Zaara simply replies with, "Yaha bhi wahi sham hai, wahi savera; Aisa hi desh hai mera jaisa desh hai tera." And here, instantly, the familiar and the foreign collapse into one. On the battlefield, Arun is struck by many such realisations, like the moment where he watches his own colleagues fall, and later, when a journalist asks him what it is like to be at war, he finds no words. By juxtaposing the two timelines, one where Arun goes about being a martyr in the war, and another where Madan Lal visits his homeland, Raghavan not only questions the futility of war, but also, in a sense, gives us two films for the price of one. Arun's story contains everything one expects from a war drama, yet Raghavan restrains it from becoming overtly emotional. There is a methodical care about how this track is filmed. Unlike other filmmakers who might incite jingoism to show the stakes, he understands that the battlefield is anything but a stage for cheap thrills. Unlike other filmmakers who might inflate heroism for spectacle, he understands and honors the weight of a soldier's labour and sacrifice without sentimentality. His focus is on the journey of a boy who longed all his life to be on the battlefield, and, when he finally arrived, witnessed the catastrophe

## Real-life story of Arun Khetarpal who was martyred at 21, a day before ceasefire; flouted orders to fight till last breath



that Arun's regiment was around the same area. So, on the day, when they heard the news of ceasefire, they breathed a sigh of relief. The family was yet to find out about Arun's death at that point. Arun Khetarpal's mother Param Vir Chakra President VV Giri presented Param Vir Chakra to Maheshwari Khetarpal, mother of 2/Lt. Arun Khetarpal at a Special Investiture Ceremony at the Vijay Chowk in New Delhi. (Photo: Express Archives)

"My mother got Arun's room cleaned up and we started looking forward to the day he would be back home," he said. But, two days later, on December 19, they got a telegram informing them that Arun had passed away in the war. "That telegram shattered our lives forever," he said and added that after that day, a "sadness seeped into our lives."

Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal was the second martyr from 17 Poona Horse to be honoured with the Param Vir Chakra after Lieutenant Colonel Ardesir Burzorji Tarapore. On the day of his induction at 17 Poona Horse, Arun raised a toast in Tarapore's memory, and he then raised a second toast predicting that he, too, would get another Param Vir Chakra for 17 Poona Horse. Mukesh, in the same chat, recalled that their mother Maheshwari Khetarpal, collected Arun's Param Vir Chakra during the Republic Day parade but at that time, the family was numb with the shock of his death. "We were so numb with what had happened that the Param Vir Chakra was secondary to us," he said. Arun became the youngest recipient of the honour in India. Late Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal Late Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, PVC, statue at Chandigarh Military Station. (Photo: Express Archives)

Arun was keen to fight for his country and passionately offered his services. In a chat with News 9 Live, his brother, Mukesh Khetarpal shared that on the day that Arun died, 9 Indian tanks were surrounded by 25 Pakistani tanks. "His tank was responsible for taking out 8-9 tanks," he recalled. Towards the end, Arun's tank had caught fire as another officer's gun had a mechanical failure. At this point, Arun was asked to abandon his tank but he simply refused. "Arun said, 'No sir, my gun is still firing'. He switched his intercom off after that otherwise, it would have been disobedience of order, and he kept firing," Mukesh recalled. Arun was ultimately killed by the enemy tank on December 16, 1971, months after he had finished his military training.

Ceasefire declared a day after Arun Khetarpal's death. The next day, on December 17, 1971, a ceasefire was declared by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In an earlier chat with The Times of India, Mukesh shared that they were glued to Radio Ceylon for updates on the war as they knew

As another season of KBC ends, Amitabh Bachchan says he spent one-third of his life on the show: 'When my eyes filled with tears...'

It's hard to imagine Indian television without Kaun Banega Crorepati, and Kaun Banega Crorepati is equally unimaginable without Amitabh Bachchan. As we step into a new year, another season of the iconic quiz show has come to an end. On Friday, KBC 17 aired its final episode, featuring an emotional Amitabh Bachchan thanking viewers for their support since the show first premiered in 2000. Reflecting on the journey, he described spending more than one-third of his life with the show as a true blessing. In his opening monologue, he said:

"Sometimes, we live a moment so deeply and get so lost in it that when it reaches its final point, it feels as though it had just begun, and yet it is ending so soon. Everything feels like it happened just yesterday. As I go through these emotions, I am about to begin the last day of this game. Spending more than one-third of my life, with all of you has been a great fortune for me." He added, "Whenever I have come on your TV screens, you have welcomed me with open arms. When I laughed, you laughed with me, and when my eyes filled with tears, your eyes shed tears too. You have been my companions on this journey, from the beginning to the very end. I can only say this much to you: if you exist, this game exists, and if this game exists, then we exist. Thank you so much." The finale also featured a musical extravaganza. Amitabh Bachchan performed for over 30 minutes, delivering renditions of iconic songs such as Rang Barse, Hori Khele Raghava, and Mere Angne Mein. Comedian Kiku Sharda also joined the hot seat, adding humor to the night and delighting audiences with his antics. Earlier, in an exclusive conversation with SCREEN, Sameer Nair, who acquired the adaptation rights of the popu-

lar British show Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, revealed how Amitabh was approached to host the Hindi version. Nair recalled that Jaya Bachchan, Amitabh's wife, was initially unsure about him making a full-time switch to television. "When we first went to him, it was complicated because it was TV and he was a film star. It was somewhere not correct to shrink him to the small screen," Nair added that Amitabh even visited the sets of the original British show in London before finally agreeing to host KBC. Talking about the show's enduring popularity, Nair said, "The love of the audience for Mr Bachchan has been really enduring. When we first did KBC, there was no Google. Which means you had to really wait through the break to get the correct answer. But even now, when he asks the question, you can Google it, yet you don't. Because you want to watch the show, the drama, and the playout the way it's intended."

Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment sells minority stake to Universal Studios amid Don 3, Jee Le Zaraa delays: report

In October 2024, Karan Johar's Dharma Productions made headlines when it sold 50% stake in their production house to Adar Poonawalla, CEO of the Serum Institute of India (SII). The news was as surprising as it was significant. Now, it is being reported that another major Bollywood studio, Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment, is entering into a partnership with Hollywood giant Universal Studios.

As per a report in Mid-day, Excel Entertainment and Universal Studios have been in talks for a while as the international studio is keen on entering the Indian market. The report also claims that Universal Studios has acquired a minority stake in Excel Entertainment, with the larger share remaining with Farhan and Ritesh. Adding further, the source said, "Excel wants to expand the scale of its productions going ahead. There are big ideas in the pipeline." Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment made its debut with 2001's Dil Chahta Hai. Over the years, the studio has delivered landmark films such as Lakshya, Don, Rock On Luck By Chance, Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara, and Gully Boy, among others.

In 2025, Excel had three major theatrical releases: Reema Kagti's Superboys of Malegaon, Emraan Hashmi's Ground Zero, and Farhan Akhtar-starrer 120 Bahadur. How-

ever, all three underperformed at the box office. Looking ahead, the studio plans to bring the much-loved Mirzapur series to the big screen with Mirzapur: The Film. Meanwhile, two of Excel's most anticipated projects, Don 3 and Jee Le Zaraa, remain in limbo, with no official updates on their future. Specifically, Don 3, which was scheduled to go on floors next month, has been reportedly delayed yet again.

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