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Medical JAC to launch black badge protests across Telangana from Wednesday

Hyderabad: The medical Joint Action Committee (JAC), comprising multiple doctors' associations, on Tuesday announced that it would launch statewide black badge protests in all government medical colleges from Wednesday, January 7, against Government Order 229.

Government doctors across Telangana will wear black badges while performing their regular duties. Patient care will not be affected in any manner.

Telangana govt. committed to welfare of Singareni Workers: Bhatti Vikaramarka

Hyderabad, Jan 6

Telangana's Deputy Chief Minister, Bhatti Vikaramarka, has reaffirmed the state government's commitment to the welfare of Singareni workers. Speaking in the Legislative Assembly, Vikaramarka announced that a cath lab is set to be inaugurated in Godavarikhani within the next 75 days.

In response to queries from members regarding the Singareni Collieries, he detailed steps being taken to enhance healthcare services for workers. "We have issued a notification for the recruitment of 32 doctors, and this process will be completed shortly. Additionally, we are currently in the process of hiring 176 paramedical staff, with the aim of filling all vacancies for medical professionals at Singareni hospitals by March," he stated.

The Deputy Chief Minister also mentioned that measures would be implemented to ensure that retired employees can access pharmaceuticals at the facilities.



Sonia Gandhi admitted to Delhi's Ganga Ram Hospital; condition stable

New Delhi, Jan 6

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi has been admitted to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here after she suffered respiratory discomfort, sources said on Tuesday.

At present, she is doing fine, and her condition is "absolutely stable", they said.

The veteran Congress leader has been kept under observation by a chest physician.

It is a routine admission, but she has this problem of chronic cough, and she keeps coming for check-ups, especially with this pollution in the city, a hospital source told PTI, adding that she was admitted on Monday evening.

Gandhi turned 79 in December 2025. As a precautionary measure, she was admitted for further observation and treatment, they said.



She had complained

of some respiratory discomfort, and upon medical examination, it was found that "her bronchial asthma had been mildly exacerbated" due to the combined effects of cold weather and pollution, the source said.

Such special auctions have become a reliable source of non-tax income for the Transport Department.

Khairatabad RTA collects Rs 43.57 lakh in fancy number auction

Hyderabad, Jan 6 The Regional Transport Authority (RTA), Hyderabad Central Zone at Khairatabad, collected Rs 43.57 lakh through a special auction of premium vehicle registration numbers held on Tuesday, indicating strong interest in high-value numbers.

The top bid of the auction was for registration number TG 09 J 9999, which was purchased by Keystone Infra Private Limited for Rs 18 lakh.

Department officials said the number attracted intense bidding and emerged as the costliest of the day. Several fancy and preferred numbers received competitive bids from both corporate entities and individual vehicle owners.

Other numbers also contributed significantly to the revenue, with bids ranging from over Rs 7 lakh to Rs 1 lakh, reinforcing the popularity of distinctive registration numbers.

Such special auctions have become a reliable source of non-tax income for the Transport Department.



Telangana records 8,861 fire accidents in 2025: Ponnam Prabhakar



Hyderabad, Jan 6 During a discussion on the Fire Services Department in the Winter Session of the Legislative Assembly, the minister highlighted the two biggest tragedies of the year – the Sigachi Industry blast near Sangareddy and the Charminar fire in Hyderabad, where 17 people died in the same house.

Prabhakar said that the Congress government is taking comprehensive measures to strengthen fire safety infrastructure and that presently, there are 138 fire station centres in the state, with nine outposts in each district. The total strength of fire station vehicles is 544, he said.



Karur Stampede Case: CBI Summons Vijay Ahead of Jana Nayagan Release

Chennai, Jan 6 The CBI has summoned TVK leader Vijay, who is gearing up for the release of his movie Jana Nayagan, in connection with the deadly stampede during his rally in Karur in September 2025.

He has been asked to appear before the central agency on January 12 at their Delhi Office.

The CBI has summoned TVK leader Vijay to appear at the Delhi office on January 12 regarding a stampede during his rally in Karur in September 2025, which occurred during his movie Jana Nayagan's promotion.

The CBI took over the case following a landmark directive from the Supreme Court of India, which intervened to ensure a "fair and independent" inquiry. The tragedy, which occurred on September 27, last year, during a massive TVK rally in Karur, claimed 41 lives and left dozens injured. A bench comprising Justices J.K. Maheshwari and N.V. Anjaria noted that the incident had "shaken the national conscience." The court highlighted that comments made by state police officials to the media often defending their own actions could create reasonable doubt regarding the impartiality of a state-led probe.

Bill to scrap H-1B programme introduced in US Congress

New Delhi, Jan 6 : Another major trouble is in the offing for Indians in the US. A Bill seeking to completely end the H-1B visa programme, which allows US companies to hire highly skilled foreign workers, was formally introduced in the US Congress on Tuesday.

Introduced by Republican lawmaker Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, the Bill seeks to amend the 'Immigration and Nationality Act' to eliminate the H-1B programme, and for other purposes. The Bill has been referred to the committee on Judiciary, and in addition to committees on Energy and Commerce, and Ways and Means.

The timing of the Bill's introduction is unusual as Greene placed the Bill on the same day she stepped down from Congress. She resigned citing disagreements with the Republican leadership.

Every year, the US government issues 65,000 regular H-1B visas and 20,000 additional visas for workers with advanced degrees obtained from US universities. So far, most of these visas have been secured by Indians.

As companies are allegedly exploiting the H-1B visa programme, the US government tightened the norms. The Trump administration recently announced new weighted selection, which prioritizes higher-skilled and higher-paid foreign workers, doing away with the random lottery system.

Earlier, in September last year, President Donald Trump imposed a \$100,000 fee on applications for new H-1B visas. In addition, the social media vetting rule was enforced on December 15, 2025.



The H-1B and their H-4 dependents now have to mandatorily make their social media accounts public, disclose their usernames or IDs used on major platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube even if the accounts were inactive in the past five years.

This is being done for the applicants whose appointments are scheduled on or after December 15 to ensure thorough background check of applicants.

With new rules in place, the US government rescheduled the H-1B visa appointments that were scheduled on or after December 15 until as late as October 2026.

Several Indians on the H-1B visa who returned to the country for visa stamping were stranded due to appointment rescheduling. While several lost their jobs, some applicants sought remote work.

Grand Inauguration of Sri Vasavi Matha Sapthaha Celebrations at Manthani.



Vasavi Kalyana Mandapam in a spiritually vibrant atmosphere. On the inaugural day, the sacred life-history scripture of Sri Vasavi Matha was ceremoniously carried in a colourful procession from the Sri Lakshmi Narayana Swamy Temple to the Sri Vasavi Temple. The Sapthaha and melodious narration of Sri Vasavi Matha's life were rendered with devotion and erudition by Vema Subrahmanyam Gupta and Polamada Satyadeep. Members of the Arya Vaishya community participated in large numbers, exhibiting immense enthusiasm and spiritual zeal throughout the programme. As part of the celebrations, prizes will also be awarded to participants who emerge victorious in the Vasavi Quiz conducted during the event. Devotees attended the programme in large numbers, and the proceedings concluded with Nama Smaranam, devotional bhajans, distribution of teertha and prasadam, followed by refreshments. On this occasion, Kotha Srinivas, President of the Temple Committee, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all devotees and participants for their active involvement and wholehearted support in making the programme a grand success.

"P.S.ASHOKAN"KARIMNAGAR BUREAU."Celebrations commenced with great splendour and devotional fervour at the Sri Vasavi Temple, marking the completion of 30 glorious years since the consecration of the temple."As part of the week-long festivities, the Sri Vasavi Matha Life History (Purana Pravachanam) programme will be held from 5 January 2026 to 11 January 2026 at the

Water Issue Resolved in Satyanagar Basti: Aakarapu Arun Patel

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 6 (Indian Chronicle)."Aakarapu Arun Patel, President of the Uppal Constituency Youth Congress, stated that the long-standing water problem in Satyanagar Basti of Venkat Reddy Nagar Division has been successfully resolved. "For the past one month, residents of Satyanagar Basti had been facing severe difficulties due to a water pipeline leakage. During the recently conducted 'Basti Bata' outreach programme, local residents brought this issue to the notice of Aakarapu Arun Patel. Responding immediately, he took the initiative to address the problem with the support of Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandamulla Parameshwar Reddy and by coordinating with the Water Board officials. With the cooperation of the officials, repair works were carried out on a war footing, successfully fixing the pipeline leakage, preventing water wastage, and restoring normal water supply to the area." Subsequently, Aakarapu Arun Patel visited the Navaranguda area and interacted di-

rectly with local residents. During this interaction, people highlighted several issues affecting their locality. He patiently listened to all the grievances and assured them that he would coordinate with the concerned officials to resolve the problems at the earliest. Speaking on the occasion, Aakarapu Arun Patel reaffirmed his commitment to stand by the people and stated that he would continue to work relentlessly until every public issue is resolved.

Childhood Friends Provide Financial Support to Late Journalist's Family"



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 6, (INDIAN CHRONICLE)."True friendship goes beyond a lifetime. Proving this, a group of childhood friends from Shaligouraram mandal came together to provide financial support to the family of their late friend, setting an inspiring example of lasting bonds. All the friends studied together in the same school and have shared a strong friendship for decades. Though they are now settled in different places due to their professions, they remained closely connected.

Former Minister Harish Rao Extended New Year Greetings, Presented with Abhayanjaneya Swamy Portrait



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 6 (Indian Chronicle)."Leaders of the BRS party from the Uppal con-

stituency, under the leadership of senior TRS leader and trustee of the Chilukanagar Gutta Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple, Gudi Swarna Madhusudan Reddy, paid a courtesy visit to former minister Tanneeru Harish Rao and extended New Year greetings. On this occasion, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy presented a divine portrait of Lord Abhayanjaneya Swamy to Harish Rao as a token of respect and blessings. Speaking on the occasion, Harish Rao expressed his heartfelt wish that the blessings of Lord Abhayanjaneya Swamy be bestowed upon all people. Addressing the gathering, MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy praised Lord Abhayanjaneya Swamy, who is enshrined on Chilukanagar Gutta, as the protector of the Uppal constituency. He also specially congratulated temple trustee Gudi Madhusudan Reddy for his dedicated efforts towards the development of the temple. Several TRS leaders from Chilukanagar participated in the programme.

Medipally Police Conduct Vehicle Checks as Part of National Road Safety Month



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 6, (INDIAN CHRONICLE)."As part of National Road Safety Month, Medipally Police conducted a vehicle inspection drive near Uppal Depot on January 6, 2026, at around 11:00 AM. During the inspections, police focused on enforcing helmet usage among two-wheeler riders. A total of 16 enforcement cases were registered against riders who were found not wearing helmets or headgear. Along with enforcement,

Medipally Police also created awareness among two-wheeler riders, emphasizing that wearing a helmet is mandatory while riding on public roads. Riders were informed about the importance of helmet use in preventing serious injuries and saving lives. Medipally Police appealed to all motorists to strictly follow traffic rules and regulations in the interest of public safety and to help reduce road accidents.

Coordination Meeting Held With Function Hall and DJ Operators at Medipally Police Station"



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 6, (INDIAN CHRONICLE)."A coordination meeting was conducted at Medipally Police Station with representatives of function halls, banquet halls, and DJ sound operators functioning within the Medipally Police Station limits. The primary objective of the meeting was to create awareness among the organizers regarding maintenance of public order, traffic management, and control of noise pollution, ensuring that

no inconvenience is caused to the general public. During the meeting, the organizers were instructed to mandatorily arrange proper entry and exit routes within their premises to prevent traffic congestion and avoid chaotic situations during events. They were also directed to strictly adhere to noise pollution control norms and ensure that DJ sound systems or high-volume music are not operated after 10:00 PM under any circumstances. The organizers were informed that prior intimation to the concerned police station is mandatory for conducting meetings, functions, or events involving large public gatherings. Where required, police permissions must be obtained in advance. It was further clarified that the use of drone cameras for any event requires prior permission from the police department. Unauthorized use of drones will attract legal action as per law. The police emphasized the importance of cooperation from hall and event organizers in maintaining public safety, a peaceful environment, and strict compliance with legal provisions. All stakeholders were advised to act responsibly to ensure that no inconvenience or disturbance to law and order arises within the Medipally Police Station limits.

Helmet Awareness Rally Marks Road Safety Month in Kagaznagar

"Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, January 6 (Indian Chronicle)."In observance of Road Safety Month, police personnel and local residents of Kagaznagar town joined hands on Monday to organise a helmet awareness rally, emphasising the critical importance of wearing helmets while riding two-wheelers. The rally was led by Kagaznagar Town Circle Inspector (CI), Sub-Inspector (SI), Rural CI, SI, and supporting staff from both police stations. A significant number of civilians. The procession commenced at NTR Chowk and proceeded through key areas of the town, including Lorry Chowk, Rajiv Chowk, and the main market area, before passing through Ambedkar Chowk and concluding at the Kagaznagar police station. The rally concluded peacefully



with participants to follow road safety norms and encourage others to do the same. Authorities urged the public to prioritise safety and contribute to making Kagaznagar's roads safer for everyone.

CPI(M) Protests Alleged U.S. Actions Against Venezuela in Medchal-Malkajgiri"

"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 6, (INDIAN CHRONICLE)."Under the leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Medchal-Malkajgiri District Committee, a protest rally was organised on January 4, 2026, condemning what the party described as illegal actions by U.S. imperialism against Venezuela. The protest was held against the alleged abduction of the Venezuelan President and his spouse. The rally began at the Kamalanagar office at 11:00 a.m. and proceeded along Kamalanagar Main Road, where demonstrators burned an effigy symbolising U.S. imperialism. The programme was presided over by CPI(M) leader Godugu Yadagiri Rao. District Secretariat member Komati Ravi set fire to the effigy as part of the protest. Addressing the gathering, CPI(M) leaders alleged that the United States has been resorting to aggressive actions against several countries in an attempt to establish global dominance. They stated that many national leaders across the world had been eliminated through conspiracies and false accusations. Referring to past incidents, they cited the killing of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein based on what they termed fabricated allegations and said that similar aggressive policies had earlier failed in Iran. The speakers alleged that Venezuela was being targeted due to its vast oil reserves and rich mineral resources, accusing the U.S. of attempting to exploit these resources for its own interests. The CPI(M) strongly condemned what it described as the unlawful detention of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro as part of this agenda. They further pointed out that while several countries across the world have opposed these actions, India has remained silent, which they said goes against the country's independent foreign policy tradition. The party leaders demanded that the Government of India take a clear stand, exert diplomatic pressure, and oppose imperialist actions that threaten global peace and sovereignty. Party slogans were raised throughout the procession from the Kamalanagar office to the main road. Senior CPI(M) leaders A.K. Durgacharyulu, P.B. Chari, Malleesh, and Shivanna Narayana participated in the protest. CITU leader Unnikrishnan, youth leader Shashank, and several party activists were also present.

Congress Senior Leaders Meet Minister Vakiti Srihari, Demand Ticket for Mudiraj Community in Uppal and Beerappagadda Divisions



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 6 (Indian Chronicle)."Senior Congress leaders from the Uppal constituency met Telangana State Fisheries Minister Vakiti Srihari on Tuesday and urged him to allocate at least one GHMC corporator ticket to the Mudiraj community in the

Uppal and Beerappagadda divisions. The delegation included Borampet Krishna Mudiraj, Janampalli Venkateshwar Reddy, Gaddam Ravikumar, Survi Murali Goud, and Tavidaboina Giribabu, who met the minister in a courteous manner and discussed community representation in the upcoming GHMC elections. During the meeting, Borampet Krishna Mudiraj—former president of the Uppal Mudiraj Association, senior Congress leader, and former councillor contestant—explained that BC communities are present in large numbers in Uppal and Beerappagadda divisions.

He requested that the Congress party consider granting him the corporator ticket in the forthcoming GHMC elections to ensure fair representation for the Mudiraj community. Responding positively, Minister Vakiti Srihari assured the leaders that he would make sincere efforts to ensure that one seat in either Uppal or Beerappagadda division is allotted to the Mudiraj community. He emphasized the importance of social justice and adequate representation for backward classes in local body elections.

Birthday Greetings to Laddu Brother



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, January 6, (INDIAN CHRONICLE)."Warm birthday wishes were extended to Laddu Brother on the occasion of his birthday today. Friends, supporters, and well-wishers conveyed their greetings and

shared messages wishing him good health, happiness, and continued success in the years ahead. The celebrations reflected the strong bond and goodwill he enjoys among people from different sections. Many expressed hope that the coming year would bring new opportunities and positive milestones in both personal and public life. Birthday greetings and messages continued throughout the day from various quarters.

Water supply to be disrupted in parts of Hyderabad on January 8

Hyderabad: The water supply in several parts of the city will be disrupted for 18 hours from 10 am on January 8 to 4 am on January 9. The affected areas include Malaysian Township, Madhapur, Kondapur, Doyens, Indian School of Business (ISB), Bharat Nagar, Moosapet,

Medipally Police also created awareness among two-wheeler riders, emphasizing that wearing a helmet is mandatory while riding on public roads. Riders were informed about the importance of helmet use in preventing serious injuries and saving lives. Medipally Police appealed to all motorists to strictly follow traffic rules and regulations in the interest of public safety and to help reduce road accidents.

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Bharat Forge, Mahindra among private defence suppliers instructed to step up production of munition, carriers



The government is learnt to have reached out to multiple private companies that are into defence equipment production, including Bharat Forge and Mahindra & Mahindra's defence division. This is linked to specific instructions being issued to private vendors for upscaling supplies of certain ammunition, including for anti-drone and smart ammunition, alongside equipment such as armoured vehicles that can be integrated with different weaponry — loitering munitions and guided missiles. Instructions have been issued to these private players to step up output of some items, including designated ammunition, over and above what is already being produced by the ordnance factories. Sources in the industry said these suppliers are likely to be summoned for a follow-up meeting shortly.

Bharat Forge has a large defence manufacturing facility in Jejur, near Pune, dedicated to the assembly and integration of guns, vehicles, small and medium arms, and systems. The company had, earlier this year, signed a landmark contract with the Ministry of Defence for supplying 184 indigenously developed Advanced Towed Artillery Gun Systems (ATAGS). The 155/52 mm calibre ATAGS was jointly developed with the Defence Research

and Development Organisation.

The indigenously developed ATAGS can fire projectiles up to 48 km and operates on an all-electric drives that makes it maintenance-free in comparison to regular hydraulic drives. It can move at a speed of 18 kmph, unlike towed guns, which typically move at around 8 kmph. Additionally, the ATAGS has a firing rate of six shells, compared to three for towed guns. Existing ammunition can be successfully fired from the ATAGS without requiring special modifications. Mahindra, too, had obtained a licence from the government to produce small arms and associated ammunition, along with its specialisation in making armoured carriers and non-armoured mobility solutions for the Indian Army. The company also produces the Marksman, a military vehicle designed for urban warfare, and the Rakshak, an armored military utility vehicle. The Indian Army had earlier issued a request for information seeking vendors to manufacture 23mm anti-drone ammunition under the "Make in India" initiative, which is being overseen by the Directorate General of Army Air Defence. The country's defence production has grown sharply since the launch of the "Make in India" initiative, reaching a record Rs 1.27 lakh crore in FY24. Currently, about 65 per cent of defence equipment is now manufactured domestically, as compared to a 65-70 per cent import dependency around a decade ago. The private sector including companies such as Bharat Forge, Mahindra and the Tata Group are playing an increasingly important role, contributing 21 per cent to total defence production in FY24, alongside fostering innovation and efficiency. India's defence industrial base, apart from the 16 PSUs, now includes over 430 licensed companies, and approximately 16,000 MSMEs.

Pakistan gets IMF tranche but economy too stretched to sustain long standoff



The Board of the International Monetary Fund Friday cleared \$2.3 billion in funding for cash-strapped Pakistan, even as New Delhi abstained from the vote after having firmly opposed the move stating providing funds to a country that supports cross border terrorism carries reputational risks and undermines international norms. The lifeline notwithstanding, high debt and perilously low foreign exchange reserves significantly add to the fragility of the Pakistan economy, which is grappling with an almost perennial balance of payment crisis and high inflation in recent years.

Its external debt jumped to over \$130 billion in 2024, with more than a fifth of this estimated to be owned by its key ally China. Its forex reserves are pegged at a little over \$15 billion, capable of paying for just about three months of imports. The forex reserves remain low relative to funding needs, with over \$22 billion of public external debt, including nearly \$13 billion in bilateral deposits, maturing in FY25, as per a Fitch report in February.

The Ministry of External Affairs said it would ask the IMF board members to look "deep within" and take facts into account before generously bailing out Pakistan. In such a dire situation, a money-guzzling conflict with India should be the last thing on a beleaguered Islamabad's mind, as it would have to essentially fund any long-drawn-out conflict with borrowed money. And while a prolonged military conflict with Pakistan is bound to impact India to some extent, the world's New Delhi is far more equipped to handle the economic impact. These crucial points have been underscored by experts and analysts more than once.

In fact, just two days before Operation Sindo, Moody's Ratings cautioned that "sustained escalation in tensions with India would likely weigh on Pakistan's growth and hamper the government's ongoing fiscal consolidation, setting back Pakistan's progress in achieving macroeconomic stability". The global ratings agency said that a persistent increase in tensions with India could also impair Pakistan's access to external financing and pressure the country's forex reserves, which remain "well below what is required to meet its external debt payment needs for the next few years".

With elevated debt levels and low reserve buffers, Islamabad had earlier managed to get a bailout package from the IMF in September 2024 with the approval of a \$7-billion loan, following which its economy has shown some early signs of a recovery from the brink of a collapse. As per the latest South Asia Development Update released in April by the IMF, Pakistan's economy has been recovering from a combination of natural disasters, external pressures, and inflation. While inflation has slowed more quickly than expected along with strong imports of capital goods and high consumer confidence suggesting a pickup in private sector growth, the incoming data on economic activity have been weaker than expected, the IMF said. Economic growth of Pakistan is projected to rise to 3.1 per cent in the financial year 2025-26 from 2.7 per cent in the financial year 2024-25, 2.5 per cent in 2023-24 and a contraction of 0.2 per cent in 2022-23. The ongoing 37-month long Extended Fund Facility programme of the IMF consists of six reviews over the span of the bailout. The other multilateral bank, the World Bank, also expects Pakistan's economic activity to grow 3.2 per cent in FY26 and 3.5 per cent in FY27. It also flagged that Pakistan's growth will likely remain constrained by tight macroeconomic policies focused on re-

building fiscal and external buffers and mitigating risks to economic imbalances. Potential macroeconomic policy slippages — driven by pressures to ease policies — along with geopolitical shocks to commodity prices, tightening global financial conditions, or rising protectionism could undermine the "hard-won macroeconomic stability", the IMF had pointed out in its statement in March this year after the first staff-level review of the loan facility extended to Pakistan. Funding from other multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank is also crucial for Pakistan's economic revival and securing it would be a challenge as India steps up its ante by seeking support from all MDBs. When the bailout package was secured by Pakistan last year, the IMF in its report in October had assessed the overall risk of sovereign stress for the country as "high", saying that it reflected "a high level of vulnerability from elevated debt and gross financing needs and low reserve buffers".

"Notwithstanding the new government's intent to deepen reforms under a new Fund-supported program, political uncertainty remains significant, and pressures for easing policies and providing tax concessions and subsidies are strong. A resurgence in political or social tensions could weigh on policy and reform implementation. Policy slippages, including particularly on needed revenue measures, together with lower external financing, could undermine the narrow path to debt sustainability, given the high level of gross financing needs, and place pressure on the exchange rate and on banks to finance the government," the IMF report had said. As for the impact on India, Moody's said: "Comparatively, the macroeconomic conditions in India would be stable, bolstered by moderating but still high levels of growth amid strong public investment and healthy private consumption. In a scenario of sustained escalation in localized tensions, we do not expect major disruptions to India's economic activity because it has minimal economic relations with Pakistan". The ratings agency, however, added that higher defence spending in such an eventuality would potentially weigh on New Delhi's fiscal strength and slow its fiscal consolidation. Experts and multilateral institutions have repeatedly flagged major structural problems and other risks plaguing the country's economy that have largely remained unaddressed. These include high fiscal and current account deficits, political instability, low agriculture and industrial productivity, protectionist trade policies, heavy government interference in business, a large and inefficient public sector, a financially unsustainable and import-dependent energy sector, weak exports, and a small taxpayer base, among others. Natural calamities like widespread floods have also exacerbated Pakistan's economic woes in recent years.

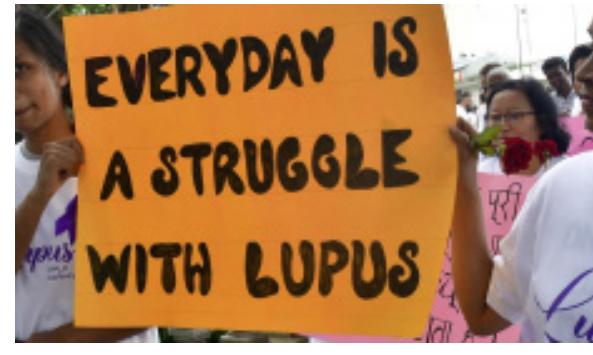
Swiggy's March quarter net loss nearly doubles to Rs 1,081 cr

New Delhi: Food delivery and quick commerce platform Swiggy on Friday reported widening of consolidated net loss during the March quarter to Rs 1,081.18 crore due to significant investments in quick commerce. The company reported a net loss of Rs 554.77 crore on a consolidated basis in the year-ago period. Swiggy's revenue from operations rose to Rs 4,410 crore during the January-March period, as against Rs 3,045.5 crore a year earlier, a regulatory filing showed. However, its total expenses shot up to Rs 5,609.6 crore during the quarter under review, as against Rs 3,668 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year. In a statement, Swiggy said the gross order value (GOV) of its food delivery business continues to grow in line with guidance at a healthy 17.6 per cent year-on-year, to Rs 7,347

crore. Adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation (EBITDA) grew 15.4 per cent quarter-on-quarter and over five times year-on-year to Rs 212 crore, and strong efficiency and execution drove a margin expansion to 2.9 per cent of GOV, up from 0.5 per cent a year ago.

Swiggy Instamart average order value increased 13.3 per cent to Rs 527 during the quarter. Instamart added 316 new dark stores — an increase of 45 per cent sequentially — its highest-ever during a quarter. Investments into customer acquisition amidst high competitive intensity saw monthly transacting users (MTUs) surge 40 per cent quarter-on-quarter to 9.8 million, the company said. Swiggy MD & Group CEO Sriharsha Majety said, "Quick-commerce is in a phase of rapid expansion and heightened competitive intensity,

All you need to know about: Lupus



While the general prevalence of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) in India is reported as 3.2 per 100,000 population, specific data on various types of lupus within India are limited. Studies on SLE in India have primarily focused on the overall disease prevalence and its clinical features. According to studies, lupus care in India faces challenges related to access, cost and awareness. Specifically, limited access to specialised rheumatologists, financial burdens, and inadequate insurance coverage contribute to difficulties in diagnosis and management. Furthermore, stigmas associated with chronic illnesses and lack of awareness among healthcare providers and the public can lead to delays in seeking medical help.

What is lupus?

Lupus is a long-term, progressive autoimmune disease in which the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue throughout the body. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), lupus can affect any part of the body, including the skin, joints, kidneys, lungs, heart, and brain. The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that lupus involves chronic stimulation of the immune system, and its exact cause remains unknown. The Lancet describes lupus as a multisystemic autoimmune disease marked by the presence of autoantibodies against nuclear antigens, immune complex deposition, and chronic inflammation — primarily affecting classic target organs like the skin, joints, and kidneys. Lupus has several forms, with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) being the most common and serious type. Other forms include Cutaneous Lupus Erythematosus (CLE), which primarily affects the skin. Within CLE, there are further subtypes like Discoid Lupus Erythematosus (DLE), which is characterised by circular lesions, and Subacute Cutaneous Lupus Erythematosus (SCLE), which often presents with rashes and joint pain. Drug-induced lupus can occur as a side effect of certain medications, while neonatal lupus affects newborns.

What are the signs and symptoms?

It is a highly variable disease. This means that the symptoms, their severity, and the way the disease progresses can differ significantly from person to person — with some experiencing mild symptoms and others facing life-threatening complications. The most common symptom, as reported by the CDC, is extreme fatigue, which can significantly impact both physical and mental

How did India's national health programmes contribute to increased longevity?

India has registered a rise on the Human Development Index (HDI), ranking 130 out of 193 countries as per the 2025 Human Development Report (HDR) released earlier this week by the United Nations Development Programme. The country ranked 133 in 2022. India's HDI value increases from 0.676 in 2022 to 0.685 in 2023, placing the country in the medium human development category. The recent report added that India's life expectancy is the highest since the inception of the index, signalling a strong recovery from the pandemic and its impact on life expectancy. Life expectancy rose from 58.6 years in 1990 to 72 years in 2023, the highest recorded since the index began.

Why has life expectancy improved?

According to the report this can be attributed to a number of factors including the country's overall push for investment and inclusive development. Angela Lusigi, resident representative, UNDP India said that rising life expectancy could be attributed to India's robust recovery from the pandemic and its investments and commitment to long-term human well-being. Credit is also being given to renewed focus on women-led development and quality education and healthcare for all. The report notes that national health programmes by successive governments such as the National Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, Janani Suraksha Yojana, and Poshan Abhiyaan have also contributed significantly to this achievement. Besides this, children today are expected to stay in school for 13 years on average, up from 8.2 years in 1990. Initiatives like the Right to Education Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and the National Education Policy 2020 have enhanced outcomes. Giving insight on the economic front, the report notes that India's Gross National Income per capita rose over four times, from \$2167.22 in 1990 to \$9046.76 in 2023 and this can be attributed to investments in programmes like MGNREGA, Jan Dhan Yojana, and digital inclusion that have contributed to poverty reduction. Importantly, 135 million Indians escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

How has India's maternal/infant mortality rate improved?

As per the Sample Registration System (SRS) Report 2021 released by the Registrar General of India (RGI), on May 7, 2025, India has continued to witness a significant improvement in key maternal and child health indicators. The latest data indicates that India has witnessed a steady downward trend in maternal and child mortality towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 targets with its progress outpacing global average. Data notes that maternal mortality ratio dropped significantly from 130 to 93 per lakh live births, infant mortality rate declined from 39 per 1000 live births in 2014 to 27 per 1000 live births in 2021; neonatal mortality rate has fallen from 26 per 1000 live births in 2014 to 19 per 1000 live births in 2021 and under-five mortality rate has dropped from 45 per 1000 live births in 2014 to 31 per 1000 live births in 2021. These sustained improvements are a result of strategic interventions and sustained efforts where the government's flagship health schemes are seamlessly integrated to guarantee quality healthcare services — completely free of cost, with zero tolerance for denial of care. Ayushman Bharat, the world's largest health assurance initiative, provides an annual health coverage of up to 75 lakh per family, ensuring financial protection and access to essential services. Also, focused interventions ensure that every pregnant woman is entitled to free institutional delivery, including Caesarean sections, along with complimentary transport, medication, diagnostics, and nutrition support in public health facilities are contributing factors," said a senior Health Ministry official.

well-being. Other frequent symptoms include pain or swelling in the joints and muscles, fevers, hair loss, frequent mouth sores, and a characteristic butterfly-shaped rash across the cheeks and nose. Less common but important symptoms may involve chest pain during deep breathing, heightened sensitivity to sunlight, cognitive and mental health changes, damage to the eyes, and complications in vital organs such as the heart, lungs, and kidneys. The WHO emphasises that the variation in affected organs may reflect different underlying immune pathways, supported by distinct autoantibody profiles. These symptoms tend to occur in episodes, known as flares, which can be followed by periods of remission where symptoms temporarily subside.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can be at risk of being affected by lupus. However, certain populations are more vulnerable. The CDC and a report in Nature highlight that it primarily occurs among women between puberty and menopause and is more common among individuals of African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Indigenous descent. While it can occur at any age, it's most often diagnosed between 15 and 45 years old. It affects approximately 3.4 million people worldwide, with 400,000 individuals being newly diagnosed each year. Though the exact cause remains unknown, WHO suggests that genetic predisposition combined with hormonal and environmental triggers likely contributes to disease development. Studies also indicate that the chance of developing SLE is believed to be associated with genetic factors, epigenetic factors, environmental triggers, and hormonal factors. Differences in clinical patterns among patients suggest that multiple disease mechanisms may be involved, making the condition highly individualised.

What are the treatment options?

Treatment for lupus aims to manage symptoms, prevent organ damage, and maintain low disease activity or achieve remission. The Lancet outlines current therapeutic approaches — under personalised guidance from healthcare professionals — starting with hydroxychloroquine as a baseline medication, often supplemented with corticosteroids and immunosuppressants depending on severity. In recent years, newer therapies like belimumab, anifrolumab, and voclosporin have been approved, particularly improving outcomes for patients with lupus nephritis — a kidney disease caused by SLE. Alongside medications, non-pharmacological strategies are essential, including lifestyle interventions, sun protection, mental health support, and patient education to improve quality of life and treatment adherence. The WHO points out that despite medical advances, there is still no universally reliable marker for diagnosis or disease activity, and access to newer treatments remains unequal globally. The primary goals of treatment are to suppress immune overactivity, manage flares, and reduce long-term complications such as infections, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular disease caused both by the illness and its treatments.



What are the challenges ahead?

The report notes that despite the progress made toward ensuring a longer life span for Indians, challenges persist. Inequality reduces India's HDI by 30.7%, one of the highest losses in the region. While health and education inequality have improved, income and gender disparities remain significant. The report also underscores a broader global slowdown in human development. The 2025 HDR reveals that the current pace of progress is the slowest since 1990 — and India is no exception. "Had pre-2020 trends continued, the world would be on track to reach very high human development by 2030, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal timelines. Now, that milestone risks being delayed by decades," notes the report.

Apple to scale iPhone production in India to \$40 billion by FY26 amid shift from China

New Delhi: Apple is expected to ramp up its iPhone production in India to nearly \$40 billion (about Rs 3,36,000 crore) by the end of FY26, as the tech giant continues to shift its global supply chain away from China amid growing geopolitical tensions and trade tariffs.

According to industry estimates, this move will enable Apple to meet 80 per cent of its iPhone demand in the US and cater fully to India's growing domestic market. The development comes close on the heels of Apple CEO Tim Cook's statement during the company's Q2 2025 earnings call, where he revealed that the majority of iPhones sold in the US in the current April-June quarter would be made in India. "For June, we do expect the majority of iPhones sold in the US will have India as their country of origin," Cook said, citing reciprocal tariffs imposed by the US government that are reshaping production strategies. This pivot is a strategic response to the tariffs that are tied to the country of origin of products. While China will continue to be the origin for most Apple products sold outside the US, India and Vietnam are emerging as key manufacturing hubs. For instance, almost all iPads, Macs

No signal at 20 feet under: Why Mumbai's Aqua Metro is stuck in a network blackout amid telcos-MMRCL stalemate



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Three months on, Mumbai's underground Aqua Metro (or Line 3, Colaba-Bandra-SEEPZ) is nowhere close to having a functional mobile network in its underground stations and tunnels. Commuters continue to bear the brunt of the network blackout, which is absolute in the stations between Worli and Colaba, while the stalemate continues between telecom service providers and the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL).

Only Vodafone Idea (Vi) and BSNL offer connectivity in restricted sections of the Metro line, which opened to the public on October 8, 2025. While Jio and Airtel users face network outage across the whole line, Vi claims to have network from Aarey to Acharya Atre Chowk station, Worli. Its users have complained of issues from Worli to Cuffe Parade. Meanwhile, a parallel situation is playing out at the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA).

The root of the disagreement in the Metro line's case stems from the third party contracted by the MMRCL to provide in-building solutions (IBS), i.e. neutral telecommunications infrastructure, in the stations 20 feet below ground. To connect to this infrastructure, telecom companies claim that the third-party, ACES India Private Limited, is demanding commercially unviable rates. Despite multiple meetings between all players, including the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), a solution is not in sight. "MMRCL has expressed its intent to discuss and come to a resolution, but telecom companies have refused to come around and agree to pay a reasonable cost for the infrastructure investment that has gone into it. It is their subscribers that are inconvenienced," said a senior MMRCL official, adding, "The rates that the third party is demanding account for three things – the physical infrastructure and installation, daily operation and maintenance costs, and the charges committed to MMRCL." Major telecom operators, however, have called these rates "monopolistic and extortionate." They say that setting up their own telecom infrastructure along the underground line would be far cheaper for them.

The gap is substantial, running to several millions of rupees," said Lt Gen Dr SP Kochhar, the director general of the Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI), the telecom industry body. A source from one of the major telecom operators said ACES has claimed a capital expenditure of Rs 118 crore, whereas internal estimates by telecom service providers (TSP) peg it at around just one-fourth of that cost, at Rs 30 crore. "The rates being demanded by Mumbai Metro and their vendor were initially Rs 13 lakh per station, which they have now reduced to Rs 5.5 lakh per station. On the other hand, TSP's internal working shows that Rs 39,000 per station per TSP per month will cover the required capex and a 10 per cent management fee," said the source.

MMRCL objected to this, calling the TSP's estimate an underestimation. While the metro rail corporation termed the demanded charges as reasonable and customary for providing Right of Way (RoW) within their premises, telecom companies pointed to MMRCL's perspective of telecom services as a revenue-making avenue, instead of an essential utility. Notably, when ACES India Private Limited, a subsidiary of Saudi-based ACES Co, was awarded the 12-year contract to provide telecom infrastructure for Line 3 in 2023, a nod was made to the higher licence fee generated per station – approximately 2.5 times more than any other Metro line in the country. In an earlier statement by the MMRCL, director Ashwini Bhide had remarked, "The non-fare box revenue generated by Metro Line 3 through this initiative [will be the] highest in India." Another official had noted "achieving the highest annual premium in the country to date for In-Building Solutions." For public transport systems, non-fare revenue – including advertising, station naming rights, in-building solutions, etc – is essential for keeping fares low and reducing dependence on government, i.e. taxpayers' money. The TSPs disagreed. "Across the world, telecom operators do not pay recurring fees for providing mobile signals meant for public use. Telecom connectivity

inside such large premises is increasingly treated as public digital infrastructure, an essential service and Right-of-Way obligation, not a revenue source. Hence, we believe firmly that this should be maintained here as well," said Kochhar.

The source from a major TSP echoed, "First and foremost, Mumbai Metro should not see telecom connectivity as a source of revenue but as an essential utility required for the convenience and safety of passengers and staff of the Metro. Once that change in mindset comes, all the problems will be immediately resolved." The MMRCL official defended this and said, "ACES India Pvt Limited was chosen through a tendering process in line with the rules. Neither are we allowing the third party to overcharge the telecom operators, as we aim to serve the same set of citizens who are commuters as well as customers of the TSPs." "Telcos are finding quoted rates high, given lower footfall."

Offering a perspective, a source with knowledge of the matter said, "Telcos are paying comparable rates at other stabilised Metro lines and airports in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, etc, where the footfalls are high." Explaining the reluctance in the case of Line 3 and the NMIA, he added, "Footfalls take some time to ramp up and steady in newly commissioned transport projects, hence the telcos are finding the rates quoted to be high given the relatively lower footfalls." He added that the mandate to ACES India Pvt Ltd to set up 5G-ready telecom infrastructure from the get-go along this unique, fully-underground, 33.5-km corridor meant a higher capex, resulting in higher charges to the TSPs. "This has resulted in a stalemate with the telcos refusing to pay charges for lower footfalls and the transport corporation not wanting to let go of critical non-fare revenue for operational viability," he said. In the meantime, the three major telecom operators continue to wait on permission from MMRCL to lay their own network infrastructure along the underground metro line, pending for over eight months now. "As per the Telecommunications Act, 2023, and new RoW rules, a public authority cannot deny provisioning Right of Way to TSPs in a public place," Kochhar had said in April, which he reiterated. He noted that global best practices, across Europe, the USA, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, the UAE and Australia, discourage the monetisation of essential telecom infrastructure serving the public, especially access that is exclusive or anti-commercial. The source from a TSP said, "Despite the telecom companies' willingness to spend money on setting up the network, Mumbai Metro is not willing to give ROW permissions, stating that it is an operational metro system, which is not a valid reason, since in other operational metro systems, new networks continue to be installed."

Adding to the complexity, the MMRCL official said that the contract with ACES was finalised before the new rules came into force in January 2025. "The investment into telecom infrastructure has to be recovered, and the new rules are not clear as to how to navigate such an instance," said the MMRCL official, noting the complications of retroactively applying new rules to a contract signed under past rules. A similar sequence of events is repeating in the case of the Navi Mumbai International Airport. The DoT rules leave some room for interpretation, agreed the source. "The other underground metros and tunnels in the works in Mumbai may face the same problem if it is not sorted," said the official. "MMRCL is hopeful a resolution will emerge." A possible solution could be, said the source with knowledge of the matter, "

The stakeholders need to come together to discuss and agree on rates which are viable at the current footfalls, and which can be scaled up to fair market rates as the footfalls stabilise, with the objective of providing a seamless mobile network to the passengers at the earliest." Completely cut off in an emergency: CommuterWhile commuters have taken to joking about Line 3 as a space for a digital detox, the absolute suspension of the network has raised worries about emergency situations. "The bare minimum required from telecom operators we consumers pay for is a few bars of network so that calls can be made or received. In case of emergencies, I am completely cut off from my loved ones and vice-versa till I exit the station," said Shahid Shaikh, 33, a Jio user who makes the journey from his home in Mumbai Central to work at Marol a couple of times a week, going offline for over an hour of the round trip. "As there are only a few telecom operators in the fray, it feels like we consumers have little in the way of choice and are taken for granted. I was sympathetic to the network issues in the beginning, but I now feel that if it isn't resolved within a week or two, I will make the switch to Vi. A spokesperson from Airtel said the situation is stuck at a stalemate over ACES's rates, but deferred answering other questions. Jio and Vi did not respond to the queries.

Body swap at Ludhiana hospital: four doctors named in FIR

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Nearly two weeks after the bodies of two women were allegedly swapped at a private hospital in Ludhiana, police named four doctors as accused in the FIR. On December 22, the body of 73-year-old Jasvir Kaur Sandhu of Moga was allegedly swapped with one Manju Diwan of Ludhiana. The family of Jasvir Kaur Sandhu filed a police complaint against Orison Super Specialty Hospital, Barewali following which an FIR was registered at Sarabha Nagar police station against management and staff of the hospital but the accused were not named.

However, Saturday, on the orders of Ludhiana police commissioner, the names of four doctors have been nominated as accused in the case, including senior gastroenterologist Dr Nirmaljeet Singh Malhi, Dr Sunil Mittal, director; Dr Rajeev Grover, director and Dr Manisha Mittal, director.

Apex Council asks Hyderabad junior cricketers to report at Uppal

Hyderabad: The Apex Council of Hyderabad Cricket Association has asked 17 players, including Hyderabad under-19 captain and World Cup-bound Aaron George, to report at Rajiv Gandhi Stadium (Uppal) on January 5 "in strict accordance with the HCA Academy of Excellence – High Performance Operational Master Plan for junior players."

However, it may be mentioned that Aaron has already joined the Indian team for the one-day series against South Africa before the forthcoming under-19 World Cup.



Exclusive visit to Vidhan Sabha, Imambara: Lucknow's curated double-decker bus tour kicks off this week



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

through Lucknow Darshan Double Decker Bus from January 7. The mock drills were used to fine-tune operational arrangements and passenger comfort," said an official of UPSTDC on Saturday after the completion of a test ride with 45 people. According to officials, there will be morning and evening bus rides, with changes in their routes. "The morning tour will start from 1090 Chauraha in Gomti Nagar at 08:30 am and will conclude by 11:30 am after criss-crossing the city, covering some of the iconic landmarks, including Raj Bhavan, GPO, and Hazratganj market," said an official. Officials said the proposed destinations will include a visit to Ambedkar Park, developed during the BSP regime, and the newly unveiled UP Darshan Park after passing through Begum Hazrat Mahal Park and Globe Park. "The visitors will also be taken to The Residency, a defining site of the 1857 uprising, for a detailed tour as well as a light and sound show during the evening tour. The route will include Chattar Manzil and Gomti Riverfront," said the official.

The tour will include ticketed entry to The Residency and UP Darshan Park, along with an exclusive entry to the Vidhan Sabha Bhavan. The evening tour will begin from 4 pm and conclude by 7 pm at Food Valley. "Light refreshments will be provided during the tours, and a 10 per cent discount on ticket bookings will be available till January 31," said the official. Last year, Uttar Pradesh hosted the highest number of visitors with 646.81 million domestic tourists, accounting for 21.94 per cent of the national share. In November, UNESCO declared Lucknow a "Creative City of Gastronomy" at the 43rd session of its General Conference in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The designation places Lucknow among 70 gastronomy cities worldwide and makes it the second Indian city to win the title after Hyderabad.

Strict law being framed to address sacrilege incidents : AAP

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Punjab AAP media in-charge Baltej Pannu said that a law is being framed to address sacrilege incidents. Taking to media in Chandigarh, Pannu said, "This proposal has already come before the Punjab Assembly. A committee has been formed, meetings have been held with representatives of all parties, and inputs are being collected to frame a strong state law with the strictest possible punishment so that no one dares to commit such a crime," he said.

The government had held a special Vidhan Sabha session on July 14 last year and tabled The Punjab Prevention of Offences Against Holy Scriptures Bill, 2025, proposes life imprisonment for sacrilege acts against religious scriptures. The Bill mandates strict punishment, extending up to life imprisonment, for the desecration of holy scriptures, including Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Bhagavad Gita, Bible and Quran. Later, the Speaker constituted a committee led by AAP MLA Inderbir Singh Nijjar to consult all stakeholders. The committee was given six months time. Pannu also slammed Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) president Harjinder Singh Dhami, accusing him of acting as a spokesperson of SAD instead of standing with justice, truth and the Guru Sahib. Responding to Dhami's press conference held in Chandigarh a day earlier, Pannu said he claimed he wanted to put his version before the people through the media. "The invitation for Dhami's press conference was issued by the SAD. Dhami Sahib often says allegations are made that he is a spokesperson of SAD. Yesterday, he himself admitted it by saying he is proud to be a soldier of the Akali Dal. It would have been better had he been a soldier of Guru Sahib," Pannu said.

Taking strong objection to Dhami's claim that SGPC does not accept FIRs and does not need the police, Pannu said this was completely misleading. "SGPC itself is constituted under an Act, which is a law. Whenever SGPC holds its general house in Amritsar, it takes permission from the Deputy Commissioner. How can you say you don't believe in FIRs or police?" he asked. Drawing examples from his own two decades in journalism, Pannu said, "If we go back to 1996, Prakash Singh Badal repeatedly spoke about forming a Truth Commission. But when Akali governments ruled from 1997 to 2002 and again from 2007 to 2017, who promoted the very officers accused of atrocities on youth? Who made Surnedh Saini the DGP? Who promoted Mohammad



Ishar Alam? Who brought his family into politics? Dhami Sahib seems to have forgotten all this. "Pannu further asserted that when the name of SS Kohli surfaced, a news channel linked to the party Dhami serves muted the story to prevent the truth from coming out. "Perhaps Kohli is sitting on big secrets. Now the SIT will uncover those secrets," he said.

He pointed out that the Ishar Singh report clearly stated that 75 per cent of the payment should be recovered from SS Kohli, yet nothing has happened in the last five years. "You say the matter lies with the Sikh Judicial Gurdwara Commission. What has that commission done in five years? The answer is clear, because people close to your party sit there. The head of the commission is the father of your party's chief spokesperson," Baltej Pannu said.

Pannu reminded that when the theft of Saroops took place on June 1, 2015, at Burj Jawahar Singh Wala, and when sacrilege incidents followed in November, SGPC failed to take effective action. "Posters were put up, but what concrete steps were taken? Which 'SGPC police' arrested the culprits or registered FIRs, when you claim you don't need the police?" he questioned. He also referred to the Kotkapura firing, where devotees demanding justice were met with water cannons and bullets. "FIRs were registered against Sukhbir Singh Badal and others. They had to seek bail from the High Court. This is the reality of claiming to be above the law," Pannu added. Pannu said, "When you hold your next press conference, answer one question with honesty. You have a diary in which details of the beabdi cases and the 328 missing Saroops are recorded. Why have you hidden that diary? Is your presidency dependent on that diary?" He added that in the coming days, he will also make public details of all FIRs registered by SGPC so far.

Thackerays union formed out of fear, not affection: ?Fadnavis

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday launched a sharp attack on Shiv Sena UBT chief Uddhav Thackeray and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray, calling their coming together ahead of the January 15 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections a "Bheeti Sangam", a union formed out of fear rather than affection. Addressing a BJP rally in north Mumbai's Kandivali area, Fadnavis said, "This is not a preeti sangam (a union out of love). This is a bheeti sangam (union out of fear)."

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) jointly released their manifesto for the BMC polls. Commenting on the document, Fadnavis said it should not be called a manifesto. "It is not a Vachanama (promises). It is a Vachanama (reading material). Even those who released it do not know what they have written," he said. Fadnavis also referred to a fact-check report on assurances made by Uddhav Thackeray in 2017, claiming that none of the promises mentioned by Sena UBT in its 2017 civic poll manifesto was fulfilled and now what they have mentioned in the recent manifesto is a copy-paste of the 2017 manifesto. "When we check the earlier assurances, not a single one was completed," he said. Continuing his attack, Fadnavis said, "Someone told me that a cartoonist (Raj) and a photographer (Uddhav) have come together. I told them that confusion and corruption have united." The Chief Minister also questioned why the manifesto was not released a day earlier, on the birth anniversary of Rajmata Jijabai, mother of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. "In recent times, some of our old friends (Sena UBT's Uddhav Thackeray) have started sitting with people who are allergic to 'Vande Mataram'. So I do not know what else they are allergic to," he said, without naming either



leader.

Targeting Uddhav Thackeray's record as Chief Minister, Fadnavis recalled that he had earlier announced a reward of Rs 1,000 for anyone who could find Uddhav Thackeray speaking about development. "Now I have decided to increase that amount to Rs 2,000," he said. At the rally, the BJP-led alliance released its campaign song "Mahapalika radate aaha (the municipal corporation is crying)", alleging misrule during the tenure of Shiv Sena (UBT) in the BMC. The song was composed by singer Avadhoot Gupte, who was present at the event and was also known for famously singing undivided Shiv Sena's song. In a setback for Shiv Sena (UBT) ahead of the civic polls, former Mumbai mayor Shubha Raul joined the BJP at the rally after resigning from the Uddhav Thackeray-led party.

Voting for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, along with elections to 28 other civic bodies across Maharashtra, will be held on January 15. The BMC, the country's richest civic body, has long been a stronghold of the Shiv Sena, but the upcoming election is expected to be closely contested amid changing political alignments.

Siddaramaiah vows fast-track trial in honour killing of pregnant woman



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Siddaramaiah "Since this is an atrocity case, a chargesheet must be filed within 60 days. Therefore, steps have been taken to appoint a private prosecutor," Siddaramaiah said. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said ensuring swift investigation and justice in the alleged honour killing of a young pregnant woman was the state government's top priority and it will take steps to establish a fast-track court for speedy trial in the case. He announced that a Bill will be introduced in the next session of the legislature to curb such crimes.

Twenty-year-old Manya Patil, a pregnant woman from the Lingayat community, was allegedly killed by her relatives in Hubballi taluk on December 21 for marrying a Dalit

youth seven months ago. Her father and two relatives allegedly attacked her when she was working in a field at Inam Veerapur village in Dharwad district. "In connection with the honour killing of a young woman named Manya from Inam Veerapur in Hubballi taluk, our priority is to take up the case for speedy trial and to ensure justice for the victim. Accordingly, the government will take steps to establish a fast-track court. A case has been registered on charges of murder and atrocities against Dalits. Since this is an atrocity case, a chargesheet must be filed within 60 days. Therefore, steps have been taken to appoint a private prosecutor," Siddaramaiah said in a post on X. Forcing a woman into marriage against her will or denying her marriage wishes, caste-based violence, assault and honour killing are heinous acts that bring shame to the entire human society, he said. "To curb such crimes in the future and to create awareness among people about the law, a special legislation will be introduced. This matter will be discussed in the upcoming session of the legislature, and an appropriate decision will be taken," he said. Manya's was among the three cases of honour killings reported in Karnataka in 2025. In April, a 17-year-old girl from Kuruba community was allegedly killed by her father at Raichur after she eloped with a boy from the SC community. In September, 18-year-old Kavita from the Lingayat community was allegedly killed by her father over her relationship with a boy from the Kuruba community.

Why Canadian entrepreneurs met UP CM



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday met a delegation of Canadian Hindu Chambers of Commerce in Lucknow and assured them of all possible support from his government. Welcoming the 24-member delegation, led by Naresh Kumar Chawda, the chief minister emphasised the need to promote new initiatives in trade, technology, and tourism. With the delegation expressing keen interest in investing in Uttar Pradesh in the MSME, religious tourism, and hospitality sectors, the chief minister assured them of all possible support from the state government, officials said. "The CM acquainted the delegation with UP's rapid progress, stating that the state offers immense

opportunities with improved security, law and order, and a strong investment environment. He added that members of the Chambers can play a significant role in bringing investment, technology, and FDI to UP. He also told them that separate policies have been framed for FDI and Fortune 500 companies," the official added. The chief minister said that special focus has been given to infrastructure development in recent years. "Uttar Pradesh accounts for 55 per cent of the country's expressway network, with significantly improved connectivity, including greenfield expressways. The state has the largest rail network, metro services in the highest number of cities, a rapid rail system, and the country's first operational waterway," the CM reportedly told the delegation. "UP is a land of opportunities, with projects such as a film city and an apparel park in Noida, logistics hubs, and the state emerging as a new data centre hub. Four data centres are currently operational, with six more in the pipeline," the CM was quoted as saying. The chief minister also said that Canadian entrepreneurs and others could contribute to the export of agricultural produce grown by farmers in UP. Kumar said that while Invest India-Invest Canada is organised every year in Canada, in 2026 it will be held three times, with two events focused on Uttar Pradesh. He informed the chief minister that his team will work in UP across MSMEs, religious tourism, and hospitality sectors, an official said.

From Ajanta caves to Chola bronzes, German envoy is in awe of India's art treasures

GNS News Agency, Jan 6

When he's not building diplomatic relations and attending official events and meetings, Dr Philipp Ackermann has something else to keep him occupied — his love for art. "As an art historian, you're taught to watch everything very carefully. That's the most important part of your training," he says.

Ackermann, German Ambassador to India, studied Art History and Economics in Bonn, Heidelberg and Utrecht, and received his doctorate in art history in 1993. Enthusiastically striding around his residence in Delhi's Chanakyapuri, which is filled with artwork and sculptures, he says, "You see the floor here... The white marble on the ground. This is Makrana marble... the same one used in the Taj Mahal..."

"I tell my German guests who visit the residence that... you're walking on the Taj Mahal. This has the same nuances of colour and many beautiful spots. You don't get it in the market anymore," he adds. In the middle of his home is a beautiful Nataraja sculpture — a Chola period bronze sculpture — placed on top of a round black table. "The German ambassador got this Nataraja as a present in 1955 from the Tamil Nadu CM. It was one of the first presents he got. It fits perfectly in the residence. It's a copy of course... but it's a beautiful piece," says Ackermann. Next, he walks into a large room with a wall painted red. On it is a collage of black and white paintings made with water colour and pigment dust.

"I wanted to change some of the artworks that the German government has selected for the residence... We found a gallery in Gurgaon... and young Indian artists. They see the room and curate their own work here. Every six months, the room changes and we display work by different artists..." As the German Embassy, set up in Delhi in 1956, marks 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2026, The Indian Express spoke to Ackermann about the Indian artworks that spoke to him on a personal level and if art can strengthen diplomacy.

What was the first piece of Indian art or architecture that spoke to you on a personal level?

It's very difficult to bring it down to one piece, but I would say the most stunning and breathtaking art I've seen in India is the Ajanta Caves. Early Buddhist frescoes are very colourful, extremely moving, there is a lot of sensuality and storytelling in these murals in a way that you would not expect from Buddhism. As for architecture... I find Humayun's Tomb may be the most perfect piece of construction of architecture in India. It's in these very clear forms and this abstract surface... and the play between marble and red sandstone is really unique.

I'm also a great admirer of South Indian sculptures, so early South Indian sculpture like Chola bronzes... the art of working with metal is very advanced, extremely fine and refined, and the aesthetics are beautiful. Have you found specific local art forms or a place where there is contemporary street art that offers a unique window into the life of Delhi? There is such a rich culture of handicrafts and textiles in India. I sometimes go to Nature Bazaar, to the Dastkar, you know, and there are some shows and it's always very interesting to see how these very skilled craftsmen open up to modern design. And it's not static... and that I think is a good sign for a traditional handicraft. There's also one art which I particularly like... Warli art, the tribal art

from Maharashtra, made by tribals who have a very strong bond with nature and they love birds.

These paintings basically cover more or less the world... You have all the activities in the village... agricultural life, you have the sun and the moon... It's a very strong expression of art I feel. Are there any parallels or contrasts in Indian and European art movements?

I think I'm convinced, as an art historian, there is much more influence and exchange of artefacts between nations and civilisations than you think. We tend to believe that civilisations develop on their own and stay with themselves for a long time, but the truth is that you have all sorts of influences across continents.

For instance, the Cholas went to Malaysia, they crossed the oceans and they brought home stuff. You go to Angkor Wat or Bali and you typically see Hindu temples. So, don't make this mistake to think that civilisations are isolated.

I will give you a nice example of the influence of European art on Indian art. You might be aware of this Srinath Pichwai culture. There was an old tradition of landscape printing in a geographic way. There is this three-dimensional idea of rivers, valleys, mountains and villages that you find in these pictures. And I find it to be a wonderful example of how arts get together and influence each other. This comes from a 17th century print from the Netherlands. If you had to recommend an overlooked art museum or gallery that is a must see for art visitors I want to just single out two museums which I really find stunning. One is the MAP museum in Bangalore. It is a small museum but they are doing great shows. It is a modern museum... with a lot of good insights in Indian popular art... not only classical art but also popular art... The second, I would say — and that's more of a classic museum, but it's also top-notch and world-class — is the Bihar Museum in Patna. I think when you want to know about the coming into being of Indian art, whether it's Hindu or Jain or Buddhist art, this is the place to go. They have beautiful artifacts...

Can art act as a way to strengthen diplomacy between two countries?

I mean, some famous artists were diplomats. One of them is the Flemish painter Rubens, who was a diplomat. And I find it a very interesting thought, should diplomats be more artistic, should they have a certain artistic side to them. I think diplomats must have some empathy... you must see your counterparts in an empathetic way. Only then can you be a good diplomat. And I think the artist sees the world in an empathetic way. Maybe that's a bit of a link to formulate.

What are you currently reading?

I read Anirudh Kanisetti's History of the Chola Empire. It explains the early Middle Ages in South India, in a very day-to-day way... You get an idea of the system, of how the Chola and the population living under them worked, what role the temples and idols played along with what role the women played. I'm also reading Arundhati Roy's Mother Mary Comes to Me. It's an excellent book... tells a lot about the 60s and 70s in Kerala, and the Christian community. So I thought it gives a very good insight into Indian society 50 to 60 years ago, and the problems families were facing then... you can see how much things have evolved.

Why a simple cheque-bounce case could mean months of court visits in Delhi



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

High Court walked back its decision, and both the judges and the cheque-bounce cases they were hearing were moved back to the physical courts. For protesting lawyers and court staff, this was vindication. "In an already overburdened legal system, introducing digital courts without stakeholder consultation and adequate infrastructure and training for staff, was bound to fail. Litigants and advocates both struggled to file pleadings and give evidence digitally," advocate Paras Jain, who practises mainly in Rohini court, told "Even court staff", Jain said, "had no idea as to how digital courts would function." Advocate Amit Rohilla who argues cheque-bounce cases in the Rohini and Dwarka courts, said the HC's idea was "conceptually progressive" but its "implementation was poor".

"The issue was not the idea itself, but poor planning, lack of preparation, and an unready system," Rohilla said. "Digital courts need reliable Internet, working video systems, a proper system of online filing, and trained staff, which were missing in many places." Also, Rohilla said, "Cheque-bounce cases require the presentation of detailed evidence and original documents, questioning of witnesses, and talks on settlement. A fully digital system struggled to handle all this adequately."

Advocate Dhir Singh Kasana, former Secretary of the Saket court Bar association who led the protest in Saket, argued that space was not a constraint in the district courts. "We have sufficient courtrooms in all districts... Technology can be used to improve them; shifting them out all together was unnecessary. Presenting evidence on VC (video conference) is impossible..." he said.

After the digital courts experiment was aborted, 22 of the 34 Rouse Avenue judges were made 'relieving' judges, which means they would essentially stand in for judges who were on leave. The digital NI Act courtrooms — set up at a cost of Rs 8.18 crore, according to information provided under the Right to Information Act, 2005 — are empty, and the corridors leading to them are stacked with cardboard boxes and thermocol, sitting from floor to ceiling next to potted plants.

These courtrooms are relatively small — they were meant to accommodate essentially one judge — which makes them less useful for hearing other matters now. The redistribution of cases has on the other hand increased the load on the physical courts in the districts. In Patiala House, 20,000 cases that would have been heard digitally have been distributed among 13 physical courts, each of which will now hear more than 1,500 additional cases. Court staff also complained about logistics issues in dealing with digital files in physical courts. "Physical files are not used in digital courts, and there is a lack of digital infrastructure in physical courts," said an ahlmaid. "There are difficulties in hearing a case in a physical court in the absence of physical files," he said.

What then is the way forward?

In early December, former Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud said it was feasible to use artificial intelligence (AI) with some human oversight to resolve large numbers of cheque-bounce cases. Lawyers who deal with these matters said some relatively easy procedural steps could ease the burden. REDUCING ORAL SUBMISSIONS, ADJOURNMENTS: Advocate Jain said refusing adjournments and accepting submissions on affidavit would significantly speed up processes.

"Pendency can be reduced if courts initiate a no-adjournment rule and take evidence of accused persons and witnesses on affidavits instead of oral testimony. Oral testimonies take long, and each case is currently heard for only a few minutes," he said. MEDIATION BEFORE LITIGATION: Advocate Rohilla said that the solution to reducing pendency lay not in setting up digital courts but in encouraging pre-litigation mediation. "Pendency in cheque-bounce courts can be reduced only through practical, ground-level reforms, not symbolic digitalisation. The most effective solution lies in early and meaningful settlements by strengthening pre-litigation mediation," he said.

According to Rohilla, a "hybrid system of e-filing and e-summons with physical hearings for evidence and settlement", can improve efficiency without affecting fairness. "Simultaneously, strict control over adjournments, speedy serving of summons, affidavit-based evidence, and increased judicial capacity are essential. Since cheque-bounce cases ultimately end up in payment rather than punishment, settlement remains the most realistic and effective tool to reduce pendency," he said. INCREASED BENCH CAPACITY: The system also needs more judges and a special tribunal to hear these cases, suggested advocate Pravesh Dabas, who said he has argued more than 300 cheque-bounce cases, mainly in Dwarka court.

"Cases remain unresolved for extended periods due to reasons including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient judicial strength, or procedural delays. When the number of judges is inadequate compared to the volume of cases, courts become overburdened, leading to excessive pendency and long delays,"

Dabas said. "Reforms such as setting up special tribunals for cheque-bounce cases, encouraging mediation, prescribing a maximum period for disposing of cases, training of lawyers, and promoting digital transactions can enhance efficiency and reduce pendency. Courts should actively encourage early settlement/ mediation, especially at the pre-summons or first-hearing stage," he said. Dabas too agreed that frequent and unnecessary adjournments are a major problem. "Courts should impose realistic costs for avoidable adjournments," he said.

Nalgonda defeated Warangal by four wickets in Inter-district T20 cricket championship

Hyderabad: Nalgonda recorded a four-wicket win against Warangal in the Kaka Venkataswamy Memorial Telangana Inter-district T-20 cricket championship being held at different grounds across the State. Batting first, Warangal scored 163 for five in 20 overs with K Rohith (36) being the top-scorer, while P Kranti (four for 30) was the lead wicket-taker for Nalgonda. In reply, Nalgonda reached home with one ball to spare and six wickets down, thanks to G Prakash's impressive 85. In another match, Khammam defeated Mahabubnagar by 13 runs under the VJD Method.

Khammam, batting first, scored 152 for eight in 20 overs with Bunny (35) and N Shiva (32) being the lead scorers, while T Harish was the pick of the bowlers with three for 37. In reply, Mahabubnagar finished at 119 for seven in 17 overs when play was stopped, with A Rafaey (32) and V Akash (33) batting well. The scores:

Warangal 163/5 in 20 overs (K Rohith 36, N Rahul 33, S Akhil 2/32, P Kranti 4/30, M Sikandar 2/40) lost to Nalgonda 166/6 in 19.5 overs (G Prakash 85, P Sainad 27, S Riyaz 2/32). Khammam 152/8 in 20 overs (N Teja 21,



Bunny 36, N Shiva 32, T Harish 3/37, Md Shabab 2/15) bt Mahabubnagar 119/7 in 17 overs (A Rafaey 32, Aaryan 26, V Akash 33, V Siddharth 2/11). Khammam won by 13 runs — VJD Method. Nizamabad 162/6 in 20 overs (M. Rithwik 54, J. Vikram 84, G. Eshwar 3/33) bt Ranga Reddy 160/8 in 20 overs (K. Praneet 21, S. Vaishnav 60).

Philippines arrests ex-general who called for President's ouster



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

A former Philippine Air Force General accused of encouraging the military to abandon President Ferdinand Marcos was arrested on a charge of sedition on Monday (January 5, 2026) at Manila's international airport. Romeo Poquiz, who had publicly called for the armed forces to "withdraw their support" from Mr. Marcos amid a burgeoning corruption scandal, was detained by Philippine national police after returning from a holiday in Thailand, Interior Department Secretary Jonvic Remulla told AFP.

"He was arrested for the charge of sedition in connection (with) his recent statements. He was arrested upon arrival from Bangkok this morning," Mr. Remulla said in a text message. Speaking at a news conference, acting police chief Jose Nartatez said Mr. Poquiz had been detained on the basis of a December 5 warrant. The 67-year-old ex-

general confirmed his arrest in a post on Facebook. "I was arrested by the (Philippine National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group) at the Airport Terminal ... Long live the Filipino!" Mr. Poquiz said, adding he was being taken to Manila's Camp Crame police headquarters. The ex-general's lawyer, Ferdinand Topacio, told AFP he had not yet been allowed to meet with his client. He added that calls for the military to withdraw its support for Mr. Marcos had not been "direct incitements to sedition but rather ... a discussion of possible outcomes of graft and corruption." "This just shows that the government is denouncing those who speak about wrongdoing instead of those who are stealing the people's money," Mr. Topacio said. Philippine Military Chief General Romeo Brawner said in October that the nation's "battle staff" had rebuffed retired officers led by Mr. Poquiz who aired their grievances with Mr. Marcos, saying they were told the military was "solid" in its support of the constitution. Mr. Brawner also said that retired officers had reached out to younger officers seeking a "coup d'état, a military junta" to "reset" Philippine society without disclosing their names. The alleged push for military intervention came as Manila was gearing up for September 21 anti-corruption protests sparked by bogus flood-control projects believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars. Mr. Marcos, who made the widespread fraud the centrepiece of a July national address, has since seen friend and foe alike implicated in the scandal, with some political opponents suggesting he was a key beneficiary of the corruption. Speaking at the signing of a new national budget on Monday, Mr. Marcos made no mention of the arrest.

Anne Frank's step-sister and Holocaust survivor Eva Schloss dies



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Eva Schloss, the Auschwitz survivor who dedicated decades to educating people about the Holocaust and was the step-sister of diarist Anne Frank, has died aged 96, her foundation announced. In a tribute, her family expressed their "great sadness" at the loss of this "remarkable woman: an Auschwitz survivor, a devoted Holocaust educator, tireless in her work for remembrance, understanding and peace". With great sadness, we received the news of the passing of Eva Schloss (née Geiringer), an Auschwitz survivor. Schloss died on January 3 in London, according to the Anne Frank House. King Charles III, who danced with Schloss at an event in London in 2022, and his wife Camilla, patron of her Anne Frank Trust U.K. foundation, said they were "greatly saddened". "We are both privileged and proud

to have known her and we admired her deeply," the royal couple said in a statement. Schloss co-founded the trust in 1990 to educate people about the Holocaust and combat prejudice. A message from The King following the death of Auschwitz survivor, Eva Schloss. Eva was Anne Frank's step-sister, and co-Founder and Honorary President of the @AnneFrankTrust, of which The Queen is Patron. Her Jewish family fled to Belgium and then Amsterdam where they settled opposite Anne Frank's house. Frank's accounts of the Holocaust have become a symbol of the suffering inflicted by the Nazis during World War II. The two girls were the same age and often played together. But from 1942 onwards, both families had to go into hiding. Schloss, her mother Elfriede, her father Erich and her brother Heinz were betrayed two years later by a Nazi sympathiser. They were arrested on her fifteenth birthday and sent to the Auschwitz extermination camp in May 1944. Schloss was able to stay in touch with her mother but was separated from her father and brother, who both died in the camps.

Anne Frank died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. After the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet army in 1945, Schloss and her mother returned to the Netherlands where they met Anne's father Otto Frank, who was a widower upon his own return from Auschwitz. Otto encouraged Schloss to pursue photography, and in 1952 she moved to London to study and met her future husband, Zvi Schloss. Eva and Zvi Schloss, who had three daughters, obtained British citizenship. Eva Schloss also regained her Austrian citizenship in 2021, aged 92. She wrote several books and recounted her experiences around the world, and was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2013. "Into her 90s, she spoke with tireless passion, often giving several talks a day, including in prisons and schools," Gillian Walnes, vice president of the Anne Frank Trust UK said in a statement. "Eva's legacy lives on in the lives she touched and the history she so bravely kept alive."

32 Cuban officers were killed in U.S. operation in Venezuela



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

An American military operation in Venezuela killed 32 Cuban officers over the weekend, the Cuban government said on Sunday (January 4, 2026) in the first official death count provided of the American strikes in the South American nation. The Cuban military and police officers were on a mission the Caribbean country's military was carrying out at the request of Venezuela's government, according to a statement read on Cuban state TV on Sunday night. U.S.-Venezuela tensions LIVE updates

What the Cubans were working on in the South American nation was unclear, but Cuba is a close ally of Venezuela's government and has sent military and police forces to assist in operations for years. Rumours of the deaths circulated on the island over the weekend. "You know, a lot of Cubans were killed yesterday," U.S. President Donald Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he flew Sunday (January 4) night from Florida back to Washington. "There was a lot of death on the other side. No death on our side." The U.S. operation on Saturday (January 3, 2026) seized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife to face prosecution on an indictment accusing them of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy.

While Venezuela's government has acknowledged that a number of people died in the American blasts, they did not confirm how many were killed. The Associated Press' Cuba's government announced two days of mourning for the Cuban officers who were killed, and former president and revolutionary leader Raúl Castro and President Miguel Díaz-Canel sent condolences to their families. The names of the dead and the positions they held were not immediately disclosed by Cuban authorities. "Faithful to their responsibilities for security and defense, our compatriots fulfilled their duty with dignity and heroism and fell after fierce resistance in direct combat against the attackers or as a result of the bombings of the facilities," the official statement said. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the son of

Cuban immigrants, also pointed to Cuban involvement in Venezuela over the weekend, saying that Maduro's internal security apparatus was headed by Cubans and that they were "propping up Maduro." "All the guards that help protect Maduro — this is well known — their whole spy agency, all that were full of Cubans," Mr. Rubio said.

Elon Musk's X to remove illegal content, permanently ban offending users

New Delhi: Microblogging site X will act against illegal content by removing it, permanently suspending accounts that uploaded the material and working with local governments as required, the Elon Musk-owned social media platform said on Sunday.

The statement from the Global Government Affairs account of X was issued hours after it said people using the platform's AI service, Grok, to create illegal content will face the same consequences as those uploading illegal content. "Anyone using Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," Musk said on X in response to a post on "inappropriate images". Global government affairs at X reiterated Musk's stance on illegal content.

"We take action against illegal content on X, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement as necessary." Anyone using or prompting Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," Global Government Affairs on X said.

The Global Government Affairs handle also shared a link for X rules, which allows sharing of "consensually produced and distributed adult nudity or sexual behaviour, provided it's properly labelled and not prominently displayed". The Indian government has found vulgar, obscene and other unlawful content being uploaded on X that are in violation of local laws. The statement from Musk and Global Government Affairs follows the direction from the Ministry of Electronics and IT (Meity), issued on January 2, to immediately remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content, especially generated by AI app Grok, or face action under the law. Meity has directed X to take action against offending content, users and accounts.

The uncertainty after Maduro: What next for Venezuela?



GNS News Agency, Jan 6

Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, has been apprehended and flown to the U.S., where the U.S. attorney-general has announced he will face charges of drug trafficking and narco-terrorism. The U.S. military's operation to snatch Mr. Maduro was carried out in the early hours of January 3 and follows months of steadily mounting pressure on the Venezuelan government. Now it appears that the U.S. operation to remove a leader it has designated as a "narco-terrorist" has come to fruition. But whether the capture and removal of Mr. Maduro will lead to regime change in the oil-rich Latin American country remains unclear at present.

The U.S. campaign against Venezuela is the product of two distinct policy impulses within the Donald Trump administration. The first is the long-held desire of many Republican hawks, including U.S. Secretary of state Marco Rubio, to force regime change in Caracas. They detest Venezuela's socialist government and see overturning it as an opportunity to appeal to conservative Hispanic voters in the U.S. The second impulse is more complex. Mr. Trump campaigned for election in 2024 on the idea that his administration would not become involved in foreign conflicts. But his administration claims that Venezuela's government and military are involved in drug trafficking, which, in Washington's thinking, makes them terrorist organisations that are harming the American people. As head of the country's government, Mr. Maduro, according to the Trump administration's logic, is responsible for that. During Mr. Trump's first administration, his Department of Justice indicted Mr. Maduro on charges of "narco-terrorism". Now U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi says there might be a new indictment which also covers Mr. Maduro's wife, who was taken into detention with him. The fact that U.S. law enforcement was involved in their capture reinforces the idea that they will now face those charges in a New York court, despite an early claim by opposition sources in Venezuela that Mr. Maduro's departure may have been negotiated with the U.S. government.

What comes next?

The big question is what comes next in Venezuela, and whether either the Republican hawks or the "America first" crowd will get the outcome that they want: ongoing U.S. military presence to "finish the job" or simply a show of U.S. strength to punish its adversary which doesn't involve a lengthy American involvement. The U.S. has discovered time and again in recent decades that it is extremely difficult to dictate the political futures of foreign countries with military force. The White House might want to see the emergence of a non-socialist government in Caracas, as well as one which cracks down on the drug

trade. But simply removing Mr. Maduro and dropping some bombs is unlikely to achieve that goal after nearly three decades of building up the regime under Mr. Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chavez. The Trump administration could have learned this lesson from Libya, whose dictatorial government the U.S. and its allies overthrew in 2011. The country collapsed into chaos soon after, inflicting widespread suffering on its own citizens and creating problems for its neighbours. In the case of Venezuela, it is unlikely that the American military's strikes alone will be enough to fatally undermine its government. Mr. Maduro may be gone, but the vast majority of the country's governmental and military apparatus remains intact. Power will likely pass to a new figure in the regime. The White House may dream that popular protests will break out against the government following Mr. Maduro's ousting. But history shows that people usually react to being bombed by a foreign power by rallying around the flag, not turning against their leaders.

Nor would Venezuela's descent into chaos be likely to help the Trump administration achieve its goals. Conflict in Venezuela could generate new refugee flows which would eventually reach America's southern border. The collapse of central government authority would be likely to create a more conducive environment for drug trafficking. Widespread internal violence and human rights violations could hardly be portrayed as a victory to the crucial conservative Hispanic voting bloc. If the Trump administration dreams of establishing a stable, pro-American government in Caracas, it is going to have to do more than just arrest Mr. Maduro. Bringing about durable regime change typically involves occupying a country with ground troops and engaging in "nation building". The U.S. tried this with decidedly mixed results in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Trump has pledged to avoid such entanglements and Mr. Rubio has said that, for now at least, the U.S. has no plans for further military action against Venezuela. Mr. Trump has a penchant for flashy, quick wins, particularly in foreign policy. He may hope to tout Mr. Maduro's capture as a victory and move on to other matters.

Nation-building failures In almost no recent U.S. military intervention did the American government set out to engage in nation-building right from the beginning. The perceived need to shepherd a new government into existence has typically only come to be felt when the limits of what can be accomplished by military force alone become apparent. The war in Afghanistan, for instance, started as a war of revenge for the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, before transforming into a 20-year nation-building commitment. In Iraq, the Bush administration thought that it could depose Saddam Hussein and leave within a few months. The U.S. ended up staying for nearly a decade.

It's hard to imagine Mr. Trump walking down the same path, if only because he has always portrayed nation-building as a waste of American lives and treasure. But that still leaves him with no plausible way to achieve the divergent political outcomes he, his supporters and America's foreign policy establishment want with the tools that he has at his disposal. Meanwhile, the U.S. president will face pressure from a range of constituencies from Republican hawks to conservative Hispanic voters to force wholesale regime change in Venezuela. How Mr. Trump responds to that pressure will determine the future course of U.S. policy towards the country. Andrew Gavthorpe is lecturer in History and International Studies, Leiden University.

Kerala's battles with the SIR

Over the past weeks, Kerala has had a roller-coaster ride with respect to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The element of amusement has been missing from it. Of the 2.78 crore voters who were issued forms during the house-to-house enumeration phase, 24.08 lakh found themselves excluded when the draft roll was published on December 23 under the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s extended time-table. A further 19.32 lakh electors on the draft roll are in limbo — 'no mapping' cases in ECI parlance — as they could not be linked to the 2002 SIR roll, which serves as the base list. Kerala is now in the phase where claims and objections by electors are being filed on the draft and notices for personal hearings are being issued to them. The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (Kerala) has said that election officials have generated 17.71 lakh notices and served 18,915 notices in the case of the 'No mapping' electors. Election officials maintain that excluded voters, if eligible, can still add their names by enrolling afresh using Form 6, or, in the case of overseas electors, Form 6A.

The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government and the State's political parties have repeatedly blamed the SIR for an injustice where voters are made to feel that their citizenship is in doubt. Citizens who have been active voters for decades stand deleted from the rolls just because they have been marked in the Absent/Shifted/Dead (ASD) list as 'Untraceable' or 'EF Refused' (the ECI description for electors who decline to accept enumeration forms or return them). Political parties and individual electors have highlighted instances where such categorisations have been erroneous. The ASD list, in the case of some polling stations at least, has been outright unbelievable with over 500 voters listed as 'Untraceable', 'Permanently Shifted' or 'EF Refused'. These issues have grabbed the headlines with several citizens, high-profile individuals included, finding themselves in the ASD list or in the grey, fuzzy zone of 'No Mapping' electors. Barring differences in the data, what is playing out in Kerala is likely to find an echo in other States where the SIR is on. But the huge expatriate population in Kerala makes some elements of Kerala's SIR singular in nature. Political parties allege that little has been done so far to ensure the inclusion of overseas electors. They have also asked the ECI to allow authorised representatives to appear on the behalf of such electors if they are summoned for hearings by the Electoral Registration Officers (ERO).

The fact that the SIR coincided with the 2025 local body elections — an overlap that led to much of the protest against the SIR — has also led to inevitable comparisons. The voter roll maintained by the State Election Commission, which is responsible for the local body elections, listed 2.86 crore electors at the time of polling in December. The roll maintained in Kerala by the ECI, which handles the Assembly and Parliament elections, saw a dip from 2.78 crore voters to 2.54 crore voters after the publication of the draft SIR roll. To be fair, the Kerala CEO has strived to make the SIR palatable and participatory by holding weekly meetings with the political parties and allowing a media presence. The CEO, Rathan U. Kelkar, has also said that all eligible electors will be included in the final list, to be published on February 21, and that there will be no harassment in the name of hearings. But what has been apparent and constant from the beginning is the trust deficit. Political parties, primarily those aligned with the LDF and the Congress-led Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF), view the ECI and the

SIR as convenient tools employed by the BJP and the RSS to further their larger political and ideological agenda. The hardship Kerala has had to undergo to secure extensions in its SIR schedule — the Supreme Court had to be petitioned at one point — has only served to strengthen such notions. At this juncture, it is pertinent to remember that in the past, cumbersome nationwide exercises such as voter enrolment, the conduct of elections and the decennial Census have enjoyed the public perception of impartiality and bureaucratic efficiency. To say that public trust in the SIR hinges on guaranteeing the inclusion of all eligible voters in the roll in a trouble-free, citizen-friendly atmosphere would not be overstating it.

Amit Panghal and Sagar shine at Senior National Boxing Championships

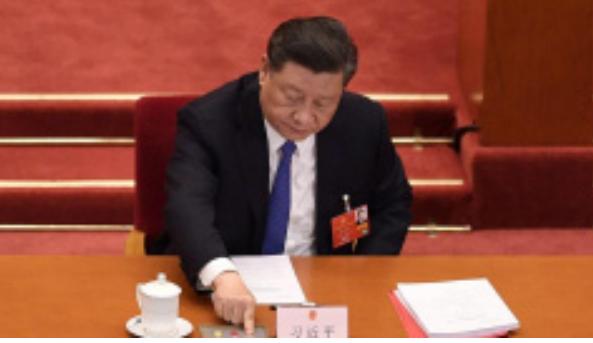
New Delhi: 2018 Asian Games gold medallist Amit Panghal of SSCB and Sagar of Haryana registered contrasting wins to advance in the Elite Men and Women National Boxing Championships being played at Gautam Budhha University in Greater Noida on Sunday.

This is the first time that the men's and women's National Championships are being held simultaneously at the same venue, with 600 boxers from across the country participating in 10 weight categories each for men and women. Amit, competing in the bantamweight

category, dominated Usman Mohd Sultan of Bihar to secure a unanimous decision. In the heavyweight category, Sagar was made to work hard by Edwin of Kerala before managing to win by a split decision. Lalrambuat of Mizoram was the other boxer to win by unanimous decision in the bantamweight category, beating Santosh Kumar of Odisha.

7

Hubris and caution — China's posture as 2026 begins



As 2026 begins, China presents a paradox: a nation wrestling with economic challenges yet projecting strategic confidence; a leadership tightening political control domestically while expanding its diplomatic and institutional reach abroad; and a system that is both anxious and assertive. For India, this Chinese posture and the shift in the stance of the United States toward Beijing and New Delhi have narrowed strategic space and complicated the management of a fraught relationship. India's diminishing prominence in the foreign policy calculus of Washington and Beijing alike adds to the complexity.

The shift in China's overall mood has been striking. Until late 2024, Track 2 dialogues revealed palpable anxiety among Chinese interlocutors about U.S. containment and economic slowdown. By mid-2025, a sense of regained momentum — sometimes bordering on hubris — permeated Beijing's strategic community. Many believed China had gained ground in a recalibrated great power competition with the U.S., managed escalation dominance more effectively, and secured tactical advantages in trade and tariff disputes. This confidence was bolstered by China's expanding influence in the Global South, its deepening alignment with Russia, and its ability to stabilise key relationships — with the notable exception of Japan — without altering core positions. Yet, beneath this confidence lies a leadership aware of structural challenges at home and a difficult international environment. The Fourth Plenum in October 2025 and the Central Economic Work Conference in December saw President Xi Jinping doubling down on national security, technological self-reliance, and the "real economy" as organising principles, while persisting with exports as a key growth driver even as he spoke of boosting domestic consumption.

China's 2025 economic growth was weaker than official figures (about 5%) suggest. Domestic demand remained weak, and the overbuilt property sector continued to weigh on confidence. Deflationary pressures (producer prices in negative territory for 38 consecutive months), sluggish productivity and tepid corporate profits persisted. Local governments face fiscal stress, limiting stimulus options. Instead of boosting consumption, Beijing reinforced a state-led model, prioritising advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), green energy, and dual-use technologies. Massive industrial policy support aims for "whole-chain breakthroughs" and the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) underscores technological self-reliance and supply chain insulation. This inward turn occurs even as China's export dependence grows to compensate for weak domestic demand. China's trade surplus crossed \$1 trillion in the first 11 months of 2025. It is increasingly dominating global value chains in manufacturing across high-tech industries such as electric vehicles, batteries, solar panels and industrial machinery. This "China Shock 2.0" is generating serious disruptions for developed and developing economies alike. As IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva warned in December, China is now too large to export its way out of a slowdown without aggravating global trade tensions. For India, China's advantages in scale, technology and system-wide efficiency and upstream control of critical inputs (rare earths to battery precursors) have not only expanded the trade deficit, expected to exceed \$110 billion in 2025, but also intensified vulnerabilities in sectors ranging from pharmaceuticals to electronics, green energy and rare earth magnets.

Domestically, 2025 was marked by further political consolidation. The leadership tightened information control, reinforced ideological discipline, and expanded the remit of national security. Yet, dysfunctionalities of the party-state were also evident in large-scale sacking of generals. The PLA continued to expand its conventional and nuclear capabilities. Emerging nuclear doctrinal shifts, such as movement toward an "early warning counter-strike" posture, suggest a more assertive and risk-tolerant military. The most consequential external development was the recalibration of U.S.-China relations under President Donald Trump's second term. Under the U.S. National Security Strategy 2025, China is no longer framed as a systemic rival but

primarily as an economic competitor. The Indo-Pacific is no longer the strategic centre of gravity; the Western Hemisphere has taken precedence, reflecting a more inward-looking "America First" approach. However, America's military intervention regime change in Venezuela, which seriously affected Chinese interests and investments and elicited sharp reactions from Beijing, have shown that the U.S.-China strategic rivalry is intact.

The Trump-Xi meeting in Busan in October produced de-escalation, including modest tariff adjustments and a selective easing of export controls. These were transactional bargains, not steps toward a G2. Yet the perception of a "G2 overlay" — a shadow of tacit coordination — has serious consequences, as even limited China-U.S. accommodation can constrain the choices of other states. For India, the implications are sobering. The long positive trajectory of the India-U.S. partnership has been disturbed by friction over trade, Russia, and Pakistan. The U.S. remains committed to preventing Chinese hegemony in Asia but is less inclined to prioritise relations with India as a strategic counter to China. Meanwhile, China believes it has gained relative advantage vis-à-vis the U.S., while Chinese interlocutors increasingly argue that India's interest in stabilising relations with China stems from turbulence in India-U.S. ties. These twin perceptions make China less inclined to accommodate India's concerns.

With Europe, instead of leveraging trans-Atlantic tensions to drive a wedge between Brussels and Washington, China adopted a tough posture — digging in on EV subsidies, refusing to curb industrial overcapacity, pushing back hard against EU trade-defence actions, and consolidating its strategic linkages with Russia. Europe, despite growing alarm over China's "strategic enabling" of Russia's war in Ukraine and fears of industrial hollowing out, found itself constrained due to economic headwinds, dependencies on China, and strategic distractions. China's attempts to stabilise major-power ties were undercut by its harsh response to the Japanese Prime Minister's comment on Taiwan. Beijing signalled that its outreach has clear limits and that it remains unwilling to accommodate divergence on issues it deems sensitive. Mr. Xi is attaching strategic priority to the Global South, positioning China as its leader and as a stabilising partner amid western retrenchment, and stepping up BRI projects, diplomatic initiatives and influence operations. But this expanding presence has also stirred unease over opaque financing, debt vulnerabilities, environmental concerns, and political leverage Beijing can derive from economic dependence. Even as China deepened its influence in Southeast Asia, the Gulf, Africa, and Latin America and pushed a China-centric institutional architecture through the AIIB, NDB, and expanded BRICS and SCO, many countries remain cautious about loss of policy autonomy.

China continued to treat South Asia as its strategic periphery and pursue a "two-ocean strategy" that normalises PLA Navy operations in the Indian Ocean. India-China relations in 2025 witnessed cautious stabilisation but no substantive progress on structural issues. The summit-level meeting in Tianjin and other high-level exchanges helped rebuild a damaged relationship. Yet, the situation along the borders remains stable but not normal. Disengagement has not been accompanied by de-escalation or de-induction. "Buffer zones" continue to restrict India's patrolling rights and grazing access. If these temporary arrangements become permanent, China will have achieved incremental gains consistent with its grey-zone playbook. China's tactical outreach has not addressed India's core concerns. Negative signals included China-Pakistan battlefield collusion (Operation Sindoor), work on a massive hydropower project in Tibet near the border, denial of rare earth magnets, delays in clearing key components, and repeated efforts to flag territorial claims in Arunachal Pradesh. India has prudently opted for step-by-step improvement in its strategy. China is likely to persist with its current strategy: managed competition with the U.S., stabilisation of major relationships along with hardball diplomacy, intensified outreach to the Global South, incremental assertiveness in maritime and border theatres, and prickliness on its "core interests". The PLA will persist with grey-zone tactics while avoiding major kinetic actions. New Delhi must pursue calibrated engagement to reduce immediate risks while strengthening asymmetric deterrence and accelerating domestic technological and industrial capabilities. External balancing remains relevant, but its dependability must be conservatively assessed in an era of U.S.-China tactical accommodation. India must prepare for a long haul — clear-eyed, resilient, and strategically patient. Ashok K. Kantha, a former Ambassador to China, is Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University, Bengaluru, and Distinguished Fellow at Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.

Uses of systematic investment, transfer plans

SIP is a mandate given by you to the Mutual Fund (MF) where a certain sum of money flows from your bank to the MF at a defined frequency, usually monthly, for investment in the designated funds. In a STP, you invest lump sum in a fund, usually a liquid fund and mandate the transfer at a defined frequency, usually monthly, into designated funds of the same MF. It is used to systematically transfer from the source fund, say liquid fund, usually to equity-oriented funds. The purpose is averaging out the cost of acquisition across market cycles. The reason for using liquid or ultra short term fund as the source fund for STP is these funds are stable in performance. Both SIP and STP are flexible i.e. you can start or pause or stop at any point if you so desire.

Though the purpose of SIP and STP is the same, there is a subtle difference. SIP is a cash-flow solution. You will earn the money gradually over a period of time via monthly salary or income from business or profession. Part of the income will be invested. SIP acts as a discipline; before it is spent, it is channelised into investments in MFs. Cost averaging in a SIP is an added advantage. STP is a cost-averaging solution. You have the money; rather than investing lump sum, you prefer to average out investments. If you keep the money in savings account, the 'propensity to spend' comes into play. Hence you park the money in a defensive fund viz. liquid or ultra short term fund. Usually monthly, the defined amount flows from the source fund to the designated funds to give you the advantage of rupee cost averaging.

Wealth creation SIP's purpose is long-term wealth creation. STP's purpose is strategic deployment of lump sum to average out. In STP, the amount in the source fund, continues to earn. If you have deployed in a liquid or ultra short-term fund, usually the accrual level is more than that of bank savings account, comparable to bank fixed deposits. In

STP, in case there is a significant correction in the equity market you can take a call on timing the market and transfer the balance amount one-shot from liquid to designated funds. Taxation In the growth option of MFs, you pay tax when you redeem i.e. you don't have to pay tax every year. In a SIP, there are multiple dates of investment. The basis of taxation is called First-In-First-Out (FIFO) i.e. the initial date of investment in the fund is considered first, then the second investment and so on, matched with the redemption price to compute capital gains. In a STP, you are redeeming from source fund and have to pay tax on capital gains till that point of time. When you redeem from the designated funds after a long period of time, it is FIFO. Other use of STP The other dimension is derisking or rebalancing portfolio. You would have a certain portfolio allocation e.g. 60% to equity. Let us say allocation to equity is higher than planned and you do not wish to withdraw from the equity market. In such a situation, you may start profit booking at the margin. It is here STP comes in handy. From the equity funds, you designate a certain sum to be transferred to, say, a liquid fund. The benefit is profit booking and rebalancing is averaged out rather than timing the market. Since no one knows the market peak, you average it out via STP. At the end of the STP, your allocation comes back to the intended level. Suitability SIP is suited more for salaried individuals or those with regular earnings. STP is for those who earn in irregular chunks so that the acquisition cost is averaged out. For salaried individuals, STP is useful when you receive a chunk e.g. bonus or windfall. The other dimension of STP is anyone may need gradual rebalancing of portfolio Conclusion Both of these are methods of investment (or withdrawal as in the case of other use of STP) and not an investment product per se. The usage depends on your objectives and financial situation e.g. available funds. You can combine the two i.e. SIP for regular income and STP for lump sum deployments.

The struggle to count women's labour



In the poem, *The Woman's Labour* (1739), Mary Collier writes: "When Harvest comes, into the Field we go, And help to reap the Wheat as well as you. Or else we go to the Ears of Corn to glean; No Labour scorning, be it e'er so mean; But in the Work we freely bear a Part, And what we can, perform with all our Heart." It is a powerful way of pointing to how women's labour often goes unseen. A 2023 United Nations report showed that globally, women spend 2.8 more hours than men on unpaid care and domestic work. The struggle to count women's labour continues.

While domestic labour has increasingly entered the public discourse, the emotional and mental labour in sustaining relationships, managing household dynamics, and supporting the well-being of others continues to go largely unacknowledged. This uncounted labour which plays a critical role in the smooth functioning of families and societies, is rarely measured or rewarded.

Shirin Rai, a professor, argues that "...many who cope with this work in contexts of poverty and of violence, are constantly told that their everyday labour — both paid and unpaid to maintain the rhythms of life-ecology do not count in/as production. ... as a global society, we fail to recognise this labour in our everyday lives, and we continue to deny its appropriate inclusion in discourses about work, in our national budgets, and in policy frameworks". This raises a critical question: what structural and ideological forces render this labour unseen and undervalued? Feminist scholars such as Isabella Bakker, Nancy Fraser and Shirin Rai have argued that economic and policy priorities have long marginalised care work by framing it as secondary to "productive" labour traditionally performed by men.

The privileging of male breadwinner employment, the relentless focus on GDP growth, and the emphasis on physical infrastructure investment over social infrastructure have all contributed to the systemic devaluation of care-related work. These priorities often result in the diversion of public resources away from services that support caregiving, such as childcare, elder care, and mental health services domains that are disproportionately occupied by women. Antonella Picchio, a professor at Cambridge, argued that "the biological aspects of human reproduction were used to hide the historical and social aspects of the gender

division of labour. The separation between the process of production and that of social reproduction of labour between men and women took new forms and shaped new power relationships within the traditional context of women's subordination". Thus, in our view, the act of non-inclusion of women's direct and indirect labour is a continuation of the subjugating practice of considering women's labour as non-productive. A closer look at global legislation and statutes reveals that the efforts to recognise women's labour institutionally are very scattered. Few countries have introduced laws, constitutional provisions or policies recognising unpaid care work/domestic/emotional labour. Article 338 of the Bolivian Constitution recognises that work at home is an economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth. Housewives are entitled to social security in accordance with the law. Trinidad and Tobago has the Counting Unremunerated Work Act, 1996 requires the statistical authorities to measure unremunerated work (housework, caring for children/elderly/disabled), break it down by gender, and assign a monetary value. Similarly, Argentina enacted a law recognising employment contracts for domestic workers where women can get pension credits (equivalent to social security contributions) for unpaid care work they have done raising children. But no law and policy recognises the mental and emotional labour put in by women to run the economy and the family.

DATA | More women join the labour force, but are they really employed?

In India, there is still no legal framework that recognises or compensates this form of unpaid work, despite it being the backbone of families and, by extension, the economy. However, courts have begun to challenge this silence. In *Kannaian Naidu and Others vs Kamsala Ammal and Others* (2023), the Madras High Court ruled that a wife who performed household duties and cared for the family contributed, albeit indirectly, to the acquisition of family assets. Therefore, she was entitled to an equal share in the property. These efforts to recognise women's labour must be accompanied by a structural reconfiguration of gendered social relations, wherein men actively participate in and co-shoulder care responsibilities. Without such a transformation, the burden of unpaid care work will remain disproportionately feminised. It will either continue to constrain the full participation of women in the formal economy or force women from marginalised socio-economic locations to sustain the reproductive labour of households where other women from dominant groups engage in formal employment. Any revaluation of labour must also encompass the often invisible factor of emotional labour, which plays a critical role in sustaining households, communities and broader economic systems, yet remains systematically unacknowledged in policy and practice. Rajesh Ranjan is a Chevening Scholar. Vrishi Shami is a lawyer-researcher who writes on policy and law. The writers acknowledge the help of Professors Rachel Rose, Eve Dickson, Shirin Rai, and Chris Newfield, and also Prof. Vanza Hamzic and Rashmi Satyal for inputs

U.S. pushes oil majors to invest big in Venezuela if they want to recover debts



White House and State Department officials have told U.S. oil executives in recent weeks that they would need to return to Venezuela quickly and invest significant capital in the country to revive the damaged oil industry if they wanted compensation for assets expropriated by Venezuela two decades ago, according to two people familiar with the outreach. In the 2000s, Venezuela expropriated the assets of some international oil companies that declined to give the state-run oil company PDVSA increased operational control, as demanded by late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. U.S. oil major Chevron was among the companies that negotiated to stay in the country and form joint ventures with state-run PDVSA, while rivals Exxon Mobil and ConocoPhillips left and filed for arbitration.

President Donald Trump said on Saturday (January 3, 2026) that American companies were prepared to return to Venezuela and spend billions to reactivate the struggling oil sector, just hours after President Nicolás Maduro was captured and removed by U.S. forces. In the recent U.S. administration discussions with oil executives in the scenario that Maduro was out of power, officials have said that U.S. oil companies would need to front the investment money themselves to rebuild Venezuela's oil industry. That would be one of the preconditions for them eventually recovering debts from the expropriations. That would be a costly investment for firms such as ConocoPhillips, the sources said. Conoco for years has tried to recover some \$12 billion from the Chavez-era nationalization of its Venezuela assets. Exxon Mobil also filed international arbitration cases, trying to recover \$1.65 billion. Mr. Trump began making public reference to the Venezuelan expropriations when he ordered a blockade of sanctioned oil tankers last month. Conditions for a return

Whether or not the companies return would depend on how executives, boards and shareholders evaluate the risk of renewed investment in Venezuela, the sources said. ConocoPhillips is monitoring developments in Venezuela and their potential implications for global energy supply and stability. It would be premature to speculate on

any future business activities or investments," a company spokesperson said in emailed comments to Reuters on Saturday (January 3). The company reiterated the statement on Sunday when asked about discussions with administration officials for this story. Exxon did not immediately respond to questions from Reuters on Sunday (January 4).

Politico first reported on the recent discussions on Saturday (January 3). Even if companies do agree to return to the country, it could be years before there is a meaningful boost to oil output. The South American country has one of the largest estimated reserves in the world, but production has plummeted over the past decades amid mismanagement, lack of investment and U.S. sanctions.

Besides uncertainty surrounding the contract framework for any operations there, companies considering a return would also need to deal with security concerns, poor infrastructure, questions about the legality of the U.S. operation to capture Mr. Maduro and the possibility of long-term political instability, analysts have told Reuters.

Venezuela, a founding member of OPEC, produced as much as 3.5 million barrels per day in the 1970s, which at the time represented over 7% of global oil output. Production fell below 2 million bpd during the 2010s and averaged around 1.1 million bpd last year, or just 1% of global production.

Trump says that Ukraine didn't target Putin residence in drone strike as Kremlin claims

Aboard Air Force One: President Donald Trump on Sunday told reporters that US officials have determined that Ukraine did not target a residence belonging to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a drone attack last week, disputing Kremlin claims that Trump had initially greeted with deep concern. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov last week said Ukraine launched a wave of drones at Putin's state residence in the northwestern Novgorod region that the Russian defence systems were able to defeat. Lavrov also criticised Kyiv for launching the attack at a moment of intense negotiations to end the war.

The allegation came just a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had travelled to Florida for talks with Trump on the US administration's still-evolving 20-point plan aimed at ending the war. Zelenskyy quickly denied the Kremlin's allegation. Trump said that "something happened nearby" Putin's residence, but that American officials didn't find that the Russian president's residence was targeted.

"I don't believe that strike happened," Trump told reporters as he travelled back to Washington on Sunday after spending two weeks at his home in Florida. "We don't

believe that happened, now that we've been able to check." Trump addressed the US determination after European officials argued that the Russian claim was nothing more than an effort by Moscow to undermine the peace effort. But Trump, at least initially, had appeared to take the Russian allegations at face value. He told reporters last Monday that Putin had also raised the matter during a phone call he had with the Russian leader earlier that day.

And Trump said he was "very angry" about the accusation. By Wednesday, Trump appeared to be downplaying the Russian claim. He posted a link to a New York Post editorial on his social media platform that raised doubt about the Russian allegation. The editorial lambasted Putin for choosing "lies, hatred, and death" at a moment that Trump has claimed is "closer than ever before" to moving the two sides to a deal to end the war. The US president has struggled to fulfil a pledge to quickly end the war in Ukraine and has shown irritation with both Zelenskyy and Putin as he tried to mediate an end to a conflict he boasted on the campaign trail that he could end in one day.

A people-led climate intelligence movement



Globally, monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems have become central to climate transparency. Under the Paris Agreement, countries must track emissions, adaptation progress, and climate finance to show movement towards their Nationally Determined Contributions. COP30 reinforced this through the Global Implementation Tracker, the Belém Mission to 1.5°C, and voluntary indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation. India aligns with this direction, emphasising that stronger domestic MRV is essential both for transparency and for unlocking climate finance, while also underscoring that developing countries need substantial financial and technical support to build such systems. Also, climate finance must not only increase in scale but also shift power downwards to frontline communities like the Indigenous Peoples, and local communities. These communities who observe climate change daily and bear its greatest impacts must lead monitoring efforts, govern funds, and access resources that support local adaptation and environmental stewardship.

Yet, MRV systems still rely heavily on remote sensing, administrative datasets, and external expertise, leaving little room for community-generated insights. It is in this context that Tamil Nadu's community-based environmental MRV (CbMRV) initiative becomes relevant. It makes community-generated environmental intelligence a formal part of climate governance. The CbMRV model

Across Tamil Nadu, climate change is reshaping daily life: in Erode, farmers describe rains collapsing into short, intense bursts, and increasing heat waves; along the Cuddalore coast, salinity is moving inland and shifting tides are affecting fish catch; and in the Nilgiris, tribal foragers report thinning forest moisture and erratic flowering cycles. These signals emerge first at the smallest ecological scales, yet policymaking relies on coarse datasets as climate intelligence has rarely been produced locally. CbMRV was created to change exactly that. It enables villages to generate systematic, science-ready environmental data. It weaves traditional ecological knowledge with field-based monitoring of rainfall, temperature, soil and water health, biodiversity, fish catch, cropping patterns, livelihoods, and even carbon stocks and emissions. This evidence is integrated into a digital dashboard that informs decision-making across village, district and State levels. CbMRV thus reframes governance as a partnership between commun-

ties and institutions, rather than a top-down exercise. The initiative began in 2023 under the UK PACT programme, which enabled Tamil Nadu to pilot a community-based MRV system that could support just transition goals. In collaboration with Keystone Foundation and other scientific partners, three ecologically distinct landscapes were selected: Aracode in the Nilgiris (mountain forests), Vellore in Erode (agriculture and wetlands), and Killai in Cuddalore (mangroves and coastal fisheries). In these locations, communities contributed generational knowledge that shaped the indicators, monitoring protocols and digital tools that now underpin CbMRV. Carbon feasibility studies were conducted in parallel to assess how reliable village-scale data could support future community-centred carbon projects. In less than three years, each pilot village has developed into a functional environmental knowledge hub, with trained monitors, field instruments and digital systems capable of generating real-time data. Community climate stewards

A defining achievement of the initiative is the emergence of 35 key community stakeholders (KCS) — farmers, fishers, women, youth, elders, and tribal knowledge-holders — who now serve as first community climate stewards. They collect and interpret environmental data, and can identify trends, work with local institutions, and help translate information into daily decisions in the near future.

CbMRV is also reshaping how data flows through governance systems. At the panchayat level, it can complement Gram Panchayat Development Plans and programmes such as the Climate Resilient Village, strengthening vulnerability assessments, crop diversification decisions, and natural resource management. At the block and district levels, village-scale evidence can support watershed development, agricultural advisories, and disaster preparedness. At the State level, CbMRV can enhance the evidence base for the Tamil Nadu Climate Tracker, the State Action Plan on Climate Change, the Green Tamil Nadu Mission, coastal adaptation programmes and climate investment pathways under the Tamil Nadu Green Climate Company. A key aim is long-term institutionalisation and the creation of a permanent green workforce. Training modules, applications, field protocols and dashboards developed under CbMRV are being proposed for integration into community colleges, Industrial Training Institutes, forestry and agricultural institutions, Panchayat Raj training centres, and State skill development programmes. With sustained support, community monitors can maintain long-term environmental baselines and eventually replicate the system across wider geographies. When the tools of science are shared rather than concentrated, and when governance grows from the ground up, climate action becomes both more democratic and more resilient.

Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Climate Change and Forests Department, Government of Tamil Nadu; Pratim Roy, Co-founder of Keystone Foundation and a rural development expert and ecologist; Tabinda Bashir, Advisor, Climate Change and Energy - Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, U.K. Government

Why Thailand and Cambodia are fighting?

The Thai-Cambodia conflict was one of the eight wars U.S. President Donald Trump claimed to have ended. In July, fighting broke out along the porous border between the South East Asian neighbours in which at least 48 people were killed and over 200,000 displaced. Mr. Trump, along with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, mediated a ceasefire between Thailand and Cambodia. But the ceasefire did not last long. In November, Thailand announced that it would suspend the implementation of the ceasefire after a landmine blast injured several of its soldiers. Bangkok accused Cambodia of mining the border region. On December 7, it carried out air strikes at Cambodian forces, triggering another round of full-scale cross border fighting. Mr. Trump talked to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Premier Hun Manet and announced that both leaders agreed to resume the ceasefire. But his claim did not have any impact on the ground as fighting continued. At least 28 people have been killed in the fresh round of violence.

The Thai-Cambodian crisis has colonial roots in the Franco-Siamese (Thai) treaties of 1904 and 1907, which defined the boundary between Siam and French Indochina. While these treaties sketched borders along the forested Dangrek ranges, the line remained largely undemarcated on the ground. The flashpoint has been Preah Vihear, the 11th century Khmer Hindu temple and UNESCO World Heritage Site. When French surveyors created maps, they placed Preah Vihear on the Cambodian side despite the temple sitting atop a cliff more easily accessible from Thailand. After Cambodia got independence from France in 1953, its rulers renewed claims over Preah Vihear, but Thailand had deployed troops in the region. In 1962, the International Court of Justice awarded Cambodia sovereignty over the temple, but the dispute has endured in the absence of a mutually accepted border demarcation. Why is Preah Vihear so important for both Thailand and Cambodia? Read this profile of the temple.

Foreign investors and tourists watch nervously as the two ASEAN members exchange fire across the border. ASEAN is already grappling with a far larger challenge in Myanmar where a brutal military regime seems determined to cling to power even at the cost of its own people. If the Thai-Cambodia border crisis metastasises into something worse, South-East Asia's hard-won reputation for stability and economic cooperation could further be undermined, writes The Hindu in this editorial. "Regional powers such as Malaysia and Indonesia have both the interests and the influence to facilitate renewed dialogue and must press both sides to return to talks without delay. Once the ceasefire is restored, ASEAN should promote confidence-building measures to address the deep mistrust between the two countries and ensure that another round of fighting does not erupt," it adds. Massacre in Sydney Bondi Beach in Sydney, one of Australia's most iconic locations, turned into a scene of massacre on December 14, the first day of Hanukkah, when two gunmen opened fire at a Jewish gathering. At least 16 people, including a 10-year-old girl and an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor, were killed and 40 others wounded. Police said the attackers were a 50-year-old man, who held licensed firearms, and his 24-year-old son. In recent years, Australia has witnessed growing antisemitic incidents, targeting its Jewish community, which makes up some 0.4% of its population. Last year, in October, a kosher-food business in Bondi was targeted, while in December, a synagogue in Melbourne was firebombed. After Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel and Israel's retaliatory genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza, antisemitic incidents in



Australia rose by 316%, between October 2023 and September 2024, with more than 2,000 cases reported, according to the country's special envoy to combat antisemitism. According to Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, the attackers, identified as Sajid and Naveed Akram, were influenced by the Islamic State's ideology. The rise in antisemitic violence should be a grave concern for Australia, which hosts the world's eighth largest Jewish community. Mr. Albanese should also remain alert to forces, domestic and foreign, that seek to divide Australian society, writes The Hindu in this editorial. "While antisemitic extremists target the local Jewish community, critics of Mr. Albanese, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — under whose watch Hamas killed 1,200 people in Israel — have sought to blame Mr. Albanese's policies, including his government's recognition of Palestinian statehood earlier this year, for the Bondi shooting. Mr. Albanese should ignore such attacks and focus instead on healing society, combating hate crimes, and addressing concerns over gun violence."

1. Cyclone impact sparks fresh calls in Sri Lanka to recast IMF deal

The programme's crushing austerity measures make recovery harder, contend activists, reports Meera Srinivasan from Colombo.

2. With Bolsonaro in jail, Brazil's right in disarray as Trump warms up to Lula

The former President's absence has done little to rally his supporters even as his family is embroiled in a bitter succession battle; the markets and U.S. officials signal waning support for the Bolsonaro brand; with legal troubles and low public backing, the far-right in Brazil faces a turbulent path ahead, reports Shobhan Saxena from Sao Paulo.

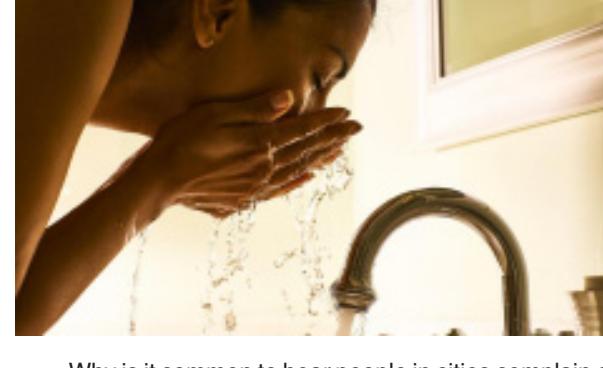
3. Nepal anti-graft body charges officials, China firm in Pokhara airport corruption scandal

Investigation finds 55 individuals colluded with Chinese state-owned company to inflate Pokhara airport costs by \$74 million, reports Sanjeev Satganya from Kathmandu.

4. U.S. National Security Strategy: America, First in the World

The document outlining the foreign policy thinking of the second Trump administration says the U.S. should not be seeking global dominance or trying nation-building in other countries; it seeks strategic stability with Russia, a new balance of power with China, and new terms of engagement with Europe, writes Varghese K George in The Hindu Profiles. 5. How will Australia's social media ban work? | Explained Why did the government think this was necessary? What are the platforms blocked for children under 16? What do companies which don't comply with the rules face?

Hard water can impact hair and skin: here's how you can prevent the damage



Why is it common to hear people in cities complain of dry skin and lifeless hair despite having access to the best products that can be bought? The reason is, the increasingly hard quality of the water in our urban areas. Dull hair and an inexplicable itchiness of the skin often boil down to a high concentration of dissolved minerals, calcium and magnesium, in our cities' water supply. For those reliant on borewells, or municipal water, hard water poses a genuine dermatological concern. Here's what you need to know about what's coming out of your taps and how you can tackle problems caused to your skin and hair.

At the core of the issue is the reaction between hard water minerals and soap. Instead of washing away cleanly, hard water and soap combine to form an insoluble sticky residue, usually referred to as soap scum. This sticky film becomes the root cause of most skin and hair problems. Dryness and itchiness are the first visible symptoms to appear when soap scum damage begins; it disrupts the skin's natural barrier and strip away natural oils. This leaves the skin feeling tight, looking dull, and often itchy. For individuals managing sensitive conditions including eczema or psoriasis, hard water is a known trigger, leading to increased redness and aggressive flare-ups. Premature ageing is one of the most devastating effects on the skin as the drying effect, compounded over time, can contribute to loss of skin elasticity — those fine lines, dark spots, crow's feet and sagging on the jawline and neck, may appear sooner than you'd like. Hair fall cycles can also start early since hard water damages hair follicles and the scalp. Hard water mixed with shampoo doesn't wash away fully and cleanly. This results in mineral residue that coats hair strands and builds up around the hair shafts and on the scalp, effectively clogging the follicles. This weakens the roots and hinders healthy growth, often resulting in increased and noticeable hair shedding. We can't stop using soaps and detergents, and most of us are reliant on the water supply

we receive. However, consistent efforts and a strategic approach that addresses the three important factors — water quality, a cleansing routine, and moisture repair — can help your skin and hair.

To prevent the damage, there are two key steps: Invest in a shower filter: This is the most accessible and affordable solution for city dwellers. A quality shower head filter, using materials such as KDF or Vitamin C, can help neutralise chlorine and reduce some of the mineral load before it hits your body. Remember to diligently change the cartridge once every three to six months, depending on the hardness of your tap water. The RO rinse trick: Using RO water for that final rinse is an immediate, budget-friendly fix. All you need is a jug of purified (RO or filtered) water in your shower. Use this as the very last rinse for your face and hair, as it will stop soap scum from collecting and lingering on the skin and hair. This is a simple, yet effective way to ensure that mineral residue is not left behind. Cleansing must become a key part of your routine to actively remove soap scum and mineral deposits that hard water leaves behind. This involves: Switching to soap-free cleansers: Ditch harsh, high-pH bar soaps. They react poorly with hard water, creating more scum. Instead, use pH-balanced, soap-free gels, natural soaps, or syndet bars (synthetic detergents) that are gentler on the skin.

The ACV rinse: A simple, natural antidote involves using a diluted rinse of Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) after shampooing to help dissolve mineral deposits and restore the scalp's natural acidity. One or two tablespoons of ACV can be mixed into a cup of filtered water and used as a final rinse. Since hard water can compromise the natural barrier of your skin and hair, post-shower skin care is critical and should become a part of your daily routine. For the skin: A popular routine is the 'three-minute rule' which involves applying a rich body moisturiser within three minutes after a shower while the skin is still somewhat damp. This is the optimal window to lock in moisture. Look for ingredients such as ceramides and hyaluronic acid in your skincare products to actively repair the damaged skin barrier. For the hair: Ensure weekly deep conditioning for the hair, as repeated use of hard water results in dry hair. Use a rich, deep conditioning hair mask once a week to replenish the moisture stripped away by hard water. You can also apply a leave-in serum post-hair wash on damp hair, but take care to avoid applying it on your scalp. Try coating your hair and scalp with a natural oil (coconut or argan oil) about 30 minutes before your shampoo wash. This protective layer acts as a buffer, preventing excessive mineral penetration and drying.

Tesla board made \$3 billion via stock awards that eclipsed tech peers



Tesla's board of directors has earned more than \$3 billion through stock awards that far exceeded the value of those given to peers at the biggest U.S. technology firms at the time they were paid, according to an analysis performed for Reuters by compensation and governance specialist Equilar. The analysis found CEO Elon Musk's brother Kimbal has earned nearly \$1 billion since 2004, based on the appreciated value of stock options held or liquidated. Director Ira Ehrenpreis has collected \$869 million since 2007. Board chair Robyn Denholm has made \$650 million since 2014. Directors reaped such windfalls even though they haven't awarded themselves new stock grants since 2020. The board agreed to suspend director compensation starting in 2021 to settle a shareholder lawsuit alleging excessive board-member pay. Between 2018 and 2020, however, the average Tesla director received a total of about \$12 million in cash-and-stock compensation. That was about eight times as much as the average director at Alphabet, the next highest-paid among the "Magnificent Seven" companies over the same period.

The value of those original awards skyrocketed along with Tesla's share price in subsequent years. That's also true of the other six firms in the Magnificent Seven — Nvidia, Alphabet, Meta, Apple, Microsoft and Amazon — which got that name because their soaring stocks have been a big driver of the long-running bull market. But Tesla is the only company among that cohort where the size of directors' original stock awards played such an outsized role in the vast wealth they've earned from these part-time jobs, the Equilar analysis shows. Tesla directors' average compensation between 2018 and 2024 — including the four years of suspended pay — was still two-and-a-half times that of Meta directors, the next highest-paid over the seven-year period.

In a statement to Reuters, a Tesla spokesperson said its directors' compensation "is not excessive but directly tied to stock performance and shareholder value creation." The statement added that board members provide extraordinary service to Tesla and devote "substantial time and effort," for example by attending 58 full-board or committee meetings in 2024. The spokesperson said that meeting frequency was well above industry norms. Tesla's board also paid itself in stock options instead of shares, a rare practice criticised by some corporate-governance specialists because it magnifies directors' upside potential with no downside risk. Tesla directors have exercised tens or hundreds of millions of dollars in options to date but also continue to hold similarly large amounts, Equilar found.

Stock options are the right to buy the company's stock after a specified period for a preset price. Option holders face no risk, corporate-governance experts say, because they're not required to buy the stock if its value drops below the preset price. If it appreciates, they can buy the shares at a discount and immediately unload them at a profit. Instead, many governance experts advise boards to pay directors in shares to align their interests with shareholders. When directors directly own shares, rather than options to buy shares, the value of their holdings drops if their company's stock price falls. Only 5% of the largest 200 companies in the S&P 500 by revenue issue directors options, according to the National Association of Corporate Directors.

The Tesla spokesperson said options create a more "at-risk" incentive structure for directors because they only get compensated if the stock rises. Directors at other firms who receive shares still get some value, even if share prices fall, "as long as the stock exceeds \$0," the spokesperson said. Four corporate-governance experts who reviewed Equilar's analysis for Reuters said the Tesla board's extraordinary compensation undermines directors' independence in overseeing Tesla and its CEO Elon Musk. "Tesla directors are ridiculously overpaid," said Douglas Chia, an independent corporate-governance consultant at Soundboard Governance LLC. "Are you actually incentivized to do a better job by being paid this much? Probably not."

Charles Elson, the founding director of the University

of Delaware's corporate-governance institute, acknowledged Tesla's argument that directors only make money if the company's stock goes up. But Elson and others recommend paying directors in restricted stock, which includes a vesting period, to better align their interests with shareholders who can both make and lose money holding shares. Further, he said, options are usually more lucrative for directors because they "tend to magnify returns dramatically." In addition to the shareholder lawsuit, the Tesla board's compensation also came under fire in a Delaware court ruling last year that invalidated the pay package the board gave Musk in 2018, which is worth \$132 billion at the company's current stock price. The judge found board members' excessive compensation and personal ties to Musk compromised CEO-pay negotiations. The board has appealed and promised Musk a replacement package worth at least \$42 billion if it loses. The board in September proposed a new compensation package for Musk that could grant him as much as \$1 trillion in Tesla stock over the next decade, worth about \$878 billion after subtracting what Musk must pay for the shares. Each of these packages alone would make Musk by far the highest-paid CEO in history — a title he already holds based on his Tesla earnings to date.

Equilar analysed Magnificent Seven directors' cash-and-stock compensation to find annual averages from 2018 through 2024. Equilar excluded members who left boards during any given year to ensure those included received a full year's compensation. Tesla directors averaged \$1.7 million annually for those years, despite having pay suspended for most of the period. Meta was next highest at nearly \$685,000. Amazon was lowest at about \$307,000. Equilar also calculated the lifetime compensation of every current Magnificent Seven director, including the appreciated value of all shares or options held or sold. Tesla's total of more than \$3 billion was paid to just five of its eight current nonexecutive members. The other three — Jeffrey Straubel, Jack Hartung and Joe Gebbia — joined the board after it suspended pay. The lawsuit settlement also requires the board to seek shareholder approval for director compensation after 2023, which it hasn't yet done. All five well-compensated Tesla directors have cashed out options. James Murdoch has liquidated the lowest amount, nearly \$81 million, while board chair Denholm has cashed out the highest, at about \$595 million, or 91% of her total compensation.

A few board members at other Magnificent Seven firms have also reaped huge sums as their companies' value surged, the analysis found. But lifetime-compensation comparisons among different firms are complicated by their varying lengths of service and by the fact that board members at some firms made personal purchases of company stock that Equilar was unable to exclude from their estimated total compensation. Equilar could not determine what company-stock purchases directors might have made before 2003 because regulators did not require board members to disclose such purchases before that year.

The examination found that Nvidia's directors collectively held or had sold about \$17 billion in the chipmaker's stock and Google-parent Alphabet directors held or had sold about \$5 billion in company shares. Those amounts include large numbers of shares the directors were paid for their board service but also could include shares they purchased with personal funds before the 2003 regulations took effect.

35% of issues in big projects due to land acquisition; no plan to change law: Cabinet Secretary Somanathan



More than a third of infrastructure project-related issues raised under the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation, or PRAGATI, framework are due to land acquisition problems, with another 38 per cent on account of forest, wildlife, and environmental reasons and right of use/way, Cabinet Secretary TV Somanathan said on Friday. Speaking two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the 50th meeting of PRAGATI – a mechanism that uses a technology-based platform to monitor projects that cost at least Rs 500 crore – the government's top bureaucrat also said that there was no plan to change the land acquisition law. "Regarding land acquisition, there is no plan to change the land acquisition law," Somanathan told reporters in a media briefing.

Of the 3,300-plus projects reviewed under the PRAGATI framework, 382 were personally reviewed by Modi, with 2,958 of the 3,187 issues raised relevant to these projects being resolved. As many as 42 per cent of the issues related to these 382 projects had to do with land acquisition, Somanathan said. "India is a democracy. There are interests of completing a project, but there are interests of people whose land is affected. Similarly, we want infrastructure; we also want a good environment. So, it is in the very nature of this that there is a balance. And there will be issues; it is never black and white. So, I am not sure that any fundamental revisit of processes is in fact (required)," he said.

"I think these are going to happen in any democratic society... If we were a country where we can throw people out of their land – and there are some countries like that, or where you can simply do what you want, those countries may be able to implement faster. But we don't want to be in that situation. We want to implement with consultation, with

consent, and with public involvement. So I am not sure that we really need to embark on regulatory reforms on these fundamental issues of public consultation, etc. Yes, here and there, there are procedural improvements that can be done and they are done from time to time. But fundamentally, I don't see any need for changes there." Large time and cost overruns have been a chronic problem in India's public projects and schemes, with the key reason being lack of co-ordination: between ministries, various levels of government (Centre, state, and local), and states. The PRAGATI framework was instituted a decade ago to resolve these issues, fast-track critical infrastructure projects, improve outcomes of flagship government schemes, and assess and resolve grievances of citizens across sectors. At the top of the framework are review meetings with the PM, which see chief secretaries of states and secretaries in the Central government in attendance. At the 50th review meeting chaired by the PM on Wednesday, five infrastructure projects were discussed. These projects – from the road, railways, power, water resources, and coal sectors – span five states and have a cumulative cost of more than Rs 40,000 crore.

Somanathan said on Friday that the PRAGATI ecosystem has accelerated the implementation of more than 3,300 projects worth more than Rs 85 lakh crore, with some of the projects reviewed being as old as the Jammu-Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link, work on which began in 1995. A total of 7,735 issues have been raised under the PRAGATI framework, of which 7,156 have been resolved. The biggest cause of these issues is land acquisition, accounting for 35 per cent of them, with forest, wildlife, and environmental issues second at 20 per cent. The third-biggest reason is right of use or way, which caused 18 per cent of the issues raised. These three make up 73 per cent of all issues, with other reasons related to construction approvals, law and order, and financing, among others. According to the Cabinet Secretary, the review meetings – especially those chaired by the PM – helped increase accountability. "In these meetings – especially at the apex level, Prime Minister's meetings – the Chief Secretary or the Secretary of the Government of India ministry is directly giving the Prime Minister a commitment on when something will happen and when it will be finished. And this is something which officers take with greater seriousness than something that is not at that level. So, it is actually a very personal accountability that arises when these projects get taken up there," Somanathan said.

Exports hurt: States flag facility and testing gaps at Board of Trade meeting



IT'S not just high US tariffs that are hurting exports. Costlier raw materials, shortage of testing facilities to ensure products meet global quality standards, and lack of adequate shipping containers are all leading to loss of competitiveness of goods exports, Union Commerce and Industry Ministry said in response to an Right to Information (RTI) application.

These challenges were flagged by exporters in a meeting of the Board of Trade chaired by Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on November 25. The BoT is an advisory body and suggests measures related to foreign trade policy and procedural simplifications to boost trade. The Indian Express had sought the details of the BoT meeting in its RTI application. The BoT meeting happened in the backdrop of slowing exports due to the steep US tariffs of 50 per cent, and both countries failing to conclude a trade deal till the fall of 2025. India was one of the first countries to initiate trade talks with the US when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Washington in February last year.

The steep US tariffs, which came into effect on August 27, 2025, have damped exports, and have triggered cancellations in orders and delayed payment. There are also worries that these could result in orders moving to its competitors such as Bangladesh, Vietnam and China. Exports dipped in October, but jumped 19 per cent in November driven by growth in exports of products that remain outside the tariff net. Labour-intensive goods, however, risk losing market share as shipments of garments, footwear and other products are being replaced. New Delhi is aggressively pushing for newer markets and has signed as many as three free trade agreements, with Oman, New Zealand and the UK, in 2025.

Tariff & anti-dumping duty imposed by USAs per the minutes of the BoT meeting, Rajasthan said US tariffs have resulted in the "cancellation of orders" in the gems and jewellery sector and that "payments were also not coming". The Spices Board said that "US tariffs had created a crisis with a 50 per cent duty on oleoresins". Oleoresins help manufacturers achieve flavour and aroma in their final products. Even as US tariffs have left out generic drugs, representatives from Goa flagged that "pharma exports had been affected due to tariffs. The Seafood Exporters Association also flagged a "significant drop in exports" to the US.

While the representative from Tirupur Exporters Association (TEA) stated that the government should subsidise the difference in the US tariffs on India and those with its competitors, the Engineering Export Promotion Council of India said that Market Access Initiative was not available for the last nine months and the utilisation of funds under Export Promotion Mission (EMP) would need to be expedited. EMP was announced in the Budget last year, with the Commerce and Industry Ministry announcing the modalities of the scheme only on December 31, 2025.

Beyond US tariffs, representatives also broached concerns over anti-dumping duties imposed by the US. Gujarat's representative expressed apprehension of an impact on exports due to the imposition of anti-dumping duty by the US. The Spices Board also raised concerns due to "anti-dumping and Countervailing Duties (CVDs)". While the US has initiated most anti-dumping investigations against China, it has launched as many as nine probes on industrial items exported from India since July last year, including products such as hexamine, oleoresin paprika, certain freight rail couplers, and overhead door counterbalance torsion springs. IN THE Board of Trade meeting, representatives from states and the industry, as well as key Central ministries, provide the Commerce Ministry with specific inputs to boost exports and trade. In November, more than 120 representatives provided suggestions on the hurdles they faced. Container shortages & lack of testing facilities Assam's representative said tea exports from the state face hurdles due to "shipping line levies for empty containers" in the context of the state being landlocked. The representative highlighted the need for taking suitable action to ensure "competitive freight rates" from Inland Container Depot (ICD) Aminagaon to Kolkata and urged the De-

partment of Commerce to "engage with exporters so that they could use Aminagaon as the preferred point of exports". Gujarat's representative also flagged the shortage of shipping containers and its impact on exporters.

Shortages of testing facilities were also flagged by a number of labour-intensive sectors and states. While Rajasthan said that "export samples go to Surat and other places for testing and therefore, there is a need for testing labs in the state", Uttarakhand said that "there was no testing lab and exporters have to go to UP for testing". Testing labs are crucial for exporters to ensure products meet international quality, safety, and regulatory standards and prevent costly shipment rejections.

The Seafood Exporters Association sought "Marine Products Export Development Authority and National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories accredited labs since the Export Inspection Council (EIC) did not have the requisite number of labs for testing. EIC is the official export certification body of India, which ensures the quality and safety of products exported from India. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) also reiterated the need for testing labs. Access to input material & regulatory costs While a MSME representative said prices of domestic raw materials remain 15-20 per cent higher than international prices, representatives from the textiles sector said that "the energy costs for spinning and manufacturing were higher by around 15-20 per cent, which needed to be compensated". An industry representative indicated that the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standards were being made applicable even for products, which are being exported to the US and the European Union, in line with their standards, as in respect of certain items, BIS standards are more complex," the minutes of the meeting showed.

The Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said restrictions on gold, platinum and silver were a source of concern. GJEPC sought an automatic route where duty benefits are not available. The council pointed out that the restriction has "made component imports more expensive". The representative from the ceramics industry in Morbi mentioned that the District Export Committees need to be monitored since the meetings were not being held regularly," minutes of the meeting showed. Another industry representative said: "MSMEs had challenges with quality control orders (QCOs), stating that QC inspectors must be facilitatory." At the BoT meeting, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal underscored the importance of quality and said that India's global reputation as a reliable exporter hinges on ensuring the highest standards in every product and consignment. On the issue of labs, Goyal said that the lab in Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) is supported by Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) and there are Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL) labs of CBIC. GJEPC is looking at setting up labs and the State Governments would be urged to provide suitable building for setting up of such labs," Goyal said. On investments, the minister mentioned that Sembcorp of Singapore is planning to set up a 1000 crore industrial park while other groups like EMMAR and Capital Land too were interested in setting up tourism and industrial park facilities. He asked state or UT governments to identify appropriate land parcels and compete for setting up of such parks.

Rubio says U.S. won't govern Venezuela but will press for changes through oil blockade



Secretary of State Marco Rubio suggested Sunday (January 4, 2026) that the United States would not take a day-to-day role in governing Venezuela other than enforcing an existing "oil quarantine" on the country, a turnaround after President Donald Trump announced a day earlier that the U.S. would be running Venezuela following its ouster of leader Nicolás Maduro. Mr. Rubio's statements on TV talk shows seemed designed to temper concerns about whether the assertive American action to achieve regime change might again produce a prolonged foreign intervention or failed attempt at nation-building. They stood in contrast to Mr. Trump's broad but vague claims that the U.S. would at least temporarily "run" the oil-rich nation, comments that suggested some sort of governing structure under which Caracas would be controlled by Washington.

But Mr. Rubio offered a more nuanced take, saying the U.S. would continue to enforce an oil quarantine that was already in place on sanctioned tankers before Mr. Maduro was removed from power early Saturday (January 4) and using that leverage as a means to press policy changes in Venezuela. "And so that's the sort of control the president is pointing to when he says that," Mr. Rubio said on CBS' "Face the Nation." "We continue with that quarantine, and we expect to see that there will be changes, not just in the way the oil industry is run for the benefit of the people, but also so that they stop the drug trafficking." The blockade on sanctioned oil tankers — some of which have been seized by the U.S. — "remains in place, and that's a tremendous amount of leverage that will continue to be in place until we see changes that not just further the national interest of the United States, which is number one, but also that lead to a better future for the people of Venezuela," he added.

Mr. Trump's vow to "run" Venezuela, repeated more than half a dozen times at a news conference in Florida on Saturday (January 3), sparked concerns among some Democrats. It also drew unease from parts of his own Republican coalition, including an "America First" base that is opposed to foreign interventions, and also from observers who recalled past nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Rubio dismissed such criticism, saying that Mr. Trump's intent had been misunderstood by a "foreign policy establishment" that was fixated on the Middle East. "The whole foreign policy apparatus thinks everything is Libya, everything is Iraq, everything is Afghanistan," Mr. Rubio said. "This is not the Middle East. And our mission here is very different. This is the Western Hemisphere."

Mr. Rubio also suggested that the U.S. would give Mr. Maduro's subordinates who are now in charge time to govern, saying, "We're going to judge everything by what they do, and we're going to see what they do." And though he did not rule out a U.S. military presence in Venezuela, Mr. Rubio

said the current U.S. "force posture" was capable of stopping drug boats and sanctioned tankers. A day earlier, Mr. Trump told reporters, "We're going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition." He later pointed to his national security team with him, including Mr. Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, and said it would be done for a period of time by "the people that are standing right behind me. We're gonna be running it we're gonna be bringing it back." The White House declined to comment beyond what Mr. Trump said Saturday (January 3).

Mr. Maduro landed late Saturday (January 3) afternoon at a small airport in New York City's northern suburbs following the middle-of-the-night operation that extricated him and his wife, Cilia Flores, from their home in a military base in the capital, Caracas — an act that Mr. Maduro's government called "imperialist." The couple faces U.S. charges of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy. The dramatic seizure of the Mr. Maduros capped an intensive Mr. Trump administration pressure campaign on Venezuela's authoritarian leader and months of secret planning, resulting in the most assertive American action to achieve regime change since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Legal experts raised questions about the lawfulness of the operation, which was done without congressional approval. Venezuela's Vice-President, Delcy Rodriguez, meanwhile, demanded that the U.S. free Mr. Maduro and called him the country's rightful leader as her nation's high court named her interim president. After arriving at the airport, Mr. Maduro was flown by helicopter to Manhattan, where a convoy of law enforcement vehicles, including an armoured car, was waiting to whisk him to a nearby U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office. A video posted on social media by a White House account showed Mr. Maduro, smiling, as he was escorted through that office by two DEA agents grasping his arms.

He is due to make his first appearance Monday (January 5) in Manhattan's federal court. Mr. Maduro and other Venezuelan officials were indicted in 2020 on narco-terrorism conspiracy charges, and the Justice Department released a new indictment Saturday (January 3) of r. Maduro and his wife that painted his administration as a "corrupt, illegitimate government" fuelled by a drug-trafficking operation that flooded the U.S. with cocaine. The U.S. government does not recognise Mr. Maduro as the country's leader. The Trump administration spent months building up American forces in the region and carrying out attacks on boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean for allegedly ferrying drugs. Last week, the CIA was behind a drone strike at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels — the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the U.S. campaign began in September.

Venezuela's capital remained unusually quiet Sunday (January 4) with few vehicles moving around and convenience stores, gas stations and other businesses closed. A road typically filled with runners, cyclists and other fitness enthusiasts on Sundays only had a handful of people working out the day after Mr. Maduro was deposed. The presidential palace was guarded by armed civilians and members of the military. At a nearby plaza, only a street sweeper and a soldier stood, and across the street, a church remained close for a second day in a row. Caracas resident David Leal arrived to the lot where he parks vehicles for a living only to quickly realise that he would likely not see any clients for a second day.

'There is no villain in this story': Mahhi Vij and Jay Bhanushali announce separation after 14 years together; how it puts focus on 'choosing peace' and co-parenting

Separations within long-term marriages often come with assumptions of conflict, blame, or unresolved bitterness. Yet for many families, the decision to part ways is framed less by fallout and more by the need to protect children's emotional stability. Television actors Mahhi Vij and Jay Bhanushali announced their separation after 14 years of marriage yesterday, issuing a joint statement on social media that emphasised mutual respect, calm decision-making, and shared parenting. In their message, the couple stated, "Today we choose to part ways on a journey called life, yet we continue to have each other's backs. Peace, growth, kindness and humanity have always been our guiding values."

While the announcement surprised many, the language of the statement stood out for its clarity and restraint, particularly in how it addressed the absence of conflict. They wrote, "Though we walk separate paths, there is no villain in this story and no negativity attached to this decision. Before any conclusions are drawn, please know that we choose peace over drama and sanity above all else." A significant part of their statement focused on parenting through separation. Addressing their children, Mahhi and Jay said, "For the sake of our children – Tara, Khushi, Rajveer, we commit to being the best parents, the best friends and whatever else it takes to do what is right for them." They further reaffirmed their bond beyond marriage, concluding, "We continue to respect one another, support one another and remain friends as we always have been with mutual respect. We ask for your respect, love and kindness as we move forward."

"Choosing peace over drama" during a separation. Sonal Khangarot, licensed rehabilitation counsellor and psychotherapist, The Answer Room, tells Indianexpress.com, "When parents say they're 'choosing peace over drama' during a separation, it shows up in small, daily choices. It means not arguing loudly in front of children, even when emotions are high, and resisting the urge to vent about the other parent to family WhatsApp groups where the child may overhear."

For Indian couples, she adds that this could look like calmly coordinating school pickups despite living with in-laws, attending parent-teacher meetings together without hostility, or letting grandparents maintain relationships with both parents. Emotionally, it involves regulating anger, tolerating discomfort, and modelling respectful communication so children don't feel caught in loyalty conflicts.

Boundaries and communication practices to make such co-parenting arrangements healthy. Committing to being 'best parents' or even 'best friends' after separation requires clear boundaries to protect children's emotional clarity. Khangarot states, "This means separating parenting from personal history—no mixed signals like family outings that mimic a reunion unless explicitly explained to the child. Communication should be predictable, respectful, and child-



focused: discussing routines, school, health, and discipline without emotional spillover." When there is "no villain" in a separation, Khangarot notes, grief can feel invalidated, especially in Indian contexts where endurance is praised over expression. "Processing emotions doesn't mean creating conflict; it means giving yourself private, safe spaces to feel — through therapy, journaling, or trusted friendships rather than family gossip. Strength lies in naming disappointment without self-blame, allowing sadness without rushing to 'move on,' and understanding that peaceful endings still involve loss," concludes Khangarot.

Elon Musk's X to remove illegal content, permanently ban offending users

New Delhi: Microblogging site X will act against illegal content by removing it, permanently suspending accounts that uploaded the material and working with local governments as required, the Elon Musk-owned social media platform said on Sunday. The statement from the Global Government Affairs account of X was issued hours after it said people using the platform's AI service, Grok, to create illegal content will face the same consequences as those uploading illegal content.

"Anyone using Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," Musk said on X in response to a post on "inappropriate images". Global government affairs at X reiterated Musk's stance on illegal content. "We take action against illegal content on X, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement as necessary." Anyone using or prompting Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," Global Government Affairs on X said.

Deepika Padukone birthday: Actor pays for flights for 50 fans, gifts them expensive hampers; flexes Ranveer Singh's Dhurandhar success.



with roses. The entire setup of the fan meet looked straight out of a film set. During the fan meet, Deepika wore a plum-coloured woollen cord set. The MC of the event also interviewed the actor, during which she answered several questions about her films. One video of her reacting to Ranveer Singh's Dhurandhar success has gone viral. When asked about the film's victory, she smiled and flexed her muscles. She was also seen flipping her hair in celebration of the film's success. When a fan asked if they were going to also talk about other films, she said, "It's all in the family guys."

A fan took to Reddit to share inside details of the fan meet. The fan revealed that Deepika paid for the back-and-forth flight tickets of over 50 fans who travelled from all over India to attend the event. She also gifted them 5 kg gift hampers, which reportedly cost around Rs 15,000 per hamper. The fan also shared that when one of the fans told Deepika that her dream destination was Paris, the actor agreed to make her dream come true, and her team exchanged numbers with the fan. Another fan asked the actor if she could dress her in one of her creations, and Deepika immediately agreed. Another fan opened up about facing mental health struggles and shared how Deepika's journey helped him. Deepika hugged the fan, got emotional, and told him off-mic that if he ever needed anything, she was there for him and asked him to let her know. Deepika was set to star in the Hindi remake of the Hollywood film *The Intern*. However, during her interaction with fans, she admitted that films like this are currently not working at the box office, which is why the makers are waiting for the right time to move forward with the project. The fan also mentioned that Deepika served a delicious, top-tier lunch for fans, which included Mexican, Chinese, and Italian cuisines. The fan claimed that Deepika also spoke about leaving behind toxic people and choosing peace over toxicity over the past year. Deepika also discussed motherhood and spoke about its challenges. She mentioned that she is a hands-on mother and, despite having help, prefers to do everything for her daughter Dua herself. She also shared that despite her responsibilities as a new mother, she is ready to make a full-fledged comeback after maternity from 2026.

Deepika Padukone turned 40 on Monday. The actress is currently holidaying in New York, where she celebrated New Year with her family in the city and continues the celebrations with her birthday today. However, a few days ago, the actor celebrated her birthday with her fans at a special fan meet she had organised in Mumbai. Photos from the fan meet have now gone viral on social media. Photos and videos from the fan meet have been released, showing fans singing the Om Shanti Om track "Ankhon Mein Teri" for Deepika as she cut a giant birthday cake. The aesthetics of the fan meet have been widely lauded, with fans calling it the most beautifully decorated fan meet organised by any star. The maroon-themed décor looked stunning, with snacks served on a table adorned

Anurag Kashyap heaps praise on Dhurandhar while disagreeing with its politics: 'Aditya Dhar is a Kashmiri Pandit who has suffered'



and another at the end when Ranveer says, 'Yeh naya India hai.' Take those two aside, it's a good film. In fact, a brilliant film that is entirely set in Pakistan," argued Kashyap. He called the filmmaking "top-notch" and lauded the "stubbornness" of Aditya Dhar, comparing Dhurandhar to "Oscar-winning propaganda films about the USA" like Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2009), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *A House of Dynamite* (2024).

Anurag Kashyap also heaped praise on Dhurandhar director Aditya Dhar, having known him since his National Award-winning 2009 short film *Boond*, on which he worked as a writer. "Agree or disagree with it, the man is honest. Not an opportunist like others. All his films are about Kashmir. He is a Kashmiri Pandit who has suffered. Either you argue with him or let him be," added Kashyap. Kashyap said if he feels like arguing about the politics of Dhurandhar, he'd call up Dhar, but can't deny that the film is "significant." "And Ranveer Singh being my favourite performance. So secure," concluded the filmmaker. In a recent edition of *Cult Comebacks* on SCREEN, Anurag Kashyap revealed that he wanted to cast Ranveer Singh in his 2015 period crime thriller *Bombay Velvet*, but the producers insisted on having Ranbir Kapoor on board instead. "Earlier, when I wrote it, it was for Ranveer Singh. He was much fresher then. But everybody sold it on the basis of Ranbir, and the actor changed. It took me at least a year to wrap my head around it," confessed the filmmaker. Before Kashyap, actor Hrithik Roshan also shared on his Instagram Stories last month that he loved Dhurandhar, even though one may or may not agree with the film's politics. "I may disagree with the politics of it, and argue about the responsibilities us filmmakers should bear as citizens of the world. Nevertheless, can't ignore how loved and learnt from this one as a student of cinema. Amazing," he posted. Co-produced by Aditya Dhar and Lokesh Dhar's B62 Studios and Jyoti Deshpande-led Jio Studios, Dhurandhar boasts of an ensemble cast, also including Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, R Madhavan, Sanjay Dutt, Rakesh Bedi, and Sara Arjun. It's become the highest grossing Bollywood film in India.

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap recently took to Letterboxd to share what he liked, and disagreed with, in the blockbuster period spy thriller Dhurandhar. In his review, he described the filmmaking as "top-notch" while noting that there were "two sequences that I have a problem with." "A spy cannot be a spy if he doesn't have hate and angst against the enemy state. A soldier also cannot be a soldier if he doesn't have angst against the enemy state. On those two counts, I have no issues," Kashyap wrote in his review.

However, Anurag Kashyap quoted two dialogues which underline the politics of Dhurandhar, which he admitted he has "a problem with." "I have two sequences that I have a problem with. Madhavan saying — 'Ek din aisa ayega jab jo bff desh ke baare mein koi sochega' —

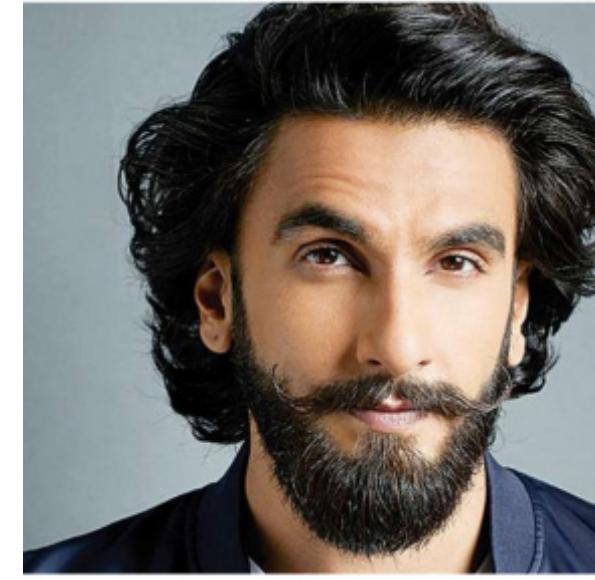
Akshaye Khanna's brother Rahul Khanna hasn't watched Dhurandhar: 'I'm waiting for him to show it to me'



Akshaye Khanna became one of the most talked-about actors after his role as Rehman Dakait went viral in Ranveer Singh-starrer Dhurandhar. The film has broken several box office records, leaving behind blockbusters like Shah Rukh Khan's *Jawan* and *Pathaan* to become the second-highest-grossing Hindi film of all time. While most audiences have already watched the film in theatres and many are still heading out to catch it on the big screen, Akshaye's brother Rahul Khanna has not seen the film yet. Why Rahul Khanna didn't watch Dhurandhar? In a recent interaction with Mid-Day, Rahul shared the reason behind not watching his brother's biggest hit so far. "I haven't seen the movie yet. I'm waiting for him to show it to me," Rahul said. Lauding Akshaye's look in the film, he added, "Anything he wears looks great, so I'm sure he looks fantastic in the film." Rahul Khanna is the second son of late legendary actor Vinod Khanna. Earlier, in an old interaction with TOI, Akshaye spoke about his bond with his brother and described their relationship as being independent of their parents. "In that sense, it hasn't changed. But the immediate family for an individual is parents and siblings, and once that starts getting smaller, you hold to what is left even more," he said. For the unversed, Vinod Khanna was married to Geetanjali Khanna, the mother of Akshaye and Rahul. However, Vinod left his family and acting career to follow spiritual leader Osho and moved to the USA to live at Osho's ashram. He later returned to India in 1990 and married Kavita Dafary.

The couple had two children together — Sakshi and Shraddha Khanna. Like in Dhurandhar, Akshaye also played an iconic negative role as Aurangzeb in Vicky Kaushal's *Chhaava*. The film released in the early months of 2025 and remained the highest earner of the year until Dhurandhar broke its record in December. With the massive success of both *Chhaava* and Dhurandhar in 2025, Akshaye became the second Bollywood actor to cross a cumulative Rs 2000 crore at the box office within a single calendar year, after Shah Rukh Khan.

All you need to know about Pralay, Ranveer Singh's next film after Dhurandhar: Bollywood's first zombie apocalypse, Lokah actor's Bollywood debut



ther since he was a co-producer on Raj & DK's 2013 zombie comedy *Go Goa Gone*.

That film, starring Saif Ali Khan, Kunal Kemmu, Vir Das, and Anand Tiwari, was produced by Saif and Dinesh's banner Illuminati Films. After Vijnan started Maddock Films, he acquired the rights to *Go Goa Gone* and even announced its sequel in 2019, with the original cast set to reprise their roles. However, there's been no development on that front since the film was paused thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. But *Pralay* will nonetheless be unprecedented for Hindi cinema. Unlike *Go Goa Gone*, set in the contemporary world where zombies just show up, Ranveer's film will have a post-apocalyptic setting. It'll also be set in a dystopian version of Mumbai, in which Artificial Intelligence would be used to turn the city into a decayed post-apocalyptic setting.

Who are Ranveer's co-stars in *Pralay*?

There were reports doing the rounds that Alia Bhatt is being eyed as the leading lady opposite Ranveer in *Pralay*. Had that materialized, it would be their third team-up after two hits in Zoya Akhtar's 2019 coming-of-age musical *Gully Boy* and Karan Johar's 2023 family comedy *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani*. But the source tells SCREEN that Alia's 2026 looks quite packed, given both her films have been pushed by months — *Shiv Rawail's* spy thriller *Alpha* and *Sanjay Leela Bhansali's* romantic drama *Love & War: Exit: Alia*. Enter: Kalyani Priyadarshan. Daughter of acclaimed filmmaker Priyadarshan, Kalyani got her breakthrough just last year when she played the titular role in *Lokah: Chapter 1*, the runaway Malayalam hit produced by Dulquer Salmaan's *Wayfarer* Films. Since she's already the face of a supernatural world, she's likely to blend seamlessly into the zombie apocalypse world of *Pralay*. While there's no official word on her joining the cast of *Pralay*, it's likely to be her Bollywood debut. *Pralay* will also mark the theatrical debut of filmmaker Hansal Mehta's son Jai Mehta. Having previously assisted his father on films like *Shahid* (2012) and *Aligarh* (2015), Jai came into his own by co-directing shows like *Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story* (2020) on SonyLIV and *Lootere* (2024) on JioHotstar. The film will be co-produced by Hansal and Sameer Nair-led *Applause Entertainment*, who've also collaborated on the *Scam* franchise and Hansal's upcoming historical show on *Gandhi*. The timeline of when *Pralay* starts and releases remains unclear. While there were plans for it to go on floors at the start of this year's second half, the timeline would now depend on the events unfolding after the release of *Dhurandhar Part 2*. Ranveer has been asked to lie low till the release of the sequel. Once it does, it'll be clearer which film he'll do first — *Pralay* or *Don 3*. Amid reports of him walking out of the latter, a source told SCREEN that Ranveer is only busy with *Dhurandhar's* bulked up avatar before he can start the *Don* threequel. But *Dhurandhar Part 2's* fate will determine the actor's next steps, but *Pralay* definitely seems to be on the cards.

Dhurandhar left Vivek Agnihotri 'mind blown, proud', praises Aditya Dhar for 'raising the bar': 'This kind of cinema doesn't happen by chance'

Ranveer Singh's *Dhurandhar* has emerged as one of the highest grossing Indian films of all time. Along with other industry peers, filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri also heaped praises on Aditya Dhar's spy-thriller drama, saying he was 'mind blown' and 'proud' of the film in his latest tweet. He expressed admiration for the director's vision and execution. Taking to his X handle, Vivek gave a detailed first reaction after watching *Dhurandhar* post his return to India recently. "Just landed back in India after two months and the first thing we did was watch @AdityaDharFilms *Dhurandhar*. Mind blown and proud are the only words that come to my mind. Anyone who knows what goes into making a film would understand what it takes to pull something like this off. The vision, the writing, the confidence, the belief in your own instinct... this kind of cinema doesn't happen by chance."

The filmmaker then mentioned a few technicians who worked tirelessly on the film. "The production design by my friend @sainisjohray is pathbreaking, not decorative, but narrative. The extraordinary music by young maestro @shashwatology is not just innovative but deeply rooted. The cinematography by Vikas Nowlakha is a new textbook for young DOPs." Praising the performances and intent of the film, he further added, "Performances... yes, some will obviously be more talked about. But the real victory of *Dhurandhar* is that even the smallest, most insignificant characters have delivered top-notch performances. Every face feels cast, directed, and placed with intention. Most importantly, every department is in rare sync, working as one organism. That kind of cohesion doesn't happen by accident. That's when you know it's purely a writer/director's film."

Vivek Agnihotri was most impressed by Aditya Dhar's work, particularly his sense of scale and design. "@adityadharfilms, I've always admired your work, especially your sense of scale and design, but this is you operating on another level. I watched the film with genuine pride... proud of you, proud of the craft, proud of Indian cinema. You are blessed. Truly. God's own child. More power to you. Keep going. Keep raising the bar. When the younger generation does work like this, Indian cinema moves forward. Simple. Bravo!" he concluded. Earlier, director Anurag Kashyap had also appreciated the blockbuster film *Dhurandhar*, while mentioning the two things he didn't like and also reflecting on the film's politics. "A spy cannot be a spy if he doesn't have hate and angst against the enemy state. A soldier also cannot be a soldier if he doesn't have angst against the enemy state. On those two counts, I have no issues," he wrote in his review on Letterboxd. "I have two sequences that I have a problem with. Madhavan saying — 'Ek din aisa ayega jab jo bff desh ke baare mein koi sochega' — and another at the end when Ranveer says, 'Yeh naya India hai.' Take those two aside, it's a good film. In fact, a brilliant film that is entirely set in Pakistan," he added. Talking about the film, *Dhurandhar* also starred



Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, R. Madhavan, Sanjay Dutt, Rakesh Bedi, Sara Arjun, and Danish Pandor. The sequel, *Dhurandhar 2*, has already been announced and is set to hit the theatres on March 19, 2026. The film has become the fifth Indian film to cross the Rs 1200 crore mark at the box office worldwide.

Chitrangda Singh calls for regulated work hours for film crew, not just actors

Mumbai: Actress Chitrangda Singh has weighed in on the growing discussion around regulated shift timings on film sets, stressing that while actors are largely taken care of, the conversation must urgently widen to include the crew members who form the backbone of the film industry. Asked about her experience, how crucial is the change towards regulated shift timings on film sets for mental and physical well-being, the actress told IANS: "I think it definitely is important. Actors are still very well taken care of. There is a lot of, you know, regard for their time, for their comfort. Usually producers, as much as they can, and directors try to work around their time." Drawing from her experience, Chitrangda highlighted that technicians such as light men, art department staff and set workers often put in far longer hours than those visible on camera.