

# INDIAN CHRONICLE

9 January, 2026 | Friday | Volume No:10 | Issue No: 285 | Pages: 12+8

www.indianchronicle.com

Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State)

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## Unemployed youth hold massive protest in Hyderabad over delay in job calendar

Hyderabad: A massive protest erupted over delay in issuance of job calendar by the Telangana Congress government at Ashok Nagar here on Thursday.

Unemployed youth in large numbers marched from City Central Library in Chikkadpally to Ashok Nagar X roads chanting slogans such as 'We want the job calendar' and 'Immediate recruitment of two lakh jobs'.

## 500% tariff on India? Trump okays Russia sanctions Bill

New Delhi, Jan 8

In a move that could have significant trade and diplomatic implications for India, US President Donald Trump has approved a bipartisan sanctions Bill aimed at penalising countries that continue to buy Russian oil, with proposed tariffs of up to 500 per cent.



The development was announced by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who said the Bill -- co-authored with Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal -- had been "greenlit" by the President following a "very productive meeting" at the White House.

"This Bill will allow President Trump to punish those countries who buy cheap Russian oil fuelling Putin's war machine," Graham said in a post on X.

He added that the legislation would give Trump tremendous leverage over countries such as China, India and Brazil to incentivise them to stop buying discounted Russian oil, which he said was funding Putin's "bloodbath against Ukraine".

The legislation, titled the Russia Sanctions Enforce-

## High drama in poll-bound WB as Mamata 'raids' I-PAC office in middle of ED searches

New Delhi, Jan 8

High drama unfolded in Assembly poll-bound West Bengal on Thursday after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided multiple locations in Kolkata, including the premises of political consultancy firm I-PAC and the residence of its head Pratip Jain, in connection with an alleged money laundering case related to coal smuggling.



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee soon rushed to Jain's house, claiming ED officials tried to seize her party Trinamool Congress' (TMC) hard disks as well as internal documents and sensitive data. Apart from providing political consultancy to the TMC, I-PAC also manages its IT and media operations.

The ED, on its part, alleged that CM Mamata disrupted the raids and took away key documents. "The search is evidence based and not targeted at any political party... not linked to elections and is part of regular crackdown on laundering," the ED said in a statement. The agency also alleged that the CM took away key evidence, including physical documents and electronic devices. The development also led to a political slugfest. The Congress and AAP supported the TMC, while the BJP said the agency should be allowed to perform its duties professionally.

Attacking the BJP, Mamata called the raids "political vendetta", and accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of misusing agencies to intimidate opposition parties. "The ED is trying to get details of all our party activities and plans. They are trying to get the candidate list. Is this the duty of the ED and Amit Shah? What if I raid the BJP office? See, I got this, the file and hard drive," the CM said, showing a green folder in her hand.

Mamata alleged that the raids began around 6 am

when no one was in the office. "They transferred our data, details of poll strategies and information into their system. This is a crime," she alleged.

When Mamata reached the I-PAC premises, central forces had sealed the entry and exit points of the multi-storey building. However, without engaging with central force personnel, the CM accessed the building through the basement and took a general lift to reach the 11th floor, where the office is situated, despite a separate VIP lift arrangement being available. She also asked Trinamool workers to protest in every block of the state against the raids.

Countering Mamata, Leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, Suvenu Adhikari, accused the CM of repeatedly interfering in the functioning of constitutional agencies. He questioned why the TMC's internal documents were

with a private consultancy firm.

In its statement, the ED said the searches were conducted on the basis of an FIR filed by the CBI on November 27, 2020, against Anup Majee and others. During investigation, it claimed, it was revealed that the coal smuggling syndicate led by Majee used to steal and illegally excavate coal from ECL leasehold areas of Bengal. "Thereafter, the coal was sold in various factories and plants located in Bankura, Bardhaman, Purulia and other districts of the state," it said.

The investigation revealed that a major portion of the coal was sold to Shakambhari Group of Companies, and there was an alleged link with hawala operators as well. The ED probe pointed out that one of the hawala operators had facilitated transactions worth crores to the I-PAC. The persons linked to generation of coal smuggling proceeds, hawala operators and handlers were covered in the searches conducted on Thursday, the ED claimed. I-PAC was also one of the entities linked to hawala money, it alleged.

During the raid, six premises in West Bengal and four in Delhi were covered. ED sources said Deputy Commissioner of Police, South Kolkata, and officer in charge of Saranipolice station came to one of the premises along with another person to verify the identity of the raiding staff.

## Telangana doctors step up black badge protests against GO 229

Hyderabad: Doctors from almost all Government medical colleges and general hospitals in Hyderabad and districts of Telangana have continued to participate in black badge protests against the Government Order (GO Ms 229) of the State government, which provides provision for the inclusion of four ex-officio members, in addition to the existing four ex-officio members, into the Telangana Medical Council (TGMG).

## Centre replaced MGNREGA to provide cheap labour to corporates: CM Revanth Reddy

Hyderabad, Jan 8

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday claimed that the NDA government at the Cen-



tre replaced the MGNREGA with VB G RAM G to ensure availability of cheap labour for big corporates by stripping the rural poor of their right to work.

Addressing a meeting of state Congress office bearers and other leaders here, he said MGNREGA ended migration and bonded labour in rural areas and empowered rural workers to demand work.



## Telangana ministers Seethakka and Konda Surekha invites KCR to Medaram Jatara

Hyderabad, Jan 8

In a heartwarming display of unity amidst political differences, Telangana state ministers Seethakka and Konda Surekha extended a cordial invitation to former Chief Minister and BRS chief K. Chandrashekhar Rao (KCR) to attend the Medaram Sammakkha-Saralamma Maha Jatara—one of the grandest festivals in the state and recognised as the world's largest tribal festival.

The meeting took place at KCR's farmhouse, where the ministers presented the leader and his wife, Shobhamma, with traditional offerings of jaggery and silk garments, signifying a sacred invitation from the god-



## Hyderabad police seize Chinese Manja worth Rs 1.24 crore, arrest 143 persons

Hyderabad, Jan 8 | Intensifying its drive against banned Chinese Manja, Hyderabad police seized a large quantity of the contraband item worth Rs 1.24 crore and arrested 143 people.

Ahead of the Sankranti festival, the authorities stepped up enforcement against the banned Chinese Manja (synthetic/nylon kite string) to curb its sale, storage, and transportation across the city.

Police Commissioner V. C. Sajjanar told a news conference that as part of the ongoing drive, the police registered 103 cases and arrested 143 persons. A total of 6,226 bobbins of Chinese Manja, with an estimated market value of Rs 1,24,52,000, have been seized.

# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Diluting ISI's institutional autonomy

The 95-year-old Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), considered the gold standard for statistical research in the country, is facing the threat of losing its institutional autonomy and independence following the NDA government's move to revamp its structure and convert it into a corporate body. This fits into a broader pattern of systematic dilution of institutional autonomy and federal values through over-centralisation of powers over the last few years. The Draft Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2025, released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), proposes major structural reforms that appear to be opaque and hastily formulated without any prior debate. The Centre wants to overhaul the governance structure of the Kolkata-based premier institute, which is synonymous with India's early efforts to use Statistics for policy and development. There are growing concerns over how the hasty reforms could dilute the autonomy and undermine the federal spirit. Over 1,500 academicians have expressed grave concern and held demonstrations to protest the government's plan, which focuses on corporatisation and revenue generation. What is alarming is that the draft Bill, seeking to repeal the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Act, 1959, omits references to national development, social welfare, and planning but introduces new priorities such as global excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and financial self-sustainability. Experts fear that increased focus on revenue generation may shift ISI away from basic research, and the essential long-term research could suffer under a corporate-style funding model. The new legislation undermines the original agreement under which the ISI society was formed in 1931.

### Service Activities Help Reach the Poor: Collector Harichandana Dasari

"Indian Chronicle" Secunderabad, January 08: Hyderabad District Collector Harichandana Dasari has said that voluntary organisations should strive to get closer to poor people through sustained service activities. As part of its social welfare initiatives, the Navabharat Association, under the leadership of social



worker Sufiyan, organised a blanket distribution programme for the poor on Wednesday at the District Collectorate premises. The programme was formally inaugurated by Collector Harichandana Dasari, who personally distributed blankets to the beneficiaries. Speaking on the occasion, she said the service activities undertaken by voluntary organisations play a vital role in society and provide much-needed support to the underprivileged sections. She appreciated the humanitarian efforts of such organisations and stated that she would always encourage and support initiatives aimed at human welfare. Additional Collector Jitender Reddy, DRO Venkata Chary, Association Chairman Sufiyan, Vice Chairman Afsana, and others were present at the programme.

**Inspection of distribution and reception center set up in Divya Bala School in the background of municipal elections:-**

**Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Local Bodies, Revenue Additional Collector Bhaskar Rao**

"(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle...January 8):- In the wake of the municipal elections, the distribution & reception center set up at Divya Bala School in Bhuvanagiri mandal was inspected on Thursday by Additional Collector and Revenue Additional Collector Bhaskar Rao. The additional collector asked the concerned officials about the arrangements, reception desks, control rooms, safety measures, drinking water and drinking water. On this occasion, the additional collector said that without any problem, all the arrangements should be completed effectively with time management.

Bhuvanagiri Municipal Commissioner Ramalingam and others participated in this program.

### Inform Police If You Are Traveling to Your Native Place: Malkajgiri ACP S. Chakrapani



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):"Malkajgiri Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) S. Chakrapani has advised residents who are traveling to their native places for the Sankranti festival to inform their local police stations in advance. He stated that sharing such information with the police would help prevent thefts during the festive season. The awareness campaign vehicle highlighting safety precautions for people leaving their homes during Sankranti was flagged off at Uppal Police Station by ACP S. Chakrapani along with Uppal Inspector K. Bhaskar. Speaking on the occasion, the ACP urged residents not to leave valuables or

cash at home and instead keep them securely in bank lockers. He also requested homeowners to ensure that CCTV cameras installed at their residences are in proper working condition. He further cautioned women who step out early in the morning to draw rangoli (muggulu) in front of their houses during Sankranti to be careful with their jewelry. The ACP appealed to the public to immediately dial 100 and inform the police if they notice any suspicious movement in their neighborhoods. Uppal DI Ramalinga Reddy, Admin SI Madhava Reddy, Sub-Inspectors Chiranjeevi, Madhu, Chada Samata Reddy, and other police personnel participated in the program.

### Road Restoration Works Must Be Completed Before Sankranti: Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):"Chiknagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee Member Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj conducted an extensive inspection tour in the Beerappa Gadda area on Thursday. During her visit, she inspected streets where drainage pipeline works have already been completed, including the roads opposite Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple, the Library, and the Ramalayam. She instructed officials of the Water Works Department to immediately take up and complete road restoration works in all such streets without delay. The Corporator emphasized that all road restoration works must be completed on a war footing before the Sankranti festival, so

that residents do not face any inconvenience during the festive season. She urged the authorities to ensure smooth and proper repairs, enabling residents to decorate their house fronts with Sankranti rangolis (muggulu) and celebrate the festival joyfully. She specifically requested Water Works Manager Satyanarayana to take all necessary measures to complete the restoration works within the stipulated time and to prevent any hardship to the public. The program was attended by TRS Party State Leader Bandala Praveen Mudiraj, senior leaders Eddula Kondal Reddy, Kokonda Jagan, Muddam Srinivas Yadav, Balakrishna Goud, Banti Goud, Beerappa Gadda Balu, Water Works Supervisor Upender, and local residents.

### TRS Leader GUDI MADHUSUDAN REDDY Present Abhayanjaneya Swamy Portrait to BRS Working President KTR



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):"Under the leadership of senior BRS leader Gudi Madhusudan Reddy, TRS leaders presented a portrait of Abhayanjaneya Swamy to Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Working President Kalvakuntla Taraka Rama Rao (KTR). The portrait was formally presented by Uppal MLA Bandaru Lakshma Reddy, during which New Year greetings were also conveyed to KTR. Speaking on the occasion, KTR appreciated the grandeur of the

Abhayanjaneya Swamy idol located in the Uppal constituency, stating that it reflects deep devotion and spiritual essence. He assured that he would soon visit the Abhayanjaneya Swamy temple situated atop Chilakanagar Gutta, along with MLA Bandaru Lakshma Reddy, to personally offer prayers. Several BRS leaders and party workers, including Erelli Ravinder Reddy, Komppala Raj Kumar, Shanigaram Tirumalesh, Photolu Raju, and others, participated in the programme.

### Conspiracy to Erase Secunderabad's Identity: Talasani Srinivas Yadav



"Indian Chronicle" Secunderabad, January 08: Former Minister and Sanathnagar MLA Talasani Srinivas Yadav on Thursday strongly alleged that the Congress government is conspiring to undermine the very identity of the historic Secunderabad region. Speaking to the media during the launch of development works at Padmarao Nagar, Talasani said Secunderabad, which has a rich and distinct history, is being deliberately sidelined by the government through unilateral decisions. He announced that a key meeting will be held on January 11 at Lee Palace, Balamra, involving public representatives and former representatives of the Secunderabad Parliamentary constituency, along with representatives of traders' associations, labour unions, colonies, basti committees and various organisations. The meeting will deliberate on the massive rally scheduled on January 17, from Secunderabad Railway Station to the Mahatma Gandhi statue on MG Road, and also chalk out future action plans. Talasani recalled that Hyderabad and Secunderabad are globally known as twin cities, with Secunderabad established as early as 1806. He accused the government of attempting to erase the name and historical significance of Secunderabad. Referring to the 120-foot-high Clock Tower built in 1897 during the Nizam era, he said it stands as a living symbol of Secunderabad's heritage. He alleged that the government is moving ahead with plans to form three corporations—Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Malkajgiri—while deliberately ignoring Secunderabad. Warning of intensified protests, Talasani said rallies, dharnas and rasta roko programmes would be launched in a phased manner until a Secunderabad Corporation is formed. "This is not a fight of any single political party, but a struggle for the self-respect of the people of this region," he asserted, adding that all political parties, caste organisations, people's movements and all sections of society are invited to join the agitation. He further cautioned Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy to remember that this is not a monarchic rule. Taking decisions without considering public opinion and the region's history reflects an authoritarian mindset, he alleged. Lashkar District Sadhana Samithi president Gurram Pawan Kumar Goud, along with Ambulance Suresh, Esuri Mahesh, Baburao, Mahender Goud, Srikanth Reddy and others were present on the occasion.

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### Ramantapur Division Congress President Mohammed Rafiq Visits Sriram Colony

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):"Ramantapur Division Congress Party President Mohammed Rafiq toured Sriram Colony in Ramantapur on Thursday and interacted with local residents to understand their issues firsthand. The "Gadapa Gadapaku Praja Prabutvam" programme continued enthusiastically in Sriram Colony. Stating that public wel-



fare is the primary objective of the government, Mohammed Rafiq visited every household and assured residents that welfare and development remain his top priorities. During the visit, residents raised concerns regarding underground drainage, drinking water supply, and the laying of proper roads, as the existing roads are in poor condition with several potholes. Speaking on the occasion, Mohammed Rafiq said that he would bring all the issues to the notice of Uppal Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy and also hold discussions with the concerned officials to ensure permanent solutions to the problems. Those who participated in the programme included TPCC representative Mohammed Taufiq, Ramantapur Division Mahila Congress President Sandhya Rani, Mallikarjuna Devasthanam Chairman Nam Raji Reddy, Poosa Sattaiah, Mogili Lingam, Besta Bhaskar, Angala Sandeep, Gayatri Goud, Tabassum Begum, Lagusani Srinivas Goud, Bhashapathi, Cable Ashok, Bugga Paramesh, Chinna Mohammed, Nayem Chotu Bhai, Shivaraj, MD Jangir, NSUI Sai, Aravind Yadav, MD Shafi, MD Siddiq, MD Riyaz, and others.

### MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy, along with temple chairman Kolluri Raju, at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the road widening works of the Pachalakatta Someshwara Temple.

"(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle...January 8):- The foundation stone for the road widening works of the famous Sri Pachalakatta Someshwara Temple in Bhuvanagiri town was laid today by Bhuvanagiri MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy. After special prayers were performed under the guidance of the temple's chief priest, Kappagantula Nagaraju Sharma, MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy broke a coconut and inaugurated the works. Speaking



on the occasion, he said that they are committed to the development of the ancient and renowned Pachalakatta Someshwara Temple in Bhuvanagiri town. He mentioned that after the temple chairman Kolluri Raju informed him about the difficulties faced by thousands of devotees due to the poor condition of the road leading to the temple, HMD funds were allocated to start the road widening works. He urged everyone to work for the development of temples, transcending political differences. Municipal Commissioner G. Ramalingam, District Library Corporation Chairman MD Awais Chisti, Congress party leaders Pothnak Pramod Kumar, Barre Jahangir, Pothamshetty Venkateshwari, Thangallapalli Ravi Kumar, Kukkaduvu Somayya, Koora Venkatesh, Manga Praveen, Dargayi Hari Prasad, Devarakonda Narasimha Chari, Gurrala Srinivas, Jangiti Vinod, and others participated in this program.

## On the occasion of the municipal elections, the objections in the draft voter list should be examined and completed as soon as possible:-

Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Local Bodies.. Revenue Additional Collector Bhaskar Rao



““(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle...January 8)– Additional Collector and Revenue Additional Collector of Local Bodies Bhaskar Rao said that objections should be examined in the draft voter list on the occasion of municipal elections and completed as soon as possible. Additional Collector visited Pochampally Municipal Corporation on Thursday. The objections raised on the draft voter list were examined and a quick investigation was conducted and the

date was ward-wise. On the 12th day, the final list should be published in the government offices, similarly, instructions were issued to the Municipal Commissioner to display the list of polling centers on the 13th of this month and to publish the list of polling centers on the 16th. As part of the next election process, the local Vinoba Bhave Mandir, which is the nomination receiving center, was inspected. Tehsildar Srinivas Reddy, ward officers and staff participated in this program.

**Time is very precious, if students and students study hard.. they will reach a higher level in life:-**  
**Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao**



““(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle...January 8)– Time District Collector Hanumantha Rao said that it is very valuable and if students study hard, they will reach a higher level in life. On Thursday, the district collector who distributed the material prepared specially for the annual examinations of the 10th class students of Zilla Parishad High School in Kotamarthi village of Addaguduru mandal. He said that class 10 is a very important turning point in life,

if you pass here, you will have the opportunity to go for higher studies. He said that it will teach the students studying in government schools how to settle down in life along with education. All the students of class 10 should also pay attention to books instead of being addicted to phones, social media and TV. The Collector congratulated Nestham Foundation for taking such a good program in the village. The concerned officials participated in this program.



Photo caption only:–“(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle...January 8)– Ramachandrapuram village Sarpanch Kolalu Ravikala Krishna Reddy and ward member Marripalli Lavanya joined the Congress party in the presence of Bhongir MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy.

## Hundi Counting at Sri Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple: EO Peddi Gari Srikant



““(KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):”“Hundi counting was conducted on Thursday morning at the Sri Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple located at Velugu Gutta, Uppal. For a period of three months, a total amount of Rs. 90,087/- (Rupees Ninety Thousand Eighty Seven only) was collected. Temple Executive Officer Peddi Gari Srikant stated that the amount collected in the hundi has been duly deposited into the temple's bank account. Speaking on the occasion, he said that various initiatives are being undertaken to provide better facilities and amenities for the devotees visiting the temple.



Photo caption only :–“(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle...January 8)– A scene showing the Honorable MLA Kumbham Anil Kumar Reddy, along with former Municipal Chairman Pothamshetty Venkateshwarlu, DCC Delegate Thangallapally Ravikumar, and other town Congress party workers and leaders, inspecting the progress of road widening works at Jagdevpur Chowrasta in Bhuvanagiri town.

## SCR to Run Eight Additional Special Trains for Sankranti Rush Hyderabad–Sirpur Kagaznagar and Hyderabad–Vijayawada



““(Taj Khan, Kagaznagar, January 8 (Indian Chronicle)– In view of the heavy passenger rush expected during the upcoming Sankranti festival season, South Central Railway has announced the operation of eight additional special trains between major destinations in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. According to an official press release issued on January 7, the special services will operate between Hyderabad–Sirpur Kagaznagar and Hyderabad–Vijayawada routes to clear the extra holiday rush. Train No. 07469 will run from Hyderabad to Sirpur Kagaznagar on Fridays and Saturdays, departing at 7.55 am and reaching its destination at 2.15 pm. The return service, Train No. 07470, will operate on Fridays and Sundays, leaving Sirpur Kagaznagar at 3.15 pm and arriving in Hyderabad at 10.20 pm. These services will commence from January 9. Similarly, Train No. 07471 will operate between Hyderabad and Vijayawada on Fridays and Saturdays, departing at 6.10 am and arriving at 1.40 pm. The return train, No. 07472, will run on Fridays and Sundays, departing Vijayawada at 2.40 pm and reaching Hyderabad at 10.35 pm. The special trains will halt at several important stations en route, including

Secunderabad, Charlapalli, Jangaon, Ghanpur, Kazipet, Warangal, Mahbubabad, Dornakal, Khammam and Madhira, among others, depending on the route. Railway officials stated that all the special trains will consist of General Second Class coaches, providing affordable travel options for passengers during the festive period. Passengers are advised to plan their journeys in advance and check train schedules before travel.

## BC Welfare Association National President Jajula Srinivas Goud participated in the training camp organized by Mana Alochana Sadhana in Yadagirigutta for the awareness of Backward Classes.

““(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau.. Indian Chronicle... January 8)– BC Welfare Association National President Jajula Srinivas Goud participated as the chief guest on the first day of the training camps organized by Mana Alochana Sadhana in Yadagirigutta for the awareness of Backward Classes. In this program, BC Castes JAC Chairman Kundarapu Ganesh Chari, MBC Editor Surya Rao, BC Association

District President Kotha Narasimhaswamy, Bhuvanagiri constituency president Saban Kar Venkatesh, State Youth Association leader Guduru Bhaskar, Mandal President Jinna Mallesh Mudiraj, Bojja Sambesh, Women's President Gundujiyothi, Women's General Secretary Jhansi, Sirkonda Sivakumar, Yadagirigutta Mandal President Ashoka Chari, and other BC leaders participated.

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## Resolve power issues in Balakrishna Nagar of Venkat Reddy Nagar Division: Aakarapu Arun Patel



““(KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):”“As part of the “Basti Bata” programme, Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Aakarapu Arun Patel, along with Uppal Electricity Department AE Kiran Kumar and Congress leaders, toured Balakrishna Nagar in the Venkat Reddy Nagar Division and reviewed the ongoing power-related problems faced by residents. During the visit, they interacted with locals and inspected issues such as the need to upgrade electricity poles from single-phase to three-phase supply, laying of new cable wires, and frequent power disruptions troubling bastis and colonies. The team explained the problems in detail to the concerned electricity officials. Responding positively, the officials assured that necessary works would be taken up at the earliest to resolve the issues. Those who participated in the programme included electricity department officials, Balakrishna Colony President

Swamy, Colony President Mohammed Ashwath, Honorary President Golusu Swamy, Treasurer Nagaraju, Congress senior leaders Masimukku, Saidulu Yadav, Kasim Goud, Nagamallaiah, Brahmaiah Shambhu, Ramachander, Nagesh, Shankar Goud, Narasimha, Rajesh, Balaji Chari, Gautham, Bhavana, Charan, Pawan, Lingesh, Ramu, Manoj, Kanna, Shyam, other party workers, and local residents.

## MP Eatala Rajender Unveils New Year Calendar Designed by Telangana Sampath



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):”“The New Year Calendar–2026, designed under the leadership of BJYM state leader Telangana Sampath Mudiraj, was unveiled on Thursday by Malkajgiri Member of Parliament Eatala Rajender.“Speaking on the occasion, MP Eatala Rajender assured Telangana Sampath that he would address public issues brought to his notice and allocate the necessary funds for their resolution.“Chilukanagar Division leaders Kappala Darshan Goud, Nagulu Satyanarayana, Devender Reddy, Potluri Venkatesh, Sravan, Nagaraju, Srinivas, Santosh, Nikhil, Prashanth, Naveen Yadav, Madhu, and others participated in the programme.

## Extensive Admission Awareness Drive by Uppal Government Degree College



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):”“The faculty of Government Degree College, Uppal, has been conducting an extensive admission awareness campaign over the past three days in 50 selected junior colleges. As part of the drive, the team is creating awareness among students on topics such as stress management, career guidance, personality development, and communication skills. Interactive activities including quizzes and JAM (Just A Minute) competitions are also being organized to actively engage students.“The campaign covered areas including Ghatkesar, Uppal, Malkajgiri, Keesara, L.B. Nagar, and Nagole, where faculty members interacted directly with intermediate students and provided detailed information about academic programs and opportunities at the college.“College Principal Dr. K. Vijay Kumar expressed confidence that the institution would once again achieve 100%“admissions in the current academic year.“Vice Principal Dr. C.H. Satyanarayana, Admissions Publicity Committee and DOST Coordinator J. Vishwanath Kumar, Academic Coordinator K. Geetha, along with faculty members Dr. Rajashree, Dr. G. Tirupathaiah, Dr. S. Yamuna Rani, P. Vijay Kumar, Dr. Srinivasa Rao, Dr. R. Chandrasagar, Dr. P. Venkateshwarlu, L. Anusha, and Sravanti actively participated in the programme.

## Former Minister and MLA T. Harish Rao Unveils New Year Calendar



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):”“A New Year–2026 calendar designed by BRS senior leader and movement activist Pittala Naresh Mudiraj was unveiled by former minister, Deputy Floor Leader of the Legislative Assembly, and Siddipet MLA Tanneeru Harish Rao at his residence on Thursday.The event was attended by several senior BRS leaders and movement activists, including Ambati Jagadish Mudiraj, Kompelli Ravinder Mudiraj, Pratap Reddy, Gireddy Janardhan Reddy, and Panga Satyanarayana. Youth leaders Mayi Praveen, Palamakula Suresh, Kalvala Santosh, Bobbala Naveen Reddy, Bailiki Mahender, former Youth President Seetha Raju Yadav, former BRSV President Yasareni Naresh Prajapati, Dachepalli Sai Kumar, Dachepalli Shiva Kumar, Ellaboini Praveen Mudiraj, Suman Panugoti, Nagaraju, and others were also present on the occasion.



## Sonalika records robust performance with Highest Ever December Overall Sales of 12,392 tractors

New Delhi, 3rd January'26: India's No.1 tractor export brand Sonalika Tractors has concluded the calendar year 2025 on a powerful high as the brand has recorded its highest-ever December overall sales of 12,392 tractors. The new performance peak marks as a perfect culmination of the landmark year defined by record breaking performances and new milestones.

Sharing his views on the robust performance, Mr. Ramon Mittal, Joint Managing Director, International Tractors Limited, said, “Our new achievement of highest ever December sales of 12,392 tractors reinforces our long-standing focus on delivering DUM with our innovative tractors across diverse farming conditions. Farmer's sentiments continue to be buoyant as Rabi sowing area has increased significantly as compared to last year, indicating a promising crop future and steady growth driven by innovative machinery. As we move forward in New Year 2026, we are all prepared to drive farm mechanisation growth through technology-driven solutions that empower farmers in building a sustainable future.”

Sonalika's latest performance highlights the brand's consistent focus on delivering performance driven solutions engineered for varied Indian farm conditions. Fully loaded with new age technologies and design, every Sonalika tractor is a symbol of robust quality that



offers operational reliability and long term value for farmers. Over the years, Sonalika has built a proud legacy and a strong reputation in manufacturing heavy-duty tractors that are designed as per detailed farmer insights – an approach that has ensured a bright future for 18+ lakh farmers. The company's manufacturing capacity at World's No.1 plant in Hoshiarpur coupled together with a widest channel partner network, ensure timely availability of advanced tractors that enhance on-field efficiency.

**Applications are being received from the public for the special grievance redressal program, and problems are being resolved on the spot:**

**- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Collector Hanumantha Rao**



“(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau...Indian Chronicle...January 8):- District Collector Hanumantha Rao stated that applications were received from the public for the special grievance redressal program, which started in the afternoon, and some problems were resolved immediately. During the special grievance redressal program held every Thursday in the Collector's chamber, and the 'Udyogavani' program, there

**SERP Director Divya Devaraj reviews the establishment of a solar power plant via video conference**



“(Mandava Srisailam...Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau...Indian Chronicle...January 8):- As part of the Women's Empowerment program, SERP Director Divya Devaraj conducted a review via video conference regarding the establishment of a solar power plant.

## THE boss of the masess Kalluri Hanmantanna

“Ind, medak district, jan 9.”“In the medak district one of the famous personality kallury hanmant Rao, the man helping hand geaved to the poor people, kalluri hanmant bc community top leader entire medak disrct narsapur segment, since 40 years narsapur seg ment ruling one community, but the next generation as per bc voting hanmant the race of mla candidate in the narsapur segment poor people looking for hanmant because thye are severals and needs..

**Baghath Association Approaches Lokayukta Seeking Resolution of Uppal Baghath Civic Issues; Hearing Adjourned to February 26**

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 8 (Indian Chronicle):”“Representatives of the Uppal Baghath Welfare Association have approached the Lokayukta seeking resolution of long-pending civic issues in Uppal Baghath. A case was filed in the Lokayukta court in 2024, naming HMDA and GHMC as respondents.“In previous hearings, HMDA had submitted its counter affidavit, following which the Welfare Association also filed its counter. During the hearing held on Thursday before Justice Rajashekhar Reddy, the association requested the constitution of an inspection commission to examine issues in Uppal Baghath, including street lights, roads, drainage, sanitation, and other civic problems. As GHMC had not responded so far, Justice Rajashekhar Reddy stated that a notice would be issued to GHMC, granting it a final opportunity to file its counter. The matter has been adjourned to February 25, 2026. The court further observed that if GHMC fails to respond by then, an inspection commission would be appointed to conduct a detailed inquiry.“Association members Mekala Madhusudan Reddy, Pawan, Ganesh, and Ranganath were present during the proceedings.

## After Indore water contamination deaths, Delhi Jal Board to intensify inspections



that given the critical importance of safeguarding the integrity and safety of the drinking water supply system across the city, he has asked the DJB to intensify regular inspections of all water supply pipelines, particularly in areas where drinking water lines run in proximity to sewer lines, to detect and repair any leaks, damages, or potential points of cross-contamination immediately. The DJB has also been asked to strengthen continuous monitoring of water quality at all water treatment plants, distribution zones, and consumer ends through frequent sampling and testing as per established standards. Further, it has been asked to ensure prompt response to public complaints regarding water quality, odour, taste, or discoloration, with on-ground verification and corrective action within the shortest possible time. Besides, DJB engineers and other officials concerned have been directed to conduct periodic audits of infrastructure to identify vulnerable sections and prioritise repairs/replacements to prevent any mixing of untreated water or external contaminants into the potable supply network. The DJB will also deploy dedicated teams for round-the-clock vigilance and maintenance in high-density and vulnerable areas. "These actions must be implemented with immediate effect and monitored rigorously by the CEO, DJB, including review of inspections carried out, complaints resolved, and water quality test results etc," read the document. Between December 24, 2025, and January 6 this year, at least eight people died after allegedly drinking contaminated water in Indore's Bhagirathpura. A public toilet without the mandatory septic tank, built over an ageing pipeline near a police outpost in the area, was initially blamed for the contamination of the city's drinking water network. Even as the toilet has since been demolished, the authorities are investigating whether the contamination spread through the local borewell connections.

## 'Aware of the rot': D K Shivakumar cites 'intelligence inputs', says time to change BDA's image

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Urban Development Minister D K Shivakumar on Tuesday said he was aware of corruption in the Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA), citing his "own intelligence inputs," and stressed the urgent need to change public perception of the organisation. Speaking at the inauguration of a workshop on governance and grievance redressal for BDA employees, Shivakumar said that the time has come to change the Authority's image, which has been tarnished due to "10 per cent corrupt employees".

"It took me six months to find out, through my own intelligence inputs, about the corruption in the system. I am aware of the rot in the system at every stage, and I am also aware of what is working well in the organisation. In this backdrop, we have decided to digitise all the documents. Some may not like this, but we have to change BDA. The organisation is getting a bad name due to some 10 per cent of the employees who are corrupt," he said. Speaking at the inauguration of a workshop on governance and grievance redressal for BDA employees, Shivakumar said that the time has come to change the Authority's image, which has been tarnished due to "10 per cent corrupt employees". Shivakumar speaks at the inauguration of workshop on governance and grievance redressal for BDA employees. Saying that the BDA and the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) were the face of Bengaluru, Shivakumar said, "What this city needs today is discipline and honesty. Instead of red-taping the files, identify the mistakes constructively and find solutions for them. I am not going to be easy on corruption, and I will take strict action against the culprits. We need to change people's perception about the organisation."

Shivakumar also urged BDA employees to find solutions to people's problems and "not create problems for them". "Find a solution within the legal framework, don't trouble the people," he added. "It took me six months



to find out, through my own intelligence inputs, about the corruption in the system. I am aware of the rot in the system at every stage, and I am also aware of what is working well in the organisation. In this backdrop, we have decided to digitise all the documents. Some may not like this, but we have to change BDA. The organisation is getting a bad name due to some 10 per cent of the employees who are corrupt," he said. (Express Photo) "It took me six months to find out, through my own intelligence inputs, about the corruption in the system," he said. He noted that engineers from disciplines other than civil engineering and architecture were entering the Town Planning Department, which was why a dedicated Town Planning College was being established in Bengaluru. "We will need to plan our cities and towns well. Other than some areas like Jayanagara, Malleshwaram, Chamarajpet, etc., there are not many planned areas. All of us are at fault for this. We need to correct these mistakes," he added. Pointing out that Bengaluru's population had grown to 1.4 crore, Shivakumar said the city was not ready for such a population growth. "We need to think of ways to shape the new Bengaluru. A peripheral ring road was planned in 2010, and it could have been done in Rs 26,000 crore had they done it then.

## How ChatGPT alert helped Bengaluru retiree avert further losses in 67.1 lakh fake IPO 'scam'



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

A response from ChatGPT — an Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot — helped a 77-year-old Bengaluru retiree prevent further financial losses after he was duped of ₹67.10 lakh in a fake stock market investment scam. According to the First Information Report filed on January 3, persons posing as representatives of IIFL Wealth Management approached the victim, a resident of Binnypet, in November last year under the promise to facilitate "pre-IPO allotments in sizable quantities." After being persuaded to sign an agreement, he was asked to make an initial deposit of ₹5 lakh, the police said.

The complainant was subsequently informed that he had been allotted 150 shares of ICICI Prudential AMC, which showed a profit of ₹80,000. Encouraged by this, the victim was asked to invest again, this time ₹23.10 lakh, for another Initial Public Offering (IPO). Though he complied, he was allegedly allotted 2.24 lakh shares at ₹45 each, far exceeding the quantity he had sought.

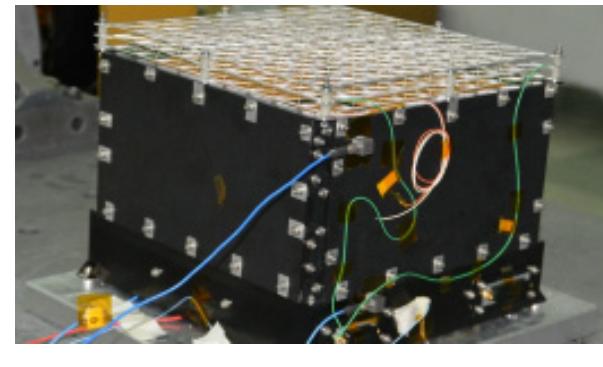
When he expressed his inability to pay for the excess allotment, the scammers offered him a loan of ₹36.79 lakh at a 13 per cent interest rate, on condition that he repays ₹42 lakh, the police said. The victim agreed to the arrangement. On January 1, he was instructed to sell the 2.24 lakh shares at ₹125 per share, which showed a paper profit of nearly ₹2 crore. However, when he requested that ₹40 lakh be released to him and the loan amount adjusted from the proceeds, the request was refused, the FIR said. "This is when the complainant got alarmed and started investigating their background in ChatGPT. Complainant was shocked to discover that this was a fraudulent organisation and had a lot of complaints

against it," the FIR filed at the Cyber Crime Police Station (CCPS), Bengaluru, noted. The police have registered a case under the provisions of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, Section 66C (punishment for identity theft) and Section 66D (cheating by personation using a computer resource) and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita's (BNS) Sections 318(4) (cheating & dishonestly inducing delivery of property) and 319(2) (cheating by personation (pretending to be someone else)).

## From Friday, book Srivani Trust tickets for VIP darshan at Tirupati temple online

After a one-month trial run, a final decision will be taken regarding the overall Srivani darshan timings. The TTD has urged devotees to make use of the online current booking facility to avoid the long wait for tickets. (Express Photo) After a one-month trial run, a final decision will be taken regarding the overall Srivani darshan timings. The TTD has urged devotees to make use of the online current booking facility to avoid the long wait for tickets. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is set to introduce online current booking for Srivani Trust tickets on a trial basis from January 9. These tickets are special VIP darshan passes offered through the Srivani Trust to donors contributing Rs 10,500 or more per person, and they provide quicker, less crowded darshan at the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple on the same day. The 800 Srivani Trust break darshan tickets currently issued at Tirumala counters will now be made available through online current booking. This is in addition to the existing online quota of 500 tickets released three months in advance. Tickets will be issued online every day at 9 am, with bookings open until 2 pm. Devotees must report at 4 pm for same-day darshan at Tirumala. After a one-month trial run, a final decision will be taken regarding the overall Srivani darshan timings.

## Isro confirms a 'cosmic dust particle' hits Earth's atmosphere every 16 minutes: Why this discovery is critical for Gaganyaan



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

In its maiden experiment to measure minute atmospheric dust particles suspended around Earth, the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) confirmed on Monday that an interplanetary dust particle enters Earth's atmosphere approximately every 1,000 seconds (or around 16 minutes). Isro developed the Dust EXperiment (DEX), a 3 kg instrument that was launched into space onboard the XPSat mission on January 1, 2024. DEX, created by the Physical Research Laboratory, is the first-of-its-kind instrument designed to detect such high-transient particles. The detection was reported during the experimental tests performed in early 2024. "The 140° wide-view detector of DEX successfully logged signals of orbital debris impact during January 1 – 9, 2024. While skimming the atmosphere on a 9.5° inclination, the detector registered several hits," ISRO said in a statement released on Monday.

Earth's atmosphere is primarily composed of gaseous matter along with suspended solid particles, or dust, originating from comets, meteors, asteroids, or similar hard-body celestial objects. While gaseous matter sup-

ports the formation of life on Earth and provides the air that we breathe, the dust particles are often classified as dangerous and hold the potential to interfere with the operations of spacecraft and satellites. Interplanetary dust also affects the quality of the space environment and influences space weather, which indirectly affects the Earth. Therefore, studying interplanetary dust particles is critical for safeguarding space assets. At the core of DEX is the dust detector, which works on the hypervelocity principle, designed to capture high-speed space dust impacts with only 4.5 Watts.

Consequences of a projectile impactDepending on the particle, the object or the projectile, its speed and size, the hypervelocity impacts can vary. The consequences of a projectile impact can range from minor dents to catastrophic failures, such as total deorbiting of spacecraft or satellites. When a projectile or solid particle exceeds a speed of 4 km/second, the impact can result in complete disintegration or melting of the projectile, risking the mission's life. Space debris, for instance, is known to travel at velocities estimated to be 14 km/second and even higher for meteors. During the experiment, Isro stated that DEX was able to measure dust flux (rate at which dust travels in the atmosphere) up to  $6.5 \times 10^{-3} / m^2 s^{-1}$  — a reasonably high rate that confirms the constant bombardment of particles. Understanding and collecting data on interplanetary dust in Earth's atmosphere will also be valuable for planning Gaganyaan missions, particularly for manned missions to space and the Moon. As India prepares for missions to the Moon, Venus, and Mars, the availability of DEX-like instruments will be crucial for studying the atmospheric compositions of these celestial bodies and enhancing our understanding of the universe. The detection and measurements of space dust can add immense value while tracking space weather and space environment, which have direct links to the safety of space assets like space telescopes, satellites pertinent for communication and navigation purposes.

## A play that says it as it is: Why 'Jikni' is a bold move that goes against the idea of 'pure' Marathi theatre

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

For generations, Marathi has carried its own hierarchies of language, where one dialect is upheld as superior, while others are asked to make adjustments. On stage, such differences are usually smoothed over in the name of clarity. Jikni resists that impulse by keeping the language on stage tethered to life. In allowing speech to remain uncorrected, the play avoids both sanitisation and spectacle, and simply lets the soundscape of lived experience remain intact. The children speak and sing exactly as they do in their everyday lives and in that refusal to adjust themselves for us lies the deepest nuance of this play. Jikni, meaning "riddle" in the Katkari language, is a musical docu-drama created by Ruchika Khot, Geetanjali Kulkarni and Archana Kulkarni, collaboratively with children from Vadavali and Sonala, adjacent villages in Maharashtra's Palghar district. The play is a slice-of-life musical production exploring the seemingly routine stories from these villages. The production is packed with songs and jingles from everyday life, describing a variety of things — from folktales on fishing to songs about the monsoon and, of course, jiknis — aiming to show life as it is.

The play moves gently through the contours of the children's everyday lives, from friendships and kinship in the village, to the way adults' lives bend around the harvest, and how time itself is measured through the agricultural year. From the fallow months to sowing, reaping, and finally the processing and sale of rice, the play follows a cycle that holds the village together. The play ended with a short heartfelt section — almost in a Brechtian sense — in which a direct conversation was held with the audience, detailing the periods of distress caused due to these activities, following which the actors took their bow. In an era where rural life is frequently aestheticised, moralised or folded into a narrow national narrative, Jikni innocently challenges the romanticised idea of "rural charm", making one confront reality. The music is central and demanding, performed exceptionally by the budding storytellers, who sing complex melodies, play instruments, and coordinate dance performances with remarkable attentiveness. The play was developed at Tarapa, a space that co-founder and actor Geetanjali describes not as an institution, but as an adda. "We never intended Jikni to be a theatrical debut," she says. "We wanted these children to learn and experience life, and to portray their lived experiences." Tarapa, she says, is a space where children play, read, encounter books and musical instruments, and participate in workshops that grow from curiosity, in an attempt to break the curriculum. It is open to people from all age groups to explore art, and this fluidity shapes Jikni profoundly.

Director, writer and composer Khot emphasises that nothing about Jikni was pre-designed. "It was always more



about the process and less about the outcome," she says. Songs emerged because the children liked a tune and the lyrics grew from their own experiences. "When they realised this was their song, they were so proud of themselves, so proud of owning something that was all theirs," she says. A song about the monsoon existed simply because the children described how they play when it rains, which then evolved into a tune. This is why the play never feels extractive. The children are not vessels for a message, nor are they performing someone else's idea of authenticity. As Wasimbari Maner, Associate Professor at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), observes, spaces like these offer an alternative to cultural monoliths, especially in a time of growing polarisation and rigid ideas of identity. "They help us find joy in everyday life," he says, adding that the linguistic "imperfections" were consciously preserved. Maner, an active member of Tarapa, was the moderator of the play's audience interaction segment. "No kid knew how to pronounce '?', and that is how we wanted to keep it. They don't need to know how to say it. This is not an attempt at cultural purity." Audience responses echo this sentiment. Veteran actor and the winner of the revered Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Dr Mohan Agashe's response spoke about a memory. Watching the children perform, he was reminded of dramatist and theatre director Badal Sircar. "I don't know if children today know about Badal Babu, but it is important to understand what theatre does," he said. Education, Agashe emphasised, does not reside only in books or formal instruction, but is also obtained through art and music. "Think of how a mother narrates a story to her child," he said. "This play has a similar impact. Plays like these are important to educate people in a way that stays with them." For Marathi theatre writer and director Shirang Godbole, the best part of the experience was its honesty. "What stayed with me was the authenticity," he said. "This is not a borrowed story. It is a lived experience." He insisted that Jikni should not be viewed as "just theatre" but as a window into Sonala village. Perhaps this is where Jikni leaves us — with a question rather than an answer. What happens when we stop asking marginalised voices to sound like us?

## Conspirator in sarpanch killing shot dead in encounter in Tarn Taran: DIG

A conspirator in the killing of AAP-backed sarpanch Jarmal Singh in Amritsar two days ago, who was also part of the module involved in plotting the murder of Congress block president Harman Sekhon in Tarn Taran, was shot dead in an encounter with a joint team of CIA staff and Anti-Gangster Task Force (AGTF) near Bhikhawind in Tarn Taran district on Tuesday, DIG (Border Range) Snehdeep Sharma said.

The DIG said the accused, Harnur, alias Noor, a resident of the Kathunangal area, was a close associate of foreign-based gangsters Prabh Dasuwal and Afridi. Sharma said, "Acting on a tip-off that Noor was travelling in the area astride a motorcycle, a CIA and AGTF joint team started following him. When our team intercepted him, the accused abandoned his motorcycle and opened fire at them." "During the crossfire, a bullet struck a police personnel, but he escaped unhurt due to his bulletproof jacket. However, Noor suffered serious injuries and was rushed to a hospital, but succumbed to his injuries," the DIG said, adding a pistol was seized from Noor's possession.

Sarpanch Jarmal Singh, a resident of Valthoa village in Tarn Taran district, was attending a wedding ceremony at Marigold Marriage Palace in Amritsar on Sunday when some unidentified assailants shot him dead from point-blank range, police said. According to eyewitnesses, the assailants, disguised as guests, attacked the sarpanch when he was eating. After a bullet struck him on his forehead, he fell on the table and was taken to a nearby hospital, but succumbed to his injuries, police said. The DIG said Noor was helping the module involved in plotting Sekhon's murder. Four suspects have already been arrested in the Sekhon murder case. "During their interrogation, it emerged that at the behest of foreign-based gangsters Donny Bal and Prabh Dasuwal, they had earlier planned to target Sekhon during the zila parishad elections held last year, but could not execute the plan," the DIG said.

The DIG said, "Noor was assisting those who conducted reconnaissance of Sekhon, while he himself did not take part in the plan." The DIG said, "Noor was assisting those who conducted reconnaissance of Sekhon, while he himself did not take part in the plan."

## From visa dreams to police complaints: Rs 74-crore immigration fraud money, 433 cheating cases, 232 fake firms traced in Chandigarh in 5 years



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

Dreams of going abroad have increasingly translated into police complaints in Chandigarh over the past five years, with official data of Chandigarh Police showing that between 2021 and 2025, as many as 433 cases of cheating related to immigration fraud were registered, involving an alleged amount of nearly Rs 74 crore. During this period, the police also traced the involvement of 232 fraudulent immigration firms, highlighting the rapid growth of illegal consultancies operating in the city. As per the police records, from 11 cases in 2021, the number rose to 36 in 2022 and 62 in 2023, before peaking at 194 cases in 2024. Though the number declined to 130 cases in 2025, the amount involved remained high, indicating that frauds were fewer but involved larger sums.

Year-wise data shows a sharp increase in the money allegedly involved in immigration fraud cases. While around Rs 1 crore was involved in 2021, the figure rose to Rs 4.93 crore in 2022 and Rs 7.77 crore in 2023. In 2024, the amount jumped to Rs 27.10 crore, followed by Rs 23.63 crore in 2025. Meanwhile, police action also intensified in parallel, leading to the arrest of accused which increased from 12 in 2021 to 32 in 2022, 41 in 2023, and 122 in 2024, before settling at 82 arrests in 2025. SSP Kanwardeep Kaur said the figures reflect only reported cases, with many complainants delaying approaching the police in the hope that agents would eventually fulfil their promises. "In several instances, people come to the police only after months of follow-up, by which time the firm has shut down or the accused has disappeared," added the SSP. The pattern has continued into the current year. On January 1, 2026, the Chandigarh Police registered an FIR at the Industrial Area police station under Section 318(4) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahiti and Section 24 of the Immigration Act. According to the FIR, the complainant alleged that an agent cheated him of Rs 18 lakh on the pretext of arranging a visa to go abroad. Police said the accused failed to fulfil the assurance and misappropriated the money. Investigation in the case is ongoing. As per the police, such complaints follow a recurring pattern — promises of guaranteed vi-

sas, repeated delays citing embassy or documentation issues, and eventual closure of offices. One of the most significant findings in the police data is the sharp rise in the number of firms involved in immigration fraud.

The records show that only four firms were identified in 2021, seven in 2022, 44 in 2023, 99 in 2024, and 78 in 2025, taking the total to 232 firms over five years. Most of these firms were found operating from prominent commercial locations, including sectors 17, 22, 34, 36, 37, 39 and 40, areas that house a large concentration of immigration consultancies, said a police official. These offices function openly from prime sectors, creating a perception of legitimacy. Many people assume that if an office exists in a commercial hub, it must be authorised, added the police official. As per information available on the Chandigarh Police website, as of now 441 immigration companies are registered with the UT Police. In contrast, police estimates suggest that more than 200 immigration firms are operating illegally in the city without mandatory permission from the UT Administration. In 2024 alone, the police identified 44 fraudulent firms and arrested around 100 owners and operators for running unauthorised immigration businesses.

Police probes have revealed a consistent modus operandi across cases. The complainants, largely young aspirants seeking overseas opportunities, were lured with promises of guaranteed visas, foreign job placements, or admissions to overseas institutions, particularly for destinations such as Canada, Australia and European countries. In many cases, individuals were cheated of amounts ranging from Rs 15 lakh to Rs 30 lakh, while there also have been instances where a single network duped dozens of people, an official involved in immigration fraud investigations said. Money was collected in cash or through bank transfers. Complainants were shown forged offer letters or incomplete documentation, while the process was deliberately delayed. Eventually, offices were shut, phones switched off, and the accused became untraceable, reveal police probes in multiple cases.

"They showed us success stories and documents that looked genuine, and said the visa was guaranteed. By the time we realised it was a fraud, the office had been shut," said Saurabh Sharma, one complainant, who had paid over Rs 3 lakh for a work visa. Another complainant, Rahul, who approached an agent in Sector 17, said repeated delays were used to buy time. "Every few weeks there was a new excuse — embassy delay, file pending, medical issue. When we finally demanded our money back, calls stopped coming through," he said. In response to the rising number of cases, the UT Police has launched a verification drive to identify unlicensed immigration agents operating in Chandigarh. SSP Kaur said registration details, office addresses, financial transactions and past complaints are being scrutinised. "Action will be taken under the Immigration

## Ex-kabaddi player murder: Kin refuse cremation till all accused held; one arrested, say police

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

Gagandeep Singh, 36, was shot dead near the Dana Mandi at Manuke village of Jagraon on Monday by a group of 10-12 assailants over his support to another kabaddi player, Ekam. As per the FIR, the rival group was led by one Gursewak Singh alias Mota from the same village. Gagandeep had reportedly stopped Gursewak and his aides from harassing Ekam, following which they killed him. Ekam received minor injuries. The assailants also reached near the victim's residence and announced to his family: "we have killed your boy, go and pick his body."

Gagandeep's killing was the fourth such incident in four days in Punjab. On Sunday, a sarpanch was killed at a wedding function in Amritsar. Prior to that, a Congress worker was shot dead at Bhinder Kalan in Moga on Saturday, while a woman was gunned down at her home in Kapurthala on Friday. Gagandeep's mother Gurmeet Kaur, on whose complaint an FIR has been lodged, said: "There's no question of cremating the body till all the accused are not arrested."

According to the FIR registered at Hathur police station, those booked include Gursewak Singh, Nikka Singh alias Gharu, Pardeep Das alias Pappa, Jaspal Singh Hansa — all from Manuke village — and Gurdeep Singh of Badhi Kalan, Moga, and their 7-8 unidentified accomplices. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Jagraon, Ankur Gupta said that multiple teams have been pressed into action and raids are being conducted to nab the accused. The car used in the crime has also been recovered. One of the accused was arrested Monday. Gurmeet Kaur said that on December 31, Gursewak Singh had attacked Ekam with swords to which Gagandeep had objected. She said that since then Gursewak started nursing a grudge against Gagandeep. She added that on Monday, Ekam and Gursewak again



had a tiff. She added that sometime later, she saw a group of men on bikes and a car rushing towards Dana Mandi where Gagandeep and Ekam were present. She said that the assailants opened an attack on his son Gagandeep and Ekam following which they ran towards fields. Soon Gursewak and Gurdeep opened fire at Gagandeep who collapsed on the ground and then the assailants kept thrashing him.

The FIR has been registered under the sections 103 (murder), 303 (2) (theft), 126 (2) (wrongful restraint), 351 (2) (criminal intimidation), 190 (unlawful assembly), 191 (3) (rioting) of BNS and 25/54/59 of Arms Act. Gagandeep's wife Navpreet Kaur said that her husband had stopped playing kabaddi but had been promoting Ekam. She said Gursewak and other were against Ekam playing kabaddi. In a statement, Ludhiana Rural SP (Investigation) Rajan Sharma said: "The incident was a fallout of old rivalry between both groups. One accused Gurdeep Singh of Badhi Kalan has been arrested and the car used in the crime has been seized. No link related to kabaddi tournaments or related issues has surfaced so far." The incident in Ludhiana came close on the heels of murder of a 30-year-old kabaddi player-cum-promoter Kanwar Digvijay Singh alias Rana Balachauria in Mohali last month.

## 'Demand since day one': Karnataka Govt says custodial interrogation of BJP MLA Byrathi Basavaraj necessary in Bikla Shiva murder case

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

The Karnataka Government Tuesday submitted before the High Court that the custodial interrogation of BJP MLA Byrathi Basavaraj in connection with the Bikla Shiva murder case is necessary, while also questioning the maintainability of his petition for anticipatory bail. Basavaraj is accused Number 5 in the murder case of real estate operative V G Shivaprakash, also known as Bikla Shiva, who was killed in front of his house in East Bengaluru in July last year.

The murder was allegedly carried out by a group at the direction of Jagadish alias Jaga, a local gangster who is alleged to have links with Byrathi Basavaraj. Jagadish, who is accused No 1 in the case, previously had disputes with Bikla Shiva related to the real estate business. On December 26, 2025, the Karnataka High Court granted interim anticipatory bail to the K R Puram MLA in the current petition.

"Since the petitioner had obtained protection from the coordinate bench of this court until 19 December,

considering the facts and circumstances of the case and conduct of investigation by the IO, at this stage without expressing any opinions on the merits of the case, it is just and proper to grant ad-interim till the disposal of the main petition," the court said then. Before this, the High Court had, in another petition, ruled that the Karnataka Control of Organised Crime Act (KCOCA) was inapplicable in the case against the Bharatiya Janata Party leader Basavaraj. During submissions Tuesday, the state counsel said, "That (custodial interrogation) has been the demand of the investigation since day one." While the government counsel also argued that proper notice of the petition had not been given to them for the hearing on December 26, Basavaraj's counsel said the Special Public Prosecutor for the matter was not in India at the time.

The bench orally questioned the haste to obtain bail on December 26, 2025, without further hearing the state's side, when Basavaraj was not arrested in the case. In the wake of submissions, the bench noted that the matter would have to be heard further on the merits. The bench set the next hearing in the Bikla Shiva murder case again on January 12.

## Protest over sale of PSPCL land, draft Electricity Amendment Bill



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

PSPCL Although the Centre has approved two 800-MW supercritical thermal units at the Ropar plant, the state government has yet to initiate the process. Continuing their agitation against the proposed sale of Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) land, the draft Electricity Amendment Bill 2025, and the demand for setting up two supercritical 800-MW units at the Ropar thermal plant under the state sector, the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of power sector employees, including engineers and pensioners, held a zonal-level protest dharna at the PSPCL Bathinda zone office on Tuesday. A large number of employees, engineers, pensioners and representatives of farmer unions participated in the protest. After the dharna, the protesters took out a march from the zonal office to the office of the Chief Engineer, Bathinda zone, as a mark of protest. Addressing the gathering, JAC leaders alleged that the Punjab government was planning to sell valuable land assets of PSPCL, calling the move highly imprudent. They claimed that most of the land had been acquired under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, for public purposes and should continue to be used for strengthening the power infrastructure.

The JAC said that in view of the rising power demand in the state, there was an urgent need to install

new substations and develop related infrastructure on these lands to ensure better services to consumers. They demanded that the proposed sale of PSPCL land be halted immediately and the assets be utilised for expanding PSPCL's activities instead of being handed over to real estate personnel. Some protesters also stated that Punjab urgently needed to enhance its generation capacity. Although the Centre has approved two 800-MW supercritical thermal units at the Ropar plant, the state government has yet to initiate the process. They demanded that the project be taken up on priority to reduce dependence on energy banking and make Punjab self-sufficient in the power sector.

The JAC also condemned the Centre's move to introduce the Electricity Amendment Bill 2025 which according to the employees is a way towards privatisation. Avtar Singh Kainth and Kuldeep Singh Udhoke of the Biji Mulazam Sangharshil Morcha, along with Kuldeep Singh Khanna of the Pensioners' Association, said that the Bill would pave the way for privatisation of power distribution, weaken the role of state governments and eliminate cross-subsidies. They warned that electricity tariffs would be determined on a 'cost-to-serve' basis, leading to higher power bills and adversely affecting poor households, farmers and low-income consumers. Ajaypal Singh Atwal, general secretary of JAC said that as per the agitation programme, the next zonal protest dharnas will be held on January 9 at Patiala, January 15 at Ludhiana and January 20 at Jalandhar. The joint protesters warned that if the state government and PSPCL management failed to take corrective steps, the agitation would be intensified, including a state-level dharna in front of the PSPCL headquarters at Patiala. Leaders of various farmer unions also addressed the gathering and extended support to the power sector employees. A chain hunger strike organised by PSEB Employees Federation has also been going on outside PSPCL headquarters at Patiala since January 1 on similar demands.

## After Dr Reddy's, Natco Pharma moves Delhi HC to revoke patent over semaglutide by Novo Nordisk in India

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

After Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Indian generic drug maker Natco Pharma has filed a fresh suit before the Delhi High Court seeking revocation of Danish pharma giant Novo Nordisk's patent over semaglutide, a medication used for managing Type-2 Diabetes. Novo Nordisk's patent is due to expire in March this year.

Justice Jyoti Singh of the High Court on Tuesday issued notice to Novo Nordisk seeking its response to Natco Pharma's suit and will hear the suit on February 5. Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) had moved the Delhi High Court last year under provisions of the Patents Act and the Commercial Courts Act seeking revocation of the Indian patent number 'IN 262697' granted in favour of Novo Nordisk. The suit by Natco Pharma comes on the heels of the Delhi HC's ruling last year in December, where it had come to a prima facie conclusion that DRL has put up a credible challenge to the validity of the patent over semaglutide held by Novo Nordisk in India.

DRL, which commenced manufacturing, was taken to court by Novo Nordisk, alleging infringement of its patent by the Indian firm. While the court has refused to explicitly restrain Indian drugmakers from manufacturing it in India, it has, however, restrained them from selling in India till the patent expires, leaving them with the option to export it to countries where Novo Nordisk does not hold a patent over the drug — such as in Canada. DRL, on the other hand, has further doubled down on the pharma giant and has sought that the patent granted to Novo Nordisk be revoked. Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, appearing for Natco Pharma, told the court on Tuesday that the firm is on a better footing than the other Indian drugmakers, since they have approached the court before commencing manufacturing. Notably, Novo Nordisk also has patent infringement suits pending at the Delhi HC against Alkem Laboratories, Sun Pharmaceuticals, and Zydus Lifesciences, along with DRL. Novo Nordisk's

semaglutide products are covered by two main Indian patents: Indian Patent No 275964 covers the composition of semaglutide itself, filed in March 2006 and expired in September 2024; Indian Patent No 262697, which covers specific formulations and delivery devices designed to improve stability and administration. It was filed in March 2007 and is scheduled to expire in March 2026. Novo Nordisk launched its blockbuster semaglutide drug, Ozempic, for Type-2 diabetes in India in December last year. The expiry of the basic composition patent in 2024 opened the door to potential generic development. In an Indian stock exchange filing in October 2025 by Natco Pharma, it was announced that its partner, Mylan Pharmaceuticals Inc, and Novo Nordisk had reached a confidential settlement in the US patent litigation over Ozempic (Semaglutide). Natco and Mylan are partnering on the development of generic Ozempic products. With Novo Nordisk's patent expiring soon, and Novo Nordisk launching its Ozempic last month, the latest suit by Natco Pharma only hints at the Indian drugmakers' race for getting a foot in the generic development of the drug. Apart from Type-2 diabetes, the semaglutide formulations have also been launched as a weight-loss drug in various jurisdictions globally and are now available as pills, apart from the injectables.

## Amid war of words with NCP, BJP says 'We expect allies to respect Savarkar'

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

In another instance of growing differences between the ruling Mahayati allies BJP and NCP amid the civic polls, the BJP on Tuesday said that its alliance partners should show reverence to Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar. Cabinet Minister and BJP leader Ashish Shelar said, "The BJP has always held V D Savarkar in the highest esteem. It wholeheartedly endorses the life and works of Savarkar. And we expect those who align with us to show the same respect towards Hindu ideologues."

In a veiled attack at Deputy CM Ajit Pawar-led NCP, he said, "If you come with us, we will work together. If you don't, we will still continue our work. If you oppose us, we will also oppose you. But our work will go on." Echoing similar sentiments, state BJP president Ravindra Chavan said, "We have always subscribed to Veer Savarkar's ideology. We have the highest reverence for the freedom fighter and Hindu ideologue. We expect those who join us to show the same reverence towards Savarkar." Responding to Shelar's remarks, NCP leader Armol Mitkari wondered how BJP can enforce its ideology on others in a coalition government.

Stating that the NCP is "committed to Shiv-Shahu-Phule-Ambedkar ideology," Mitkari posted on X, "Even if we don't accept the ideology which BJP wants us to do, it is a fact that BJP will have to accept our party's Ambedkarite ideology, even if it is unwillingly." Another senior NCP minister requesting anonymity said, "I wonder why BJP is thrusting Savarkar ideology on us. Post 2019 Assembly elections, when Devendra Fadnavis took early morning oath along with Ajit Pawar as deputy chief minister forming BJP-NCP alliance, where was their ideology? Again in July 2022, when Ajit Pawar-led NCP joined the BJP-Shiv Sena coalition, nobody in the BJP raised questions on ideology. They welcomed NCP with open arms. Post 2024 Assembly elections too, we formed the government in Maharashtra and pledged support to NDA at the Centre. Why did nobody raise the ideology issue, then?" Both BJP and NCP have been engaged in a



Amid civic polls in Maharashtra, tensions have surfaced within the Mahayati alliance as the BJP urged NCP leaders to show reverence to Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar.

ward of words after Ajit Pawar-led party united with Sharad Pawar's NCP(SP) for the civic polls. The NCP-NCP(SP) alliance will take on BJP in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad municipal corporations in Western Maharashtra. On its part, the BJP distanced itself from NCP in Brihamumbai Municipal Council polls citing the party's Mumbai poll incharge Nawab Malik's alleged involvement in a case linked to Dawood Ibrahim gang. Instead, BJP formed alliance with Shiv Sena led by Deputy CM Eknath Shinde in 14 out of 29 municipal corporations including Mumbai, Thane, Kalyan-Dombivali etc. Last week, during a poll campaign, Ajit Pawar had termed BJP a "corrupt party". The deputy CM also attacked the BJP saying, "I was accused of being involved in an Rs 70,000 cr irrigation scam. But has anything been proved? Look, today I am sitting next to those very people and sharing power in Maharashtra."

## Venezuela will 'turn over' up to 50 million barrels of oil to U.S., claims Trump



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

President Donald Trump has claimed that Venezuela's interim government would send 30 to 50 million barrels of oil to the United States, after Washington invaded the oil-rich South American country on January 3 and captured its President, Nicolas Maduro. "I am pleased to announce that the Interim Authorities in Venezuela will be turning over between 30 and 50 million barrels of high quality, sanctioned oil, to the United States of America," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post on Tuesday (January 6, 2026).

After capturing Mr. Maduro in a night-time attack, which according to American media killed at least 75 people, including 32 Cubans, Mr. Trump had said the U.S. would "run" Venezuela and that American oil companies would return to the country and make investments. Later, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the U.S. was not seeking to "govern" Venezuela but would enforce changes through economic sanctions and a naval quarantine, which is currently in place on oil tankers going in and coming out of Venezuela. In Tuesday's post, Mr. Trump said the oil sent by Venezuela would be sold at the market price and the proceeds would be controlled by him "to ensure it is used to benefit the people of Venezuela and the United States". But he did not say what would Venezuela would get in return or provide a timeline for shipping the oil.

## Economist Amartya Sen not required to attend SIR hearing over spelling error, says ECI



total Officers, asking for daily reports on the number of logical discrepancy notices served constituency-wise.

Earlier, during the first phase of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists, around 1.36 crore voters were found with data inconsistencies. After subsequent verification and corrections, the number has now come down to approximately 59 lakh voters under the logical discrepancy category. Another source in the poll body said that the Commission will now hold a meeting with Chief Electoral Officers of all States and Union Territories. "The emergency meeting, convened by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, is scheduled in New Delhi for January 8 at 10 a.m.," he said. Sources said the discussion is likely to focus on the ongoing SIR process, poll preparedness, and several law and order issues.

## Iran executes man convicted of spying for Israel's Mossad



Tehran: Iran executed a man convicted of spying for Israel's Mossad, state media reported Wednesday. The official IRNA news agency identified the man as Ali Ardestani, saying he relayed sensitive information to Mossad officers in return for financial rewards in the form of cryptocurrencies. The report said the man confessed to the spying charges and that he had hoped to receive a million-dollar reward as well as a British visa. It called Ardestani a "special operative force of Israel" and said he gave images and footage of "special places" to Mossad

## Protest-hit Iran warily watches US after its raid on Venezuela

Dubai: Iran faces a new round of protests challenging the country's theocracy, but it seems like the only thing people there want to talk about is half a world away: Venezuela. Since the US military seized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, a longtime ally of Tehran, over the weekend, Iranian state media headlines and officials have condemned the operation. In the streets and even in some official conversations, however, there's a growing question over whether a similar mission could target the Islamic Republic's top officials including the supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The paranoia feeds into wider worries among Iranians. Many fear that close US ally Israel will target Iran again as it did during the 12-day war it launched against Tehran in June. Israel killed a slew of top military officials and nuclear scientists, and the US bombed Iranian nuclear enrichment sites. Khamenei is believed to have gone into hiding for his protection. "God bless our leader, we should be careful too," said Saeed Seyyedi, a 57-

year-old teacher in Tehran, worried the US could act as it did in Venezuela. "The US has always been after plots against Iran, especially when issues like oil, Israel are part of the case. In addition, it can be complicated when it is mixed with the Russia-Ukraine war, the Lebanese (group) Hezbollah and drug accusations." The US long has accused the Iranian-backed Hezbollah of running drug-smuggling operations to fund its operations, including in Latin America, which the group denies. Immediately after Maduro's seizure, an analyst on Iranian state television claimed, without offering evidence, that the US and Israel had plans during the war last year to kidnap Iranian officials with a team of dual-national Iranians. Even for conspiracy-minded Iranian television, airing such a claim is unusual. Then on Sunday night, the prominent Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Javedan warned an audience at prayers in Tehran University that Khamenei's life was in danger. "Someone said he had a bad dream that the leader's life is in danger," Javedan said, without elaborating. "Please pray."

## Nick Reiner to be arraigned in killing of parents Rob and Michele Singer Reiner



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

Los Angeles: Nick Reiner is set to be arraigned and enter a plea Wednesday in the killing of his parents, Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner. His scheduled appearance in a Los Angeles Superior Court comes three and a half weeks after the beloved actor-director and his wife of 36 years were found dead with stab wounds in their home in the upscale Brentwood section of Los Angeles, authorities said.

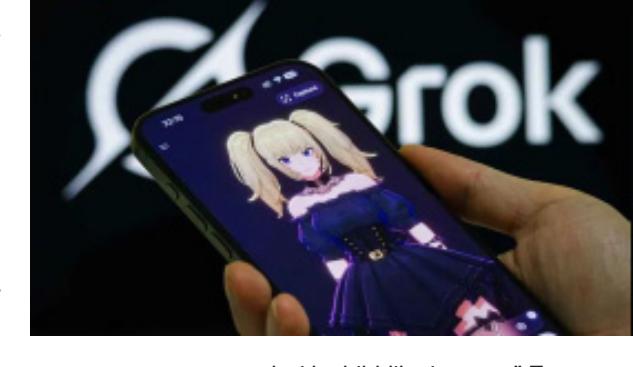
Nick Reiner, 32, the youngest of Rob Reiner's four children, was arrested hours later, and has been held without bail since. He was charged two days later with two counts of first-degree murder. He did not enter a plea during a brief first court appearance December 17, when he wore shackles and a suicide prevention smock. His attorney, Alan Jackson, has given no indication of the plans for his defense. Nearly all defendants in criminal cases plead not guilty at this stage. Jackson could also ask for another delay before a plea is entered.

If Nick Reiner pleads not guilty, the case would nor-

mally head toward a preliminary hearing to determine whether there is enough evidence for him to stand trial. His mental competence for trial could also be a factor. A decade ago, Nick Reiner publicly discussed his severe struggles with addiction and mental health after making a movie with his father, "Being Charlie", that was very loosely based on their lives. Rob Reiner, 78, and Michele Singer Reiner, 70, were killed early on the morning of December 14, and they were found in the late afternoon, authorities said. The LA County Medical Examiner said in initial findings that they died from "multiple sharp force injuries", but released no other details, and police have said nothing about possible motives.

Jackson is a high-profile defense attorney and former LA County prosecutor who represented Harvey Weinstein at his Los Angeles trial and Karen Read at her intensely followed trials in Massachusetts. After the initial Reiner hearing, Jackson called the case "a devastating tragedy". He said the proceedings will be very complex and asked that the circumstances be met "not with a rush to judgment". The counts against Reiner come with special circumstances of multiple murders and an allegation that he used a dangerous weapon, a knife. The additions could mean a greater sentence. Prosecutors have said they have not yet decided whether to seek the death penalty. The prosecution is being led by Deputy District Attorney Habib Balian, whose recent cases included the Menendez brothers' attempt at resentencing and the trial of Robert Durst. Rob Reiner was a prolific director whose work included some of the most memorable and endlessly watchable movies of the 1980s and '90s. His credits included "This is Spinal Tap", "Stand By Me", "A Few Good Men", and "When Harry Met Sally", during whose production he met Michele Singer, a photographer, and married her soon after.

## Musk's AI chatbot faces global backlash over sexualised images of women, children



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

London: Elon Musk's AI chatbot Grok is facing a backlash from governments around the world after a recent surge in sexualized images of women and children generated without consent by the artificial intelligence-powered tool. On Tuesday, Britain's top technology official demanded that Musk's social media platform X take urgent action while a Polish lawmaker cited it as a reason to enact digital safety laws. The European Union's executive arm has denounced Grok while officials and regulators in France, India, Malaysia and Brazil have condemned the platform and called for investigations. Rising alarm from disparate nations points to the nightmarish potential of nudification apps that use artificial intelligence to generate sexually explicit deepfake images. The problem emerged after the launch last year of Grok Imagine, an AI image generator that allows users to create videos and pictures by typing in text prompts. It includes a so-called "spicy mode" that can generate adult content.

It snowballed late last month when Grok, which is hosted on X, apparently began granting a large number of user requests to modify images posted by others. As of Tuesday, Grok users could still generate images of women using requests such as, "put her in a transparent bikini." The problem is amplified both because Musk pitches his chatbot as an edgier alternative to rivals with more safeguards, and because Grok's images are publicly visible, and can therefore be easily spread. Nonprofit group AI Forensics said in a report that it analyzed 20,000 images generated by Grok between December 25 and January 1 and found that 2 per cent depicted a person who appeared to be 18 or younger, including 30 of young or very young women or girls, in bikinis or transparent clothes.

Musk's artificial intelligence company, xAI, responded to a request for comment with the automated response, "Legacy Media Lies". However, X did not deny that the troublesome content generated through Grok exists. Yet it still claimed in a post on its Safety account, that it takes action against illegal content, including child sexual abuse material, "by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement as necessary." A growing list of countries are demanding that Musk does more to rein in explicit or abusive content. X must "urgently" deal with the problem, Technology Secretary Liz Kendall said Tuesday, adding that she supported additional scrutiny from the UK's communications regulator, Ofcom. Kendall said the content is "absolutely appalling, and unacceptable in decent society." Ofcom said Monday it has made "urgent contact" with X. The watchdog said it contacted both X and xAI to understand what steps it has taken to comply with British regulations.

A Polish lawmaker used Grok on Tuesday as a reason for national digital safety legislation that would beef up protections for minors and make it easier for authorities to remove content. In an online video, Włodzimierz Czarzasty, speaker of the parliament, said he wanted to make himself a target of Grok to highlight the problem, as well as appeal to Poland's president for support of the legislation. The bloc's executive arm is "well aware" that Grok is being used for "explicit sexual content with

some output generated with child-like images," European Commission spokesman Thomas Regnier said. "This is not spicy. This is illegal. This is appalling. This is disgusting. This is how we see it, and this has no place in Europe. This is not the first time that Grok is generating such output," he told reporters Monday.

The Paris prosecutor's office said it's widening an ongoing investigation of X to include sexually explicit deepfakes after officials received complaints from lawmakers. Three government ministers alerted prosecutors to "manifestly illegal content" generated by Grok and posted on X, according to a government statement last week. The government also flagged problems with country's communications regulator over possible breaches of the EU's Digital Services Act. The Indian government on Friday issued an ultimatum to X, demanding that it take down all "unlawful content" and take action against offending users. The country's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology also ordered the company to review Grok's "technical and governance framework" and file a report on actions taken.

The ministry accused Grok of "gross misuse" of AI and serious failures of its safeguards and enforcement by allowing the generation and sharing of "obscene images or videos of women in derogatory or vulgar manner in order to indecently denigrate them." The ministry warned failure to comply by the 72-hour deadline would expose the company to bigger legal problems, but the deadline passed with no public update from India.

The Malaysian communications watchdog said Saturday it was investigating X users who violated laws prohibiting spreading "grossly offensive, obscene or indecent content." The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission said it's also investigating online harms on X, and would summon a company representative. The watchdog said it took note of public complaints about X's AI tools being used to digitally manipulate "images of women and minors to produce indecent, grossly offensive, or otherwise harmful content." Lawmaker Erika Hilton said she reported Grok and X to the Brazilian federal public prosecutor's office and the country's data protection watchdog. In a social media post, she accused both of generating, then publishing sexualized images of women and children without consent. She said X's AI functions should be disabled until an investigation has been carried out.

## CIA turncoat Aldrich Ames, who sold US secrets to Soviets, dies in prison at 84



Washington: CIA turncoat Aldrich Ames, who betrayed Western intelligence assets to the Soviet Union and Russia in one of the most damaging intelligence breaches in US history, has died in a Maryland prison. He was 84. A spokesperson for the Bureau of Prisons confirmed Ames died on Monday.

Ames admitted being paid USD 2.5 million by Moscow for US secrets from 1985 until his arrest in 1994. He admitted disclosing the identities of 10 Russian officials and one East European who were spying for the United States or Great Britain. His betrayals are blamed for the executions of Western agents working behind the Iron Curtain and were a major setback to the CIA.

He pleaded guilty without a trial to espionage and tax evasion and was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Prosecutors said he deprived the United States of valuable intelligence material for years. He professed "profound shame and guilt" for "this betrayal of trust, done for the basest motives," money to pay debts. But he downplayed the damage he caused, telling the court he did not believe he had "noticeably damaged" the United States or "noticeably aided" Moscow. These spy wars are a sideshow which have had no real impact on our signifi-

cant security interests over the years," he told the court in a matter-of-fact tone. In a jailhouse interview with The Washington Post the day before he was sentenced, Ames said he was motivated to spy by "financial troubles, immediate and continuing".

# India's academic openness under strain



The recent denial of entry to noted Hindi scholar Francesca Orsini from the U.K., despite holding a valid visa, has brought to light the need for a more balanced and thoughtful approach to understanding and assessing the role of critical academic engagement, and to recognising the broader value of scholarly exchange both within and beyond India. It seems that a rather difficult situation is emerging for international scholars who have critically engaged with Indian society, politics, or history. Entering on a tourist visa and participating in academic events can expose them to procedural complications related to visa regulations, while applying for an academic visa may itself become challenging in light of their critical scholarly work. This places such scholars in a constrained position, limiting opportunities for academic exchange and dialogue. The long-term consequence of this paradox is clear: independent and critical voices from abroad will gradually be silenced, rendered rare, and eventually made invisible in India's academic landscape. This situation raises a fundamental question about the spirit of inclusiveness in Indian academia. Universities and research institutions have historically thrived on exchange, critique, and intellectual diversity. The presence of global scholars — sometimes sharply critical, sometimes sympathetic — has enriched debates, introduced new frameworks, and helped Indian academics situate their work in global conversations. In a democracy, criticism is not a threat; it is a sign of vitality. From anthropologists studying caste to historians revisiting colonial legacies and economists questioning policy orthodoxy, these critical engagements in Indian academia have helped refine national self-understanding. India's reputation as a vibrant democracy has never been undermined by such scholarship. On the contrary, it has been strengthened by the openness with which these voices were received and debated. It is important to recall that no government in India has ever fallen because of academic criticism. Universities and research programmes across the country have long demonstrated maturity in accommodating a spectrum of ideas, including those critical of state policies. Research funding agencies such as the UGC, ICSSR, ICHR, and DST have historically supported projects examining sensitive social and political questions without censorship or hostility.

## What are biomaterials and how do they work? | Explained



Biomaterials are materials derived wholly or partly from biological sources, or engineered using biological processes, that are designed to replace or interact with conventional materials. They are increasingly used across sectors such as packaging, textiles, construction, and healthcare. Common examples include bioplastics made from plant sugars or starch, bio-based fibres used in textiles, and medical biomaterials such as biodegradable sutures and tissue scaffolds. Biomaterials can be broadly categorised into three types: drop-in biomaterials, which are chemically identical to petroleum-based materials and can be used in existing manufacturing systems (such as bio-PET); drop-out biomaterials, which are chemically different and require new processing or end-of-life systems (such as polylactic acid or PLA); and novel biomaterials, which offer new properties not found in conventional materials, such as self-healing materials, bioactive implants, and advanced composites.

### Why does India need biomaterials?

For India, biomaterials address multiple goals, including environmental sustainability, industrial growth, revenue generation, and supporting farmer livelihoods through a single pathway. Indigenous biomaterials biomanufacturing can reduce India's heavy dependence on fossil-based imports for plastics, chemicals, and materials. It would also enable diversified value for agricultural feedstocks and residues, offering farmers new income streams beyond food markets. As global regulations and consumer preferences shift toward low-carbon and circular products, biomaterials position the Indian industry to remain competitive in export markets. Biomaterials also support domestic policy goals around waste reduction, such as the ban on single-use plastics and climate action goals.

### Where does India stand today?

India's biomaterials sector, spanning bioplastics, biopolymers, and bio-derived materials, is rapidly emerging as a strategic industrial and sustainability opportunity, with the bioplastics market alone valued at around \$500 million in 2024 and forecast to grow strongly through the decade. Balrampur Chini Mills planned PLA plant investment in Uttar Pradesh is one of the biggest investments in India. Domestic innovation includes startups like Phool.co, converting temple flower waste into biomaterials, and Praj Industries, who have their own demonstration-level bioplastics plant in progress. Although India has a rich agricultural base, in some sectors, there is foreign dependence for the technologies required for the transformation of feedstocks into market-ready final products.

### What are other countries doing?

The EU has moved to a single, binding Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (EU) 2025/40 (PPWR) that recognises that compostable packaging has demonstrable environmental benefits for specific applications. The UAE is positioning itself as a major manufacturing base via large-scale PLA investment. Emirates Biotech has selected Sulzer technology for a PLA plant planned in two phases of 80,000 tonnes/year each to begin operations in 2028. This would be the world's biggest PLA facility once it is fully operational. The U.S. is leading in a number of transformative technologies, securing it as a leader in biomaterials. A push for biomaterials comes through its federal purchasing power through the USDA's BioPreferred program. What is the way forward? India has an advantage in building a biomaterials industry, but some

issues would need to be addressed first. If feedstocks also do not scale with increased demand, there could be feedstock competition with food sources. Similarly, aggressive agricultural practices could lead to water stress and soil deterioration. Further, weak waste-management and composting infrastructure could undermine environmental benefits. Fragmented policy coordination across agriculture, environment, and industry may slow adoption, and failure to move quickly could leave India dependent on imports as other countries scale faster. To capitalise on this sector, policy actions include scaling biomanufacturing infrastructure (especially fermentation and polymerisation capacity), improving feedstock productivity for crops such as sugarcane, maize, and agricultural residues using emerging technologies, and investing in R&D and standards to develop both drop-in and novel biomaterials. Clear regulatory definitions, labelling norms, and end-of-life pathways (recycling or industrial composting) are essential to build consumer and industry confidence.

## health matters newsletter where health stands as the year begins

It's a new year, heralding new beginnings, hopes and aspirations. And on that note, let's begin with some good news: in line with the growing use of AI in medicine, the Health Ministry has said that an AI-powered tool, the Clinical Decision Support System is set to be deployed at various public and private hospitals. The tool will provide free digital assistance to doctors for faster, evidence-based decision-making, reports Bindu Shajan Perappadan. In a country where serpentine queues at government hospitals entail hours of waiting time, this may spell better outcomes for the future, albeit, if appropriate safeguards are in place, as with all things AI. Another move that may be of good news for public health but has raised protests in some quarters is the Finance Ministry's notification of new GST rates for tobacco products. Bidis have been moved to the 18% category from the now-defunct 28% slab. All other tobacco products have been moved to the 40% slab. These new rates will be effective from February 1, 2026, writes T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan. The government has stated that this is in line with global public health guidance. There is no doubt that tobacco is a major risk factor for non-communicable diseases, the burden of which India is reeling under. However, the Federation of All India Farmer Associations has said this move will hurt farmers' income and exacerbate smuggling in a market already grappling with illicit trade -- highlighting the need for reforms that take into account impacts on livelihoods while trying to safeguard public health. In re-

## Privatisation and policy gaps threaten India's public health system



The danger today is not only administrative. When international scholars with a critical perspective grow hesitant to apply for visas, when Indian researchers hesitate to engage with interrogative frameworks, and when conferences avoid certain topics to ensure permissions, academic life itself becomes impoverished. The loss is not merely institutional but intellectual and moral. Nations that have prized only conformity have rarely advanced in the long run, either in knowledge or in innovation. India, which has always projected itself as a civilisation rooted in dialogue, samvad, must not turn its back on this tradition. Furthermore, academic collaboration today operates in a deeply interconnected global environment. Research in areas such as digital culture, climate change, migration, artificial intelligence, and postcolonial theory cannot be meaningfully pursued in isolation. When certain scholars are denied access, entire research networks fragment. Students lose opportunities to interact with international peers; projects lose comparative depth; and the overall quality of scholarship declines. The effect is cumulative, slow but lasting. Inclusiveness in academia, hence, is not simply a matter of hospitality but of democratic responsibility. A confident democracy has nothing to fear from critique; in fact, it thrives on it. The most effective way to counter misunderstanding or misrepresentation is through open dialogue, not exclusion. The history of Indian scholarship offers numerous examples of such engagement. The work of sociologists, historians, and anthropologists, both Indian and foreign, has shaped global understanding of caste, gender, religion, and modernity. These studies have sometimes been uncomfortable for those in power but have helped India appear as an intellectually vibrant society fearless of bureaucratic scrutiny. This pluralism is a hallmark of democracy, and it has always coexisted with patriotic commitment. If it begins to appear that India is using visa restrictions as a means of selective control over academic engagement, the message sent to the world will be unfortunate: that India no longer welcomes the exchange of ideas unless they conform to official narratives. Over time, the space for independent thought would shrink, and universities would risk becoming echo chambers. What India needs instead is a renewed commitment to academic openness, a framework that differentiates between political subversion and intellectual dissent, that trusts scholars to engage in debate without ulterior motives, and that recognises the long-term benefits of a plural academic environment. It is not that there are no initiatives to promote international academic collaboration; the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) is a notable example of such efforts. However, for initiatives like GIAN to be truly meaningful, they must also create space for critical scholars to engage freely and thoughtfully with Indian academia, enriching dialogue through diverse and independent perspectives. To build a future-oriented, knowledge-driven society, India must invite all serious thinkers to participate in its academic life, irrespective of their critical positions.

The situation from the perspective of those providing care is equally worrisome. ASHA workers continue to struggle for their rights, and working conditions for healthcare workers in most public hospitals remain abysmal.

Privatisation further compounds the problem. With private equity increasingly driving India's private healthcare industry, doctors are now expected to meet monthly targets, much like in any profit-driven sector. Through schemes such as AB PMJAY and rampant public-private partnerships, public money is increasingly shunted to the private sector, further weakening the public health system. Privatisation has also impacted medical education. With most private medical colleges charging upwards of 40 lakhs for undergraduate medical training, doctors are forced to shift their focus from understanding and acting on the social causes of disease to earning enough to recover the massive investment of money and time required to become doctors. Additionally, the medical education system has reduced medical training to MCQ-solving, producing doctors who are more focused on memorising facts and cracking exams than acquiring real clinical skills that can save lives. Today, "just an MBBS" is seen as having little value, and doctors are expected to pursue fellowships even after post-graduation to secure respectable practice or employment.

As health and healthcare increasingly become expensive commodities, and the public health system continues to erode, the future of India's health looks deeply worrisome. While increased public health funding, greater investment in primary care, and regulation of privatisation are frequently discussed as solutions, these remain largely abstract ideas. Their implementation depends on those in power, who repeatedly display apathy at every opportunity. What, then, can save India's crumbling public health system?

Doctors as agents of changeDoctors occupy a unique position of power and trust in society, giving them an exceptional capacity to drive social change. They are among the few professionals who witness, firsthand and daily, how policy decisions translate into human suffering: how poverty becomes malnutrition, how unsafe roads become trauma, how weak regulation becomes cancer, kidney failure, or tuberculosis. This proximity to suffering grants doctors moral authority that few other groups possess. Their voices carry credibility across social classes, in courts, in the media, and in policymaking spaces, precisely because they speak from lived clinical experience rather than abstract ideology. The idea that the physician's responsibility extends beyond the clinic is not new. To undergraduate students in India, Rudolf Virchow, a German pathologist, is known primarily for his contribution to cell theory and the foundations of modern pathology. However, Virchow's role as a revolutionary physician is rarely discussed.

In 1848, he helped start Medical Reform, a weekly newspaper that promoted the idea that "medicine is a social science" and that "the physician is the natural attorney of the poor." He argued that disease was not merely a biological event but a political and social outcome shaped by poverty, poor housing, hunger, lack of education, and exclusion from power. Virchow did not limit these ideas to academic writing. Convincing that lasting improvements in health required structural change, he entered active politics. In 1861, he co-founded the German Progressive Party and was elected to the Prussian Diet, where he emerged as a leading constitutional opponent of Otto von Bismarck's authoritarian and militaristic policies.

Virchow consistently argued that state resources should be directed away from military expansion and toward sanitation, housing, education, and public health infrastructure. For him, these were not welfare measures but essential medical interventions.

His political engagement continued in the German Reichstag from 1880 to 1893, where he advocated for urban sanitation systems, clean water supply, public education, and scientific freedom. Virchow used legislative spaces to translate epidemiological observations into policy, insisting that physicians had a duty to confront the social conditions that produced illness. By stepping beyond hospitals and laboratories into newspapers, parliaments, and public debate, Virchow exemplified the physician not as a passive technician, but as an active agent of social change.

In 1985, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, recognising how physicians mobilised their scientific authority and moral credibility to challenge nuclear proliferation and frame it as an existential public health threat. Their work demonstrated how medical knowledge could be deployed to confront global political violence and reframe security debates around human survival and health. Similarly, doctors have played visible roles in struggles against oppressive political systems. During the apartheid era in South Africa, physicians organised to expose racial discrimination in healthcare, document abuses, and challenge the medical establishment's complicity with state violence. Groups of doctors openly opposed apartheid policies, asserting that neutrality in the face of injustice was incompatible with medical ethics. India, too, has its own history of physicians as social reformers. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy stands out as a powerful example, a doctor who used her medical training to challenge deeply entrenched social injustices. As one of India's first women doctors and legislators, she fought against child marriage, devadasi practices, and the exclusion of women from education and public life. Her work illustrates how medical authority can be leveraged to advance gender justice, social reform, and public welfare far beyond the clinic. Together, these examples underline a critical point: the physician's role has never been confined to diagnosis and treatment alone. Across history and geographies, doctors have stepped into public life to confront injustice, authoritarianism, and structural violence, affirming Virchow's enduring claim that medicine is inseparable from social change, and that physicians, by virtue of their work, are uniquely positioned to act as its agents. Political accountability is high time doctors in India began questioning why their outpatient departments are increasingly crowded with patients presenting at advanced stages of disease; why the medicines they prescribe are unaffordable for most; and why, when affordable, those treatments are often ineffective.

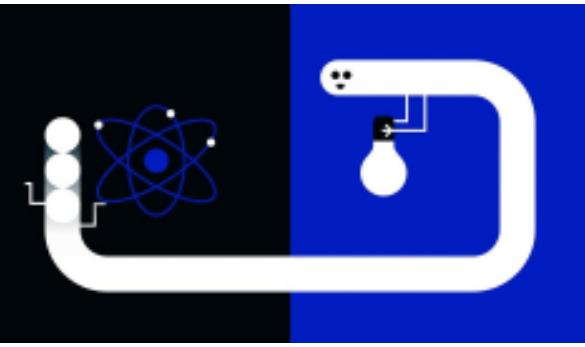
Oncologists must ask why tobacco and alcohol continue to be aggressively promoted through surrogate advertising, why smokeless tobacco has become more affordable rather than less, why patients in India lack access to newer and potentially life-saving cancer therapies, and why so much suffering remains normalised. Trauma surgeons must confront why road traffic injuries are rising in India. Nephrologists must ask why the number of people requiring dialysis is rising so rapidly, and why access to dialysis remains so limited. Obstetricians must question why anaemia continues to be a major and persistent problem among pregnant women. Pulmonologists must ask why we have failed to eliminate tuberculosis despite decades of sustained effort and resources. Following these questions inevitably leads to the same conclusions: policy failure, either because effective policies do not exist or because existing policies remain confined to paper and are never meaningfully implemented. These answers also point to persistent complacency, and often complicity, among those in power. They lead us to multiple "industries" that prioritise profit over people's health, often enabled, protected, or even actively supported by the state.

India's health system can be compared to a bucket whose job is to contain suffering and keep the floor dry. Today, that bucket is overflowing, yet most of our attention is focused on finding better and more sophisticated mops to manage the spill. These mops, our diagnostic and treatment modalities, are themselves often flawed, while the flooding continues to worsen because of the holes in the bucket: public-private partnerships, unchecked privatisation, and chronic underfunding of public healthcare. Meanwhile, few are willing to look upstream at the tap and ask the more uncomfortable questions: Who benefits from the tap being left open? How can it be closed? Who is responsible for closing it, and why are they not doing so? Doctors must help shift the focus to the tap, even as they continue to question the tools used to keep the floor dry. Doctors not only have the power to drive social change; they also carry a moral responsibility to stand up for the rights of those who suffer, the very people who entrusted them with their bodies and made it possible for them to become doctors in the first place.

migrant communities as those faced with multiple challenges when fighting tuberculosis. With India battling to eliminate TB, the report is a reminder of where challenges lie, both for patients and frontline workers. The second development is the Health Ministry's ban on oral formulation of nimesulide above 100mg in immediate release form, citing serious risks to health. Nimesulide is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug used for its pain-relieving, anti-inflammatory, and fever-reducing effects. Moving on to research on health that has made headlines this week: mental health has taken centre-stage. In worrying but not surprising news, the Indian Psychiatric Society has expressed deep concern over the persistently high mental health treatment gap in India, noting that nearly 80-85% of individuals suffering from psychiatric disorders do not receive timely or appropriate care.

The burden in India is huge; access to care remains dismal and this is a gap that urgently needs closing. Research continues to bear out the importance of this: older adults who are frail and have depression could be at a higher risk of dementia, with the factors combined contributing to 17 per cent of the overall risk, according to a study from China; while another study from Saudi Arabia found that insomnia or anxiety could be linked to fewer number of immune cells, potentially resulting in a less effective immune system.

# The curious history of how quantum mechanics came to be 'seen' in an electrical circuit



the junction depends directly on the sine of that phase difference, which is what Josephson expressed in his formula:  $I = I_c \sin(\phi)$ , where  $\phi$  is the angle expressing the phase difference. Imagine two synchronised dancers performing the same steps. If they move perfectly in sync (no phase difference), they look like one. If one dancer is slightly ahead of the other, that offset (their phase difference) creates visible interference in their motion. Similarly, when the superconductors' phases differ, that offset drives a beat between them, producing a current even when no voltage is applied.

Josephson also predicted that if a voltage were applied, the current would oscillate at a specific frequency proportional to that voltage. He also said that if the setup were illuminated with microwaves of that frequency, there should be a measurable voltage across the barrier. When other researchers quickly confirmed these predictions, this Josephson effect became a cornerstone of quantum electronics. In 1972, the BCS theory won the Nobel Prize for physics, and Josephson followed the next year with the prize for his work. To visualise the Josephson effect, imagine two reservoirs of water separated by a thin glass wall. Classically, no water should cross it. But in the quantum world, waves associated with the molecules on either side can interfere and create a small but steady leak through the wall. The Josephson junction — which is a sandwich of two superconductors and an insulator — is the electrical version of this improbable leak. The supercurrent doesn't arise from a push, or voltage, but from the coherence of the quantum waves themselves. 'Coherence' here means the ability of the system to maintain its quantum character. And because of this coherence, a Josephson junction can behave like a single quantum entity, even though it consists of trillions of electrons. In the quantum world, waves associated with the molecules on either side of this reservoir can interfere and create a small but steady leak through the wall. In the quantum world, waves associated with the molecules on either side of this reservoir can interfere and create a small but steady leak through the wall. | Photo Credit: Image created with ChatGPT 5

The next great leap on this chain was that of the British-American physicist Anthony Leggett. By the late 1970s, physicists knew Josephson junctions behaved in ways consistent with quantum theory, but there also remained a deeper conceptual question: could an entire macroscopic variable, such as the current flowing in a circuit, obey the laws of quantum mechanics as if it were a microscopic particle? Leggett, then a young theorist with a background in superfluid helium, recognised that the Josephson junction offered the ideal testing ground. He proposed treating the phase difference between the two superconductors (remember: a collective property involving trillions of electrons) as a single parameter moving in an energy landscape. In his model, the system resembled a marble trapped in a valley between two hills. The marble represented the phase difference; the hills represented energy barriers determined by the junction's current and capacitance. If the marble had enough energy, it could roll over the hill, corresponding to the junction switching from a zero-voltage state to one with a finite voltage. But even without enough energy, quantum mechanics allows the marble to tunnel through the hill, appearing on the other side without having to go over the top. Leggett predicted that at a sufficiently low temperature, when there wasn't enough heat in the system to push it over the energy barrier, a macroscopic variable of the system could tunnel through — and that this could be observed as a small current that's independent of the temperature. His work did more than

propose a radical idea: it set down specific conditions in which macroscopic quantum effects could survive the destructive influence of the environment. He analysed how frictional losses and electromagnetic noise (together known as dissipation and decoherence) would discourage quantum tunnelling, and showed how to design circuits that would minimise effects. In other words, his theory showed a way to use the Josephson junction to test the limits of quantum mechanics. Among those who took up the challenge were Clarke, Devoret, and Martinis. They developed exquisitely clean Josephson junctions and cooled them to fractions of a degree above absolute zero. By biasing the junction with a steadily increasing current, they could watch for the point at which it switched into a finite voltage state.

At high temperatures, the switch occurred at random currents determined by thermal fluctuations: i.e. the hotter the sample, the more easily it could jump over the barrier, instead of opting to tunnel through. But as they lowered the temperature, something remarkable happened. Below a certain point, the temperature no longer mattered: the junction continued to switch with a small but steady probability, exactly as Leggett's model predicted. This escape rate also stopped following the classical thermal pattern and instead settled into a pattern only quantum mechanics could explain. In effect, the trio had caught a macroscopic system tunnelling through an energy barrier. To strengthen their case, the three then turned to spectroscopy. If the phase variable truly behaved like a quantum particle, it would have to have discrete energy levels. They followed Josephson's prediction and shone microwaves of specific frequencies on the circuit, and found that it absorbed energy only when the frequency matched the gap between energy levels. This was clear evidence of energy quantisation in a macroscopic object. The superconducting qubit

In two papers in 1981 and 1985, they described the observation of macroscopic quantum tunnelling and quantised energy levels, both in a single Josephson junction — a result that built directly on Josephson's discovery and Leggett's theory. Over the next few decades, as physicists developed materials more suited to these tests and advanced techniques that could make finer measurements, they were able to confirm these effects with ever greater precision. Eventually, the experiments became the foundation of today's quantum computers. Or as Michael Schirber of Physics Magazine put it: "The work thrust open the field of superconducting circuits, which have become one of the promising platforms for future quantum computing devices." At the heart of these computers is the superconducting qubit, which is a device that works by harnessing the same quantum behaviour seen in Josephson junctions. A qubit is the basic unit of information in a quantum computer. Unlike a classical bit, which can be either 0 or 1, a qubit can exist in a superposition: part 0 and part 1 at the same time.

This allows quantum computers to explore many possibilities simultaneously, making them powerful for solving problems that are too complex for classical computers. Each of these qubits consists of a circuit of the sort the laureates used. By virtue of behaving like a quantum particle, a variable of the macroscopic circuit — e.g. the phase difference — would essay the role of the qubit, while the large size of the circuit would make it easy for an operator to manipulate and measure it. Leggett has often reflected that while quantum mechanics appears universal, there may still be limits imposed by environmental factors, and that probing those limits is as important as building devices that exploit them.

## Searching for George in Chennai's George Town

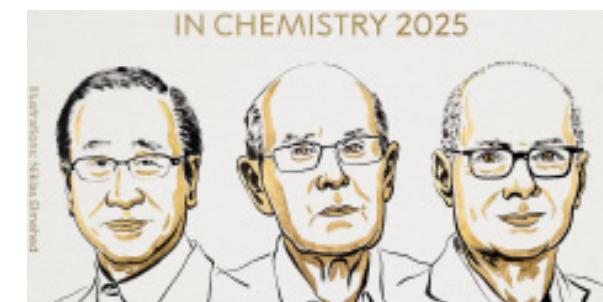


Last week, I went to George Town after a considerable hiatus. Walking there, always a challenge, becomes more so for me, as practically every nook and cranny is a lesson in history. The area is also, sadly, a perfect instance of how not to maintain a heritage precinct. For all that we are repeatedly told that we need to look to Singapore as our role model, in my view, it should be Galle in Sri Lanka or George Town in Malaysia that we need to look to for what can be done with our George Town.

I was also much saddened by the many familiar landmarks that seem to have vanished to make way for tasteless commercial buildings and high rises in an area that can scarcely accommodate any further congestion. I wonder who is responsible for giving permissions for such buildings. But then, as a Commissioner of the Greater Chennai Corporation famously told the High Court of Madras a few years ago, 90% of buildings in George Town are in violation of some code or the other. So perhaps, nobody is really in charge. The Corporation seems to have added to the chaos in recent times. For a century and more, the rear of the Flower Bazaar police station had a triangle with a statue of King George V in its midst. The statue itself was funded by the Govindoss Chaturbujadoss family, wealthy Gujarati magnates of George Town and among the financiers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills when they were begun in the 1860s. The statue's sponsor was Kushaldoss Chaturbujadoss "on behalf of the citizens of Madras." The sculptor was Sir Bertram Mackennal. Of Australian origin, he was something of a specialist on George V memorabilia, designing statues, stamps, and coinage.

The statue was erected here in 1913, ostensibly to commemorate the coronation of the King Emperor in 1911 in the grand durbar in Delhi and also to mark the change of name from Black to George Town, which was done in 1905, when as Prince of Wales he visited Madras. A deputation of citizens waited upon the Prince, and requested that Black Town be so renamed. That is then the history of the statue. Now, I am not so sold on the idea of statues commemorating anyone, leave alone colonial rulers and officials. But if we have decided to retain the statue, we may as well give it some space to breathe and enable passersby to take a look at it. That is how the statue was all along, though its pedestal was put to a variety of not-so-complimentary uses. But in the last few months, some bright spark in the Corporation decided to put up a series of shops all around the statue. These, despite a plaque marking the inauguration of the complex, seem to have not been allotted to anyone and are all shuttered. The alleys between the shops are so narrow that they have become convenient rubbish dumps and open latrines, and the stench is unbearable. The poorly-designed warren of shops is for evicted hawkers from the NSC Bose Road footpaths — an ongoing battle since the 1950s, with the late Traffic Ramaswami being the most memorable crusader. They may never serve to rid the area of hawkers, but they have managed to completely hide old King George.

## Trio win Chemistry Nobel 2025 for metal-organic frameworks



The Nobel Prize in Chemistry is being awarded to Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson and Omar M. Yaghi "for the development of metal-organic frameworks." The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced "The Nobel Prize laureates in chemistry 2025 have created molecular constructions with large spaces through which gases and other chemicals can flow. These constructions, metal-organic frameworks, can be used to harvest water from desert air, capture carbon dioxide, store toxic gases or catalyse chemical reactions."

In 1989, Richard Robson tested utilising the inherent properties of atoms in a new way by combining positively charged copper ions with a four-armed molecule; this had a chemical group that was attracted to copper ions at the end of each arm. Though the molecular construction had potential, it was unstable and collapsed easily. However, Susumu Kitagawa and Omar Yaghi provided this building method with a firm foundation. Kitagawa showed that gases can flow in and out of the constructions and predicted that MOFs could be made flexible. Yaghi created a very stable MOF and showed that it can be modified using rational design, giving it new and desirable properties.

The 2024 Nobel Prize for chemistry was shared by David Baker "for computational protein design" along with Dennis Hassabis and John Jumper "for protein structure prediction." Nobel Prize announcements kicked off on Monday (October 6, 2025) with the Prize for Physiology or Medicine. Three scientists - Mary E. Brunkow, Fred Ramsdell, and Shimon Sakaguchi shared the Medicine Nobel for identifying the immune system's security guards, regulatory T cells. Physics Nobel, announced on Tuesday (October 7),

## How do woodpeckers protect their brains?

First things first, why do they constantly knock their heads against wood? Knocking one's knuckles against wood is understandable, since it's considered a source of good luck. But woodpeckers don't have knuckles, so do they use their bills as a substitute? Not really. The birds hold the ability to peck wood 20 times per second. Through this, they dig for food and create shelters. However, while these are considered to be the reasons, there is one that holds even more depth. Scientists at Brown University, after considerable research, came up with the hypothesis that woodpeckers hold a form of 'gene expression' within them that was similar to what was found in a songbird's mind. But while a songbird's gene expression enables it to attract mates through its tweeting, that of a woodpecker allows it to do the same through pecking and drumming of wood. It's like a Morse code for birds! With over 200 species of woodpeckers spread across the world, each bird pecks with a different rhythm and altering speeds based on what they are trying to communicate.

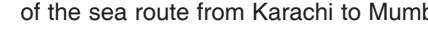
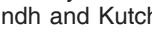
A tongue of a taleThey say the tongue is one of the strongest muscles in the human body. But when it comes to the tongue of a woodpecker, well, there lies a whole new realm of fascination. The bird has an extremely long and sticky tongue that it uses for extracting and consuming insects within the holes in the wood drummed by its bill. The surface of their tongues is covered with barbs that help in catching their prey. But hold on! There's one more incredible usage of this tongue, and that is protecting the skull of the bird. The total length of the tongue is one-third of the woodpecker's body length. But how does it protect the skull? To understand the importance, we need to take a closer look at the anatomy of the bird's skull. The tongue is so long that it wraps around the skull, thus protecting it from the impact and cushioning the brain. How? Well, think of the woodpecker's tongue as an elongated piece of bubble wrap. When the muscles surrounding the bird's tongue-bone contract, it causes the long tongue to hold the woodpecker's spine and skull in place as it constantly drums into the tree. And it isn't just the tongue that provides the bird with protection, but there are also soft bones that lie at the front and back of the skull that spread out the area of the shock generated. A bike ride of inspirationWhat is the main thing that innovators have learned from the anatomy of a woodpecker's skull? That would be the concept of shock absorption. The woodpecker is nature's inspirational living creation that showcases the science of cushioning impact. A concept that serves as a major asset for innovation, since it is an ability that can protect objects from breaking and people from sustaining fatal injuries. One prominent invention inspired by the woodpecker would be industrial designer Anirudha Surabhi's 'Kranium'.

## Timeline of the India-Pakistan dispute over a 96-km long creek



Story so far: "Any aggression by Pakistan in the Sir Creek area will be met with a resounding response that will change both history and geography," warned Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on October 2, 2025. Celebrating Vijayadashami with the troops stationed in the Indian Air Force (IAF) base in Bhuj, Mr. Singh cautioned Islamabad against any misadventures in the 96-km-long strip of water bodies i.e. an estuary, which has been under dispute since 1914. The two nations have been recalibrating their naval strategies since India launched Operation Sindo in May 2025, hitting terror and military sites inside Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Focus on the strategically significant Sir Creek has renewed since then, as experts believe Pakistan has a 'perceived military edge' in that region. Originally known as 'Ban Ganga', the 96-km estuary flowing into the Arabian Sea, separating Rann of Kutch in Gujarat's western border from Pakistan's Sindh Province in its southwestern border, was named 'Sir Creek' after a British representative during the colonial years. The marshlands in Sir Creek is the largest fishing grounds in Asia and is home to untapped petroleum, minerals, oil and gas reserves. Apart from the economic and strategic significance of the creek, the water body is ecologically sensitive. India and Pakistan have laid claims to the Territorial Sea, Exclusive Economic Zone, and Continental Shelf in Sir Creek. During the British Raj, Rann of Kutch fell under the Princely State of Kutch while Sind came under Bombay Presidency — directly under British administration. In 1908, the Kutch Darbar and the Sind administration laid disputes claims on a small sector in the western portion of Rann. However, the dispute was settled by the British administration after its Bombay government passed a resolution on February 24, 1914, delineating the borders between the two Provinces.

Depicted via a green line on a British-approved map, the resolution awarded the entire Kori Creek, which lies to the west of the Rann of Kutch to the Kutch Darbar and the entire Sir Creek to Sind i.e. Bombay Presidency. Post-partition, Kutch became a part of India, while Sind Province fell under Pakistan. This reignited the border issue, now between two sovereign nations — making it an international dispute from an interstate issue under the British Raj. Pakistan claims that the borders between Kutch and Sind lies on the eastern bank of Sir Creek i.e. the green line connecting the mouth and top of Sir Creek as mentioned in Paragraph 9 of the resolution. However, India claims that in Paragraph 10 clarifies that the adopted line extends from the top of Sir Creek, east to where it joins Sind — depicted in blue dotted lines. It also states that as Sir Creek changes its course over time, the western boundary should be taken as the 'centre of the navigable channel of Sir Creek'. India claims that this effectively make the river's course the boundary between Sindh and Kutch.



## India's trade deficit with FTA countries widening; electronics exports stand out performer: Niti Aayog



ics supply chains, the Niti Aayog said. The widening of the trade deficit was driven by a contraction in exports to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.

India has been in talks with ASEAN to re-negotiate the terms of the trade agreement; however, India and ASEAN missed the end of 2025 deadline. However, in October last year, ASEAN and China signed an upgraded free-trade agreement. India's shipments to FTA countries contracted as exports to ASEAN, the largest FTA export partners fell by 16.9 per cent, while Malaysia (-39.7 per cent), Singapore (-3.2 per cent), and Australia (-10.9 per cent) also witnessed sharp declines. UAE, India's second-largest FTA export destination, saw a modest 2.1 per cent dip, whereas exports to South Korea (15.6 per cent), Japan (2.8 per cent), Thailand (2.9 per cent), and Bhutan (10.2 per cent) recorded marginal gains, the report said.

Meanwhile, India's share of imports from its top seven markets – China, UAE, Russia, USA increased, contributing around 43 per cent of total imports in Q1 FY26 from 39 per cent in Q1 FY25, amounting to \$76.7 bn. In Q1 FY26, India recorded significant y-o-y import growth, with notable increases from the UAE (28.7 per cent), China (16.3 per cent), the USA (16.9 per cent) and Singapore (14 per cent). However, import growth declined with Iraq (-13.3 per cent), Russia (-8.7 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (-8.50 per cent). The report pointed out that gold compounds and petroleum primarily drove rising imports from the UAE. Gold compounds, which were previously not imported from the UAE, have now made the UAE one of the top import sources, surpassing Japan, which was previously the leading supplier. Imports of petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals have also increased sharply. "From China, the surge was concentrated in the 'other' subcategories under HS 85, particularly codes 851779 (circuit boards-parts) and 854239 (electronic integrated circuits-other). In the case of Iraq, while imports of petroleum oils declined, imports of mineral fuels in gaseous form and petroleum

At a time when India is accelerating free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations to diversify exports and soften the impact of US tariffs, a Niti Aayog report has said that India's trade deficit with its FTA partner countries is rising sharply, but exports from sunrise industries such as electronics are growing their foothold globally.

The Niti Aayog's 'Trade Watch Quarterly' report released Tuesday said India's trade deficit with FTA partners rose 59.2 per cent between April and June last year compared to the previous year as imports jumped by 10 per cent to \$65.3 billion and exports declined by 9 per cent to \$38.7 billion. India has concluded FTAs with Oman, New Zealand and the UK in 2025 and is in active negotiations with the EU, the US, Australia, Bahrain, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Canada and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). New Delhi is also considering a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Brazil and Israel.

However, the report said that India's export performance during the period shows clear structural divergence, with a sharp decline in petroleum exports but a strong surge in electronics exports. Electronics emerged as the standout performer, rising 47 per cent year-on-year, increasing its share to over 11 per cent of total exports, reflecting deeper integration into global electron-

## Institutional investments in Indian real estate hit all-time high of \$8.47 bn in 2025: Report



record capital deployment in the last quarter. The October-December quarter of 2025 alone witnessed investments of \$4.2 billion, the highest ever recorded in any quarter, indicating strong tailwinds for the sector. Office assets continued to attract the bulk of investments, accounting for 54 per cent of annual inflows. The Indian office market drew \$4.5 billion in 2025, nearly double the level seen in 2024, backed by strong Grade A space uptake across major markets. The final quarter alone contributed nearly two-thirds of annual office investments. The residential segment followed with \$1.6 billion in inflows, posting a 36 per cent year-on-year growth and accounting for 18 per cent of total investments. Colliers attributed the momentum to favourable demographics, rising income levels and increased developer expansion into Tier II cities through joint-venture platforms, attracting both domestic and foreign investors.

Mixed-use, retail and alternative assets also saw healthy traction, collectively attracting about \$1.5 billion, or nearly 17 per cent of total investments in 2025. Investor appetite in these segments continues to be driven by portfolio diversification and rising focus on demand-led assets such as data centres, co-living spaces and second homes.

"Investment traction is supported by strong operational performance and consecutive record-breaking Grade A office space uptake over the past three to four years. With over 370 million sq ft of existing office stock having the potential to be included in future REITs, we expect a greater degree of institutionalisation and consolidation, supported by cross-border capital flows in the coming years," Colliers said. Of the \$2.3 billion invested through multi-city transactions in 2025, over 40 per cent was directed towards residential assets, reflecting growing investor interest in early-stage residential projects and expansion into newer markets, including emerging Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Looking ahead, institutional investments are expected to strengthen further, supported by expanding domestic capital, improving global risk appetite and India's strong economic fundamentals. "Core income-generating assets — particularly offices, industrial and logistics parks, and the residential segment — will remain priority areas for investors in 2026," said Badal Yagnik, CEO and MD, Colliers India.

## Gold, silver prices surge as US-Venezuela conflict boosts safe-haven appeal

Gold and silver prices rose over 1 per cent on Monday as escalating geopolitical tensions following a US strike in Venezuela that led to the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, drove investors towards safe-haven precious metals. Spot gold prices rose 1.03 per cent while silver climbed nearly 1.07 per cent. The gold (999 purity) ended at Rs 1,36,168 per 10 gram on Monday, compared to the previous closing of Rs 1,34,782 per 10 gram, according to the India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA). Silver (999 purity) closed at Rs 2,37,063 per kilogram on Monday, compared to a close of Rs 2,34,550 per kg on January 2, as per IBJA. On Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold price for February futures rose 1.28 per cent to Rs 1,37,499 per 10 gram. Silver for March futures jumped 2.83 per cent to Rs 24,000 per kg compared to previous close to Rs 23,316 a kg. It surged around 6 per cent in intraday trades. In global markets, spot gold advanced 2 per cent to around \$4,415 per ounce, while spot silver surged \$75.19 per ounce. Venezuela is now the hotbed of disruption and given the developments over the weekend it is interesting to conjecture what can happen in the markets. Gold and silver have gained which is again expected as they tend to react to any disturbance," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda. Venezuela's share in total oil supplies is less than 1 per cent and there are sanctions here too though some exports are channelled to China. Out of a total of around 105 mn barrels a day, their production is less than a million. However, known reserves are the highest in the world which can be the

attraction for the USA, he said. "The US's increasingly assertive foreign policy, even if designed to encourage 'peace through strength', will heighten geopolitical risk in 2026," according to a report by BMI, a unit of Fitch Solutions. "The ousting of Maduro will heighten concerns in Iran in particular, given that Trump has threatened strikes in defence of Iranian protesters — a threat we regard as credible; the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua are also likely to come under greater pressure," the report said. "Silver prices are trading close to all-time highs due to strong industrial and investment demand, ongoing supply concerns, and global geopolitical tensions," said Satish Dondapati, VP & fund manager, Kotak Mutual Fund. "Recent price swings in silver were mainly caused by higher margin requirements announced by the CME and China's silver export restrictions by January 1."

Stress hormones released during anxiety make the heart beat faster and narrow blood vessels, leading to a sudden rise in BP. "At home, people are relaxed, so readings often come out normal. While white coat hypertension is not always dangerous, it should not be ignored, as some people may later develop true high BP," stressed Dr Gupta. Worrying about test results, dealing with unfamiliar surroundings, or recalling past health experiences can activate stress hormones, elucidated Dr Sangoi. "These hormones temporarily narrow blood vessels and increase heart rate, leading to a short-term spike in blood pressure," he told *indianexpress.com*.

## Meet the recently discovered superbug named after an iconic Star Wars villain



The deep sea, with its strange and unusual animals, never stops amusing scientists. One of the latest discoveries is a giant sea bug called Bathynomus vaderi, found in the cold waters near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. The marine creature has been particularly popular among the fans of the Star Wars franchise, because of its iconic colloquial name! The angular-headed bug is being called the Darth Vader superbug, thanks to its striking similarity to the iconic villain's helmet. Its large, triangular, and widely spaced compound eyes, as well as the facial features, further add to the resemblance.

The superbug belongs to a genus of giant isopods called Bathynomus, which live in deep, chilly waters. This new species is impressively large, weighing over 2.2

pounds (1 kilogram) and growing up to 12.8 inches (32.5 centimetres) long. Besides its Darth Vader-like appearance, the species has a unique narrowing and slight backward curve at the last segment of its back legs, which distinguishes it from typical isopods. It was first identified in 2022, when a group of scientists examined samples collected by local fishers in Vietnam from the South China Sea. The fishermen fetched these bottom feeders from extremely dark depths of the sea. The researchers noted several features that set it apart from other giant isopods, including a distinct hip bone depression and a specialised bony ridge on its coracoid. These differences confirmed it as a completely new species.

Studying supergiant isopods like *B. vaderi* is challenging because they live in deep-sea environments that are hard to reach. Most discoveries happen when fishers bring specimens up or through special deep-sea expeditions. Every new find, however, helps scientists understand deep-sea life and the unique adaptations of these remarkable creatures. Unfortunately, *Bathynomus* species have recently become a popular delicacy in Vietnam, beating the original seafood staple, lobster, which is usually very pricy. While this growing demand is turning these sea bugs into a valuable seafood product, it also increases fishing pressures, which could threaten the species. This calls for a conscious effort to keep the species protected. May the force be with them!

## As Deepinder Goyal generates buzz with 'Temple' device on forehead, experts advise caution: 'The biggest worry is that...'

Deepinder Goyal's recent appearance on a podcast drew public attention and sparked curiosity, as he was seen wearing a small device — named Temple — fixed near the temple region of the head. According to several reports, the experimental wearable health gadget, developed by a private research initiative backed by the Zomato founder and CEO, continuously measures brain oxygenation, which indirectly reflects blood flow to the brain when the person is upright and moving, or sitting for long durations. According to Goyal, the core idea is "Gravity Ageing Hypothesis", which aims to track minute fluctuations in cerebral blood flow and oxygenation, generating real-time data that could help researchers understand how posture, activity and lifestyle affect brain health over time.

Goyal has mentioned previously that he has been wearing the device for nearly a year as part of ongoing testing. Notably, the device is not currently available for sale; it is only positioned as a research prototype, not a medical product. Given the ongoing research, experts on social media have cautioned against relying on what you see.

Taking a dig at the device's "0 scientific standing", Dr Suvrankar Datta, an AI researcher and radiologist from AIIMS Delhi, wrote on X, "As a physician-scientist and one of the earliest researchers in India in Arterial Stiffness and Pulse Wave Velocity (2017) which predicts cardiovascular mortality, I can assure you that this device currently has 0 scientific standing as a useful device and do not waste your hard-earned money to buy fancy toys billionaires can afford to waste money on. If you are one, then go ahead." Celebrity nutritionist Ryan Fernando had a more watered-down response to many of the queries he received about the gadget's viability. "Some say it is still based on hypothesis, some say there are no large-scale reviews yet. What I think is that any brain health tech must grow through serious credibility checks and testing before strong claims are made. But if it is safe and time-tested, then I genuinely do welcome innovation in the brain health space," he said in a post on Instagram.

Taking a cue from the varied responses, we turned to neurological experts for a better understanding. Dr Sudhir Kumar, a consultant neurologist at Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad, explained that the device worn on Goyal's temple is based on near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS). "It uses light to estimate changes in brain oxy-

genation, which indirectly reflects cerebral blood flow, but does not measure blood flow directly. There is some scientific backing, mainly in research, anaesthesia, and ICU settings. However, in real-world use, readings are influenced by scalp blood flow and motion, limiting accuracy. These devices are not diagnostic," said Dr Kumar. Dr Sheetal Goyal, consultant neurologist at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, said that in clinical neurology, changes in blood flow are studied in conditions such as stroke, dementia, and traumatic brain injury, always using validated imaging tools in controlled settings.

According to Dr Kumar, in clinical neurology, there are "robust and validated tools, such as Transcranial Doppler, CT perfusion, and MRI angiogram, that provide far more accurate and actionable information on cerebral blood flow." For healthy individuals, there is no current medical need to monitor cerebral blood flow. The brain has strong autoregulation, and routine monitoring does not improve health outcomes. At present, such wearables are better viewed as experimental or wellness gadgets, not medical devices," said Dr Kumar. Concurring, Dr Goyal said that even if some data is collected, there is currently no evidence that monitoring blood flow through a consumer device improves cognition, mental clarity, or emotional regulation. "The biggest worry is that people may misunderstand the information. They might think the device is diagnosing or improving brain health, but it hasn't been tested for medical use," emphasised Dr Dinesh Pimpale, consultant neurologist, KIMS Hospitals, Thane. They may find future niche roles in research or high-risk environments, but they do not add value to routine clinical practice today, Dr Kumar said. Simple, proven methods enough sleep, regular exercise, mental stimulation, managing stress, and getting timely medical advice are much more effective than relying on unverified devices," said Dr Pimpale.

## Why your blood pressure may be normal at home but high at the doctor's clinic

Is it common for blood pressure (BP) to be normal at home but high when checked at a clinic? Yes, said Dr Rahul Gupta, director and cardiologist at Gleneagles Hospital, Parel, adding that it is called 'white coat hypertension'. Adding that it usually happens because people feel anxious, stressed, or nervous during a hospital visit, Dr Gupta continued: "Even the fear of medical tests, waiting rooms, or seeing a doctor can temporarily raise BP levels. In some cases, rushing to the clinic, climbing stairs, lack of sleep, caffeine intake, or talking during the BP check can also cause higher readings." Agreeing, Dr Parin Sangoi, consultant interventional cardiologist at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, said that unrecognised high blood pressure can quietly harm the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes over time, but that unnecessary treatment can be avoided when readings are understood correctly.

Why does it happen?

Stress hormones released during anxiety make the heart beat faster and narrow blood vessels, leading to a sudden rise in BP. "At home, people are relaxed, so readings often come out normal. While white coat hypertension is not always dangerous, it should not be ignored, as some people may later develop true high BP," stressed Dr Gupta. Worrying about test results, dealing with unfamiliar surroundings, or recalling past health experiences can activate stress hormones, elucidated Dr Sangoi. "These hormones temporarily narrow blood vessels and increase heart rate, leading to a short-term spike in blood pressure," he told *indianexpress.com*.

What should you do?

Stress can influence BP readings. "Check BP at home regularly using a reliable digital monitor. Sit calmly for 5 minutes before taking the measurements and note the readings. Avoid tea, coffee, smoking, or exercise 30 minutes before a BP check. Sharing home BP records with your doctor helps in the correct diagnosis," said Dr Gupta. In some cases, doctors may suggest 24-hour ambulatory BP monitoring. Managing stress, exercising regu-



larly, eating less salt, and sleeping well also help keep BP under control. Dr Gupta advised keeping track of the readings and showing them to the doctor, who will decide on the appropriate treatment and avoid prescribing unnecessary medication. "Follow the guidelines given by the doctor and keep the BP within the normal range," said Dr Gupta.

## Centre plans Aadhaar-style ID for EV batteries for traceability

New Delhi: The road transport ministry has proposed a new system to give electric vehicle batteries a unique identification number, similar to Aadhaar, to improve tracking, safety and recycling. The move is aimed at ensuring complete traceability of batteries from manufacturing to final disposal. Under the draft guidelines issued by the ministry, every battery producer or importer will be required to assign a 21-character Battery Pack Aadhaar Number, or BPAN, to each battery introduced in the market or used for self-consumption. Companies will also have to upload all relevant battery data on an official BPAN portal.

## Bangladesh leaves door open, might travel to India for T20 World Cup



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

While the ICC hasn't made any official comment on the issue, it is understood that they held an internal meeting on Tuesday and then conveyed their decision to Bangladesh (BCB) While the ICC hasn't made any official comment on the issue, it is understood that they held an internal meeting on Tuesday and then conveyed their decision to Bangladesh (BCB)

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has denied the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) request to shift its upcoming T20 World Cup matches from India to Bangladesh. The Indian Express understands that during a virtual meeting with BCB officials late on Tuesday evening, the ICC said there are no inputs of security threats to any of the teams and that Bangladesh must play in India as per the Members Playing Agreement (MPA). It is understood that the BCB has sought time, and the ball is now in their court. The ICC, as things stand, is not coming up with any alternate schedule and a final decision is expected to be taken on Saturday. However, all things point to the BCB eventually agreeing to play its matches in India as per the original schedule. Although the ICC is yet to respond officially, the BCB acknowledged receiving a response from the world body. "The BCB has received a response from the ICC regarding the Board's expressed concerns over the safety and security of the Bangladesh National Cricket Team in India for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, including the request for relocation of the team's matches. In its communication, the ICC has reiterated its commitment to ensuring the full and uninterrupted participation of the Bangladesh team in the tournament. The ICC has conveyed its willingness to work closely with the BCB to address the concerns raised and has assured that the Board's inputs will be welcomed and duly considered as part of the detailed security planning for the event," the BCB said in a statement on Wednesday.

On Sunday, a day after the BCCI ejected Mustafizur Rahman from the Indian Premier League (IPL), the BCB responded by putting in a formal request to the ICC asking for their World Cup matches in Kolkata and Mumbai

to be moved to Sri Lanka, who are the co-hosts. "As far as the ICC goes, there is no security threat in India, and the ICC has communicated this to the BCB. The ICC hasn't received any inputs which say the security of the Bangladesh team is at risk in India. Under these circumstances, there is no reason to tweak the schedule and move the matches. There is very little time left. The BCB has been reminded of the MPA, and they have to decide now," sources in the know told

With the ICC standing firm, the BCB seems to have read the writing on the wall. As the world body has clearly stated that there are no security threats, the only option at the moment for Bangladesh is to seek clearance from its government to travel for the tournament. "The Board will continue constructive engagement with the ICC and relevant event authorities in a cooperative and professional manner to arrive at an affordable and practical solution that ensures the smooth and successful participation of the team in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026. The BCB remains firmly committed to placing the highest priority on the safety, security and well-being of the Bangladesh National Cricket Team," the BCB said.

With the BCB taking a step back, full clarity is expected by the weekend. But the ICC seems to have informed the BCB that while it is open to discussions in the coming days, it won't wait beyond Saturday. It is understood that the Bangladesh cricket body would have discussions with its government, which has taken a hard stand on the issue.

Hours before the BCB put in a request to move the matches away from India, Asif Nazrul, the advisor for Youth and Sports in the Mohammad Yunus-led interim government in Bangladesh, wrote on his Facebook page: "We won't stand for any insult to Bangladesh's cricket, cricketers and the country. The days of slavery are over. The Board should make it clear that where a Bangladeshi cricketer cannot play in India despite (being) contracted, the entire Bangladeshi cricket team cannot feel safe going to the World Cup. I have also instructed the board (BCB) to request its matches be held in Sri Lanka." Reports emerging from Bangladesh suggested that the ICC has informed the BCB that if they don't send the team to India, they have to forfeit the points. However, such a scenario seems far-fetched at this stage, as in the case of Bangladesh refusing to turn up, a different team will be called in. The BCB declined to have been given such ultimatums. "The BCB has also taken note of certain reports published in a section of the media suggesting that the Board has been issued an ultimatum in this regard. The BCB categorically states that such claims are completely false, unfounded and do not reflect the nature or content of the communication received from the ICC," it said. From the moment the Bangladesh government reacted strongly to Mustafizur's expulsion from the IPL, the BCB was left with no choice but to make a request to move the matches away from India.

## England's Jacob Bethell becomes youngest batter since 2006 to record Ashes century

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

England batter Jacob Bethell made a statement hundred in the team's final innings of a gruelling Ashes 2025-26 tour at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday, becoming one of the youngest ever to record a ton in the iconic rivalry. Taking over the No. 3 spot from the out-of-form Ollie Pope, Bethell bettered his previous best of 96 to record his maiden Test century in 162 balls, reaching the landmark with a slog through wide long-on.

Aged 22 years and 78 days, the southpaw became the second youngest batter to record an Ashes hundred in the 21st century, only behind former England captain who cracked a century at Perth in 2006 at 21 years and 357 days of age. With the No. 3 woes protracting in this series after Pope failed to record a fifty-plus score in six successive innings, Bethell was drafted in for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne, where he returned scores of 1 and 40. The ongoing Test is the fifth for Bethell at the position. His century also made him the first England No. 3 in 14 years since Jonathan Trott to slam an Ashes century. Former skipper Michael Vaughan and Mark Butcher are the only other batters who have scored a century from No. 3 in the Ashes since 2001.

During the Melbourne Test, Bethell had credited his IPL stint with the Royal Challengers Bengaluru for helping him handle the pressure of an Ashes debut. With Bethell chipping in with a handy 40, England chased down 175 on the second day of the Test to record their first win on Australian shores after more than 14 years.



They snapped an 18-match winless run on Australian soil. "I was pretty nervous. Not so much with the people, just the occasion, I guess. But I've played over in India where it feels like there's 160,000 people watching. This atmosphere was incredible and it was nice to get a win and contribute," he was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "The IPL, I only played two games but every game and every occasion... Definitely, just knowing what I'm able to get out of myself when the situation is like that and when the atmosphere is like that. I definitely had a lot more confidence coming into this game after playing in front of, I don't know, 50,000 – which felt like 100,000 – at the Chinnaswamy." Bethell played just two games for RCB in the last edition that the franchise won for the first time in 17 years, producing a 55 off 33 against Chennai Super Kings in the second match at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

## Ashes: 'I think he's someone that has to be persisted with. He's someone that..'

Michael Hussey on Cameron Green

With a tally of 149 runs at an average of 21.28 in the ongoing Ashes so far along with a total of four wickets at an average of 60.75, Australian all-rounder Cameron Green has not had a fine run in the series for the hosts. Green, who made his test debut for Australia in 2020, is currently ranked 17th in the list of ICC Test all-rounders and former Australian batsman Michael Hussey believes that Green should learn for this series and should be persisted with by the Australian team management.

"I think he'll actually learn a lot from this series, learn a lot about himself as a person, learn a lot about himself about his game. It'll build his resilience. I think he's someone that has to be persisted with. He's someone that can bat in the top six. He can bowl high-quality overs. This series hasn't gone his way. Some of it to his own mistakes, but some of it, things just don't go your way. And sometimes that happens in cricket, happens in a Test series. He's had a tough series here and he will have learned a lot. We'll see the benefits of that in the next, I think we've got 20 Test matches coming up in the next couple of years, we'll see the benefits of that in those games," Hussey told Fox Sports.

Green, who had created history last month by becoming the most expensive overseas player in IPL history in the IPL 2026 Auction with Kolkata Knight Riders buying him for Rs 25.50 crore, has averaged 21.82 in his last eight Tests prior to Sydney Test with the bat including a half-century. The all-rounder has a highest score of 45 runs in the ongoing Ashes series and has taken a total of four wickets without taking in excess of one wicket in

an innings this series. In the Sydney Test, Green played a 64-ball knock of 37 runs during Australia's first innings total of 518 for 7 at the end of the third day's play. Green's bowling lacked consistency with him giving away 85 runs while taking one wicket in his spell of 18 overs during England's first innings. While Australian team-management also picked up all-rounder Beau Webster for the Sydney Test with the 32-year-old all-rounder currently batting on 452 runs at the end of the third day's play, former Australia captain Mark Waugh believes Green has more potential than Webster but Green needs to start performing. "He's a great talent. We know that. He's capable of getting a hundred and getting a 'five fa'. He's probably in the genuine all-rounder class when he's fit. But like anybody, you just don't give him a spot in the team. You've got to perform and he would know that. He'll get a bit more leeway than most players because he's young and he's got talent. They see him as the number one all-rounder and I think that's right. If you're comparing Webster and Green, I'm taking Green over Webster. Although Webster's done well, I think Green's got more potential to get a hundred and take a 'five fa'. I see him ahead of Webster, but he's got to start performing. I suppose the other thing in Green's favour is that the batting order is not very settled... now that Khawaja's just gone. There's not a lot of people putting their hands up. There's spots to be filled already without getting rid of Cameron Green, so that's probably in his favour as well." Waugh told Fox Sports.

## Malaysia Open badminton: PV Sindhu turns up heat after slow start to overcome Sung Shuo Yun in season-opener



GNS News Agency, Jan 8

By a strange quirk of fate, PV Sindhu was drawn to face Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun to start her season for the second calendar year in a row. Back in 2025, it was at the India Open, where Sindhu had returned to training only a few days prior after her brief break for off-season wedding festivities. She was off to a flying start, but was pushed to her limits in the second game. This time around, Sindhu was returning to court after a long time away from action, having ended her 2025 season early due to injury. So when she trailed 1-7 at the start of the match, there were signs of rustiness. Sindhu, however, shook off the rust quickly and turned up the heat on Sung, showing shades of her best attacking game and also defensive solidity when pushed around, coming through 21-13, 22-20 in 51 minutes at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday.

Carrying on from her good start, there was a 22-shot rally won by Sung for 8-4. But at this point, it felt like Sindhu was getting into a decent groove in terms of movement and shot quality, even though she lost that point. And it proved so as the Indian killed off the next two points quickly with her power. A couple of whipped forehand smash down-the-line winners made it 9-9 and by then it was evident Sindhu was starting to dictate the tempo and not being reactive. A measure of Sindhu's rhythm is how well she hits the round-the-head forehand crosscourt

## Ian Nepomniachtchi's top 20 exit shows Russian chess is down, but it's not checkmated yet

GNS News Agency, Jan 8

A month after Ian Nepomniachtchi exited the FIDE World Cup kicking and screaming at one thing or another, he made another departure, this one much quieter. Nepo, a two-time world championship contender, exited the ranks of the world's top 20 chess players in the FIDE ratings list published in the final month of 2025. This meant that for the first time since FIDE started publishing ratings lists from July 1971, there was no Russian chess player in the top 20 in the world.

Not having a Russian among the world's top players in chess is akin to having the Brazil football team failing to qualify for a FIFA World Cup. A once-powerful chess empire — a country that, in its previous iteration as the Soviet Union, produced world champions like Mikhail Botvinnik, Vasily Smyslov, Mikhail Tal, Tigran Petrosian, Boris Spassky, Anatoly Karpov, Anatoly Karpov and Vladimir Kramnik like they were being produced on a conveyor belt — is now searching for its next champion. Garry Kasparov, who has a claim on being recognised as one of the greatest chess players in history, once explained how the Soviet Union was able to churn out the world's best players in a row.

"In the Soviet Union, chess was treated by the authorities as a very important and useful ideological tool to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of the Soviet communist regime over the decadent West," Kasparov said on the 'Conversations with Bill Crystal' show in 2016. "We had millions of kids going through these networks in the country where there were very few options available for talented kids — business was not an option, politics was not an option, the law was not an option, and every parent tried to look for some opportunities for their kids, and chess was one of them. Music, ballet, some kind of science, sports in general, so that's why Soviet authorities could channel this huge mass of potentially talented kids into this chess network." Ian Nepomniachtchi Russia Chess Nepo, a two-time world championship contender, exited the ranks of the world's top 20 chess players in the FIDE ratings list published in the final month of 2025. (Picture Credit: Michal Walusza/FIDE)

That chess network is running on fumes these days as other chess empires emerge in nations like China, USA, India and Uzbekistan. The signs of Russia's fading imprint on the global chessboard had been visible for a while. In July last year, for the first time in FIDE ratings history, no Russian found a spot in the top 10 after Nepo slipped out. The 2024 World Chess Championship in Singapore was a duel between a Chinese grandmaster and an Indian teenager. World championships were once all-Soviet affairs. But over the past decade and half, the era of Magnus Carlsen and the age of Indian prodigies has coincided with Russians finding themselves on the periphery — a notion that would be impossible to imagine only a few decades ago when the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, but the chess czars shaped by the regime were still soldiering on.

"Russia is not the Soviet Union. It's a fraction (of what the Soviet Union was)," five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand, who spent the prime of his career battling Karpov, Kasparov and Kramnik, had said in an Express Adda interview in 2024 when asked about the reasons behind Russian chess' shrinking influence. "Of course, computers also came along and made all the training advantages that the Soviets had built up kind of irrelevant very fast. When the country broke down, a lot of Soviet chess players immigrated to other countries and started coaching there, so they passed it on."

It must, however, be noted that Russian chess might be down on the canvas, but it's most definitely not out cold. 54 Years Russian dominance ends: First time since July 1971 no Russian in world's top 20. Despite the 35-year-old Nepo not being anywhere close to sneaking into this year's Candidates (an event that will be held to handpick a challenger to Gukesh at the next world championship), there will be some Russian representation in the form of Andrey Esipenko, who has an outside chance of winning. The women's Candidates tournament, which will be held at the same time as the Open event in Cyprus,

will have two Russians in the eight-player mix, Katerina Lagno and Aleksandra Goryachkina. Lagno and Goryachkina had also combined forces in November to help the Russian team, playing under the FIDE flag, win the 2025 Women's World Team Chess Championships in Linares. This year, the Russian teams seem poised to make a comeback to playing under the national flag and other national insignia, three years after FIDE banned Russian symbols from competitions due to the invasion of Ukraine.

And while there are no Russian grandmasters in the top 20 in the open section, the women's ratings list has three Russians in the top 10, with Polina Shuvalova joining Lagno and Goryachkina. The juniors sections too have Russians in the top 10 with Anna Shukhman (second in the world among girls), Volodar Murzin (third in the world among boys) and Aleksey Grebnev (world no 8 in juniors) being the players that the country can hope to carry on its legacy in the sport. At the recently-concluded FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championship, Goryachkina also won the Women's World Rapid title while in the open section Russian grandmaster Vladislav Artemiev took silver at the World Rapid event.

## Four Associate players to watch at ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2026

Hyderabad: The ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup has acted as the platform in which many greats of the game launched their careers, and the class of 2026 will be out to do the same.

Of the 16 teams taking part in the 16th edition of the tournament, four are ICC Associate Members, and here are four players to look out for, according to ICC Media release on Wednesday. The 17-year-old is one of three brothers in the Japan squad, joined by siblings Gabriel and Montgomery.

Charles has represented Japan's senior team and made headlines in November when he took six wickets for four for Northern Suburbs during an Australian U17 grade clash against Western Suburbs in Queensland, helping dismiss the opposition for just seven. Hara-Hinze had scored 99 earlier in the match. A bowling all-rounder, he lists his favourite cricketer as Ravi Jadeja. Manu Saraswat produced a series of eye-catching performances during the Europe Qualifier as Scotland reached the U19 Men's World Cup for the 11th time. The all-rounder made two stylish unbeaten fifties, marshalling the chases during his side's wins over Sweden and Jersey. Figures of four for 43, also against Jersey, were his best of the Qualifier while his three for 43 against the Netherlands, in what was essentially a winner-takes-all clash, proved crucial in helping Scotland defend 237 and earn their place in Zimbabwe and Namibia. Laksh Bakrania is an impressive slow left-arm who is more than capable of chipping in with the bat too. Since making his T20I debut in 2024 against Mali, the 18-year-old has picked up 20 wickets in 16 appearances, with career best figures of four for six against Cameroon.

## 'Abhishek Bachchan dies in Delhi 6': Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra says 'India hasn't evolved' to accept film's original cut



This version, he says, opens with the death of the film's protagonist, Abhishek Bachchan. "The original film opens with the ashes immersion of Abhishek's character in the Ganges. And over that, a voiceover comes, in Abhishek's voice, saying, 'These are my ashes.' That's how the story begins, and in the very opening frame you are told that your hero is dead." Mehra continued: "That's the original version. I still have it with me. That's the one that went to the Venice Film Festival. They saw the film, they freaked out, they said 'wow,' and they gave it a lovely reception out there. And that's why I call it the Venice cut, or the director's cut. And Variety, the film magazine, gave it a front page, calling it '(un)Bollywood'." Abhishek Bachchan In the version of the film that was released, Abhishek Bachchan's character survives, and the narrative concludes with a decidedly optimistic ending.

On why he changed the ending for the Indian release, Mehra admitted: "Out of foolishness. Sheer foolishness. We filmmakers are foolish people, mad, foolish, all of that. I think there was so much dark humour in the film. There was so much going on that everybody who saw the cut said, 'Leave it with some hope,' and all that. And I fell for it. I shouldn't have." Asked if he plans to release the original director's cut someday, especially at a time when older classics are being re-released, Mehra remained uncertain: "I don't know, I really don't. If I were to re-release, I still feel the time isn't right. I still feel the nation hasn't evolved; in fact, we have gone down the hole in many ways. Of course, we have progressed in many ways as well, but I don't know how to define that progress."

## 'Aamir Khan uses half a vanity van, comes half hour early, takes care of his entourage,' says Vir Das

Vir Das is reuniting with Aamir Khan Productions 15 years after Abhinay Deo's 2011 hit action comedy *Delhi Belly*. This time, he plays the titular role as well as turns director with the spy comedy, *Happy Patel: Khatarnak Jasoos*, which he's co-directed with Kavi Shastri. Aamir not only serves as the producer, but also pops up for a cameo in the film.

"We're like we're going to shoot with Aamir last because we really want to have our sh\*t together and have a tight-functioning unit," said Vir. "You're imagining the day he comes on set, three more vanity vans will be required. Aamir Khan comes half an hour early and uses half a double-door vanity van, with an entourage that he takes care of," added Vir.

He confessed that once Aamir did his first shot of *Happy Patel*, Vir and Kavi had to pause for 30 seconds after calling cut only because they couldn't believe they were directing Aamir Khan. "You're trying very hard to fanboy. You also realize, in that moment, that some people just have this magical, ethereal thing that they bring on to the screen, which you can see in real time. You've shot with the entire cast, including yourself, who do not have that thing (laughs)," Vir said on a podcast on Hook's YouTube channel. "We improvised with him on an insane level with our suggestions. And he was just super secure," revealed Vir. *Happy Patel: Khatarnak Jasoos* also stars Mithila Palkar, Mona Singh, Sharib Hashmi and Shrushti Tawade, along with another cameo by Vir's *Delhi Belly* co-star Imran Khan, who returns to the big screen 11 years after Nikkhil Advani's 2015 romantic comedy *Katti Batti*. Vir had reached out to Aamir with the script of the film, proposing to co-direct with Kavi, immediately after he won an International Emmy Award for his Netflix stand-up special *Vir Das: Landing* in 2023. He claimed that nobody else could back his quirky, offbeat spy comedy besides Aamir. *Happy Patel: Khatarnak Jasoos* is slated to release in cinemas on January 16.

Vir's testimony shows that Aamir leads by example on set. Last year, on the podcast *Game Changers*, Aamir had slammed younger stars for burdening their films' budgets with excessive entourage demands on set. He said, "These stars are earning in crores and yet not capable of paying for their needs? I find this extremely strange. It is very sad and harmful for the industry. I am saying it strongly that it's a shame that even today, there are actors who

are being very unfair to their producers and their films. When you can afford a lifestyle for yourself, why are you putting that on a producer? Why should the producer give you six vans when all you need is one van for makeup?"



A lot of film industry members, including seasoned producers, have flagged their concerns regarding escalating entourage costs on film sets these days. Filmmaker Sanjay Gupta said on the *Cyrus Says* podcast last year, "I know certain actors who have six vanity vans. It's mandatory." These include one each for personal space, hair and makeup, taking meetings, workout, dining, and staff. "Workout van means he'll bring his trainer, his assistant, the driver of the van, and the maintenance man of the van. That's six people for one van. Then, makeup and hair and the stylists have their own assistants," he added. He even pointed out that star couples are "worse" because they demand double the number of vans and entourage costs. "There are 11 vans that come on set. Don't they eat together at home? They're husband-wife, and still they have separate kitchen vans," said Gupta.

Veteran filmmaker and Alia Bhatt's father Mahesh Bhatt also inadvertently revealed that there's a vanity van for her daughter Raha Kapoor on the set. Filmmaker Karan Johar even joked he wants his kids, Yash and Roohi Johar, to become hair and make-up artists once they grow up because of the prices they're demanding from producers today. He further argued on the *Game Changers* podcast, "I have an ethical problem with entourages, not a financial one. We set a fixed budget for such needs. But if an actor wants anything beyond that, be it a personal trainer or specific dietary requirements, they should cover the cost themselves. I will pay for it only when it's essential for the film, like in a sports drama requiring a certain physique. But if you are a regular hero, then your job is to look good, and look fit, you are an artist."

## Shark Tank's Anupam Mittal takes a jibe at Aman Gupta's resignation as boAt CMO: 'You don't even have a job anymore'

Shark Tank India is back with its fifth season with a couple of new sharks but the show, so far, seems to have retained what works best for them — stories of homegrown entrepreneurs. Tuesday's episode saw Varun Duggirala and Pooja Jauhari with their educational brand for kids — EMoMee. The pitch turned exciting after all five sharks offered them a deal and were actually competing with each other to get a piece of the pie. At one point, Anupam Mittal and Aman Gupta got into an argument as they were both trying to partner with EMoMee.

Varun and Pooja, who hail from Mumbai, brought their brand EMoMee, a micro-story universe where they drop a new story on YouTube every day. These videos teach real-life skills to kids between the ages of 3 and 8 years. The couple asked for an investment of Rs 1 crore for 2 percent equity.

Varun also revealed that he has made content ecosystems for the biggest of brands for the last 14 years. Soon after their introduction, Aman Gupta walked up to the couple and greeted them. When Namita asked how he knew them, Aman revealed, "Glitch was one of the finest creative companies out of India. Our entire creative program, production, strategy were made by Varun and his team. I would not even know what I had to do, so Varun has been an integral part in developing boAt in the initial phase."

With EMoMee, Varun has become a second-time creative founder. Varun and his partner, Rahul, started Glitch from a small room, and by 2017, it became one of the biggest creative agencies. Glitch got acquired by WPP in 2017-18. Varun's wife, Pooja, was the CEO of Glitch. Pooja, on the other hand, began her professional jour-

ney at 15; at the age of 25, she became the Marketing Manager at The Times Of India. She became the CEO for Glitch at 27, and by the age of 35, she was the group CEO for Glitch and four other agencies. At 39, she started EMoMee. Varun and Pooja have two kids, and when they became parents, they realized that kids have a lot more to learn outside of school. So, they decided to build an IP for the global audience with EMoMee. While their pitch impressed Anupam Mittal right from the start, others also loved the content they presented. During the pitch, Varun shared that they first focused on their content so the parents could trust them. Since April 2025, they have been posting one video a day. He shared, "At the start of April, we had 1000 subscribers, in August we had 1 million subscribers, and by November, they grew to 1.5 million subscribers. In the last 28 days, we got 1.7 crores

## Imran Khan won't 'let the fear of backlash restrict' him from speaking his truth; actor stands by his accusations against Vishal Bhardwaj



"The approach to casting is all based on budget. It has nothing to do with the actor. Nobody cares whether you're the right actor for the role. They're just thinking, 'How much money can I get with him?' That's how I ended up being cast in *Matru*. I believe he cast me for a dishonest reason, not a truthful, creative one. And once it was done, I think he felt a kind of creative dishonesty, that he had made a choice he didn't fully believe in. I could feel that from the very first day of the shoot. He never said anything beyond 'action' and 'cut' to me. There was no bond. It was the loneliest film I have ever made. He left me with 'jo karna hai karo,'" Imran had said.

After the conversation started making headlines, Imran clarified via social media, "I think it's important to add context; I still think VB is a quality filmmaker and I respect his commitment to making original films that challenge the mainstream. I am proud to have been a part of MKBKM, which I consider to be a film with an important and valuable message. The director-actor relationship is a key element of moviemaking, and not all relationships are in sync. I told this story not to cast blame, but to describe my experience and provide context for the making of the film (which I think adds interesting insight)... and also to use myself as an example to discuss the way projects are cast and greenlit in the industry." Imran Khan is all set to make his comeback in Bollywood with *Adhoore Hum Adhoore Tum*. The film also stars Bhumi Pednekar and Gurfateh Pizada. Talking about the film, Imran told HT, "*Adhoore Hum Adhoore Tum* is a character story approached from where I'm in my life. I'm a divorced man in my 40s and a parent, a story with such shades is what makes it interesting to me." He also weighed in on the idea of not having a PR machinery. Sharing his views on the same, Imran added, "I have worked at a time when I had a PR and a manager. Having had a taste of it and knowing what it brings to your world, I now don't want those things. I don't want a manager who will go out there and look for work for me. The manager's pay percentage depends on keeping me steadily employed, because of which he may push me to do things I don't want to. I don't want them to find work for me; I want to find my work. Engaging in the PR game is a full-time job; it takes hours every day sitting with the PR team, planning strategies, and reviewing the results. Because of how much everyone does it, the public is aware of it. Now the public looks at everything without speculation. Is this a PR stunt? What is the angle behind it? I'd rather work at my own pace."

In an earlier interview with Hindustan Times, Imran spoke about his comments about Vishal Bhardwaj and said that he stands by his words. "I won't say something that I don't stand by. To let the fear of backlash restrict you from speaking your truth or anything of interest is no good. Today, everyone is following some sort of prescribed script that you are told will be well-received. At the same time, I don't think the idea is to offend people, I'm pointing the lens at myself and sharing my experience," he said.

In an earlier interview with Samdosh Bhatia, Imran had said, "I did a film called *Matru Ki Bijlee Ka Mandola*. The idea of casting me as a Haryanvi villager is very left-field casting. It was only in the aftermath that I understood how the film came about. Ajay Devgn was originally attached to the film, and they had started preparations. Somewhere during that stage, he backed out. I was coming off a couple of hits like *Delhi Belly* and *Mere Brother Ki Dulhan*, so he cast me not because I was the perfect actor for the part, but because with me attached, he could get a certain budget to make the film."

## James Cameron is now the only filmmaker with four billion dollar hits as *Avatar: Fire and Ash* earns over \$1 billion in 3 weeks



James Cameron's sci-fi fantasy epic *Avatar: Fire and Ash* didn't open as big as its prequel, *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), but it has grown slowly and surely at the global box office. Within just three weeks, it has now entered the \$1 billion club, significantly propelled by its international earnings outside of North America and Canada. *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, the third instalment in Cameron's popular *Avatar* franchise, collected \$40 million over its third weekend in North America. The earnings happened despite competition from much-talked-about films like Paul Feig's thriller *The Housemaid*, starring Sydney Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried; Josh Gad's sports drama *Marty Supreme*, starring Timothee Chalamet; Tom Gormican's action adventure comedy *Anaconda*, starring Paul Rudd and Jack Black; and the unstoppable holdover release, Disney's animated sequel *Zootopia 2*. The third weekend collection has helped the total domestic box office collection of *Avatar: Fire and Ash* to go up to \$306 million across North America and Canada.

*Avatar: Fire and Ash* box office worldwide. *Avatar: Fire and Ash* has greatly benefited from its international box office collection. The film earned \$777.1 million from cinemas outside of North America and Canada. Out of this, its biggest share comes from China (\$138 million), where it's the second biggest animation release of 2025 after *Zootopia 2* (\$601.40 million), also a Disney release.

After China, *Avatar: Fire and Ash* amassed the most in France (\$81 million), Germany (\$64.1 million), South Korea (\$44.1 million), the UK (\$42.5 million), Mexico (\$31.8 million), Australia (\$25.8 million), Spain (\$25.2 million), Italy (\$24.2 million), India (\$23.6 million), Indonesia (\$16.6 million), and Brazil (\$14.9 million). Add the domestic and international box office collections of *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, and the film has surpassed the coveted \$1 billion mark at the global box office. It's now the 39th biggest global hit of all time, after beating Christopher Nolan's 2012 superhero film *The Dark Knight Rises* (\$1.081 billion) with its \$1.087 billion worldwide earnings.

With *Avatar: Fire and Ash* entering the \$1 billion club, it's given its director James Cameron the unique position to have scored four billion dollar hits globally. Out of the other three, two are the previous instalments of his *Avatar* franchise — *Avatar* (2009) and *Avatar: The Way of Water*. In fact, those two films scored above \$2 billion each globally, making the cumulative worldwide box office collection of the franchise to be \$6.35 billion, and counting. Before the *Avatar* franchise, Cameron scored his first billion dollar hit with his 1997 epic romance *Titanic*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, who is also a part of his *Avatar* franchise. *Titanic*, the fourth highest global grosser of all time, also stands at \$2.25 billion. The first and third positions are held by *Avatar* (\$2.9 billion) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (\$2.34 billion), with Russo Brothers' 2019 Marvel movie *Avengers: Endgame* (\$2.79 billion) sitting in the middle.

With *Avatar: Fire and Ash* entering the \$1 billion club, it's given its director James Cameron the unique position to have scored four billion dollar hits globally.

Hence, *Avatar: Fire and Ash* has tremendous expectations to at least come as close to the other three of Cameron's highest grossers, which count among the top 5 highest grossers of all time worldwide. The fifth position is secured by another 2025 animated release, China's action adventure fantasy *Ne Zha 2*. At \$2.24 billion, it's the only non-American film in the top 5 highest global grossers of all time. At the Indian box office, *Avatar: Fire and Ash* has performed tremendously well, earning over Rs 177 crore within three weeks. This collection is achieved despite major competition from domestic releases like Aditya Dhar's blockbuster period spy thriller *Dhurandhar*, Sameer Uddhav's romantic comedy *Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri*, and Sriram Raghavan's period war drama *Ikkis*.

*Avatar: Fire and Ash* released in India across six languages. The native English version has secured the biggest chunk of the film's domestic box office collection at Rs 78 crore, followed by the dubbed Hindi (Rs 60 crore), Tamil (Rs 26 crore), Telugu (Rs 15 crore), Malayalam (Rs 2.03 crore), and Kannada (Rs 48 lakh) versions. *Avatar: Fire and Ash* has far surpassed the lifetime box office collection of the first *Avatar* at the India box office, which stands at Rs 28.92 crore. But it's less than half of the lifetime domestic box office earnings of *Avatar: The Way of Water*, which amassed Rs 391.40 crore at the India box office. But *Avatar: Fire and Ash* has still earned more than major Bollywood releases of 2025, including *Jolly LLB 3* (Rs 117.60 crore), *Tere Ishk Mein* (Rs 119.50 crore), *Thamma* (Rs 157.05 crore), and *Sitaare Zameen Par* (Rs 166.58 crore). Its next target is *Raid 2* (Rs 179.30 crore), which it should be able to surpass on its third Wednesday (day 20) at the India box office, given the current trajectory. *Avatar: Fire and Ash* has also become the highest grossing Hollywood film of 2025 at the Indian box office. It's beaten the likes of *Tom Cruise*-starrer *Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning* (Rs 106.90 crore), *Brad Pitt*-starrer *F1* (Rs 102.82 crore), and *Scarlett Johansson*-starrer *Jurassic World Rebirth* (Rs 100.56 crore).

## Rashmika Mandanna welcomes New Year in Italy, shares Amalfi getaway pictures

Mumbai: Actress Rashmika Mandanna rang in the New Year with her buddies in Italy. During the fun getaway, the 'Animal' actress also got a chance to visit Amalfi, a mesmerizing place in the Campania area.

While they were there, Rashmika and the gang made the most of their time by laughing their hearts out and stuffing themselves with cheese and *Tiramisu*. Sharing a few glimpses of her memorable visit on Instagram, the 'Pushpa' actress penned, "You know we went to this beautiful place called Amalfi and it was so so soooooo stunning... toooo beautiful it was... The sunshine- the lemon trees... Went with the bestest gang ever! Those days were filled with making memories- filled with love and laughter- our tummies filled with cheese and *tiramisu* (sic)".

The close-up photographs of Rashmika had her posing in a loose gray hoodie, paired with black trousers, making some cute and goofy expressions. Meanwhile, Rashmika's New Year wish for 2026 included a heartfelt message, urging her 'lovelies' to begin 2026 with love and gratitude.