

## Vijay Deverakonda, Rashmika Mandanna tie the knot in Udaipur

Udaipur: Actors Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna on Thursday tied the knot in a private ceremony attended by close family and friends at a luxury hotel on the outskirts of Udaipur, and shared pictures of their big day on social media.

Mandanna donned a red sari with traditional gold jewellery, while Deverakonda complemented her look with an off-white dhoti and red shawl in the photos shared by the couple on their respective Instagram handles.



New Delhi, Feb 26

Termining the publication of a chapter on corruption in the judiciary in a Class VIII NCERT social science textbook as "deep-rooted, well-orchestrated conspiracy to malign the judiciary", the Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a blanket ban on the controversial book and on the publication or circulation of its content.

Taking a firm view, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said those responsible "fired the gunshot and the judiciary is bleeding today". A Bench of CJI Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Vipul M Pancholi ordered the seizure of all physical copies of the first edition social science textbook for Class VIII titled "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" (Vol-II), published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in February 2026. It also ordered the immediate takedown of its digital versions.

The Bench, however, clarified that the suo motu proceedings were not meant to stifle any legitimate critique

## They fired gunshot, judiciary bleeding: SC bans NCERT book with chapter on corruption

or the right to scrutinise the judiciary. "We are of the firm conviction that rigorous discourse helps the living vitality of the institution," the CJI said, lauding the role of mainstream media in highlighting the issue and playing a constructive role.

The Bench directed NCERT, in coordination with the Union and state education departments, to ensure that all copies of the book, hard or soft, currently in circulation and whether held in storage, retail outlets or educational institutions, be seized and removed from public access.

Rejecting an apology published by NCERT, the Bench issued contempt of court notices to the Secretary, School Education (Union Ministry of Education), and NCERT Director Dinesh Prasad Saklani, directing them to show cause why action under the Contempt of Courts Act or any other law should not be initiated against them or those responsible for introducing the offending chapter.

"Given the serious consequences and an everlasting adverse impact on the independence of the judiciary... such misconduct will fall within the purview of criminal contempt. If proved to be a deliberate move, it will undoubtedly lead to interference with the administration of justice, besides scandalising the institution," it said.

The top court, which had on Wednesday taken suo motu cognisance of the matter, also sought the entire records related to the preparation and finalisation of the controversial chapter, along with the names of those involved. "We would like to have a deeper probe. It's my duty as the head of the institution to find out who is responsible; heads must roll," CJI Kant said.

Ordering them to file compliance reports on affidavit within two weeks, the Bench posted the matter for further hearing on March 11. "Any attempt to circumvent this order through electronic means or altered titles shall be seen as direct interference, wilful breach and defiance of the directions issued by the court," the Bench said.

"It seems to us that there is a calculated move to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary... This is a deep-rooted conspiracy... If allowed to go unchecked, it will erode the sanctity of judicial office in the estimation of the public at large and within impressionable minds of youth," the court said.

At the very outset, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said 32 copies of the book that had reached the market had been withdrawn and that the entire book would be revisited. When Mehta said the two individuals who prepared the chapters would never work with the NCERT, UGC or any Ministry, CJI Kant replied, "That will be very easy then and they go scot-free... they fired the gunshot, the judiciary is bleeding today!"

It said, "While the publication dedicates an entire chapter on the role of the judiciary in our society, it washes away the illustrious history of the Supreme Court, high courts and trial courts and omits the role played by the

institution towards preservation of democratic fabric... The text fails to recognise the role of the judiciary which upheld the basic structure doctrine.

"It seems to us that the narrative in the book does not delve into any transformative measures heralded by this court, including legal aid mechanisms and streamlining access to justice. The silence is particularly egregious since so many high-ranking officers have been held by this court for corruption, misuse of public office or diversion of funds. It seems to us that the choice of words and expressions in the book may not be a mere inadvertent or bona fide error.

"The necessity of judicial intervention is not from a desire to suppress criticism but to uphold the integrity of education. While students begin to navigate the nuances of public life and institutional architecture, it is improper to expose them to biased narratives at this age, which can lead to fundamental misconceptions and hinder their understanding of the responsibilities with which the judiciary works."

The Bench said it had asked the Supreme Court Secretary General to verify whether such a publication had been released by NCERT. "Instead of introspection of what had been written in the book in the most reckless, irresponsible, contemptuous and motivated manner, the Director (NCERT) responded in writing defending the contents," it said.

Supreme Court Bar Association president Vikas Singh and senior advocates Kapil Sibal, AM Singhvi and Siddharth Mridul demanded action against the erring officials.

## India, Israel conclude first round of FTA talks; Modi, Netanyahu push for deeper trade ties

NEW DELHI, FEB 26

Trade negotiators from India and Israel concluded the first round of negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA), here today.

Separately Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, at a bilateral meeting in Israel, announced a slew of measures, including a possible faster digital payment system to strengthen economic ties.

A joint statement that followed the Modi-Netanyahu meet asserted their commitment for the realisation of the FTA between the two countries and tasked the negotiating teams to expedite the negotiations for an early signing of the agreement.

The two Prime Ministers welcomed the signing of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the FTA agreement negotiations and the convening of the first round in New Delhi.

Both leaders emphasised the importance of unlocking the full potential of bilateral trade and investment.

Netanyahu appreciated India's fintech revolution, exemplified by the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which is a model for affordable, real-time cross-border transactions.

Both sides agreed to explore linking UPI with Israel's fast payment system to enhance interoperability and strengthen economic ties. An MoU was signed between NPCI International and MASAV for cooperation in order

to examine linkages between NPCI and MASAV for cross-border payments between the countries.

"The two welcomed the launch of the India-Israel Financial Dialogue to boost closer financial cooperation," the statement said. The two sides also welcomed the strategic partnership in the financial-cyber domain.

Furthermore, both leaders encouraged more Indian participation in the infrastructure sector of Israel, particularly in light of major upcoming projects in Israel in the sectors of metro, rail, road, airports, desalination plants, waste-water treatment plants, etc.

The two leaders welcomed the conclusion of the 4th round of India-Israel CEOs Forum and Business Summit in Tel Aviv in November 2025. They commended the meaningful engagement between business and government leaders, which contributed to strengthening bilateral economic cooperation and unlocking new opportunities for investment and collaboration across key sectors.

Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to building on this positive momentum to further deepen the India-Israel strategic partnership. They also welcomed the signing of the MoU on Arbitration between Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA) and Israeli Institute of Commercial Arbitration (IICA) recognising it as a significant step toward facilitating smoother commercial dispute resolution and enhancing investor confidence.



## DGP orders high-tech security grid for Godavari Pushkaram

HYDERABAD, FEB 26

Telangana State DGP Shivadhar Reddy has emphasised the implementation of effective security measures to ensure the Godavari Pushkaram are organised in a highly prestigious manner.

On Wednesday, a video conference was held at the DGP office with police officials from various districts to discuss these preparations. Endowments Principal Secretary Sailaja Ramaiyar and other senior officials were also in attendance.

During the conference, the DGP instructed officers on matters regarding security, traffic management, and the provision of facilities for devotees attending this significant religious event.

He recommended that stringent security protocols be established for the Godavari Pushkaras, which are scheduled to commence on 23 July. Notably, since the last event, the number of districts in the state has increased, requiring officers to compile detailed reports based on their current field operations.

He proposed that the technical expertise and experience gained from the recent Medaram Jatara should be effectively applied to these Pushkaras. Considering the massive influx of people expected, advanced technology will be extensively utilised. The DGP emphasised the need for facilities such as CCTV cameras, facial recognition systems, and ANPR cameras for vehicle identification.



Drone surveillance will also be implemented to monitor the crowd effectively.

The plan includes incorporating technology like video analytics and heat maps, ensuring continuous surveillance through a state-level real-time command and control centre. These arrangements will be similar to the robust security models used for the Prayagraj and Nashik Kumbh Melas. A comprehensive mobile application and digital display boards will be specifically designed for devotees.

Additionally, tracking systems for ambulances and fire vehicles will be established to ensure effective emergency services throughout the festival period. Additional DGP Mahesh Bhagwat and several IGP and district commissioners also participated in the session.



## ED grills Anil Ambani for 9 hours; CBI files fresh FIR in Rs 2.2K-crore fraud case

MUMBAI, FEB 26

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday grilled Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani for over nine hours during the second round of questioning in connection with an alleged bank fraud-linked money laundering case related to his group firm RCOM, officials said.

He had been called again for questioning on Friday in a separate case linked to an alleged loan fraud against the Yes Bank, they said. The 66-year-old industrialist entered the federal probe agency's office in central Delhi around 10:30 am and left around 8:20 pm.

Officials in the agency said they had recorded Ambani's statement under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The probe pertains to an alleged over Rs 40,000 crore worth bank fraud by Reliance Communications (RCOM). Ambani was first questioned by the ED in August 2025 in the alleged loan fraud against the Yes Bank.

The ED arrested former RCOM president Punit Garg as part of its investigation in January. The alleged laundered funds were "diverted" through multiple foreign subsidiaries and offshore entities of RCOM, the agency claimed earlier. Ambani and his multiple group companies are facing allegations of loan fraud, and the ED recently constituted a special investigation team (SIT) to probe all these instances.

The SIT was formed on recent directions of the Supreme Court. The ED on Wednesday attached Ambani's Mumbai house, 'Abode', worth Rs 3,716 crore.

Meanwhile, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday registered a second case against M/s Reliance Communications based on the complaint given by Bank of Baroda for offences of conspiracy, cheating under IPC and criminal misconduct and abuse of official position under Prevention of Corruption Act, against him, M/s Reliance Communications and others.

The allegations in the FIR are that Bank of Baroda has suffered a loss of more than Rs 2,220 crore due to the loans availed by M/s Reliance Communication that were allegedly diverted and mis-utilised by creating fictitious transactions with related parties.

After the registration of the case, the CBI has conducted searches at Anil's residence and offices registered under M/s Reliance Communication Ltd. Various documents connected with these loan transactions have been recovered, and further investigation into the matter is underway.

## Hyderabad to Introduce Pod Taxis for Last Mile Connectivity

Hyderabad, Feb 26

The residents of Hyderabad are set to benefit from a new innovative transport facility as the government prepares to introduce 'pod taxis' to address last mile connectivity for metro commuters. Named Personal Rapid Transit (PRT), this system will connect metro stations directly with key locations such as headquarters, IT hubs, and residential areas. Currently, around five lakh people use the city's metro daily, but reaching final destinations often proves difficult due to a lack of buses and autos, high fares, and traffic congestion. To tackle these issues, the government has decided to implement pod taxis on elevated tracks that operate independently of road traffic. The first phase will cover areas including Rayadurgam-Kukatpally, Rayadurgam-Hitech City, Financial District, Knowledge City, and the vicinity of the Secretariat. The project will be executed under the public-private partnership model of design, build, finance, operate, transfer (DBFOT), with a consultant being appointed to assess the technical and financial feasibility.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Socialist voice from citadel of Capitalism

The New Year has heralded a defining moment for New York, as the citadel of America's celebrated capitalism has been stormed by a socialist of South Asian descent. Zohran Mamdani, who has taken over as Mayor, has vowed to implement audacious plans to govern the city with a focus on the welfare of the working class. The historic significance of the occasion was not lost on observers; it marked several firsts for America's largest city of eight million residents. The 34-year-old Mamdani is the first Muslim of South Asian origin to be elected to the top post, the first to use a Quran to take oath and the youngest mayor in over a century. The inauguration ceremony in Manhattan captured the generational, political, ethnic and religious magnitude of Mamdani's ascent. He was unapologetic about his democratic socialist credentials. In his public speech after the swearing-in ceremony, he underscored the city's diversity, vowed to protect the underprivileged and reiterated his pledge to attempt to tax the wealthy and corporations to fund his proposals, which include universal childcare and free buses. He placed himself in a lineage of New York mayors who focused their tenures on uplifting the city's most vulnerable. Many New Yorkers — some with hope, some with trepidation — expect Mamdani to be a disruptive political force as reflected by his address that promoted core campaign promises of universal childcare, affordable rents and free bus service. Now the countdown begins as he sets out to fulfil his lofty promises to deliver an agenda of safety, affordability and abundance — where the government "looks and lives like the people it represents".

The occasion also sent out a message to Democratic Party leaders struggling to regain footing at the national level: The excitement surrounding Mamdani's ascendance may suggest a path forward. Significantly, Mamdani declared that he would govern the way he campaigned — as a democratic socialist — and said that meant he would focus on working-class New Yorkers, regardless of criticism from naysayers. The highlight of the spectacular inauguration was the presence of Senator Bernie Sanders, a democratic socialist at the vanguard of the Democratic Party's liberal wing. Sanders, whom Mamdani calls his inspiration, defended the new Mayor's agenda, saying affordable housing is not a radical policy but is the right and decent thing to do. Apart from highlighting his core campaign issues, Mamdani mentioned a few ideas that could have broader appeal beyond his traditional support base, including reforms in the property tax system, an issue that has frustrated New Yorkers across the ideological spectrum. Mamdani's elevation is a testament to the vibrancy of American democracy, in which a seven-year-old immigrant from an African nation can come to the city to realise his dream of becoming its mayor at 34. In the process, he demolishes ethnic stereotypes, overcomes entrenched bureaucracy and ideological status quoism of his own party.

## Kalyana Lakshmi' Scheme – A Wedding Gift for Poor Girls Yamini's Family Receives Financial Assistance Cheque Distributed by Tahsildar and Sarpanch

Nelakondapalli Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Report February 26, (Indian Chronicle): "The government's Kalyana Lakshmi scheme is proving to be a great support for the marriages of girls from economi-



cally weaker families, said Tahsildar Venkateswarlu of Nelakondapalli. "On Thursday, at the Tahsildar's office in the mandal headquarters, officials and public representatives jointly handed over the sanctioned Kalyana Lakshmi cheque to Bandla Tirupatamma, mother of Bandla Yamini from Rajarampet village. "Speaking on the occasion, Rajarampet Sarpanch Rayapudi Rama Rao said that efforts are being made to ensure that all eligible beneficiaries receive government welfare schemes. He stated that the government is providing this financial assistance to ensure that daughters' marriages do not become a financial burden on poor families and urged beneficiaries to make good use of the support. "Family members of the beneficiary expressed happiness over the timely sanction of the cheque and conveyed their gratitude to the government. "Revenue officials Madhusudan and Ramadevi, along with Congress leaders Chittoori Achayya and Bandla Venkateswarlu, were present at the event.

# Eagle Eye on Donated Lands in Khammam Demolition of Poor People's Houses for the Luxuries of the Elite!

BJP State Treasurer Devaki Vasudeva Rao and District President Nelluri Koteswara Rao Lash Out at State Government



Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Report February 26, (Indian Chronicle): "The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) strongly criticized the state government for what it called inhumane treatment of the poor in Khammam district. The party alleged that houses of poor families, who have been residing for decades on donated lands, are being demolished mercilessly to benefit influential individuals and real estate businessmen. "Speaking at a special press conference held at the district BJP office in Khammam on Thursday, BJP State Treasurer Devaki Vasudeva Rao and District President Nelluri Koteswara Rao strongly condemned the state government, local ministers, and revenue officials. They accused ruling party leaders of conspiring to grab lands that were originally donated for the welfare of the poor. "The BJP leaders expressed anguish that lands donated decades ago



for housing the poor are now being targeted. Innocent families who built small huts and have been living there for years are allegedly being evicted without mercy. They claimed that officials conducted spot inspections, seized Aadhaar cards, and demolished houses overnight using bulldozers without even giving residents 24 hours' notice. They described the actions as inhuman, stating that children, elderly people, pregnant women, and families were left on the streets in tears, while authorities showed no compassion. The leaders alleged that the demolitions were carried out solely to benefit real estate interests and for commissions. "Providing historical background, BJP leaders said that in 1954, inspired by the Bhoodan movement, a donor named Kalvala Rajeshwara Rao donated approximately 62 acres of land for housing the poor. They

criticized successive Congress-led central governments — from Indira Gandhi to Rajiv Gandhi and Manmohan Singh — for allegedly failing to distribute these lands to the poor. Instead, they alleged that the current state leadership is attempting to seize the land and develop high-end colonies on the lines of Jubilee Hills for the benefit of wealthy individuals. They criticized ministers such as Tummala Nageswara Rao and Ponguloti Srinivasa Reddy, stating that despite holding positions in multiple governments, they have done nothing substantial for the poor. "The BJP leaders further alleged that the state government is facing a severe financial crisis. According to them, while the budget estimated revenue of around ₹2.30 lakh crore for the year, only ₹1.40 lakh crore has been realized, leaving a revenue deficit of approximately ₹90,000 crore. They accused the government of attempting to fill this gap by selling lands donated for the poor. They stated that while large encroachers living in permanent buildings are being ignored, the government is targeting poor people's huts. "They also criticized the Congress and other parties for allegedly using minorities and the poor merely as vote banks. Leaders who once sought votes from Muslim and poor communities are now demolishing their homes without compassion, they alleged. They asserted that BJP is the only party genuinely fighting for the rights of the poor. "Finally, BJP leaders challenged the government and revenue authorities to make the 1954 land records (Pahani) public. They demanded transparency regarding ownership and the original purpose of the 62 acres of land. They called for an immediate halt to demolitions and demanded that houses be constructed for the displaced poor at the same location. Otherwise, they warned that the BJP would launch a district-wide agitation in Khammam. "Several district leaders and party members were also present at the press conference.

## Memorandum Submitted to Khammam District Collector Anudeep Durishetty

Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Report February 26, (Indian Chronicle): "Rayala Nageswara Rao, Chairman of the State Warehousing Corporation, and Puvvalla Durgaprasad, former DCC President, submitted a memorandum to Anudeep Durishetty, District Collector of Khammam. "In the memorandum, they urged the Collector to identify eligible poor families in Velugumatla, Khammam, who had constructed houses on Bhoodan lands and later lost them, and to ensure justice is provided to them through government intervention. "They also demanded strict action against those who illegally sold Bhoodan lands. Furthermore, they requested that Bhoodan lands should not be used for purposes other than official government needs. "On this occasion, the District Collector assured them that he would discuss the matter with the government and take necessary steps to ensure justice for the eligible



poor families

## Follow Traffic Rules and Ensure Safe Travel: SI of Karepalli

Arvapalli Nagesh khammam Staff Report February 26, (Indian Chronicle): "The Sub-Inspector of Khammam district Karepalli Mandal Gopi, urged the public to follow traffic rules and ensure safe travel. "As part of road accident prevention measures, the Police Department conducted the second phase of the "Arrive Alive" awareness program under the supervision of Rural ACP Tirupati Reddy. The program was organized in Karepalli to create awareness among auto drivers and motorists. "Speaking on the occasion, SI Gopi said that road accidents are frequently occurring due to over-speeding, drunk driving, and violation of traffic rules. He noted that roads are turning into scenes of bloodshed, leading to the loss of precious lives and leaving affected families in deep sorrow. "He stated that the Police Department has been focusing on road safety and accident prevention across the district. Road safety is not solely the responsibility of the police, he emphasized, adding that accidents can be reduced only when society as a whole comes forward and acts responsibly. "He further said that "Arrive Alive"



should become a movement rather than just an awareness campaign. The aim of the Police Department is to transform this initiative into a people's movement. Real change is possible only when every individual follows traffic rules and encourages others to do the same, he added.

## Deepak Tiwari, IAS Appointed as Vikarabad District Collector

"Indian Chronicle" Jade Srinivas. February, 26. "Vikarabad: Deepak Tiwari, IAS, who has been serving as the Additional Collector of Komuram Bheem Asifabad district for the past two years, has been transferred by the Government and appointed as the District Collector of Vikarabad district. "During his tenure in Komuram Bheem Asifabad district, Deepak Tiwari played an active and significant role in administrative affairs. He gave special emphasis to the effective implementation of various development and welfare programs. Known for his accessibility, he remained approachable to the public and took proactive steps in addressing several local issues and grievances. "Recognizing his dedicated service and administrative capabilities, the government issued orders appointing him as the District Collector of Vikarabad. On this occasion, district officials and public representatives congratulated him and expressed their best wishes for his new role. There is strong hope and confidence that Deepak Tiwari will continue to deliver efficient and people-friendly administration in Vikarabad district as well.



## Samindla Vani takes charge as Municipal Chairperson

"Jagtlal Correspondent, February 26 (Indian Chronicle) : "Samindla Vani Srinivas took charge as the new Chairperson of Jagtlal Municipality on Thursday. "MLA Dr. Sanjay Kumar attended the ceremony and congratulated her. Vice Chairman Jeenath Parveen Munna Bhai also assumed office. 22nd ward Councilor Arav Laxmi honored them and urged everyone to work together for municipal development.

## Time to Cleanse Politics of Money and Liquor Influence

"Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 26. "Educated and Ethical Individuals Must Enter Politics: Krishna Ranteki (State Resource Person) "India is a democratic nation where citizens elect their government. However, the absence of educated and morally upright individuals in politics has become a serious concern. Money, liquor, and corruption are increasingly dominating the political landscape. "Why Should Educated and Ethical Individuals Enter Politics? "• Service to Society: They enter politics with a genuine intention to serve society. "• Integrity and Transparency: They uphold values such as honesty and transparency, making governance more accountable. "• Social Development: They strive for social progress and work toward resolving public issues. "• Eradication of Corruption: They aim to eliminate corruption and bring integrity into governance. "How Are Money and Liquor Influencing Politics? "• Rising Corruption: These factors fuel corruption and weaken democratic institutions. "• Loss of Public Trust: People are gradually losing faith in governments and political leaders. "• Stagnant Social Development: Social progress slows down, and public issues remain unresolved. "What Can Be Done to Encourage Ethical and Educated People to Enter Politics? "• Encourage Educated Individuals: Motivate qualified and capable individuals to participate in politics. "• Promote Moral Values: Introduce reforms in the education system to strengthen ethical values. "• Eliminate Corruption: Take strict measures to eradicate corruption. "• Increase Public Awareness: Raise awareness among citizens and encourage active participation in the political process. "India needs educated and morally responsible individuals in politics. We must ensure that money and liquor do not dominate the democratic system. To achieve this goal, citizens, intellectuals, and political leaders must work together collectively.



## Uppal Circle to Get Safety Markings to Prevent Road Accidents Rs 32 Lakhs Sanctioned by Uppal Constituency Congress In-Charge Parameshwar Reddy



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 26 (Indian Chronicle): "Safety road markings will be installed at major junctions in Uppal Circle to prevent road accidents, informed Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-Charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, along with former Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy. They stated that safety markings will be set up at 13 important junctions across the circle. An amount of ₹32 lakhs has been sanctioned for the project to enhance road safety measures. "Safety Markings Across Uppal Constituency "Parameshwar Reddy further said that safety markings will soon be installed at all major road junctions across the Uppal constituency. He expressed confidence that these measures will significantly help in preventing road accidents and ensuring safer movement for motorists and pedestrians. "Areas Where Safety Markings Will Be Installed "Safety markings will be installed at the following locations: "Uppal Mala Basti Junction "Mahadev Motors Junction "South Swaroop Nagar Junction "Venkateswara Temple Junction "VT Common Junction "Ramalayam Temple Junction "TX Hospital Junction "Mande Market Junction "Satya Nagar Junction "Uppal Laxma Reddy Colony (Old Registration Office Street) "Surya Nagar Junction "Devender Nagar Road "Race Course Road Junction "Leaders and Party Members Present "The program was attended by Lingampalli Ramakrishna, Pasikanti Nagaraju, Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Eega Anjaneyulu, Alwal Bhaskar, Gorige Mahesh, Bakaram Arun, Butkuri Madan Goud, Bazar Naveen Goud, Delhi Chandrasekhar, Jithu, Naresh Kanna Goud, Rangulu Shekhar, Vamshi Goud, Shiva, and Chintu, among others.

## Uppal Media Club Felicitated by Bethi Subhash Reddy – Full Support Assured for Service Activities

\*\*\*\*KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 26 (Indian Chronicle):\*\*\*\*The newly elected committee members of the Uppal Media Club (Print & Electronic Media Committee) were warmly felicitated by former Uppal MLA Bethi Subhash Reddy at his residence on Thursday. He honored the members with shawls and extended his heartfelt congratulations. "Speaking on the occasion, he appreciated that after 35 years, senior journalist and newly elected President Vaddepalli Kishore successfully brought together representatives of both electronic and print media onto a common platform and established a united press club in Uppal. He described this initiative as highly commendable. "He expressed hope that the new committee would work efficiently with friendship and coordination, further enhancing the prestige of the media fraternity. He also assured that he would strive to secure necessary facilities for the committee from the government in the coming days. Subhash Reddy advised the media to maintain an unbiased approach and bring public issues to the attention of the government. He emphasized that the



media should take a leading role in creating awareness

among the public about development and welfare programs. "He further clarified that he would always extend his complete support to the social service activities undertaken by the Uppal Media Club. On this occasion, Uppal BJP President Marineni Phaninder, General Secretary Theega Vittal Rao, and representatives of the Uppal Media Club were present.

## Irshad Khan (Uppal Khan) Visits Patient at Kakatiya Hospital, Extends Financial Assistance



\*\*\*\*KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 26 (Indian Chronicle):\*\*\*\*Minority leader of Uppal, Irshad Khan

(popularly known as Uppal Khan), visited Kakatiya Hospital on Thursday to console and support Agvane Sai, a resident of Beerappagadda, who is currently undergoing treatment. He has been admitted to the hospital due to severe blood vomiting and a lung infection. "Upon receiving information about the patient's condition, the Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge, Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, immediately directed Irshad Khan to visit the hospital and extend necessary support to the affected family. Responding promptly, Irshad Khan reached the hospital, met the patient and his family members, and enquired in detail about his health condition. He held discussions with the doctors to understand the present medical status and the treatment being administered. During this difficult time, he offered words of encouragement to the patient and boosted his morale. "Considering the financial difficulties being faced by the family, Irshad Khan provided immediate financial assistance to the patient's wife. He also spoke with the hospital management and requested a concession in the overall medical bill. The management responded positively and agreed to provide a reduction in the bill. "He further requested the doctors to take special care to ensure the patient's speedy recovery. Speaking on the occasion, Irshad Khan assured the family that he would continue to stand by them in their time of need.

## Union Minister Bandi Sanjay launches Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament poster; Karimnagar to host district-level event on Feb. 28.

Khaja Sikander Mohiuddin Staff Reporter, Indian Chronicle Karimnagar, Feb 26 : Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Wednesday released the poster for the district-level Viksit Bharat 2026 Youth Parliament competitions and called upon students to participate in large



numbers and articulate their views on the Emergency within the constitutional framework.

Addressing students, he said the platform offered an opportunity to reflect on the theme, "50 Years of Emergency: Lessons for Indian Democracy," and to present their opinions thoughtfully and responsibly. He urged youth to examine the historical context of the Emergency

and express their ideas in a manner consistent with constitutional values.

The competitions, open to youth in the 18-25 age group, will be conducted at the district, State and national levels. Participants will be given three minutes to speak in Hindi, English or Telugu on the designated theme.

The district-level event will be held at SRR Government Arts and Science College on February 28 from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. under the aegis of the NSS wing, according to Principal K. Ramakrishna. Interested candidates must register through the My Bharat portal under the Viksit Bharat event.

TGC JTA State General Secretary Dr. Kadaru Surender Reddy expressed hope that students would come forward in large numbers, as in the previous year, and strive to reach the national level.

Mera Yuva Bharat District Officer M. Venkata Rambabu said participants should seize the opportunity to showcase their talent and bring laurels to the district.

Vice-Principals P. Nithin Pathak and T. Rajayya, district-level coordinator B. Elizabeth Rani, NSS Programme Officers Srinivas Reddy, Satya Prakash, Dr. K. Arjun, Venkateswarlu, Rajender and Rajesh, along with faculty members and NSS volunteers, were present.

## Strict Action Demanded Against the Killers of Infant Mounika



\*\*\*\*Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, February 26:\*\*\*\*BSP Uppal Constituency President Mindrala Narsinga Rao demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible for the death of two-month-old infant Mounika in Kummera village of Nagarkurnool district. "He stated that during the Mallanna Jatara festival, members of a Chakali family were allegedly attacked when they questioned the temple authorities about a receipt for the money they had offered. The accused reportedly assaulted them, which ultimately led to the tragic death of infant Mounika. "He expressed anguish that the main accused have not yet been arrested and termed it highly condemnable. He criticized the incident as an act of caste arrogance and said such inhuman behavior is unacceptable in a civilized society. "He further alleged that merely claiming to be a "BC Bandhu" under Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is not enough, and if the government is sincere, it should immediately arrest the accused and send them to jail. "He urged the government to ensure strict punishment for the culprits so that such incidents do not recur and justice is delivered to the victim's family.

## 10 PhysicsWallah (PW) students in Hyderabad secure 99+ percentile in JEE-2026 Main Session 1

Hyderabad: \*\*\*\*Sambhav Surana, a resident of Hyderabad, Telangana, achieved a 99.94 percentile in the JEE Main 2026 Session 1 examination. He is among 10 students from PhysicsWallah (PW) in Hyderabad who secured a percentile of 99 or above in this session. Kishore Samanyu Thallapragada (99.61 percentile) and Srihan Thota (99.55 percentile) were some of the other high-performing PW students in the city. "The National Testing Agency (NTA) declared the results for JEE-2026 Main Session 1 on February 16, 2026, for the examination conducted across 658 centres globally. PW students, Amiteshwar Singh (99.83 percentile) from Jammu & Kashmir, Vishnu Bhardwaj Upadhyay (98.96 percentile) from Meghalaya and

Hemakshi Kumar (98.26 percentile) from Andaman & Nicobar Islands were the top scorers from their respective states. "Sambhav, who prepared through PW's tech-enabled Vidyapeeth centre, scored 99.72 in Physics, 99.65 in Chemistry and 99.97 in Mathematics. "Ankit Gupta, CEO of Vidyapeeth-Offline, PhysicsWallah (PW) said, "I want to congratulate all students and believe their high performance in this examination is a just reward for their hard work and dedication. Now is the time to focus on the JEE Advanced exam and begin preparations for it. For all other students who did not score according to their expectations, your scores don't define your future. Treat this result as feedback to prepare better for the JEE-2026 Main Session 2, which is right around the corner."

## Canon Celebrates 23rd Consecutive Year of No. 1 Share of Global Interchangeable-lens Digital Camera Market India, 2026

\*\*\*\*Canon Inc. announced today that the company's interchangeable-lens digital cameras (digital SLR and mirrorless cameras) have maintained the No. 1 share of the global market for 23 consecutive years from 2003 through 2025. "Canon's EOS series of interchangeable-lens digital cameras is an imaging system based on the basic concept of "Speed, Comfort, and High Image Quality," for which the company has developed proprietary key components, including CMOS image sensors, the DIGIC image processors, and interchangeable lenses. "Putting together a wide-ranging product lineup, from high-performance flagship models that are highly trusted by professionals to entry-level models that allow users to enjoy full-scale shooting with easy operation, as well as a rich selection of 113 RF and EF lenses that enable a wealth of creative expression, Canon continues to support the diverse needs of customers. "During the dawn of digital SLR cameras, Canon introduced its breakthrough EOS Digital Rebel / EOS 300D / EOS Kiss

Digital (product name varies by region) in September 2003. By launching this groundbreaking camera, which was competitively priced and featured a compact, lightweight design, Canon spurred growth in the digital SLR market, capturing the top share of the global market and heralding the age of digital SLR cameras. "Canon has since continued to introduce innovative products, including the professional model EOS-1D series, as well as the EOS 5D series, which played a leading role in popularising video recording with digital SLR cameras. "In October 2018, the company launched the EOS R System, which further expands the boundaries of visual expression, followed by the full-frame mirrorless EOS R5—the world's first camera to feature 8K video recording, released in July 2020, and the flagship EOS R1, released in November 2024, which combines advanced autofocus performance, high image quality, and high reliability to meet the demanding needs of professionals. Canon continues to pursue new possibilities in imaging expression.

## AI, Creators, Messaging Ignite India's Omnichannel Shopping Boom: Meta & Retailers Association of India Whitepaper

Hyderabad: As Indian consumers move fluidly between scrolling on social media and shopping in-store or online, retail journeys are becoming increasingly omnichannel. To understand this shift, Meta, in collaboration with the Retailers Association of India (RAI), has unveiled findings from a new whitepaper highlighting how AI, short-form video, creators, and messaging platforms are reshaping Indians discover, evaluate, and purchase products across digital and physical channels. "The report finds that omnichannel shoppers are significantly more valuable, with consumers who shop across channels spending 2.5 times more than single-channel shoppers and up to 73% more when engaging across multiple touchpoints. Blending research insights with real-world case studies, the whitepaper outlines how discovery, conversation, and commerce are converging to make unified retail journeys a core growth model. "Said Meghna Apparao, Director, E-Commerce & Retail (India), Meta, "I urge retail leaders to focus on three transformative pillars highlighted in this whitepaper. First, harness the power

of Reels and Creators to drive authentic engagement and brand storytelling. Second, embrace omnichannel performance marketing to seamlessly connect with consumers across platforms, optimizing reach and impact. Third, leverage WhatsApp as a direct, personalized channel for customer interaction and commerce. Together, these strategies unlock new growth opportunities, foster deeper relationships, and position your brand at the forefront of digital retail innovation in India's dynamic market. "Said Hitesh Bhatt, Director - Marketing & Communications, Retailers Association of India (RAI), "There has been a fundamental shift in retail: consumers no longer move between online and offline; they operate across both at once. Discovery, influence, and purchase now happen through content, creators, conversations, and stores, often in the same journey. For retailers, the challenge is no longer adopting digital tools, but integrating them to drive measurable outcomes. Omnichannel maturity will define competitiveness in Indian retail, and this report outlines what it takes to get there."

## Myntra Celebrates its 19th Birthday with Myntra Birthday Blast, bringing over six million styles

\*\*\*\*Hyderabad\*\*\*\*To commemorate its 19th birthday, Myntra, one of India's leading fashion, beauty, and lifestyle destinations, has announced Myntra Birthday Blast (MNB). The event will go live from February 28, with Myntra Insider customers getting early access 24 hours early, starting February 27. With irresistible offers, this edition brings together an expansive selection of over 6 million styles from 20,000+ international and made-in-India brands across fashion, beauty, and lifestyle categories. "Category trends & demand forecast" The categories expected to see traction in this edition include Men's and Women's Ethnic Wear, Beauty and Personal Care, and Watches and Wearables, driven by the wedding season demand and upcoming festivals such as Eid and Holi. Other categories expected to witness demand include Women's and Men's Western Wear, Men's apparel, Sports wear, and Spring-Summer essentials as shoppers refresh their wardrobes for the new season. Additionally, momentum is anticipated across Travel Es-

entials, Footwear, Kids' Wear, Accessories, and gifting-led categories, supported by increased social gatherings and travel during this period. "Several popular brands that are expected to witness heightened traction include H&M, Nike, MANGO, Levis, U.S. Polo Assn., Anouk, Libas, Skybags, CeraVe, Bath and Body Works, and M.A.C "Speaking on the third edition of Myntra Birthday Blast, Ritesh Mishra, Head of Category and Revenue, Myntra, said, "Myntra Birthday Blast continues to be a special event for us to celebrate our journey with millions of customers across the country. As Myntra celebrates 19 years, we are incredibly grateful for the love of our customers and the trust of thousands of brand partners, which have played a pivotal role in redefining the fashion landscape in the country. As we continue to set new benchmarks in the e-commerce paradigm, our focus remains on scaling excellence and setting the new standards for how the modern customer experiences fashion, beauty, and lifestyle shopping."

## Qualcomm-backed Arduino partners with Get Set Learn to scale Physical AI and future-ready STEAM education across India's K-12 ecosystem

\*\*\*\*Hyderabad\*\*\*\*Get Set Learn, an Arvind Mafatlal Group company focused on future-skills education, today announced a strategic collaboration with Qualcomm Technologies, Inc. and Arduino, provider of a leading open-source electronics platform, to strengthen AI, electronics, and emerging technology education for K-12 learners in India. "As artificial intelligence rapidly evolves beyond the cloud and into real-world physical systems, powering robotics, automation, sensing, and intelligent decision-making, equipping students with the ability to build and apply these technologies has become essential for future workforce readiness and national competitiveness. Through this collaboration, Qualcomm Technologies, Inc., Arduino, and Get Set Learn will bring Physical AI learning and future-ready curriculum into India's K-12 education ecosystem. "The collaboration aims to make advanced technology more accessible, practical, and buildable in real classrooms. By combining Arduino's open, developer-trusted hardware and toolchains with Qualcomm Technologies' energy-efficient on-device and edge AI capabilities, students will gain hands-on experience in designing and building intelligent physical systems that can operate reliably, even in low-connectivity

and resource-constrained environments common across India. "Under the collaboration, Get Set Learn, Qualcomm Technologies, Inc. and Arduino intend to: " Design and deploy classroom-ready learning pathways that integrate electronics, coding, robotics and artificial intelligence to measurable outcomes from grades K 12. " On-device, edge AI experiences where learners design, deploy, and iterate physical systems locally, minimizing cloud dependence while improving responsiveness, privacy, and cost efficiency. " Support the transformation of ATL and STEAM labs into structured, certification-led learning spaces aligned with future skills and life skills development. " Implementation at scale through Get Set Learn's national school partnerships and content ecosystem, ensuring consistent, classroom level level impact across public and private education systems. "Built for India, Aligned to Global Standards "The initiative embraces open, widely adopted global standards and toolchains so schools can invest with confidence. By focusing on physical computing with on-device AI, programs remain resilient to connectivity variability, reduce recurring costs, and teach the architectural fundamentals engineers use to ship real products- sensing, actuation, control loops, and local inference.

## PhonePe Launches AI-Powered search built using Microsoft Foundry

\*\*\*\*Hyderabad\*\*\*\*PhonePe today announced the launch of an AI-powered natural language search feature built using Microsoft Foundry. This feature enables PhonePe users to initiate and complete in-app tasks via natural language text or voice commands, enhancing convenience and bringing personalization to the platform's overall experience. "The feature uses capabilities enabled by Microsoft Foundry to replace traditional navigation with intent-based routing, directly guiding users to their intended destination. For instance, a request such as "Pay Hemanth 20 rupees" automatically launches the payment interface with the recipient pre-selected or displays all relevant contacts named Hemanth. Similarly, commands like "Recharge FASTag" or "Gold price" navigate the user to the appropriate page or surface with the most relevant information or transactional options. "Beyond simple transactions, this feature captures insights and can interpret whether a user is trying to make a payment, complete a purchase, or reach support for help. All of this is achieved via a hybrid model that combines local on-device and cloud inferencing, while keeping all processing secure and ensuring privacy with no personal or transac-

tional data leaving the PhonePe environment. "Speaking on the launch, Rahul Chari, Founder, Whole-time Director & CTO, PhonePe, said: "For years, payment apps have been built as utilitarian tools, optimized for transactions and not people. This launch is the first step towards changing that. Our vision is to make payments accessible to every Indian, and AI enables us to build an intelligent interface that anticipates what users need before they even go looking for it. Through our collaboration with Microsoft, we aim to simplify payments further by understanding intent, not just inputs. And we believe intelligence at the edge is the future and the most thoughtful way to deliver real value without compromising on privacy or security. "Puneet Chandok, President, Microsoft India and South Asia said: "As more Indians embrace natural language to interact with digital services, PhonePe's new AI-powered experience is a strong step toward more intuitive and accessible digital payments. Microsoft Foundry provides the underlying capabilities that help innovators like PhonePe build secure, scalable and human-centred products for millions. We're committed to supporting India's digital ecosystem with trusted AI that empowers organisations to deliver simpler and more meaningful customer experiences."

## Aries Agro Limited Distributes Electronic Prosthetic Hands to 70 Persons with Disabilities in Telangana

Hyderabad: Aries Agro Limited, a leading name in the agricultural sector, successfully distributed high-quality battery-operated electronic prosthetic hands to 70 persons with disabilities from underprivileged communities across Telangana. The initiative was undertaken as part of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program in partnership with Inali Foundation. The distribution camp was organized at Mahbub College, S.D. Road, Secunderabad, on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. A team of expert prosthetists from Inali Foundation conducted detailed measurements and custom-fitted the electronic prosthetic hands to meet the specific needs of each beneficiary. The primary objective of the initiative was to restore confidence, dignity, and independence among individuals who have lost their hands. Designed with modern technology, these advanced battery-powered prosthetic hands are expected to significantly improve the daily lives and functional capabilities of the recipients. Speaking on the occasion, Rahul Mirchandani, CMD of Aries Agro Limited, said, "We believe it is our fundamental responsibility to support underprivileged sections of society. Empowering persons with disabilities and enabling them to lead self-reliant



lives is central to our vision of creating meaningful social impact." Mr. Jayapradeep Subramanian, Executive Vice President (Marketing), Aries Agro Limited, added, "We are proud to bring a ray of hope into the lives of the beneficiaries through this service initiative. We encourage them to make the best use of this opportunity to enhance their quality of life. Giving back to society is an integral part of our organizational culture."

## Chilukanagar Division Issues Brought to the Notice of the Deputy Commissioner — Under the Leadership of Division President Mulakalapalli Rajesh Mudiraj



KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 26 (Indian Chronicle): As per the instructions of Uppal Congress Party In-charge Mandamala Parameshwar Reddy, the Chilukanagar Division Congress Party leaders, un-

der the leadership of Division President Mulakalapalli Rajesh Mudiraj, brought several public issues faced by residents within the division to the attention of the authorities. On this occasion, the leaders met Deputy Commissioner G. Raju courteously and felicitated him with a shawl. They explained in brief the problems faced by the people in the division, particularly highlighting the lack of basic amenities at the Vaikunthadham (cremation ground). The Deputy Commissioner responded positively and assured that a special action plan would be initiated to provide essential facilities at the Vaikunthadham. Congress Party family members who participated in the program included Chilukanagar Division Congress Party In-charge Akkiti Aagam Reddy, Kompalli Balaraju, Nallavelli Mahender, Gandikota Ganesh, Dandugula Shankar, Amar, Janganna, Jagadeesh, Vamshi, and others.

## Ramanthapur Zilla Parishad School Visited by Division Congress Party President Vallapu Srikanth Yadav Will strive to develop it as a Model School: Vallapu Srikanth Yadav

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 26 (Indian Chronicle): Vallapu Srikanth Yadav, Working President of the Congress Party, Ramanthapur Division, visited the Zilla Parishad High School in Ramanthapur on Thursday. During the visit, Headmistress Latha and the teaching staff brought to his attention the infrastructure needs and development works required for the school. Vallapu Srikanth Yadav assured them that all necessary facilities would be provided to improve the school. He stated that efforts would be made to transform the Ramanthapur ZPHS into a model school within Greater Hyderabad. He further assured that he would discuss the issues with District In-charge Minister Sridhar Babu and Uppal Constituency In-charge Parameshwar Reddy to ensure their resolution. The Headmistress, teachers, and students expressed happiness over his assurance and commitment to the development of the school.



## Government to Extend Validity of Existing Accreditation Cards



Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 26, "Old Accreditation Cards to Remain Valid for Two More Months" The government is set to allow the continued use of existing accreditation cards for another two months. Official orders formalizing the extension are expected to be issued within a day or two. The move is likely aimed at ensuring that accredited members do not face inconvenience while the process of issuing new accreditation cards is underway. Further clarity will be available once the formal government order (GO) is released.

## Vishwadeepti School Clinches Coveted 4-Star National Cleanliness Honour

P. S. ASHOKAN, KARIMNAGAR BUREAU, Koyyur (Mulugu/Bhupalpally District): Vishwadeepti Upper Primary School, Koyyur, has carved a niche of distinction by securing District-Level Recognition in the Swachh Evam Harit Vidyalaya Rating (2025-26) programme, an esteemed national initiative instituted by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Exemplifying institutional excellence, the school achieved an impressive aggregate score of 86.40 per cent, thereby earning a coveted 4-Star rating. The honour reflects the institution's unwavering adherence to the highest standards of cleanliness, sanitation, environmental sustainability, and the inculcation of responsible student practices in alignment with the transformative vision of the National Education Policy 2020. In the detailed category-wise assessment, the institution secured 72.73 per cent in Water Management, 70.37 per cent in Sanitation Facilities (Toilets), and a remarkable 100 per cent in Handwashing with Soap as well as Operation and Maintenance. It further attained 95 per cent in Behavioural Change and Capacity Building and 90.48 per cent in Mission LIFE initiatives, underscoring its steadfast commitment to ecological responsibility and environmental

literacy among students. Significantly, Vishwadeepti School is reported to be the only private institution in the district to receive this prestigious distinction. The comprehensive rating framework evaluates schools nationwide on nearly sixty rigorous indicators, encompassing hygiene standards, infrastructural adequacy, greenery enhancement, water conservation, and sustainable institutional practices. At a formal ceremony held in Bhupalpally, district authorities presented a memento and certificate of appreciation to the school leadership. The accolade was received by the Principal in the esteemed presence of senior education officials, in recognition of the institution's exemplary stewardship in maintaining sanitation excellence, greenery development, and environmentally responsible governance. The accomplishment has drawn widespread admiration from educators, parents, and the broader community. Strengthening its holistic educational approach, the school has also enhanced student engagement through the provision of play materials and the promotion of activity-based pedagogical strategies, fostering a vibrant, health-conscious, and eco-friendly learning environment. This distinguished honour stands as a powerful testament to Vishwadeepti School's resolute commitment to academic excellence, sustainability, and the comprehensive development of its learners.

## Major IAS Reshuffle; Telangana Government Announces Key Bureaucratic Changes

Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 26, "Major IAS Reshuffle in Telangana; 45 Officers Transferred" The Telangana government has issued orders transferring and assigning new responsibilities to 45 IAS and State Civil Service (SCS) officers across various departments. Key Senior-Level Transfers: S a n j a y



Kumar has been transferred from Special Chief Secretary, Industries & IT, to Special Chief Secretary, Panchayat Raj & Rural Development (PR&RD) and Rural Water Supply (RWS). Sabyasachi Ghosh has been entrusted with the Flagship Welfare & Development Schemes Unit along with CSR responsibilities. M. Dana Kishore will continue as Special Chief Secretary, Labour, Employment, Training & Factories Department, and has been given additional charge of the Disaster Management Department. N. Sridhar has been appointed as Principal Secretary, IT & Industries Department. Rahul Bojja has been transferred as Principal Secretary (Political Affairs), General Administration Department, with additional charge of BC Welfare. E. Sridhar has been appointed as Secretary, Irrigation & CAD Department. Gaurav Uppal has been appointed as Secretary, Finance & Planning Department, with additional charge as CEO & DG of TGRAC. B. Vijendra has been shifted from Mahabubnagar District Collector to Secretary, Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society. D. Divya will continue as SERP CEO and has been given additional charge as State Nodal Officer for Prajavani. Adwait Kumar Singh has been transferred from Mahabubnagar Collector to Special Secretary (Coordination), Telangana Bhavan, New Delhi. M. Hanumantha Rao has been transferred from

Yadadri Bhuvanagiri Collector to Director of Endowments. Sikta Patnaik has been appointed as Special Secretary, Finance Department. Sandeep Kumar Jha has been appointed as Jangaon District Collector. M.D. Musharrif Ali Faruqi has been transferred as CMD of the third DISCOM. Pamela Satpathy has been shifted from Karimnagar Collector to Special Commissioner, Labour Department. Anuraag Jayanti has been appointed as Yadadri Bhuvanagiri Collector. Rahul Raj P.S. has been appointed as Special Commissioner & Registrar, Cooperative Department. Bhavesh Mishra has been redesignated as Special Secretary, IT Department. New District Collectors Appointed: Jitesh V. Patil - CMD, TGSPDCL. Rizwanbasha Shaik - Jogulamba Gadwal Collector. Santhosh B.M. - Director, Tribal Welfare. Prateek Jain - Narayanpet Collector. Sneha Shabarish - Mahabubabad Collector. Chitra Mishra - Karimnagar Collector. G a r i m a Agrawal - Rajanna Sircilla Collector. Deepak Tewari - Vikarabad Collector. Pratima Singh - Medak Collector. Ankit - Bhadradi Kothagudem Collector. Chahat Bajpai - Hanumakonda Collector (with additional charge as GWMC Commissioner). Khushboo Gupta - Mahabubnagar Collector. Other Key Postings: P. Katyayani Devi - Joint Managing Director, State Finance Corporation. G. Phaneendra Reddy - Additional Collector, Narayanpet. M a n d a Makarandu - GHMC Rajendranagar Zonal Commissioner. Faizan Ahmed - Additional Collector, Medchal-Malkajgiri. Shivendra Pratap - Joint Managing Director, Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited. P a r m a Pinkeshkumar Lalitkumar - GHMC Quthbullapur Zonal Commissioner. Uma Shankar Prasad - Additional Collector, Vikarabad. State Civil Service (SCS) Officers' Postings: G.V. Shyam Prasad Lal - Additional Collector, Nagarkurnool. P. Chandraiah - Additional Collector, Mancherla. Y.V. Ganesh - Additional Collector, Warangal. Abdul Hameed - Additional Collector, Siddipet. B. Venkateshwarlu - Additional Collector, Nirmal. N. Kheemya Naik - Additional Collector, Wanaparthy. K. Vidyasagar - Additional CEO, Industry & Investment Cell. M. Surender - Additional Nodal Officer, Prajavani. With these changes, the government has initiated a comprehensive administrative reshuffle aimed at strengthening governance and streamlining departmental functioning across the state.

## National Science Day Week Celebrations Held Grandly at Government Degree College, Uppal

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 26 (Indian Chronicle): National Science Day Week celebrations are being organized at Government Degree College, Uppal, under the aegis of the Science Departments, informed the coordinators Dr. V. Srinivasa Rao and Dr. R. Chandrasagar. As part of the week-long celebrations, a Quiz Competition was conducted on February 25, followed by a Poster Presentation on February 26. The coordinators stated that an Extension Lecture on the theme "Women in Science Extension" will be organized on February 28. Dr. Y. Kalyana Lakshmi, Associate Professor of Physics from Osmania University, will attend as the Chief Guest and deliver the extension lecture, said Dr. V. Srinivasa Rao, Head of the Department of Physics. Prizes will be distributed to the winners by the Chief Guest during the valedictory session. Principal Dr. K. Vijay Kumar and Vice Principal Dr. C.H. Satyanarayana expressed their happiness over the successful conduct of the events. Faculty members Dr. Yamuna Rani, K. Geetha, and Dr. A. Ravi Prasad served as judges for the competitions. Dr. G. Tirupatiah, Jaldia Vishwanath Kumar, Vijay



Kumar, Dr. Venkateshwarlu, Sravanti, Anuradha, Anusha, and a large number of students actively participated in the programme.

## Tungaturthi Ravi Inspects Removal of Water Hyacinth at Peerzadiguda Pedda Cheruvu

NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 26, (Indian chronicle): Works to remove water hyacinth from Peerzadiguda Pedda Cheruvu (Mini Tank Bund), located under Boduppall Circle-10 of Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation, are progressing at a rapid pace. Congress Party president Tungaturthi Ravi inspected the ongoing removal operations on Thursday. During his visit, he instructed the contractor to ensure that the cleared water hyacinth is transported immediately, without causing inconvenience to residents of nearby colonies. Speaking on the occasion, Tungaturthi Ravi said that the excessive growth of water hyacinth in the lake had led to mosquito breeding and foul smell, causing serious inconvenience to the public. He stated that continuous efforts are being made to provide better civic amenities and maintain hygienic surroundings for local residents.



## Free Eye Screening Camps for Drivers Held Under "Arrive Alive" Road Safety Initiative

NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 26, (Indian chronicle): As part of the Telangana Police's "Arrive Alive" road safety campaign, multiple free eye screening camps were conducted for Heavy Motor Vehicle (HMV) drivers in the Cherlapally Industrial Area, Auto Nagar, and Vanasthalipuram on Thursday. The camps were organized by the Rachakonda Security Council (to be renamed Malkajgiri Security Council from April 1) in coordination with Malkajgiri Traffic Police, Vanasthalipuram Traffic Police, and LB Nagar Traffic Police, following directions issued by the State Director General of Police. The initiative aimed to reduce road accidents by improving drivers' vision health and increasing awareness about road safety regulations. In the Cherlapally Industrial Area, two free eye screening camps were conducted at the premises of Indian Oil Corporation Limited and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited with medical support from Solis Eye Care. In Auto Nagar, additional camps were held at Sri Srinivasa Tours and Travels, with medical assistance provided by Dr. Agarwal Eye Care and Nethra Eye Care. A separate eye screening camp was also conducted in Auto Nagar under the supervision of Vanasthalipuram Traffic Police, with medi-

cal services extended by Sri Netralaya. During interactive sessions with drivers, several concerns were raised regarding visibility problems caused by high-intensity focused LED headlights. Drivers also highlighted hazardous potholes and unsafe U-turn points in the Cherlapally Industrial Area, stating that three to four vehicles had recently been stranded at such locations. Traffic officials clarified that the use of focused LED headlights is illegal and instructed drivers to ensure the use of half covers or strip covers to prevent glare to oncoming vehicles. Officials assured strict enforcement against violations. Regarding infrastructure-related issues, plant management authorities were advised to approach IALA, which is responsible for maintenance in the Cherlapally Industrial Area. At the camps conducted at BPCL and HPCL premises, approximately 180 heavy vehicles participated. At the Auto Nagar location, 186 HMV drivers underwent eye examinations. Overall, around 366 drivers benefited from the screenings. Several cases of cataract and pterygium were detected, while others were advised to use corrective spectacles and undergo further medical treatment. The program was attended by Anuradha, DCP LB Nagar; Srinivasulu, DCP Traffic LB Nagar; Manohar, DCP Road Safety, Malkajgiri; Srinivas, Additional DCP Traffic; Naveen Reddy, ACP Traffic LB Nagar; Kashi Reddy, ACP Vanasthalipuram; and inspectors Bhoopathi Gattumallu, Srinivas Reddy, Srisailem, Venkateshwarlu, and Mahesh, along with representatives of the Rachakonda Security Council and other police officials. Drivers and members of the public expressed appreciation for the initiative, stating that such programs significantly contribute to driver health, road safety, and accident prevention.

## Pakistan archaeologists find rare coins, decorative stones from UNESCO-listed site near Takshashila



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Pakistani archaeologists found rare decorative stones and coins while excavating a UNESCO-listed site near the historic city of Takshashila, providing a rare view of the earliest urban settlement of the extensive ancient civilisation. The discoveries were made at the ancient Bhir Mound, where experts unearthed decorative stones dating to the 6th century BC and coins from the 2nd century AD. Dawn reported that officials hailed the discovery as the most significant at the site in a decade. It reported that experts uncovered fragments of metamorphic decorative stone identified as lapis lazuli, alongside the rare bronze coins attributed to the Kushan dynasty, dramatically pushing forward the material narrative of ancient Gandhara. Aasim Dogar, the Deputy Director of the Punjab Department of Archaeology who serves as head of the excavation team, confirmed the preliminary analysis of the artefacts. "The decorative stones are lapis lazuli, a prized semi-precious stone, while the coins belong to the Kushan period," Mr. Dogar said.

The excavation team relied on specialised forensic assistance to date the metal artefacts. Mr. Dogar noted that detailed numismatic analysis conducted by specialists from the University of Peshawar confirmed that the coins bear the image of Emperor Vasudeva. Vasudeva is recognised by historians as the last of the 'great Kushan rulers' who presided over the region. According to Mr. Dogar, the ob-

verse of the recovered coinage depicts Vasudeva, while the reverse features a female religious deity. He described this specific imagery as a distinct hallmark of Kushan-era religious pluralism, which often blended various theological traditions. The artefacts were discovered on the northern side of the archaeological remains, specifically within the B-2 trench — one of 16 distinct trenches currently excavated at the site. Mr. Dogar said the surrounding archaeological evidence reveals that these specific remains constituted a residential area. These latest discoveries affirm that Takshashila reached the zenith of its political, cultural, and economic influence under Kushan rule, particularly between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. "Under emperors such as Kanishka the Great, Taxila emerged as a major administrative, commercial, and intellectual centre," Mr. Dogar said. He added that widespread Kushan patronage of Buddhism during this era led to the construction of stupas, monasteries, and vast religious complexes. The period also marked the rise of Gandharan art, a distinctive synthesis of Greek, Roman, Persian, and Indian traditions, with Takshashila serving as its core hub. Malik Tahir Suleman, a renowned numismatist, told Dawn that Kushan coins serve as some of the most critical historical sources for understanding ancient South and Central Asia. "Issued between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, Kushan coins evolved from Indo-Greek imitations into a sophisticated imperial currency system," Mr. Suleman said. "Struck mainly in gold, copper, and bronze, they reflect the empire's economic strength and vast trade networks, including links with Roman markets." Mr. Suleman said Kushan coinage is distinguished by its rich iconography and multilingual inscriptions. He explained that they often depict rulers in Central Asian attire on one side and a remarkable range of deities — from Helios and Mithra to Shiva, Nana, and the Buddha — on the other. Beyond the coins, the discovery of the deep-blue lapis lazuli fragments provides vital clues regarding ancient supply chains. Mr. Dogar noted that the stone has been valued for millennia across ancient civilisations. "Its presence at Taxila points to long-distance trade links, particularly with Badakhshan in present-day Afghanistan, a historic source of lapis lazuli," Mr. Dogar said.

## Russia hands to U.S. what it says is proof of attempted Ukrainian strike on Putin residence

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

A senior Russian military chief handed to a U.S. military attache on Thursday what he said was part of a Ukrainian drone containing data he said proved that the Ukrainian military this week had targeted a Russian presidential residence. Moscow accused Kyiv on Monday of trying to strike a residence of President Vladimir Putin in Russia's northern Novgorod region with 91 long-range attack drones. It said Russia would review its negotiating position in ongoing talks with the U.S. on ending the Ukraine war.

Ukraine and Western countries have disputed Russia's account of the alleged attempted strike.

A video posted on the Russian Defence Ministry's Telegram channel showed Admiral Igor Kostyukov, head of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of Russia's Armed Forces, handing to the U.S. attache what he described as the "controlling mechanism of a drone found among downed fragments." The decryption of the content of the memory of the navigation controller of the drones carried out by specialists of Russia's special services "confirms without question that the target of the attack was the complex of buildings of the Russian president's residence in Novgorod region," Mr. Kostyukov said. "We presume that this measure will do away with any questions and allow for the truth to be established." The Ministry had earlier posted a statement on Telegram saying its findings would



be turned over to the United States. The Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday that U.S. national security officials had found Ukraine did not target Putin or one of his residences in a drone strike. Reuters could not immediately verify the report. U.S. President Donald Trump initially expressed sympathy for the Russian charge, telling reporters on Monday that Putin had informed him of the alleged incident and that he was "very angry" about it. By Wednesday, Mr. Trump appeared more sceptical, sharing on social media a New York Post editorial accusing Russia of blocking peace in Ukraine. Ukraine has denied carrying out such an attack and described the accusation as part of a Russian disinformation campaign meant to drive a wedge between Kyiv and Washington after a weekend meeting between Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

## Kim's daughter visits family mausoleum, promoting her potential status as heir in North Korea



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Seoul: The teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made her first known visit to a sacred family mausoleum, a step that experts say bolstered her status as her father's potential heir. The visit, which occurred on New Year's Day on Thursday, even sparked speculation that the girl, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and aged about 13, could be named a high-level official at the upcoming ruling Workers' Party congress. Images carried by North Korea's state media on Friday showed Kim Ju Ae standing in the front row with her parents and deeply bowing at Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, where the embalmed bodies of her late grandfather and great-grandfather are on display. The palace is "a place that symbolises legitimacy of the North Korean regime" and her visit there ahead of the Workers' Party congress is a politically orchestrated move, said Cheong Seong-Chang, deputy head of the private Sejong Institute in South Korea. Kim Jong Un, 41, is the third generation of his family to rule North Korea since the country's foundation in 1948. He often marks key state anniversaries by visiting the Kumsusan palace and paying respect to his father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. Cheong predicted that Kim Jong Un could give his daughter the first secretary post at the Workers' Party, the party's No 2 job, at the congress. Other experts say she is too young to accept such a high-profile post and might be provided with lower-level jobs.

The congress, the first of its kind in five years, is

meant to establish new priorities in state policies and reshuffle officials. North Korea hasn't said when it will hold it, but the National Intelligence Service, South Korea's spy agency, said it likely will be held either in January or February. Since first appearing in state media in November 2022, Kim Ju Ae has accompanied her father at a slew of events including military parades and missile launches. In September, Kim Jong Un brought her on his trip to Beijing. During New Year's Day celebrations this week, she kissed her father on the cheek, showing their closeness. In January 2024, the NIS said it viewed Kim Ju Ae as her father's likely heir. Some outside experts disagree with that assessment, citing Kim Jong Un's relatively young age and the extremely male-dominated nature of North Korea's power hierarchy. The NIS told lawmakers in November that Kim appeared to have no major health problems. Revealing the young Kim Ju Ae was a surprise to foreign experts because neither Kim Jong Un nor Kim Jong Il were mentioned in North Korean state media before they became adults. Some observers say Kim Jong Un likely aimed to shore up public support for his plan to extend the family's rule by repeatedly disclosing Kim Ju Ae in public events.

## Gmail users can now change their usernames without losing existing data

New Delhi: Google account holders can now change their primary '@gmail.com' email addresses to a new address while retaining all data from their existing account, as the tech giant begins a gradual rollout of the feature.

The update, which is currently appearing on select language versions of Google's official support page, confirms that data saved in the account—including photos, messages, and emails—will remain completely unaffected when a user switches to a new Gmail ID.

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



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

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

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

The remarks drew a backlash from the BJP, a former

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

## 'Dropping her home safely was my duty': Meet the TET-qualified Kolkata cab driver whose viral act is restoring the city's trust

Forced to drive a cab after failing to secure a job despite clearing the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET), Munna Ajj Mollick, 31, has unexpectedly found himself in the social media spotlight after safely dropping home a young woman passenger who got into his cab in an inebriated condition late on Christmas Eve. A video of the incident, which went viral soon after, has reignited conversations around women's safety in Kolkata in the aftermath of the RG Kar incident. However, Mollick said that while the internet hails him as a hero, his mother's reaction to the incident was a reminder that he had actually done nothing "extraordinary".

In a long conversation with The Indian Express, the viral cab driver revealed that he originally hails from East Burdwan in West Bengal and moved to Kolkata after high school with the aim of uplifting his family through education. For eight years, Mollick worked as a security guard, earning a meagre Rs 4,200, while attending night classes at Shyama Prasad College. By 2022, he had cleared the TET and completed his Diploma in Elementary Education, fulfilling all requirements for teaching primary students. He was even empanelled and reached the final interview stages, but his dream got buried under massive recruitment scams and ongoing court cases that have since left the lives of thousands of candidates in limbo.

"When I cleared TET, I felt that all my struggles would end, but then came the cases, one after another. Honestly speaking, for middle-class or lower middle-class people, such a scam upends their lives. Look at the inflation rate, it is not possible to make ends meet without a proper job or employment," he said. Kolkata cab driver By 2022, he had cleared the TET and completed his Diploma in Elementary Education, fulfilling all requirements for teaching primary students. With a younger brother to educate and a father who is working as a security guard, Mollick decided to drive a cab for a living, relying on the Maruti Alto he had bought on a loan. "I thought, I know driving. It will be independent work. I had no time to develop any skills any further, and I wanted to do something that could help me earn money immediately," he recalled. The incident that put him in the limelight took place around 10.30 pm on Christmas Eve this year. An inebriated young woman, about 18-19 years old, booked his cab for a long journey from South Kolkata to the northern fringes of the city near the airport. Though she started the journey with a male friend, he disembarked at a Metro station just minutes into the trip, leaving Mollick alone with the young woman who was in a vulnerable state. "As her safety was in my hands, I knew I had to drop her home properly," he said. Realising the sensitivity of the situation



and the likelihood that misunderstandings may crop up later, Mollick decided to record their interaction during the drive. "She was heavily intoxicated and not in her senses, so for my own security, I started recording. Her phone had died and she wanted to speak to her mother. I called her up and gave the phone to the young woman, but the mother was offended and she asked to speak to me. I assured her that I would drop the young woman home safely, and said I would give her a call five minutes before reaching the destination so that she could come and receive her," he said. Upon arrival, the young woman was unable to even operate the door of her building. Mollick stepped out, unlocked the door for her, and waited until she was safely inside before driving away.

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

## Indonesia's new penal code takes effect, marking historic break with colonial law

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Jakarta: Indonesia on Friday began enforcing its newly ratified penal code, replacing a Dutch-era criminal law that had governed the country for more than 80 years and marking a major shift in its legal landscape. Since proclaiming independence in 1945, the Southeast Asian country had continued to operate under a colonial framework widely criticised as outdated and misaligned with Indonesia's social values. Efforts to revise the code stalled for decades as lawmakers debated how to balance human rights, religious norms and local traditions in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. The 345-page Indonesian Penal Code, known as the KUHP, was passed in 2022. At the time, then-US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the US was "closely monitoring the revised criminal code" of its democratic partner. It criminalises sex outside marriage, applies to citizens and foreign visitors, and reintroduces penalties for insulting the president and state institutions. It comes into force following a three-year transition period. Moving away from a colonial framework a previously revised code was poised for passage in 2019, but then-President Joko Widodo urged lawmakers to delay a vote amid mounting public criticism that led to nationwide protests involving

tens of thousands of people. Opponents said it contained articles that discriminated against minorities and that the legislative process lacked transparency. A parliamentary taskforce finalised the bill in November 2022 and lawmakers unanimously approved it a month later in what the government called a "historic step." Deputy Law Minister Edward Hiarij said he defended the reforms as a modernisation effort that shifts Indonesia's criminal justice paradigm toward corrective, restorative and rehabilitative justice. The new criminal code prioritises repairing harm and social integration, rather than relying solely on punishment," Hiarij said during a briefing on the new penal code on Thursday, adding that these principles reflect values long embedded in Indonesian society. Alongside the KUHP, Indonesia is also preparing a new criminal procedural law, or KUHPA, aimed at addressing procedural inefficiencies and strengthening human rights protections. Together, the reforms represent a comprehensive overhaul of the justice system, Hiarij said. Under the amended code, sex outside marriage is punishable by up to one year in prison, while cohabitation carries a six-month sentence. However, adultery cases can only proceed following a complaint by a spouse, parents or children — a safeguard t

## Wellness in India 2026: Why sexual health, women's care and recovery are taking centre stage



Wellness in India is no longer limited to luxury retreats, spa holidays or aspirational lifestyles. In fact, wellbeing is becoming embedded in everyday life — shaping how people work, travel, recover, relate and rest. From longevity therapies in city hotels and urban sanctuaries focused on emotional regulation, to women-led health conversations, community-driven wellness festivals and a renewed interest in ecological, place-based healing, the country's wellness landscape is expanding rapidly and deliberately. This shift is also reflected in how people choose where to stay and how to spend their time. The Global Wellness Institute predicts that by 2030, one in three travellers globally will select a hotel primarily for its wellness programming — a statistic that underscores how central wellbeing has become to decision-making across travel, hospitality and lifestyle. In India, that change is already visible, driven by rising stress levels, changing family structures, greater awareness around mental and sexual health, and a growing desire for practices that offer long-term resilience rather than temporary relief.

For decades, sexual wellness in India existed behind closed doors or was dismissed as something people should simply "figure out" on their own. Over the last few years, however, a cultural unsealing has occurred. People are speaking with an honesty, naming their desires, anxieties, kinks, insecurities and emotional struggles with startling clarity. Yet this surge in expression has not been matched by an equivalent rise in understanding.

Within sexuality coach and founder of sexual wellness platform Get Intimacy, Pallavi Barnwal's community, people are asking questions that range from deeply vulnerable to technically practical. Men speak openly about erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, anxiety around performance, fear of rejection and the shame of "not knowing". Women articulate confusion around desire, pain, emotional disconnect and the pressure to perform a version of sexuality they do not feel. Couples raise pragmatic questions about compatibility, pleasure, technique and the emotional gridlock that arrives quietly in long-term relationships. This is not a lack of willingness; it is a lack of tools. As the Puducherry-based practitioner notes, "People are becoming more open, expressive, and curious but most still lack basic sexual literacy and resist seeking counselling." The gap becomes most evident in people's search for instant solutions. "People seek instant solutions instead of the therapeutic processes required for healthy, sustainable intimacy," she says. Many arrive after trying everything else — advice from friends, online content, supplements and experimentation — without recognising that intimacy challenges, like any chronic pattern, require time, reflection and guided support. Only a small percentage commit to long-term coaching, yet those who do often experience profound shifts: deeper emotional connection, reduced anxiety, increased body awareness and an entirely different relationship with pleasure. In 2026, sexual wellness is likely to move from curiosity to structure — from anonymous confessions to guided conversations, from improvisation to trauma-informed counselling, and from shame to skill-based intimacy education.

Women's health, reclaimed Perhaps the most culturally significant shift building on this intimacy conversation is how women are reframing their relationship with wellness. Historically, women have centred their lives around the wellbeing of others, often neglecting their own health until a crisis forced intervention. That pattern is now changing. Women are increasingly seeking support across the full spectrum of their lifecycle — from menstruation and fertility to perimenopause, menopause, emotional transitions and spiritual growth. Dr Sreelal Sankar, Head of Ayurveda at Ananda in the Himalayas, explains that women's wellbeing is inherently transitional, shaped by distinct biological and emotional phases. "Our programmes support hormonal balance, emotional resilience, metabolic health and personal growth," he says. At Ananda, this care takes the form of structured Ayurvedic programmes such as hormonal rebalance, fertility enhancement and menstrual health. These programmes combine personalised nutrition plans, lifestyle corrections, therapeutic Ayurvedic treatments and massages, addressing not isolated symptoms but systemic balance across the body and mind, while also supporting emotional wellbeing. This shift is now cultural. Women are no longer waiting for crises to prioritise their health. In 2026, they will continue to reclaim time, space and wellbeing without guilt, speaking more openly about menstruation, fertility, perimenopause and menopause. In doing so, they are driving a quiet but significant transformation within households and communities. Longevity goes mainstream The mainstreaming of longevity is perhaps the clearest sign that wellness is becoming a daily requirement rather than an occasional reset. As urban routines disrupt circadian rhythms, compromise sleep, overstimulate the nervous system and create a constant state of low-grade inflammation, people are turning to therapies designed to restore physiological balance efficiently.

At Fairmont Mumbai, a luxury hotel located near Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, longevity therapies are designed to feel efficient rather than intimidating. Cryotherapy takes place inside a temperature-controlled cold chamber, where guests step in for a brief session lasting a few minutes. The exposure triggers a cold-induced hormonal response that cuts through inflammation and mental fog, delivering a sharp sense of alertness without the prolonged discomfort people often associate with ice baths. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is administered in a pressurised chamber where guests breathe oxygen at higher-than-normal atmospheric pressure. The experience is calm and restorative rather than clinical, increasing oxygen delivery to tissues and supporting cellular repair and cognitive clarity in a world where shallow breathing and disrupted sleep have become default states.

Red-light therapy is offered as a full-body experience, allowing light wavelengths to penetrate muscle tissue and skin more comprehensively, stimulating mitochondrial activity — the body's energy centre — and helping with persistent fatigue. Intermittent vacuum therapy addresses poor circulation caused by long hours of sitting, using controlled pressure changes around the lower body to encourage blood flow and lymphatic drainage. As Rashmi Ambastha, Director of Spa, Wellness and Recreation at Fairmont Mumbai, puts it, "Longevity-focused wellness is less about momentary comfort and more about improving biological resilience over time." The future of this trend lies in continuity: mem-

berships that support weekly recovery, staycation formats centred on restorative work, and programmes that position longevity as routine rather than reward. Wellness as everyday practice: urban sanctuaries take root Another major shift is the rise of urban wellness centres, especially in cities like Mumbai — intimate, contemplative spaces that help city-dwellers regulate their emotional lives. Mira Kapoor's Dhun Wellness in Mumbai's Bandra and the recently opened AUM Life in Worli are prime examples of this shift. Digital saturation, fractured families, dual-working households and relentless competitiveness have quietly reshaped mental health in India. Richa Agrawal, founder of AUM Life, observes, "The rapid growth of urban wellness centres is being driven by a fundamental shift in how people are prioritising their lives. With increasing professional pressures, digital overload, and sustained mental fatigue, there is a growing need for spaces that support emotional, psychological, and holistic well-being." Crucially, accessibility today is no longer just about cost or proximity. It is about translating ancient knowledge — breathwork, meditation, yoga and introspective practices — into forms that feel relatable and sustainable for everyday urban life. People are no longer drawn to intimidating philosophies; they want gentle, effective practices that help them feel less reactive, more self-aware and emotionally anchored.

Meera Shah, a communications professional who lives in Santacruz, visits Dhun Wellness twice a week before heading to her office in Bandra. "It's become part of how I manage my week," she says. "I come here early, do a yoga-and-meditation session, and then go straight to work. I'm not looking for a big spiritual experience. I just notice that I'm calmer. It's subtle, but it changes how the rest of my day unfolds."

Wellness festivals Wellness today is no longer confined to solitude. While some still seek retreat-style isolation, others are gravitating towards communal formats that blend joy, connection and inner work. Wellbeing-led festivals are emerging as powerful spaces for social healing, particularly in a time marked by loneliness, digital fatigue and emotional disconnection. At the heart of this shift are thoughtfully curated programmes. As Himanshu Jakhar, founder of the Belong Festival, a three-day festival designed to celebrate the joys of friendship, personal growth, and wellbeing, and whose first edition was held in Jaisalmer in November, explains, the daytime schedule featured "a range of sessions and workshops — from breathwork and sound healing to yoga and movement. There were also acoustic sets and live bands, designed to help participants slow down and drop more deeply into their inward journey." Several workshops focussed on connection, alongside practices centred on meditation and mindfulness, creating a rhythm that balanced introspection with shared experience. The experience was intentionally intimate. While applications ran into the thousands, invitations were extended to just 100–110 participants, reinforcing the festival's emphasis on curation and meaningful interaction. That sense of closeness was felt deeply by attendees. "I spent two days at the festival," says Goa-based marketing professional Insia Laxewalla, "and experienced everything from an intense breathwork session that slipped me into a peaceful, alert trance, to workshops that invited childlike play, movement, surrender and reflection. Each experience steadily peeled away inhibition and control." She adds that, as a facilitator, she found herself forming intimate micro-communities with strangers through shared voices, candid conversations and moments of collective vulnerability. "We smiled, spoke, and sometimes cried together." A transformative trend emerging in hospitality is the shift toward deeply personal, in-room rituals that prioritise rest and nervous-system repair. This movement is gaining momentum because it recognises something fundamental: people increasingly crave private, unhurried forms of care that do not require navigating spa schedules, public spaces or social performance.

At Amaraanth in South Goa, this trend takes a distinct shape. For the first time, the spa experience is brought directly into the guest's room — not as a convenience but as a deliberate reimagining of intimacy and restoration. What begins as a dry massage, done seated and tailored to the guest's comfort, flows seamlessly into a bathing ritual set in an outdoor space surrounded by thick greenery. The setting itself becomes part of the treatment: a large stone bathtub, open skies, the quiet hum of plants, and the sensory privacy that hotels rarely offer. The ritual is meticulously personalised. Guests are invited to choose their preferred bathing salts, essential oil blends and even the type of tea they would like to sip — usually from a set of three or four infusions. The therapist prepares the tub, infuses the salts, adjusts temperature, and builds an atmosphere where the body can soften and the mind can slow down without interruption. This is where the collaboration with The HVN in Knightsbridge in London becomes important. Their grounding in Shinrin Yoku, or Japanese forest bathing, and their integrative wellness philosophy inform the structure of this ritual. The HVN's emphasis on warm-water immersion, salt therapy and essential oils for nervous-system regulation is translated into a format that is quiet and contemplative. The result is a ritual that supports circulation, reduces inflammation, eases muscular tension and offers a deep emotional calm that many guests describe as the closest thing to a reset. Return to roots: foraging, soil-to-skin and ecological intelligence As global wellness pivots toward technology, India is seeing a counter-movement rooted in tactility, ecology and place. Hyper-local, foraged and seasonally aligned treatments are emerging as a marker of authenticity. This mirrors how foraging first reshaped food culture — from chefs seeking indigenous ingredients to mixologists creating forest-led cocktails. Now, that same curiosity about provenance is entering the world of wellness. Increasingly, guests want to know not just what goes into their treatment but where it comes from, how it was grown and why it supports the body in specific ways. They are asking deeper questions about hibiscus and its cooling properties, sesame and castor for grounding, or tulsi for stress regulation. The more fragmented modern life becomes, the more people seem to crave rituals anchored in the logic of landscape. Aramness Gir, in Gujarat, has also opened the door to participatory forms of wellness. While not everyone will want to forage — and it is not feasible for every guest — there is a clear and growing segment seeking immersive, educational experiences that allow them to walk the land, identify botanicals and understand how seasonality affects potency. Just as food enthusiasts embraced farm-to-table dining, wellness seekers are beginning to pursue soil-to-skin therapies. The notion of customising a ritual based on herbs gathered from the property, even if guided, feels both intimate and empowering. Rafeek Jabbar, wellness director at Aramness Gir, a boutique lodge bordering the Sasan Gir Park in Gujarat, observes: "The nature-led approach is resonating now because guests are seeking authenticity in an increasingly synthetic world. When you receive a treatment crafted from the very land beneath your feet, something ineffable happens." This movement is grounded in ecological respect: ethical harvesting, regenerative gardens and ingredient cycles aligned with local seasons.

## How long can humans really live? Inside the longevity science boom



The Greenland shark can live up to 500 years. The kind of longevity that probably has something to do with its home: cold, dark depths of the North Atlantic Ocean and Arctic Ocean. Scientists have been studying the sharks' biology — from its slow metabolism to cellular repair — to find answers for healthy ageing in humans. Meanwhile, human beings navigate infectious bacteria and parasites, chaos, greed and grief. At a time when most of us feel powerless over world events, emergent from the pandemic with broken dreams and spirits, the Silicon Valley biosciences and tech elite are attempting the ultimate form of control: over our mortality and the body's decay.

Then there is longevity that looks effortless even in bad air — inside a Mumbai park with unruly grass. Reporting on new directions in geroscience and longevity over the past couple of years, I've met two sanguine centenarians. K.M. Mathappan, 101, who lives with his daughter Mary Mathappan, 54, a finance professional. And his neighbour and friend, Antony J. Mundane, 104, who lives nearby with his son. Both centenarians grew up in rural Kerala. They are well-cared-for, and are regulars at a 7 a.m. laughter club at their neighbourhood park. I first met Mathappan one such boisterous Mumbai-winter morning at the laughter club. In his 100th year, Mathappan, a former real-estate lawyer and active contributor to his church's community work, adducted with surprising ease, and smiled his way through a gentle exercise routine. Further still from the Greenland shark's safe abyss, and centenarians in busy cities, thriving despite air pollution and ageist mindsets, are the new imaginations and breakthroughs in longevity science — on magnificent display at the 2025 Global Wellness Summit (GWS) in Dubai.

Themed 'Longevity Through a Wellness Lens', the conference in November was a feast of ideas and inventions — some real and effective, some wild even to the pathological optimist. The GWS is hosted annually by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), a New York-based non-profit. At the summit, the GWI released the Global Economy Monitor, which estimated the global wellness industry at \$6.8 trillion in 2024 (for India, it was \$156 billion). The study projects it to grow by 7.6% annually over the next five years, reaching an estimated \$9.8 trillion in 2029. As a media delegate attending the five-day summit, by the end of Day 1, it was obvious to me that longevity wellness is more than tech billionaire Bryan Johnson urging us "not to die", or making biohacking a performative spectacle like he does. Biohacking is any incremental change to a human being's body, diet, and lifestyle to improve their health and well-being, and is a cornerstone of longevity science. Often, illness and tragedy force us to biohack — it's just that we have a name for it now. Nine years ago, after a dire cancer diagnosis, two surgeries and chemo-misery as primary treatment, longevity had a very different meaning for me. How best to bring my body and mind back to normal, avoid hospitals, and keep that recurrence at bay — I embraced biohacking purposefully. It meant a new lifestyle and new ways of feeding and nurturing myself. It eventually led me to start The Slow Fix, an IP for a knowledge and awareness platform for preventive health and mindful living. Immersing myself in the world of longevity as a journalist and cancer survivor has been a way to understand my journey overcoming what's possibly the worst the human body can be subjected to — when cells in your own body go rogue. But this new world of longevity also makes me question why the entire focus is on how to live up to 100 and beyond — the promise and celebratory lens on the future — and not even a little on how well the ill and the terminally ill can live, for however long that is possible. Palliative longevity, I call it.

Today, everything that has a promise to upgrade your body, mind or spirit in some way is a longevity solution — even if that means the lines between hope, belief and scientific data blur. At the Dubai summit, when "the father of biohacking" Dave Asprey presented his life story of healing and age-reversal using everything from meditation to wearables and supplements, the thought that popped in my head was: That face isn't botoxed? The 52-year-old author (Heavily Meditated, 2025) even displayed his washboard abs as proof of biohacking success. Elsewhere at GWS, there were instances of Artificial Intelligence (AI) diagnostics urging humans to pay heed to what their liver is telling them, mood-elevating longevity skincare, and multi-sensory wellness architecture. The brain solutions were particularly fascinating — and movie-like. Sat Randhawa, founder-CEO of One Hype, a brain-mapping technology company, guided me through a wearable they have developed: The Brain X360. A helmet with octopus-like tentacles, it can tell you how tired or aged or foggy your brain is, and then proceed to offer interventions and treatment strategies. "Imagine this being connected to your device, and when your brain is tired, automatically blurring your screen so you stop looking and scrolling," Randhawa told me. Do we need to wear a helmet to tell us when to put a stop to the brain rot?

I tried the breath-analysis metabolic test by the Greek company PNOE — it analyses 23 biomarkers through breath — with "clinical-grade precision," say the company representatives. You breathe normally with a scuba-diving kind of gear over your nose and mouth, and a few days later, you get a report in your inbox laying out your metabolic blueprint. I received mine, seemingly with no exceptional findings. I have no idea though who can interpret the finer points of that report and suggest remedies for what's not optimal. At the same event, experts in neuroaesthetics, the science of what happens to our brain when we experience art and beauty, shared insights on the power of optimising sensory stimulus. Ari Peralta, a neuroscientist from Harvard who is known for his expertise on multi-sensory design, told me over a hummus-abundant lunch, "Our body receives about 11 million signals every second, and the senses are responsible for transforming that information into valuable insights in the brain, shaping our experiences and emotions." Longevity evangelists want us to live longer, beyond 80 or 100 (lifespan). And live well (healthspan). We see grandparents resigned to live in their 70s, 80s or 90s without work, with diabetes and bad knees, waiting for death. Longevity efforts want to change that narrative. Imagine 80-year-olds earning money, contributing to society, and effortlessly walking their pets.

This is not a far-fetched idea, for there are geographic areas with lower rates of chronic diseases and longer life expectancy. These are called blue zones, which are expanding around the world. Besides the original five in Dan

Buettner's book Blue Zones (2012) — Okinawa (Japan), Sardinia (Italy), Nicoya (Costa Rica), Ikaria (Greece) and Loma Linda (California) — Singapore is now considered one, and Oulu (Finland), expected to be one soon. Mathappan's Kerala is often considered the Indian Blue Zone due to better health and education infrastructure, but because accurate data related to birth and age in large swathes of Indian population are unavailable, categorising a Blue Zone poses unique challenges in India. Indian marketing-research firm Data Bridge brought out one of the first studies on the longevity economy in the middle of the pandemic in 2020 — estimating it at \$15 trillion, projected to grow to \$27 trillion by 2030. In India, one of the definitive studies came out in May 2025. "Longevity: A New Way of Understanding Ageing" by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, Dalberg and Ashoka, concludes that by 2067, India will have the largest population of older adults in the world. This report calls for a shift in how we think about growing old. Swetha Totapally, study co-author and regional director for Dalberg Asia-Pacific, says, there's a false perception that "ageing is something we can deal just deal with later after we've gotten richer as a nation."

Every nation, culture and society, and their epics and mythologies have had something to say about immortality — chiranjevis like Hanuman in the Ramayana, for example. But as a scientific or self-improvement movement, the pandemic catapulted the names of two bio-scientists and efforts in biosciences into what we now know as the longevity movement. Latvia-born, Massachusetts-based Alex Zhavoronkov and Evelyn Bischof, who lives between Israel, China and Switzerland, are credited to be pioneers, based on their research on how data and AI can increase lifespan and quality of life. Then came the GLP-1 category of drugs, hyped like a moonshot. The repurposed diabetes drug is being used for genuine metabolic disorders and clinical obesity, and also as a pre-wedding quick-fix to look thin. Doctors and pharmaceuticals are promising miracles with this drug, including healthspan extension. A longevity movement makes sense at this moment because of population sciences: Everywhere in the world, birth rates are falling and lifespans are increasing. Several studies and reports by the UN and the World Health Organization project that the number of people aged 60 and over globally will nearly double to approximately 2.1 billion by 2050. At the same time, birth rates are falling dramatically. In India, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi are seeing birth-rate drops at nearly double the national rate, according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) data. Tamil Nadu's decline (2.35% annually) is steeper than the national average. So, we are certainly moving to a world that will have less youthful curiosity than ever in human history. People above 60 will be a significant demographic. So, How do cultures and nations remain active, productive and happy? Some of the biggest hurdles to achieving aspirational healthspan present themselves in India. The most expansive longevity project in India so far is Longevity India, a multi-disciplinary initiative by The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) which introduced its flagship project, the BHARAT Study, in 2024. Dr Deepak Saini, Longevity India convener, says, "The study is not for the affluent, it is for everyone. However, as always, when the impact occurs, the affluent will have access earlier because it's the scale that makes things democratically accessible. Once the technical challenges are ironed out and the affluent ones 'show' that the approach works, it will become accessible to the masses. Just like the cell phone revolution." Saini says the need is "India-specific science": building biomarkers, risk scores and health status indicators and care pathways from and for Indian cohorts instead of importing cut-offs and algorithms for high-income Caucasian populations.

The toughest challenge so far, according to most longevity startup owners, is the Indian mindset of seeking only symptom-addressing healthcare models. Rishi Pardal, co-founder and CEO of Biopeak, says, "Most people are used to engaging with healthcare only when something goes wrong. The second challenge is building a collaborative ecosystem for preventive, personalised care. These models work effectively only when diagnostics, specialists and therapies come together around the individual." Personalised longevity consultations in India can cost anything between Rs 10,000 and Rs 1 lakh. Meanwhile, new-age wellness centres are mushrooming, with IV therapies and other biohacking mechanisms like cryotherapy and hyperbaric oxygen chambers on offer. In Mumbai, an IV drip of NAD, a crucial coenzyme found in all living cells, essential for metabolism, energy production, DNA repair, and gene regulation, costs anywhere between Rs 30,000 and Rs 50,000. Lying still for half an hour inside a barrel-like hyperbaric oxygen chamber while high-dose oxygen flows through your body could cost less. The oxygen chamber experience certainly isn't for claustrophobics.

What is Noctourism?

In Europe, a travel trend this winter is Noctourism, hotels and wellness centres with packages for downtime, sleep therapies, sound baths and stargazing. In August 2025, Swiss-headquartered multinational hospitality chain Aman Resorts introduced the Longevity Pathways programme curated by the group's wellness advisor, tennis champion Novak Djokovic — a longevity era poster boy. At Amanbagh, one of their properties in Rajasthan, the programme's detox protocol includes Ayurvedic treatments like Shirodhara, vegan food cooked with source-investigated ingredients, hatha yoga and pranayama, and a fire meditation. As the resort's in-house Ayurveda expert tells me, the Longevity Pathways programme channels, in spirit, what 'Ayurveda' literally means — the knowledge of longevity. After living without noise and stimulus for three days, I returned with sharper focus and a feeling of lightness, which the Mumbai grind quickly eroded, and I was back to my basic biohacking ways. Private healthcare is also taking baby steps in longevity. Mumbai's Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital recently launched its Centre for Well-being and Longevity. The initiative brings together global expertise in functional and integrative medicine. Dr Mukesh Thakur, director of Internal Medicine, Acute Medicine and Clinical Transformation, says, lifestyle-related chronic illnesses are appearing far earlier in Indians — often in their 30s and 40s — compared to Western countries where they typically manifest a decade or two later. Emphasising early detection and root-cause treatment, Dr. Thakur advocates an integrative approach. "Holistic health goes beyond organs to include the mind and behaviour," he says, adding that the extending of healthspan — not just lifespan — must be the central goal of modern healthcare. Deepinder Goyal, founder & CEO, Zomato, started Limber Life Sciences company and 'Continue' longevity-research project. Food-delivery service Zomato founder Deepinder Goyal, whose latest venture is a longevity company, called Limber Life Sciences, it sets out to use multi-disciplinary approach to extending healthspan. Goyal also recently announced 'Continue', an open-source longevity-research project aimed at decoding the science behind human ageing. Instead of building a startup, Goyal says he is stepping into the world of biological research, exploring how environment, molecular changes — and believe it or not, gravity! — shape how long we live.

## Smell-based repellent among several innovations to tackle leopard menace at agri trade fair in Pune



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

At the bustling Kisan Agri Show at Moshi in Pune, Pestosys LLP Wednesday unveiled 'Animal Out', a natural smell-based repellent pitched as a game-changer against the rising leopard attacks terrorising Maharashtra farmers and populace alike. Its organic formula, developed to repel predators, claims to offer protection without harm. Sprayed on field boundaries or animal paths, it triggers an unpleasant odour to feline senses, deterring incursions while remaining safe for humans, the environment, and wildlife, the company claimed. Leopards straying from forests into farmlands near villages have long menaced crops and human lives in Maharashtra. Lately, the incidents of human-leopard conflicts have risen sharply in Maharashtra, with deaths reported in the rural areas, along with the presence of leopards.

Subsequently, in a first, several exhibitors at the on-going Kisan show at Moshi, who earlier offered solutions aimed at predators like nilgai, boars and others, showcased innovations to tackle the growing leopard menace. A start-up displayed solar-powered alarm systems that emit light and sound to deter wildlife entry at night, while a few others demonstrated motion-sensor fences minimising human intervention. Another product was a night torch with a sound button that users could press if they suspected a wild animal nearby. The button would then emit a powerful sound to scare the creature away. An AI-driven camera-trap solution that tracks animal movements in real time also drew attention for helping forest officials and farmers respond swiftly.

Alongside these, various NGOs held awareness cam-

paigns stressing coexistence strategies and early warning networks. Together, the stalls reflected a newly discovered unified call for a technology-driven approach to protect farmlands, forests, and, most importantly, lives. Developed by founder Avinash Salunke, a 25-year veteran in pest management, Animal Out turned out to be one of the more popular stalls, thronged by visitors. Much of this could be due to recent procurement orders for the product from the Maharashtra Forest Department, which underscored the product's credibility. The Chakan Range has approved 10 litres of the repellent on December 1 for man-leopard conflict mitigation, followed by identical procurements in Junnar, Ghodegaon, Khed and Shirur. "As leopard threats persist, herbal breakthroughs like Animal Out spotlights humane tech bridging human habitats and wild frontiers," said its founder, Salunke. "Our goal is to make farmers feel secure without harming wildlife," said Om Patil, co-founder of Pune-based start-up showcasing solar-powered alarm systems at the event. "The light-and-sound devices we've developed automatically detect movement at night and trigger deterrents, helping farmers sleep peacefully while keeping animals at bay in an eco-friendly way." Deputy Conservator of Forests, Pune, Mahadev Mohite, confirmed that farmers across the affected regions are increasingly adopting various preventive measures, such as solar-powered lights, blinkers, nylon nets, and fencing channels, to protect their fields. "Many have also started using sound-based equipment to deter wild animal attacks," he added. "Preventive measures such as these certainly help deter animals from entering human territories, but they do not address population control," said Aditya Paranjape, Wildlife Warden, Pune District Forest Department. "Deterrents alone will not bear fruit in the long run. Effective management of leopard-human conflict requires a balanced approach combining population control, deterrent use, and scientific conflict mitigation. These methods offer only temporary relief, as wild animals are intelligent creatures that eventually recognise and adapt to deterrents," he added.

The 35th edition of KISAN Agri Show, which opened on December 10 at the Pune International Exhibition and Convention Centre (PEC), Moshi, is one of the country's foremost platforms for agricultural innovation. Spread across 30 acres, the five-day event is expected to draw thousands of farmers, agri-entrepreneurs, and innovators, who will engage with over 600 exhibitors under one roof.

## Early Post-Operative Prosthesis to be introduced in all armed forces hospitals: Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin, Director General Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS), said in Pune on Thursday that plans are underway to introduce Early Post-Operative Prosthesis (EPOP) in all armed forces hospitals. "The Artificial Limb Centre (ALC), in coordination with the office of senior consultant (surgery), is introducing EPOP in all AFMS hospitals. By fitting EPOP as early as two days after amputation, patients can benefit from faster recovery, improved morale and significantly better functional outcomes," Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin said.

She was speaking at the inaugural function of 'Continuing Rehabilitation Education-2025' at ALC, Pune, on the theme 'Improving Outcomes in Amputee Rehabilitation'. Early prosthetic fitting and independent ambulation are major objectives of the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation of the amputee, with early walking playing a vital role. At ALC, a premier medical institute of the Indian armed forces, comprehensive rehabilitation care is provided to help amputee patients (disabled soldiers, veterans and civilians) progress from hesitant first steps to confident strides. "A technically perfect amputation is only the beginning. The real measure of success, however, lies in the quality of rehabilitation that follows, a domain in which ALC excels," Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin said.

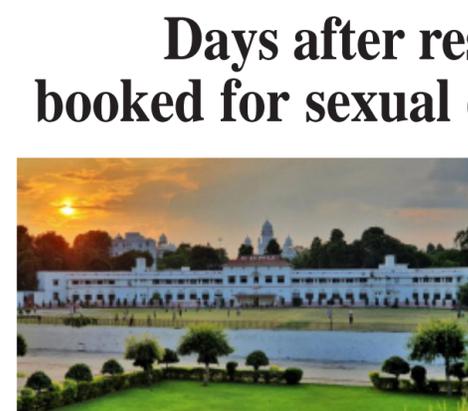
Brigadier C N Satish, Commandant, ALC, explained that it is scientifically proven that the longer the person is without a limb, the poorer the outcome. "Usually, it takes a month or two after an amputation for a patient to get a limb and walk. Hence, EPOP is a new innovation where a temporary artificial limb can be made and fitted to the patient as early as two to three days after the amputation. The advantage is it boosts morale, and the healing process starts sooner," he told the media after the inaugural event. "AFMS at crossroads of trauma care, rehab, and national security"

In her speech, Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin said that across the world, there has been a rise in the number of people living with limb loss due to road trauma, diabetes and conflict. "For the armed forces, this challenge is even more acute. Modern warfare increasingly produces survivable yet disabling injuries. At AFMS, we stand at the intersection of trauma care, rehabilitation, and national security. Our responsibility is two-fold: to return the wounded soldier to duty as soon as possible and to ensure that those who cannot return continue to lead purposeful, dignified, and productive lives," she added. The AFMS has greatly strengthened battlefield medical readiness through the Yodha Rakshak Doctrine and the BACHAAV protocol, preparing every frontline soldier to be a capable first-responder, the DGAFMS said. She added that training centres across India impart the intensive two-day Yodha Rakshak capsule, equipping combatants in modern methods of rapid haemorrhage control, damage-mitigation, resuscitation and early evacuation to maximise life and limb salvage. "This covers all aspects of the acronym BACHAAV, that is, bleeding management, airway management, circulation, hypothermia, analgesia and antibiotics, atriakt karvaiye (additional procedures), and vyakt karna or documentation, and usage of the Yodha Rakshak Kit. The Artificial Limb Centre fits perfectly into this continuum," Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin added. She also inaugurated the Additive Manufacturing Lab that can enable precise, patient-specific prosthetic designs for better comfort and fit. "This facility is a more specialised form of 3-D printing. The conventional method to manufacture an artificial limb takes longer, and the chances of a precise fit may not be that good, and there may be difficulty in replicating a good prosthesis. In 3-D printing, we scan stumps into a computer, which is used to print the artificial limb. It speeds up the process as we can print multiple sockets and replicate them later if required," Brig Satish explained. Plans to make ALC a national centre of excellence for 80 years, the Artificial Limb Centre (ALC) has represented excellence in amputee rehabilitation—combining innovation, technology and compassion for battle casualties, veterans, and civilians, Surgeon Vice Admiral



Arti Sarin said on Thursday, adding that a proposal to make it a National Centre of Excellence will be submitted. "Current collaborations are there with DEBEL [Defence Bioengineering and Electromedical Laboratory] on exoskeleton development for spinal-cord-injured patients, and apart from the state-of-the-art Gait and Balance Lab and Upper Limb Training Lab, ALC has also expanded into additive manufacturing and formal academic training," Surgeon Vice Admiral Sarin added. "The ALC has also played a decisive role in the victories of the Services Paralympic Team, whose athletes hold national and international records. Murlikant Petkar, India's first Paralympic gold medalist, whose life inspired the film Chandu Champion, was rehabilitated at this very centre," she said. "Looking ahead, our aim is to collectively elevate ALC into a National Centre of Excellence for amputee rehabilitation. This will include structured training programmes, strong research collaborations, national registries and data systems, innovation hubs linked to academia and industry, indigenous, affordable, high-performance prosthetic designs and tele-rehabilitation platforms and augmented Artificial Limb Service Centres for remote care," she said.

"Need to make accessibility truly seamless" In her virtual keynote speech, Sminu Jindal, Managing Director of Jindal SAW Limited and Founder-Chairperson of Svayam, an accessibility rights organisation, spoke about her challenges. At the age of 11, she was involved in an accident while travelling from Jaipur to New Delhi that resulted in her needing a wheelchair for the rest of her life. Jindal set up Svayam and, for the last 25 years, has dedicated herself to reshaping societal perspectives about individuals with reduced mobility. "Everyone deserves equal access to the built environment, and over the years, there have been changes. However, there is still a need to make accessibility truly seamless. Accessibility should be viewed as an investment rather than an expense," she said, adding that the role of the armed forces is significant in collaborating to improve lives.



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

A week after a King George's Medical University (KGMU) doctor faced an FIR of sexual exploitation promis-

## Oppn walks out of Maharashtra Assembly over 'anomalies' in cotton, soybean procurement; ruling MLAs too slam Marketing Minister Jaykumar Rawal



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Opposition members on Thursday staged a walkout from the Maharashtra Assembly in protest against the Mahayuti government's 'apathy' towards cotton and soybean farmers and alleged irregularities in the procurement of yields. They highlighted the rising mismatch between the purchase price and the guaranteed price of the produce. The Opposition members were dissatisfied with the minister's token replies to their questions over the non-initiation of official cotton procurement centers in many parts of the state and the failure to provide Minimum Support Price (MSP) for soybean. Besides, certain legislators from the ruling parties also expressed displeasure over the reply by Marketing Minister Jaykumar Rawal during Question Hour, after which Speaker Rahul Narvekar assured to hold a meeting of concerned legislators at his chamber. Congress Legislative Party leader Vijay Wadettiwar accused the government's response of being a "mockery of the

farmers". During the Question Hour, Wadettiwar highlighted that cotton procurement is hit by the restrictions imposed by the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) and the low procurement limit.

He further criticised the government for removing the import duty on cotton, which was previously 12%, which would result in a sharp drop in cotton prices in India. Wadettiwar and other Opposition members claimed that soybeans are not being procured at the designated MSP of Rs 5,300 per quintal at procurement centers and asked the minister to visit fields to understand the true situation. The minister also failed to give a proper reply to Wadettiwar's question on blanket procurement of soybeans, given that 70 per cent of the produce is being turned away at centres, and whether the government would follow up with the Central Government regarding the cotton import duty. Amid the Opposition uproar, the Speaker directed a meeting to be held to resolve the issue, a demand rejected by the Opposition. They instead wanted the government to make a statement in the House. From the ruling front, NCP's senior MLA Prakash Solankhe said that the minister has no ground knowledge of happenings, while BJP MLA and former minister Babanrao Lonikar highlighted the problems on the ground. With no positive response from the government, Opposition members such as Wadettiwar, Nana Patole, Rohit Pawar, Siddharth Kharat, while those from the ruling side, including Arjun Khotkar and Daulat Daroda, entered the well of the House and raised slogans against the government's stance on farmers' issues. Despite CM Devendra Fadnavis' intervention and assurance to find a way out, the ruckus continued, and Opposition members walked out of the Assembly.

## 3 arrested for 'assault' on non-veg patty vendor during Gita Path event in Kolkata

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Three people have been arrested in connection with the alleged assault on a chicken patty seller who was "humiliated" for selling non-vegetarian food during the Gita Path event at Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground. Police said that after the video went viral, the accused were identified from the footage and arrested based on two complaints filed at Maidan police station. The 'Paanch Lokkho Konthe Gita Paath' (Gita recitation by five lakh voices) event, organised by Sanatan Sanskriti Sansad, was taking place on December 7 when the alleged incident happened. The victim is a resident of Arambagh in Hooghly district. "Those arrested have been identified as Soumik Golder (23), Swarnendu Chakraborty (32) and Tarun Bhattacharya (51). They were arrested this morning," said an official on Thursday. Police said the three have been booked on charges of voluntarily causing hurt, mischief, unlawful assembly and deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class. Soumik Golder is the main accused who had allegedly asked the vendor his name and forced him to hold his ears. All three will be produced in court on Thursday.

The vendor, Sheikh Riajul, has been selling patties in Kolkata for the last 23 years. The viral purported video showed Riajul surrounded by people attending the event. Some of them asked who had allowed him to sell chicken during the Gita Path. The victim is seen being asked his name, made to do sit-ups holding his ears, and beaten. The vendor was seen requesting the crowd to let him leave while the mob continued abusing and assaulting him. They later threw away all the patties he was carrying. "They asked me my name," Riajul said. "As soon as I told them Sheikh, they started hitting me. They told me to squat. Threw my food... For the last 23 years I have been doing this, I never saw Kolkata in this way."



The incident triggered a political debate, with the TMC and other Opposition parties accusing the BJP of trying to impose a "mob-lynching culture" and dictate the food habits of Bengali residents. On Thursday, CM Mamata Banerjee raised the issue from a rally in Nadia. She said, "A hawker went to sell his items. This is seen in all meetings. It maybe didn't cross his mind that 'I will sell this, I won't sell that'. They caught him and beat him. I got all of them arrested. This is Bengal, not Uttar Pradesh." Addressing the people present, she said, "Will you vote for the BJP? They don't allow people to eat fish and meat. They impose vegetarianism." Kunal Ghosh, TMC state general secretary and spokesperson, strongly condemned the alleged assault. "Don't buy it if you don't eat non-vegetarian food. But why beat up the seller?" he said. "They earn money by selling various things there. I condemn this incident." Meanwhile, the BJP questioned the vendor's intention behind selling non-vegetarian food near a religious gathering. BJP leader Debjit Sarkar said, "Can Gita Path be done after eating chicken patties? During Gita Path, if a man is entering with chicken patties, it shows how reluctant they are."

## In 30 months, Siddaramaiah booked an aircraft for travel every 5 days; Rs 47.38 crore spent



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Siddaramaiah, in a written response to the unstarred question, noted that payments for the use of 48 aircraft/helicopter was made in the 2023-24 fiscal. The cost incurred for the flights was 12.23 crore. Siddaramaiah, in a written response to the unstarred question, noted that payments for the use of 48 aircraft/helicopter was made in the 2023-24 fiscal. The cost incurred for the flights was 12.23 crore. (File Photo) In his two-and-a-half-year tenure as the Karnataka Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah hired a helicopter or an aircraft every five days to travel with his Cabinet col-

leagues to various parts of the state or to New Delhi. According to data shared in response to a question in the Legislative Council, aircraft or helicopters were booked 181 times for Siddaramaiah's travel.

Data shows that the total expense incurred for these flights was Rs 47.38 crore, starting from May 26, 2023, days after Siddaramaiah became CM, until November 11, 2025. The details were shared in response to a question by BJP MLC N Ravikumar. Siddaramaiah, in a written response to the unstarred question, noted that payments for the use of 48 aircraft/helicopter was made in the 2023-24 fiscal. The cost incurred for the flights was 12.23 crore. Subsequently, in the 2024-25 fiscal, bills were cleared for the rental of aircraft or helicopters 85 times, costing the state exchequer Rs 21.11 crore. In the current fiscal year, bills for renting 48 aircraft/helicopters over six months were Rs 14.03 crore. Data also shows that 180 of the 181 flights were booked through GMP Air Charters, while the remaining flight was booked through GoJets Aviation. In his query, Ravikumar sought details on the reasons the CM has hired aircraft over the past two-and-a-half years. Siddaramaiah, in his response, noted that renting out aircraft/helicopter for the official trips of the Governor, CM, and Chief Justice was exempt from the provisions of the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act.

## Days after resident doctor at Lucknow's KGMU booked for sexual exploitation, intern faces similar charges



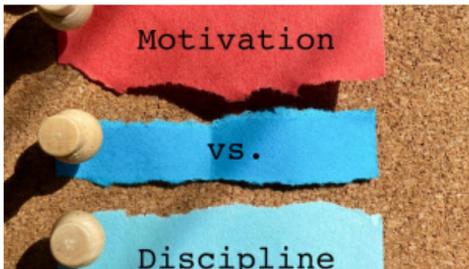
GNS News Agency, Feb 26

A week after a King George's Medical University (KGMU) doctor faced an FIR of sexual exploitation promis-

ing marriage, an intern at the Lucknow institute has been booked after a nursing student levelled similar charges against him. According to the Lucknow police, they lodged the case against the intern on charges of sexually assaulting the victim on the pretext of marriage for months and harassing her by threatening to circulate her photos on social media at the Qaiserbagh Police Station. Vishwajeet Srivastava, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Lucknow, told The Indian Express that an investigation into the allegations is underway and that action will be initiated based on the evidence. According to the complaint of the woman, who belongs to another district and is pursuing a nursing course at another institute in Lucknow, she got in touch with the KGMU intern, who also belongs to another district, through a common friend. She alleged the accused befriended her, and later entered into a physical relationship, assuring him

that he would marry her. However, she said the accused refused to marry her when she started asking to do so. He started issuing threats to circulate her intimate photos on social media, she alleged. The Lucknow police said the victim's statement would be recorded before the magistrate, and the accused would be summoned to the police station for questioning. When contacted, KGMU spokesperson Dr K K Singh told The Indian Express the police have not informed the university administration about the case so far. Singh said that as the victim does not belong to this campus, the university administration will initiate action if the police officially send documents confirming the charges against the intern in the investigation. Last week, a resident doctor was booked on charges of sexual exploitation of a colleague on the pretext of marriage, and forcing the victim to convert. The doctor has been suspended.

## Which is more important: motivation or discipline?



Motivation, especially the intrinsic variety, is often touted as being essential for people's success. The yearning to do something is what gets us going. Without this spark, we may just lie in bed, especially if we believe that what we do isn't impactful. However, while intrinsic motivation is important, we also need to cultivate discipline to achieve a goal. Whether it's losing weight, scaling a Himalayan peak or writing a book, we need to act on our desire to effect change. Discipline enables us to stick it out, especially when the going gets tough. Yin and yang in a blog post on Second Nature, Tamara Willner says motivation and discipline are the yin and yang of well-being. When we engage in an activity because we find it "personally rewarding", we are intrinsically motivated. So, we may crack our heads over a crossword every morning or go for a run because we find these activities pleasurable. However, there might be days when you are not inclined to run either because you slept in or have more pressing tasks to attend to. This is where discipline plays a part. According to Willner, discipline refers to "training yourself to work in a controlled and regular way".

In a blog post on Psyche, Christian Jarrett says that Aleksandr Usyk, a Ukrainian boxer who has been a world champion twice, rates discipline as being key to his success. As motivation is fleeting, we cannot depend on this alone to achieve goals. We also need to inculcate habits

that get us there, and discipline helps us form those habits. Eric Partaker, an executive coach, also argues in a blog post on EricPartaker&Co, that motivation may "get you started", but discipline is what sees you through to the "finish line." He reinforces Usyk's point that motivation doesn't last long. That's why we rely on discipline to keep our "commitment to the process." Work together

But sheer discipline, without motivation, is unlikely to help you climb higher peaks. I'm rarely motivated to clean up my house. However, when I find a room or cupboard looking unduly messy, I muster the discipline to declutter. Neither do I relish the process nor do I set more exacting standards of cleanliness for myself. So, discipline without motivation does not help us rise to new levels. Successful people, says Willner, tend to dip into both the sauces of discipline and motivation. If I examine my impetus to write or work out, I have to confess that my motivation ebbs and flows. There are days when I feel compelled to put down thoughts on paper and days when I feel I don't have anything compelling to say. Discipline is what helps me chug through periods when inspiration doesn't strike. If I only write on days I feel motivated, then my output would be very sparse. But if I commit to writing a predetermined number of words every day, no matter how I'm feeling, I have something to work on. Then my motivation kicks in and helps me stay on course. Likewise, my desire to exercise yo-yos from day to day. But since I've managed to make it a habit by repeatedly doing it at the same time every day, I don't even ask myself if I'm in the mood to exercise. I just know it's time to lace my shoes, and I go through the motions almost on autopilot. Unlike my spring cleaning efforts, there are days when I enjoy my workout and am enthused to push myself by either upping the weights or trying a more challenging routine. So, motivation and discipline are the twin forces that galvanise and keep us on track to achieve our goals. The writer is visiting faculty at the School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, and the co-author of Bee-Witched.

## What interests you?



Environmental Science is one of the best undergraduate backgrounds for IFS. Develop a realistic plan depending on your year of graduation. Build strong basics in your subjects, focus on Science, Geography, Economics (NCERT books), read the newspaper daily, and take notes regularly. Join a test series to help you prepare for prelims with mini-tests. Work on concept clarity. If needed, take time off after graduation to prepare for the exam. Be mindful of your goal and work on time management.

I am doing B.Com. (Hons) with an ACCA integrated course (final year), but don't want to be an accountant. I am interested in Law and Economics. Should I pursue an LLB after B.Com. Or work for a year and pursue a Master's in Economics? Athish

Consider an LLB if you enjoy reading, writing, argumentation, policy, governance, human rights, analytical thinking and working with people, institutions, and systems. LLB opens up careers in corporate and commercial law, litigation and advocacy, policy, research, compliance and so on. Look at a Master's in Economics if you enjoy data research, policy, economics theory, and so on. Career options are research, consulting, corporate strategy, banking and finance and data analytics. You could also combine Law and Economics and explore options in corporate and commercial law, banking and financial regulation, tax law, competition law and IPR. Another option is to use your B.Com for a non-accounting career like policy research, public administration, business journalism, CSR roles in companies and so on. Think about what you enjoy before making a decision. I hold a B.Voc in Forensic Science, a Diploma in Cyber Security and certifications in Ethical Hacking and Computer Hacking Forensic Investigation. I began a Higher Diploma in Computer Science in Singapore, but could not complete it. Since 2023, I have been preparing for the UPSC exam and am also pursuing an M.A. in Public Administration from IGNOU. What are my options? Maneesha

If UPSC is your dream, continue with a structured backup. Your background will make you a good fit for law and order, internal security, e-governance, cybercrime policy and other roles. You can also consider a career in cybersecurity and digital forensics in the public and private sectors. An advanced certification in OSCP / ECIH / GCFA / GCIA is optional but powerful and is the fastest path to job security. Look for roles such as digital forensic analyst, cybersecurity analyst, security operations analyst, malware analyst and so on. You can also combine Public Administration and Cyber Security in Digital Governance and Policy. Career options include digital policy consultant, research associate at think tanks, and e-governance project manager in government and corporate organisations and think tanks. You can consider a Master's in Public Policy (MPP) later. Finally, if academics interest you, consider an M.Sc. Cyber Forensics or Digital Forensics to be a lecturer in Forensic Science, a lab analyst, cyber forensic examiner, or a researcher in forensic tech labs.

## Russia scores highest Ukraine gains since first year of war

Russia's battlefield gains in Ukraine last year were the highest since 2022, an AFP analysis showed, as Kyiv was set to host security advisers from allied states despite Moscow's unrelenting strikes. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said around 15 countries would attend the talks, along with representatives from the European Union and NATO, with a US delegation joining the meeting via video link.

The talks — and a subsequent summit of leaders from the so-called coalition of the willing planned for next week in France — are the latest in a flurry of efforts to end the nearly four-year war. Mr. Zelenskyy said in a New Year's Eve address that a US-brokered peace deal was "90 percent" ready, though the important issue of territory remains unresolved. The diplomatic push comes as Russia presses its advantage against outmanned and outgunned Ukrainian troops on the battlefield. The Russian army captured more than 5,600 square kilometres (2,160 square miles), or nearly one percent, of Ukrainian territory in 2025, according to an analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), which works with the Critical Threats Project. This includes areas that Kyiv and military analysts say are controlled by Russia, as well as those claimed by Moscow's army. The land captured is more than in the previous two years combined, though far short of the more than 60,000 square kilometres Russia took in 2022, the first year of its all-out

invasion. Moscow has kept up its aerial barrage of Ukraine, with the latest strike on a residential area of the major city of Kharkiv, reducing parts of multi-storey buildings to smouldering piles of rubble. AFP images from the site showed firefighters tackling the blaze and rescuers scrambling to evacuate people to safety. The local authorities said a three-year-old child was killed and at least 19 people were wounded in the attack, which Mr. Zelenskyy slammed as "heinous". "Unfortunately, this is how the Russians treat life and people — they continue killing, despite all efforts by the world, and especially by the United States, in the diplomatic process," he said on social media. Russia's defence ministry rejected Ukraine's claim, saying in a statement its forces "did not plan or carry out strikes using missiles or air strikes within the city limits of Kharkiv". Underlining the deadly risks for civilians, Ukrainian officials on Friday ordered the evacuation of more than 3,000 children and their parents from 44 front-line settlements in the Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk regions, where Russian troops have been advancing. More than 150,000 people have been evacuated from front-line areas since June 1, said Ukrainian Restoration Minister Oleksiy Kuleba. On Thursday, Russia accused Kyiv of a strike on a hotel and a cafe in Ukraine's occupied south that killed 28 people, and warned of "consequences" — but Ukraine said the attack targeted a military gathering that was closed to civilians.

## Iran's protests: What we know



not only internally but also externally", she said. Regional arch-foe Israel and the United States in June pounded Iranian nuclear sites and killed top military brass during a 12-day war.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Florida that if Tehran rebuilt its nuclear facilities, the United States would "knock them down." Trump said on Friday the United States was "locked and loaded" to respond if Iran killed protesters. Iran has also been weakened following major blows dealt to its regional allies, including in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. Some Iranians hold long-standing resentment that Tehran has given too much financial or military support to its regional proxies, such as Lebanese movement Hezbollah, during economic hardship at home. Iran International, a television channel based outside Iran that is critical of the authorities, has reported that recent protest slogans included "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life for Iran."

How have authorities reacted?

Protesters and security forces clashed in several Iranian cities on Thursday, with six reported killed, the first deaths since the unrest escalated. Schools, banks and public institutions were closed on Wednesday for a public holiday, with officials saying this was due to the cold weather and to save energy. But authorities have also recognised the grievances as legitimate, and announced a series of measures, including replacing the central bank governor. President Masoud Pezeshkian, a reformist, said on Thursday that he and his government would "end up in hell", in the religious sense, if they failed to address economic hardship. "The government knows that merchants are the lifeblood, the beating heart of Iran's economy, and therefore it is obliged to take measures to address, at least partially, the big issues," French-Iranian sociologist Azadeh Kian told AFP. But supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 86, has yet to speak publicly on the matter.

How big is it?

Opposition abroad have welcomed the new protests. Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's ousted shah, on X hailed 2026 as "the definitive moment for change", while the National Council of Resistance in Iran said Iranians wanted to "free themselves from the scourge of religious tyranny". But Kian said today's protests were not as large-scale as previous demonstrations sparked by economic grievances, including those of 2019. They were sparked by a petrol hike, spreading to around 100 cities and towns, and left hundreds dead, according to rights groups. "I very much doubt the current rallies could bring down or overthrow the regime," she said. Arash Azizi, a postdoctoral associate and lecturer at Yale University, said the demonstrations however remained "the most serious wave of protests since 2023". "It is clear that with ever declining standards of living and growing discontent, [the government] will have to face periodic protests," he said.

Iran has been rocked this week by protests that started in Tehran and have spread to other cities, with at least six people killed in clashes with security forces. Official media has largely played down the protests but videos have flooded social media, many of which are difficult to authenticate, or have even been manipulated. Here is a recap of what we know and what analysts think it all means. Watch: Protests spread across Iran as economic crisis deepens

What's going on?

The protests began on Sunday in Tehran, where some shopkeepers went on strike over high prices and economic stagnation. Iran's economy has been battered by years of crushing international sanctions over its nuclear programme, with raging inflation and a collapsing currency. By Tuesday, student protests erupted at universities in the capital Tehran and the central cities of Isfahan and Yazd. Some merchants in the capital's bazaar joined in. Demonstrations have now affected 20 areas, mostly towns in the west of the country, according to an AFP tally of official and local Iranian media reports. In the southern city of Fasa, dozens of people protested outside a government building, lobbing projectiles and seeking to tear down its gate, according to videos posted on Wednesday, whose location AFP verified. Slogans heard at protests now include "Death to the dictator" and "Woman, Life, Freedom", the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) says, citing verified videos and reports. AFP was not immediately able to authenticate these soundbites. The same chants were used in mass demonstrations after the September 2022 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish woman arrested for allegedly breaching the country's dress code for women. But authorities stamped out the 2022-2023 protests, using mass arrests and executions as part of its levers of repression, rights activists say. The system in charge since the 1979 revolution stayed in place.

What's the context?

The protesters are very clear in their slogans — they are not looking for reform," said US-Iranian human rights lawyer Gissou Nia, of the Atlantic Council. They come as "the Islamic republic is dealing with a range of pressures,

## India's ancient trees: Are we protecting nature's living timekeepers?



Time in a city is a blur. Things change, and we often don't notice. Nothing changes, and we don't realise it. That is why I try to live near trees. They keep time and are never in a hurry about it. It is winter in Chennai, and the Siris are dropping their leaves. Soon, one can gaze up at the sky through their profusely branching arms, abandoned nests, and barren twigs. The trunk splits into branches and those into smaller ones; infinitely dividing themselves without ever losing proportion. Every broken branch is the tree in miniature. Nature's designs are full of such rhythmic, repetitive patterns called fractals — complicated mathematical models built from simple repeated shapes diminishing in size every time they are repeated. And, perhaps, fractals are not just spatial but temporal as well. What if time were not the relentlessly ticking, linear movement we think it to be, but a 4D block where the past, present, and future co-exist? That is pretty much what long-lived trees do. They stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time, but on their own terms. Operating on principles beyond our frazzled timescales through mathematical patterns like the golden ratio. Measuring time as a physical record through seasons and growth rings, and slow conversations through root and fungal networks. Slowness, a virtue and strategy.

India is full of old-growth trees, and the longest-lived ones often are spiritually significant. For long, it was thought that there were no trees in India that were more than a thousand years old, but that may be changing now. You have the usual suspects, the figs. Many are Banyans (Ficus benghalensis), bustling and brooding mini-worlds of their own, spreading over acres in different parts of the country and living up to 500 years. Including the great Banyan of the Theosophical society in Chennai that once covered nearly 40,000 sq. ft. Then there are its cousins, the Peepals (Ficus religiosa). Like the Bodhi at Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment. The present tree is only around 145 years old, but traces its direct lineage back to over 2,500 years, with descendants spreading across the world. In the high Himalayas, the magnificent Himalayan Cedars (Cedrus deodara) live up to their name as the trees of the gods. A particular specimen in the arid zone of Lahaul in Himachal Pradesh has been reported to be more than 1,500 years old. Two particularly large specimens growing near a cluster of Shiva temples in Jageshwar in Uttarakhand are believed to be older than 900 years each. The related Shurs or Himalayan Pencil Cedars (Juniperus polycarpus) are also very long-lived, with many individuals growing in remote high-altitude regions believed to be more than 1,000 years old as well.

From Ethiopian warlords Further south in the Western Ghats is another millennia-old denizen. The Soligas of the Biligiriranga (aka BR) Hills, in southern Karnataka, centre their world and spiritual lives around the Dooda Sampige, an enormous and venerable Michelia champaca (reclassified as Magnolia champaca) tree. The tree has a trunk that is more than 22 metres across. Meanwhile, the massive

Kannimara Teak (Tectona grandis) of Parambikulam Tiger Reserve towering at nearly 45 metres is only about 500 years old. Less is known about the greybeards in the east. A Bakhor Bengena (Divine Jasmine, Tamilnadia uliginosa), a small flowering tree in Sivasagar in Assam, has been around for more than 500 years, right from the time of the Ahom kingdom. Some of the oldest trees in India are not even Indian. The extraordinary Baobab (Adansonia digitata) has come to India from Africa over the millennia through trade relations, through Ethiopian warlords and later the Europeans. This "tree of life" is present across the country, most notably in Mandu, but nowhere in large numbers. Many of them are known to be nearly a 1,000 years old and one unverified tree in Savanur, Karnataka, has been said to be over 2,000 years old. Baobabs can live to be 2,500 years old. Globally, some of the oldest trees known include Methuselah, a more than 4,850-year-old Bristlecone pine in California and Pando, a clonal colony (genetically identical trees connected by one root system) of Quaking Aspens in Utah, the U.S., potentially over 10,000 years old. How long a tree lives is decided by a combination of inherent and external factors, including genetic makeup, which dictates its potential growth rate and resistance to stressors that enable them to withstand harsh conditions and resist disease, contributing to long lives. Conversely, fast-growing species are shorter-lived. This is also likely to impact how climate change and related impacts drive tree population and ages across the world. As a direct result of their long-livedness, many trees alive today have been a silent witness to significant historical, social and ecological events. In the U.S., such trees are identified and listed as "Witness Trees" and receive special protection and preservation under a "Witness Tree Protection Program". This is something India could potentially mimic, considering its extraordinary cultural riches and the speed at which some of them are being lost. The complexity of the world cannot be understood fully by the limited shapes and lines of our invented geometry. Nature is wrinkled and rumpled, full of rough edges; irregular, yet perfect. Trees are a symbol and a reminder of this and the interconnectedness of all things and need to be revered as such.

## Neuralink may restore full body functionality, says Elon Musk

New Delhi: Billionaire Elon Musk on Saturday said that his brain-computer interface company Neuralink can possibly restore full body functionality.

The breakthrough focuses on the motor cortex, restoring "full body functionality" for people with severed spinal cords. "I am confident at this point that restoring full body functionality is possible with Neuralink," the Tesla and SpaceX founder shared in a post on the social media platform X. "Neuralink can essentially help bridge communications from the cortex, past the point in the neck or spine, where the nerves are damaged. It is possible from a physics standpoint to physically restore full body functionality," he said in a video post. The motor cortex technology feature was announced by Musk in 2022, and the testing began in humans in the same year. The device includes a chip that replaces a small piece of bone and is connected to the brain via a series of thin, threaded electrodes. The company's N1 implant includes 1,024 electrodes distributed among 64 threads, according to the company's website. In September, the company announced that it had implanted its device in 12 patients. Meanwhile, on January 1, Musk's California-based neurotechnology firm announced taking major steps toward restoring vision, with a brain implant that allows the visually impaired, even those blind from birth.

## Search for Brown University shooter continues as questions swirl about U.S. campus security



Authorities knocked on doors and scoured yards Monday (December 15, 2025) in search of any video or other evidence that might lead them to the Brown University gunman, whose face was covered or not visible in footage captured before and after the weekend attack that killed two students and wounded nine others. Officials released three new videos of the man they believe carried out Saturday's (December 13) attack that show him wearing a mask and a dark two-tone jacket. Although his face wasn't visible, the footage from about two hours before the shooting provided the clearest images yet of the suspect.

The FBI said the man is about 5 feet, 8 inches (173 centimetres) tall, with a stocky build. The agency offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the identification, arrest and conviction of the person responsible. "We're asking for the public's assistance," Providence's police chief, Col Oscar Perez, said at a news conference, urging people who might recognise the suspect to call a tip line. Police renewed their search after releasing a person of interest Sunday (December 14) once they determined the evidence pointed elsewhere. Meanwhile, details began to emerge about the students who were shot.

The lockdown order for the Ivy League school was lifted Sunday (December 14) after authorities said they had detained the person of interest. But hopes for a quick resolution were dashed when they announced hours later that they had released him. The abrupt change of direction marked a setback in the investigation as questions swirl about campus security, the apparent lack of school video evidence and whether the focus on the person of interest gave the attacker more time to escape. Colin Moussette, who has friends at Brown and is considering enrolling next fall, said while visiting the campus Monday that he felt uneasy knowing the suspect hadn't been caught. "How someone got away, like in the middle of the day is, to me, not only heartbreaking but very concerning," he said. "How they got access to the building is concerning."

Before Monday's (December 15) news conference, police released a second video showing someone dressed in black walking along a city street minutes after the shooting. The video — like one released the day of the shooting — didn't show the suspect's face. In a neighbourhood near the university, a line of officers scraped their feet through a snow-covered yard looking for evidence. Meanwhile, agents identifying themselves as U.S. marshals asked locals if they had security cameras. Attorney General Neronha, who said Sunday (December 14) that there weren't many cameras where the attack happened, said Monday that investigators were "making steady progress." Law enforcement on Monday (December 15) appeared to still be performing basic of investigative tasks, including tracing the suspect's movements in the minutes after the attack and searching for evidence near the crime scene. "I was really glad to see that they were doing something," said Katherine Baima, who lives in the area. "This is the first time any of us in my build-

ing, as far as I know, had heard from anyone. We hadn't gotten alerts and we were really surprised that there hadn't been anyone searching, let alone knocking on doors, on the first night." One of the dead was active in church. The other overcame health concerns

The shooting happened in an auditorium-style classroom where students in a study group were preparing for an upcoming exam. Ella Cook, a 19-year-old sophomore who was vice president of the Brown College Republicans and beloved in her church in Birmingham, Alabama, was one of the students killed, according to her pastor at home. In announcing her death Sunday, the Rev R Craig Smalley described Cook as "an incredible grounded, faithful, bright light" who encouraged and "lifted up those around her." Ella was known for her bold, brave, and kind heart as she served her chapter and her fellow classmates," Martin Bertao, the president of the club, said in a message posted on X.

The other student who was killed was MukhammadAziz Umurzokov, an 18-year-old freshman majoring in biochemistry and neuroscience. He was helping a friend at a review session for an economics final when he was shot, his sister said. As a child, Umurzokov suffered a neurological condition that required surgery, and he later wore a back brace because of scoliosis, said Samira Umurzokova, noting that the family immigrated to the US from Uzbekistan when she, her brother and sister were young. "He had so many hardships in his life, and he got into this amazing school and tried so hard to follow through with the promise he made when was 7 years old," she told the AP by phone Monday. Only one of the nine people wounded had been released as of Sunday, Brown President Christina Paxson said. One was in critical condition and the other seven were in critical but stable condition. Mayor Brett Smiley said Monday evening that none of their conditions had worsened, but that he didn't have further information. Durham Academy, a private K-12 school in Durham, North Carolina, confirmed that a recent graduate, Kendall Turner, was critically wounded and that her parents were with her. "Our school community is rallying around Kendall, her classmates, and her loved ones," the school said in a statement.

Another wounded student, 18-year-old freshman Spencer Yang of New York City, told the New York Times and the Brown Daily Herald from a hospital bed that there was a mad scramble after the gunman entered the room where he and the other students were studying for finals. Many students ran toward the front of the room, but Yang said he wound up on the ground between some seats and was shot in the leg. Mr. Yang, who expects to be discharged in the coming days, said he tried to keep some of the more seriously wounded students conscious until police arrived. Questions are raised about campus security. Brown was no longer on lockdown and the city's schools were open Monday (December 15). But some colleges and universities, including in Rhode Island and some Ivy League schools, were increasing security in light of the attack. Yale said extra security would be in place for Hanukkah celebrations. The shooting occurred as final exams were underway at Brown, one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious schools. Investigators were not immediately sure how the shooter got inside the first-floor classroom. The attack set off hours of chaos on campus and in the surrounding neighbourhoods, as hundreds of officers searched for the shooter. Li Ding, a Rhode Island School of Design student who is on a dance team at Brown, was upset that there wasn't better security on campus. "The fact that we're in such a surveillance state but that wasn't used correctly at all is just so deeply frustrating," Li Ding said.

## Chile's leftist candidate concedes defeat to ultra-conservative Kast in presidential runoff

The candidate of Chile's left-wing governing coalition, communist Jeannette Jara, conceded defeat on Sunday (December 14, 2025) after early presidential results showed a strong lead for ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast, as voters opted for change following years of rising fears over heightened crime and immigration. According to preliminary results with 83% of the vote counted, Mr. Kast won 58% of the vote, with Ms. Jara, a former labour minister in President Gabriel Boric's left-wing government, getting 41%, making it clear she was on course to lose to her right-wing rival. On social media, Ms. Jara said she called Mr. Kast to congratulate him on his successful campaign.

"To those who supported us and were rallied by our candidacy, rest assured that we will continue working to advance a better life in our homeland," she wrote. "Together and standing tall, as we have always done." As Chileans voted on Sunday, even detractors of ultra-conservative former lawmaker Jose Antonio Kast said the candidate whose radical ideas lost him the past two elections was likely to become the country's next leader.

Mr. Kast's commanding lead in the polls over his rival in the presidential runoff, communist Jeannette Jara, shows how the hard-liner agitating for mass deportations of immigrants has seized the mantle of the traditional right in a country that once defined its post-dictatorship democratic revival with a vow to contain such political forces. Vowing a



harsh security crackdown to address heightened fears about uncontrolled immigration and crime, Mr. Kast's popularity has surged in recent months. "Just because he's the most right-wing we've seen in decades doesn't mean that it's a dictatorship, that's what the left wants you to believe," said Juan Beltran, 68, a taxi driver who voted for Mr. Kast in hopes he stops the frequent violent carjackings that make him scared to go to work each day. "It means that he'll have an iron fist, and take action like others haven't." While casting his ballot on Sunday, Mr. Kast demonstrated respect for Chile's democratic institutions. "Chile has a tradition, and I am very clear that whoever wins, whether Jeannette Jara or me, will have to be president of all Chileans," he told the hundreds of supporters thronging him.

ferred to a study published in The Lancet in July 2024, which estimated that 7.2% of all deaths in India were associated with air pollution, amounting to around 34,000 deaths annually in just 10 cities. He also highlighted an August 2024 study by the International Institute of Population Sciences, which used data from the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-5). According to this study, districts that do not meet National Ambient Air Quality Standards recorded a 13% rise in premature adult mortality and nearly a 100% increase in child mortality. Further, he cited a December 2024 study published in The Lancet Planetary Health, which estimated that long-term exposure to polluted air contributes to about 15 lakh additional deaths in India every year compared to a scenario where the WHO air-quality guidelines are met. A November 2025 report by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation estimated that nearly two million deaths in India were linked to air pollution, a 43% increase since 2000. The Congress leader noted that the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, last revised in 2009, are outdated and require urgent revision and strict enforcement. "The present standard for PM2.5 is 8 times the WHO guideline for annual exposure and 4 times the guideline for 24-hour exposure," he said. He also called for revisiting the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

## Delhi AQI: Congress urges action against pollution amid Delhi's severe smog crisis

The Congress asserted on Monday (December 15, 2025) that India cannot afford to pollute its way to prosperity, emphasising that faster economic growth must not come at the cost of public health and environmental degradation. The principal Opposition party said rising pollution levels need not and must not be the price citizens are compelled to pay for development. Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said, in a statement that India's current clean-air strategy relies excessively on Graded Response Action Plans (GRAP), which are largely reactive in nature. He argued that these measures focus on managing pollution crises after they occur, rather than preventing them through sustained policy interventions. "We need tough, multi-sectoral actions with scale and speed throughout the year, not just during the winter months of October to December," Mr. Ramesh said, calling for a comprehensive and continuous approach to tackling air pollution. The Congress communication chief criticised the Centre for stating in the Rajya Sabha on December 9, 2025, that there was no conclusive data establishing a direct correlation between air pollution and deaths or disease. He described this as a display of insensitivity, noting that the government had made a similar claim in July 2024. Deaths linked to pollution Citing scientific evidence, Mr Ramesh re-

## Trump seeks \$10 billion in defamation suit against BBC over editing of January 6 speech



US President Donald Trump on Monday filed a lawsuit seeking at least \$10 billion from the BBC over a documentary that edited his 2021 speech to supporters ahead of the U.S. Capitol riot. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Miami, seeks "damages in an amount not less than \$5,000,000,000" for each of two counts against the British broadcaster for alleged defamation and violation of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act.

Mr. Trump accused Britain's publicly owned broadcaster of defaming him by splicing together parts of a January 6, 2021, speech, including one section where he told supporters to march on the Capitol and another where he said "fight like hell". It omitted a section in which he called for peaceful protest. The BBC has apologised to Mr. Trump, admitted an error of judgment and acknowledged that the edit gave the mistaken impression that he had made a direct call for violent action. But it has said there is no legal basis to sue. The BBC is funded through a mandatory licence fee on all TV viewers, which U.K. lawyers say could make any payout to Mr. Trump politically fraught. Crisis led

to resignation. Facing one of the biggest crises in its 103-year history, the BBC has said it has no plans to rebroadcast the documentary on any of its platforms. The dispute over the clip, featured on the BBC's "Panorama" documentary show shortly before the 2024 presidential election, sparked a public relations crisis for the broadcaster, leading to the resignations of its two most senior officials. Mr. Trump's lawyers say the BBC caused him overwhelming reputational and financial harm. The documentary drew scrutiny after the leak of a BBC memo by an external standards adviser that raised concerns about how it was edited, part of a wider investigation of political bias at the publicly funded broadcaster.

The documentary was not broadcast in the United States. Mr. Trump may have sued in the United States because defamation claims in Britain must be brought within a year of publication, a window that has closed for the "Panorama" episode. To overcome the U.S. Constitution's legal protections for free speech and the press, Mr. Trump will need to prove not only that the edit was false and defamatory but also that the BBC knowingly misled viewers or acted recklessly. The broadcaster could argue that the documentary was substantially true and its editing decisions did not create a false impression, legal experts said. It could also claim the program did not damage Mr. Trump's reputation. Other media have settled with Mr. Trump, including CBS and ABC, when Mr. Trump sued them following his comeback win in the November 2024 election. Mr. Trump has filed lawsuits against the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and a newspaper in Iowa, all three of which have denied wrongdoing. The attack on the U.S. Capitol in January 2021 was aimed at blocking Congress from certifying Joe Biden's presidential win over Mr. Trump in the 2020 U.S. election.

## 3 Indian students among those injured in Australia's Bondi Beach attack



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Melbourne: Three Indian students were among 40 people injured in the terrorist attack on Sydney's Bondi

Beach in Australia, according to a media report on Tuesday. Two out of these three students are believed to be receiving treatment in the hospital, The Australia Today news portal reported. The names of the Indian students injured during Sunday's attack have not been disclosed yet.

The Indian students sustained injuries during the shooting, and their exact condition has not been formally confirmed yet, it said. Naveed Akram, 24, and his father, 50, opened fire on a gathering during the Jewish festival Hanukkah by the Sea celebration. At least 15 people were killed in the attack, including a 10-year-old child. Five of the injured remain in critical condition, while two injured police officers are in serious but stable condition, it added. New South Wales Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon said the investigation is expanding as new information emerges, including international travel by the alleged attackers and the discovery of extremist material, the report said.

## Never allowed territory for activities against Bangladesh's interests: India

The Ministry of External Affairs on Sunday (December 14, 2025) asserted that forces that are "inimical" to the people of Bangladesh have never found a foothold on the territory of India. The response came soon after the neighbouring country alleged that "incendiary" remarks by deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina—who is currently based in India—have been inciting her supporters to launch "terrorist" attacks in order to "thwart" the February 2026 election.

"India has never allowed its territory to be used for activities inimical to the interests of the friendly people of Bangladesh. We expect that the interim Government of Bangladesh will take all necessary measures for ensuring internal law and order, including for the purpose of holding peaceful elections," said the Ministry of External Affairs.

Earlier, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Bangladesh summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma and reiterated its demand for "expeditious extradition" of Ms. Hasina, who has been in India since fleeing Dhaka on August 5, 2024. A press note released by the Bangladesh MoFA said the officials "drew the attention" of the Indian envoy to "anti-Bangladesh activities by fugitive Awami League members staying in India". The Ministry accused them of "planning, organising, and helping to carry out terrorist activities within Bangladesh to hinder the upcoming elections." Bangladesh started demanding the repatriation of Ms. Hasina since the fall of her government and the demand became a formal request following the death sentence that Ms. Hasina and the former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal received from the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) on November 17. Sunday's remarks from Bangladesh's MoFA accused Ms Hasina of making "incendiary statements calling upon her supporters to engage in terrorist activities in Bangladesh, aiming to thwart the upcoming parliamentary elections."



The statement acquires a sharp focus as it came three days after a right-wing youth leader, Sharif Osman Hadi, was shot and critically injured in Dhaka. Subsequently, authorities in Dhaka have zeroed in on Faisal Karim Masud, a part-owner of a local IT firm, for his alleged involvement in the plot to assassinate Mr. Hadi. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh in its statement indicated that the alleged assailants in this case might try to seek refuge in India and said, "The Ministry further sought India's cooperation in preventing the escape to India of the suspects involved in the recent attempted assassination of Bangladeshi political leader Sharif Osman Hadi and, in case they manage to enter Indian territory, to ensure their immediate apprehension and extradition to Bangladesh." Bangladesh announced the schedule of the February 2026 election on December 11, and the attack on Mr. Hadi came soon after, indicating a spike in violence in the country. India has been calling for a "transparent and inclusive" election, hinting at its preference for participation of all sides, even as Bangladesh has banned political activities by the Awami League, which was in power under former Prime Minister Hasina for more than 15 years from 2009 to 2024.

## Bondi beach shooting: Philippines confirms Indian national among gunmen who allegedly visited country

This screen grab made from UGC handout video footage courtesy of Timothy Brant-Coles shows two gunmen dressed in black firing multiple shots on a bridge at Bondi Beach in Sydney on December 14, 2025. The father and son behind one of Australia's deadliest mass shootings spent nearly the entire month of November in the Philippines, Manila's immigration department confirmed on December 16, with the father entering the country as an "Indian national". (Photo by AFP Photo/Courtesy of Timothy Brant-Coles/Handout)

This screen grab made from UGC handout video footage courtesy of Timothy Brant-Coles shows two gunmen dressed in black firing multiple shots on a bridge at Bondi Beach in Sydney on December 14, 2025. The father and son behind one of Australia's deadliest mass shootings spent nearly the entire month of November in the Philippines, Manila's immigration department confirmed on December 16, with the father entering the country as an "Indian national". (Photo by AFP Photo/Courtesy of Timothy Brant-

Coles/Handout)

The Philippines Bureau of Immigration said on Tuesday (December 16, 2025) that the two alleged gunmen behind the mass shooting at Sydney's Bondi Beach travelled to the Philippines on November 1 aboard Philippine Airlines Flight PR212 from Sydney to Manila and onward to Davao. A spokesperson for the bureau said that Sajid Akram, 50, an Indian national and Australian resident, travelled on an Indian passport, while his son Naveed Akram, 24, an Australian national, used an Australian passport, arrived together on the same flight. They departed on November 28 on the same flight numbered, PR212, from Davao via Manila back to Sydney, weeks before the assault that killed 15 people. The attack on Sunday (December 14, 2025) was Australia's worst mass shooting in nearly 30 years, and is being investigated as an act of terrorism targeting the Jewish community. It was not immediately clear what activities they undertook in the Philippines or whether they travelled elsewhere after landing in Davao, a city in Mindanao.

## IndiGo to engage US-based aviation expert John Illson for root cause analysis of its network-wide flight disruptions



Following the recent widespread disruption in its flight operations, the country's largest airline IndiGo has decided to engage an external expert to conduct an independent review and assessment of the disruption and the factors that contributed to it. The airline's board has approved the appointment of Chief Aviation Advisors LLC, led by veteran aviation expert captain John Illson, the carrier announced Friday. The chairman of the airline's board Vikram Singh Mehta on Wednesday had announced that the board will involve an external technical expert to work with the management and help determine the root causes and ensure corrective action, "so that this level of disruption never occurs again". Apart from IndiGo's own root cause analysis, a government-ordered investigation by an inquiry panel constituted by sector regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is already underway. The panel was constituted last Friday (December 5), the peak of the disruption with over 1,600 IndiGo flights cancelled in a single day, and was given 15 days to submit its report. Catch all the latest updates around IndiGo flight cancellations, refunds, investigation, and DGCA action here.

"Captain Illson brings more than four decades of aviation experience across the FAA (US Federal Aviation Administration), ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization), IATA (International Air Transport Association) and major global carriers. With an illustrious track record in global air transport, he brings extensive expertise in global aviation strategy, customized consulting, safety leadership, setting international standards, and new aircraft technologies," IndiGo said, adding that the decision follows the recommendation of the board-constituted Crisis Management Group (CMG). According to Illson's LinkedIn profile, the former airline captain earlier served as a senior advisor to American aviation regulator FAA on development of strategies to enhance the FAA's safety oversight systems. Previously, he worked in senior positions in the domain of aviation safety at various organisations and corporations, including a stint as the chief of the Operational Safety Air Navigation Bureau at United Nations' aviation body ICAO.

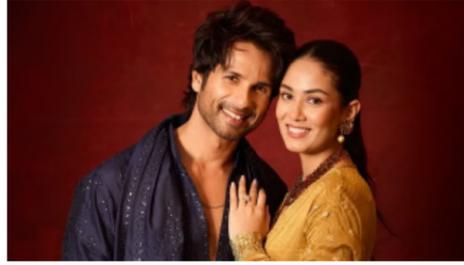
"As part of its assessment, the CMG advised commissioning an independent expert review in the matter. With the Board's approval now in place, the review will begin at the earliest, and the independent expert reviewer will submit a comprehensive report to the Board upon completion," said an IndiGo spokesperson. The airline did not elaborate on how long its root cause analysis will go on for. In his video statement on Wednesday, while announcing that the airline's board will engage an independent expert for root cause analysis, Mehta had denied allegations that the crisis was

engineered and that the airline tried to influence the government over the revised Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules. Mehta, a former long-time chairman of the Shell Group of Companies in India, also said that claims that the airline's board was not engaged on the FDTL issue are "not correct".

Some aviation sector experts and former bureaucrats had questioned the effectiveness of the airline's high-profile board and whether it did enough in the months leading up to a massive operational crisis that brought the country's aviation system to its knees. While Mehta mentioned that the board was involved and had received the necessary information about the new crew rest rules from the airline's management, he did not say whether the board was aware that IndiGo was underprepared for the new rules and whether it made any intervention in the run-up to the rollout of the second phase of the FDTL norms from November 1. Apologising for the disruption that impacted tens of thousands of passengers, Mehta said that while he had been urged to make a statement on the issue, he chose to wait because the airline's board felt that its first duty was to support IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers and his team, restore operations, and help passengers who were affected. With the airline's operations now stabilised, Mehta said that he felt it was the right time for him to speak.

On questions raised on the airline's board, Mehta said, "There has also been a claim that the board was not engaged. This is not correct. The board has been closely involved with this matter for many months. Both the board and the (board's) risk management committee have received relevant information from the management on the implementation of the rules." The network-wide disruption faced by IndiGo was primarily due to the carrier's inadequate preparation for the second phase of the new crew rest and duty norms that took effect on November 1. IndiGo was short on crew against what the new norms required, and in combination with a few other factors, this led to widespread disruption in the airline's operations, leading to thousands of flight cancellations since the middle of last week. The new FDTL rules stipulate more rest for pilots and rationalization of their flying duties—particularly late night operations—in a bid to better manage pilot fatigue, which is a key risk to aviation safety. These new norms, which were stipulated in January last year were delayed in their implementation, and took effect in two phases—from July 1 and November 1—with the second phase rollout hitting IndiGo considerably. The new norms meant that airlines either had to have more pilots to maintain their schedule, or shrink the schedule in line with the new requirements. IndiGo, however, was caught unprepared. In review meetings, IndiGo also accepted that the disruptions "have arisen primarily from misjudgement and planning gaps in implementing" the second phase of new FDTL rules, with the airline saying that the actual crew requirement for the new rules exceeded what it had anticipated, as per the DGCA. Given the scale of the disruption, the DGCA last week granted IndiGo a temporary one-time exemption from some night operations-related changes in the new FDTL norms for its Airbus A320 pilots. The temporary rollback, which will be in place till February 10, helped IndiGo to get its act together and stabilise operations. The DGCA also granted a few other temporary relaxations to IndiGo in a bid to ensure that flight operations remain stable.

## Mira Kapoor reveals how she and husband Shahid manage money as a couple: 'Had to learn how to budget the house'



How do Bollywood star couples manage their money? Do they bicker over a single penny, or does one partner keep track of all the bank accounts while the other spends to their heart's content? In a recent episode of Masoom Minawala's podcast, Mira Kapoor gave us a peek into her and husband Shahid's marriage, sharing how they handle finances and strike a balance in their relationship. "It's never been a topic of discussion as to my money or your money. When I got married, I was not working. It would have been very easy for Shahid to have said, 'You don't know anything, and you're not earning anything. I'll handle everything.' But no, it wasn't like that. I was running the house, and I had to learn to budget it. I needed to learn how to go month to month, keep a check on things, and I still do that. I have to give a lot of credit to him," she told Minawala.

Money is a sensitive topic, tied to security and stability from a young age. Without open conversations, we might not feel secure, leading to distrust and underperformance in the relationship. Aligning financial goals with your partner encourages this financial security. Mukesh Pandey, Director of Rupyaa Paisa, believes that for couples in a relationship, financial issues rarely stem from a lack of money but rather from a misunderstanding of how each person views money. "In India, it has been reported that by 2025, more than half of all households will be borrowing more money

than before. The average per household for all loaned money has risen 23% from 2023 to 2025; the amount owed by the average household is now about 4.8 lakhs per person," Pandey told indianexpress.com. He added that according to research by Rupyaa Paisa, almost 41% of couples globally who combine their financial resources engage in financial infidelity (e.g., lying or hiding their debts or purchases). How Shahid and Mira manage their money Mira reveals she is in charge of handling the household budget. (Source: Instagram/@mira.kapoor)

Pandey says that couples who do not communicate openly about their finances, including income levels and debt, can often feel pressured, both as individuals and as a couple. According to him, financial health is most effectively achieved through honest conversations, combining financial resources, and realistic expectations regarding savings and investments. "Having regular monthly chats regarding financial situations, establishing savings and investment plans, disclosing credit and spending behaviour, and discussing upcoming expenses are not just additional benefits; these are fundamental aspects of couples' financial wellness," he shared, adding that when evident communication about finances occurs, couples can create stronger financial partnerships and improve trust between one another. Aarti Chawla, a Mumbai-based relationship psychotherapist and life coach, agreed with him, adding that it is critical to set boundaries on financial transactions and individual expenses to promote financial harmony and avoid daily conflicts over who is spending more. In a relationship, it is healthy to recognise that there is no absolute right or wrong, only different perspectives. Maturity involves finding a harmonious path and sometimes making compromises. And financial harmony isn't just about managing money; it's about aligning values, fostering trust, and working towards shared goals. "Open communication, understanding, and mutual respect create a solid foundation for a fulfilling and prosperous relationship," said Chawla.

## From nightclubs to 'naam': How Gen Z is turning bhajan clubbing into India's hottest sober high



For years, India's Gen Z has carried a reputation shaped by stereotypes: a cohort dismissed as aloof, easily distracted, indulgent in nightlife, and Insta-validation. Popular imagination paints them as the "party generation" — more invested in EDM drops than any spiritual depth. But a startling cultural shift across cities is changing that narrative entirely. From Bengaluru to Mumbai and from Delhi to Pune, young people are filling darkened auditoriums and café-turned-concert halls — not for alcohol-fuelled raves, but for nights of collective chanting and ecstatic devotion. Music that once belonged to temples and grandparents' living rooms now reverberates through professional sound systems and stage lighting. The tracks may invoke Krishna, Shiva, or Rama, yet the vibe feels electric, contemporary, and unapologetically youthful. Smartphones are up — not for crazy selfies with drinks, but to capture a kind of high that leaves no hangover.

This emerging culture, popularly referred to as 'bhajan clubbing', reveals a deeper truth about Gen Z. Behind the ease of memes and their "too cool to care" image, there is a generation actively seeking belonging, grounding, and meaning. They are questioning the exhaustion of consumer-driven nightlife, the burnout caused by digital noise, and the emptiness of performative pleasure. And instead, they are crafting a fresh grammar of spirituality that is fluid, inclusive, playlist-driven, and unapologetically open. Event organisers report record turnouts; ticketed devotional nights are selling out as quickly as mid-tier EDM shows; Google searches for "modern kirtan" and "sober rave India" have surged; and curated bhakti events now travel city to city like mainstream concert tours. This isn't a fringe experiment — it's a youth-led cultural movement pushing India into a new devotional renaissance.

Bhakti, once bound by temples and timelines, is now being remixed by those born fully into the broadband era. They are transforming prayer into performance, ritual into rhythm, and spirituality into a social experience that resonates long after the music stops. Take a recent night in Hyderabad — one of many cities where this spiritual rave culture now thrives. In Hyderabad, for instance, the lights are low, the bass is thumping, and fifteen hundred-some things have their hands in the air, eyes half-closed, screaming in unison. If you walked in blindfolded, you'd swear it was a Sunburn after-party. Except there's no alcohol at the bar, only cutting chai and cold coffee, and the lyric bouncing off the walls is Shri Krishna Govind Hare Murari. Welcome to Bhajan Clubbing — the unlikely movement that has replaced vodka shots with vibhuti and EDM drops with dholak rhythms. Twenty-four-year-old Vaishnavi Kumar, a marketing executive from Pune, calls it her "clean rave". "My friends and I are done with hangovers," she says. "Here the high lasts longer, and I wake up remembering every minute of it." In Hyderabad, 28-year-old IT consultant Mahi Sharma felt the same electric surge when a hundred strangers linked arms and sang Rama Rama Rata Rata Biti Re Umariyya till 2 am. "I posted one Reel, and my DMs exploded with 'Where? When? Take me!'" she laughs. And Hyderabad is far from unique — the same chants now echo across India's metros, from Bengaluru to Mumbai and Delhi. Prachi & Raghav who started backstagesiblings Prachi & Raghav who started backstagesiblings, India's bhajan clubbing sensation.

These are not isolated stories. Over the past year, ticketed bhajan concerts have sold out faster than many mid-tier EDM gigs. Prachi and Raghav Agarwal — the sibling duo better known as BackstageSiblings — went from hosting a living-room baithak for 50 people to selling 1,500 paid tickets in Mumbai in under a year. Radhika Das, a London-based Kirtan artist and Bhakti Yoga teacher, drew 15,000

people in New Delhi. Even traditional bands report a spike: Suresh Prajapat, first runner-up on India's Got Talent Season 8, says audiences now demand entire "spiritual sets" instead of the occasional high-energy bhajan slipped between Bollywood numbers. The numbers are startling. According to IMARC Group's report, India's spiritual and wellness market is already valued at \$58.5 billion and is growing at a rate of roughly 10–12% annually. Within this, the live devotional music segment has expanded significantly: organisers like EVA Live now routinely sell 5,000–15,000 tickets for single-city kirtan concerts, a scale that was previously unthinkable. Google Trends shows that searches for 'bhajan clubbing', 'modern kirtan', and 'sober rave India' have risen by 400–600% since early 2024. To understand GenZ's attraction to sober devotional nights, we must shift from the dancefloor to the psyche — and the social forces shaping their lives. The science is remarkably clear. Dr Sobha Nair, a clinical psychologist, points to the neurophysiology of collective chanting. "Repetitive rhythmic vocalisation — what we do in bhajans and kirtans — down-regulates the sympathetic nervous system and lowers cortisol levels within minutes," she explains. Studies published in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2021) and the *International Journal of Yoga* (2023) confirm that group kirtan produces significant reductions in state anxiety, enhances oxytocin levels, and measurable heart-rate variability shifts toward parasympathetic dominance — the same "rest-and-digest" state achieved through mindfulness meditation or forest bathing, but faster and more socially bonded. In other words, a 45-minute 'Jai Sita Ram' loop gives you the physiological equivalent of a solid therapy session, except you are dancing with strangers who feel like family by the end.

Professor Anita Raju, who teaches postmodern religion, describes bhajan clubbing as a classic case of "deterritorialised spirituality". "For earlier generations, devotion was tied to geography (the village temple), time (Thursday evening aarti), and hierarchy (the pandit decides pace and volume)," she says. "Gen Z has unmoored bhakti from all three. They have moved it into cafés, banquet halls, and paid-ticket venues; they decide the playlist on the fly; and they treat the microphone like an open-mic rather than a sanctum." This is not secularisation; it is re-enchantment on new terms. The sacred is no longer inherited — it is curated, remixed, and shared on Reels. As Raghav Agarwal puts it, "Any song can be a bhajan if it brings you peace." Their sets seamlessly transition from Hey Shyam in a trap beat to an old Rafi classic back to Govind Bolo Hari Gopal Bolo, collapsing the binary between the devotional and the popular. Liquid devotion, where smartphone becomes new temple bell. Sociologists call this "liquid devotion" — borrowing Zygmunt Bauman's idea of liquid modernity — where identity, community, and even faith flow continuously rather than remain fixed in institutions. The smartphone becomes the new temple bell: one viral 15-second clip of 300 people jumping to Ram Ram Jai Raja Ram does more missionary work than a thousand pamphlets. Yet the movement is careful not to entirely antagonise tradition. Venues still insist on vegetarian food and total alcohol bans — a non-negotiable clause that clubs happily accept because the foothold compensates for lost liquor revenue. Sheela, owner of a popular Mumbai nightlife space, says, "We used to make 70% of our money from the bar. Now, on bhajan nights, we make it from cover charges, and the crowd is three times bigger. Everybody wins." For Gen Z, the appeal is threefold: authenticity, community, and control. After growing up in a world of endless scrolling, dating-app burnout, and quarterly layoffs, many are exhausted by performative hedonism. A 2024 Deloitte Gen Z and Millennial Survey (India chapter) found that 67% of respondents now blend therapy with spiritual practices, while 41% actively seek "experiences that make me feel part of something bigger". Bhajan clubbing delivers exactly that — without the Sunday-morning regret. Prachi Agarwal remembers the exact moment she realised they were onto something bigger than a hobby. "We were investment bankers four months ago," she says, laughing. "We quit when we saw strangers crying and hugging each other after our sets. Money can wait; this feeling can't." As the clock edges past midnight in yet another dimly lit hall, the beat drops into the simplest of all mantras — "Hare Krishna Hare Rama". Phones are up, but not just for selfies; they're recording something they want to replay when anxiety hits at 3 am on a Tuesday. The crowd sways like one organism.

## Nadella and Fadnavis launch MahaCrimeOS AI to fast-track cybercrime investigations; Fadnavis announces \$1 billion investment by Brookfield to set up GCC in Maharashtra



Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella together with Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, unveiled MahaCrimeOS AI — the country's first AI-powered platform to fast-track cybercrime investigations. The platform designed to augment officers with AI tools that help them to resolve cases faster and more efficiently, combining human expertise with responsible innovation, has been developed by CyberEye, a partner independent software vendor (ISV) of Microsoft, with the Maharashtra Government's Special Purpose Vehicle MARVEL, and Microsoft India Development Center (IDC). It is built on Microsoft Azure OpenAI Service and Microsoft Foundry.

While Nadella showcased a video illustrating how MahaCrime AI OS helped deliver justice to a cybercrime victim in Nagpur, CM Fadnavis, while addressing the media, said, "Our collaboration with Microsoft began with solving complex cybercrime challenges, but its potential is far greater." MahaCrimeOS AI was launched on Friday, currently, it is live in 23 police stations across Nagpur, and it is proposed to be rolled out to all 1,100 police stations across the state. Making another key investment announcement, Fadnavis on Friday said that the global asset management company, Brookfield, will build a Global Capacity Centre (GCC) in Maharashtra with an investment of over \$1 billion. The GCC will span across two million square feet and is expected to be Asia's largest facility, the Chief Minister said. "It will provide direct employment to 15,000 people and create 30,000 jobs indirectly," Fadnavis told reporters.

Besides, the state government is also in discussions with logistics firm FedEx to set up a GCC between Mumbai and Pune. "The Navi Mumbai International Airport has opened up avenues for logistics, and they (FedEx) want to leverage it. We had a discussion with them," he said. Nadella and Fadnavis also discussed the future of digital safety and AI-driven governance in the state. "There were discussions on expanding the AI copilot platform to other sectors such as health, education, agriculture, delivery of services. We will also collaborate with Microsoft in making Maharashtra as the AI hub of the country," the chief minister said. He also requested Microsoft, which recently committed \$17.5 billion investment for India, to consider investing in

Maharashtra, as it offers a vast talent pool. Earlier this week, Microsoft announced to invest \$17.5 billion in India — its largest in Asia — over four years (CY 2026 to 2029) to advance the country's cloud and artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, skilling and ongoing operations.

## US lawmakers move resolution to end 50% tariffs on India

Washington: A group of influential Democratic lawmakers have introduced a resolution in the US House of Representatives to terminate the 50 per cent tariff on imports from India, which they describe as illegal and economically damaging. Led by Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, along with Congresswoman Deborah Ross and Congressman Marc Veasey, the resolution moves to terminate President Donald Trump's national emergency authorising tariffs of up to 50 per cent on imports from India, which they describe as illegal and economically damaging.

The initiative follows a bipartisan, Senate-passed measure to end tariffs imposed on Brazil and curb what lawmakers see as the president's misuse of emergency authorities to raise import duties. According to the sponsors, the resolution would terminate the national emergency that President Trump invoked under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose sweeping tariffs on Indian products. It would also rescind the additional 25 per cent "secondary" duties that took effect on August 27, layered on top of earlier reciprocal tariffs. Together, those actions raised duties on many Indian-origin goods to as high as 50 per cent. "President Trump's irresponsible tariff strategy toward India is a counterproductive approach that weakens a critical partnership," Congressman Krishnamoorthi said. "Instead of advancing American interests or security, these duties disrupt supply chains, harm American workers, and drive up costs for consumers. Ending these damaging tariffs will allow the United States to engage with India to advance our shared economic and security needs," he said. Ross said the impact of the tariffs extends beyond Washington's trade policy debates and is being felt directly in states such as North Carolina, which has close commercial and community ties with India. "North Carolina's economy is deeply connected to India through trade, investment, and a vibrant Indian American community," she said. "Indian companies have invested over a billion dollars and created thousands of good-paying jobs in our state — especially in the Research Triangle's life sciences and technology sectors."

## Pant's role and Siraj's return in focus as India pick ODI squad for New Zealand series



New Delhi: The indefatigable duo of Rishabh Pant and Mohammed Siraj is expected to be the big talking point on Saturday when the selectors pick a 15-member Indian ODI squad for the three-match series against New Zealand starting January 11 in Vadodara. While no major shake-ups are expected in the squad that beat South Africa a few weeks ago, two specific concerns could be addressed by the Ajit Agarkar-chaired selection committee. The first issue is Pant's position as the second wicketkeeper, with Ishan Kishan showing his hitting prowess in the middle order for Jharkhand and Dhruv Chand Jurel smashing a 'Daddy Hundred' for UP in the domestic circuit.

Agarkar and head coach Gautam Gambhir have shown an inclination to select personnel based on team combination. In T20 Internationals, they have preferred keepers who are openers such as Sanju Samson and Kishan. In ODIs, however, the keeper is needed to be a middle-order

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

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

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

That's life for batsmen living on the edge. They take calculated risks and also gamble to ace odds. These batting buccaneers keep burying the good old ethos of batting to build their own creed. That bargain comes with consequences, as Rishabh would have realised. But then he can't help it; he is a compulsive stroke-maker. Rishabh belongs to the Cult of Speed and is not too different from the early die-hard fighter jocks taking to the skies to break the sound barrier. Historians say those pioneer aviators would opt to crash and die rather than slow down or eject out.

Rishabh isn't alone. There is a growing tribe of young players in world cricket who keep pushing the envelope, never compromising on their ultra-aggressive batting approach. England has a couple — Harry Brook and Jamie Smith, Australia used to have one in Sam Konstas. In India too the youngsters are joining the Carefree Club. The Next Big Batsman, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, the 14-year-old who hit the first ball he faced in IPL into the stands, is the poster boy of this entertaining brand of batting and is expected to be a role model for other potential members of this Cult. Interestingly, the wicket-keeper who has taken Rishabh's place, Ishan Kishan, is also not too different from him. Same skill-set, similar temperament, both in their late 20s; Ishan also loves courting danger. But is Ishan a better bet than Rishabh or is this the case of the former being more suited for T20s and latter for Tests? Not quite, this is a curious case. Both wicket-keepers have represented India in all formats. They have had many glorious days where they have been hailed as daredevil heroes. And also an equal number of off-days, if not more, when they are painted as villains for dancing down the track only to miss the ball or getting out to a hideous hoick. Their incredible highs notwithstanding, both have been periodically written off. But they have, without fail, kept bouncing back to prove the world wrong. So how did the weighing scale swing towards Ishan during the T20 World Cup selection meeting? Recency bias, maybe.

## Mustafizur Rahman released by KKR following BCCI's instruction

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have said on Saturday that they have released fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman after being instructed to do the same by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). KKR had bought the 30-year-old Bangladesh fast bowler for Rs 9.5 crore in the auction ahead of the 2026 season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) in December. "Kolkata Knight Riders confirms that BCCI/IPL as the regulator of IPL has instructed it to release Mustafizur Rahman from the squad ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) season," said KKR in a statement that came shortly after BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia announced communicating the instruction with the three-time IPL champions.

"The release has been carried out following due process and consultations, upon the instruction of the Board of Control of Cricket in India. BCCI will allow Kolkata Knight Riders a replacement player in line with IPL regulations, and further details will be communicated in due course." Saikia had earlier said that the BCCI had told KKR to release Mustafizur "due to recent developments".

"Due to the recent developments that are going on all across, BCCI has instructed the franchise KKR to release one of their players, Mustafizur Rahman of Bangladesh, from their squad," Saikia told the news agency ANI. "BCCI has also said that if they ask for any replacement, BCCI is going to allow that replacement."

KKR slammed for signing up Mustafizur Rahman as one of seven Bangladeshi players in the auction pool but the only one to find bidders. Mustafizur entered with a base price of Rs 2 crore but ended up being signed up by KKR for Rs 9.20 crore. Delhi Capitals opened the bidding for the 30-year-old, and Chennai Super Kings challenged, with Mustafizur

batter, coming in at No.5 or 6. Pant has played just one ODI between July 2024 and December 2025 under Gambhir's tenure. His tally of 31 ODIs in eight years with an average of less than 35 does not reflect his potential. Even his critics agree he has more impact than Kishan and Jurel.

However, his shot selection in the recent Guwahati Test against South Africa did not impress the head coach or the selectors. Dropping him without a fair run could also raise uncomfortable questions.

The second aspect is the selection of pacers. Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah are likely to be rested with the T20 World Cup in mind. It remains to be seen if Harshit Rana and Arshdeep Singh, who played against South Africa, will also be given a break. Siraj, overlooked for the Champions Trophy and the South Africa series, has not played in the first four rounds of the Vijay Hazare Trophy but may feature for Hyderabad in the last three rounds. His omission from the 50-over setup after being a regular till the 2023 World Cup has been baffling. In the case of Mohammed Shami, though he continues to play for Bengal across formats, there is a view that he may be past his prime in international cricket. Communication between Shami and the selectors has also not been clear. Among Vijay Hazare Trophy performers, Sarfaraz Khan (for No.4) and Devdutt Padikkal (opener) are genuine contenders. But with Shubman Gill, Rohit Sharma and Yashasvi Jaiswal already assured of places, Padikkal may find it tough. Sarfaraz has been brilliant domestically, but Ruturaj Gaikwad surged ahead with a century against South Africa. In the end, all debates may prove to be a storm in a teacup if the selectors decide to maintain status quo.



Towards the end of 2025, few of Rishabh's bouts of brain-fade coincided with Ishan's purple patch domestically. Fate timed their dramatically fluctuating fortunes such that Rishabh's dip came just around the time Ishan was riding the wave. In a few months' time, the trend could change but as of January 2026, Ishan's stock is up. About six months back, the Rishabh script was peaking. During the England tour, when he had walked to bat with a fractured toe, he was called the warrior who could do no wrong. Before that, he had scored 2 hundreds, 3 fifties. Finally, he was showing consistency, even though he had batted like he had always done. Obviously, pre-meditation was part of his on-the-crease batting routine. Commentators took punts on when he would charge out of the crease — mostly it was on the second or third ball he faced but once it was the first one too. India were winning, Rishabh was calling the cards perfectly.

In England, it all looked charming, but against South Africa, Rishabh's luck ran out and it started to get ugly. Recency bias would set in and Rishabh would suffer the same fate as other frustratingly talented players. Had Rishabh not messed up against South Africa in Tests, he might have even made it to the World Cup team. In the last edition that India won, the wicket-keeper had played a few useful hands, including a blinder against Pakistan on those dodgy American pitches. Even after Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli had gotten out, he continued to go for his shots, scoring 42 from 31 balls to be the team's top scorer. He was in a similar situation against South Africa in Tests, but this time he couldn't hit out of trouble. Rishabh's career trajectory should be a lesson for other batsmen on speed. They need to know that batting greats with long careers don't get caught in the risk-reward conundrum. Ishan needs to decide if he wants to be the next Rishabh or the greatest wicket-keeper who could smash the ball, Adam Gilchrist. Closer home, Virender Sehwag too was a carefree batsman but when he went to battle, he carried both — a sword and a shield.



having turned out for both sides in the past. KKR entered the fray at Rs 5.4 crore and then managed to keep CSK at bay. However, KKR and their co-owner, Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan, have since come under intense criticism on social media and by politicians for signing the Mustafizur, linking it to reports of attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh in recent weeks. Mustafizur has played 60 IPL games and taken 65 wickets. The 2026 season of the IPL would've marked a decade of playing in the league for him, having made his first appearance playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2016. SRH won the title that season and Mustafizur became the first overseas player to win the "Emerging Player of the Tournament" award. He has since gone on to play in every season except for two, in 2019 and 2020. He played for SRH in the 2017 season as well after he which he spent a season at Mumbai Indians. Mustafizur then didn't feature in the 2019 and 2020 seasons before spending a year with the Rajasthan Royals in 2021. He then spent two seasons with Delhi Capitals and then played for the Chennai Super Kings in 2024. Mustafizur then returned to DC last year.

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



GNS News Agency, Feb 26

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

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

An analysis by The Indian Express of participation trends since 2019 in some of the major sports revealed that when champions rise, a wave unfurls. There has been a multifold spike in the participation numbers — driven by women athletes — from 2019 to 2025, noticeably in disciplines where Indians have emerged as world beaters. The true impact of India's Olympic and World Championship medals is seen beyond the podium, across the country's sprawling geography. From a badminton dream nurtured inside a no-frills academy to a budding javelin thrower from the attolls of Lakshadweep to a shooting prodigy from a chemical cluster in Gujarat. The participation in the National Javelin Day, to commemorate Neeraj's Tokyo Olympics gold medal in 2021, has grown sevenfold in just three years — from 700 in 2022 to 4,974 in 2025. In the javelin competition at the junior national championships, there has been a 90% growth (75 in 2023 to 143 in 2024) among men and a staggering 125% among women (61 in 2023, 137 in 2024).

The spike is more pronounced in shooting, the only other sport where India has won an individual gold medal after Independence — Abhinav Bindra's historic feat at the Beijing Games in 2008. From 8,011 participants at the National Championships in the pre-pandemic year of 2019, the number surged more than 100% to 16,951 in the ongoing 2025 edition. The growth is most visible in the air rifle and air pistol events, where India has amassed Olympic, World Championships and World Cup medals — from 3,825 air pistol competitors at the National Championships in 2019 to 6,703 in 2024; and in air rifle, up from 2,817 in 2019 to 4,835 in 2024. Inspired by Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's pathbreaking results, India's premier junior ranking badminton tournament, the Krishna Khaitan Memorial, has witnessed a 100% increase in the U-19 men's doubles; from 104 in 2012 to 208 in 2022. Similarly, at the Rajasthan State Ranking tournament, the entries went up from 517 in 2022 to 893 last year, a 70% increase.

Talking of how big medals boost participation numbers, Lalit Bhanot, the chairman of the Athletics Federation of India's Planning Commission, gives the example of javelin. Kashinath Naik's bronze medal at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, he told The Indian Express, showed "there was javelin talent in India... (Neeraj) Chopra, of course, really boosted the popularity of javelin by becoming the Olym-

pic gold medalist and that can be seen in the increasing number of athletes who throw over 80 metres." In men's javelin, 80 m is considered an elite performance threshold. In 2023, two years after Chopra's Olympic gold, India had six throwers who crossed that mark — the same as Finland, seen as the event's powerhouse. At September's World Championships, India had four javelin throwers, more than any other country. Women athletes drive growth. The growth in numbers has been driven by the increased participation of women athletes. Two years ago, a research by The Indian Express of India's Asian Games contingent revealed that the female-male percentage ratio among the medal winners was 43:57. It pointed to a shrinking gender gap when it comes to sporting success. Two decades ago, the ratio was approximately 36:64 and in the 2018 edition, it stood at roughly 40:60. This trend is visible at the national level, too.

From 2019 to 2024, the participation of women in junior national javelin championships skyrocketed from 31 to 137, a staggering 125% spike. Among the seniors, women's javelin throw has recorded a 70% increase in participation at the inter-state tournament, while the men's numbers remained stable. While women's participation in shooting is still almost 46% less than men, it is rapidly catching up and growing faster in most events. This is evident from the 111% rise in 10 m air pistol — from 1,033 in 2019 to 2,181 last year — and almost 90% increase in 10 m air rifle, from 1,075 in 2019 to 2,038 in 2024. In weightlifting, too, there has been an increase in women's numbers across all categories. "My observation is women are more disciplined and driven," says national weightlifting coach Vijay Sharma, who has been in Mirabai Chanu's corner for the last decade. "When you have more to prove and better will-power, the chances of you succeeding increase automatically." The surge in women's participation is apparent even beyond the disciplines identified by the sports ministry as a high priority. For instance, according to the All India Football Federation, the number of women players has grown from 8,683 during 2016 to 2020 to 37,829 from 2022 to 2025. The launch of a women's league in 2016, the emergence of players such as Manisha Kalyan, the first Indian to have played in the UEFA Champions League for women, and occasional eye-catching results, leading to the national team qualifying for the 2026 Asian Cup — first time in 23 years — are seen as the reasons for this surge.

In archery, for instance, the numbers in senior men's participation at the national championship have been declining year-on-year, and the spread of the sport isn't as wide as athletics, badminton or shooting — 65% of the archers are from half-a-dozen states in western and northern India. The bigger worry, however, is in wrestling, the only sport where India has won a medal in each of the last five Olympics. The sport, thrown into turmoil following the allegations of sexual harassment against its former president, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, has witnessed a steep fall in participation numbers at the National Championships. In men's freestyle, for instance, there were 284 entries at the 2019 National Championships.

That number fell to 190 in 2023, when the protests against Brij Bhushan began, and slumped further to 136 last year. Similarly, in women's wrestling, the entries fell from 234 in 2019 to 94 in 2023 and a marginal increase of 124 in 2024. In Greco-Roman style, too, the numbers dropped from 264 in 2019 to 133 in 2024. A Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) official said this happened because of "internal problems". At the National Championships earlier this month in Ahmedabad, the total number of participants in men's freestyle, Greco-Roman and women's freestyle categories were 'approximately 750' — the same as pre-Covid and pre-protests years. The federation official says, "We had two National Championships in the aftermath of the protests, one held by the WFI, which wasn't recognised by the government, and another by the ad-hoc body which the Indian Olympic Association formed. Because of that, the participation numbers fell sharply. This year, we were back to normal since most of our internal issues are sorted."

## Like with Pakistan, India-Bangladesh cricket ties could snap after BCCI asks IPL franchise Shahrukh Khan's KKR to eject Mustafizur Rahman from team

GNS News Agency, Feb 26

India could be staring at a Pakistan-like situation with Bangladesh, with bilateral cricket now in doubt amid the ongoing political crisis. The uncertainty has put India's scheduled tour later this year on hold, also raising the prospect of the two sides meeting only at neutral venues in global events. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had issued a media release on Friday, stating that they will host India for three ODIs followed by three T20Is in the first week of September. However, following recent developments across the border, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided to put the series on hold and will seek Indian government approval before taking a final call.

The BCCI will communicate to BCB about Indian government decisions in due course. The ongoing political crisis, however, is unlikely to impact Bangladesh's participation in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka in February. "We didn't travel to Bangladesh last year too, BCB had issued their international calendar, but it looks doubtful, as we need Indian government approval to play in any other country. As far as the T20I World Cup is concerned, Bangladesh will play as per the scheduled games in India," a top BCCI official said.

The decision to put the series on hold comes on the same day as the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) was informed by the BCCI to release Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from their squad, ahead of the 2026 season. KKR had bought the 30-year-old Bangladesh fast bowler for Rs 9.5 crore in the auction ahead of the 2026 season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) in December.

Bollywood superstar and KKR co-owner Shah Rukh Khan also found himself in the eye of the storm, with various political leaders calling for the three-time IPL champions to remove Rahman from their squad. Hindu spiritual leader Jagadguru Rambhadracharya had called the 60-year-old actor "anti-national", adding that he had no character. "... It is unfortunate (Shah Rukh Khan took Bangladeshi cricketer in KKR for IPL 2026), but he will do so because he is considered a hero. Shah Rukh Khan's stance has consistently been at odds with the nation. He has no character. His character has always been questionable and anti-national," Rambhadracharya said. Shiv Sena leader Anand Dubey had also targeted the actor, adding that they would not allow



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Rahman to play at "any cost". "If Shah Rukh Khan plays him and earns money, that money will be used to nurture terrorists there and conspire against our country. We will not allow this to happen at any cost," he said. "Kolkata Knight Riders confirms that BCCI/IPL, as the regulator of IPL, has instructed it to release Mustafizur Rahman from the squad ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) season," said KKR in a statement that came shortly after BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia announced communicating the instruction with the three-time IPL champions. "The release has been carried out following due process and consultations, upon the instruction of the Board of Control of Cricket in India. BCCI will allow Kolkata Knight Riders a replacement player in line with IPL regulations, and further details will be communicated in due course," it added. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia had earlier said that the BCCI had told KKR to release Mustafizur "due to recent developments".

## When Nawazuddin Siddiqui said women kept rejecting him for Akshaye Khanna; said they all love him: 'What's so special about him'



Be it box office success or the controversy surrounding it, actor Akshaye Khanna is currently the belle of the ball. Following his performance in Aditya Dhar's film Dhurandhar, he is getting a lot of compliments from within the industry. Speaking of compliments by contemporaries, Khanna received a pretty impressive one from Nawazuddin

Siddiqui a few years ago. The Sacred Games actor once claimed during an interview that Khanna was the reason behind him facing rejection from a lot of girls, because they all loved him instead.

While promoting their film Mom, Sridevi, Akshaye, and Nawaz had talked to NDTV. During the interview Nawaz jumped in and shared a story from his time as a bachelor. He said that he faced a lot of rejection during his pursuit for a partner, and a major reason behind it was the fact that all girls were obsessed with Khanna. A modest and silent-looking Khanna can be seen listening to the story patiently, while Sridevi and the audience are laughing it up.

Nawaz said, "I want to share this one thing with everyone. Before I was married, I was trying very hard to court someone. I would try to talk to girls, but they all used to reject me. So I asked all of them, 'What kind of a man do you like?' and I am honestly telling you that all those girls were his (Khanna's) fans." He continued, "I used to ask them, 'What's so special about him?' Someone used to talk about his smile, or someone would start talking about his eyes. He had a weird hold on women, and he had a big fan following." Akshaye jumped and said, "I had?" Nawaz quickly changed his statement and said that women still love him; it's just that he does very few films and that he should do more for his fans to watch. Akshaye laughed away the compliment as Nawaz concluded with, "All of those fans, and everyone else, want Akshaye Khanna to work again. He doesn't show up a lot, and he is very choosy about his work. Hamari dua hai (it's our wish) that he does more films."

## Tommy Lee Jones' daughter Victoria Jones found dead in San Francisco hotel room; investigation underway

Tragedy struck for Hollywood icon Tommy Lee Jones, when his daughter passed away on January 1. Victoria Jones was 34 and was found dead in her hotel room in San Francisco. While the cause of her death has not yet been revealed, an investigation into the matter is underway. According to a report by People magazine, law enforcement confirmed that the SF Fire Department had been notified of an emergency at the Fairmont Hotel. Upon reaching the scene, they reported that an unidentified person was found dead. NBC Bay Area reported that the body was later identified and was believed to be Victoria, and that no foul play was suspected. The police department and medical examiners were also present on the scene, and Victoria was pronounced dead after not responding to CPR.

Victoria was born to Tommy and his second wife, Kimberlea Cloughley. The couple also share an older son, Austin Leonard Jones, who has also worked in Hollywood. Victoria had a handful of roles in films like Men In Black II and The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, and the latter was directed by Tommy himself. She even made an appearance in one episode of One Tree Hill.

Tommy married his first wife, Kimberlea, in 1981, and he was doing a lot of TV movies during that time, like Barn Burning, The Executioner's Song, and The Rainmaker. Kimberlea gave birth to Austin in 1982 and to Victoria in 1991.



During an old interview with the New Yorker, Tommy recalled working with his daughter and said, "She's a good actress, has her SAG card, speaks impeccable Spanish... When she was a baby, I told Leticia, her nurse, to speak to her in Spanish. She had to get up at 5 a.m. for her part (In The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada). One morning, she wouldn't get out of bed. I said, 'Honey, this is work.' But she wouldn't budge. So I fired her. Then, without telling me, the production staff went over and woke her and rushed her out to the set just in time."

## Manu Varma announces separation from Sindhu Varma after 25 years of marriage: 'When the compatibility is no longer there...'



Putting an end to their quarter-century-long companionship, renowned Malayalam television actors Manu Varma and Sindhu Varma are heading for a divorce. Mentioning that he and Sindhu have been living separately for the past two years, Manu revealed recently that their divorce case is currently under the court's consideration.

"My wife and I are currently separated. We are not legally divorced yet, though. The chances of us reuniting are very slim. There is no point in saying that we fell in love and began a life together after that; so many people who loved and lived together more than we did have ended up parting ways. At least until two or three years ago, we were in love and together. It doesn't take much time for all this to happen," he shared during a conversation with Movie World Media. Manu Varma is the son of veteran character actor Jagannatha Varma (late) and the cousin of eminent ad filmmaker Prakash Varma, who recently made a majestic acting debut in director Tharun Moorthy's blockbuster Mohanlal-Shobana starrer Thudarum (2025).

Manu added, "When the compatibility is no longer there, it is better to live apart. There is no need to struggle and live together. What if problems escalate while living together? Why do that? Isn't it like that in foreign countries? Moreover, even after separating, people there maintain a friendship; it would be good if that came here too. However, if that happens, perhaps divorces might increase.

## Javed Akhtar reacts to video showing him wearing topi, saying he 'has turned to God', mulls legal action: 'Damaging my reputation'

While the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has proven beneficial to many across various fields, there have also been instances where people have had to pay for its dark side. Celebrities have become the most common targets of disinformation generated using AI, including deepfake videos and morphed images. From Rashmika Mandanna, Amitabh Bachchan, and Alia Bhatt to Ranveer Singh and Shilpa Shetty, many have faced the wrath of AI over the past few years. The latest to fall prey to this is legendary screenwriter-lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Recently, an AI-generated video of him went viral on social media, reportedly showing Javed wearing a skullcap and proclaiming that he had "turned to God." A staunch atheist for years, his 'sudden change of heart' piqued the interest of many, and the clip became a hot topic in the virtual world in no time. Subsequently, Javed himself took to social media to dismiss the video as fabricated.

He wrote on X (formerly Twitter), "A fake video is in circulation showing my fake computer generated picture with a topi on my head claiming that ultimately I have turned to God. It is rubbish. I am seriously considering to report this to the cyber police and ultimately dragged the person responsible for this fake news and those few who forward it to the court for damaging my reputation and credibility (sic)."

## Kartik Aaryan admits to calling his ex girlfriends even after he is in a new relationship, Ananya Panday calls it a red flag: Great Indian Kapil Show



Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday's film Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri is possibly at the end of its theatrical run, due to the continued success of Dhurandhar and the screens being taken over by the new release Ikkis. But the stars of the film will soon be seen on Kapil Sharma's Netflix show The Great Kapil Show to promote their film. The promo of the same is out and it features Kartik and

Ananya sharing some fun banter with Kapil. In the promo, Kapil jokes, "We might say Happy New Year all we want, but the real happiness is for someone like Kartik. Every time he has a new film, a new heroine..." Another part of the promo has Kapil playing a game with the two actors as he asks them to raise a red flag or green flag over his statements. He asks in the promo, "Calling your ex despite being in a relationship."

Ananya picks up her red flag and gives a shocked expression when Kartik says, "I do it sometimes, you must also do it sometimes." To this, Ananya smiles and nods in agreement. Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri had a disastrous run at the box office after its release on Christmas. The film opened at Rs 7.75 crore at the box office and could only earn Rs 23.5 crore at the box office during the first extended weekend. After the first week, the film made Rs 30.2 crore. The film made only Rs 1.35 crore on New Year's Day while latest release Ikkis made Rs 7 crore, and Dhurandhar, on its 28th day, earned Rs 15.75 crore. This was Kartik's only release in 2025. He is now looking forward to Nagzilla, produced by Karan Johar's Dharma Productions, and directed by Fukrey fame Mrigdeep Singh Lamba. For Ananya, this was her second theatrical release of the year after Kesari Chapter 2.

## 'If something happens to Amitabh Bachchan, your wife will face consequences': Khuda Gawah producer recalls shooting amid war in Afghanistan

Amitabh Bachchan and Sridevi-starrer 1992 film Khuda Gawah was one of the most ambitious films of that era. So much so that the makers of the film decided to shoot in Afghanistan when the region was under threat from Taliban, and tensions were flaring up in the area. Manoj Desai, who produced the film, shared in a recent interview that Amitabh's mother Teji Bachchan and Sridevi's mother Rajeswari called him and told him that there would be consequences for him if their children did not come back safe and sound. In a recent interview with CNN News18, Manoj recalled, "I had to meet Amitabh Bachchan's mother, Teji Bachchan, and she told me very clearly that if Munna (Amitabh) does not come back, then you don't cry. If something happens to Jaya then your wife will also suffer some consequences. Because why are you going to Afghanistan, because Munna wants to go there..." Desai recalled that they had to shoot a sequence where the characters would play Buzkashi, a traditional sport played in Afghanistan. He shared that Danny had previously played this for Feroz Khan's film Dharmatama. And here, Danny would be next to Bachchan while filming the sport. He further recalled that family members of Sridevi and Danny also told him that nothing should happen to them. "Sridevi's mother also called me, and told me that if something happens to her, then you don't come back. I got threats from every corner," he recalled and added, "Danny's wife, she also gave me a warning that nothing should go wrong with Danny." He shared that they shot under military security as Amitabh Bachchan knew the then-president of the country, Mohammad Najibullah. "He gave a lot of support there. We had military support and we would have three tanks ahead of us, and three tanks following us. That's how we shot," he shared. In a previous chat with Bollywood Hungama, Manoj had



shared, "If Amitabh Bachchan had gotten shot with one bullet, it would all have been over. If Sridevi would have been shot, it would be over. Because there was a war going on." In 2010, Amitabh spoke to PTI and recalled how they shot in Afghanistan. He shared, "Najibullah, the former President of Afghanistan was a great fan of Hindi films and he had urged Indian Government to arrange our visit to the country. When we were discussing the script of Khuda Gawah, I said let us go to Afghanistan to shoot. We went to Mazar-e-Sharif to shoot the sequence of traditional Afghan spot of Buzkashi. The President provided us excellent security when the shooting was on. Fighter Jet planes were keeping vigil in the sky and Army tanks were at the side of the sets. It just felt like a battlefield," he said.

## Kirti Kulhari makes relationship with Four More Shots Please co-star Rajeev Siddhartha official: 'Worth a thousand words..'



Soon after the post was shared, their Four More Shots Please! co-star Maanvi Gargroo reacted to the reel and wrote in the comments section, "Happy new year, lovelies." Their fans are also thrilled to see them together. "New couple in town ???? You guys looks adorable, sending love n hugs," wrote a fan while another added, "Anjana and Mihir in parallel universe." "Too happy for u guyyz ??????....but yeh bolna hai yeh toh Siddhi ka Pati tha naa?????," added another. "Ohhhh my goooooooodd you guys are dating ???????????????????. Wow beautiful pair," reacted another fan. Kirti Kulhari was earlier married to actor Saahil Sehgal but in 2021, they decided to separate mutually after five years of marriage. Her separation announcement post on Instagram read, "A simple note to let everyone know that my husband Saahil and I have decided to separate. Not on paper, but in life. A decision that's probably harder than the decision of 'being with somebody', because coming together is celebrated by everyone you love and care about. And the decision of 'not being with somebody' brings along pain and hurt to the same people. It's not easy. Guess it's not meant to be easy but IT IS WHAT IT IS. To all those who really care, I am in a good place and I hope everyone who matters in my life is too. Will not be commenting further on this. Upward and Onward ... Always..."

Kirti Kulhari Four More Shots Please co-star Rajeev Siddhartha Kirti Kulhari took to Instagram to confirm her relationship with fellow actor Rajeev Siddhartha. Actors Kirti Kulhari and Rajeev Siddhartha made their relationship official in the New Year. The Four More Shots Please actor Kirti Kulhari shared a reel, not only wishing her fans on the occasion of New Year but also make her relationship with co-star Rajeev Siddhartha public. The actor confirmed her relationship by shared the video which has many mushy pictures of the duo. Kirti Kulhari sparked dating rumours last year after sharing several pictures with her Four More Shots Please! co-star Rajeev Siddhartha. In the wee hours of Friday, Kirti took to Instagram to make the news official of her fans. From coffee dates to car selfies and also clicks from vacations together, the reel has many cosy moment of Kirti and Rajeev Siddhartha. It also has a heart and arrow made on a window. Sharing the reel, Kirti wrote, "A picture is worth a thousand words... ??#happynewyear happy2026 everyone... ??."

## Makers of Keerthy Suresh-starrer 'Thottam' release new poster

New Delhi: The makers of "Thottam", featuring National Award-winning actor Keerthy Suresh, shared the new poster of the film. The film is written and directed by Risha Sivakumar, it is produced by A V Anoop, Novel Vindhyan, Simmy Rajeevan, Monu Pazhedath. "Thottam" also features Antony Varghese alongside the actor. The poster featured Suresh wearing a brown dress on the backdrop of the street with broken glass bottles lying around.