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## Kejriwal, Sisodia among 23 discharged; CBI moves HC

New Delhi, Feb 27

A court on Friday discharged AAP supremo and former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, ex-Deputy CM Manish



Sisodia, Telangana Jagruthi founder K Kavitha and 20 others in the alleged excise policy case, holding that the prosecution failed to meet even the basic threshold of suspicion required under the criminal law.

In a 598-page order, Special Judge Jitendra Singh of the Rouse Avenue Courts said the case, as presented by the CBI, "was unable to survive judicial scrutiny" and stood "discredited in its entirety", while directing departmental proceedings against the investigating officer (IO) for implicating an accused without any material.

Hours after the order was pronounced, the CBI challenged it in the Delhi High Court. Sources said the appeal was filed against the trial court's verdict immediately since several aspects of the investigation had either been ignored or not considered adequately.

In his first reaction after being discharged in the case, Kejriwal became visibly emotional, calling the court's decision a moment of "truth prevailing".

Meanwhile, placing the issue of investigation at the centre, the court said accountability could not be deferred where individuals were arraigned without evidence. It specifically flagged the implication of then Deputy Commissioner of Excise Kuldeep Singh, noting there was no material against him.

"To permit such conduct to pass without consequence would erode public confidence in the administration of criminal justice and would amount to tacit judicial approval of investigative impropriety, an outcome which the rule of law does not permit," the court observed.

The order dismantled the prosecution case threadbare. It recorded that the material placed on record did not disclose even a prima facie suspicion, far less the "grave suspicion" required for the framing of charges. The court held that the case, as structured by the CBI, "col-

lapses at the threshold".

It said forcing the accused to undergo a full criminal trial in the absence of legally admissible evidence would amount to a miscarriage of justice and an abuse of the criminal process.

The court found that there was no material to show that Kejriwal received or facilitated receipt of any bribe. The allegations were based on statements of co-accused or witnesses but lacked independent corroboration. The court also found no documentary or electronic evidence indicating any pecuniary advantage.

It held that mere approval of policy decisions, without proof of dishonest intention or quid pro quo, could not attract criminal liability.

The court also pulled apart the prosecution's reliance on an approver, noting that the case against certain accused, including Kejriwal, rested almost entirely on statements made by one Raghav Magunta, without any

independent corroboration.

It held that these statements amounted to inadmissible hearsay in the absence of supporting documentary evidence, financial trails, or testimony from independent witnesses.

Allegations of conspiracy were rejected for lack of evidence showing any meeting of minds. The court reiterated that suspicion, however strong, must be founded on tangible material.

"Stated differently, this court records that the theory of an overarching conspiracy, so emphatically projected, stands completely dismantled when tested against the evidentiary record," the court held.

On Sisodia, the court found no material showing demand or acceptance of illegal gratification. It recorded that the CBI failed to establish any direct or indirect financial trail linking him to alleged bribe transactions. The decisions relating to the excise policy were taken collectively, and there was nothing to indicate that Sisodia acted unilaterally or with criminal intent.

The court found that the excise policy was the outcome of a consultative and deliberative process. Stakeholders were engaged, procedures were followed and even inputs from the Lieutenant Governor were sought and considered, though not mandatory.

"In the absence of policy or demonstrably unlawful implementation, the prosecution theory is reduced to conjecture. Private persons who sought to derive commercial advantage from a policy validly framed and lawfully implemented, without any established violation of policy conditions or statutory prohibitions, cannot be compelled to face the rigours of criminal prosecution," the court said.

The court further observed that the investigation appeared to proceed on a "predetermined trajectory", implicating nearly every individual connected with the policy to create an "illusion of depth and credibility to an otherwise fragile narrative". It found that attempts to link the case to the Goa Assembly elections were based more on inference than legally sustainable material.

On personal liberty, the court underscored that pre-trial incarceration could not be treated lightly. "Liberty, once curtailed, cannot be meaningfully restored by a subsequent acquittal, nor can the passage of time compensate for the loss occasioned by unwarranted pre-trial detention," the court said.



## SC rejects WB Govt's objection to EC training judicial officers

New Delhi, Feb 27

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain the West Bengal Government's objections to the Election Commission imparting "training" to judicial officers deployed to verify claims for expediting the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process in the state.

"Please do not make small excuses to stall the process. This has to end... Let the judicial officers work... They will work independently. The judicial officers must be trusted," a Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi told senior counsel Kapil Sibal, appearing for the West Bengal Government.

"Who will train them? To understand the process. Our order is clear as daylight and the EC's instructions cannot override our orders," the Bench emphasised.

The court's remarks came after Sibal mentioned the matter for urgent hearing. "Something strange has happened, directions/modalities to the judicial officers have been issued by the Election Commission behind your back after the order of this court. Judicial officers have been given a training module on what to refer and what not to refer. This court stated the Chief Justice of the High Court will decide modalities," Sibal submitted.

The Bench, however, disagreed. It said there was nothing improper in the poll panel coordinating with judicial officers who were unfamiliar with the SIR work assigned to them. "We gave an alien responsibility to the judicial officers," the CJ noted.

## Menaka is TMC pick for RS, if elected will be first LGBTQ MP



New Delhi, Feb 27

West Bengal's ruling All India Trinamool Congress on Friday named a Supreme Court lawyer among four leaders as its nominee for the March 16 Rajya Sabha elections.

Once elected given the TMC's Assembly strength in the House, Menaka Guruswamy will be India's first openly LGBTQ Member of Parliament. Menaka and her partner Arundhati Katju came out as a couple after the SC partially struck down Section 377 of the British-era IPC. The duo had launched a long struggle against this Section

which criminalised consensual same sex relationships.

Menaka is also one of the litigants in the case on gender equal marriage rights in the country. She has represented the TMC in the RG Kar rape case and most recently in the ED case against I-PAC in the state.

Other nominees of TMC are Babul Supriyo, ex-DGP Rajeev Kumar and actor Koel Mullick.

Supriyo is currently an MLA from Ballygunje and Koel Mullick just delivered a Tollywood hit. The state will see elections for five RS seats with the TMC confident of bagging four.

## KCR stands vindicated as Delhi court acquits all accused persons in excise case

HYDERABAD, FEB 27

The acquittal of all accused persons in the Delhi excise policy case by a Delhi court gave fresh political ammunition to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, which has consistently maintained that the case was politically motivated.

From the outset, BRS president and former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao had termed the Delhi liquor policy case a manufactured scam, alleging it was orchestrated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to weaken

BJP leaders had begun raising allegations against Kavitha as early as August 2022. She was first questioned by the CBI in December 2022, examined multiple times by both the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate ahead of the 2023 Assembly polls, and eventually arrested by the ED in March 2024, just months before the Lok Sabha elections. She spent over five months in prison before securing bail.

Using her case, both the BJP and the Congress consistently targeted Chandrashekhara Rao and other BRS leaders during both the Assembly in 2023 and the Lok Sabha elections in 2024. Despite these allegations by his political opponents, the BRS supremo repeatedly said there was "nothing in the case" and that Kavitha would emerge unscathed.

The court verdict has now proved that the BRS' claims of political vendetta stand validated. BRS leaders pointed out that the outcome exposed a pattern of media trials and selective targeting of opposition leaders by the ruling BJP at the Centre and the Congress in the State. They stated that the case was another classic example of the investigative agencies being used as political tools to target the opposition.

Beyond personal vindication, the verdict could revive Chandrashekhara Rao's broader political thesis that central agencies were increasingly deployed in high-stakes political battles. With regional parties recalibrating their strategies, the outcome will reinforce arguments for greater institutional neutrality and federal balance in national politics.

## BC, SC and ST organisations stage protest at DGP office over Kummera village incident

Hyderabad: Members from the BC, SC and ST JACs staged a protest at the DGP office here on Friday demanding justice for the victims in the Kummera village incident in Nagarkurnool. BC Welfare Association national president and Rajya Sabha MP R Krishnaiah charged that the police were protecting the accused in the Kummera incident.

Stern action should be initiated against the offenders and the Home Department has to take up the responsibility in delivering justice to the victims, he said.

"If justice is not delivered immediately, the BCs will launch a large-scale movement across the State," Krishnaiah said, adding that the DGP should immediately intervene and provide reassurance to the victim's family. Later, parents of the two-month-old baby, who died in an alleged stampede at Kummera Mallanna temple last week, along with BC leaders met DGP B Shivadhar Reddy and said there was a threat to their lives.

## Newly married man killed in suspected honour killing in Andhra

Rajamahendravaram (Andhra Pradesh): In a suspected case of honour killing, a newly married man was killed by his wife's brothers in Dwarapudi village of East Godavari district, a police official said on Friday.

Rajamahendravaram East Zone Deputy Superintendent of Police B Vidhya said Surya Prakash was attacked late on Thursday after he had married Sandhya earlier in the day.

"A newly married man was killed in what appears to be an honour killing after his wife's brothers attacked him with stones in Dwarapudi village on Thursday night," Vidhya told PTI.

The couple, in their early 40s, belong to the BC community. They have both known each other since Class 10.

The woman's brothers attacked Prakash, suspecting that their sister was trapped in marriage as he was unemployed and was helping in his father's business, Vidhya said.

Sandhya works in the local Mandal Revenue Officer



(MRO) office in East Godavari district, she said.

The families of the couple were not aware of the wedding until the pictures were shared, a police official said.

The bride had shared her wedding pictures with her brothers in the afternoon and expected them to visit the groom's residence, Vidhya said.

When the couple reached the groom's house in Dwarapudi village late at night, it was locked as his father, who runs a clothes business in the village, was not at home.

While the couple were waiting outside, the woman's two brothers allegedly attacked Prakash with stones, leading to his death, police added.

Police registered a case under BNS Section 103(1) and initiated further investigation.

The accused are at large and police have deployed special teams to trace and apprehend them, Vidhya said.

EDITORIAL

BJP all the way

IN the end, all that outgoing Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde managed to do was to delay the inevitable. He tried hard to punch above his weight, but the BJP had too many aces up its sleeve. In last month's Assembly elections, the BJP-led Mahayuti had recorded a thumping victory. Shinde's fate was practically sealed when his Shiv Sena faction ended up with only 57 seats, not even half the tally (132) of the saffron party. His supporters were just clutching at straws when they sought replication of the Bihar model — the BJP had won more seats in that state than its ally, the Janata Dal (United), but had given the CM's chair to Nitish Kumar. The writing was on the wall: Shinde had to be put in his place, and the BJP did exactly that with characteristic deftness.

Everything has fallen into place for the saffron party in Maharashtra over the past two-and-a-half years. It capitalised on disunity within the Shiv Sena to win over Shinde and bring down the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government. A year later, Ajit Pawar — always ready to join any alliance, provided he gets the deputy CM's post — broke away from his uncle Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and joined hands with the ruling coalition. The split in the Sena and the NCP worked to the BJP's advantage, which has gone from strength to strength.

In the last week of June 2022, when his government's fate was hanging by a thread, an embittered Uddhav claimed that he had warned Shinde of the BJP's "use and throw" policy. The ex-CM was not off the mark as Shinde today finds himself at the mercy of his formidable ally. His faction has been reduced to a liability for the senior partner, which can survive and thrive without its support. With Devendra Fadnavis at the helm, the BJP has tightened its grip on Maharashtra politics, not only decimating the Opposition but also dwarfing its own allies.

Municipal co-option members should be given opportunity to Seva Dal workers "Former Minister, MLA requested by Congress Seva Dal State Secretary Bogoji Mukesh Khanna

"Jagitial Representative, February 27 (Indian Chronical): "Congress Seva Dal State Secretary Bogoji Mukesh Khanna stated that Seva Dal workers play a crucial role in taking the party's ideology to the people and achieving victories. He mentioned that the Congress party leadership recognizes the efforts of Seva Dal workers and



prioritizes them for nominated positions in governments where the party is in power. "He emphasized the need for similar opportunities for Seva Dal workers in Telangana. In this context, he met Jagitial MLA Dr. Sanjay Kumar and former Minister Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy, requesting them to facilitate opportunities for Seva Dal workers in municipal co-option memberships and other nominated positions in Jagitial town. "Leaders Dyavanapalli Rajender, Bhoga Nagabhushan, Ushokola Gangadhar, Kamatala Jagadishwar, Rahul, Wajid, Afroz, Shakir, Ranav, and others participated in the event.

"Third day of Inter exams peaceful in the district. Additional Collector Latha visits Rayikal college.

"Jagitial Town, February 27 (Indian Chronical): Inter first year exams are being conducted in 30 exam centers in Jagitial district. Out of 6750 students for general courses, 6614 attended, while 136 were absent. For vocational courses, 1057 out of 1142 students attended, with 85 absent. Overall, 97.19% students appeared for exams. District Additional Collector B.S. Latha inspected arrangements and exam process at Pranathi Junior College and Govt. Junior College in Rayikal. Board of Intermediate special observer also inspected six centers in the district. No malpractice cases were reported. Students under stress can call Tele Manas helpline 14416 for counseling, said district exams convener B. Narayana."

"Arrive Alive" Initiative: Vision Screening for Drivers, Strict Warning on Drunken Drive

"Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 27, "Free Eye Camp for Truck Drivers in Kagaznagar; SP Warns Against Drunk Driving" Kagaznagar: As part of the "Arrive Alive" road safety initiative, a free eye screening camp for lorry and truck drivers, along with cleaners, was organized on Friday at the SPM HRD Building in Kagaznagar town. The programme was conducted under the supervision of Kagaznagar Town Police in association with the Kagaznagar Medical Association. "District Superintendent of Police Nitika Panth, who attended the event as the chief guest, formally inaugurated the eye camp. Addressing the gathering, she emphasized that vision defects — one of the major causes of road accidents — must be identified and treated at an early stage. She stated that clear eyesight is extremely crucial, especially for lorry and truck drivers who undertake long-distance journeys. "The SP further advised drivers to strictly adhere to traffic rules while operating vehicles and warned against driving under the influence of alcohol. She underscored that every driver carries the responsibility not only for their own safety but also for the lives of others on the road. "Kagaznagar Town Inspector Prem Kumar, Medical Association President Dr. Kottapalli Srinivas, Dr. Venkateshwar, Sub-Inspectors Sudhakar and Raju, AVMI personnel, and others participated in the programme



Former Minister honors Councilor Lakshmi

"Jagithyal Representative, February 27 (Indian Chronical): "Senior leader Arav Lakshmi Raju from



Jagithyal town was honored by former Minister Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy with a shawl on Friday, on the occasion of his election as Councilor. Jeevan Reddy advised Councilor Arav Lakshmi ACS Raju to work for the welfare of the people and the development of the ward for five years as a Councilor. The program was attended by Elagandula Chandra Sekhar, Mote Ward Member Bhagwan, former MPP Ramesh Babu, Oddada former Sarpanch Anjan and others.

Bandari Lakshma Reddy Distributes Kalyana Lakshmi, Shaadi Mubarak Cheques; Seeks One Tola Gold for Beneficiaries



Indian Chronicle): "Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy participated as the chief guest in the distribution of 151 Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak cheques to beneficiaries belonging to Uppal Mandal. The programme was held at the Uppal Circle Municipal Office. The cheque distribution programme was conducted under the Leadership of Uppal Mandal Tahsildar Pool Singh Chauhan. Speaking on the occasion, MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy stated that the cheque distribution process should be conducted in a transparent manner, as



directed by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. He urged the government to provide one tola of gold along with ₹1,16,000 financial assistance to the beneficiaries under the Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak schemes. "He further instructed officials to ensure that cheques are sanctioned to eligible beneficiaries without delay. Referring to the Congress party's election promise, he emphasized that providing one tola of gold would fulfill the assurance given to the public. Staff from the Uppal Mandal Revenue Office, TRS leaders, party workers, and beneficiaries attended the programme.

Uppal MLA Bhandari Lakshma Reddy Distributes Exam Pads to 10th Class Students at Uppal Zilla Parishad Government School

Under the leadership of BRS Senior Leader and Sahaya Foundation Founder Akula Mahender



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 27 (Indian Chronical): "An exam pad distribution program for 10th class students was held in a grand manner at the Uppal Zilla Parishad High School. The program was organized under the leadership of Uppal Division BRS senior leader and Sahaya Foundation founder Akula Mahender. Uppal MLA Bhandari Lakshma Reddy attended the event as the chief guest and distributed exam pads to the students. "Speaking on the occasion, the MLA



encouraged students to study hard, achieve excellent results, and bring pride to their parents, teachers, and the constituency. He assured that continuous support would be extended for the development of education. He also stated that various student welfare initiatives would be undertaken under the aegis of the BLR Trust. Local BRS leaders, party workers, teachers, students, and others participated in the program and made it a success.

Uppal Constituency In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Responds Swiftly to Navaranguda Mosque Issues

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 27 (Indian Chronical): "A significant step has been taken towards the development and improvement of basic infrastructure at the Navaranguda Mosque located in Venkat Reddy Nagar Division. On the occasion of the upcoming Ramadan festival, senior Congress leader of Venkat Reddy Nagar and Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Aakarapu Arun Patel requested that government funds be sanctioned for the mosque. Responding immediately, Arun brought the matter to the attention of Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy. "Parameshwar Reddy responded positively to the issues faced by the mosque and assured that he would take the initiative to ensure the release of government funds ahead of Ramadan. Upon being informed about the water shortage at the mosque, he immediately spoke to the concerned officials and urged them to resolve the issue at the earliest. As an immediate relief measure, a water tanker was arranged and the problem was addressed. "Muslim community members including Jangir, Masjid Maulana, Mustafa, Pasha, and Asif, along with Congress party workers, participated in the program and expressed their gratitude to Parameshwar Reddy for his prompt response to the issues.

Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament to be Held on March 5 at Uppal Little Flower Degree College – Youth Asked to Register via My Bharat Portal

"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 27 (Indian Chronical): "The Rangareddy District-level Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament programme will be organized on March 5 at the premises of Little Flower Degree College, Uppal. "The programme is being conducted under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, with the support of Mera Yuva Bharat. The main objective of the Youth Parliament is to promote awareness among youth about democratic values, the parliamentary system, and national development. The platform will provide an opportunity for young people to express their views on important national issues. "The event is being organized under the guidance of Principal P. Jayanthi Reddy and coordinated by NSS Programme Officer Dr. Prashanth M. The college management has appealed to the youth of Rangareddy district to make use of this opportunity and participate in large numbers. Interested participants must register through the My Bharat portal. "For additional details and information, they may contact 9553355828. "If you want, I can also format it in a more professional newspaper style with headline variations.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA REVENUE DEPARTMENT Office of the District Collector, Adilabad FORM-VI (PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION) (Under section 11(1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (Central Act 30/2013) and State rule 19(1)) Collector File No. G1/2218/2018 Date: -02-2026 RDO File No. B/730/2018 Date: -02-2026 It is intended to require the land mentioned below Ac. 5.20 gts. (Ac. 5.20 gts (Patta land) (+) (Ac. 0.04 gts Govt. land) in the villages of 1.Sirsanna -2, Singapur, Bela Mandal, Adilabad district for public purpose namely for construction of Inter State Lower Pen Ganga Project (D) Distributory canal DL-18 main canals. Therefore as per (Act 30/2013) under section 6(2) it is hereby issued notice for the lands mentioned in Annexure as it is not necessary of Social impact study report for the Project of Irrigation Department. It is hereby given exemption from the limits of Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 Chapter No. II and III under such Inter State Lower Pen Ganga Project G.O.Ms. No. 58, 1 & CAD (L.A. R/R/A2) such project Government Orders department Date 25.07.2017. Therefore the Preliminary Notification is issued for starting of land acquisition work mentioned below for the acres of Ac.5.16 gts. in the villages of 1.Sirsanna, 2, Singapur, Bela Mandal, Adilabad district. SCHEDULE Village: Sirsanna/Singapur Mandal: Jainath District: Adilabad

Sl.No.	Survey No.	Beet No.	Survey Area	Patta/ Wet/ Dry	Enjoinment Area	Name of Paddar / Father	None of the applicant's claimant/ heirs name (Trees/Bore well/ Pipeline/ others)
1- Sirsanna Village							
1	73/1	3	0.31	0.15	Ganapatwar Aaryan Gita W/o Lakshman	Own	Nil
2	73/1	7	0.16	0.16	K.Pedda Aasa Reddy S/o Kishu	Own	"
3	74/1	74	0.20	0.10	Urade Rupa W/o Udesh	Own	"
4	74/2	4	0.10	0.10	U.Vinod S/o Raghu Ram Reddy	Own	"
5	76/1	76	0.26	0.13	K. Rupesh S/o Vinayak Rao	Own	"
6	76/2	76	0.13	0.13	K. Sathesh S/o Vinayak Rao	Own	"
7	77/3	77	1.05	0.22	Y.Kista Reddy S/o Nago Rao	Own	"
8	77/1	77	0.23	0.23	P. Pandari S/o Raja Ram	Own	"
9	78/2	78	0.03	0.03	Y. Raju S/o Gouranna	Own	"
10	81/1	81	0.32	0.12	G.Saleek Rao S/o Vinayak Rao	Own	"
11	81/1	81	0.36	0.09	Barolla Sumanjali W/o Vijay Kumar	Own	"
12	81/2	81	0.04	0.15	Kishor S/o Babu Rao	Own	"
13	86/5	2	0.02	0.02	Vinand Rao S/o Ball Ram	Govt	"
13/12/42/2	81/1	0.04	0.04	0.04	Govt. Land	Govt	"
Total				4.07	4.07		
2- Singapur Village							
1	28/A	28	1.13	0.24	Kuntia Rajasekhar Reddy S/o Govind Reddy	Own	Nil
2	28/B	28	1.13	0.14	Sanjeev Reddy S/o Venkat Reddy	Own	"
3	28/B/1	28	1.13	0.15	Yeltee Kista Reddy S/o Bhumanna	Own	"
Total				1.13	1.13		
Grand Total				5.16	5.16		

11(1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 to all whom it may concern. The Chapter-II & III social impact for construction of Inter state lower Pen Ganga project canal will not be applicable to these rules for proposal. A Plan of the land available in the office of the Special Deputy Collector (Land Acquisition), Revenue Divisional Office. They may be inspected on days during office hours. Government of Telangana / Collector and appropriate government is pleased to authorize Officers in order of deciding how much land to be acquired Staff and workers to enter into any place, power to survey and take measurements, digging of land or laying of bore, informing nature of land and take other works as provided and specified in section 12 of the said Act. Under section 11(4), no person shall make any transactions/ mortgage on such land from the date of issue of Preliminary notification of such notification without prior approval of District Collector. Under section (15) of the said act, if any connected persons with the land, if any persons affected due to the negotiations for the decision of compensation, having any objections, they may inform their objections in writing to the concerned Land Acquisition Officer in (60) days from the issue of such Preliminary Notification. Sd/- Revenue Divisional Officer, Adilabad Sd/- Additional Collector, Adilabad Sd/- District Collector, Adilabad DIPR RO.No.1234/LA/PP/Adv/Pub/2025-26

# They should revise the voter list and conduct voting again, demands BRS Party senior leader and former councilor Sumit Goud

Indian Chronicle Babar Tandur(Feb 27) BRS Party senior leader and former councilor Sumit Goud has condemned the allegations made by Congress Party leaders regarding bogus votes in Tandur town, Vikarabad district. Sumit Goud questioned the authenticity of the victory of the Congress candidate in Ward 8, Javed, saying if he won with bogus votes, what about the 500 bogus votes in Ward 29? He alleged that the candidate in Ward 29 also won with bogus votes. Sumit Goud expressed surprise, stating, "Is this the only victory?" He clarified that the BRS party doesn't accept the Congress party's victory in the municipality. He accused Congress leaders of engaging in malicious politics in Tandur. Sumit Goud challenged MLA Manohar Reddy to remove bogus votes if he's honest, asking, "If not, did the MLA also win with bogus votes?" He pointed out that in Ward 29, the BLO survey revealed only 18% votes, but election officials instructed BLOs to adjust it to 40%, questioning the fairness of this action. He alleged that the ruling party is winning by inflating voter numbers and demanded immediate removal of bogus votes, revision of the old voter list, and publication of a new voter list. The media conference was attended by TRS Party senior leaders, former councilor Sumit Goud, BRS Party senior leaders Srinivas Goud, Ravikant Yadav, Vijay Kumar, and Venkateshulu.



# Free Eye Check-up Camp for Lorry and Truck Drivers in Kagaznagar under 'Arrive Alive' Program

### Road Accident Prevention is the Main Objective



Indian Chronicle(Jade, Srinivas)February, 27. As part of the prestigious 'Arrive Alive' road safety initiative undertaken by the Police Department to prevent road accidents, a free eye check-up camp was organized on Friday at the SPM HRD Building in Kagaznagar town. The camp was conducted under the supervision of Kagaznagar Town Police in association with the Kagaznagar Medical Association for lorry and truck drivers as well as cleaners. The District Superintendent of Police, Nitika Panth, attended the program as the chief guest and formally inaugurated the eye screening camp. Addressing the gathering, the SP emphasized that poor vision is one of the major causes of road accidents and that early detection and treatment of eyesight problems are crucial. She stated that clear vision is especially important for lorry and truck drivers who undertake long-distance journeys. She advised drivers to strictly follow traffic rules, avoid driving under the influence of alcohol, and refrain from overspeeding. Rash driving, negligent driving, and overloading of heavy vehicles would invite legal action, she warned. The SP further stressed that every driver has a responsibility not only for their own safety but also for the lives of others on the road. During the camp, participating drivers and cleaners underwent eye examinations, and those requiring medical attention were given appropriate advice and guidance by doctors. The program was attended by Kagaznagar Town Inspector Prem Kumar, Medical Association President Dr. Kothapalli Srinivas, Dr. Venkateshwar, Sub-Inspectors Sudhakar and Raju, AVMI Inspectors, and other officials.

# Hubli Express Train Stop at Nawandgi (Bashirabad) A Dream Come True for Locals Chevella MP Konda Vishweshwar Reddy



Indian Chronicle Babar Tandur(Feb,27) The stoppage of the Hubli Express train at Nawandgi (Bashirabad) railway station in Vikarabad district is a moment of great joy. Chevella MP Kond Vishweshwar Reddy and Tandur MLA Buyyani Manohar Reddy hailed the development, saying it fulfills a 13-year-old demand of the people. The people of Bashirabad had been fighting for this stoppage and submitting numerous petitions. We are delighted that their wish has been granted from February 27," said MP

Kond Vishweshwar Reddy and MLA Manohar Reddy. The MP expressed gratitude to the people of Bashirabad for trusting him and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, V. Somanna, and SCR officials GM Srivatsav, DGM Uday Nath, Kiran, and CPRO B. Sridhar Kumar for making it possible. MLA Manohar Reddy traveled from Nawandgi to Hyderabad on the Hubli Express train, accompanied by local leaders U.Ramesh Kumar, Ajay Prasad, Baleshwar Gupta, passengers, marking the occasion.

# Wankidi School Campus Turns Risky with Deep Construction Pits

Rs2.30 Crore Boys' Hostel Works Raise Safety Concerns Indian Chronicle(Jade, Srinivas)February, 27. Serious safety concerns have emerged at the PM Shri ZP High School in Wankidi mandal headquarters, where construction of a boys' hostel building worth 2.30 crore is currently underway. The foundation stone for the project was recently laid by In-charge Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, following which deep foundation pits were excavated on the school premises. However, no safety measures have been put in place around the construction site, drawing sharp criticism from parents and local residents. There are no protective barricades, warning boards, or safety tapes around the deep pits, posing a serious threat to students. Safety of 700 Students at Risk Nearly 700 students from Classes 6th to 10th are studying in the school. Since the construction site is located within the school campus, students may unknowingly approach the area during recess or while moving between classes. Even a moment of carelessness could lead to serious accidents, parents fear. Locals warn that students could accidentally fall into the deep pits or suffer injuries. The situation may become even more dangerous during the rainy season, as the pits could fill with water. Allegations of Negligence Despite the significant project cost, the absence of basic safety precautions has raised questions about administrative negligence. Parents have urged school authorities, engineering officials, and the contractor to immediately install protective fencing around the site and restrict student access to the area. Immediate Measures Demanded Installation of iron barricades around the pits Placement of clear warning signboards Complete restriction of student access to the construction zone Special monitoring during school hours Parents and local residents emphasized that student safety must be the top priority and that preventive

measures should be taken before any unfortunate incident occurs.

# Despite Losing Her Father at a Young Age, Najia Nishat Achieves Success in IBPS Through Determination and Her Mother's Support

Kishore Vaddepalley, Hyderabad, February 27 (Indian Chronicle): Najia Nishat, a native of Bibipet village in Sangareddy district, has secured a job through the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS) examination. She has been selected as a Clerk in Central Bank of India and State Bank of India. Coming from an economically underprivileged family and having lost her father at a young age, Najia overcame numerous hardships with the encouragement and support of her mother. Without taking any formal coaching, she prepared on her own and successfully cleared the competitive banking examinations. She completed her Intermediate education at Vagdevi Junior College, Narayanakhet, pursued her graduation at Acharya Jayashankar Degree College, and later completed her post-graduation from Osmania University. Recently, she was selected as a Probationary Officer (PO) in Central Bank of India, and now as a Clerk in State Bank of India. Her achievement has become a source of inspiration to many aspiring candidates. Friends and well-wishers have congratulated her on this remarkable accomplishment.



# Uppal All-Party Leaders Urge Zonal Commissioner to Ensure Transparency in Electoral Process

KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 27 (Indian Chronicle): Leaders of the Uppal All-Party Forum met the Uppal Zonal Commissioner, Radhika Gupta, on Friday and submitted a representation requesting that the ongoing electoral process be conducted in a transparent and fair manner, in accordance with the guidelines of the Election Commission of India. The leaders urged the Commissioner to ensure that Booth Level Officers (BLOs) carry out house-to-house verification properly and without irregularities. They also emphasized that voter mapping and deletion of votes should be undertaken transparently and strictly as per rules. Responding to their concerns, Zonal Commissioner Radhika Gupta assured them that the process would be closely monitored at every stage to ensure it is conducted properly. She advised the leaders to immediately bring to her notice any instances of irregularities. She further stated that officials are continuously supervising the work of BLOs to maintain transparency and accuracy. Leaders from the BJP, BRS, TDP, and CPM participated in the meeting.



# Bajrang Dal Reviews Arrangements for Training Camp at Sai Dham

### - National President Kishan Prajapati Visits 54-Foot Hanuman Statue in Kushayiguda - Calls for Hindu Unity



During the visit, he inspected the 54-foot Hanuman statue currently under construction near the Kushayiguda bus stop. He later offered special prayers at the Shivanjaneya Swamy Temple in Kushayiguda. Addressing party workers, Prajapati said that today's youth must follow the path of dharma and uphold cultural values. He condemned attacks on Hindu temples across the country and urged vigilance over incidents allegedly targeting Hindu women under the pretext of "love jihad." He also stated that attempts are being made to divide Hindus along caste lines and weaken unity, and called for collective solidarity within the community. The programme was attended by South India Bajrang Dal Convenor Kumaraswamy, Telangana Vishwa Hindu Parishad Vice President Ramesh Babu, Telangana State Bajrang Dal Convenor Srikanth, Bhayanagar Convenor Vishal, Kushayiguda Prakhand Pramukh Saket Arun, Yashwanth Sagar, Ragiri Varun Saket, BJP leaders Surrender Goud, Anand Goud, Regonda Venkulu, Laxman Goud, Ganesh Goud, Venkatchalam, GVN Rao, Sampath Rao, Sahadev Goud, Pittala Raju, Dayanand, Appi, Srikanth, Sridhar, Somesh Naidu, Kalavati and others.

NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 27, (Indian Chronicle): Preparations for the All India Bajrang Dal training camp scheduled to be held from March 7 to 14 at Sai Dham in Medchal-Malkajgiri district were reviewed on Friday. As part of his tour of the Telugu states, Bajrang Dal National President Kishan Prajapati visited Kushayiguda and conducted a review meeting with local leaders regarding the arrangements for the camp.

# She Gave Life to Four Even After Death A Moving Story of Organ Donation from Janakapur

Indian Chronicle(Jade Srinivas)February, 27. In a deeply moving incident from Janakapur village in Asifabad district, 34-year-old Eesta Srujana gave a new lease of life to four people through organ donation after being declared brain dead. Srujana suddenly fell ill at her residence and was immediately rushed to the hospital by her family members. Despite receiving intensive treatment in the ICU, doctors declared her brain dead after all efforts to save her life failed. The news left her family devastated and the entire village in shock. In the midst of unbearable grief, her husband, Nagaraju, made a courageous and noble decision. With his consent, doctors proceeded with organ donation. Srujana's kidneys, liver, and lungs were retrieved and successfully transplanted into patients who were in urgent need of life-saving organs. The successful transplants brought hope and renewed life to four individuals and their families who had been waiting for a second chance at life. What was a heartbreaking loss for one family became a blessing for four others. Though Janakapur village is mourning the untimely demise of Srujana, people are also expressing immense pride in her selfless act. Villagers, well-wishers, and community members have praised the family for their humanitarian decision during such a painful time. Doctors stated that organ donation can save multiple lives and emphasized



the need for greater awareness in society. Srujana's story stands as a powerful reminder that even in death, one can give the gift of life. Her sacrifice and her family's generosity will continue to inspire many to consider organ donation. May her soul rest in peace, and may her family find strength in knowing that she lives on through the lives she saved.

# Women urged to leverage Friday Sabha for health and welfare support.

Khaja Sikander Mohiuddin Staff Reporter, Indian Chronicle Karimnagar, Feb 27 : The Department of Women Development and Child Welfare organised a Friday Sabha at the Anganwadi Centre in Karkhana Gadda in Karimnagar on Friday. Addressing the gathering, 30th Division Corporator Kallapalli Sharada Balaraju urged women to utilise the Friday Sabha platform to air their grievances and seek timely solutions. She called upon pregnant women and lactating mothers to attend the meetings regularly and benefit from the welfare and health initiatives being implemented by the government. District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Venkataramana said that under the 'Arogya Mahila' programme, nearly 50 types of medical tests were being conducted free of cost for women across the district. He appealed to women to make full use of services available at government hospitals and primary health centres. Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) Sabita said the presence of health and Anganwadi staff at the Friday Sabha would help address issues raised by women without delay. She added that apart from imparting pre-primary education, Anganwadi centres were conducting creative activities to nurture children's talents on a par with private institutions. Officials also explained the concept of the 'Sugar Board' set up at Anganwadi centres to create awareness about the health risks associated with excessive sugar consumption and to promote healthy dietary habits among children and mothers. As



part of the programme, 'Srimantham' and 'Annaprasana' ceremonies were performed for beneficiaries. School headmasters Satyanarayana Chari and Chintala Venkataiah, ICDS Supervisor Rajeswari, CDPO Parveen, Medical Officer Lavanya, Anganwadi teachers, ASHA workers, ANMs, pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent girls were present.

## Directors' guild to move CCI over film technicians' 'monopoly bid'



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Directors Association of Eastern India, Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India, Competition Commission of India, cci, Kolkata news, WEst Bengal news, Indian express, current affairs Preparations on the eve of inauguration of 30th Kolkata International film festival, in Kolkata

The Directors Association of Eastern India (DAEI) is all set to file a case with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against the Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India (FCTWEI) accusing it of trying to monopolise the industry and overstepping its mandate as a trade union, those familiar with the matter said. The association alleged that the technicians' union has been flouting the CCI's past orders. Addressing a press conference in Kolkata, actor Parambrata Chatterjee said, "The FCTWEI

has been acting as a law-making and law-enforcing body, exceeding its mandate as a union which should be focused on the workers' welfare. This is a clear violation of the CCI's 2018-2019 order." The DAEI claims to have gathered substantial evidence on the FCTWEI's alleged disregard for the established rules and its attempts to monopolise the market. A trade union's primary responsibility is to protect the interests of its members, not to impose new regulations, it added. The announcement came a day before the inauguration of the 30th edition of the Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF). Chatterjee, however, clarified, "For the last 25 years, I have been taking part in the KIFF. It is everyone's film festival. There is no connection with our announcement of a legal fight against the federation and the festival." Accusing the federation of obstructing work, actor-director Parambrata Chatterjee said, "The federation is preventing those from the outside to work. A trade union has no legal right to make any rules of an industry. They don't allow people to work with small banners and unnecessarily force them to hire a large number of people. The number of technicians for each format is specified by the federation." Claiming that a director or producer cannot work with the people of their choice, he said, "This is illegal. It is natural for a director and producer to shoot with the people of their choice." In June, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had formed a committee to resolve the standoff between the two bodies after a section of directors and technicians went on a strike.

## Maha Kumbh: 2025 Centre nod to Rs 2,100-crore grant

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Maha Kumbh, Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, Prayagraj, Yogi Adityanath, UP government, Uttar Pradesh government, Indian express news, current affairs Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during an event on 'International Day of Persons with Disabilities', in Lucknow THE CENTRE has approved a special grant of Rs 2,100 crore for the Maha Kumbh 2025 set to commence next month in Prayagraj district. Officials said on Tuesday that Rs 1,050 crore has been released as the first installment. The allocation comes in response to a special request made by the Uttar Pradesh government for a one-time financial assistance to ensure the "safe and successful organisation of the grand event." The Yogi Adityanath-led BJP government has allocated Rs 5,435.68 crore for organising Maha Kumbh 2025. This budget is being utilised across 421 projects. So far, Rs 3461.99 crore has been approved for financial implementation, officials said.

In addition, Rs 1636 crore is being allocated to 125 projects through departmental budgets from key departments such as the public works department, housing and urban planning, bridge corporation, tourism, irrigation and the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation. The projects include infrastructure development, such as the construction and strengthening of roads, railway overbridges, underpasses, erosion control along riverbanks, interlocking roadways, riverfront development, and beautification of all major intersections under a theme-based plan. Prayagraj is also be-



ing developed as a top-tier smart city through the coordination of Smart City projects and the Prayagraj Development Authority. IT-based monitoring systems and clean drinking water facilities are being implemented for the benefit of pilgrims. Efforts under the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation are ensuring advanced sanitation and cleanliness. Solid waste management systems and 100 per cent sewage treatment coverage are also being established. Projects such as the creation of a Digital Kumbh Museum and the development of a tourism circuit connecting Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Vindhyachal, and Chitrakoot. Comprehensive arrangements are being made to ensure smooth travel, safety and a spiritual experience for pilgrims and tourists.

## Maha Kumbh declared a temporary new district with 66 villages, 4 tehsils



GNS News Agency, Feb 27 FOR BETTER management of Maha Kumbh Mela that is scheduled to begin next month, the Uttar Pradesh government has notified the Kumbh Mela area as the 76th district of the state for a duration of four months. Officials said on Tuesday that

over 5,000 hectares would come under this district. Around 66 revenue villages, part of four tehsils, would be part of this temporary district, they added. The Maha Kumbh, which will take place after a gap of 12 years, will start from January 13. Officials said a notification giving the area the status of a separate district was issued on December 1. As the preparations for the Maha Kumbh, which is expecting the biggest footfall of lakhs of pilgrims this year, are in full swing, sources said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also expected to be in Prayagraj. "Both magistrates and police would get powers for crime prevention and administration. There would be Mela District Magistrate as well as a Senior Superintendent of Police," informed Vijay Kiran Anand, Kumbh Mela Adhikari, who would act as District Magistrate of the Maha Kumbh Mela area. "This [giving status of a temporary district] was done last year as well. The area is far bigger this time," said Anand.

## In its last phase, Congress's Dilli Nyay Yatra awaits senior leaders

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Congress, congress Dilli Nyay Yatra, Dilli Nyay Yatra, Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, delhi news, India news, Indian express, current affairs Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu at the launch of the yatra. Archive Nearly a month after the launch of the Dilli Nyay Yatra, the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee's (DPCC) ambitious campaign to regain a foothold in Delhi, after failing to secure a single seat in the last two elections, is facing an uphill battle. Despite the initial momentum provided by Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's participation during its launch, there has been an absence of senior party leadership since then.

While DPCC leaders said they had invited several prominent figures from the high command, including Chief Ministers and influential leaders from regional and religious groups like Purvanchali, Jatt, Muslim, and Dalit faces, they are yet to join the outreach programme, being held across Delhi's 70 assembly constituencies. The yatra is now in its fourth and final phase, and sources said Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi will attend in the next few days. "We had invited leaders ranging from CMs and deputy CMs of Congress-ruled states to Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha MPs to and even national spokespersons based in Delhi and the NCR to march alongside Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav but their participation was rare," a Congress source said.

"The Delhi Congress has managed the yatra, an extension of Rahul Gandhi ji's Bharat Nyay Yatra alone. Rahul ji is going to join it later this week in Northwest Delhi followed by a thanksgiving event at the Talkatora Stadium on December 9. Priyanka ji is also expected to come. Other senior leaders are yet to confirm," the source added. A source from the All India Congress Committee (AICC) said there were differences of opinion between the senior leadership and the Delhi leadership when it came to an alliance



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between the Congress and AAP, with the Delhi leadership of the party against the move. While meetings were held between the two parties recently, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal said Sunday that the party will contest the election alone. Yadav also echoed the sentiment. During this year's Lok Sabha elections, the Delhi Congress and AAP entered a seat-sharing pact, but tensions emerged following a significant defeat. While leaders initially suggested the possibility of an alliance for the assembly elections, Congress Chief Yadav later called the pact the "biggest mistake". A DPCC leader said, "The yatra has energised many people to start campaigning... an alliance will massively cut down on the number of seats, and we are not ready to deal with that unpleasantness from our people." "Several leaders who have been invited are either busy with activities in their respective states or with the ongoing Parliament session, that is why they have not been able to come," a senior leader added.

## Karnataka HC quashes extortion case against Sitharaman, others



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Electoral bonds, Karnataka High Court, Bengaluru police, Nirmala Sitharaman, Indian express news, current affairs The HC ruled that the complainant lacked the locus standi to file an extortion case as he was not a direct victim of the extortion attempt, under IPC Sections 383 and 384. The Karnataka high court (HC) Tuesday quashed a case of extortion registered by the Bengaluru police against Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the former and

current presidents of the state BJP unit, and unnamed ED officials, over the electoral bonds scheme of the BJP government. The HC had stayed proceedings in the case earlier on September 30 after the Bengaluru police registered an FIR related to extortion against the minister and others on September 28 under IPC Sections 384 and 120 B. That came after a private complaint filed by a local anti-corruption activist, Adarsh Iyer.

The complainant alleged that Sitharaman and others extorted funds to the tune of `8,000 crore from corporates through the electoral bonds scheme by holding out the threat of action by the Enforcement Directorate. Iyer from NGO Janadhikara Sangharsha Parishath had approached the court seeking a probe into the electoral bonds scheme on April 15 after police refused to register an FIR. A special court for elected representatives directed the filing of an FIR based on the private complaint on September 27. The HC ruled that the complainant lacked the locus standi to file an extortion case as he was not a direct victim of the extortion attempt, under IPC Sections 383 and 384. "... what the complainant projects is a huge hocus-pocus, but alas, he has no locus," the court said

## 40,000 pre-primary schools in Gujarat remain shut to protest new guidelines

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

While the owners and management of pre-primary schools submitted their representation to Education Minister Kuber Dindor and Minister of State for Education Praful Pansheriya on Tuesday, they have also announced to reach Gandhinagar to protest later this month if their demands are not met. "We were to protest in Gandhinagar today but since we did not get permission... we carried out our protest city and zone-wise by remaining closed, and through rallies. Since the deadline to adhere to the new policy and get registered ends in February 2025, we have asked for clarity and time for the paper work," Rajesh Parikh, Ahmedabad zone coordinator of Gujarat Independent Pre-school Association (Proposed), Among the three major demands raised by pre-primary school owners is clarity on Building-Use (BU) permission. "BU permission lacks clarity. While the education department says we can submit any BU — commercial, residential or education — the municipal corporation is mandating only education BU," Parikh added. Notably, most of the private independent pre-primary schools in the state are running without registration. "Among our other demands is relaxation in the clause for a 15-year lease agreement with stamp duty for the property. Since 80 per cent pre-primary schools in Gujarat are running out of rented properties, which owner will be able to get a stamped paper on a 15-year lease agreement? Also, the formation of a trust will require account audit every year, resulting in additional charges," Parikh added. Sagar Nayak, spokesperson of the pre-primary school association, told The Indian Express that the association has been submitting representations to the state government since April, demanding some relaxation in the norms. To regulate pre-primary schools in the state, the Policy for Regulation of Non-Grant-in-Aid Private Pre-primary Education Institutes for the State



of Gujarat was notified on May 15, 2023, after recommendations made by the state-level task force committee headed by the Education Minister and stakeholders where the Director, Primary Education, has been designated as the Gujarat State Pre-primary Regulatory Authority. The policy came into effect for the implementation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, resulting in restructuring of school education. As per the policy, it was mandated for existing institutes to get registered within 12 months. This time-frame has been extended till February 2025.

The policy applies to institutions, trusts, organisations, company or any such non-governmental entity, imparting early childhood or pre-primary education to children of age group 3-6 years in Gujarat. Required documents to be uploaded for online application for registration include a copy of certificate of registration of the society, company, or trust, and a copy of resolution passed for opening the institute by the same society, company or trust. The institutes are required to submit a copy of BU permission given by the revenue authority concerned or building regularisation order along with a fire safety certificate.

## CREDAI flags concerns over proposed hike in jantri rates in Gujarat

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

CREDAI, Confederation of Real Estate Developers Associations of India, credai Ahmedabad, Ahmedabad news, Gujarat news, India news, Indian express, current affairs "Under the proposed jantri rates, these would increase to Rs 6,000 to Rs 30,000 per sq mt (Rs 560 to Rs 3,000 per sq ft). The average increase in purchased FSI rates would be at least Rs 800 per sq ft," the CREDAI said. The Confederation of Real Estate Developers Associations of India (CREDAI), Ahmedabad, has raised concerns over the hike in the jantri rates proposed by the Gujarat government, warning that it could "result in a 30%-40% hike" in property prices. The body has also sought an extension of the deadline for submitting objections from the current December 30, 2024, to March 31, 2025. The Gujarat government announced the proposed hike in the jantri (government-fixed rates for land or property) on November 20, inviting objections. The jantri was last revised in April 2023.

Members of CREDAI on Tuesday held a meeting to discuss the new rates and, in a statement issued later in the day, said that the new rates could also lead to a "substantial increase in stamp duty and land premium amounts". According to the developers' body, the proposed hike is from "200% to 2000%", which, they said, should be done in "a phased manner following a scientific methodology". Even as the body has sought an appointment with Chief Minister



Bhupendra Patel to put forth its suggestions, it said in the statement that the government should "de-link" Non-Agricultural land premium, paid FSI (Floor Space Index), and property tax from the jantri rates. It also demanded a "significant" reduction in the stamp duty and registration charges. Some of the concerns raised included that of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and FSI. "The current jantri rates place paid FSI rates between Rs 1,200 and Rs 10,000 per sq mt (Rs 120 to Rs 1,000 per sq ft)," the statement read. "Under the proposed jantri rates, these would increase to Rs 6,000 to Rs 30,000 per sq mt (Rs 560 to Rs 3,000 per sq ft). The average increase in purchased FSI rates would be at least Rs 800 per sq ft," the CREDAI said.

## 'Serial killer also behind murder of partially blind man in Dabhoi'

Rahul Jat, the man caught by Valsad police for allegedly killing five people, including four differently abled persons inside trains between October and November, has now confessed to have killed and robbed another person in June in Dabhoi town in Vadodara district, police said. The body of Fayaz Ahmed Shaikh (30), a resident of Akkalkuwa in Nandurbar district of Maharashtra, was found on June 9 in a desolate spot near a railway station in Dabhoi. Like a majority of Jat's other targets, Shaikh was also differently abled with partial blindness and had met the accused inside a train, said police. Officials said Jat killed Shaikh on June 8 over an argument and robbed him of cash amounting to Rs 5,500 and a mobile phone. On Monday, Valsad police said that, during questioning, Jat told them he met Shaikh at the Vadodara Railway Station. They both wanted to go to Mumbai but accidentally ended up in a train going to Dabhoi from Vadodara, said Valsad Deputy Superintendent of Police A K Verma. After a few stations, they realised their mistake and got down at a station ahead of Dabhoi. Verma further said, "Jat and Shaikh got out of the station and walked up to a petrol pump. After this, they reached a desolate place where a quarrel ensued between them over some issue. The accused then strangled Shaikh to death and took away his money and mobile phone before escaping from the spot." Dabhoi police recovered Shaikh's body the next day and lodged an accidental death report. On the basis of Jat's alleged confession, a police team from Valsad reached Vadodara Railway Station and

collected CCTV footage dating back to June 8. They also contacted Dabhoi police and gathered information about the recovery of Shaikh's body. Talking to The Indian Express, Valsad District Superintendent of Police Dr Karanraj Vaghela said, "After Jat's confession, Dabhoi police has added murder and robbery sections in the accidental death complaint in Shaikh's case. The complaint was filed by the father of the deceased, Mehboob Shaikh." Notably, Jat had walked out of Jodhpur jail in May 2024, only a month before the Dabhoi incident. He was put behind bars for his alleged involvement in a series of truck thefts. "The accused has confessed to have committed six murders, including those of three women and as many men," Vaghela added. Jat's alleged involvement in the murder on trains came to light following his arrest in the rape-murder of a 19-year-old woman in a mango orchard in Valsad district last month. On November 14, the teenager was on her way home from tuition classes when Jat spotted her and began following her. As the woman reached a desolate spot, he pulled her into a neighbouring mango orchard, raped and killed her. Jat left behind his backpack containing his clothes and other belongings, which helped the police eventually identify and nab him on November 24. Following his arrest, he allegedly confessed to have committed four murders inside trains between October 20 and November 24 — the day of his arrest. The bodies of his victims, including two men and two women, were recovered inside coaches reserved for the differently abled in trains in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, and Karnataka.

## What to know about martial law declared and then overturned by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Troops surround South Korea's parliament overnight after the president declares martial law. He accuses pro-North Korean forces of plotting to overthrow one of the world's most vibrant democracies. Lawmakers voice outrage and hastily vote to end the declaration in an early-morning session. Confusion, rumour and fear were spreading through South Korea before dawn Wednesday (December 4, 2024) after the sudden edict by President Yoon Suk Yeol, the first martial law since more than four decades ago when the country was controlled by a dictatorship. The declaration and a rushed vote by lawmakers to overturn it were moments of high drama for an unpopular leader who has struggled with political deadlock in an opposition-dominated parliament and scandals involving him and his wife.

Why was martial law declared?

While there was no direct evidence presented, Mr. Yoon raised the spectre of North Korea as a destabilising force. Mr. Yoon has long maintained that a hard line against the North is the only way to stop Pyongyang from following through on its nuclear threats against Seoul. Amid the surreal scenes of troops massing around parliament, here are some things to know as this story unfolds:

The 'anti-state' plot immediately after Mr. Yoon's declaration the military chief called in key commanders for talks. South Korean troops set up barricades and then made their way into parliament. The leader of the main opposition, which controls parliament, ordered lawmakers to return to the building, where they eventually voted to lift the declaration of martial law. But there were far more questions than answers as the uncertainty stretched into the early morning hours. Mr. Yoon's declaration of an emergency martial law was accompanied by an accusation that the opposition was engaged in "anti-state activities plotting rebellion." But he did not explain what that means and provided no specific evidence. The vague statement is reminiscent of the heavy-handed tactics of the South Korean dictatorships that ended in the late 1980s. A series of strongmen repeatedly invoked North Korea when struggling to control domestic dissidents and political opponents. Lawmakers from both sides voice opposition. The opposition lambasted Mr. Yoon's move as un-democratic. Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung, who narrowly lost to Mr. Yoon in the 2022 presidential election, called Mr. Yoon's announcement "illegal and unconstitutional." A man speaks to police officers outside the National Assembly, after South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law, in Seoul, South Korea on December 4, 2024. A man speaks to police officers outside

the National Assembly, after South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law, in Seoul, South Korea on December 4, 2024. | Photo Credit: Reuters But the sudden declaration was also opposed by the leader of Mr. Yoon's own conservative party, Han Dong-hoon, who called the decision "wrong" and vowed to "stop it with the people." "The people will block the president's anti-constitutional step. The military must be on the side of the public in any case. Let's resolutely oppose it," Kim Dong Yeon, the opposition party governor of Gyeonggi province, which surrounds Seoul, wrote on X. Average South Koreans were in shock. Social media was flooded with messages expressing surprise and worry over Mr. Yoon's announcement. "Martial law? I thought it was deepfake content but is it really a martial law decree?" one X user wrote. "I first thought about a war with North Korea when he said he would impose a martial law," another X user wrote. Yoon is struggling politically

There were quick claims that the emergency declaration was linked to Mr. Yoon's political struggles. His approval rating has dropped, and he has had little success in getting his policies adopted by a parliament that has been controlled by the opposition since he took over in 2022. Conservatives have said the opposition moves are political revenge for investigations into the opposition leader, who is seen as the favourite for the next presidential election in 2027. Just this month, Mr. Yoon denied wrongdoing in an influence-peddling scandal involving him and his wife. The claims have battered his approval ratings and fuelled attacks by his rivals. The scandal centres on claims that Mr. Yoon and first lady Kim Keon Hee exerted inappropriate influence on the conservative ruling People Power Party to pick a certain candidate to run for a parliamentary by-election in 2022 at the request of Myung Tae-kyun, an election broker and founder of a polling agency who conducted free opinion surveys for Mr. Yoon before he became president.

Yoon has said he did nothing inappropriate. Martial law is extremely sensitive in South Korea. South Korea became a democracy only in the late 1980s, and military intervention in civilian affairs is still a touchy subject. During the dictatorships that emerged as the country rebuilt from the destruction of the 1950-53 Korean War, leaders occasionally proclaimed martial law that allowed them to station combat soldiers, tanks and armoured vehicles on streets or in public places to prevent anti-government demonstrations. Such scenes are unimaginable for many today. The dictator Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea for nearly 20 years before he was assassinated by his spy chief in 1979, led several thousand troops into Seoul in the early hours of May 16, 1961, in the country's first successful coup. During his rule, he occasionally proclaimed martial law to crack down on protests and jail critics. Less than two months after Park Chung-hee's death, Maj Gen Chun Doo-hwan led tanks and troops into Seoul in December 1979 in the country's second successful coup. The next year, he orchestrated a brutal military crackdown on a pro-democracy uprising in the southern city of Gwangju, killing at least 200 people. In the summer of 1987, massive street protests forced Chun's government to accept direct presidential elections. His army buddy Roh Tae-woo, who had joined Chun's 1979 coup, won the election held later in 1987 thanks largely to divided votes among liberal opposition candidates.

## Keir Starmer rejects notion that U.K. has to choose between Europe and America

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Mr. Starmer is one of several European leaders navigating Mr. Trump's imminent return to power. Mr. Trump is expected to meet several Heads of State on Saturday when he visits Paris for the re-opening of the Notre Dame Cathedral. As U.S. President, Mr. Trump had a testy relationship with the European Union (EU), over trade, defence expenditure and positions on Russia and Ukraine

"That somehow we are with either America or Europe is plain wrong. I reject it utterly," Mr. Starmer said during a foreign policy speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet in London on Monday evening. "The national interest demands that we work with both," he added. Mr. Starmer said the U.K. would "never turn away" from its relationship with the U.S., calling the bilateral relationship the "cornerstone" of the U.K.'s security and prosperity for over a century. The Prime Minister said the two countries being close was not based on sentimentality but "hard-headed realism", as he highlighted areas of cooperation that were important in current times: tech, AI, security and military cooperation. At a dinner at the Trump Tower in Manhattan on September 26, Mr. Starmer had told Mr. Trump, then a presidential candidate, that his government "would invest more deeply than ever" in the U.K.-U.S. relationship. This was the first meeting between the two men.

"And we will rebuild our ties with Europe too," Mr. Starmer said during his speech on Monday night, as he blamed the Conservatives for the state of ties with



Europe. Mr. Trump announced the appointment of billionaire Warren Stephens for the post of U.S. Ambassador to the U.K. Mr. Stephens, the CEO of financial services company Stephens Inc., was initially a donor to Mr. Trump's Republican rivals in the latest election cycle before donating to the Trump campaign. Mr. Stephens had also donated in support of Mr. Trump's campaign in 2019 and 2020. The Consumer Finance Protection Bureau had taken action against Integrity Advance, a payday loan company in which Mr. Stephens had a 40% stake, according to reporting from the Guardian in 2017. "Warren has always dreamed of serving the United States full time. I am thrilled that he will now have that opportunity as the top Diplomat, representing the U.S.A. to one of America's most cherished and beloved Allies," Mr. Trump said on Truth Social, his social media platform.

## Hammas, Fatah agree to create joint committee to run post-war Gaza

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party have agreed to create a committee to jointly run post-war Gaza, negotiators from both sides said Tuesday (December 3, 2024). Under the plan, which needs Abbas's approval, the committee would be composed of 10 to 15 non-partisan figures with authority on matters related to the economy, education, health, humanitarian aid and reconstruction, according to a draft of the proposal seen by AFP. Hamas Fatah meeting in Egypt Following talks in Cairo brokered by Egypt, the two rival factions agreed the committee would administer the Palestinian side of the Rafah checkpoint on the border with Egypt -- the territory's only crossing not shared with Israel. Fatah's delegation, led by central party committee member Azzam al-Ahmad, would return on Tuesday to Ramallah to seek Abbas's final approval, negotiators from both sides told AFP. The Hamas delegation was headed by politburo member Khalil al-Hayya. The initiative comes at a time of renewed diplomatic efforts to end the Gaza war, which was sparked by Hamas's unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. These efforts, led by the United States together with Egypt, Qatar and Turkey, come nearly a week after a fragile ceasefire between Israel and



Hezbollah came into force in Lebanon. Rivalry between Hamas and Fatah. Hamas and Fatah have been bitter rivals since Hamas fighters ejected Fatah from the Gaza Strip after deadly clashes that followed Hamas's resounding victory in a 2006 election. Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007, while the secularist Fatah movement controls the Palestinian Authority and has partial administrative control in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. As US President Joe Biden's administration prepares to hand over power in January to president-elect Donald Trump, Palestinians face intense US pressure to ensure Hamas will have no role in Gaza once the war ends. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, one of the most right-wing in Israel's history, made Hamas's destruction in Gaza one of its main war objectives. It also has repeatedly expressed strong opposition to the Palestinian Authority playing any role in the Gaza Strip after the war. Hamas's October 7 attack resulted in 1,208 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has resulted in at least 44,466 deaths, also mostly civilians.

## Joe Biden's pardon of son Hunter sparks debate over potential clemency for others



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

President Joe Biden's decision to break his word and pardon his son Hunter has spurred a broader discussion about what else he should be doing with the broad clemency powers of the presidency before he leaves office in January, including whether he should even be pardoning Donald Trump. Mr. Biden on Tuesday (December 3, 2024) ducked questions on his decision on his son, ignoring calls for him to explain his reversal as he was making his first presidential trip to Angola. He dismissed shouted questions about the matter with a laugh during a meeting with Angolan President João Lourenço at the presidential palace, telling the Angolan delegation: "Welcome to America." Mr. Biden was not scheduled to take questions from the press during his trip to Africa, and he has largely avoided interactions with reporters since President-elect Trump's victory last month. Mr. Biden's decision to offer his son a blanket pardon for actions over the past 11 years has sparked a political uproar in Washington, after the president repeatedly had said he would not use his extraordinary powers for the benefit of his family. Mr. Biden claimed that the Justice Department had presided over a "miscarriage of justice" in prosecuting his son, using some of the same language that Mr. Trump uses to describe his own legal predicaments. Biden's reversal drew criticism from many Democrats, who are working to calibrate their approach to Mr. Trump as he prepares to take over the Oval Office in seven weeks. There is concern the pardon -- and Mr. Biden's claims that his son was prosecuted for political reasons -- will erode their ability to push back on the incoming president's legal moves. And it has threatened to cloud Mr. Biden's legacy as he prepares to leave office on Jan. 20. Hunter Biden is the closest presidential relative ever to be granted clemency, but other leaders have pardoned family members and close friends. Bill Clinton pardoned his brother Roger for drug charges after Roger Clinton had served his sentence. By the time Mr. Trump left office after his first term, he had issued 144 pardons, which included Charles Kushner, the father of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner. He also pardoned fervent supporters Steve Bannon, Roger Stone, Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn and other people convicted in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation. In the months after the 2020 election, Mr. Trump and his allies were trying to overturn his loss, a failed effort that culminated in the violent riot by his supporters at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. There were discussions at the time over whether Mr. Trump would pre-emptively pardon some of those

involved in the effort -- and maybe even himself -- before he left office. But that never happened.

Now, Democrats are having similar discussions about pre-emptive pardons on their side because of Mr. Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail. He's made no secret of his desire to seek revenge on those who prosecuted him or crossed him. He talks about "enemies from within." He's circulated social media posts that call for the jailing of Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, former Vice President Mike Pence and Sens. Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer. He's also taken aim at Liz Cheney, a conservative Republican who campaigned for Ms. Harris, promoting a social media post that suggested he wanted military tribunals to punish her because she was guilty of treason. Sen. Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, said last week on Boston Public Radio that Mr. Biden might consider broad pardons to protect people against whatever wrath Mr. Trump may seek, but also as a way to move the country past this acrimonious and divided time.

"I think that without question, Mr. Trump is going to try to act in a dictatorial way, in a fascistic way, in a revengeful first year at least of his administration toward individuals who he believes harmed him," Mr. Markey said. Presidents enjoy expansive pardon powers when it comes to federal crimes. That includes granting clemency to people who have not yet been charged, as President Gerald Ford did in 1974 when he pardoned his predecessor, Richard Nixon over the Watergate scandal. The decision at the time caused an uproar but has been seen in the ensuing decades as a move that helped to restore order. Mr. Markey cited Mr. Ford's pardon as way for the country "just to close that chapter and move on to a new era." Mr. Biden could do the same, Mr. Markey said, to help the country move on "to an agenda that deals with the ordinary families." Sen. Joe Manchin, the Democrat-turned-independent from West Virginia, took it a step further and suggested Mr. Biden should even pardon Mr. Trump for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, federal charges that are now evaporating with Mr. Trump's upcoming return to the White House. "Why don't you go ahead and pardon Donald Trump for all his charges?" he asked in an interview with CNN. "It would have gone down a lot more balanced. I'm just saying, wipe them out." At the same time, Democratic lawmakers and criminal justice reformers are pushing Mr. Biden to grant pardons to broad groups of Americans. Democrats Ayanna Pressley, Jim Clyburn and Mary Gay Scanlon wrote to Mr. Biden on Nov. 20, asking him to use his clemency powers to "address longstanding injustices in our legal system, and set our nation on the path toward ending mass incarceration." The letter, also signed by 61 others, suggested Mr. Biden could use his powers to send a powerful message of criminal justice reform and would "rectify unjust and unnecessary criminal laws passed by Congress and draconian sentences given by judges." "We encourage you to use your clemency powers to help broad classes of people and cases, including the elderly and chronically ill, those on death row, people with unjust sentencing disparities, and women who were punished for defending themselves against their abusers," they wrote. So far, Mr. Biden has only pardoned 25 people, none with direct ties to him. Most presidents tend to grant a flurry of clemency requests at the end of their terms and it's likely Mr. Biden will do likewise.

## No-confidence vote draws France into new political crisis

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

France headed into a new political crisis on Tuesday (December 3, 2024) as opposition lawmakers vowed to topple the minority government of Prime Minister Michel Barnier in a no-confidence vote after just three months in office. A standoff over an austerity budget, which has caused jitters on financial markets, follows months of tension since President Emmanuel Macron appointed the 73-year-old in September. Far-left party brings no-confidence motion. The far-left France Unbowed (LFI) opposition party said it would bring a no-confidence motion after Mr. Barnier used executive powers on Monday to force through social security legislation without a vote. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN), which has demanded changes to the 2025 budget, said it would back the LFI move. French legislators were expected to vote on the motion Wednesday, with first results around 1900 GMT.

Two no-confidence motions will be put forward. One by the far right is unlikely to pass. Another proposed by the hard-left should go through with backing from RN lawmakers. "Blocking this budget is, alas, the only way the constitution gives us to protect the French people from a dangerous, unfair and punitive budget," Le Pen said on X. Mr. Barnier warned against the move. France's situation is "very difficult in economic and social terms," Mr. Barnier told the National Assembly lower house. The vote would "make everything more difficult and more serious," he added. Turbulence intensified political instability. Mr. Macron, currently on a visit to Saudi Arabia, has appeared to be mostly a spectator in the crisis he unleashed by ordering snap elections in June, prompting some voices to question if he should consider resigning. The turbulence has intensified political instability in the key EU member following the inconclusive elections called by Macron in a bid to halt the rise of the far right. Mr. Barnier has been under pressure to cut 60 billion euros (\$64 billion) off government spending in 2025 in a bid to cut the public-sector deficit to five percent of gross domestic product, from 6.1% of GDP this year. He has made a number of concessions to the opposition including scrapping plans for a less generous prescription drug reimbursement policy from next year. But Le Pen has still opposed Barnier's plan.

Le Pen kept asking for concessions and Barnier had not thought she would back a no-confidence motion, a political source said. "I didn't think she'd dare," Mr. Barnier said on Monday, according to the source. Jockeying for leadership positions has started, with Socialist party boss Olivier Faure saying Macron must "appoint a left-wing prime minister". But economists at ING said the likelihood of quickly finding a replacement for Mr. Barnier was "highly uncertain" because the National Assembly is so divided. People on Macron resigning in a poll published on Monday, 52% of French people said they favoured Mr. Macron resigning, but were above all concerned about their purchasing power. "I'm very worried and very upset with the forces on the left and the forces on the far right," Bertrand Chenu, a 65-year-old retiree, told AFP in Paris. In Strasbourg, Emmanuel Parisot, 51, said the crisis was Mr. Macron's fall because he dissolved parliament and called snap polls. "It's all the president's responsibility," Parisot said. "We don't know where that's going to lead. If the government falls, it would be the first successful no-confidence vote since a defeat for Georges Pompidou's government in 1962, when Charles de Gaulle was president. The lifespan of Barnier's government would also be the shortest of any administra-



tion of France's Fifth Republic which began in 1958. Some observers have suggested that Le Pen, 56, is playing a high-risk game and seeking to bring down Macron before his term ends by ousting Barnier. Le Pen is embroiled in a high-profile embezzlement trial. If found guilty in March, she could be blocked from participating in France's next presidential election, scheduled for 2027. If Mr. Macron stepped down soon, an election would have to be called within a month, potentially ahead of the verdict in her trial. "She could hope, if she won, to be in the Elysee Palace by early February," said Mujtaba Rahman, managing director for Europe at Eurasia Group.

## South Korea to approve more paternal leaves amid low births

Seoul: South Korea's presidential committee on population policy on Tuesday unveiled plans to have up to 70 per cent of fathers take parental leave by 2030 as the government intensifies efforts to tackle the nation's pressing demographic challenges. The figure would mark a sharp increase from just 6.8 per cent recorded in 2022, according to the Presidential Committee on Ageing Society and Population Policy. The rate for mothers stood at 70 per cent in the same year.

The data represents the ratio of people who take parental leave among eligible workers with children aged eight or younger. The latest announcement comes amid anticipated changes in the parental leave policy starting next year. Currently, both mothers and fathers can each take up to one year of parental leave, which can be divided into three periods. Starting in February, however, if both parents take at least three months of leave, each parent's total leave period can be extended to 18 months, which can be split into four periods. Also, the cap on compensation for parents taking time off from work will be raised to 2.5 million won (\$1,782) a month from the current 1.5 million won for the first three months of their leave. The monthly compensation will gradually decrease to 2 million won for the following three months and to 1.6 million won for the next six months. The detailed amount will vary depending on workers' ordinary wages. The country also aims to reduce the proportion of women experiencing childbirth-related career interruptions to 10 per cent by 2030, compared with 22.3 per cent recorded this year.

## South Korea lifts President's martial law decree after Parliament votes against it



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's government early Wednesday (December 4, 2024) lifted the martial law he imposed during a tense night of political drama in which troops surrounded parliament and lawmakers voted to reject military rule. Mr. Yoon said his government withdrew military personnel following a bipartisan parliamentary vote that rejected martial law, and the measure was formally lifted around 4.30 a.m. during a Cabinet meeting. Mr. Yoon had declared martial law late Tuesday (December 3, 2024), vowing to eliminate "anti-state" forces as he struggles against an opposition that controls the country's parliament and that he accuses of sympathising with communist North Korea. Less than three hours later, parliament voted to lift the declaration, with National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik declaring that the martial law was "invalid" and that lawmakers "will protect democracy with the people." People watch a TV screen showing South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's televised briefing at a bus terminal in Seoul on December 3, 2024.

The president's surprising move harkened back to an era of authoritarian leaders that the country has not seen since the 1980s, and it was immediately denounced by the opposition and the leader of Mr. Yoon's own party. Police and military personnel were seen leaving the Assembly's grounds after Woo called for their withdrawal. Lee Jaemyung, leader of the liberal Democratic Party, which holds the majority in the 300-seat parliament, said the party's lawmakers will remain in the Assembly's main hall until Mr. Yoon formally lifts his order. "Democratic Party lawmakers, including me and many others, will protect our country's democracy and future and public safety, lives and properties, with our own lives," Lee told reporters. Jo Seung-lae, a Democratic lawmaker, claimed that security camera footage following Mr. Yoon's declaration showed that troops moved in a way that suggested they were trying to arrest Lee, Woo and even Han Dong-hoon, the leader of Mr. Yoon's People Power Party. Officials from Mr. Yoon's office and the Defense Ministry did not respond to requests for comment early Wednesday (December 4, 2024). Seemingly hundreds of protesters gathered in front of the Assembly, waving banners and calling for Mr. Yoon's impeachment. Some protesters scuffled with troops ahead of the lawmakers' vote, but there were no immediate reports of injuries or major property damage. At least one window was broken as troops attempted to enter the Assembly building. One woman tried unsuccessfully to pull a rifle away from one of the soldiers, while shouting "Aren't you embarrassed!"

Under South Korea's constitution, the president can declare martial law during "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states" that require the use of military force to maintain peace and order. It was questionable whether South Korea is currently in such a state. When martial law is declared, "special measures" can be employed to restrict the freedom of press, freedom of assembly and other rights, as well as the power of courts. The constitution also states that the president must oblige when the National Assembly demands the lifting of martial law with a majority vote. Following Mr. Yoon's announcement, South Korea's military proclaimed that parliament and other political gatherings that could cause "social confusion" would be suspended, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.

In Washington, the White House said the U.S. was "seriously concerned" by the events in Seoul. A spokesperson for the National Security Council said President Joe Biden's administration was not notified in advance of the martial law announcement and was in contact with the South Korean government. Speaking at an event with Japan's ambassador to Washington, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, a longtime Asia diplomat, reiterated that the U.S.-South Korea alliance is "ironclad" and the U.S. would "stand by Korea in their time of uncertainty." "I also want to just underscore that we have every hope and expectation that any

political disputes will be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law," Campbell said. The South Korean military also said that the country's striking doctors should return to work within 48 hours, Yonhap said. Thousands of doctors have been striking for months over government plans to expand the number of students at medical schools. The military said anyone who violates the decree could be arrested without a warrant. Soon after the declaration, the parliament speaker called on his YouTube channel for all lawmakers to gather at the National Assembly. He urged military and law enforcement personnel to "remain calm and hold their positions. All 190 lawmakers who participated in the vote supported the lifting of martial law. Television footage showed soldiers who had been stationed at parliament leaving the site after the vote. Hours earlier, TV showed police officers blocking the entrance of the National Assembly and helmeted soldiers carrying rifles in front of the building. An Associated Press photographer saw at least three helicopters, likely from the military, that landed inside the Assembly grounds, while two or three helicopters circled above the site.

The leader of Mr. Yoon's conservative People Power Party, Han Dong-hoon, called the decision to impose martial law "wrong" and vowed to "stop it with the people." Lee, who narrowly lost to Mr. Yoon in the 2022 presidential election, called Mr. Yoon's announcement "illegal and unconstitutional." Mr. Yoon said during a televised speech that martial law would help "rebuild and protect" the country from "falling into the depths of national ruin." He said he would "eradicate pro-North Korean forces and protect the constitutional democratic order." "I will eliminate anti-state forces as quickly as possible and normalise the country," he said, while asking the people to believe in him and tolerate "some inconveniences." Mr. Yoon - whose approval rating has dipped in recent months - has struggled to push his agenda against an opposition-controlled parliament since taking office in 2022. Mr. Yoon's party has been locked in an impasse with the liberal opposition over next year's budget bill. The opposition has also attempted to pass motions to impeach three top prosecutors, including the chief of the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office, in what the conservatives have called a vendetta against their criminal investigations of Lee, who has been seen as the favourite for the next presidential election in 2027 in opinion polls. During his televised announcement, Mr. Yoon also described the opposition as "shameless pro-North Korean anti-state forces who are plundering the freedom and happiness of our citizens," but he did not elaborate.

Mr. Yoon has taken a hard line on North Korea over its nuclear ambitions, departing from the policies of his liberal predecessor, Moon Jae-in, who pursued inter-Korean engagement. Mr. Yoon has also dismissed calls for independent investigations into scandals involving his wife and top officials, drawing quick, strong rebukes from his political rivals. Mr. Yoon's move was the first declaration of martial law since the country's democratisation in 1987. The country's last previous martial law was in October 1979, following the assassination of former military dictator Park Chung-hee. Natalia Slavney, research analyst at Stimson Center's 38 North website that focuses on Korean affairs, said Mr. Yoon's imposition of martial law was "a serious backslide of democracy in South Korea" that followed a "worrying trend of abuse" since he took office in 2022.

"It remains to be seen what the political fallout of this brief emergency martial law will be - both domestically and internationally. But South Korea has a robust history of political pluralism and is no stranger to mass protests and swift impeachments," Slavney said, citing the example of former President Park Geun-hye. Park, the country's first female president, was ousted from office and imprisoned for bribery and other crimes in 2017. U.N. spokesman says watching "very closely and with concern" The United Nations is monitoring the political upheaval in South Korea, where President Yoon Suk Yeol has declared martial law, "very closely and with concern," a spokesman told reporters on Tuesday (December 3, 2024). "We're watching the situation very closely and with concern," Stephane Djuaric, spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, told reporters. "The situation is evolving quickly."

Kremlin calls situation 'concerning', says news agency The Kremlin said Tuesday (December 3, 2024) that the situation in South Korea after the declaration of martial law was "concerning" and it is paying close attention, Interfax news agency reported. President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the agency: "The situation is concerning. We are watching closely."

## What are the controversies around pardoning power? | Explained

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The story so far: U.S. President Joe Biden has granted an unconditional pardon to his son Hunter Biden who faced sentencing for federal tax and gun convictions.

Can the President pardon anyone?

The 'royal prerogative of mercy' is a historic prerogative of the British monarch to grant pardons to convicted persons. This was originally used by the monarch to withdraw or provide alternatives to death sentences. At present it is used to grant clemency for any sentence or penalty based on ministerial advice. According to the U.S. Constitution, the President can grant pardon except in cases of impeachment. The U.S. President has absolute power of pardon for federal criminal offences. Such a pardon may be issued prior to the start of a legal case as well as prior to or after a conviction for a crime. Once accepted, the pardon grants relief from punishment and associated disqualifications but does not erase the conviction record.

What is the current controversy?

Right from the pardon to the leaders of the 'whiskey rebellion', who protested against a federal tax, granted by the first President George Washington in 1795 to President Bill Clinton's pardon of his half-brother Roger on the last day of his office in 2001, pardoning power has been mired in controversies. Donald Trump had pardoned his son-in-law's father in 2020. In the instant case, President Joe Biden has granted pardon to his son for tax and gun offences for which he has been convicted, and for any potential federal crimes that Hunter Biden may have committed between 2014 and 2024. This is in contrast to the public promises that Joe Biden had made earlier that he would not pardon his son. The reason stated by the President was that Hunter Biden was selectively and unfairly prosecuted, and was singled out only because he is his son. Hunter Biden was convicted by a jury of illegally buying and possessing a gun as a drug user. He then pleaded guilty in a tax evasion case.



What is the Indian system?

Article 72 and 161 of the Constitution provide powers to the President and Governor respectively to grant pardon, commutation, remission, respite or reprieve to a convict. These are sovereign powers which are to be exercised on the advice of the council of ministers. A pardon in the Indian context absolves the offender from conviction, punishment and all associated disqualifications. There have been various instances in India where the acceptance, rejection or delay in decisions of mercy petitions by ruling governments have been entangled in political controversies. The Supreme Court in the Epuru Sudhakar case (2006) has held that the exercise of pardoning power is subject to judicial review on the grounds of arbitrariness, mala fides or extraneous considerations.

What can be the way forward?

The pardoning power is a practice that has its origins during the time of absolute monarchy when there was no separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary. Critics have argued that the pardoning power in modern times have been more often used for political considerations than to correct judicial errors. In the U.K., the Criminal Cases Review Commission has been constituted to investigate alleged miscarriages of justice. It has diminished the use of the royal prerogative of mercy.

## Punjab's education strategy prioritises teacher empowerment and global learning, says Minister Bains in Korea



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

At UNESCO's international forum on — 'Futures of Education-2024', Punjab School Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains on Tuesday (December 3, 2024) said Punjab's educational strategy has put an unprecedented focus on teacher empowerment and global learning to achieve educational transformation. Pointing out that education was the fundamental solution to global challenges, Mr. Bains said the Punjab government has embarked on an ambitious infrastructure development mission, focusing on creating robust educational ecosystems, which includes constructing thousands of new classrooms, erecting boundary walls for school security, providing bus services to students, installing Wi-Fi in schools and deploying security guards to en-

sure student safety.

He was addressing the gathering during the international conference at Suwon Convention Center in the city of Gyeonggi-do of the Republic of Korea. "These comprehensive measures have been placed to create a secure and technologically enabled learning environment," he said, according to a statement. He added that Punjab's educational strategy is an unprecedented focus on teacher empowerment and global learning. "The state has initiated comprehensive teacher training programs, sending educators to premier global institutions. School principals have been trained at the Singapore Principals Academy, while elementary teachers have received specialized training in Finland's renowned education model, bringing world-class pedagogical insights to Punjab's schools," he said. He said that the Punjab government has introduced innovative school concepts that go beyond traditional educational frameworks. "The 'Schools of Eminence' focus on professional training, 'Schools of Applied Learning' stress on vocational skills and the 'Schools of Happiness' represent a unique child-psychology-based learning approach designed to create joyful educational experiences," he said. Mr. Bains said education is a comprehensive approach to addressing global challenges such as climate change, terrorism and social inequities. "The state government's mission is unequivocal which ensures that no child is left behind and every child has access to quality education that prepares them for future challenges," he added.

## Philippines says China Coast Guard fired water cannon; Beijing calls Manila's accusations "bogus"

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

China's coast guard accused the Philippines of making "bogus accusations" after Manila said it had fired water cannon and "sideswiped" a Philippine government vessel in the disputed South China Sea on Wednesday. The Philippine vessel "turned at a great angle and reversed, deliberately colliding" with a Chinese ship, a statement read, adding that Manila had "later deliberately distorted the truth and made bogus accusations in an attempt to mislead international understanding". The Philippines said the China Coast Guard fired water cannon and "sideswiped" a government vessel Wednesday during a maritime patrol near the disputed Scarborough Shoal, after Beijing said it had "exercised control" over the ship. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, brushing off rival claims from other countries -- including the Philippines -- and an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. Vessels from the two sides have clashed frequently in the past year, resulting in injuries and damages.

Tensions flared again on Wednesday, with Manila releasing a video appearing to show a Chinese coast guard hitting the right side of fisheries department vessel BRP Datu Pagbuaya, with the crew shouting, "Collision! Collision!". The Chinese ship "fired a water cannon... aiming directly at the vessel's navigational antennas", the Philippine coast guard and fisheries ministry said in a joint statement. The Chinese vessel then "intentionally sideswiped" the ship before launching a second water cannon attack, the statement



said. China's coast guard said in a statement that Philippine ships "came dangerously close" and that its actions had been "in accordance with the law", but gave no further details about the manoeuvres it used during the incident. "On December 4, Philippine Coast Guard ships... attempted to intrude into China's territorial waters around Huangyan Island," coast guard spokesperson Liu Dejun said, using the Chinese name for Scarborough Shoal. The shoal -- a triangular chain of reefs and rocks -- has been a flashpoint between the countries since China seized it from the Philippines in 2012. Since then, Beijing has deployed patrol boats that Manila says harass Philippine vessels and prevent Filipino fishermen from accessing a fish-rich lagoon there. The shoal lies 240 kilometres (150 miles) west of the Philippines' main island of Luzon and nearly 900 kilometres from the nearest major Chinese land mass of Hainan.

## Bangladesh AHC in Agartala suspends services after breach by mob, officials suspend 3 police officers

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

The Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala on Tuesday announced the suspension of visa and consular services for an indefinite period a day after an incident involving a breach of the consular premises by a mob during protests against the arrest of a Hindu monk in the neighbouring country. The Assistant High Commission (AHC) posted a notice on their board without specifying when the services would resume. This incident, which sparked a fresh diplomatic row between India and Bangladesh, resulted in the suspension of three Tripura police officers for their negligence in duty at the AHC. West Tripura Superintendent of Police K. Kiran Kumar issued the order for the suspension of the three sub-inspectors. Seven protesters from the Hindu Sangharsh Samiti have been detained by the police in connection with the breach at the AHC. The police and security agencies are currently reviewing CCTV footage and social media posts to identify those involved in the incident.

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Tripura State Rifles (TSR) troops have been deployed at the AHC and two checkpoints have been set up outside as a security measure. Two additional checkpoints have also been created on Akhaura Road leading to the Agartala Integrated Check Post. These security measures have been put in place based on assessments made by senior police and intelligence officials, according to sources. In a statement released on Monday, Chief Minister Manik Saha, who holds the Home portfolio, condemned the incident at the Bangladesh AHC. On



the other hand, protests against alleged atrocities committed on minority Hindus in Bangladesh continued in Agartala and other parts of the State on Tuesday. The Sanatani Yuba, a right-wing youth organisation, held a protest rally in Agartala city under heavy security presence. In another major development, Tripura Hotel and Restaurant Owners Association has declared they would not provide accommodation to Bangladesh nationals in protest of the deterioration of the communal situation there. It, however, said the measure is temporary. Meanwhile, a leader of a Hindu organisation stated that they will continue to hold protests until attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh are stopped and the country's Hindu leader Prabhukrishna Das is unconditionally acquitted from false charges.

## President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers urge judge to toss his hush money conviction

President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers formally asked a judge Monday (December 2, 2024) to throw out his hush money criminal conviction, arguing continuing the case would present unconstitutional "disruptions to the institution of the Presidency". In a filing made public Tuesday (December 3, 2024), Mr. Trump's lawyers told Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan that dismissal is warranted because of the extraordinary circumstances of his impending return to the White House. "Wrongly continuing proceedings in this failed lawfare case disrupts President Trump's transition efforts," the attorneys continued, before citing the "overwhelming national mandate granted to him by the American people on November 5, 2024." Prosecutors will have until Dec. 9 to respond. They have said they will fight any efforts to dismiss the case but have indicated openness to delaying sentencing until after Mr. Trump's second term ends in 2029.

Following Mr. Trump's election victory last month, Mr. Merchan halted proceedings and indefinitely postponed his sentencing, previously scheduled for late November, to allow the defence and prosecution to weigh in on the future of the case. He also delayed a decision on Mr. Trump's prior bid to dismiss the case on immunity grounds. Mr. Trump has been fighting for months to reverse the conviction, which involved efforts to conceal a \$130,000 payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels, whose affair allegations threatened to disrupt his 2016 campaign. He has denied any wrongdoing. Mr. Trump takes office Jan. 20. Mr. Merchan



President-elect Donald Trump's lawyers have formally asked a judge to throw out his hush money criminal conviction

hasn't set a timetable for a decision. A dismissal would erase Mr. Trump's historic conviction, sparing him the cloud of a criminal record and possible prison sentence. Mr. Trump is the first former president to be convicted of a crime and the first convicted criminal to be elected to the office. Mr. Merchan could also decide to uphold the verdict and proceed to sentencing, delay the case until Mr. Trump leaves office, wait until a federal appeals court rules on Mr. Trump's parallel effort to get the case moved out of state court or choose some other option.

## Shiv Sena will leverage Shinde's clout to bag a few important portfolios



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

There's a repeated sentiment one hears from Shiv Sena leaders in Maharashtra: 'Respectable treatment should be given to our leader Eknath Shinde.' It comes attached with an unsaid warning: 'Don't trifle with him. Don't take him lightly.' With the Mahayuti still dragging its feet on government formation days after its sweeping victory in the Maharashtra Assembly election, most Shiv Sena leaders seem to have accepted that the party's 57 seats are unlikely to bring Mr. Shinde back to the CM's chair given the BJP's 132-seat tally, but they emphasise this means that their party — and their leader — must be given a larger consideration in other areas as their just due. As he prepares for an imminent stepdown, the caretaker Chief Minister faces the dilemma of how to best use it to leverage the party's bargaining power, for stronger portfolios including the Home department, as well as a larger role in the Union government. Shiv Sena leaders also stress the need to preserve Mr. Shinde's legacy as the common man's CM, who set a precedent by opening the doors of his office and residence to ordinary people who travelled far and wide to see him.

"We did not ask for anything in the Centre earlier. Even when we had more numbers than some other regional parties, we were given a [Minister of State] position. We did not say anything because we had the Chief Minister's position [in Maharashtra]. Now, if that is being taken away, then our party needs to grow too," one Shiv Sena leader said. "We have fought the elections under his leadership. He was our face. People trusted him and gave us this massive mandate," said another leader. "If he is not going to be the Chief

Minister, then the party should get repaid commensurately," a third party leader said. All the Shiv Sena leaders The Hindu spoke with denied rumours about the party declining the position of Deputy CM or giving mere outside support to a BJP government. "There is no question about Sena sitting out of the government. Also, we want Eknath Shinde to be the DCM if that is the top position given to our party," another Sena leader insisted. Political growth During the campaign for the Assembly election, Mr. Shinde held 75 rallies across the State. Between him and his son Shrikant Shinde, they covered more constituencies than the party contested. Over the last two and a half years, Mr. Shinde has established himself as a strong leader who brought electoral gains to the Mahayuti alliance from the bitter split with Uddhav Thackeray's Sena. From being expected to play second fiddle to the BJP, to coming into his own over a short span of time, he has shown political presence of mind. In fact, he has often proven to be a tough nut to crack. "We had not anticipated Shinde to become so strong. When he had joined us with his MLAs, we had thought, it will be easy to navigate around him. But he has grown stronger politically," a BJP leader said. The common man's CM Shiv Sena leaders agreed with that assessment. "Whoever becomes the CM now will have larger shoes to fill. He showed how to be a people's man. He would stop his convoy to greet people, he would open his doors for the poor and the needy, without any bureaucratic considerations.

He shaped several initiatives, including 'Government at your doorstep' and the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana, with this in mind," a senior Sena leader said. "Will any other CM allow people to meet him at his official residence at 2 a.m.? Will the doors of Varsha [the CM's official bungalow] now stay open at all hours? Will people travelling from far and wide get fed while waiting to meet him? He has changed the image of the CM in a common man's life," that leader added, even while admitting that with the numbers heavily tilted in favour of the BJP, it was unfair to expect them to share the CM position. "For me, the biggest position is being the favourite brother of my favourite sisters," was Mr. Shinde's evasive response to all the speculation. He let his actions speak instead of words: just two days before a new government is formed, despite his own illness, the caretaker CM called for a meeting of the State administration to conduct business as usual till the last possible minute.

## Jay Shah has his hands full as he takes over as ICC chairman

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Jay Shah takes office as chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC), at a critical juncture. There is the re-entry of cricket in the 2028 Olympics, for one. The Champions Trophy imbroglio seems to have been sorted out, but there is a more important issue bubbling with ramifications for the sport itself. With India's decision not to travel to Pakistan next year for political reasons, the tournament is now scheduled to be played in Dubai too (for India matches). As a face-saving expedient, Pakistan have told the ICC that the hybrid format should be followed if Pakistan don't come to India for the 2026 T20 World Cup, 2029 Champions Trophy or the 2031 ODI World Cup all scheduled in this country. That is unlikely to happen because the power dynamic is in India's favour. Shah, son of India's Home Minister, who until last week had mainly India's interests at heart, will have to recalibrate his outlook and work for the game at large. Of the four Indian chairmen before him, only Shashank Manohar — "an Indian administrator with a conscience," Wisden called him — thought beyond India and addressed the interests of the game which was then being hijacked by the 'Big Three', India, Australia and England. The separation between India and the world is notional because where cricket is concerned, India are the world. They have the money, the power and the energy to bend the sport to their will. Like England did when they had those things. Some three decades ago, the official veto power England and Australia enjoyed in the ICC was removed. Now India have the veto, even if unofficially. But does a country have the power of insistence or endorsement that insists an individual can play only in certain countries or formats? Can players sue their boards for 'restraint of trade'? That argument allowed players in the 70s to win a court case after choosing Kerry Packer's series in Australia over Test cricket. We will know soon enough. Last year, 74 England players appeared in franchise tournaments around the world, more than from any other country. Now the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has banned players from appearing in leagues that clash with their domestic season (the IPL excepted).

The Professional Cricketers Association might take the ECB to court over this, thus firing a salvo that will influ-



ence where the game is headed. The 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC) from their home boards is the players' visa to leagues, from Pakistan and South Africa to Canada and the West Indies. England have no objection to their players taking part in the IPL, the richest and the most sought-after tournament ever since it was inaugurated in 2008. The IPL has made millionaires of more cricketers from more countries than any other. Understanding that boards might need to be encouraged to provide the NOCs, the IPL began by paying ten percent of players' salaries to their country's national boards. The ECB's action might see a further diminishing of red-ball cricket if players choose a good deal in the present to the possibility of being remembered as a hero of the long game in the future. It might — an argument that has been made in these columns before — lead to a split in the administration of the game too, with T20 and Test cricket being run by separate bodies. It happened with rugby when it was split into union and league that became two distinct games. As players turn their backs on the First Class game for the higher returns and apparently greater security that the franchises promise, it seems natural to have two different governing bodies too. If Test cricket becomes a sport played by those not good enough for the franchises, it might not matter so much; this is where legacy comes in. T20, by its nature is a forgettable sport; to be remembered in a couple of decades, a player must make his mark in Test cricket.

## Takeaways from COP29

Two major global events took place last month: the G20 Summit in Brazil and the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Baku, Azerbaijan. Catalysing finance to address climate change was a central theme at both events. The deal reached in Baku, though hard-won, falls short of expectations. To be fair, the expectations for climate finance were never easy to meet. Assessments had shown that developing countries need \$1.3 trillion per year through 2035 to build infrastructure for adapting to climate change; investing in clean energy, land use, and urban development to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and recovering from disasters. This amount was to come from the 24 high-income countries listed in Annex I of the UNFCCC. Given the outlook of slow economic growth, green investments required in their own territories, and the likelihood of the U.S., which accounts for half of cumulative federal spending, pulling back, there was little appetite for a significant commitment.

The biggest disappointment, however, is that even the small commitment made — \$300 billion per year — does not come entirely from public finance, but from sources including Multilateral Development Banks, carbon markets, and private finance. It is recognised that private finance tends to flow to economies where returns are commercially attractive, and it can easily shift back to advanced economies when conditions change. This creates uncertainty about whether emerging economies will see much benefit. Even larger economies like India are unlikely to get adequate resources for priorities such as adaptation.

That said, there were significant victories as well. The set of agreements on carbon markets concluded a decade of negotiations. While bilateral carbon credit deals between countries had been taking place under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement, COP29 clarified the procedures for authorising

these credits, their transferability between registries, and the standards needed to ensure their environmental integrity. This prevents credits from being revoked and investment getting stranded. A bigger win was the move towards implementing a global carbon market under Article 6.4, with several procedural rules agreed upon. The swift adoption of these rules by individual countries is crucial to launching this market, which will help direct capital towards the most efficient emission reduction projects worldwide. India is likely to be a major beneficiary in this regard. Other positive outcomes included new emission reduction pledges from the European Union, Canada, and other regions. Many nations committed to propose steeper 2035 targets in their revised Nationally Determined Contributions than their current commitments. The U.K. and Brazil have announced their updated targets, while Norway is consulting on its own. Mexico, under the leadership of climate scientist Claudia Sheinbaum, became the latest major economy to announce a goal to reach net zero by 2050.

At the G20 Summit, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto unveiled an ambitious plan to retire all coal and fossil fuel-fired plants by 2040. This is significant, as Indonesia is the largest exporter and third-largest consumer of coal globally. It also highlights that the focus on coal is back — a challenge that India staved off in previous COPs in order to ensure that the focus remained on all fossil fuels. The lack of progress on the "phase-out" of all fossil fuels at both COP29 and the G20 Summit is a cause for concern. Should we acknowledge that the battle to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C has likely been lost, and adopt a more realistic target? A study released before COP29 indicated that the world was already 1.49°C warmer than pre-industrial levels by the end of 2023. Another suggests that there are still pathways to reverse temperature rise within the 1.5°C limit, even with a temporary overshoot.

## Giving roots to sustainable Indian agriculture with HAI



Moravec's paradox, which explains that Artificial Intelligence (AI) excels at complex tasks beyond human capability but struggles with tasks requiring direct interaction with the environment, offers scope for cross-linking human intelligence with AI for mutual improvement. This paradox could pave the way for developing Hybrid Agricultural Intelligence (HAI) by combining farmers' knowledge with AI, creating sustainable solutions that are tailored to the dynamic challenges confronting India's agricultural sector. Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy. As in the Economic Survey's provisional estimate for 2023-24, the contribution of agriculture to the Indian GDP is pegged at 18.2% at current prices while providing a livelihood to 42.3% of the 1.4 billion citizens. India's agriculture, done in 219.16 million hectares during 2021-22 (Land Use Statistics at a Glance-2018-19 to 2021-22, Government of India), has been shaped by the unique knowledge and adaptive strategies of farmers accumulated over thousands of years of ecological understanding. Indian farmers have developed deep knowledge to deal with diverse seed and planting material requirements, crop rotation and management, soil types, weather patterns and consumer preference. This traditional "farmers' intelligence" or the Indigenous Technology Knowledge (ITK) forms a vital foundation for smallholders (who constitute over 80% of the agricultural community), to sustain yields on small land holdings despite minimal resources and unpredictable monsoons. Complementing this, scientific research led by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has further enriched farmers' knowledge and capabilities, playing a key role in empowering them and contributing to India's rise as a leading agricultural nation.

The advent of technology In recent years, AI, machine learning, drone applications, cutting-edge sensors and remote sensing technologies well-suited to the large farming areas have helped agriculture rapidly advance in developed countries. Now, increasingly, these innovations have begun making an entry in Indian agriculture, with an aim to enhance productivity and efficiency and also sustain the environment. However, small landholdings create unique challenges for Indian farmers to adopt AI technologies since they are designed for large farms. Hence, many still rely on traditional farming knowledge which has allowed Indian farmers to manage microclimates and optimise yields through century-long accrued insights through a combination of practical tactile observations, visual cues and oral folklore passed down through generations. Their ITK was refined over hundreds of years, including the Green Revolution period as well, allowing them to develop adaptive strategies in local agriculture that could align with natural resources constraints, ecological changes and enhanced resilience against different stresses. Innovative farmers have developed new crop varieties through long-term breeding. The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFR) was established in 2001 to protect their contributions. Additionally, many farmers conserve wild cereal, millet varieties and horticultural crops with valuable traits, recognised through the PPVFR's Genome Saviour Awards. Farmers and village artisans have also created tools and equipment that are suited to Indian agriculture, such as the popular coconut climbing device by M.J. Joseph of Kerala, known as the 'Chemperi Joseph' device. Rural Indian women constitute 48% of self-employed farmers and 33% of agricultural labourers, making them integral to sustainable farming practices. They handle critical tasks such as seed selection and planting, polycropping,

soil health, water management and pest control involving low-input, organic methods, and post-harvest processing suitable for local conditions. Their expertise in agriculture plays a vital role in enhancing the resilience of smallholder farms against environmental changes.

On indigenous knowledge To capture the indigenous agriculture technologies developed by the farmers, the ICAR, in the year 2000, under the National Agricultural Technology Programme, had initiated a Mission Mode Project on Collection, Documentation and Validation of the ITK. The information had been published as the Inventory of ITK in Agriculture as two part documents (Das et al., 2002). These remain an important repository of Indian farmers' knowledge which could be put to wider use.

Despite the robustness of Indian farmers' indigenous knowledge, which evolved alongside Green Revolution technologies to adapt to local conditions, the increasing pressures of soil degradation, climate change, market volatility, limited resources including labour now demand enhanced support systems. This is where the potential of AI and modern technology becomes particularly relevant.

The Global AI market is growing at a CAGR of 23.1% from 2023 to 2028, with a rise in investments from \$1.47 billion to \$4.7 billion during this period. It is estimated that the adoption of AI could reduce cost of cultivation by 22% as in an Ark-Investment report. Already, under the AI4AI programme (AI for Agriculture Innovation) started by the Indian government, an initiative called 'Saagu Baagu' in Khammam district of Telangana State had shown that from 2020 to 2023, the adoption of AI-enhanced chilli yield by 21% per acre, reduced pesticide application by 9%, a 5% decrease in fertilizer usage, and an 8% improvement in unit prices due to quality enhancements. Consequently, chilli farmers earned more than ₹66,000 per acre per crop cycle, enhancing their income substantially. This clearly indicates the scope of AI in transforming Indian agriculture.

To effectively develop hybrid agricultural intelligence (HAI), farmers need to recognise the value of their own agricultural knowledge as well as the potential of modern AI technologies. Training programmes should be implemented to educate them on using AI tools in conjunction with their farming practices. Need for collaborative platforms Collaborative platforms should be developed where farmers can share their farming knowledge with AI developers while integrating agricultural technologies generated by research organisations. This will not only refine AI tools for agriculture but also provide farmers with advanced insights and innovative solutions to enhance their practices. This ongoing data integration will create a symbiosis of farmers' wisdom and modern technology, resulting in continuous adaptive solutions modified to changing farming needs. AI platforms such as 'Kisan-e-mitra', 'Bhashini' and 'Sarvam' can facilitate this exchange through multilingual support. Pilot projects must be launched across regions to test this hybrid approach, evaluating its impact on efficiency, yields, income, and overall sustainability and refined further. Partnerships among the government, ICAR, tech companies, and farmers' cooperatives are crucial for developing HAI. However, such partnerships should be equitable, ethical, inclusive and ensure safeguarding national data, the interests of the farming community, and farm labour and the food security of the nation. Guaranteeing affordable and accessible AI tools for smallholder farmers is of paramount importance too. Despite challenges such as data integration, privacy concerns, financial constraints, and social resistance, if successfully implemented, HAI has the potential to transform Indian agriculture. By combining farmers' knowledge with AI, HAI can make farming more resilient, sustainable, and adaptable to future challenges, leading to a more prosperous and resource-efficient agricultural sector in India. Murali Gopal is Principal Scientist, Agricultural Microbiology and Head of the Division of Physiology, Biochemistry and Post-Harvest Technology, ICAR-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod, Kerala. Alka Gupta is Principal Scientist, Agricultural Microbiology, ICAR-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute Kasaragod, Kerala. The views expressed are personal

## Enabling a level playing field

As Harmanpreet Kaur went out to bat during the 2024 ICC Women's T20 World Cup at Sharjah, millions were glued to their screens, including Sanskriti's 86-year-old grandfather, a former player who once captained India's deaf cricket team. While he always marvels at the action on the field, something else caught his attention this time: a sign language interpreter at the corner of the screen, translating every nuance of the game. For the first time, he could follow the commentary and post-match speeches without relying on us. Earlier this year, on Global Accessibility Awareness Day, Star Sports and Disney+Hotstar incorporated features that made live cricket accessible to India's 63 million hearing impaired and five million visually impaired citizens. Finally, the sport Sanskriti's grandfather loved was truly within reach.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2026, we must strive for better implementation of the Convention at the national level, particularly through the recognition of the linguistic human rights of hearing impaired people. This is crucial because, for most Indians, cricket is more than just a sport; it cultivates a sense of national belonging. Yet, this camaraderie unintentionally leaves many behind, especially the 90 million persons with disabilities.

A sense of isolation Despite progressive endeavours, such as the Accessible India Campaign and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, glaring gaps remain in the lived experiences of people with disabilities. They feel isolated not because of their condition, but because of social barriers. The world is unfortunately designed for able-bodied people and the exclusion of persons with disabilities persists in the way buildings, sidewalks, stadiums, movie theatres, seating areas, and even washrooms are built. Legal mandates such as ramps and tactile paving are either absent or are merely tokenistic gestures.

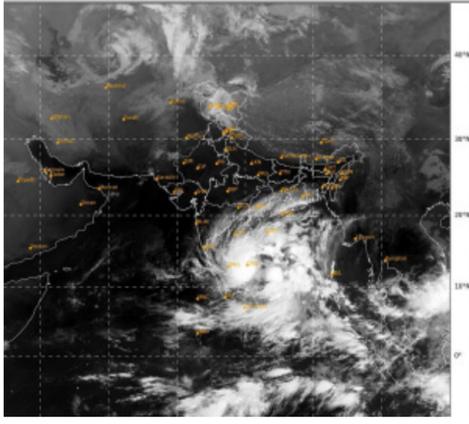
The same inaccessibility can be seen in cricketing infrastructure too, whether in stadiums or on live broadcasts. While ongoing state efforts towards inclusivity in the education and health sectors are relevant, the private entertainment sector also requires attention. Persons with disabilities are not just citizens with capacity-building requirements; they are also individuals with the need to explore recreational avenues. That this has not been recognised by entertainment providers begs the question of whether our collective idea of leisure is inherently ableist. In theatres, where cricket matches are increasingly being screened, we rarely pause to wonder about access for wheelchair users or assistive devices for visually impaired people. This highlights the need to integrate accessibility into popular

culture so that every person can reclaim their right to leisure. However, enabling people to exercise their right to leisure does not end with making infrastructure accessible; it also demands showcasing inclusive stories in popular entertainment. Films such as Margarita with a Straw (2014) and Srikanth (2024) lent great depth and sensitivity to the representation of disability in cinema. Such films challenge the public's unidimensional perspective on disability, while also making persons with disabilities feel seen and heard. They help shed light on the state of accessibility, prompting slow but steady public shifts towards making future entertainment infrastructure more inclusive.

Steps in the right direction The government is also increasingly aware of the intersection between entertainment and inclusivity. A recent ruling by a Supreme Court bench, headed by former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, stated that stereotyping differently abled persons in visual media and films perpetuates discrimination. The Court said that creators ought to provide an accurate representation of disabilities rather than mocking them. This is a step in the right direction. Private players are also widening the scope for accessibility in subtle ways. We now have subtitles and audio descriptions on OTT platforms. These measures are convenient for everyone, including able-bodied persons, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. As technology continues to permeate our society, especially with the rise of Artificial Intelligence, we may soon see many more such measures.

Building disability friendly ecosystems is no longer about philanthropic leanings. Globally, the total spending power of 1 billion persons with disabilities, including their family and friends who are likely to make accessibility-based choices, is estimated at \$13 trillion, an untapped opportunity. Investing in one's business to serve potential consumers and to build million-dollar revenues in the process is a strategic decision. These endeavours signal the recognition of individuals with disabilities as valued consumers and as crucial contributors to our economy. Accessibility initiatives undertaken by different platforms in recent times offer a glimpse of what the future can be — a world where persons with disabilities are active participants in the entertainment industry. These efforts redefine the identities of persons with disabilities and give them both respect and a sense of belonging. This shift reminds us that a true community leaves no one behind. Sanskriti Bhatia Former Consultant at Young Leaders for Active Citizenship, an Indian Sign Language Interpreter, and an MPP candidate at the University of Cambridge; Shivangi Tyagi, Officer, Programs and Policy Communications at Young Leaders for Active Citizenship

# Cyclone Fengal was unusually hard to predict and track | Analysis



As of December 2, Cyclone Fengal was still alive and kicking, and was predicted to soak parts of north Kerala and south Karnataka (including Bengaluru) in the following days. It appeared to have retained its identity in the forecasts as it crossed peninsular India en route to the Arabian Sea. It may not reorganise into a cyclone again over the ocean, but considering the way this year has unfolded thus far, anything seems possible. In fact, nothing has been typical during 2024. The year 2023 produced a stream of headlines — often days in a row — pointing out the record warming, the strong El Niño, and a litany of extreme weather events strewn around the planet. On the other hand 2024 was expected to continue to be warm but also transition to being a La Niña year. In fact, given that they had successfully predicted the early El Niño, weather models' confidence ran high when they predicted a strong La Niña in 2024.

Alas, it turned out to be wrong — and fantastically so. The pattern of sea surface temperature anomalies in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean have been quite unusual, with no significant cooling along the equator and a slight warming just to the north of the band. This situation is best described as "disorganised" — and the same label would hold for the post-monsoon circulation over the North Indian Ocean. Chennai has continued to get doused by the northeast monsoon as well as the rain brought by Cyclone Fengal. But the rest of the country, but especially the peninsula, remains much drier than normal as far as the northeast monsoon is concerned. Weather models had also predicted an Indian Ocean Dipole but it did not make an appearance either. Mother Nature has developed a habit of delivering a whiplash just as researchers are riding high on a year of successful forecasts, and this occasion is no different. At the same time, researchers and lawmakers alike are faced with new puzzles now. The unusually long life of Fengal

Cyclone Fengal remained a low-pressure system after forming in the far eastern Indian Ocean on November 14 and became a depression in the Bay of Bengal only after 10 days. It moved relatively slowly for another week before the India Meteorological Department said it had become a cyclone and ready for a name. The northern Indian Ocean has been warm since the southwest monsoon ended earlier this year. And during a La Niña year, this warmth should have encouraged more cyclones to form. This hasn't been the case. Next, the storm that eventually became Fengal drifted westward, then took a sharp turn northward before wobbling back westward, all due to the northeast and easterly winds blowing in the background. The warm Bay of Bengal also allowed Fengal to move slowly. But just as it made landfall,

the soaked coastal soil supplied the energy for the cyclone to remain coherent instead of dissipating rapidly. It is this prior rainfall that is likely to allow Cyclone Fengal to live longer than it should have, and could even help it survive all the way onto the Arabian Sea. Cyclone prediction is tough

It's always tempting to focus on regional features to understand weather predictions or how they fall short, but one shouldn't forget that 2024 has been unusual for hurricane predictions as well. Researchers had predicted a historic hurricane season over the North Atlantic Ocean but it turned out to be a doozy during much of the summer, only ramping up later in the season. Modellers have learnt to expect a strong hurricane season during a La Niña but clearly the failure of any significant cooling in the tropical Pacific Ocean has left us with a confusing hurricane season. It is unclear how the overall global cyclone numbers also started to increase later than expected even as they delivered deadly blows during an active November. In all, the weather events so far raise questions about the effects of typhoons on northern Indian Ocean cyclones as well as on the northeast monsoon. Indeed, despite all conditions being favourable for cyclogenesis — including a warm ocean, weaker vertical wind shear, moisture loading, and low-level circulation seeds — the post-monsoon cyclone season has been relatively quiet. And Fengal has served yet another reminder of just how hard it is to predict cyclones. Global warming? More of everything every time. Against the global smorgasbord of extremes, 2023 demonstrated just how erratic weather can get when warming ramps up quickly. The year handed its baton to 2024, which appeared to continue the sprint, although the temperature anomalies in the latest summer stayed below those of 2023. It seems very likely that the global surface temperature in 2024 will cross 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels — yet the fact that weather models were wrong about the La Niña, the Indian Ocean Dipole, and the hurricane season prompt us to not forget that nature continues to throw the dice each day. And while global warming loads the dice, modellers still lack the upper hand: they can only say some numbers are more likely, not whether any number is a certainty.

Furthermore, 2024 not seeing a La Niña doesn't mean it will have normal conditions. Clearly some unexpected pattern turned up to throw a monkey wrench in our forecasts. Focus on the warming pattern. There are good reasons to focus on global warming but we also need to remember the 1.5°C and 2°C targets are not scientific. They are lines in the sand we have drawn for reference. We also know the warming pattern matters much more for how global warming will manifest in local weather patterns. The North Indian Ocean is affected by El Niños and the La Niñas as well as by the rapid warming over West Asia and the loss of sea ice over the Arctic. The Southern Ocean has a direct 'pipeline' to the tropical Indian Ocean through which warmer water can flow. Cyclone Fengal is a good example of how the global warming pattern mixes with natural modes of climate variability to keep producing unpredictable local weather patterns and extreme events. Our cyclone seasons have also become unusual.

The southwest and the northeast monsoons can provide additional moisture and energy sources for a cyclone even after it has completed landfall. Another good example of how challenging cyclone predictions have become is the mid-monsoon land-borne deep depression in 2024 that transitioned into becoming Cyclone Asna over the Arabian Sea before fizzling away. With all these uncertainties in mind, we must keep our eyes on global and regional warming patterns and their bout with natural climate modes to develop more reliable forecasts of chronic and acute climate stressors over the Indian subcontinent.

## Local action amidst global inertia



After hours of intense negotiations, the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) ended with a climate finance goal where developed countries are to provide \$300 billion annually by 2035. However, this is far from what the developing countries need, and once again brings global climate gridlock into the spotlight. No consensus

The notion that developed countries should finance climate action in developing nations while also ramping up their own mitigation efforts (such as taking the lead in phasing out fossil fuels and reaching net zero emissions faster) is accepted in principle, but has proven contentious to implement across COPs. The developed world continues to use fossil fuels to meet most of its demands and has no plans of reaching net zero before mid-century. The deadlock has remained a recurring theme at climate negotiations, and COP29 was unsurprisingly no exception. The powerful fossil fuel lobby, especially the oil and gas lobby; the developed world's heavy reliance on fossil fuels; the re-election of climate

change deniers; and the differential impacts of climate change across the globe (with the developing world more likely to be impacted than others) are all challenges that hinder reaching a consensus. Global negotiations are not useless. On the contrary, they are extremely important, even if the victories are few and far between. For instance, the Montreal Protocol, which came into force in 1989, has successfully helped protect the ozone layer and eliminate certain chemicals used in refrigeration (chlorofluorocarbons), a significant contributor to the depletion of the ozone layer. Similarly, the Kyoto Protocol, the first global accord on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which came into force in 2005; the 2015 Paris Agreement, a consensus on limiting global warming to 2 degrees Celsius with revised national targets every five years; and the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact, which introduced a loss and damage fund and in which nations declared their respective net-zero dates, are some of the milestone COPs to celebrate. However, unlike the melting of glaciers, the pace of action has been slow. Studies indicate that the 1.5 degrees Celsius target will

be breached within a few years, with one study even suggesting that it has already been exceeded. Scientific evidence warns that crossing this threshold will lead to severe consequences in terms of natural disasters and heat stress, which are already apparent across the world. In some instances, the changes expected are unknown and could be catastrophic. Further, studies also point to the fact that the earth's climate will continue to evolve even after global net zero is reached, but the longer we take to get there, the more significant the impact of climate change will be. India's efforts. Whether the goal is to limit global temperature rise to 1.5-2 degrees Celsius or condemn political aggressors for starting wars, the rate at which action is needed is exponential, but the rate at which it is realistically possible is incremental at best. So then, how do we reconcile these different scales (exponential versus incremental rates) of action? Our answer is to focus efforts on national and sub-national level action. In India, several policies and finance have already been put in place towards clean energy transition, assuming that international climate finance contri-

bution will be minimal. Being a developing country with several challenges, India has largely followed the co-benefits approach in addressing climate change. For instance, the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana provides households with subsidies to install rooftop solar panels, thereby also addressing energy poverty and access. The PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) initiative aims to promote the adoption of zero-emission vehicles, including two-wheelers, three-wheelers, ambulances, and trucks, offering purchase subsidies and supporting essential charging infrastructure to accelerate the transition to clean air and clean transportation. The Perform, Achieve, and Trade scheme, soon to be replaced by the Indian Carbon Market, helps mobilise investments needed to improve energy efficiency and emissions reduction in industries. It is important to note that India has been working hard on reducing its emissions intensity (CO2 per unit of GDP) as per its commitment to the Paris Agreement. Further, in addition to strategies for emissions mitigation, State Action Plans on Climate Change support adaptation strategies tailored to specific vulnerabilities of States and regions, with a focus on agriculture, forestry, water resources, and disaster risk reduction. While global consensus and funding remain elusive, local and national actions are making tangible progress. The hullabaloo around COPs from "non-parties" is less crucial than the need to drive action on the ground. India deserves praise for already taking steps in the right direction. Moving forward, sustained efforts in emissions mitigation, mindful consumption aligned with Mission LIFE,

# What is Centre's new Oilfields Bill? How will it change India's petroleum industry?



The story so far: Parliament's winter session has remained chilly as a stand-off continues between the Centre and Opposition over the indictment of Indian businessman Gautam Adani by the US Department of Justice (DoJ). The Rajya Sabha had listed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024 for passage on Monday (December 2, 2024), but the Upper House was quickly adjourned for the day without any legislative business being conducted. The Bill had been introduced in the Upper House during the Monsoon session. "This Bill aims to ensure policy stability for oil and gas producers and allow international arbitration," said Union Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri while speaking at the Geo India 2024 conference on November 15. Promising private sector companies 'zero interference' by the government, Mr. Puri also said that the Bill would enhance India's domestic output and cut down its reliance on oil imports.

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India's oil and petroleum imports for the past three quarters have been worth ₹4,121,787.4 million, ₹4,294,979.6 million and ₹3,130,294.1 million respectively. This is worth at least thrice the country's quarterly oil and petroleum exports. "For India to reduce its import dependence, the increase in domestic production must outpace the country's rapidly growing energy demand," explains Vivek Rahi, Partner, KPMG in India, adding, "Imports have largely remained unchanged in spite of policy measures aimed at boosting domestic production—such as the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP), the Discovered Small Fields (DSF) policy, gas pricing reforms, and reduced royalty rates for deepwater, ultra-deepwater, and high-pressure/high-temperature areas." Here's a look at the proposed amendments and how they will affect India's oil industry. Mineral oils definition and lease expanded. Currently, the petroleum industry is burdened by delays in obtaining environmental and forest clearances, complexities in land acquisition, absence of comprehensive standards, procedures, and guidelines for operational and safety compliance, explains Mr. Rahi. "India is believed to hold yet-to-find potential of 13 billion tons of oil equivalent. This bill addresses two critical issues to help India exploit these resources — separation of petroleum and mining activities and expanding the definition of mineral oils," he says.

In the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948, petroleum and natural gas were the only two defined as mineral oils. This Bill expands the definition to include coal bed methane, oil shale, shale gas, shale oil, tight gas,

tight oil, and gas hydrate, but does not include coal, lignite and helium occurring in the petroleum process. Subsequently, the Bill alters the previously used mining lease to introduce a 'petroleum lease' which allows companies to explore, prospect (search for oil and gas fields), produce, make merchantable, and dispose of mineral oils. Mining leases in use will remain valid. "The broader definition (of mineral oils) enables the efficient exploration, development, and production of both conventional and unconventional hydrocarbon resources without any policy confusion," says Mr. Rahi, adding, "This (separation of leases) eliminates redundant or irrelevant approvals, streamlining the regulatory framework." Expands Centre's regulatory powers, decriminalises offences. Under the Act, the Centre was empowered to regulate the grant, terms and conditions, and time period of leases, production, storage and conservation of mineral oils and collecting royalties, fees and taxes for mineral oils. This Bill expands the Centre's powers to include framing rules for lessees to reduce emissions, sharing of oil production and processing units, merger of leases and resolving disputes on leases. With India and the energy sector's focus on green technology, this Bill also urges oil companies to use oilfields for other purposes like hydrogen production, carbon capture utilization and storage or coal gasification.

Explaining how this is reflected in the current practices of the oil and gas industries, Mr. Rahi says, "The global industry is increasingly prioritizing decarbonization with methane capture, carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS), and other low-carbon technologies." Acknowledging that the current viability of such projects is subject to challenges, he adds, "government support, in the form of a policy direction to begin with and possible incentives in the future, could make these projects sustainable." Further, the Bill also decriminalises offences related to the above-mentioned petroleum activities, such as those pertaining to invalid leases and non-payment of royalties; however, it increases the monetary fine for them from Rs. 1000 to Rs 25 lakhs. Refuting any claims of avenues for misuse of the decriminalisation clause, Mr. Rahi stresses that it has been a long-standing demand of the industry, as many operators are increasingly outsourcing specific operations to optimize costs. "By shifting from criminal penalties to administrative fines for minor infractions, companies can focus on compliance and operational improvements without the fear of severe legal consequences. This will foster a more predictable environment, encourage innovation, and streamline the regulatory process," says Mr. Rahi. Opening up no-go areas to oil exploration. The Centre has allowed oil exploration within previously defined no-go areas, such as those near missile testing sites. In a recent bid, 1.36 lakh square kilometers of area was being offered, of which 38% had been previously marked no-go area, said Mr. Puri. This Bill is an attempt by the Centre to "catch up and make up for somewhat tardy or slow focus on implementation in the past" as oil exploration and production was not in focus for previous governments, says Mr. Puri. "While these reforms are designed to enhance exploration and production, achieving a meaningful reduction in import dependency will require a sustained and significant growth in domestic production, particularly in oil, natural gas, and deployment of renewable energy," Mr. Rahi says.

## The salience of the Places of Worship Act and the Gyanvapi precedent

A suit filed against the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal district, Uttar Pradesh, in which the trial court hastily issued an ex-parte order permitting a survey of the mosque triggered violence on November 24, resulting in the death of four persons. The petitioners have alleged that the 16th-century mosque was built at the site of an ancient Hari Har Mandir which was purportedly demolished by Mughal ruler Babur in 1529.

The incident is part of a pernicious trend of local courts in States like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh entertaining civil suits contesting the origins and character of mosques across the country. Experts have however flagged that such suits constitute a violation of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 (1991 Act), which freezes the character of religious sites as of August 15, 1947, and bars claims seeking to alter their status.

What the 1991 law stipulates. The 1991 Act was introduced by the Congress government under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao amid the communal turmoil that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. While introducing the Bill in the Lok Sabha, then Home Minister S.B. Chavan stated that the "enactment of this Bill will go a long way in helping restore communal amity and goodwill." The law preserves the character of a place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits courts from examining whether any place of worship has been altered since that date. Section 3 of the Act forbids the conversion—either in whole or in part—of a place of worship from one religious denomination to another, or even within different sects of the same religion. However, the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute in Ayodhya was explicitly exempted from the Act's purview, as the matter was already sub-judice when the law was enacted.

A five-judge Constitution Bench in the 2019 Ayodhya title suit affirmed that the law was designed to protect the secular fabric of the nation and imposes a positive obligation on the State to preserve the religious character of all places of worship as they stood on the day India attained independence. It more pithily stated that claims that stem from the actions of Mughal rulers against Hindu places of worship could not be entertained in a court of law today. Although the disputed site was awarded to the child deity Ram Lalla, the top court barred the institution of similar suits concerning other religious places, in accordance with the provisions of the 1991 Act. A slew of petitions have been filed in the apex court challenging the constitutionality of the law, including one by BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay. The petitioners argue that by freezing the status of religious sites as they stood in 1947, the law effectively prevents Hindus from "reclaiming" their places of worship that were allegedly "invaded" by Muslim rulers and British colonialists. They further point out that destroyed temples retain their original character under Hindu personal laws and cannot be considered valid mosques under Islamic law without the establishment of a waqf. In September 2022, a Bench led by then Chief Justice of India (CJI) U.U. Lalit directed the government to file a response on its stand within two weeks. However, two years later, the Centre has still not submitted its affidavit.

Noted academician Prof. (Dr.) Faizan Mustafa told The Hindu that the inordinate delay in hearing the challenge has emboldened lower courts to disregard the provisions of the 1991 law. "An authoritative pronouncement from the top court is crucial to preserving the country's social fabric. The government is duty-bound to defend the constitutionality of par-



Following the communal violence in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, Justice Chandrachud's oral remarks on the 1991 Act during the Gyanvapi case have sparked political controversy, with Congress claiming they have opened a Pandora's box. However, experts told

parliamentary laws. Similarly, the court must expedite the hearing of the challenge with a presumption in favour of the Act's constitutionality. A heavy burden lies on the petitioners to prove its unconstitutionality, he said. The Gyanvapi precedent. In August 2021, five women associated with the Vishwa Vedic Sanatan Sangh filed a petition in a Varanasi civil court seeking year-round access to pray at a shrine located behind the western wall of the Gyanvapi mosque complex. They claimed the mosque housed several Hindu deities.

On April 8, 2022, a Varanasi civil judge appointed an Advocate Commissioner to conduct a videographic survey to ascertain the alleged existence of these idols. The mosque committee challenged the order before the Allahabad High Court citing the 1991 Act. However, the High Court and later the Supreme Court refused to halt the survey. In May 2022, during a hearing on the maintainability of the suit, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud remarked that the 1991 Act does not preclude inquiries into the status of a place of worship as of August 15, 1947, provided there is no intent to alter or convert its character. This interpretation marked a stark departure from the stance taken in the Ayodhya verdict, also purportedly authored by the former CJI. It also effectively broadened the scope for district courts to entertain a host of similar petitions. For instance, the High Court adopted a similar reasoning to uphold the maintainability of suits in the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah dispute in Mathura. This oral remark has also recently sparked a political storm, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claiming that it has since opened a Pandora's box. "Oral observations hold no binding authority as they are not formally recorded in the order. The legislative intent of the 1993 Act could not have been any clearer — it explicitly bars even the admission of such suits. Such claims may only be considered if, on August 15, 1947, the site was unquestionably used by multiple religious communities, for instance, as both a temple and a mosque," explained Dr. Mustafa. "Law of the land." The Supreme Court is yet to decide the preliminary issue raised in several of these suits — whether the 1991 Act bars even the filing of pleas questioning the "original" status of a religious site or just the final alteration of its nature of worship. The apex court has not stayed any provision of the 1991 Act. It is the law of the land and lower courts are bound to enforce it," Dr. Mustafa added. Such revanchist suits also threaten to stoke communal tensions and reopen historical wounds, precisely the outcome the 1991 Act sought to avert.

## Love, sweat, and reps: How fitouples are redefining relationship goals



Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli just dropped a workout picture, and—boom—the internet went into meltdown mode. Is this you every time a celebrity couple shares a gym update? You're not alone. Many people dream of having a partner who's as much a fitness enthusiast as they are—or even better, someone who can nudge them into a healthier routine. And let's face it, the idea of posting those cutesy couple workout photos on social media is pretty tempting too. But relationships today are about more than just shared interests or common goals. Compatibility has evolved into a multi-faceted checklist, and fitness is quickly becoming a top priority for many couples. Enter fitouples—partners who sweat it out together, motivate each other, and set new standards for what it means to be #RelationshipGoals. Beyond just physical fitness, being a fitouple can improve emotional intimacy, strengthen communication, and transform your relationship in ways you might not expect.

Why fitouples are a thing now?

Ruchi Ruuh, a Delhi-based relationship counsellor, highlights how exercising as a couple can significantly boost relationship satisfaction. "Couples who work out together report higher daily relationship satisfaction compared to those who exercise alone," she says. This increase stems from shared positive experiences and enhanced emotional bonding during workouts. Physical intimacy is another key benefit. "Engaging in partnered exercise often leads to more affectionate and intimate moments, which can strengthen the emotional connection," Ruuh adds.

Couples who work out together report higher daily relationship satisfaction, say experts. (Photo: Unsplash) Joint health behaviours - such as maintaining a healthy diet and exercising together - also predict better health outcomes, which, in turn, boosts relationship satisfaction. "Happier couples tend to prioritise joint health behaviours, creating a positive feedback loop," she explains. Partner workouts require constant non-verbal communication—reading body language, adjusting form, or signalling for help. This practice, according to Chandni Tugnait, psychotherapist and founder of Gateway of Healing, enhances partners' ability to understand each other in daily life intuitively. Many fitouples

report a better grasp of each other's moods and needs without saying a word. It's also well-known that exercise triggers the release of feel-good chemicals like endorphins, dopamine, and adrenaline. Experiencing these together creates powerful memory imprints of shared joy. "Fitouples often feel a stronger emotional connection after a joint workout because of this natural chemical bonding," says Tugnait. Celebrity fitouples in today's social media-driven world, many people look to their favourite celebrity couples for inspiration, especially when it comes to fitness. Celebrities, who have access to the best trainers, nutritionists, and wellness experts, often share glimpses of their workout routines, and these posts can become aspirational for their fans. Take, for instance, the snippets Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli share from their shared sessions. These are not just proof of their strong relationship, but also their dedication to health. This sets a standard for couples looking to prioritise fitness together. Their photos radiate the kind of shared effort and mutual support that many fans dream of. Similarly, Shahid Kapoor and Mira Rajput - they might not have time to workout together often, but when they do, they never miss putting it on the gram.

Jyotika and Suriya, one of Tamil cinema's most beloved couples, are another excellent example of how shared fitness routines can strengthen a relationship. Known for their commitment to both their careers and family life, this dynamic duo also makes time to stay fit together. Whether it's Suriya's dedication to martial arts or Jyotika's passion for yoga and fitness, they maintain a healthy lifestyle that has become a source of inspiration for many. Real-life fitouples: Building love through fitness. Jitika Gupta, marketing director at BigMuscles Nutrition, shares how her fitness journey with her husband, evolved over time. "I've always been a fitness enthusiast, but having Suhel Vats (founder of BigMuscles Nutrition) as a partner has taken it to another level. We inspire and influence each other," she says. For Jitika, having a fitness-focused partner has been a game-changer. "We bond over our workouts. It's our stress buster and helps us stay connected despite our busy schedules." Gayatri and Aditya are another power couple who transformed their lives through fitness. "In December 2015, Aditya was 72 kg with 24 per cent body fat. His goal was to get fit and avoid health issues like diabetes," shares Gayatri. Inspired by her husband's journey, Gayatri followed suit, reducing her body fat from 32 per cent to 18 per cent, and now sports six-pack abs. For Gayatri, the best part of their fitness journey is having a partner who's also her best friend and coach. "We've been married for 19 years, but it feels like we're newlyweds. Our shared fitness routine keeps us young." More than just fitness: Being a fitouple isn't just about hitting the gym together—it's about building a relationship based on mutual support, shared goals, and a healthier, happier life.

## Paddy farming at a crossroads in Kerala



On the quiet banks of the Pampa river at Thakazhi in Alappuzha district, a modest, weathered building buzzes with activity. In the heart of Kuttanad, a wetland ecosystem historically popular as Kerala's rice bowl and spread across Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts, a group of seasoned paddy farmers have gathered to collect paddy seeds, offered free of charge by the government, for the upcoming pancha (summer/crop-II, November-April) season. The farmers, following their regular preparations, ready themselves for another season in the ever-challenging world of paddy cultivation. "These days, there is no guarantee of recovering the money spent on paddy cultivation, let alone making a profit," says Mathew Thomas, a veteran paddy farmer, as he loads sacks of paddy seeds into a vehicle.

Thomas cultivated paddy on 5.5 acres during the last pancha season but incurred significant losses which led him to skip farming in the subsequent crop season (crop-I, May-October). "Poor rainfall and intense heat affected the crop. The average yield I got was only one tonne per acre, far below the 2-2.5 tonnes I used to harvest from an acre during normal pancha seasons. A yield of more than 1.5 tonnes per acre is essential just to cover the production cost," Thomas explains. Santhosh K., another farmer, says his average yield was 700 kg per acre. "There was a time when a family could make a living by cultivating paddy, but that is no longer possible. Paddy farming is becoming increasingly unprofitable. Why do I still cultivate paddy? The answer is sheer passion," says Santhosh.

A few hundred metres from the seed distribution centre lies the 320-acre Aivelikkad paddy polder situated below sea level between the Pampa and Manimala rivers and accessible only by boat. After skipping the recent crop cycle (crop-I), the polder, where 144 farmers cultivate paddy, is filled with water in preparation for the pancha season. "It was the first time in recent history that we completely abandoned paddy cultivation in the additional (crop-I) season, having suffered huge losses in the pancha season due to poor yield," says Chackappan Antony, president, Aivelikkad paddy polder.

According to him, the majority of farmers at Aivelikkad harvested less than 1.5 tonnes per acre in the pancha season. He says that a yield of one tonne per acre fetches ₹28,200, while the cost of cultivating one acre of paddy is around ₹35,000 [the cost of paddy farming is higher in this region due to its geographical peculiarities]. "We hope that nature will be kinder this season," Antony says. While paddy farmers across the Kuttanad region and other parts of Kerala have similar stories to share about the last pancha season, the issues in the sector go beyond it. Problems in the paddy sector, driven by a complex interplay of factors, are raising alarm bells. If searing heat was the issue during the pancha season, recent years have seen washouts due to recurring floods. Issues in paddy procurement, long delays in receiving the procurement price, and high labour costs are some of the main challenges adding to farmers' troubles. As per the data provided by the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation (Supplyco), the designated agency for paddy procurement in the State under the Department of Food and Civil Supplies, paddy procurement dropped by 23.5% in Kerala, falling to 5.59 lakh tonnes in 2023-24 from 7.31 lakh tonnes in 2022-23.

But this data may not be entirely reliable, as there have been allegations in the past that farmers in the Palakkad region, bordering Tamil Nadu, brought paddy from the neighbouring State to avail themselves of Supplyco's better procurement offer, due to the lower cost of production there. The absence of this practice could also have contributed to the decline in procurement figures, according to experts. In 2023-24, Supplyco managed to procure only 1.54 lakh tonnes of paddy during crop-I and 4.05 lakh tonnes in crop-II compared to 2.27 lakh tonnes in crop-I and 5.04 lakh tonnes in crop-II the previous year. In 2021-22, the agency procured 7.48 lakh tonnes when combining both crop seasons.

In Palakkad, the leading rice-producing district in the State, procurement fell to 1.83 lakh tonnes in 2023-24 from 2.92 lakh tonnes in 2022-23. Alappuzha, the second-highest paddy-producing district, saw a reduction from 1.69 lakh tonnes to 1.60 lakh tonnes over the same period. Alongside the decline in procurement, the season witnessed a decrease in paddy acreage and the number of farmers. In 2022-23, Supplyco procured paddy from 2.5 lakh farmers who cultivated it in 1.82 lakh hectares (ha). This dropped to around two lakh farmers who cultivated the crop in 1.71 lakh ha a year after. According to the Economic Review-2023 by the Kerala State Planning Board, rice production in the State reported a slight increase from 5.59 lakh tonnes in 2021-22 to 5.93 lakh tonnes in 2022-23, even as the area under cultivation declined from 1.94 lakh ha to 1.90 lakh ha over the same period. The report also notes that in 2020-21, rice production in the State was 6.27 lakh tonnes with 2.02 lakh ha under cultivation. It further highlights that from 8.75 lakh ha in 1970-71, the area under paddy cultivation in Kerala dropped to 1.90 lakh hectares in 2022-23. "All the districts, except Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, and Kottayam recorded a decline in area under paddy in 2022-23 compared to 2021-22," the report notes. The latest data are awaited as the Economic Review 2024 has not been published yet. Experts and farmers attribute the declining paddy cultivation, especially the poor yield in the last pancha season, to various factors, including climate vagaries. M. Surendran, Professor and Head, M.S. Swaminathan Rice Research Station, Moncompu, says climate change is becoming a major threat to paddy cultivation. "Each year, the mean minimum

temperature is rising, leading to an increase in the average maximum temperature. In general, the ideal average minimum temperature for paddy flowering used to be between 16°C and 20°C in the morning. However, in January and February 2024, the average minimum temperature was between 23.5°C and 25°C. This increased daily mean average temperature affected flowering, fertilisation, and yield," Surendran notes. As per the data from the research station, the region received only 76.1 mm of rainfall in December 2023, compared to 168 mm during the same period a year earlier. Rainfall in January 2024 was just 6.5 mm, with no rain at all in February. "The lack of rainfall led to increased heat, which raised soil acidity levels and impacted the crop. It is crucial to receive adequate rainfall between 30 and 60 days after sowing to keep acidity in check. Though the region recorded 76.1 mm of rainfall in December, it did not help because most sowed late. Farmers need to adhere to the crop calendar and suitable variety to better manage the changing climatic conditions," Surendran says. Around 9 km from Thakazhi lies Edathua in Kuttanad. Farmers at the 200-acre Vadakara Edassery Varambinakam paddy polder are hard at work, many with their feet stuck in the mud as they prepare the fields for the pancha season. More than a month ago, the polder was harvested using combine harvesters. As the yield from crop-I was below expectations, a look of disappointment was writ large on the farmers' faces. "In the last pancha season, we got an average yield of 1.75 tonnes per acre. However, in the additional (crop-I) season, the yield fell below one tonne," says Cyriac Jose, secretary, Vadakara Edassery Varambinakam.

Apart from low yield, farmers are frustrated with the government's "flawed" procurement policy, which often leads to delays in the procurement of harvested paddy and payments, as well as its reluctance to increase the paddy procurement price. Farmers of Vadakara Edassery Varambinakam are disappointed that they are yet to receive payments for the paddy procured in October.

Paddy farmers in the State receive procurement amounts from banks as post-harvest credit upon presenting the paddy receipt sheet issued by Supplyco. The government later reimburses these amounts with interest to the banks. Though this system was designed to prevent delays in receiving both the Central and State government shares, farmers have experienced significant delays in getting payments in recent years. "Stricter State-specific procurement policies and delays in payment for the procured produce have been deterring factors for a good number of farmers, forcing them to opt for private markets, even when the farm harvest price is much lower than the procurement price," notes P. Indiradevi, Professor and Director of Research (Retired), Kerala Agricultural University. According to her, the procurement system can be made more efficient and effective through the involvement of cooperative institutions. Farmers preparing fields for paddy farming (pancha/crop-II) at Thakazhi in Kuttanad, Alappuzha. In the case of procurement price, it has remained unchanged at ₹28.20 a kg since 2022-23. In 2021-22, Supplyco procured paddy from farmers across the State at ₹28 a kg, including the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹19.40 provided by the Union government and ₹8.60 as the State's share. The following year, when the Centre raised the MSP by ₹1 to ₹20.40, the State increased the overall price by only 20 paise to ₹28.20, reducing its contribution to ₹7.80.

In 2023-24, the Centre further increased the MSP by ₹1.43, but the State offset this by lowering its share by the same amount, keeping the procurement price unchanged. The Centre again raised the MSP by ₹1.17 to ₹23 in June this year, but there has been no corresponding increase from the State yet. The State government began reducing its share in 2021-22, cutting it by a total of ₹2.43 between then and 2023-24. If it decides not to raise the procurement price in 2024-25, the State's share will drop to ₹5.20.

While the authorities claim that paddy farmers in the State receive better prices than in other States, farmers note that high production costs and unpredictable weather conditions make paddy farming a loss-making venture. Soneyken Pulinkunnu, general secretary, Nel Karshaka Samrakshana Samiti, says if the State government had not reduced its share in recent years, paddy farmers would now be receiving over ₹32 a kg. "According to Supplyco data, paddy procurement stood at 5.59 lakh tonnes in 2023-24. When converted to rice, this amounts to less than four lakh tonnes. The government spends crores purchasing rice from the open market, cultivated in other States, to meet the demand. Yet it is not committed to promoting agriculture. Thousands of hectares of farmland lie idle across the State and available data indicate that over one lakh people have quit farming in recent years," argues Pulinkunnu.

An expert committee led by retired IAS officer V.K. Baby submitted its report on improving the paddy procurement system as part of a proposed revamp in the State, several months ago, but the government is yet to act on its recommendations. Though the government has not officially released the report, it reportedly contains several suggestions to make the paddy procurement process more transparent and end irregularities. Agriculture Minister P. Prasad, in response to a question in the Assembly recently, stated that steps had been initiated to procure paddy from farmers and transfer payments to their accounts without delay in the 2024-25 season. "The Agriculture department is providing full support to paddy farmers and working to prevent a reduction in the area under paddy cultivation in the State. The department strives to ensure maximum production by providing high-quality, high-yield paddy seeds and offering technical guidance for adopting scientific cultivation methods," the Minister had said in a written reply in the Assembly. Even as the government attempts to increase paddy production, the rice-loving State is set to continue to depend on other States to meet its annual demand of around 40 lakh tonnes of rice for the foreseeable future.

## Scientists gather to decode puzzle of world's rarest whale

It is the world's rarest whale, with only seven of its kind ever spotted. Almost nothing is known about the enigmatic species. But on Monday a small group of scientists and cultural experts in New Zealand clustered around a near-perfectly preserved spade-toothed whale hoping to decode decades of mystery. "I can't tell you how extraordinary it is," said a joyful Anton van Helden, senior marine science adviser for New Zealand's conservation agency, who gave the spade-toothed whale its name to distinguish it from other beaked species. "For me personally, it's unbelievable." Van Helden has studied beaked whales for 35 years, but Monday was the first time he has participated in a dissection of the spade-toothed variety. In fact, the careful study of the creature -- which washed up dead on a New Zealand beach in July -- is the first ever to take place. None has ever been seen alive at sea. The list of what scientists don't know about spade-toothed whales is longer than what they do know. They don't know where in the ocean the whales live, why they've never been spotted in the wild, or what their brains look like. All beaked whales have different stomach systems and researchers don't know how the spade-toothed kind processes its food. They don't know how this one died. Over the next week, researchers studying the 5-metre (16-foot)-long male at an agricultural research centre near the city of Dunedin hope to find out.



ervation. The first spade-toothed whale bones were found in 1872 on New Zealand's Pitt Island. Another discovery was made at an offshore island in the 1950s, and the bones of a third were found on Chile's Robinson Crusoe Island in 1986. DNA sequencing in 2002 proved that all three specimens were of the same species -- and that it was distinct from other beaked whales. But researchers studying the mammal couldn't confirm whether the species was extinct until 2010, when two whole spade-toothed whales, both dead, washed up on a New Zealand beach. But none has been studied before. On Monday, the seventh of its kind, surrounded by white-aproned scientists who were measuring and photographing, appeared relatively unblemished, giving no clue about its death. Researchers pointed out marks from cookiecutter sharks -- normal, they said, and not the cause. The dissection will be quiet, methodical and slower than usual, because it is being undertaken in partnership with Maori, New Zealand's Indigenous people. To Maori, whales are a taonga -- a precious treasure -- and the creature will be treated with the reverence afforded to an ancestor. Members of the local iwi, or tribe, will be present throughout the dissection and consulted at each turn, allowing them to share traditional knowledge and observe customs, such as saying a karakia -- a prayer -- over the creature before the study begins.

"There may be parasites completely new to science that just live in this whale," said van Helden, who thrilled at the chance of learning how the species produces sound and what it eats. "Who knows what we'll discover?" Only six other spade-toothed whales have ever been found, but all those discovered intact were buried before DNA testing could verify their identification.

New Zealand is a whale-stranding hotspot, with more than 5,000 episodes recorded since 1840, according to the Department of Con-

servations and our traditions, this whale is a gift of Tangaroa, deity of the ocean," said Tumai Cassidy from the local people Te Runanga Otakou. "It's very important for us to respect that gift and to honour the whale." The iwi will keep the jawbone and teeth of the whale at the end of the dissection, before its skeleton is displayed in a museum. 3D printing will be used to replicate those parts, using a CT scan taken of the whale's head this week. "It all builds a richer picture for that species but also tells us how it interacts with our oceans," Cassidy said. It's thought that spade-toothed whales live in the vast Southern Pacific Ocean, home to some of the

world's deepest ocean trenches. Beaked whales are the ocean's deepest divers for food, and the spade-toothed may rarely surface, adding to its mystery. The assembled scientists on Monday included a few who had travelled from abroad to see the whale, which was put in refrigerated storage after its discovery. "What we are interested in is not only how these animals died, but how they lived," said Joy Reidenberg, a comparative anatomist from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. "In discovering how they live, we are hoping to find discoveries that we can apply back to the human condition."

## VR headset to detect defects in the eye

Hyderabad: Remember eye specialists swinging a small torchlight between the two eyes to detect defects in the black portion of the eye (pupils)? While such a traditional method totally depends on the doctor's judgment and surroundings, a group of researchers from Hyderabad have now come up with a fool-proof Virtual Reality (VR) based headset called as VR headset-pupillometer to detect defects in the pupil. The VR headset not only reduces the need for torchlight, but also enables the eye specialists even in remote locations to diagnose optic neuropathies, disorders that arise from a damaged optic nerve, more accurately and efficiently. The results of a pilot study, utilizing the VR headset, developed by researchers from Hyderabad-based L.V. Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI), were published 'Frontiers of Ophthalmology' (September, 2024), demonstrated the ability of the device in accurate diagnosis. The LVPEI researchers, Rahul Negi, Manasa Kalivemula, Karan Bisht, Manjushree Bhate, Virender Sachdevia and Dr Shrikant R Bharadwaj, took a dedicated pupillometer (which detects the size of the pupil) developed and modularized it such that it can be integrated into a commercially available VR headset with built-in eye tracking capability, they explained.

## Thales announces launch of Data Risk Intelligence

Hyderabad: Thales recently announced the launch of Data Risk Intelligence, an Imperva Data Security Fabric (DSF) solution that addresses the risks to data wherever it resides. The combined intelligence and contextual insights from Data Risk Intelligence provide a unified visibility of risks to critical data with a unique view of the strength of encryption for data across an organisation's entire data estate, a press release said.

With the enhanced visibility, Data Risk Intelligence empowers CIOs, CISOs, and data risk specialists to accurately identify the most critical data that are at risk by sever-

ity and likelihood, enabling them to effectively prioritise risk mitigation with clear recommendations for corrective action, it said. Thales data security products vice president Todd Moore said the ability to view data risk in key dimensions across organisational risk, asset risk, and regulatory risk in one place is extremely impactful. "Data Risk Intelligence is the first of many integrations between the Thales and Imperva platforms that empower our customers to protect their data and all the paths to it. Through our combined platforms, Thales has all the tools to help our customers understand their data security risks and provide a clear set of actions to mitigate these risks," Moore added.

"According to our be-

## Fresh US-China trade war breaks over chips, 'connecting economies' like India could gain



In what hints at the trade relation between the United States (US) and China going forward under incoming President Donald Trump, the two largest economies have got into a fresh tit-for-tat trade restriction. After the US announced export restrictions on computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips, China on Tuesday retaliated by banning export of gallium, germanium, antimony, and other key high-tech materials to the US. The fresh trade war assumes significance as "connecting economies" that are preserved as neutral and do not fall into the US or China camp, such as India, have benefited from the geopolitical tensions between the US and China since Trump's first term. As China's export share in the US saw a decline from 2019, countries like Vietnam, Mexico, and India have witnessed an increase in export opportunities to the US.

China on Tuesday said it is banning export of gallium, germanium, antimony, and other key high-tech materials with potential military applications. Beijing had earlier, too, partly restricted exports of strategically important materials by asking exporters to apply for licences. The Chinese Commerce Ministry announced the move after the US expanded its list of Chinese companies subject to export controls on computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips. In a speech earlier this year, First Deputy Managing Director at International Monetary Fund (IMF) Gita Gopinath had said that evidence suggests non-aligned countries (such as India) did not play an important

role serving as connectors between rival blocs during the Cold War — likely because they had a much smaller economic footprint, and global supply chains were not yet developed. But today they have greater economic and diplomatic heft and are much more integrated into the global economy and their role as connectors this time can help attenuate some of the costs of fragmentation.

Gopinath had compared current trade fragmentation with that of the Cold War-period, stating that trade between rival Western and Eastern blocs was significantly depressed during the Cold War, relative to trade within these blocs. "Thus far, today's fragmentation is not significantly different from the initial years of the Cold War. However, compared to the average 'between-bloc trade shortfall' during the entire Cold-War-period, fragmentation so far is an order of magnitude smaller," she said. Explaining her cause of concern during the current period, Gopinath said that trade fragmentation is much more costly this time around because unlike the start of the Cold War when the ratio of goods trade to GDP was 16 per cent, now that ratio is 45 per cent. "Moreover, while back then countries within a bloc were taking off trade restrictions, now we are in an environment of growing protectionism with several countries turning inward. The potential role of non-aligned countries in the current trade frictions also makes the situation today different from the Cold War experience," she said. Notably, India is planning to increase the funding outlay for chip manufacturing incentive policy to \$15 billion from the \$10 billion it had committed for the first phase. Tata is building India's first commercial fabrication plant along with its Taiwanese partner Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) for a cost of more than Rs 91,000 crore. The government has also approved three assembly and testing plants, which are called ATMP and OSAT in chip parlance. The assembly and testing plants are less complex than the semiconductor fabrication plant. The first of these three plants was approved in June 2023, and is being built by US-based Micron Technology. Tata is building an assembly plant in Assam while the third facility is being built by CG Power and Industrial Solutions of the Murugappa Group, in partnership with Renesas Electronics of Japan.

## Rupee recovers from all-time low, rises 3 paise to 84.69 against US dollar

The rupee recovered from its all-time low level and settled for the day with gains of just 3 paise at 84.69 (provisional) against the US dollar in a range-bound trade on Tuesday, amid a positive trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said the rupee has been on a downturn largely on the back of Donald Trump's rhetoric on BRICS currency, political instability in the Eurozone, weaker domestic macroeconomic indicators and unabated foreign portfolio outflows. US President-elect Trump on Saturday threatened a 100 per cent tariff on BRICS nations if they act to undermine the US dollar. Moreover, market participants are also awaiting cues from the upcoming RBI monetary policy on December 6, which will likely focus on balancing inflation and growth. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.75 and moved in a narrow range and touched an intra-day high of 84.64 and an all-time low of 84.76 against the greenback. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 12 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.72 against the dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.18 per cent at 106.25. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose by 1.11 per cent to USD 72.63 per barrel in futures trade.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary on Monday said in Parliament that the rupee remains one of the best-performing Asian currencies despite geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and other headwinds, indicating India's sound economic fundamentals. One of the main reasons for the depreciation of INR has been the broad-based strength of the USD, he said. "During CY 2024, Dollar Index has increased by about 4.8 per cent till November 19, 2024. More recently, the Dollar Index touched 108.07 on



November 22, 2024, its highest in more than a year, exerting pressure on emerging market currencies," he said. Further, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and uncertainty surrounding US elections results also added to the headwinds. The depreciation of a currency is likely to enhance export competitiveness, which in turn impacts the economy positively. On the other hand, depreciation may raise the prices of imported goods.

He further said, the RBI monitors key developments across the globe which may have an impact on USD-INR exchange rate. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed 597.67 points, or 0.74 per cent higher, at 80,845.75. The Nifty rose 181.10 points, or 0.75 per cent, to settle at 24,457.15. Traders said the persistent selling pressure by foreign funds added further strain on the currency. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 238.28 crore, according to exchange data.

## IndiGo takes Mahindra Electric to court alleging trademark infringement after automaker uses '6e' in name of new electric SUV



India's largest airline IndiGo has filed a case in the Delhi High Court against automobile major Mahindra & Mahindra's (M&M's) electric mobility arm, Mahindra Electric Automobile (MEAL), for using the airline's identifier code 6E in the name of its recently unveiled electric vehicle BE 6e. IndiGo has the registration for the "6E" trademark and uses it extensively in its branding and advertising. "The '6E' mark is an integral part of IndiGo's identity for the past 18 years and is a registered trademark that holds strong global recognition. The '6E' mark, whether standalone or in its variants and formative forms, is extensively used by IndiGo for its offerings and for goods and services provided in collaboration with trusted partners. Any unauthorised use of the "6E" mark, whether standalone or in any form, constitutes an infringement of IndiGo's rights, reputation, and goodwill. IndiGo is committed to taking all necessary and appropriate steps to safeguard its intellectual property and brand identity," the airline said in a statement. MEAL unveiled its electric-origin SUVs — BE 6e and XEV 9e — on November 26, and has applied for trademark registration for "BE 6e". In a filing with the stock exchanges, M&M said that it does not see any conflict with IndiGo pertaining the trademarks, and that along with MEAL, it is in talks with the airline to arrive at an "amicable solution". "...the Company (M&M) does not see a conflict as Mahindra's mark is 'BE 6e', not the standalone '6E'. It differs fundamentally from IndiGo's '6E', which represents an airline, eliminating any risk of confusion. The distinct styling further emphasizes their uniqueness," M&M said, add-

ing that the trademark registration filed by MEAL is specifically for vehicle class. "The Company and MEAL has taken on board the concerns that InterGlobe Aviation Limited ('IndiGo') have to infringement of their goodwill, which was not our intention. The Company and MEAL are engaged in discussions with them to find an amicable solution," the automobile company said. The case came up for hearing before the Delhi High Court on Tuesday, and is now likely to come up for hearing next week. The starting price for the BE 6e is Rs 18.90 lakh and it will be launched in a phased manner from January-end. MEAL expects to start deliveries towards the end of February or early March.

## Sumadhura Group eyes Rs.2,500 crore revenue with new uber luxury residential offering

Hyderabad: Sumadhura Group, a leading real estate player in South India will develop Palais Royale, an uber luxury project in Hyderabad with an estimated revenue potential of Rs.2,500 crore. Nestled in proximity to the thriving Financial District, Palais Royale will offer the residents a seamless connectivity to major business hubs, entertainment zones, and lifestyle destinations. It will spread across 7.35 acres of land parcel with a saleable area of 2.6 mn sq. ft, feature a magnificent 52-storeyed high-rise tower spread across three wings, and compose of 523 units of 4 & 5 bed residences. The project will also include five levels of basement parking, to be handed over in December 2029. Along with the high-end residences, the project will comprise a wide array of luxurious amenities and biophilic designs, inspired by a unique blend of nature and technology. Palais Royale will house an 85,000 sq. ft floating grand clubhouse, over 85% landscape area, and cutting-edge Luxury Tech integrations, a press release said.

## 'Arey, aurat kyu sex ke baare mein baat kar rahi hai?': Ahsaas Channa highlights the stigma around women's sexual desires



In an interview with Hauterfly, the actor highlighted how society often places excessive importance on male pleasure, celebrating men's sexual experiences as a form of achievement. "If a woman is saying, 'I've not had sex for a very long time, I'm h\*\*ny'... and they just flip calling her a s\*\*t (sic)." She continued, "Male pleasure ko bohot zyada mahatwa diya jaata hai... ki 'tu score kiya... arey tujhe sex kyu nahi mill raha hai' (Male pleasure is given too much importance... like 'you scored... why aren't you getting sex?')." But if we say the same thing to a woman, then it's frowned upon... ki arey, aurat kyu sex ke baare mein baat kar rahi hai? (Like, why is a woman talking about sex?) This disparity in how male and female sexual behaviour is perceived reflects deeper societal biases that influence how women's worth is often linked to their sexual history.

Why are there such stark double standards?

Gurleen Baruah, existential psychotherapist at That Culture Thing, says, "Much of it stems from deeply ingrained societal and cultural narratives. Historically, men were seen as protectors and providers, roles that associated them with dominance, autonomy, and control. Over time, this dominance extended to how their sexual behaviours were viewed." On the other hand, women were traditionally assigned the role of nurturers, with their worth tied to purity and chastity. Their sexuality was policed under the guise of protection, reinforcing the belief that women's sexual autonomy needed to be controlled, often by men. Even today, she admits, these perceptions persist, reinforced by media, cultural conditioning, and outdated beliefs. "Men are often praised for their sexual experiences, which are seen as

achievements, while women face judgment and derogatory labels for similar choices. There's also a lingering notion, rooted in outdated evolutionary psychology, that men are naturally wired to seek variety. At the same time, women are biologically programmed for selectivity and nurturing—ideas that have little scientific grounding yet continue to shape societal attitudes." Baruah stresses, "The irony is that we no longer live in a world where these traditional roles hold relevance. Women are just as autonomous and capable as men and sexuality should be seen as a personal and equal experience." Creating a supportive environment where women can express their sexuality without fear starts with comprehensive sexual education that normalises conversations on consent, equality, and patriarchy from a young age. Creating a supportive environment where women can express their sexuality without fear starts with comprehensive sexual education that normalises conversations on consent, equality, and patriarchy from a young age. (Source: Freepik)

Role of s\*\*t-shaming in perpetuating harmful gender norms around sexuality S\*\*t-shaming is a harmful practice rooted in traditional gender norms and patriarchal values, targeting women who openly discuss or express their sexuality. "By labelling them with derogatory terms like 's\*\*t' or 'wh\*\*e,' society seeks to control their autonomy and confine them to outdated roles of submissiveness and restraint," highlights Baruah. This judgment is perpetuated by both men and women, reflecting deep-seated fears about female sexual agency. The psychological toll is profound, Baruah says, often leading to lowered self-esteem, shame, and even behaviors driven by rebellion or a need for validation. Slut-shaming is not about morality; it is a tool of control that undermines women's worth, autonomy, and equality. Creating a healthier, more supportive environment where women feel comfortable expressing their sexual desires Creating a supportive environment where women can express their sexuality without fear starts with comprehensive sexual education that normalises conversations on consent, equality, and patriarchy from a young age. Baruah says that addressing patriarchal systems that control women's sexuality is essential, advocating for autonomy and equality in all spheres. Media, families, and institutions must model positive discussions and celebrate diverse experiences of desire.

## Air pollution causes male infertility while prolonged exposure to road traffic noise causes female infertility: Study

A study published in the BMJ Journal recently has linked exposure to two common environmental factors — air pollution and road traffic noise — to infertility in men and women. According to the study, long-term exposure to particulate matter (PM2.5) has a significant impact on male fertility, while women, particularly those above the age of 35, are more affected by prolonged exposure to road traffic noise. Researchers mentioned, "Among men, we observed that exposure to PM2.5 was associated with a higher risk of infertility, with similar sized hazard ratios in the two investigated age groups (30-36.9 and 37-45 years)."

It further added, "Among women, noise was associated with a higher risk of infertility in the 35-45 age group, whereas no association was observed in the 30-34.9 age group." Infertility is already a growing concern globally, with various factors including lifestyle choices, health conditions, and now, environmental factors playing a critical role. This study sheds light on how invisible pollutants can interfere with reproductive health, posing new challenges to both public health and individual well-being.

How does exposure to particulate matter (PM2.5) lead to reduced sperm count or impaired sperm quality in men?

Dr Suri Raju V, senior consultant urologist at Regal Superspecialty Hospital, Bengaluru, highlights that exposure to PM2.5, tiny particles less than 2.5 micrometres, is increasingly recognised as a significant factor affecting male fertility. These particles, when inhaled, enter the bloodstream and cause harm, primarily by inducing oxidative stress. PM2.5 contains toxic elements like heavy metals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that generate reactive oxygen species (ROS). "Excessive ROS can damage sperm DNA, membranes, and impair sperm motility, leading to reduced sperm count and quality. Additionally, PM2.5 can disrupt hormone production, particularly testosterone, further impairing sperm production. It also triggers systemic inflammation, affecting reproductive organs like the testes, contributing to male infertility," he mentions. When exposure to high levels of air pollution is unavoidable, such as during commuting, wearing N95 masks can help filter out PM2.5 particles. When exposure to high levels of air pollution is unavoidable, such as during commuting, wearing N95 masks can help filter out PM2.5 particles. (Source: Freepik)

Specific biological mechanisms triggered by noise pollution that might lead to infertility in women The link between road traffic noise and infertility, particularly in women over 35, highlights the impact of environmental stress on reproductive health, says Dr Suri Raju. Prolonged noise exposure triggers several biological mechanisms that can affect fertility: Chronic Stress: Continuous noise above 55 decibels activates the stress response, raising cortisol levels, which can disrupt reproductive hormones like oestrogen and progesterone. This may lead to irregular menstrual cycles or conditions like anovulation (absence of ovulation) and amenorrhea (absence of menstruation).

Sleep Disruption: Noise pollution affects sleep, reducing melatonin levels, which are crucial for ovarian function and fertility. For women over 35, this exacerbates age-related fertility decline. Oxidative Stress and Inflammation: Noise increases oxidative stress and inflammation, potentially harming egg quality and endometrial receptivity. It can also contribute to conditions like endometriosis or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), which impact fertility. Cardiovascular and Metabolic Effects: Noise pollution is linked to hypertension and metabolic disorders, which affect blood flow to reproductive organs and can lead to fertility issues like PCOS. Preventive measures individuals can take to minimise exposure to air pollution and traffic noise With increasing evidence linking environmental pollutants like air pollution and noise to infertility, individuals, particularly those living in urban areas, can take several proactive steps to minimise their exposure, according to Dr Suri Raju: Air Quality Awareness: Staying informed about the air quality in your area is a crucial first step. On days when the air quality is poor, avoid outdoor activities, especially during peak traffic hours when pollution levels are at their highest. Indoor Air Quality Management: In addition to using air purifiers, regular ventilation and the use of houseplants known for their air-purifying properties, such as snake plants and



peace lilies, can help improve indoor air quality. Regularly cleaning and vacuuming with HEPA-filtered devices can also reduce particulate matter buildup indoors. Personal Protective Measures: When exposure to high levels of air pollution is unavoidable, such as during commuting, wearing N95 masks can help filter out PM2.5 particles. Using protective eyewear can also reduce irritation from airborne pollutants, which may indirectly affect overall health and well-being. Noise Reduction Strategies: For those exposed to constant road traffic noise, investing in soundproofing measures at home, such as double-glazed windows, heavy curtains, or soundproof panels, can significantly reduce indoor noise levels. Noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs can be used during sleep or relaxation to minimise noise disturbances.

## Yashoda Hospitals doctors treat 'lung attack' successfully for first time in India using Inari device



Hyderabad: Doctors at Yashoda Hospital have treated 'lung attack' successfully for the first time in India using Inari device. Mali Rishikesh, a 20-year-old student from Karimnagar district, was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition after a blood clot formed in the pulmonary artery, the blood vessel that carries oxygen-depleted blood from the heart to the lungs. The blood flow to the lungs was stopped due to a "pulmonary embolism".

For the first time in India, Yashoda Hospitals doctors removed the blood clots using a state-of-the-art medical device called 'pulmonary thrombectomy' and gave Rishikesh a new life. Yashoda Hospitals group, Director, Dr. Pavan Gorukanti, said Pulmonary embolism (PE) is like heart attack or brain stroke where a blood clot that typically originates from the deep veins of the legs breaks loose and travels through the bloodstream to the lungs, blocking a pulmonary artery or one of its branches.

## Ahead of Manchester United's visit to Arsenal, Ruben Amorim warns: 'Storm will come'



EMS News Agency, Dec 6 Despite an unbeaten start to his stint as the Manchester United manager, Ruben Amorim has warned his players on the eve of the Premier League trip to Arsenal that 'the storm will come' and there will be difficult times ahead. The 39-year-old has had a promising start to his tenure after taking over from Erik ten Hag last month, winning two games and drawing one. However, facing title contenders Arsenal at their home on Wednesday will be his toughest challenge yet. "The storm will come,"

Amorim said, according to the Guardian. "We are going to have difficult moments and we will be found out in some games. And I know that because I know my players and I know football and I follow football." Amorim's United beat Everton 4-0 on Sunday with youngster Amad Diallo shining under the new manager. However, Amorim admitted the team faced a 'lot of problems' after they changed the way they were building up and that his team is at a 'different point' compared to Arsenal. "I understand the difference between the teams and we are in the point in that we are putting simple things in the team, without training, and you feel it in game against Everton: they changed a little bit the way they were building up. They are a very good team, and we had a lot of problems because we cannot change it by calling one thing to the captain. We don't have this training, so let's focus on each game, on the performance, what we have to improve, trying to win games." "I know it's really hard to be a Manchester United coach and say these things. We want to win all the time, no matter what, we are going to try to win, but we know we are at a different point, if compared to Arsenal. We go with confidence to win, but we know we need to play very well to win."

## India express preference for training sessions being closed for crowd

GNS News Agency, Feb 27

A day after more than 5000 spectators watched the Rohit Sharma led Indian team practice at the Adelaide Oval ahead of the second Pink Ball Test match of the Border Gavaskar Trophy starting December 6, it has emerged that the Indian team management has requested for such open training sessions to be stopped. As per a report in The Age, the Indian management have requested Cricket Australia to not allow spectators during their training sessions further in the tour. "India have expressed a preference for their remaining training sessions not to be open to the public to minimise potential noise or distractions," a CA spokesperson told The Age on Wednesday. While the Indian team had their practice sessions at WACA at Perth for some days before training at the Optus Stadium at Perth ahead of the opening Test, the Indian team had arrived in Adelaide after the PM XI match at Canberra. Cricket Australia had earlier shared about similar open sessions as Tuesday for the Test matches at Brisbane and Sydney and these plans seem to be curtailed after this development. At the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the training sessions are held at outdoor nets located in public space outside the ground in Yarra Park. According to The Age, CA had estimated a crowd between 3,000 and 5,000 to see the training sessions at Adelaide with majority of the crowd being NRIs and Indian origin population. The publication also reported that the BCCI had lengthy discussions



with Cricket Australia before agreeing for open training sessions at Adelaide. "It is a tradition at most Australian venues for fans to be allowed to watch training ahead of a Test match, and Cricket Australia held lengthy negotiations with the BCCI before the tourists agreed to the open session in Adelaide," read the report. Indian batsman KL Rahul talked about the experience of training in front of a crowd on Wednesday. "Very different. Not used to it. We have practice with crowds but it's mostly T20 and ODIs back home, we've had crowds come in and watch our practice sessions. So it felt a little different but also it adds to your preparation for the Test match and gives us a bit of what we can expect on day one or all the days here in Adelaide, so it was good."

## KL Rahul opens up on overcoming mental challenge of being floater in India's batting line-up



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

KL Rahul on Wednesday opened up about the 'mental challenge' of playing in different batting positions over the years but said he is now comfortable in any role. Speaking to reporters in Adelaide, where the second Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia begins on Friday, Rahul said he found it hard to negotiate the 'first 20-25 balls' whenever he was slotted in a new position. "I have batted in many positions. Earlier it was a

bit of a challenge, not technically but mentally about how to play those first 20-25 balls," he said. "How early can I attack? How much do I need to be cautious? Those were things that were tricky early on. But now that I have played in Tests and ODIs all over the place, it has given me an idea of how I want to manage my innings."

Rahul, who made his Test debut in Australia a decade ago as a middle-order batsman, came on as an opener in the first Test and scored 26 and 77. He partnered Yashasvi Jaiswal at the top as Rohit Sharma was not available for selection. But with the captain set to return for the second Test, Rahul's batting position is once again set to change. When asked about his preferred position, the 32-year-old said: "Anything (opening or middle order)... I just want to be in the playing XI, which means wherever. You go there and bat and play for the team." Rahul said he has simplified his approach and now looks to play out 30-40 balls at the start of his innings to feel comfortable in the middle. "Whether I am batting top of the order or in the middle order. If I can manage the first 30-40 balls at start, everything then seems like regular batting, that's what I try to focus on," he explained.

## Politics doesn't happen in Australia. I know it happens in India: Ryan Harris



GNS News Agency, Feb 27

Australian pacers Josh Hazlewood's comments of "You probably have to ask one of the batters that question," during the first Test, when asked if they can chase the runs posted by India in the final innings, have opened up to speculation if there are factions in the Australian team. Days after the defeat Australian Cricket declared that Hazlewood was suffering from an injury and was ruled out of the 2nd Test in Adelaide which sparked further debate. "Now, a few days later, Hazlewood is out of the second Test and possibly the series too with a supposed side strain. Strange, that, since nobody had noticed anything wrong with Hazlewood at that media conference," former Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar speculated in his column for Sportstar. "Look, there are no, factions. That's just all garbage. I've even heard Mr Gavaskar coming out and saying there's some faction. It's all rubbish. That doesn't happen in Australia. I know it happens in India. I've lived there," former Australian bowler Ryan Harris would respond sternly speaking to The Indian Express about the matter. "There's no politics and no, you don't miss a game (On Hazlewood) for saying what he said," Harris defended. "I've spoken to a couple of the boys here at and everyone's smart. They just know our media and how they work. The Australian media have jumped on it, because we went so bad in Perth. But you're allowed to be outplayed."

India did manage to win the last couple of tours in Aus-

tralia and started this one well with an emphatic 295-run win. "Actually, you know, what Australian media and people have got to realize is that India have won here the last couple of times and they're a very good team. I mean, it's only one test. I mean, I have all the respect for Gavaskar, he's a legend of the game. He is just throwing a little grenade over here and the media have just got hold of him and are having a feast."

## Border-Gavaskar Trophy: After Steve Smith, doubts over Mitchell Marsh's availability for Adelaide Test

Although he continues to push his case for selection, there are growing concerns over Mitchell Marsh's availability for the Adelaide Test starting Friday. According to Australian broadcaster SEN, Marsh has suffered a back problem which will all but rule him out of bowling in the second Test against India if he is picked in the playing 11. The Western Australian all-rounder had bowled 17 overs in the first Test in Perth as his team's fourth seam bowling option. The back injury triggered speculation about Marsh's availability for the second Test. To add fuel to the fire, the inclusion of all-rounder Beau Webster to the squad heightened the speculation, as per Fox News. Marsh's fitness concerns come close on the heels of an injury scare to Steve Smith. The batsman was taking throwdowns from teammate Marnus Labuschagne during nets on Tuesday when he was hit on the right thumb. Smith winced in pain and was examined by the team's medical staff before he left the training session mid-way.

## Politics doesn't happen in Australia. I know it happens in India: Ryan Harris



EMS News Agency, Dec 6

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ond Test and possibly the series too with a supposed side strain. Strange, that, since nobody had noticed anything wrong with Hazlewood at that media conference," former Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar speculated in his column for Sportstar. "Look, there are no, factions. That's just all garbage. I've even heard Mr Gavaskar coming out and saying there's some faction. It's all rubbish. That doesn't happen in Australia. I know it happens in India. I've lived there," former Australian bowler Ryan Harris would respond sternly speaking to The Indian Express about the matter. "There's no politics and no, you don't miss a game (On Hazlewood) for saying what he said," Harris defended. "I've spoken to a couple of the boys here at and everyone's smart. They just know our media and how they work. The Australian media have jumped on it, because we went so bad in Perth. But you're allowed to be outplayed." India did manage to win the last couple of tours in Australia and started this one well with an emphatic 295-run win. "Actually, you know, what Australian media and people have got to realize is that India have won here the last couple of times and they're a very good team. I mean, it's only one test. I mean, I have all the respect for Gavaskar, he's a legend of the game. He is just throwing a little grenade over here and the media have just got hold of him and are having a feast."

## 'It should be good for the remainder of the Test': Pitch curator on the rain affected second India Australia Test match at Adelaide Oval

With the Rohit Sharma led Indian team going into the second Pink Ball Test in the Border Gavaskar Trophy on December 6 having a 1-0 lead in the series, the spotlight will be on the pitch as well Adelaide weather for the opening day. While India were bowled out for 36 in the Adelaide Test during the 2020-21 Border Gavaskar Trophy, where they bounced back to win the series 2-1, the visitors would hope to carry on from where they left in Perth after the 295-run win over Australia. With a record crowd expected on a rain-expected opening day at the Adelaide Oval, pitch curator Damian Hough rates that the pitch will be good for the Test. "Friday looks like it could be thunderstorms. I'm not sure exactly on the timing of those storms coming through, but we're expecting to pull covers on Friday. Hopefully it clears out on Saturday morning, then it should be good for the remainder of the Test," said Hough while speaking with cricket.co.au.

While Australia have played in 12 of the 23 Pink Ball Test matches since 2015, when the concept was introduced, they have won 11 Pink Ball Test matches. India on the other hand have played in four Pink Ball Test matches having played their first such Test against Bangladesh at Eden Gardens in 2019. Indian have won three out of their four Pink Ball Test matches with three wins in India and the only loss coming at Adelaide in 2020-2021. According to Hough, a total of 6mm of grass will be left on the pitch for the Test, the same length as provided for the Sheffield match between South Australia and Western Australia. Pacers had accounted for most of the wickets with Jayden Godwin, Henry Hunt and Cameron Bancroft hitting centuries in the match,



which was drawn. "Shield games, whether it's a red ball or a pink one, we're trying to replicate the Shield and the Test preparation ... very similar preparations. The Shield pitch showed if you didn't get a new ball under lights, and you had a couple of set batters in, you're able to see through some night-time cricket," said Hough. The pitch curator also views that pitch played any role in India's score of 36 in the second innings, the last time India played at Adelaide Oval. Indian had a 53-run lead after the first innings. "On the morning of day three, no one would have expected that Test match to finish in three days. That was just really good bowling from Australia ... I don't think the pitch played a part in that. Our job is to get that balance right and try to get a really good, even contest," concluded Hough. The pitch used in Adelaide is drop in one.

## I don't speak to Dhoni, its been a Decade: Harbhajan Singh

In a shocking conversation, the Indian Spinner Harbhajan Singh said that he and Mahendra Singh Dhoni haven't spoken to each other for over a decade. The only conversation they had was some on-field discussion while playing for CSK.

According to Harbhajan, the two former India teammates who won two World Cups together in 2007 and 2011 have not communicated with one another. "No, I don't speak to Dhoni. When I was playing at CSK, that's when we spoke, but otherwise, we haven't spoken. It's been 10 years and more. I have no reason; perhaps he does. I don't know what the reasons are. When we were playing in the IPL at CSK, that's when we used to talk, and that, too, was restricted to the ground. After that, he did not come to my room, nor did I go to his," the former Indian spinner stated in a conversation with News18.

The last time Harbhajan and Dhoni represented India together was in 2015 – in an ODI against South Africa. They reunited three years later, playing a couple of seasons for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL.

"I don't have anything against him. If he has something to say, he can tell me. But if he did, he would have told me



by now. I never tried to call him because I have a lot of passion. I only ring up those who pick up my calls. I don't have the time otherwise. I stay in touch with the ones I am friends with. A relationship is always about give and take. If I respect you, I hope you will respect me back. Or you respond to me. But if I call you once or twice but don't get a response, I will probably only meet you as much as I am needed to," added Harbhajan.

## What Gukesh did in Game 7 opening 'takes guts... really impressed by him'

After a battling 72-move draw between Ding Liren and Gukesh in Game 7 of the world chess championship on Tuesday, former world champion Magnus Carlsen said he was in awe of the opening ideas that Gukesh and his team found to surprise the world champion. Follow our liveblog of Game 8 of the World Chess Championship here: World Chess Championship Game 8 Game 7 was the longest match of this year's world chess championship lasting five hours and 30 minutes. "This was a fantastic game. Really couldn't have asked for more. Best game of the match so far. One that really thrilled everybody," Carlsen said on the Take Take Take app. "There was a fascinating idea from Gukesh in the opening and almost entirely new concept. Then he played a really good game until a certain point. Ding started fighting back and we got a fantastic back-and-forth battle. Ding found a lot resources."

Carlsen heaped praise on the opening used by Gukesh, crediting it to his trainer Gregorz Gajewski, who's known for his opening ideas. Gukesh's 7.Re1 was a move that caught the Chinese grandmaster off guard. He burnt up 28 minutes to play his reply (7...dxc4, where Ding picked off an undefended pawn from Gukesh).

"We saw a tremendous surprise found by the Gukesh camp. It was really quite impressive. We don't see these completely new ideas that often in a world championship match. Usually the ideas that you find are tweaks to ideas that are really known," said Magnus Carlsen. "It was very well suited to the match situation and Ding's temperament. We all expected Gukesh to go for e4. But instead he finds



something fresh in an entirely new direction. It was fascinating to see," added Magnus Carlsen. "You don't play this kind of opening if you're not highly ambitious with white pieces. Even though they must have analysed to the point where they knew this was safe to play with white, this takes guts to use in this situation with the match tied. Just to give up a pawn and know that you're not getting it back." Magnus Carlsen had said after Game 5 that he had not been impressed by Gukesh so far in the match. But that evaluation seems to have changed somewhat. "I was really impressed with how Gukesh played," Magnus Carlsen said after the drawn game 7. "The way Ding saved the draw was really immaculate. Gukesh had some weak moments today. Not hating on Gukesh. We just have really high expectations off him based on what he's done for a year." Asked who has impressed him the most after seven games, Carlsen said: "Ding. Partly because we did not have a lot of expectations."

## Mahesh Narayanan on Mammootty-Mohanlal project: 'Lal sir has a full-fledged role'



The last time Mammootty and Mohanlal starred in full-fledged roles in a film together, today's Malayalam stars like Dulquer Salmaan, Nivin Pauly, Tovino Thomas, and Asif Ali hadn't made their debuts, and Fahadh Faasil was still on a sabbatical. It was in Twenty:20 (2008) that they last appeared together as leads. When news about them reuniting after 16 years in Mahesh Narayanan's upcoming film was revealed, Malayalam cinema audience were jubilant. There were also reports that similar to Kadal Kadanna Mathutty (2013), Mohanlal would only be appearing in a cameo in the Mahesh film, which also stars Kunchacko Boban and Fahadh Faasil. However, in a recent interview to The Hollywood Reporter India, Mahesh shed some light on these speculations. "All the actors have solid characters with lots of material to perform. Lal

sir is going to appear in a full-fledged role," said Mahesh, who also pointed out his challenges in presenting a film that would present the ensemble in the best possible manner. Apart from Mammootty, Mohanlal, Kunchacko Boban and Fahadh, the action thriller also stars Revathy, Nayanthara, and Darshana Rajendran. Sharing his inspiration for making such a big-budget film with such a huge star cast, Mahesh Narayanan said that he is a big fan of films made by veteran directors IV Sasi and T Damodaran, who revelled in making multi-starrers. "My film is a collaborative experience, and I'm attempting something similar," said Mahesh. Backed by Anto Joseph Film Company, the film, tentatively referred to as MNMM (Mahesh Narayanan, Mammootty, Mohanlal), went on floors in Colombo a couple of weeks ago.

## Govinda's daughter calls feud with Krushna Abhishek-Kashmera Shah 'toxic': 'It's masala for people'

The feud between Govinda-Sunita Ahuja (Govinda's wife) and his nephew Krushna Abhishek-Kashmera Shah (Krushna's wife) had been brewing for years until Govinda shared the stage with Krushna on the latest episode of The Great Indian Kapil Show. While it seems like the feud has come to an end, Govinda's daughter Tina Ahuja recently opened up about the same and said that she found this entire episode to be quite "toxic." In a chat with Bollywood Bubble, when Tina was asked about the misunderstanding within the family, she said that this has become "masala" for spectators and she tries to keep herself away from the conversation. Tina also said that she had previously spoken to Arti Singh, Krushna's sister, about this and shared her stance on the same. "It is kind of toxic. I wouldn't lie and I have said this to Arti as well and I will always try to keep myself away from it," she said.

Tina continued, "To be honest, I am very happy in my life. I don't speak about all these things and I think it's a thing of the past and I don't want to talk about it again and again. It will turn into another story. There is no need for that. Things are good, decent, respectful." When asked more about the episode, she said, "It becomes masala for people." Tina Ahuja did not make many comments about the feud within the family and said that she met her cousins and things between them were pleasant. "I just know one thing that I met my



cousins, everything was good, respectful, decent. They are busy in their own world, I am busy in my own stuff," she said. Govinda had previously attended the wedding celebrations of Krushna's sister Arti Singh.

Recently, Govinda accidentally shot himself but the actor is doing fine now. He recently appeared on Kapil Sharma's show where Krushna Abhishek called him "Mama no 1" as they got to share the same stage after many years.

## Shalini Passi reacts to reports of her Bigg Boss 18 entry



Art collector Shalini Passi grabbed a lot of attention with her turn in the latest season of Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives. Even after the show, the audience has been keen to know more about Shalini and her life. Recently, it was reported that Shalini will be appearing on Bigg Boss 18. When SCREEN reached out to Shalini to confirm the same, she neither confirmed nor denied the reports, and reacted with a laughing emoji. It was earlier reported that Shalini Passi would enter Bigg Boss 18 as a guest and would even live in the house for a few days. It was said that Shalini's stint on the show would be similar to Orry's in the last season. However, a source has informed us that this news is not true. The source said, "Shalini leads quite an amazing life. She doesn't need this show (Bigg Boss) to highlight it." The source also pointed out that after getting a launch with a Netflix show, appearing on a controversial show like Bigg Boss 18 is

not something Shalini would do. The latest season of the Salman Khan-hosted reality show has not managed to hold viewers' attention. The makers have been trying their best to make the latest season work. In an exclusive interview with SCREEN earlier, special host Ravi Kishan also called the contestants boring. In an upcoming episode of Bigg Boss 18, director Anurag Kashyap will be seen schooling the contestants for their disappointing participation in the reality show.

## Madras HC rejects producers association plea to ban film reviews for first three days after release

Chennai: The Madras High Court has declined to grant an interim order to restrain individuals or social media channels from reviewing films within three days of their theatrical release. Justice S. Sounthar, while hearing the petition filed by the Tamil Film Active Producers Association (TFAPA), questioned the feasibility of such a restriction, stating, "Reviewers are entitled to review any film; it is their opinion." Advocate Vijayan Subramanian, representing TFAPA, argued that certain individuals, under the guise of film reviews, defame directors, actors, and producers, causing damage to their reputations.

The association sought restrictions on these activities and requested the court to issue directions to the City Police Commissioner to prevent YouTube channels from entering cinema theatres for the purpose of film reviews. The petition highlighted the lack of regulation and self-discipline on social media platforms, leading to defamatory remarks and coordinated efforts to manipulate film ratings, a practice known as "review bombing."

TFAPA claimed these actions, often motivated by personal or business rivalries, negatively influence public opinion and harm box-office collections before the audience forms its own judgment.

## Janhvi Kapoor wears T-shirt with boyfriend Shikhar Pahariya's name and pictures.

Janhvi Kapoor and Shikhar Pahariya, rumoured to be dating for quite some time now, often grab headlines with their date nights and adorable gestures for each other. Recently, Janhvi went a step ahead of her 'Shiku' necklace, which she has sported on several occasions. She has made a new addition to her wardrobe. In a recent viral photo, Janhvi and her Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari co-star Varun Dhawan were seen posing with the staff of a hotel in Nashik. However, what caught everyone's attention was the t-shirt that Janhvi was wearing. The customized T-shirt featured her boyfriend Shikhar Pahariya's name and his pictures printed on it.

The photo was posted on the Instagram handle of the luxury hotel in Nashik. The caption of the post read, "We recently had the honour of hosting the supremely talented stars of Bollywood @janhvikapoor and @varundvn and it has truly been one of the 'pinch us' moments." This isn't the first time that Janhvi Kapoor has expressed her love for boyfriend Shikhar Pahariya publicly. In April this year, at the screening of her father Boney Kapoor's Maidaan, she wore a customised necklace with Shikhar's name. In an earlier interview with Mirchi Plus, Janhvi talked about her bond with Shikhar and said, "He has been in my life since I was 15-16. I think my dreams have always been his dreams and his



dreams have always been my dreams. We've been very close. We've been each other's support system almost as if we've raised each other."

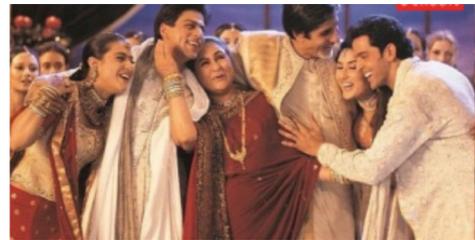
On the work front, Janhvi Kapoor was last seen in Devara: Part 1. She will next be seen in Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari. Directed by Shashank Khaitan, the film also features Varun Dhawan. Janhvi also has RC16 with Ram Charan in the pipeline.

## 'Shah Rukh would ask about Hrithik, he would ask about Kareena,' Nikhil Advani says no star wanted to be the first to step out of vanity during Bole Chudiyaa

Kajol, Shah Rukh Khan, Jaya Bachchan, Amitabh Bachchan, Kareena Kapoor and Hrithik Roshan in Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham. Kajol, Shah Rukh Khan, Jaya Bachchan, Amitabh Bachchan, Kareena Kapoor and Hrithik Roshan in Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham.

Karan Johar's Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham managed to bring together the biggest stars of Hindi cinema but getting them all together on the set at the same time wasn't the easiest task. In a recent interview, director Nikhil Advani, who was an assistant director on the film, recalled his memories of shooting the song "Bole Chudiyaa" with Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol, Kareena Kapoor and Hrithik Roshan. Nikhil shared that on days when the six of them would be required on the set at the same time, they would all wait for the other one to reach the set before them. Talking to Filmfare, Nikhil shared that there were seven make up vans on the set when they were shooting the part of the song that required all the actors but none of them was coming on to the set. "We are shooting the sequence where all of them are there and wondering why no one is coming. The set was lit up like it's Diwali," he shared.

Nikhil Advani then recalled walking from one vanity van to another asking the actors to report on set, but all of them just kept asking if the others had reached. "I went and I told Kajol that shot is ready, she asked, 'Has Shah Rukh come?' I said no. She says, 'Tell him to come, then I will come.' I go to Shah Rukh, he asks, 'Has Hrithik come? Tell him to come, then I'll come.' I go to Hrithik, he asks, 'Has Bebo come? Tell her to come and then I will.' I go to Jaya ji, she asks,



'Has the old man come? No.' So nobody has come," he recalled.

Nikhil said that he along with the other ADs on set then placed themselves outside all the vanity vans so they could all come out at the same time. "I said 'Jaya ji, I am standing outside your van and I am putting six other ADs outside other vans. We are on a walkie, you step out, I promise you everyone will step out. That's how we did it," he shared and added, "And Karan had fainted. He is shouting on the walkie, looking at the monitor." Nikhil said that the problems only lasted until they were out of the vans, and from then on, it was smooth sailing. "They are stars, they have tantrums but once they are there, they would be like 'You are looking so lovely.' All of this used to happen. It was madness. Jaya ji and Kajol would talk in Bangla. Amit ji would be sitting there. It was crazy," he shared. Nikhil Advani then went on to direct Kal Ho Naa Ho under Dharma Productions. He recently released his SonyLIV series Freedom At Midnight.

## Sukumar's speech at Pushpa 2 Hyderabad event leaves Allu Arjun in tears: 'Pushpa is not just cinema, it is my...'

Pushpa 2: The Rule was supposed to hit the screens on August 15, 2024. The stage was set for the return of Pushparaj as the boss of the red sandalwood crime syndicate who has to fight it out against an equally egotistical cop Bhanwar Singh Shekawat. However, closer to the release date, there were speculations that a rift between director Sukumar and actor Allu Arjun was derailing the shooting process. It was then announced that Pushpa 2 wouldn't meet the proposed date of August 15. Many rumours started to circulate, chief among them was how the movie could actually be shelved due to irreconcilable differences. Cut to four months later, Sukumar, at Pushpa 2's pre-release event in Hyderabad, hugged Allu Arjun tight for a long time before stepping on to the stage. "Pushpa 1 and Pushpa 2 was made just because of my love for my darling, Bunny," said Sukumar about his Pushpa actor.

Sukumar, who made his directorial debut with Allu Arjun's sophomore film, Arya, has been an integral part of the actor's two-decade-long career. "From Arya, I have seen his growth as a person, and as an artist. The bond that we share stems from an exchange of creative energy. We discuss strongly about his performances, and he gives it all to ensure even the slightest of expressions, like the movement of an eyeball, or the quiver in the voice is perfect. Darling, I did the film just for my love for you," said Sukumar, who revealed that when he approached Allu Arjun for Pushpa, he only had a handful of scenes and idea about the character.

"When I came to do this film with you, I didn't have a story. It is on your trust, your energy, and how you responded to each scene that helped develop Pushpa. I knew I can do anything for this man," said the filmmaker, who was effusive in his praise for the National award-winning actor. "Hon-



estly, cinema is my world, and to see someone giving it his all to elevate my world is special. In fact, I believe Allu Arjun creates an elevated platform for all his films, and ensures he takes his cast and crew along with him to work on that level. I repeat, it is my pure love for you. This is not about cinema. This is not about writing. Pushpa is just my love for you." Reacting to the audience's cheers about Pushpa 3, Sukumar pointed out that it was magnanimous of Allu Arjun to spend over three years to his vision. "I'm sorry Arjun that I took three years of your prime time. But yeah, if he is ready to give me that time again, then why not?" said Sukumar giving a mixed response to the possibility of a third part. Pushpa 2 Cast and Crew With songs and background score by Devi Sri Prasad, and additional background score by Sam CS, the film stars Rashmika Mandanna, Fahadh Faasil, Anasuya Bhardwaj, Sreeleela, Sunil, Ajay Ghosh, and Dhananjaya in pivotal roles. Pushpa 2 Budget Made over a budget of Rs 400 crore, Pushpa 2: The Rule is billed as one of the most expensive Indian films, and is expected to break various box-office records upon release. The makers are confident that the movie would become this year's second entry into the Rs 1000 crore club after Kalki 2898 AD.

## TVF Aspirants fame Naveen Kasturia ties the knot with girlfriend Shubhanjali Sharma

Actor Naveen Kasturia, known for TVF's Aspirants and Pitchers, tied the knot with his longtime girlfriend Shubhanjali Sharma in a lavish ceremony in Udaipur, Rajasthan. His TVF team, including founder Arunabh Kumar, and his co-stars Amol Parashar, Namita Dubey, Sunny Hinduja, and Shivankit Singh Parihar were a part of their big day. Amol shared several pictures and videos of the wedding on social media on Tuesday morning, following which Naveen posted the official wedding photos on his Instagram account. Taking to his Instagram account, Naveen shared two photos from the precious moment. In

one of the pictures, he can be seen putting sindoor and in the other one, the duo can be seen taking pheras, which is a part of the wedding tradition. Naveen wore an ivory sherwani with sequin and ruby red motif detailing, along with a brown dupatta. The actor paired it with a layered pearl necklace and a turban. Along with the post, he wrote, "Chat mangni pat byaah!" His friend and Tripling co-star Amol Parashar also shared glimpses of the beautiful traditional ceremony, with all their friends and family in attendance.