

BRS, Congress, CPI locked in tough Kothagudem contest

Khammam: There has been a tough competition between BRS, Congress and CPI in the newly formed Kothagudem Municipal Corporation while BJP is trying to prove its presence.In Kothagudem Municipal Corporation there are 1,34,775 voters in 60 municipal divisions. There are 70,314 women voters, 64,431 men and 30 other voters. The BRS is contesting the elections independently by fielding candidates for all the 59 divisions while unable to field its candidate in the 35th division due to technical reasons.

Municipal election campaign concludes in Karimnagar

Karimnagar: The roar of campaign vehicles of contesting candidates from various political parties fell silent as campaigning for the municipal elections concluded at 5 pm on Monday.

Union and State ministers, MLAs, MLCs and other public representatives canvassed in favour of councillors and corporators contesting in municipalities and municipal corporations on behalf of their respective parties.

Opposition mulls removal motion against Birla, cites ‘bias, muzzling’

New Delhi, Feb 9

The Opposition is weighing a notice to seek the removal of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on grounds of alleged bias, not allowing Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi to speak on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, suspending eight MPs and making unfair remarks against women members.

The development came even as Rahul and other Opposition leaders met Birla in his chamber to discuss ways to break the week-long logjam. The stalemate has persisted since Rahul was prevented by Birla from quoting portions about the 2020 India-China LAC stand-off from former Army Chief MM Naravane's book.

While the Opposition objected to Birla "presiding over a systematic erosion of parliamentary conventions", Lok Sabha Secretariat sources refuted the claims that the Speaker's remarks about women MPs' conduct and his advice to the PM not to come to the House on February 4 amid disruptions were exaggerated.

Opposition leaders said the motion under Article 94-C of the Constitution, which they were considering against the Speaker, has the signatures of 100 MPs. They said it had the backing of Congress, Samajwadi Party, DMK, Left parties, RJD, Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) and other INDIA bloc constituents. The TMC is, however, yet to announce its position, and wants to discuss SIR while the SP is keen to debate the alleged insult of Malwa queen Ahilyabai Holkar.

The government, for its part, said the Opposition had the right in a democracy to move the motion, but lacked the numbers to carry the same. "The notice to remove the Speaker is being moved on four grounds--he disallowed Leader of the Opposition from speaking on the Motion of Thanks, did not act against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey who levelled unsubstantiated charges against senior leaders of the Congress, suspending eight MPs and levelling charges on the conduct of women MPs," an Opposition source said.

The decision to move the notice against the



Speaker was taken earlier today during a meeting at the residence of Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

Meanwhile, Rahul, Abhishek Banerjee (TMC), Akhilesh Yadav (SP) and TR Baalu (DMK) met Birla to find a solution. Rahul is learnt to have told the Speaker that he wanted to talk about the suspension of eight Opposition MPs, as also remarks made against women MPs.

The leaders also urged the Speaker to revoke the MPs' suspension.

After meeting Birla, Rahul said outside Parliament that PM Narendra Modi did not come to the Lok Sabha on February 4 as he was "scared of the contents of Gen Naravane (ret'd)'s memoirs". "Those claiming there was a threat to the PM from women MPs should register an FIR," he said.



HYDRAA Demolishes Illegal Structures on Park Land in Narsingi, Land Worth Up to ₹80 Crore Reclaimed

Rangareddy District: In a major crackdown on illegal encroachments, HYDRAA carried out demolition operations in Narsingi, reclaiming valuable park land that was unlawfully occupied by land grabbers. The action has sent a strong warning against encroachments on public spaces.

The drive took place within the limits of Narsingi Municipality, where park land belonging to Arunodaya Housing Society was illegally taken over.

1,600 Square Yards of Park Land Recovered

Officials said nearly 1,600 square yards of park land had been encroached upon and illegal constructions were raised. Acting on complaints from local residents, HYDRAA officials inspected the site and launched immediate action.

The reclaimed land is estimated to be worth between ₹50 crore and ₹80 crore, highlighting the scale of the encroachment.

Illegal structures on park land were completely demolished

The land was taken back under HYDRAA's control

Boards were installed to mark the area as protected park space

Officials stressed that parks are vital public assets and must be preserved for community use.

Strict Warning Against Future Encroachments

HYDRAA officials issued a strong warning, stating that:

Park land encroachments will not be tolerated under any circumstances

Anyone involved in similar illegal activities in the future will face strict legal action



Campaigning ends for municipal elections in Telangana

Hyderabad: Campaigning for municipal elections in Telangana came to an end on Monday.

Polling in seven municipal corporations and 116 municipalities will be held on Wednesday (February 11).

A total of 12,930 candidates are in the fray for 2,996 wards in the 123 urban local bodies.

As many as 52.43 lakh voters are eligible to cast their votes in the municipal elections. They comprise 25.62 lakh men, 26.80 lakh women and 640 others.

The State Election Commission has set up 8,203 polling centres and arranged 16,031 ballot boxes for polling.

The state poll body will also arrange 137 strong rooms and 136 counting centres.

Re-polling, if any, will be conducted on February 12. Counting of votes will be taken up on February 13.

The municipal elections are witnessing a three-cornered contest among the ruling Congress, opposition Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The campaign saw no-holds-barred attacks by leaders of all three major contestants. The ruling Congress party sought the mandate in municipal elections to continue the welfare schemes implemented by its government during the last two years.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, who led the Congress campaign, accused BRS and BJP of having a secret deal to defeat the Congress party.

The Chief Minister also launched a scathing attack on the BJP for what he called shielding BRS president and former chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR), his son K. T. Rama Rao (KTR) and other leaders in the alleged irregularities in the Kaleshwaram project and Formula E car race case.

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president, all state ministers, MPs, MLAs and other leaders of the ruling party campaigned for the party candidates.

BRS campaign was led by KTR and senior leader T. Harish Rao. They targeted the Congress government over what they call its unfulfilled promises and corruption.

Revanth Reddy sees triangular contest in municipal polls, avoids predictions

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy acknowledged a triangular fight in municipal elections, refraining from predicting results. He said local leaders would manage post-poll alliances and urged the CBI to investigate the Kaleshwaram project and power purchase agreement cases

Hyderabad, Feb 9

Hyderabad: Admitting that there would be a triangular contest in the municipal elections, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Monday said he had not yet made any calculations on the probable results.

This was after he claimed that all his calculations and predictions during the Assembly and Parliament elections had turned out to be correct. When asked about the outcome of the municipal elections, Revanth Reddy said he had not yet done any assessment of the likely results.

During an informal interaction with media persons here, the Chief Minister said that if any alliance had to be stitched together after the results, the responsibility would be entrusted to the local leadership. Referring to the verbal duel between the Congress and the BJP over the alleged irregularities in the Kaleshwaram project, he said the CBI should initiate proceedings. If the CBI refused to take up the case, the State government would have to step in, he added.

"Not just the Kaleshwaram case, we will offer the Power Purchase Agreement case also to the CBI. Let them take up the case," Revanth Reddy said.

After having earlier trained his guns at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for failing to accord national project status to the Palamuru Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme, the Chief Minister on Monday tried to defend



his reference to Modi as his 'Bade Bhai'. "For all the Chief Ministers in the country, he is Bade Bhai," he claimed.

On the reported district reorganisation plans, the Chief Minister said the Centre had issued specific instructions to all State governments. Accordingly, from January 1, 2026 to March 31, 2027, there would be no scope for making any changes, he said, claiming that the Congress had no political interests in the exercise.

The Centre would take up the population census, including caste census, followed by delimitation of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies, an increase in the number of constituencies and the implementation of One Nation One Election in 2029, he added.

Young couple dies by suicide over marriage fears in Telangana's Siddipet

Siddipet: A young couple died by suicide on the outskirts of Pedda Lingareddypally in Siddipet rural mandal on Monday. They were identified as Myadnagari Sravan (26), a resident of Narayanraopet, and Navya (19), a resident of Pedda Kodur in Chinna Kodur mandal.

While Sravan was operating a JCB to earn a livelihood after discontinuing his studies, Navya was a degree first-year student at a college in Siddipet. Fearing opposition from elders to their marriage, the couple reportedly ended their lives by hanging.

Police registered a case and initiated an investigation. The bodies were shifted to the government hospital in Siddipet for postmortem examination.



India, Greece sign joint declaration to boost defence industrial cooperation

New Delhi, FEB 9

India and Greece on Monday issued a joint declaration to strengthen defence industrial cooperation, while the European nation announced it will post a military officer at the India-led international maritime information centre in Gurugram.

The announcements were made after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a bilateral meeting with Greece's Minister of National Defence, Nikolaos-Georgios Dendias, in New Delhi. Both ministers reiterated that the India-Greece strategic partnership was based on shared values of peace, stability, freedom and mutual respect, the Ministry of Defence said.

Notably, Greece would be the third country in Türkiye's "backyard" with which India has ramped up military ties over the past couple

of years. After Cyprus, Greece is the second country on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea with which New Delhi has strengthened defence cooperation. To the east of Türkiye, India has also developed close relations with Armenia, including the supply of military equipment.

Both Greece and Cyprus are locked in separate, long-pending boundary disputes with Türkiye. India and Israel, both strategic partners, currently have strained ties with Ankara, which has aligned itself closely with Pakistan and even supplied weapons used by Islamabad during Operation Sindoor in May last year.



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Notice is hereby given that the Original Registered Sale Deed bearing Document No. 2935/2015, belonging to Smt. Pujala Umabharathi, W/o Shiva Bharmiah Pusala, R/o H. No. 13-6-250/3, Karwan, Asifnagar, Hyderabad-102, has been lost. The said document was lost on 20-01-2026 at about 3:00 PM, while traveling from Tandur RTC Bus Stand to Hyderabad for personal work. If anyone finds the above said document, kindly hand over the same to the below address: Smt. Pujala Umabharathi W/o Shiva Bharmiah Pusala H. No. 13-6-250/3, Karwan, Asifnagar, Hyderabad-102

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Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Maintaining status quo

The Reserve Bank of India's decision to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% is guided by strong economic growth, despite external headwinds, and benign inflation. In its first meeting in the new year, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has unanimously opted for a neutral stance at a time when macroeconomic conditions are encouraging — consumer inflation levels being well below the target level; domestic demand resilient and global trade linkages getting realigned. The successful completion of the trade deals — first with the European Union and now with the United States — augurs well for the economy, prompting the RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra to take an optimistic position about strong growth momentum in the days ahead. India's long term growth outlook remains favourable, with GDP growth estimated at 7.4% for the financial year 2025-26. Stability in benchmark lending rates, combined with a supply-side push in the recent Union Budget, is expected to complement demand traction across sectors. Global growth, supported by tech-investments, accommodative financial conditions and large-scale fiscal stimulus, is expected to be marginally stronger in 2026 than projected earlier. However, the confluence of escalating geopolitical frictions and rising trade tensions could be a matter of concern. The pause in repo rate provides stability for capital-intensive sectors like construction and infrastructure, supporting credit flow and long-term investment. This aligns strongly with the Union Budget, which has reinforced its focus on infrastructure through higher capex of Rs 12.2 lakh crore and an enhanced Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) scheme to promote domestic manufacturing of high-value, advanced equipment. Keeping the repo rate unchanged means that home loan EMIs will not change either. The upside of this is that current house loan borrowers will not experience any EMI shocks for now, and new borrowers can plan their housing purchases with the benefit of predictability. For the real estate sector, an unchanged rate environment brings stability to funding costs, supports disciplined cash-flow management, and enables uninterrupted project execution. The RBI has reiterated its commitment towards providing sufficient liquidity for transmission. It has made it clear that, given the durable liquidity injected over the last few weeks, there would be no need for further durable liquidity injections in the fourth quarter of FY26. With headline inflation moving closer to the central bank's comfort band and real GDP growth continuing to outperform expectations, policy continuity allows the transmission of earlier rate actions to fully play out across the banking system. The trade deals with the EU and the US are significant positives for domestic manufacturing, improving competitiveness versus key markets like China and strengthening the 'China-plus-one' opportunity.

Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy Lays Foundation Stone for Uppal Mudiraj Association Building

Rs62 Lakh Allocated for Construction of Additional Association Hall



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 9 (Indian Chronicle):“Corporator of Uppal Division, Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy, along with Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Parameshwar Reddy, laid the foundation stone on Monday for the construction of an additional building for the Uppal Mudiraj Association at Bharat Nagar in Uppal Division. The project is being taken up with an estimated cost of ₹62 lakh. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy stated that the Mudiraj community should progress economically, socially, politically, and excel in all fields. He assured that the Congress Party is committed to the development and welfare of the Mudiraj community and reiterated his readiness to extend all possible support for the Mudiraj Association. He further mentioned that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is giving top priority to the welfare of Backward Classes

(BCs) in the state and is implementing several initiatives for their upliftment. The program was attended by Uppal Mudiraj Association President Eega Anjaiah Mudiraj, Vice President Manda Chandrashekhara Mudiraj, General Secretary Talari Vinay Kumar Mudiraj, Treasurer Eega Shekhar Mudiraj, Secretary Eega Babu Mudiraj, Borampet Ramu Mudiraj, Joint Secretary Teega Dayakar Mudiraj, Cultural Secretary Kavali Ramu Mudiraj, committee members Pittala Sailu Mudiraj, Karunakar Mudiraj, Teega Hanumanthu Mudiraj, advisors Borampet Ramesh Mudiraj, Eega Eshwarayya Mudiraj, Talari Venkatesh Mudiraj, Kokkonda Jagan Mudiraj, and several other Mudiraj community members including Talari Danayya, Talari Nursing Rao, Borampet Ravi, Mahankali Raju, Talari Jangir, Eega Srinivas, Eega Lakshman, Talari Vijay, Kasturi Lakshman, Kavali Hari, Mamindla Balaraju, Aratikayala Mallesh, and Kayala Chandu Mudiraj.

Congress candidate Kondapalli Saritha wins by a huge margin MLA koram

“Yellandu, February 9 (Indian Chronicle):“ MLA Koram Kanakaiah and Corporation Chairman Muvva Vijay Babu said that the Congress party should ensure the victory of Kondapalli Saritha in Ward No. 23 with a huge majority. He was speaking at a public meeting in



the district on Monday. The youth living in the ward will be given jobs in Pusapalli OC, pattas will be given to government or retired workers, Indiramma house and ration cards will be given to all the poor. CM Revanth said that what no government has done, the government will provide free rice, free electricity and interest-free loans to self-help groups. He said the Congress government had fulfilled all promises made to the people. Win the battle.. The MLA made it clear that the development of the ward is my responsibility.” [3:38 PM, 2/9/2026] +91 91338 86639: End

Elect the Congress and CPI(M) candidates who stand with the people. --- MLA Jare

Naga Manoj Kumar, Aswarapet constituency, February 7, Indian Chronicle: In the context of the Aswarapet new municipality elections, the Honorable Congress MLA Jare Adinarayana conducted an extensive election campaign today in all 22 wards of the municipality. On this



occasion, he appealed to the people to elect the Congress party candidates supported by the CPI(M) party and the CPI(M) party candidates with a massive majority.



The MLA visited every ward, held corner meetings in the main centers of each ward, and spoke directly with the people. He explained the welfare schemes for the poor implemented by the Congress government and the benefits received by middle-class families.

He stated that his aspiration is for his development work to be visible to the people through actions rather than words. He said that he is far removed from ostentation and boasts and that the people's trust is his strength. He also clarified that it is not in his nature to be disheartened by the meaningless criticisms of the opposition or to be elated by unnecessary praise.

On this occasion, the MLA appealed to the people to strengthen the democratic forces for the future development of Aswarapet and said that electing the Congress and CPI(M) candidates who stand with the people is the right decision.

Special Cell Set Up at Bhadrachalam ITDA to Facilitate Ekalavya School Admissions



Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadrachalam kothagudem Bureau, February 9, Indian Chronicle: “To facilitate easy access to admissions into Class VI in Telangana Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), a special help desk has been set up at the ITDA office in Bhadrachalam under the directions of Project Officer B. Rahul.” ITDA Assistant Project Officer (General) David Raj inspected the online registration centre arranged for the EMRS entrance examination on Monday. During his visit, he reviewed the number of applications submitted so far and interacted with the staff overseeing the process. Addressing officials, Mr. David Raj said that the special cell was established at the ITDA office to assist tribal parents in understanding the online application process and to ensure that all eligible tribal students apply without fail. He instructed staff to create awareness among parents in a clear and simple manner and ensure that applications are submitted only through the online mode. He further directed that principals should collect details of students who apply through nearby internet centres without visiting the ITDA office. He emphasized that internet centres must charge only ₹100 as the prescribed application fee and warned that strict monitoring should be maintained over such centres to prevent overcharging. Mr. David Raj appealed to parents in EMRS catchment villages to ensure that their children apply online for admission into Class VI without delay. ITDA Administrative Officer Sunnam Rambabu, EMRS staff members Mahesh and Ashok Kumar, and others were present during the inspection.

Corporator Bandaru Srivani Venkatrao Lays Foundation Stones for Multiple Development Works in Ramanthapur Division



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 9 (Indian Chronicle):“Development activities are progressing rapidly in the Ramanthapur Division. On Monday, local Corporator Smt. Bandaru Srivani Venkatrao laid the foundation stones for several important development works across various localities in the division. Speaking on the occasion, the Corporator stated that she would work tirelessly for the development of the division till her last breath, in line with the promises made to the people. She emphasized that her goal is to transform Ramanthapur into a model division. She added that understanding public issues directly and providing permanent solutions to them remains her primary objective. As part of the development initiatives, foundation stones were laid for: “Underground drainage works at Balakrishna Nagar, Bhoo Lakshamma Temple Street Development of three parks at Pragathi Nagar at a cost of ₹55 lakh Construction of CC roads with

an expenditure of ₹30 lakh Road development works from Indranagar Jenda to Mirchi Bandi Multiple development works at Ram Shankar Nagar, Street No. 4, with a budget of ₹35 lakh The Corporator stated that upon completion of these works, basic amenities in the area would significantly improve, leading to enhanced living standards for local residents. The program was attended by BJP leaders Sankuri Kumaraswamy, Vemula Tirupathiah, Ilitam Narasimha Reddy, Kandakatal Dayakar Reddy, Welfare Association President Swamy, MD Jangir, Aroju Krishnamurthy, Anil Kumar, Danayya Konda, Krishna Murthy, and several others. Local residents expressed their gratitude to the Corporator and urged that the development works be completed at the earliest.

Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy Inaugurates Uppal Kuruma Sangham Building

Additional Building Constructed at a Cost of Rs 30 Lakhs



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 9 (Indian Chronicle):“Uppal Division Corporator Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy, along with Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Parameshwar Reddy, on Monday inaugurated the additional building of the Uppal Kuruma Sangham at Bharat Nagar in Uppal Division. The additional structure has been constructed at an estimated cost of ₹30 lakhs. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy stated that the Kuruma community should progress and excel economically, socially, politically, and in all other fields. She emphasized that the Congress Party is committed to the development and welfare of the Kuruma community and assured full support for any initiatives taken by the Kuruma Sangham. She further mentioned that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is giving special priority to the Backward Classes (BCs) and working towards their upliftment across the state. The event was attended by several prominent leaders and members

of the Kuruma community, including Uppal Kuruma Sangham President Chindam Venkatesh Kuruma, State Secretary Gorige Mallesh Kuruma, Senior Advisors Gorige Ramesh Kuruma, Janni Raghu Kuruma, Gorige Ailayya Kuruma, Zone Secretary Kondra Hanumanthu Kuruma, Zone Vice President Gorige Pedda Mallesh Kuruma, Working President Barla Krishna Kuruma, Mote Narasimha Kuruma (Uppal Division President), and many other office bearers and community members. Women leaders including Mahila President Batkiri Manjula Kuruma, Gorige Nagamani Kuruma, Bandari Manjula Kuruma, Kemidi Indira Kuruma, and others also participated. Several Kuruma leaders, activists, and residents were present, making the event a grand success.

Trade Unions Hold Bike Rally to Ensure Success of Nationwide Strike on February 12



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 9 (Indian Chronicle):“A bike rally was organized on Monday in the Uppal Industrial Area under the leadership of various trade unions, urging workers to make the nationwide general strike scheduled for February 12 a grand success. Leaders from different trade unions participated in the rally, including INTUC leaders Prakash Reddy, CITU leaders J. Venkanna, Venkatesh, Urmila, Swamy, Y. Venkateshwarlu, Anji, and Syed Jilani, AITUC leaders Paramesh and Jagga Reddy, and BRTU leader Saidulu, among others. Addressing the gathering, trade union lead-



ers stated that the nationwide general strike is being organized by central trade unions to oppose the Central Government's policies. They demanded the withdrawal of the notification issued on November 21, 2025, which seeks to implement four labour codes in place of 29 existing labour laws. The leaders also demanded the withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Act, 2025, continuation of the MGNREGA scheme, which provides employment guarantee to the poor, and revision of wages in line with rising prices of essential commodities. “They further demanded the implementation of minimum wages, opposed the four labour codes brought by the Centre, and urged the government to regularize contract and outsourcing employees by making them permanent.

102 Ambulance Services Prove a Boon in Wankidi Mandal Safe Transportation for Pregnant Women from Home to Hospital



“Indian Chronicle" kumram bheem, Asifabad District Reporte, Jade Srinivas. February, 08. “Komaram Bheem Asifabad District, Wankidi Mandal: “The 102 Ambulance Services provided by the Telangana Government have emerged as a major support system for the people of Wankidi Mandal, especially for pregnant women in rural areas. These services are playing a crucial role in ensuring safe motherhood and child health care, while reducing risks associated with delayed medical attention. “Under the jurisdiction of the Wankidi Primary Health Centre (PHC), the 102 ambulance is providing continuous medical transport services to villages falling under various sub-centres. With the coordinated efforts of ASHA workers and ANMs, pregnant women from the third month to the eighth month of pregnancy are being transported safely from their homes to the hospital for regular health check-ups and brought back home after the examinations. “Considering the lack of transportation facilities in interior villages, the free 102 ambulance service has become a lifeline for rural pregnant women, ensuring timely access to medical care and reducing complications during pregnancy. “In addition, pregnant women who require scanning tests, blood transfusions, or advanced medical care are being promptly shifted to the Asifabad District Government Hospital through the 102 ambulance service, based on medical necessity. This

timely intervention has helped save many valuable lives, according to local health officials. “Furthermore, after deliveries conducted at government hospitals, the 102 ambulance ensures the safe transportation of both mother and newborn baby back to their homes, providing postnatal care support and minimizing health risks during travel. “Due to these dedicated services, a large number of beneficiaries in Wankidi Mandal have already availed the 102 ambulance facilities. Health officials and medical staff have appealed to all residents of the mandal to make full use of the 102 ambulance services during emergencies and maternity-related needs. The successful implementation of this program is credited to the dedicated efforts of 102 Ambulance Pilot Srinivas and Programme Manager Naresh Yadav, who are rendering their services with commitment and responsibility. Their work has earned appreciation from the public, as the 102 ambulance services continue to strengthen maternal and child health care in the mandal.



Collector Calls for Full-Scale Arrangements at Vote Counting Centres

“Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 9, “District Election Officer and Collector K. Hariitha has directed officials to ensure comprehensive arrangements at all counting centres in view of the 2nd General Municipal Elections. “On Monday, she conducted a surprise inspection at the Municipal Election Polling Material Distribution Centre, Strong Room, Counting Centre, and Postal Ballot Centre set up at the Social Welfare Gurukul School and College in the district headquarters. During the visit, the Collector reviewed the preparedness and facilities at the venues. “Speaking on the occasion, she instructed officials to make complete arrangements for staff at the polling material distribution centre. Adequate shade, seating, drinking water, and food facilities must be provided to polling personnel, ensuring there are no shortcomings in arrangements. “She further directed that proper security and CCTV cameras be installed at the Strong Room. Necessary measures should also be taken to ensure that the counting process in the counting hall is conducted smoothly and peacefully. “Officials were instructed to facilitate a calm and orderly environment for personnel



casting their votes through postal ballots. It was informed that 28 polling stations have been set up across 20 wards in Asifabad Municipality. The Collector emphasized that all arrangements must ensure the polling and counting processes are carried out in a peaceful and orderly manner. “Asifabad Municipal Commissioner Gajanan, Tahsildar Riaz Ali, and officials from various departments participated in the programme.

Collector Urges Voters to Exercise Franchise on February 11

“Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 9, “District Election Officer and Collector K. Hariitha has appealed to all eligible voters to exercise their franchise in the 2nd General Municipal Elections scheduled to be held on February 11. “In a statement issued on Monday, the Collector emphasized that every registered voter must participate in the democratic process by casting their vote. “She informed that buses are being arranged for the transportation of polling personnel on the day prior to polling and on polling day. In view of the elections, a holiday has been declared on polling day for all educational institutions and other buildings being used as polling stations in the municipalities of the district. “Further, from February 10 to 13, holidays have been declared for all government buildings, educational institutions, distribution centres, reception centres, counting centres, and other premises being utilized for election-related activities. “The Collector also directed that employees registered as voters be granted necessary time off by their respective offices to enable them to cast their votes. “Managements of commercial establishments, business units, shops, industries, and other organizations located in polling areas have been instructed to declare a paid holiday on polling day to allow employees and workers to exercise their right to vote.



The Congress is responsible for the development of the city

Koram Kanakaiah, Muvva Vijayababu and Mallibabu Yadav participated in the campaign

“Yellandu, February 9 (Indian Chronicle): “MLA Koram Kanakaiah, Telangana State Irrigation Development Corporation Chairman Muvva Vijay Babu and former ZPTC DCCB Director Mekala Mallibabu Yadav said that during the Congress government, the municipality was developed. “As the campaign for the municipal elections came to an end on Monday, leaders of various political parties in the municipality conducted a massive campaign to capture the municipality. Koram Kanakaiah, Muvva Vijay Babu and Malli Babu Yadav campaigned in support of the Congress candidates. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the second instalment of Indiramma houses from April, the process of increasing pensions in this budget, as well as Rythu Bandhu and other schemes will be implemented, the Congress government has implemented 6 guarantees as announced in the manifesto in just two years. He said that the previous BRS government had only developed the leaders of the party by making false promises and not developing the municipality at home. 11.12.13 Wards candidates Rampa Ramya, Madugu Sai Sudha, Venkatalakshmi, District Congress leaders Shaikpathe Mohammed, Dhaniakula Hanumantha



Rao, “Congress leaders Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, K. C. Venugopal, Rahul Gandhi, Ahmed Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Ahmed Patel, P. Chidambaram, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka were among those who attended the meeting.

All set for the municipal elections; police conduct parade.

With the aim of ensuring peace and order for the public Elections must be conducted in a peaceful atmosphere.

CI Nagaraju Reddy, SI Yayathi Raju



“S Naga Manoj Kumar, Aswarapet constituency, Feb 09, Indian Chronicle: In the wake of the municipal elections being held for the first time in Aswarapet, the police department has made stringent arrangements. Keeping law and order in mind, they have taken meticulous measures to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections. On this occasion, a police parade was conducted



under the leadership of Aswarapet CI Nagaraju Reddy. All the police personnel marched in a rally on the town's main road. CI Nagaraju Reddy stated that this parade was conducted as part of maintaining law and order during the elections. He said that the town's voters should exercise their right to vote without fear and that the police would be there to support the people. Officials stated that these measures were taken to ensure a peaceful atmosphere during the elections. CI Nagaraju Reddy, SIs Yayathi Raju and Akhila, Dammampeta SI Sai Kishore Reddy, and other police officers participated in this program.

Farmers Urged to Register Cotton Produce at CCI Centres Before February 20

“Indian Chronicle (Taj Khan), February 9, “District Collector and District Magistrate Rahul Raj of Kumram Bheem Asifabad district has appealed to cotton farmers to register their produce at Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) procurement centres before February 20, 2026. “In a statement issued on Sunday, the Collector said that CCI procurement centres are currently operating across the district for the 2025–26 cotton season. Farmers who have not yet registered their cotton stocks are advised to complete the registration process at the earliest. “He informed that cotton procurement under CCI will continue only until February 20, 2026. Farmers are requested to take note of the deadline and ensure that their produce is registered and brought to the designated CCI centres within the stipulated time. “The district administration has urged all eligible cotton



farmers to utilize this opportunity and avoid last-minute inconvenience.

Venkat Goud extends support to Congress

“Yellandu, February 9 (Indian Chronicle): “Senior Congress leader and BC JAC state convener Madatha Venkat Goud is backing the Congress candidates. As part of this, on Monday, Dooda Kiran Mitra, the candidate of the second ward of Illandulapadu, came to the election office in full support of Daniel. He urged the people of the area to vote for the candidate supported by the Congress party on the hand symbol and win with a huge majority. With the arrival of Madatha Venkat Goud, his fans voluntarily participated in large numbers.



BJP Candidate Surges Ahead in Ward No. 10.

""P. S. ASHOKAN ""KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. ""Victory All but Certain for Samala Ashok""A highly favourable atmosphere has emerged for the victory of Samala Ashok, who is contesting as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate for Councillor of Ward No. 10 in the Manthani Municipal Elections. The people of Ward No. 10 have been extending overwhelming support to Ashok, recognising his long-standing commitment to public service.""A senior BJP leader with over three decades of experience in grassroots-level public service, Samala Ashok enjoys immense goodwill among the local residents. Through extensive door-to-door campaigning, he has been personally assuring voters of his unwavering focus on addressing ward-level issues and working tirelessly for their resolution.""Known for his gentle demeanour, approachable nature, and inclusive leadership style, Ashok has consistently stood by the people on public issues, even without holding any official position



in the past. His responsiveness to citizens' concerns has strengthened public confidence, prompting residents to firmly resolve to elect him as their representative.""Ashok has stated that the people of Ward No. 10 have been grappling with numerous civic problems due to the apathy and neglect of previous administrations. He highlighted key issues such as drinking water scarcity, inadequate drainage systems, and malfunctioning streetlights, which have remained unresolved for years.""Reaffirming his commitment, Ashok assured that he would work with utmost sincerity and integrity to ensure basic amenities, comprehensive development, and improved quality of life for all residents of the ward. He further pledged to remain constantly accessible and accountable, standing as a reliable support system for the people at all times.""He also emphasised his intention to facilitate the effective implementation of various Central Government welfare schemes, ensuring that their benefits reach every eligible household. Addressing public dissatisfaction, Ashok pointed out that many deserving families are yet to receive Double Bedroom houses, and accused the Congress party of failing to fulfil its promises, including the implementation of six guarantees and the assurance of a 72,500 pension, which has reportedly led to public resentment against the ruling party.""Samala Ashok reiterated that he would strive to ensure that every household receives its rightful welfare benefits. His dynamic and people-centric campaign has been particularly successful in resonating with youth, women, and senior citizens, making his victory in Ward No. 10 increasingly certain.

Beerappagadda Welfare Association Submits Complaint to GHMC Over Road Problems

""KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 9 (Indian Chronicle):""Rachakonda Shivakumar, BJP youth leader and President of the Beerappagadda Welfare Association, submitted a complaint to GHMC officials highlighting the poor condition of roads in the Beerappagadda Division.He stated that roads in several localities within the division are severely damaged, while some stretches have been left incomplete, causing serious inconvenience to the public. Due to the deteriorated condition of the roads, local residents are facing daily difficulties in commuting. He also pointed out that water stagnation on damaged roads is creating sanitation issues and may lead to health problems for residents.Rachakonda Shivakumar emphasized that children, elderly people, and women are particularly affected by the situation. On behalf of the local residents, he urged GHMC officials to respond immediately, sanction the required works, and take up road construction on a full scale without further delay.Appealing for a swift resolution to public issues, he assured that he would continue to work consistently for the development of the area. Local residents appreciated and congratulated Rachakonda Shivakumar for taking their problems to the notice of the authorities."Colon



Telugu Literary Congress Highlights Literature's Power to Unite Society



"" Indian Chronicle OU February 09:The 2nd Telugu Literary Congress was held on Monday at the Arts College auditorium, Osmania University, under the aegis of the Department of Telugu. The event brought together poets, writers, professors, and students to deliberate on the role of literature in shaping society and culture.""Speaking as the chief guest, poet and writer MLC Deshapati Srinivas emphasized that without literature, humanity risks losing its values. He explained that while history and social sciences record time and space, it is literature that nurtures existence, emotions, and culture. Recalling the contributions of Ande Sri and Gaddar, he noted how their literary works inspired the Telangana movement. Srinivas urged researchers to focus on universal themes and called on writers to examine the causes of social fragmentation. ""Without literature, human beings drift away from humane values.""Researchers should focus on universal issues that bind society together.""Writers must explore the roots of social fragmentation to heal divisions.""Osmania University Vice-Chancellor Professor Molugaram Kumar highlighted that Telugu is not just a language but a way of life. He stressed the importance of adapting Telugu to modern technologies such as AI, speech-to-text, and Natural Language Processing. He cited Maharashtra's example of imparting engineering education in Marathi and expressed hope that Telugu could similarly expand into digital content creation, cinema, and folk arts.""Professor Chintakindi Kaseem, Director of the Literary Congress and Principal of Arts College, explained that the initiative was modelled on Science and History Congresses. He noted that participants ranged from school teachers to university professors, and emphasized the inclusion of creative

writing and literature-related components in the syllabus.""Telugu University Vice-Chancellor Professor Veldanda Nityananda Rao cautioned against excessive modernity, warning that it widens intergenerational gaps and weakens human relationships. He stressed the importance of traditional food, values, and respect in nurturing healthy societies.""Other speakers, including Professor Lavanya Dean of Arts, Telangana University, Kalvala Vishweshwar Reddy of the Chairman for Global Telangana Association, and Dr. Remilla Murthy, advisor for "Telugu Sampada", discussed the global ex-



pansion of Telugu language and literature.""The event was attended by Professor Sagi Kamalakar Sharma, Convener of the Literary Congress, and Head of the Telugu Department Osmania University, Dr S Raghu and Dr Chandraiah along with Telugu faculty members, researchers, and students from across Telangana and beyond.

Additional Collector for Local Bodies, Bhaskar Rao, inspected the polling material stored at the Bhongir Municipal Office



""(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhongir District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... February 9):- As part of the conduct of the municipal elections, Additional Collector for Local Bodies, Bhaskar Rao, personally inspected the polling material stored at the Bhongir Municipal Office on Monday. He instructed that the ballot boxes to be distributed to the polling stations, the sealing and unsealing



procedures, forms, stationery, and other election materials should be kept ready. He directed that the necessary materials for each polling station should be distributed on time with a precise plan. He advised the staff participating in election duties to strictly adhere to the election code of conduct and perform their duties carefully without any mistakes. Municipal Commissioner Ramalingam and other staff members participated in this program.

Collector Hanumantha Rao visits the Facilitation Center in Aleru and Yadagirigutta Municipalities Inspection of the Postal Ballot Process



""(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... February 9):- On Monday, District Election Officer and Collector Hanumantha Rao inspected the postal ballot process set up in Aleru and Yadagirigutta municipalities. The District Election Officer and Collector visited the facilitation center established to enable employees assigned to election duties to exercise their right to vote through postal ballot. He inquired about the number of people who had utilized



the postal ballot. He also asked whether the ballot papers were distributed ward-wise. He inspected the arrangements and facilities available at the facilitation center. He stated that the postal ballot process would conclude by Monday evening. The Collector instructed the officials to transport the ballots to the counting hall under strict police security."Municipal Commissioners and other concerned officials participated in this program.

The upcoming municipal elections must be conducted freely, fairly, and in a peaceful atmosphere:



- Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Election Officer Hanumantha Rao

""In the wake of the municipal elections... strict enforcement of rules.... Collector Hanumantha Rao""(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... February 9):- District Collector & District Election Officer Hanumantha Rao stated in a press release on Monday that all arrangements have been completed to conduct the upcoming elections for the Bhuvanagiri, Aleru, Yadagirigutta, Pochampally, Choutuppal, and Mothkur municipalities freely, fairly, and in a peaceful atmosphere. He said that the arrangements for the polling, which will be held from 7 AM to 5 PM on



the 11th of this month, have been completed. In this context, a silent period will be in effect from 5:00 PM on February 9, 2026, to 5:00 PM on February 11, 2026. It was clarified that during this period, candidates, political parties, and their followers must strictly adhere to the Election Code of Conduct – 2019."During the silent period, public meetings, rallies, processions, campaigning through loudspeakers, microphones, and vehicles, door-to-door campaigning, displaying banners, flexes, and posters, election campaigning through social media, and offering inducements such as cash, liquor, and gifts to voters are completely prohibited."They warned that strict legal action would be taken against those who violate these rules."They also stated that weapons are prohibited in the vicinity of polling stations..."To ensure the conduct of polling in a peaceful atmosphere, no one is allowed to carry weapons to the polling station or its surrounding areas on the polling day.

BSP Delhi Leaders Visit Medchal Constituency Padayatra Conducted for Victory of Candidates in Aliabad Municipality



""Nacharam, Indian Chronicle, February 9: ""On today senior leaders of the Bahujan Samaj Party from Delhi visited the Medchal Assembly constituency. As part of the campaign to ensure the victory of BSP candidates contesting in Aliabad Municipality, extensive election ?????? was carried out."In Aliabad Municipality, a padayatra was

organized in support of the BSP candidates:"Goode Venkatesh contesting from Ward No. 18,"Ashok Koduri contesting from Ward No. 17, and"Sailu (Maisammagudem) contesting from Ward No. 6."The programme was conducted under the leadership of District President Banoth Ravinder Naik. The chief guests who participated in the campaign included BSP Central Coordinator Suresh Arya, State Vice President Sriramakrishna, State Secretary Sheelam Anita Reddy, District Vice President Erravalli Mallesh, Uppal In-charge Konda Apparao, Uppal President M. Narsingarao, District Leader Koppu Rajayya, District General Secretary Sukka Dayanand, Malkajigiri In-charge Gautham Raj, Medchal General Secretary Birru Yakaswamy, District Leader Ilakanth, Jawaharnagar Prabhakar, and PMC Srinivas."Addressing the public during the padayatra, the leaders appealed to the voters to cast their votes in favour of the Bahujan Samaj Party's Elephant symbol and ensure a massive victory for the BSP candidates in the upcoming municipal elections. A large number of Bahujan party activists participated enthusiastically in the programme.

Reel gone wrong? UP woman found hanging; daughter says she was ‘acting’ after watching video



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

On Friday afternoon, the cries of a child coming from a house rang through the streets of Baberu, a small town in UP’s Banda district. Concerned, a neighbour went to the house to check and was met with a horrifying sight: a woman hanging from a hook, with a scarf tied around her neck. Police were informed; a team rushed to the spot and brought down the body. The woman was identified as 28-year-old Mohini. While police are probing all angles, they

suspect the death occurred while she was recording a video on her phone, possibly a reel. No suicide note has been recovered so far. Police said Mohini is survived by her husband, Jagjeet Kumar, who works in a private job, and their two children — an eight-month-old son and a four-year-old daughter. The couple had been married for around eight years. The daughter was present in the room at the time; it was her cries that had alerted neighbours. Police alerted Jagjeet, who was out for work at the time. The body was later sent for post-mortem examination to ascertain the exact cause of death. Superintendent of Police, Banda, Palash Bansal, said the victim’s daughter told the police that her mother was watching something on her phone and, while doing so, carried out the act that led to her death.

During their preliminary inquiry, police said they examined the woman’s phone and claimed they found evidence suggesting she had searched extensively online on ‘how to hang oneself’. Station House Officer of Baberu police station, Rajendra Singh, said the victim’s phone was examined and it was found that she had been watching reels on hanging. Mohini’s husband told mediapersons that he was at work when the incident occurred. He said a local resident informed him of his wife’s death, following which he immediately rushed home. Her father-in-law, Ram Gopal, said he was unaware if Mohini made reels. He claimed there was no reason for her to die by suicide as there were no disputes or problems between the couple. “There was peace in the family... they were not facing any crisis. She used her phone frequently, but I do not know what she was doing on it,” he said.

‘Have stopped counting days’: Pushed to Bangladesh, Sweetie Bibi and sons continue their agonising wait to return to India

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

For Sweetie Bibi, 33, and her two children, Qurban, 6, and Imran, 12, it has been more than seven months since they were picked up by the Delhi Police and pushed into Bangladesh. Confined in a house in Chapainawabganj, Bangladesh, she says she has stopped counting the days and has almost lost hope of a return to her home in Bengal even as the Supreme Court is set to hold the next hearing in the case on February 18. Sweetie, a migrant labourer from Bengal, used to work as a ragpicker in Delhi. On June 18, Sunali Khatun, her husband Danish, and their eight-year-old son, hailing from Paikar village in Birbhum, along with Sweetie and her two sons, who hail from Dhitora village in Birbhum, were picked up by the Delhi Police. On June 26, all of them were ‘pushed back’ to Bangladesh after being declared “illegal immigrants”.

On December 5, a pregnant Sunali was brought back to India along with her son after a flag meeting between the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Bangladesh Border Guards (BGB) following a Supreme Court order, but the rest of the group had to stay back. Thereafter, Sunali gave birth in Bengal and was visited by TMC Lok Sabha MP Abhishek Banerjee, who also named the baby.

“You can’t imagine the pain! Speaking with The Indian Express over the phone from Bangladesh, Sweetie said, “I have stopped counting the days. All I hear is that a new date of hearing is there before the Supreme Court. Now it is on February 18. You cannot imagine the pain. What will happen to my two boys? We are confined in this house in Bangladesh.”

“Five days back, I spoke with my family members in Bengal over the phone. I have a nine-year-old boy at home. How can he stay without me? My other two children are here with me. How long can we be here like this? My children have a future. Everyone seems to have forgotten about us,” she added. Sweetie and her children, along with Sunali’s husband Danish, are living in the house of one Faruk Sheikh, who has been entrusted with their care by a Bangladesh court after bail. “We were labelled Bangladeshi citizens and pushed into this country. Together, we spent seven days on the Dhaka streets and later came to Chapainawabganj from where we were arrested by the Bangladesh Police and jailed. Like her, we spent three months in jail before being let out on bail by a court here. Me and my sons have suffered in the same way. But she was taken back, and we remain confined to this house,” Sweetie added. Sweetie’s brother Amir Khan, who lives in Birbhum district’s Paikar



village, said, “Now there are elections in Bangladesh and then the month of Ramzan. Whenever we speak, she breaks down. We have provided all details, including old land deeds of the family, to the court. We have trust in the court. But so far, we have just got dates after dates. Sunali and her boy have been brought back. On the same logic, my sister and her children should have been brought back. But sadly, she is still in Bangladesh.”

Birbhum-based social worker Mofizul Islam says he has been in touch with them over the phone. “What can I say to them? They always ask when they will return. I am trying to provide all support possible,” he said. Islam had assisted the families in Bangladesh and is currently back in Bengal. “We are standing with the family. Providing all support. We are hopeful that the highest court of the country will allow them to be back home, just like Sunali. All relevant papers indicating they are residents of Bengal have been placed with the court,” said Samirul Islam, TMC Rajia Sabha MP. The two families were picked up by the K N Katju Marg police in Delhi on June 18, 2025, and were accused of being illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. On August 21, they were arrested by the police in Chapainawabganj, Bangladesh, under the Passport Act and Foreigners Act and sent to jail after being produced before a local court. On September 26, a division bench of Justices Tapabrata Chakraborty and Ritabrata Kumar Mitra directed that six members of two families from Birbhum — including Sunali — be brought back to West Bengal within four weeks. On October 3, the senior judicial magistrate of the District Court in Chapainawabganj, declared both families as Indian citizens based on their Aadhaar cards and residential addresses in West Bengal, ordering their “pushback” to India. All of them got bail from the Chapainawabganj court on December 1.

Pit unattended, poor barricading: Inquiry flags deadly safety lapses in Delhi biker’s death

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

A preliminary inquiry by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) into the death of a 25-year-old biker, who fell into an excavation pit in Janakpuri on Thursday night, has found that mandatory safety arrangements were not enforced and the site was left without supervision. The two-member inquiry committee, which visited the accident site on Friday, also found that while the road had been closed from both sides and traffic diverted, barricading at the work site was “inadequate and improperly maintained” by the contractor. The report also claimed that the biker may have used the route as a shortcut to get home, it is learnt. The victim, Kamal Dhyani, had spoken to his brother just before midnight on Thursday and told him he would be home soon. On Friday morning, his body was discovered at the bottom of the pit in West Delhi’s Janakpuri, covered in mud and still wearing his red helmet. His motorcycle lay next to him. Just a day before the tragedy, the pit, around six metres long and four metres wide and deep, had been dug by the DJB on a service road as part of an ongoing major revamp of the Capital’s drainage network. What the committee found at the site According to the report, local inquiry revealed that the deceased had entered a “restricted or closed narrow portion of the barricaded roadway” and was moving against the designated traffic flow, “apparently in an attempt to take a shortcut towards his residence”. However, the committee underlined that iron barricades, which are mandatory along the entire perimeter of excavation sites, were not in place as required. “These barricades must remain firmly in place and should only be relocated once the road surface has been fully levelled and made safe for public use,” the report underlined, adding that green-mesh netting may be deployed only selectively and cannot substitute iron barricades in areas where excavation has been undertaken. Site left unattended, officials and contractor faulted Crucially, the inquiry found that the project site was left unattended at the time of the incident, reflect-

ing a “serious lapse in mandatory safety arrangements”. This, the committee said, highlighted deficiencies in night-time supervision, vigilance and the discharge of official duties by both the executing agency and supervising officers of the engineering division concerned. “Prima facie, such negligence constitutes non-compliance with established safety norms and points to dereliction of duty,” the report said, fixing responsibility on the contractor agency, M/s KK Spun India Ltd-O Liner JV, and staffers including Ramesh Kumar Gupta, Superintending Engineer (Drains), Project-IV; Azad Singh Grewal, Executive Engineer, EE(P)SR-II; Vandana, Assistant Engineer (Civil); and Alok Kumar, Junior Engineer (Civil), who is working on a contractual basis — the latter three were suspended on Friday. The committee has proposed disciplinary action against the officials concerned, show-cause notices to contractors “without delay”, and making Chief Engineers responsible for enforcing safety compliance across projects. Strict enforcement of barricading and pit-protection norms across all work sites Mandatory daily safety monitoring reports” by site engineers, documenting safety arrangements and corrective actions taken. Periodic surprise inspections by senior officers to verify on-ground compliance and identify lapses. Systematic maintenance of photographic records at each site as proof of safety compliance. “The fatal accident at Janakpuri stands as a grave reminder of the consequences of inadequate safety oversight,” the report said, adding that “safeguarding the public must remain the foremost priority” and that any lapse in this regard is unacceptable. A senior official said that the inquiry was conducted to inquire into and examine multiple aspects of safety and compliance at the accident site. “A comprehensive and detailed inquiry report will be submitted in due course,” said the official. Apart from the suspension, an FIR has been registered under sections of culpable homicide against unknown persons. On Saturday, the Delhi Police also apprehended a sub-contractor in connection with the case.

Karnataka govt moves to amend law to revert from EVMs to ballot papers for state rural polls



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Following up on a decision to revert from EVMs to ballot papers for local polls, the Karnataka government has decided to introduce a bill in the forthcoming budget session of the legislature to facilitate the reversion. A meeting of the state cabinet this week approved the introduction of the Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2026, to do away with EVMs for local polls in villages and to revert to the older system of casting votes on ballot papers.

“To ensure transparency and confidentiality in the election process of local authorities, the government has decided to conduct the elections of local bodies through ballot papers and ballot boxes as before and henceforth to do away with the process of Electronic Voting Machines.” It has also been decided to entrust the State Election Commission with

the responsibility of preparing the electoral roll to make this process credible, transparent and free,” the Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah noted. The Cabinet has decided to present the bill in both the Houses of the legislature, Law Minister H K Patil said. The Karnataka State Election Commission had announced last month that the upcoming polls for the five city corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will be held using ballot paper. The elections are expected after May this year. “There are two best practices. Ballot papers have been used since the beginning. For the past 20-30 years, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) have been used. There is no Act or Supreme Court order that bars ballot papers,” State Election Commissioner G S Sangreshi said.

Last year, amid the allegation of ‘vote chori’ made by the Congress, the Cabinet of the Congress-led government in Karnataka had decided to recommend that the State Election Commission should switch to ballot paper for all elections conducted by it. The SEC conducts polls for rural local bodies such as zilla, taluk and gram panchayats, and urban local bodies such as municipal corporations, city municipal councils, town municipal councils and town panchayats. “All upcoming elections for local bodies will have ballot papers rather than Electronic Voting Machines,” Law Minister Patil had stated last year. The Cabinet had also decided last year to recommend empowering the SEC to prepare and revise voter rolls for various local bodies, as compared to the use of rolls prepared for Assembly elections for local body elections.

‘Deliberate attempt to mislead public’: Congress, BJP square off again over Bengaluru Metro fare hike

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

In a fresh flare-up of words with the BJP, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has slammed the Centre over the Bengaluru Metro fares, saying the proposed hike from February 9 is part of a pattern of unfair treatment of the state. “This fare hike is not an isolated incident. It fits a larger pattern of how the BJP-led Union Government repeatedly hurts Karnataka through reduced tax devolution, denial of fair grants, delays in infrastructure support, And now, metro fares that burden common people,” Siddaramaiah said on Friday, blaming the BJP for the upcoming fare hikes.

Siddaramaiah’s statement was part of a lengthy response on social media to BJP allegations that the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) fare hike was a decision of the Karnataka government. “Bengaluru Metro fare hike again. The corrupt Congress government, which has looted the tax money of Kannadigas and emptied the treasury, is now ruthlessly pickpocketing from passengers. Respected Siddaramaiah sir, the Bengaluru Metro travel fare is already the highest in India,” the Leader of the Opposition in the state legislature, R Ashok, said on Friday.

“The Metro fare hike proposal and fare increase are matters concerning the state, and the government should immediately stop this dacoity,” the BJP leader said. In response, Siddaramaiah stated that under the Metro Railways (Operation & Maintenance) Act, 2002, Metro fares are not decided by the state but are “determined by an independent Fare Fixation Committee (FFC) constituted solely by the Government of India through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs”. “Neither the State Government nor the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation has the legal authority to override or disregard these recommendations,” Siddaramaiah said. “To now blame the Karnataka Government for a decision legally imposed by the Union framework is not just dishonest, it is a deliberate attempt to mislead the public. Therefore, attributing the fare revision to the Karnataka Government is factually incorrect and misleading,” he added. Siddaramaiah has said that he would urge the Centre to reconsider the fare levels recommended by the Fare Fixation Committee and “explore mechanisms to moderate or rationalise fares, especially for daily commuters, students, and low-income groups”. Tejasvi Surya flags errors



The BJP MP from Bengaluru South, Tejasvi Surya, who is a vocal espouser of the cause of Metro commuters in Bengaluru, has claimed that the revised fare calculation was riddled with errors and has written to the Centre to set up a new FFC. “The 2025 Fare Fixation Committee for Bengaluru Metro, constituted under Section 34 of the Metro Railway Operations and Maintenance Act, 2002, recommended a fare revision effective from 09.02.2025, for Namma Metro. This revision, ostensibly calculated on the basis of the 2016 DMRC Fare Fixation Committee’s formula, has resulted in an average increase of fares by 50 per cent and raised the maximum fare from 60 to ₹90. This has also made Bengaluru metro the most expensive in the country,” the BJP MP said in a letter.

Surya has said that there are errors in the fare revision due to the selection of the wrong base year of 2016-17 for the computation of the operating costs, resulting in a deviation from the standard fare revision methodology. The Bengaluru Metro is set to see a rise in ticket prices by 5 per cent from February 9, with fares rounded to the nearest rupee when the increase exceeds 50 paise. The minimum fare will rise from Rs 10 to Rs 11, and the maximum fare from Rs 90 to Rs 95. Currently, the Bengaluru Metro charges Rs 10 for journeys up to 2 km and Rs 90 for trips beyond 25 km. The fares will reinforce Namma Metro’s status as India’s most expensive Metro system. A significant fare revision conducted by the BMRCL last year had triggered a furore. Last year, BMRCL raised prices by over 100 per cent in some categories. Following a public backlash, the hike was capped at 71 per cent.

Bengal Madhyamik examination: 19 candidates debarred for possessing mobile phones in exam halls



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) stated that 13 candidates have been barred from taking the Madhyamik (Class 10 Board) examination after being caught with mobile phones inside examination halls on Friday. Among those 13 candidates, four each were from Kolkata and Kalimpong, while two were from Cooch Behar, and one each from Jalpaiguri, Malda, and East Burdwan districts. A WBBSE official said, “Records show multiple candidates from the same schools being caught at particular venues.”

According to the WBBSE, two candidates were caught using unfair means at Talliguri High School in Cooch Behar, four candidates were caught at Sanghamitra Vidyalaya in Kolkata, while four candidates were also caught at Bagrakote High School in Kalimpong. In other cases, one candidate was caught at Katwa Durgadasi Chaudhurani Girls’ High School in East Burdwan, an examinee was caught at Duramari CK High School in Jalpaiguri, and one candidate was caught at Chanchal Rani Dakshayani Girls’ High School in Malda. After Friday’s cancellations, the total number of students whose papers were cancelled for using unfair means has risen to 19. Earlier, on the first day of the Madhyamik examination on February 2, one candidate was caught with a mobile phone while taking the First Language paper. Five more candidates were caught during the Second Language paper on February 3. The WBBSE also suspended eight teachers and non-teaching staff, including the headmaster, of Ajhapur High School in East Burdwan, after the officer-in-charge of the Madhyamik examination centre was allegedly attacked over a dispute regarding a mobile phone being found in the possession of a non-teach-

ing staff member inside the examination centre.

The WBBSE has banned all electronic devices in exam halls, including mobile phones, calculators, smartwatches, and earbuds. If any candidate is found with any such device, then the device will be seized, and the examination of the candidate will be cancelled. Invigilators have also been barred from carrying any electronic device inside exam halls. Only admit cards, registration certificates, pens, and transparent clipboards are allowed in the examination hall. There are cloakrooms outside examination halls for the safekeeping of bags and personal belongings. This year, a total of 9,71,340 candidates are appearing for the Madhyamik examination, compared with 9,69,425 last year. Out of them, 4,26,733 are boys, 5,44,606 are girls, and one is a transgender person. There are a total of 2,682 examination centres across the state. Out of these, 945 are main examination centres, and 1,737 are sub-centres.

ITDA to set up Giri Mart at Bhadrachalam to promote tribal livelihoods

Kothagudem: The authorities of Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Bhadrachalam have planned to set up a ‘Giri Mart’ at Bhadrachalam town in the district

According to the ITDA project officer, B Rahul the initiative is aimed at boosting livelihood opportunities of tribals in the district as well to make quality food items, essential commodities and forest products collected by the tribals available to the public.

Women self-help groups and adivasi families that have been running small scale industries would be given the opportunity to sell their products at the mart, which would be a centralised platform for their business, the official said. There are several women SHGs such as Srirama Joint Liability Group that has been making healthy millet snacks and a group of women marketing scented phenyl, gel candles and washing powder while some are producing cold pressed cooking oils. The Giri Mart would benefit them.

The invisible menders: Pune’s rafugari artisans fight to keep a fading craft alive

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Every morning, Datta Sonawane makes the familiar journey from Patas village in Daund taluka to his spot outside Life Dry Cleaners on East Street in Pune Camp. And for 32 years, he has practised a skill with such precision that its greatest achievement is invisibility: rafugari, the traditional craft of seamlessly repairing damaged textiles.

“The hallmark of good rafu work means blending into the background design so much that one should get confused where the damage was if asked to point out later,” says Fakruddin Ansari, another artisan based in Wakad who has been practising the craft for three decades. Ansari says, rafugari, which gained prominence in the 1700s, originated in Kashmir and Central Asia. This craft flourished across North India, Iran, and Uzbekistan, where skilled artisans, known as ‘textile physicians’, would embroider intricate designs on clothes and repair antique shawls for royal families and the wealthy. “Rafu was more than just physical repair. It was used to hide economic loss. Fallen royal families across princely states in the country secretly repaired their clothes to present a well-to-do front to the world,” Ansari explains.

rafugari artisan Fakruddin Ansari, based in Wakad, says rafugari originated in Kashmir and Central Asia where skilled ‘textile physicians’ would embroider intricate designs on clothes and repair antique shawls for the wealthy. Today, these craftsmen use meticulous patchwork and tanabana (interlay) techniques to fix tears in garments, like in Pashmina shawls, Banarasi sarees, and others, so perfectly that the mend becomes undetectable. Sonawane’s journey to rafugari began out of necessity. With no livelihood opportunities in his village, he moved to Pune and was drawn to the craft after watching his uncle work. Through observation and trial and error, he developed expertise in the field. For over three decades, he has regularly travelled by train between Daund and Pune, a distance of around 65 km each way, to practice his craft. What keeps Sonawane and Ansari committed to their work isn’t just income, but the stories woven into each garment they touch. “Most customers who visit love their garments because there are memories attached to them, like someone’s mother’s saree, father’s shirt, or a wedding suit,” Sonawane says. “Some keep repairing the same outfit multiple times because they consider it auspicious. People also prioritise comfort over money. Some pay Rs 500 for rafu on jeans worth Rs 700.” His clientele spans all age groups, though he notes that mostly elderly and those wanting to preserve heirlooms from past generations seek his services. “I have worked on garments which are 80 years old,” he adds. The value of his work is evident in the trust his customers place in him. “People agree to pay what I quote because some outfits



like jeans and lehengas cost lakhs. I have repaired jeans worth Rs 50 lakh.”

Price of precisionRafugari demands both skill and patience. Patchwork involves replacing damaged parts with identical fabric, while tana-bana requires removing threads from the garment’s hidden areas to seal holes, matching the weave and pattern exactly. “It requires patience and is quite time-consuming as the entire work is done by hand. The rate of work depends on the type of cloth and how much time it will take,” Sonawane says. But the meticulous nature of the craft comes with challenges. “Most customers demand it to be done immediately, which is not possible,” Ansari said. “One mistake can force rework on the entire patch.” “The most challenging part is finding threads matching the colour shade of the outfit. A small mistake in picking the colour can make the patch visible,” he adds. Years of repetitive work have also taken a physical toll on the artisans. The small, repetitive motions and firm, sustained grip required for rafugari strain the tendons, joints, and muscles. “Over the years, repetitive handling of clothes causes hand pain, and I’m now taking medical treatment for pain relief,” Sonawane says. Ansari faces similar challenges. “Rafu work impacts eyesight. Long hours of focusing on minute, intricate details often result in severe eye strain and blurred vision.”

Despite earning around Rs 40,000 to 45,000 per month on average, Sonawane says the craft has an uncertain future. “Rafugari is a dying craft facing extinction due to evolving fashion, changing consumer behaviour, and a lack of interest from the younger generation,” he says. “Rafu charges have increased because the number of artisans has fallen drastically.” His own sons, both in their final year of graduation, have shown no interest in learning the craft. “Taking it forward has become difficult,” Sonawane says. Yet he refuses to let the craft disappear without a fight. “I’ll definitely work till my body supports, but to keep rafugari alive, I would teach it free of cost to those who are interested in it,” he says.

From 19th-century archives to 3D reality: The ‘Thambi’ mascot of the Madras Sappers comes to life in a new exhibit



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Munisamy, the iconic mascot of the Bengaluru-headquartered Indian Army’s Madras Engineering Group, popularly known as the Madras Sappers, has recently been brought to life via 3D printing along with murals of some of their iconic military achievements. The prints were done by IND in a BOX, at the direction of Colonel Uday Sankeshwar, Director of the Madras Sappers Museum and Archives. Munisamy is said to represent the archetypal quality of a ‘Thambi’, as the personnel of the Sappers are affectionately called.

According to Shilpa Spoorthy from the ‘IND in a BOX’ team, “We 3D printed the two-foot bust based on a descrip-

tion given to us as well as an archive photo. With both the bust and murals having to be recreated from archival black-and-white photographs, digital artist Sriram Seshagiri was responsible for translating the two-dimensional images into physical exhibits”. It will now be displayed as a permanent exhibit at the Museum at Pune’s College of Military Engineering, she said. This exhibit will be displayed alongside those from other Sapper units throughout the country.

Munisamy was a mule operator during the inter-World War period. Up to World War-II, mules and other animals were used by armies around the world to aid in logistics, especially in inhospitable and mountainous terrain.

Regarding Munisamy, Colonel Sankeshwar said, “He enforces the epitome of the Madras Sappers. When we refer to a Thambi, he is the Thambi we refer to. He has all the characteristics, from the moustache to the stern eyes and face.”

The 3D printing method has also been used to recreate two murals from the Sappers’ history – ‘The Opening of the Mandalay Gate’ and ‘The Zojila Pass’. The former refers to the recapture of Fort Dufferin in Myanmar’s Mandalay from the hands of Japanese forces, while the Sappers had famously played a key role in ensuring a proper track for Indian tanks to be used against Pakistani positions in Jammu and Kashmir’s Zojila.s a model of a train created by French manufacturer Decauville that ran within the limits of the Madras Engineering Group premises in Bengaluru. A model of a train created by French manufacturer Decauville that ran within the limits of the Madras Engineering Group premises in Bengaluru

The initiative also includes a model of a train created by French manufacturer Decauville that ran within the limits of the Madras Engineering Group premises in Bengaluru. According to Colonel Sankeshwar, this narrow-gauge train ran until 1967, having performed the role of regular transport for most soldiers between the Assaye and Meanee Lines within the cantonment.

had been dug by the DJB on a service road as part of an ongoing major revamp of the Capital’s drainage network. The government had ordered an inquiry into the tragedy and to fix responsibility and three officials involved with the project — a junior engineer, an assistant engineer, and an executive engineer — were suspended.

In the order marked to chief engineers (CE) of the PWD and the I&FC department, Chaudhary said all construction and maintenance work taking place on roads or adjoining areas must be carried out with prescribed safeguards in place — including barricades, signboards, diversion signage, and reflector lights. Similarly, where drains run alongside roads, immediate and suitable measures must be taken to ensure that no vehicle or pedestrian falls into them. Engineers have also been directed to erect permanent walling or temporary crash barriers at all vulnerable locations along drains within 24 hours. “Finally, in case of construction of buildings or manual cleaning of the drainage network, all possible safeguards such as the use of helmets, boots, green safety nets and other measures prescribed in the manual should be strictly followed,” Chaudhary said. Issuing a stern warning, the ACS added, “Needless to say, strict and serious action will follow against the respective CEs/AEEs/JEs should any accident take place due to negligence or a casual approach adopted by the officers.”

BMC’s new guard?: BJP names Ritu Tawde as mayor pick, Shinde Sena chooses Sanjay Ghadi as deputy

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The ruling Mahayuti alliance in Maharashtra on Saturday formally announced its candidates for the mayor and deputy mayor posts at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), with the BJP fielding senior corporator Ritu Tawde as mayor and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena nominating Sanjay Shankar Ghadi as deputy mayor. The decision was taken at a meeting of alliance leaders earlier in the week.

Mumbai BJP president Amit Satam announced Tawde’s name, while former MP Rahul Shewale declared Ghadi as the Shiv Sena’s official nominee. The two parties later rotated every 15 months. This effectively means Mumbai will have four deputy mayors during the five-year civic term, a structured internal arrangement aimed at balancing representation within the alliance. With the Mahayuti holding a clear majority in the BMC, the election scheduled for February 11 is expected to be a formality unless there is a significant shift in numbers. The Shiv Sena (UBT) has held meetings at Matoshree and is likely to field a candidate, but the ruling combine currently enjoys a comfortable position. Ritu Tawde’s elevation carries a strong political message. A two-term corporator from Ghatkopar’s Ward 132, she is seen as an aggressive ‘Marathi face’ of the BJP in a largely Gujarati-speaking belt, a social balancing act that party leaders privately say is deliberate. Her name had been in discussion along with Shital Gambhir, but the leadership eventually settled on Tawde, who was widely considered a strong contender. She began her municipal ca-



reer with a win from Ward 127 in 2012, followed by a victory from Ward 121 in 2017. In the 2025 civic elections, she was elected from Ward 132. Tawde has also served as president of the BMC’s Education Committee and has been an active voice in civic deliberation. At 57, Sanjay Ghadi represents the organisational old guard of the Shiv Sena. A BCom graduate, he studied at a BMC school until Class 7, completed schooling at Chhabildas High School in Dadar, and graduated from Siddharth College of Commerce and Economics in Fort.

His political journey began in 1988-89 as a divisional head of the Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena, the undivided Shiv Sena’s student wing. In 1990-91, he served as president of the Mumbai University Students’ Council and as a Senate member. Over the years, he held various organisational responsibilities, including serving as state general secretary in the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena before returning to the Shiv Sena. He later became a Shiv Sena deputy leader and is currently the party’s Raigad district contact chief. He was elected corporator in 2017, served until 2022, and was re-elected in 2026. Within the party, he is regarded as a loyal and disciplined organisational leader. His wife, Sanjana Ghadi, is a Shiv Sena deputy leader and spokesperson. His son, Suyash Ghadi, is associated with the Yuva Sena as a legislative assembly coordinator.

First phase of revived 117-km Bengaluru Business Corridor project to be completed by mid-2027: DK Shivakumar



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The first phase of an ambitious Rs 26,000 crore Bengaluru Business Corridor project, which has been revived by the Congress government in Karnataka, will reach completion in about 18 months’ time, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar has said. The 117-km business corridor project, formerly known as the Peripheral Ring Road project, has been touted as a solution for the perennial traffic problems seen on the periphery of the city. Speaking after reviewing the project’s implementation this week, Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru Development Min-

ister, said its first phase would be completed by mid-2027.

“I had a review meeting on the Business Corridor project with BDA (Bengaluru Development Authority) officials. I gave away cheques, certificates and TDRs (Transferable Development Rights) to land owners. As many as 650 land owners have consented to give their land and we have given compensation to 400 land owners till now,” he said on Thursday. The deputy chief minister said the project is being implemented without a budgetary allocation and on the basis of a loan from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (Hudco). The Bengaluru Business Corridor Limited, a special purpose vehicle has been formed for the implementation of the project. Upon completion, the project would connect NICE Road with Tumkur Road and Hosur Road via Hesaraghatta Road, Doddaballapur Road, Ballari Road, Hennur-Bagalur Road, Old Madras Road, Hoskote-Anekal Road, and Sarjapur Road. After the project was revived last year, Shivakumar had said, “It will solve traffic congestion in the city to a large extent. It will significantly help businesses on Outer Ring Road (ORR) also.” The Congress government has pushed ahead with the Business Corridor despite resistance from conservationists, land owners and demands for denotifying the land acquired for the project over 15 years ago.

Maharashtra to issue ‘Bhu-Aadhaar’ for every farm, launches initiative to measure sub-divisions of farmlands to end decades of 7/12 mismatches



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Taking a step towards modernising land records and ensuring transparency in rural land ownership in Maharashtra, Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Saturday announced a comprehensive initiative to measure sub-divisions (pot hisse) of agricultural lands across the state. The objective is to eliminate long-standing mismatches between official land maps and the Record of Rights (7/12 extracts), which have persisted due to a lack of physical measurements for subdivisions created over the decades, he said. Under the initiative, the physical measurement of all plots has to be updated with maps and is aligned accurately with 7/12 records. Every land parcel will be assigned a Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN), also known as ‘Bhu-Aadhaar’, in line with Central Government guidelines. This unique identifier will serve as a single reference point for all land-related information, similar to an Aadhaar card for individuals, to create an accurate digital database for seamless access to land details as part of digital governance.

Bawankule said, “Protecting farmers’ land rights and introducing transparency are top priorities. By ensuring that maps and 7/12 records match perfectly through this measurement drive and the introduction of Bhu-Aadhaar, we will strengthen the rural economy and provide long-term relief from land-related disputes.” Since the first land survey (1890–1930), and particularly from 1992 to December 2024,

a staggering 2,12,76,499 new subdivisions have been formed due to sales, purchases, inheritance, partitions, and other transactions. The absence of corresponding physical measurements has led to discrepancies in official records, resulting in disputes and complications in land transactions, crop insurance, loans, and government scheme benefits. To address this, the Settlement Commissioner, Pune, is launching a ‘Pilot Project for Measurement of Sub-Divisions’. The project will begin in selected areas and scale state-wide, with involvement of private survey institutions to ensure efficiency and accuracy.

The initiative will help reduce mutual land disputes through clearly defined boundaries and areas. Along with it, accurate and matching maps aligned with 7/12 extracts will ensure easier access to crop insurance, bank loans, and government schemes with reliable digital records. It promises faster, more transparent processes for land buying, selling, and transactions. District-level committees under the district collector and taluka-level committees under the sub-divisional officer will conduct weekly reviews of progress. This project aligns with national efforts to digitise land records and empower farmers with secure, verifiable ownership details.

QR code-based payments to be implemented in 19 ORR Inter-change Toll Plazas from April 1

Hyderabad: All the toll plazas of Outer Ring Road (ORR) are set to completely go for cashless transactions starting April 1.

The ORR users who do not have FASTag presently have the option of making cash payment of toll charges which would be completely dispensed with by shifting to UPI-based QR code payments from April 1. This follows the union government decision to implement cashless transactions at National Highway toll plazas. While vehicles with FASTag facility, which work with RFID technology, are automatically scanned at toll plazas, those without the FASTag can use apps such as PhonePe, Paytm and Google Pay to make the toll payments

Japan snap election: PM Takaichi counts on her popularity to win Sunday’s poll



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is leveraging her popularity to help her party win Sunday's (February 8, 2026) snap election as she pushes her right-wing agenda to boost her country's economy and military capabilities in the face of growing tensions with China and an unpredictable Washington. The ultraconservative Ms. Takaichi, who took office as Japan's first female leader in October, has since enjoyed high ratings and support as her style and "work, work, work" mantra resonates with younger fans. Latest polls indicate a landslide win in the lower house for Ms. Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party. The opposition, despite the formation of a new centrist alliance and the rising far-right, remains too splintered to be a real challenger.

Ms. Takaichi's relatively safe bet is that her LDP party would, together with its new partner, the Japan Innovation Party, or JIP, secure a majority in the 465-seat lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament. Simple majority likely. Still, the latest surveys by major Japanese newspapers show there is a possibility Ms. Takaichi's party could win a simple majority on its own, while her coalition could win as many as 300 seats — a big jump from a thin majority it held since a 2024 election loss. The coalition lacks a majority in the other chamber, the upper house, which leaves it dependent on cooperation from the opposition to pass legislation, a risk to stability. Ms. Takaichi said Sunday's election is about deciding if she should stay on as Japanese leader and tackle her "nation-splitting policies." "If the LDP fails to win a majority, "I will step down," she said. A big win by Ms. Takaichi's coalition with its right-wing new partner JIP could mean a significant shift in Japan's security, immigration and other policies further to the right as far-right populists gain ground, such as the anti-globalist, surging nationalist party Sanseito. Opposition centrist alliance

The Buddhist-backed dovish Komeito party, which had split from the LDP over Ms. Takaichi's political views and lax anti-corruption measures, has formed a centrist alliance with the liberal-leaning main opposition — the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan — promising policies that include a "realistic" security, a nuclear weapons-free world and diversity. Komeito's ability to turn out multimillion votes from the Soka Gakkai sect could present a minor setback

to the LDP, but surveys for the centrist alliance are not promising. Left-leaning parties are increasingly losing ground as younger voters see their war-renouncing and anti-nuclear policies as unrealistic, and their further decline is inevitable, said Izuru Makihara, a University of Tokyo professor and expert in Japanese politics. Ms. Takaichi has pledged to revise security and defence policies by December to bolster Japan's offensive military capabilities, lifting the ban on lethal weapons exports and moving further away from the country's postwar pacifist principles. She has been pushing for tougher policies on foreigners, anti-espionage and other measures that resonates with a far-right audience but ones that experts say could undermine civil rights. Ms. Takaichi needs to find ways to increase defence spending in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's pressure on Japan to loosen its purse strings. In her campaign speeches, Ms. Takaichi stayed away from contentious issues and focused on the economy, tougher immigration and measures on foreigners, including tougher requirements for foreign property owners and a cap on foreign residents. Chiharu Sasaki, a resident of Tokyo, said that while it's good to have a female leader, she has to see what Ms. Takaichi will do. "There is an image that Ms. Takaichi is someone who gets things done, but she hasn't really proved it yet ... so I'm still a bit cautious," Sasaki said.

Tensions with China Japan has been facing escalating tensions with China after Ms. Takaichi suggested Japan could get involved in the case of Chinese military action against Taiwan, a self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own. Her comment, deviating from other Japanese leaders' strategic ambiguity in the past, angered China. Beijing has since stepped up economic and diplomatic retribution. The prolonged tensions and economic impact from China's trade and diplomatic reprisals have raised concerns, prompting Ms. Takaichi to step back from her right-wing rhetoric. Mr. Trump wants Japan to spend more on weapons as U.S.-China rivalry continues in the region. On Thursday, Mr. Trump gave a rare endorsement for Ms. Takaichi on X, announcing his invitation for her to visit the White House on March 19 and praising her as "a strong, powerful, and wise leader." "She will not let the people of Japan down!" Mr. Trump said. Record snowfall in northern Japan over the last few weeks, which blocked roads and was blamed for dozens of deaths nationwide, could hinder voting or delay vote counting in that part of the country. Ms. Takaichi's party is also reeling from political funds scandals and its deep-rooted ties to the Unification Church, which surfaced during the investigation of the 2022 assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Opposition leaders demand that Ms. Takaichi clarify allegations in newly surfaced documents that link her and her party to the controversial church, which has faced hundreds of lawsuits in Japan from families who say that it manipulated members into draining their savings to make donations. Also in the mix ahead of the vote on Sunday are uncertainties as to just how Ms. Takaichi's popularity among younger generations, traditionally known for low turnout at the polls, could translate into party votes

Bitcoin falls 9%; Asian shares slip as Wall Street hit by tech losses

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

U.S. futures and Asian shares traded mostly lower, tracking Wall Street's losses as technology stocks again dragged on markets. Bitcoin sank to roughly half its record price, giving back all it gained since U.S. President Donald Trump won the White House for his second term. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was up 0.5% to 54,073.52, recovering from losses earlier this week, with technology-related stocks leading gains. SoftBank Group rose 1.9%, and chipmaker Tokyo Electron rose 3%. Japan will also be holding its general election on Sunday (February 8, 2026), in which Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi expects to win a stronger public mandate for her policies. South Korea's Kospi lost 1.7% to 5,076.69, weighed down by tech shares. Samsung Electronics, the country's biggest listed company, fell 0.9%. Chipmaker SK Hynix was down 0.6%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 1.2% to 26,569.14. The Shanghai Composite index was flat at 4,075.37. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 shed 1.6% to 8,745.60. Taiwan's Taiex fell 0.2%.

Against the backdrop of the technology sell-off this week, Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency, saw dimming enthusiasm and was trading about 9% lower at just under \$65,000 on Friday (February 6, 2026), after it briefly sank more than 12% to below \$64,000 on Thursday (February 5, 2026). That's down from a record of above \$124,000 in October. The future for the S&P 500 was 0.3% lower, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.2%. On Thursday (February 5, 2026), the S&P 500 fell 1.2% to 6,798.40, its sixth loss in the seven days. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.2% to 48,908.72. The Nasdaq composite dropped 1.6% to 22,540.59.

Technology stocks were among the worst hit as concerns persist over whether massive AI investments by many of the Big Tech firms will pay off. Chipmaker



Qualcomm sank 8.5% despite better-than-expected quarterly revenues. Alphabet lost 0.5% as investors were focussed on its huge spending on AI. Amazon fell 11% in after-hours trading on Thursday (February 5, 2026) after it announced plans to boost capital spending by more than 50% to \$200 billion in AI and other areas. American Artificial Intelligence startup Anthropic's new AI tools also fuelled the sell-off of software stocks on Wall Street this week, as its sophistication means many traditional software development services and products could be disrupted or replaced. Gold and silver prices have been volatile this week following a months-long rally as investors moved into safe-haven assets, prompted by factors including elevated geopolitical tensions. Gold prices fell 1% on Friday to \$4,843.70 per ounce, after nearing \$5,600 last week. Silver prices dropped 6.6% to \$71.63 per ounce after rising earlier this week. It lost more than 31% last Friday. In other dealings early Friday, the U.S. benchmark crude oil gained 35 cents to \$63.64 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 36 cents to \$67.91 a barrel.

Three arrested in Peshawar linked to suicide attack at Shia mosque

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Pakistan's police have arrested two men and a woman in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Peshawar linked to a suicide attack at a Shia mosque in Islamabad on Friday. At least 31 people were killed and 169 others injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up at Khadijah al-Kubra mosque-cum-imambargah in the Tarlai area of Islamabad, in one of the worst terror attacks targeting the community in recent years. A police official said that during the operation late on Friday (February 6) night, two brothers of the alleged suicide bomber and a woman were arrested and interrogation is currently underway. According to investigation officials, an identity card recovered from them helped establish the attacker's identity as Yasir. Mourners arrange the coffins of the victims of Friday's suicide bombing inside a Shiite mosque, during a funeral prayer, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026. (AP Photo/Anjum Naveed) | Photo Credit: Anjum Naveed

Official records show that his permanent address was Abbas Colony, Shiro Jangi, Charsadda Road, Peshawar, while his temporary residence was in Ganj Mohalla Qaziyan, Peshawar. Investigators have also revealed that prior to the Islamabad suicide bombing, the attacker had remained in



Afghanistan for approximately five months where he allegedly received formal training in weapons handling and suicide attacks.

Following this disclosure, investigation agencies have shifted their focus toward identifying and dismantling the network operating behind the attack. Police officials stated that further raids are being conducted in Peshawar and Nowshera to identify potential facilitators and contacts. Authorities emphasised that the investigation into the Islamabad suicide bombing is being carried out from all angles, and additional evidence is expected to surface, which may help clarify the full scope of the terrorist incident.

India-U.S. deal does not include any item that would hurt Indian farmers, says Piyush Goyal



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

India and the U.S. early morning issued a joint statement in which they announced that the two countries had reached a framework for an Interim Agreement, and would continue working together towards a more comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement. While U.S. President Donald Trump has already signed an executive order removing the 25% tariffs the U.S. had imposed on imports from India for its trade in Russian oil, Mr. Goyal said that another executive order is expected next week that would reduce the remaining 25% reciprocal tariff to 18%. "We have not included any item where any Indian farmer will be hurt," Mr. Goyal said at a press conference later in the day. "All sensitive items have been kept out of the deal. No genetically modified items will enter India, and no tariff relief has been given [to the U.S.] on meat, poultry, dairy, soybean, maize, rice, wheat, sugar, millets, fruits such as bananas, strawberries, cherries, citrus fruit, greenpea, kabuli chana, moong, oilseeds, ethanol, and tobacco."

OpenAI unveils AI agent service as part of push to attract businesses

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

OpenAI ?on Thursday said it is launching a service, ?called Frontier, for companies to build and ?manage so-called artificial-intelligence agents, or AI ?tools that can complete specific tasks, like fixing a software bug. The platform is part of a broader effort by OpenAI to seize the enterprise market from its rivals, notably the AI startup Anthropic, which draws the bulk ?of its revenue from companies. Last year, OpenAI ?CEO Sam Altman said enterprise growth would be a "huge focus" for his company. The enterprise market is just one ?of many places ?where OpenAI and Anthropic are going head-to-head. Both companies are preparing to go public, a process that will pit them against each other ?for investor attention.

The two companies will ?also be running rival ads during the Super Bowl. Anthropic's ad appears to ?be a thinly veiled jab at OpenAI's decision to bring ads to ChatGPT, a critique ?that ruffled feathers at OpenAI on Wednesday. In a post on X, Altman described Anthropic's ad as funny but "clearly dishonest." OpenAI executives said Frontier is meant to work with a company's preexisting infrastructure as well as AI agents built by third parties. OpenAI is unsatisfied with some of Nvidia's latest AI chips, and it ?has



sought alternatives since last year, eight sources familiar with the matter said, potentially complicating the relationship between the two highest-profile players in the AI boom. That approach means that companies might ?adopt OpenAI's enterprise tools faster than is otherwise possible, said Fidji Simo, who oversees OpenAI's product and business teams as the startup's CEO of applications. "This is us saying we're going to build an intelligence layer that's going to help every enterprise turn on agents in a much easier way," she said.

India-U.S. interim trade deal: Closely engaged with America for electronics and IP, Union Minister Vaishnaw says

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

The Indian government is closely engaged with the U.S. for electronics and IP-related matters, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Saturday (February 7, 2026), as the two nations announced that they have finalised a framework for an interim trade agreement. The U.S.-India joint statement on the interim agreement for trade deal has called for addressing non-tariff barriers that affect bilateral trade. It specifically mentions barriers related to the trade in U.S. medical devices, U.S. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) goods. Asked about views on the statement and its expected impact, Mr. Vaishnaw said the commerce ministry is the nodal body to share details but as far as electronics is concerned India is closely engaged in the discussion. "We are very closely engaged from our side as far as electronics and IP is concerned. We believe in co-development, co-creation, we believe in IP, respecting IP. We believe that India has a lot to offer to the entire world in terms of new products, new ideas, new technologies and that journey is progressing at a very rapid measure, good pace," the minister said. The joint statement calls for working towards a positive outcome, within six months of the agreement getting into force on whether U.S.-developed or international standards, including testing requirements, are acceptable for the purposes of U.S. exports entering the Indian market in identified sectors.

As per the statement, India and the U.S. will significantly increase trade in technology products, including Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) and other goods used in data centers, and expand joint technology cooperation. Sharing his views on the GPU agreement, Mr. Vaishnaw said data centres are going to be a major growth



journey in the coming years. He said that under the India AI mission, the country has procured over 34,000 GPUs as part of the common compute facility and very soon about 20,000 more will be added. "So far we have committed investments of \$70 billion, if we add the other announcements, it is about USD 90 billion. I expect that in the coming months, this number will go beyond \$200 billion. That is the general expectation which is coming up and that will generate new opportunities for our service providers, for the young startups who can provide new solutions," Mr. Vaishnaw said. During October-December, Google announced an investment of \$15 billion, Microsoft \$17 billion, Amazon \$35 billion and Digital Connexion \$11 billion. Mr. Vaishnaw said that the investments in data centres will create that strength which is needed in all the five layers of the AI architecture, AI stack. "Many of our startups will be very keen on having more and more compute facilities available in our country through these data centres, so that they can use it for developing solutions and also providing the solutions to the world," Mr. Vaishnaw said.

Rudranksh Patil wins gold in Asian Championship men’s 10m air rifle

New Delhi: Former world champion shooter Rudranksh Patil offered a glimpse of what lies ahead this season by clinching the gold medal, while Olympian Arjun Babuta finished second, as India made a telling statement in the men's 10m air rifle event at the Asian Championship here Friday. Rudranksh, one of the finest rifle marksmen to emerge from the country after Olympic gold medallist Abhinav Bindra and Gagan Narang, shot a superb 251.9 in the final to hold off the challenge from compatriot Babuta (250.7) and stamp his authority on the sport. The duo, along with Vishal Singh, also earned India the team gold in the event.

The 22-year-old Rudranksh, who endured the disappointment of missing the Paris Olympics despite earning a quota place for the country, underlined his class by topping the qualification round with a superb 632.1. Two more Indians — Babuta (628.0, fifth) and Vishal (624.6, eighth) — also advanced to the eight-shooter final. Rudranksh began the final on a slow note, sitting sixth after the first set of five



shots in the competition stage, but quickly found his rhythm in the next series to move up to second. From there, he never looked back during the elimination round.

This was Rudranksh's maiden individual gold at the continental level, having previously claimed the mixed team top-podium spot in Jakarta in 2024.

Qualcomm announces tape-out stage of 2nm semiconductor design in Bengaluru



Qualcomm Technologies, Inc. on Saturday (February 7, 2026) announced the tape-out of its 2nm semiconductor design in Bengaluru, as the company highlighted the contributions and collaboration of its largest engineering workforce outside the United States. The tape-out phase refers to one of the last stages in the semiconductor design process, before formally transitioning the product to the manufacturing stage.

The event took place at the Qualcomm Bengaluru facility, and during the visit of the Union Minister of Railways, Information & Broadcasting, Ashwini Vaishnaw. “The

Qualcomm Bengaluru campus serves as a key engineering center for development across next-generation wireless, AI, compute, and system-level technologies,” shared the company in a press release. Qualcomm highlighted that its presence in India spanned more than 20 years of continuous investment, and made note of its engineering development centres in Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad.

The company referred to India’s emergence as a “critical hub” for advanced semiconductor development and stressed on the importance of strengthening domestic chip design capabilities. “India is increasingly at the center of how advanced semiconductor technologies are being designed for the future. Seeing Qualcomm’s work here, its engineering strength, deep design capabilities, and long-standing commitment to India, is truly impressive. Milestones like this demonstrate how far India’s design ecosystem has come and align strongly with our vision of building a globally competitive semiconductor industry,” said Mr. Vaishnaw. “This milestone reflects over two decades of Qualcomm’s commitment to India, investing in talent, building advanced engineering capabilities, and operating at a scale that enables us to support our stakeholders in their digital transformation journeys. India today plays a key role in how we support the design, development, and delivery of next-generation technologies for the world. The innovation being developed here is helping shape the future of connectivity, computation, and intelligent systems globally,” said Savi Soin, President, Qualcomm India.

India-U.S. trade deal provides much-needed macro predictability: Nasscom U.S. CEO Forum

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Indian technology companies are already delivering measurable outcomes for the U.S. economy — high-quality jobs, regional investment and innovation at scale,” he said at a Nasscom U.S. CEO Forum meeting held in Washington DC on February 4th (5th in India), 2026, shortly after the announcement of the India-US trade deal. The Nasscom U.S. CEO Forum was focused on moving this partnership from collaboration to co-creation, anchored in data, accountability, and long-term value creation, Mr. Nambiar added.

Energy security also emerged as a strategic priority, with the United States scaling AI-critical energy capacity and India integrating green and nuclear energy to support next-generation data centres, the forum noted. According to the forum, Indian technology companies are increasingly contributing to AI-driven energy optimisation, grid analytics, and digital infrastructure, reinforcing the resilience of the U.S. innovation ecosystem. The meeting held at Capitol Hill brought together leading Indian technology business leaders and senior US policymakers to advance a shared agenda focused on enhancing innovation, AI, trusted supply chains, workforce development and local job creation across the United States, said Nasscom in a statement on Thursday.

“India and the United States have a generational opportunity to build a trusted technology alliance across AI, semiconductors and digital infrastructure. Indian tech companies are deeply embedded in the success of US enterprises, supporting the majority of Fortune 500 firms while creating local jobs across US states,” said Amit Chadha, CEO & MD, L&T Technology Services & Vice Chair at Nasscom U.S. CEO Forum. “By supporting the joint U.S.-India target of a bilateral trade number of \$500 billion, we can help shape a more resilient, innovation-led future for both economies,” he added. Conceived as a flagship leadership platform in July 2025, the Nasscom US CEO Forum brings together leaders from government, industry, academia, think tanks, and the Indian diaspora to advance the India–US technology partnership. According to Nasscom, Indian technology firms affiliated with Nasscom currently contribute \$103 billion to U.S. GDP and support over half a million jobs across 25 US states. India Inc. also has been playing a critical role in strengthening regional economies, enabling US Fortune 500 enterprises to innovate, scale and remain globally competitive, the forum said. As part of the Washington, DC programme, the Nasscom delegation engaged with several Members of Congress and senior Administration officials, including Rep. Zoe Lofgren, Rep. Julia Brownley, Rep. Don Beyer, Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith, Sen. Ron Wyden and Deputy US Trade Rep Ambassador Rick Switzer. The Forum also recognised



Sen. Mark Warner, Senior Senator for Virginia and Congressman Rich McCormick, Representative for Georgia’s 7th District, for their leadership in advancing bipartisan co-operation on technology, innovation and jobs. AI tools won’t bypass India’s tech services; it will redefine and augment its role

Meanwhile, Nasscom, in a statement, said AI models and tools would continue to drive exponential innovation and rapid adoption. The recently released Claude Cowork tool was aimed to automate work across functions such as legal, sales, marketing, and data analysis, it said, adding, “However, concerns that such tools will significantly disrupt or eliminate the technology services sector where India has a strong global presence are misplaced.” Indian technology services companies work closely with global enterprises that operate complex technology environments, with interconnected systems and fragmented data, it argued. According to the apex body, creating real business value from AI requires careful coordination, with humans in the loop who understand business context, industry knowledge, and enterprise workflows. AI is unlikely to be adopted as a simple “out-of-the-box” solution in large enterprises; it is assuredly adding, technology services companies have already accelerated their data and AI capabilities by investing in platforms, building partnerships with AI companies and hyperscalers, upskilling talent, and leveraging mergers and acquisitions. With AI, new opportunities are emerging in areas such as legacy modernisation, AI-ready data foundations, and the use of intelligent agents across business and enterprise functions, yet, as enterprise AI adoption moves from experimentation to large-scale deployment, technology services companies will play a critical role in enabling this transition, as per Nasscom. The industry body further said, “AI adoption will follow different paths across different types of enterprises, and the technology services sector is actively reinventing itself to stay ahead of these changes.”

India must scale up non-animal methods for pre-clinical drug testing, say experts

Non-Animal Methods or NAMs, for pre-clinical testing of drugs, have been gaining ground across the world. With the development of new technologies and with countries updating their regulations on drug development and testing, there is now an opportunity for India, which houses a giant pharmaceutical sector, to not only benefit from this trend but also make significant contributions.

This was highlighted by experts during a webinar held on Thursday , February 5, 2026, to mark the launch of a report, ‘Landscape Analysis on Alternatives to Animal Testing for Drug Development in India’, jointly brought out by Humane World for Animals India, DBT-InStEM, Animal Law and Policy Network and Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories Ltd. The experts said that every year, millions of animals in India are sacrificed for pre-clinical testing. Shifting to NAMs was not only an opportunity to improve scientific relevance in the development process but also a means to reduce costs and accelerate timelines, while being ethically aligned with global best practices, they said.

The report states that NAM technologies — such as organoids, organ-on-chip systems, microphysiological platforms, and in silico modeling — address challenges in drug development, including high clinical attrition rates and poor species translatability, where only about 10% of Phase I candidates reach approval. In order for this to materialise, the creation of infrastructure, enhancement of scientific capabilities, clear guidance from and formalising of frameworks by regulators are some of the factors that need to be addressed, they said.

The report says that while India is an emerging adopter of NAM technologies, there is stakeholder uncertainty about whether these technologies would replace, complement, or reduce animal testing. The experts called for the setting up of an industry-led consortium, the creation of a Central agency for NAMs, investments into local bio-banks, reagents, culture media and software, and establishment of hub-and-spoke models to support research and training. The webinar participants include Alokparna Sengupta, managing

ing director, Humane World for Animals India; Sarfaraz K. Niazi, adjunct professor, University of Illinois; Arvind Ramanathan, scientist, DBT BRIC — Institute for Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine; Deepak Sapra, CEO-API & Services, Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories Ltd.; and Satish Reddy, chairman, Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories Ltd.

What is suborbital tourism?

Billionaire businessman Jeff Bezos is launched with three crew members aboard a New Shepard rocket on the world’s first unpiloted suborbital flight from Blue Origin’s Launch Site 1 in Texas, U.S., July 20, 2021. | Photo Credit: ReutersA: On January 31, Blue Origin, the private space company owned by Jeff Bezos, announced that it was suspending its New Shepard suborbital space tourism programme for at least two years to focus on its “lunar capabilities” instead. Suborbital tourism is a form of space travel where paying passengers fly to the edge of space but don’t complete a full orbit around the earth.

K-Dramas, algorithms and adolescence: How digital fantasy becomes an escape



Pooja Chahal, a student counsellor at a government school in Delhi, still remembers the 12-year-old girl who began hearing voices. It started with fainting spells. Soon, the child became convinced someone was whispering threats in her ear, telling her she would be killed. Upon probing, Chahal found a stressful home life: a father who beat her mother, a sudden flight from their old life, a changed name. Amid this upheaval, the child had found solace in online games. She was eventually referred for psychiatric treatment.

That memory returned with force this week, when three sisters — aged 12, 14 and 16 — jumped from their high-rise apartment in Ghaziabad. They, too, had created a world apart, centred around South Korea, a country they had never visited. In an eight-page note, they wrote that they “loved Koreans” and could never accept marriage to Indian men. Their father had taken away their phones, their portal to that other life. “Korean is our life,” they wrote. “Now you have seen the proof.” These two stories — one involving clinical psychosis, the other a fatal fixation — frame a disturbing question: in an age of limitless digital immersion, where does passionate fandom end and a break from reality begin? When fantasy becomes an emotional shelter The universe the sisters immersed themselves in is designed to appeal. South Korea’s Hallyu, or Korean Wave, has reached India through music, television and online platforms. K-pop streaming in India surged 362 percent between 2018 and 2023, powered by global phenoms such as BTS, data from the Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange shows. Yet psychologists caution against simplistic explanations. “The problem begins when we look for a single cause,” says Itisha Nagar, a Delhi-based psychologist who works with children. “There is a lot of focus on Korean dramas and too little focus on the contexts children are growing up in today.”

For many Indian viewers, entry into this universe is driven by the algorithm. fantasy world Children retreat into fantasy worlds that offer relief and consistency. (Image generated using AI)

Abhyudaya Karamchetu, 32, a public relations professional in Hyderabad, recalls being pulled in almost accidentally around 2018, when short, unexplained clips from Boys Over Flowers, a popular K-drama, began appearing repeatedly on her Facebook feed. “I didn’t even know the title,” she says. “I used to just see two-or three-minute clipings, and when I tried to search, it would disappear.” Curious, she began searching online for fragments of scenes, scrolling through comment sections for context, before downloading an app which offers community-powered subtitles for Asian dramas and movies. “Now, these dramas are easily accessible,” she says. That accessibility, psychologists say, matters most when fantasy stops being a temporary escape and begins to function as an emotional shelter. For vulnerable children, digitally mediated fantasy worlds can become carefully constructed spaces of safety — predictable, controllable and emotionally legible in ways real life is not. “A child’s basic right is to feel safe, physically and emotionally,” says Namrata Mahajan, a counselling psychologist in Gurugram. “When that safety is missing, the brain, which is wired for survival, will hold on to something else.” In these circumstances, children retreat into fantasy worlds that offer relief and consistency, often forming parasocial attachments to fictional characters or celebrities who feel attentive, protective and emotionally available. Over time, these imagined relationships can begin to substitute for real ones, making the return to everyday life (with its conflicts, ambiguities and disappointments) feel overwhelming. “Children resort to living in a world of fantasy when they can no longer find solace in the real world,” says Chahal.

The appeal of K-dramas K-dramas are structured for immersion. Usually limited to 16 episodes, they are designed for binge-watching and emotional payoff. Unlike many Indian television soap operas, they frequently centre professional women and male leads whose authority is tempered by restraint. “When you go deeper, you see the kind of respect the lead actor gives to the woman,” Karamchetu says. Even when the male lead is rude or arrogant initially, “there is a certain limit to that arrogance. There is mutual respect even in hatred.” Jagadeesh Reddy, a cultural observer and curator who has previously worked with the Korean Cultural Centre India, situates this appeal within a broader cultural strategy. Korean content, he says, is part of a carefully built ecosystem of soft power, where music, drama, food, beauty and language reinforce one another.

“How do you know a country?” he asks. “First through food and music. Then tourism, then stories.” Korea, he says,

began with music, followed by television dramas and beauty culture, creating multiple points of emotional entry. Format matters too. “We are not really creating youth-related content here,” he says. Indian television, he observes, remains dominated by long-running daily soaps centred on family conflict. Korean dramas, by contrast, targeted younger audiences much earlier, offering tightly written 16-episode arcs that could be consumed in bursts. “You can binge-watch them,” he says. “And the stories are aspirational — they give that adrenaline of somebody trying to achieve something or fighting the conditions they are in.”

That aspiration resonates strongly with Indian youth navigating academic pressure, social comparison and limited emotional vocabulary.

What children are escaping from Understanding this appeal requires looking beyond screens. “Urban living, nuclear families, polluted environments, social media, internet exposure, sedentary lifestyles, corporate schooling and survival-centric parenting leave very little space for emotional presence,” Nagar says. “We have turned our eyes away from children because there is so much else demanding attention.”

In that absence, other forces step in. “K-dramas are designed in a way that can make anyone, adults as well as children, feel warm, connected and special,” she says. “But any kind of obsession or addiction is always an escape from the norm.” When real attachment figures are unavailable, fictional characters become emotionally reliable substitutes. (Image generated using AI) When real attachment figures are unavailable, fictional characters become emotionally reliable substitutes. (Image generated using AI) The difference with children, Nagar adds, is developmental. “Unlike adults, children find it difficult to differentiate the real from the unreal.” What is often described as an obsession is better understood as a search for validation. This is not the first time that a generation has built its own fantasy refuges. In the 1980s, tabletop role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons provoked moral panic for encouraging immersive alternate identities.

In the 1990s, satellite television brought MTV, American sitcoms like Friends and global pop into living rooms, sparking anxieties about Westernisation. The 2000s saw Japanese anime — from Dragon Ball Z to Naruto — build devoted followings, followed by the immersive worlds of online games and TV dramas from various countries. Later came massively multiplayer online games, fantasy fandoms and cinematic worlds like Harry Potter, each offering coherent mythologies that felt more ordered and emotionally legible than everyday life. What distinguishes the current Korean wave is integration.

Today’s digital ecosystems collapse music, television, fashion, language, beauty standards and fandom into a single, always-on emotional environment, accessed privately and continuously through personal screens. It is a complete world, offering not just stories but an entire aesthetic and identity toolkit. For older viewers like Karamchetu, immersion often remains bounded. She reads fan theories and fan fiction on platforms like Wattpad, but resists translating admiration into lifestyle emulation. For adolescents, however, the boundary between admiration and identity is more porous. Saina Singh, 16, from Jammu, observes that in her peer group, fluency in this universe is mandatory social currency. “If you don’t know those references,” she says, “you’re thought to be living under a rock.”

Technological shifts The rise of this phenomenon cannot be separated from broader technological shifts. Affordable smartphones and cheap data have made high-speed internet nearly universal. Post-pandemic, Chahal says, “every child has access to a device.” “Peer influences work here as in the case of drug addiction,” Chahal says. “Children hear about certain shows or games from their peers, but those at risk develop an addiction.” She has seen a paradigm shift across class. “Parents are working all day long, and there is no one to supervise the child.” At its most profound, this engagement evolves into parasocial relationships — the one-sided sense of intimacy with a media persona.

Mahajan explains the core need. “A child’s basic right is to feel safe,” she says. “When the child does not feel this, our brains and bodies, which are wired for survival, will hold on to something else.” When real attachment figures are unavailable, she says, fictional characters become emotionally reliable substitutes. Abruptly cutting off these worlds can feel catastrophic. “It’s almost like a crisis for that person,” she says. “Because that child is so used to that ideal world that coming back to the real self is really very terrifying.” Mahajan cautions against seeing this as a problem of a specific culture. “I would not see a particular culture as bad. It is about how we are using it.” What matters is whether engagement disrupts daily life, relationships and emotional regulation.

Beyond screens The solution, experts say, lies in emotional availability and teaching resilience. Children need meaningful time and presence, a sense that they matter beyond performance or compliance. Today’s digital ecosystems allow fantasy identities, communities and narratives to operate without pause, supervision or ritual closure, making the boundary between imaginative play and emotional dependence far more fragile for adolescents still learning to anchor themselves in the real world.

Covid-19 vaccine not linked to reduced fertility, study of 60,000 women finds

New Delhi: Amid several claims of vaccination and reduced fertility, a study of nearly 60,000 women showed that the Covid vaccine played no role in a decrease in childbirth. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, unfounded rumours have circulated, especially on social media, alleging that vaccination impairs chances of becoming pregnant.

In the later stages of the pandemic, there was a decrease in the number of children born in some countries, including Sweden. This raised the question of whether this could be due to the new vaccines. “Our conclusion is that it’s highly unlikely that the mRNA vaccine against Covid-19 was behind the decrease in childbirth during the pandemic,” said Toomas Timpka, professor of social medicine at Linköping University, Sweden. The study, published in the journal Communications Medicine, found no statistically significant difference between vaccinated and unvaccinated women in childbirths and miscarriages.

“We see no difference in childbirth rates between those who have taken the vaccine and those who haven’t. We’ve also looked at all registered miscarriages among those who became pregnant, and we see no difference between the groups there either,” Timpka said. Their analysis is based on a study of almost 60,000 women aged 18 to 45 years in Sweden. Of these women, 75 per cent were vaccinated once or more against Covid from 2021 to 2024. The researchers



used data on childbirths, vaccinations, miscarriages, and deaths from health care records. The results are in line with several previous studies that have not found any association between the Covid vaccine and fertility.

Importantly, the study examined conception and pregnancy in the general population, unlike most previous research, which “focused on couples undergoing fertility treatment.” The researchers also adjusted their findings for factors other than Covid that could have affected conception rates, such as age and underlying illness. Several studies have shown that Covid infection can be dangerous for pregnant women, but vaccination can reduce that risk substantially. “

Enabling a modern and future-ready labour ecosystem



November 21, 2025 will go down as a milestone in India's journey of Viksit Bharat — a day when the much awaited Four Labour Codes were made effective by the Government of India. India has taken a giant leap in labour rights with the implementation of four modernised Labour Codes (the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020). These reforms create a fair, modern and future-ready labour ecosystem — one that empowers workers, enhances enterprise competitiveness and strengthens India's path towards a Viksit Bharat and Aatmanirbhar Bharat. India's labour framework has evolved gradually over several decades, leading to the creation of multiple pieces of legislation operating across different time periods and economic contexts. While these laws have played an important role in shaping employment relations, the growing size and diversity of India's workforce brought to the fore the need for simplification and consolidation. The Second National Commission on Labour recommended grouping existing laws into broader functional codes. Extensive consultations with industry, employers, trade unions and State governments between 2015 and 2019 led to these four comprehensive Labour Codes being enacted.

A workforce that is both large and young India today has one of the world's largest and youngest workforces, with more than 643 million workers, and is expected to contribute nearly two-thirds of new global workforce entrants in the coming years, as in the World Economic Forum. Recent labour market trends point to a positive momentum: between 2017-18 and 2023-24, India created 16.83 crore jobs, the unemployment rate declined from 6% to 3.2%, and formal employment expanded significantly. Given that a large share of India's workforce still remains in the informal sector, the need for a simplified and coherent labour framework has been particularly important to help extend protections and improve productivity of the unorganised sector. The coverage under the Code for Social Security has been extended to the unorganised sector also. These developments reflect the growing dynamism of the economy and emphasise the need for a modern labour regulatory system that supports this trajectory. For workers, the Labour Codes provide a stronger and more consistent set of protections. Universal minimum wages, a national floor wage, mandatory appointment letters, timely payment of wages, and clear rules on working hours —including the 48-hour work week — reinforce fairness and security. The OSH Code's emphasis on safety committees, free preventive

health check-ups and improved workplace standards strengthens the focus on well-being and productivity.

The Code on Social Security, 2020 provides for universal Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) coverage with no geographic restrictions, streamlined Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) procedures for quicker resolutions, and support for the construction sector through simplified cess payments. It also establishes a National Social Security Fund for various worker categories. Another major reform under these codes is the simplification of compliance requirements. The shift to single registration, single licence and single return significantly reduces administrative burdens, particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME). A uniform definition of wages introduces clarity across multiple laws, helping reduce disputes and improving predictability in wage-related calculations. Decriminalisation of minor offences and the introduction of digital processes such as algorithm-based inspections encourage transparency and trust-based compliance. India's workforce is diversifying, with the rapid growth of gig and platform-based employment, flexible working models and digital-enabled livelihoods. In this context, the Social Security Code's inclusion of gig and platform workers is timely. With the size of this workforce expected to grow from one crore in 2024-25 to 2.35 crore by 2029-30, establishing a framework for social protection is a forward-looking measure that aligns with the changing nature of work. The Codes also emphasise formalisation, which remains vital for long-term economic progress. Clearer rules, standardised definitions and transparent processes encourage more enterprises to enter the formal economy and help extend protections to a larger share of the workforce. Women's participation in the workforce has improved yet remains below its potential. According to the International Labour Organization's India Employment Report 2024, India's female labour force participation rate stands at 32.8%. The Labour Codes help strengthen the enabling environment by reinforcing equal remuneration, enhancing maternity benefits and expanding social protection to unorganised, gig and platform workers. The OSH Code also allows women to work at night with their consent and has adequate safety arrangements, thereby widening opportunities across several sectors. Together, these provisions support greater access and continuity of employment for women as the economy evolves. A modern labour framework must balance the need for worker protection with the requirements of a competitive business environment. The Labour Codes aim to provide this balance by offering clearer industrial relations norms and faster dispute resolution, while ensuring that workers have access to essential rights, safety and social security. This balanced approach supports investment, promotes stability and helps strengthen India's position in global value chains. The next few days will be crucial as the implementation process for these Codes moves forward. It will be important for States to align with the minimum thresholds and guiding principles laid out in the Codes to ensure uniformity and clarity across the country. After the Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms, this represents one of the most significant structural reforms. This reform momentum should continue, supporting greater investments, and thereby contributing to higher employment generation in the country.

Uphold the promise of Vande Mataram

India has commenced celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, the ballad that became a battle cry for India's freedom. This is also an opportune time to ask how far we have realised Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's immortal words — "Sujalam, Suphalam, Malayaja sheetalam, Sasya-shyamalam (translated as clear-watered, rich in fruits, cooled by mountain breeze, lush and green with its fields of harvest)". A biodiverse land

Down the ages, India's environment has been critical to its becoming the cradle of one of the world's great civilisations. India's population and its fertility rate owe much to the fertility of its soil, which was able to provide abundant harvests to support a large population. Even as India's land area comprises just 2.4% of the land in the world, the Convention on Biological Diversity testifies that India is home to about 8% of the world's species. Over 91,200 species of animals and 45,500 species of plants are found in India. And such has been the reliability of India's rain-bearing winds that even before India gained independence, the renowned geographer Halford Mackinder spoke of the country as a 'Monsoon power' that will shape the future of the world. How have we safeguarded elements of this priceless environmental heritage that birthed our civilisation — Sujalam, Suphalam, Malayaja sheetalam? India's life-giving rivers are in deep crisis. Nearly 43% of river monitoring systems have found traces of heavy metal contamination.

The level of pesticide content in several Indian rivers is well above permissible limits. In Global Water Quality rankings, India ranks 120 out of 122 countries. Unsurprisingly, we do not trust the water sourced from our aquifers. A survey last year found that 60% of Indian households use a filter for their tap water. The pollution in the Yamuna may now be the subject of memes, but there is no room for mirth in the misery we have created for ourselves. Studies estimate that over 40% of food samples in India have pesticides in excess of permissible levels. Unsurprisingly, cancer cases are expected to rise by 12% over the next five years. The crisis of our time Not just Bankim Chandra, poets, from Kalidasa to Tagore, eulogised India's fresh and fragrant air. What would they have to say today about Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI)? On October 30, Indian cities took up the top 40 spots in the world's most polluted cities. Travel websites are now advertising destinations in India with the selling point of "an AQI less than 50".

The fiscal burden of air pollution now equals nearly 9.5 % of India's GDP, and threatens to erase the economic progress we have made in recent decades. Disturbingly, a Lancet study released in October found that 17 lakh Indians died prematurely in 2022 due to man-made air pollution, representing a spike of 38% from 2010. Renowned for its spices and mineral riches, India's richest treasure has always been its agricultural bounty. With at least 66 fruits and 29 cereals native to its land, India boasts of remarkable agri-diversity. Yet, India's agriculture is fighting an uphill battle today against climate change and needs all the support it can get. The impact of climate change has manifested itself in myriad ways, from warmer temperatures to erratic rainfall that has affected soil quality. The result has been the lowering of Vitamin C levels in citrus fruits in Karnataka, the increase in sugars in grapes in Maharashtra, and the delayed flowering of apple trees in Himachal Pradesh. Right to clean air and water

Vande Mataram was more than a rousing cry to rally people, or a slogan for independence. It was, and remains an article of faith to Indians. Its words represent a promise to the people of India about their homeland. We have seen several political debates over the years about how many



stanzas of Vande Mataram should be sung. Perhaps it is time we had a debate — cutting across ideological and partisan lines — on how true our national song's words ring today. Equally, where our health, the longevity of our parents and the well-being of our children is at stake, every citizen needs to step up and speak out. The recent India Gate protest, against air pollution, may be just a sign. In "Anandamath", Bankim Chandra describes a band of monks in 1770 determined to free their motherland from colonisers. In 2025, their spirit lives on in the young activists demanding a healthier environment. It is embodied in every placard and post asking for freedom from the scourges of pollution and inaction in the face of climate change in India. Can there be a more opportune moment than the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram to raise the call for a sujal, suphal and sasya-shyamal India? Not just for our right to clean air, it is time to ask those we elect to redeem the promise of Vande Mataram.

Kashmir experiences coldest November since 2007; Mercury in Srinagar drops to -4.5°C

Kashmir is experiencing its coldest November since 2007, with minimum temperatures dipping below the freezing point across several locations, officials said on Friday (November 28, 2025). Srinagar recorded its coldest night of the season on Thursday (November 27, 2025) with the minimum temperature settling at -4.5°C, down from -4.4°C, the previous night, officials said.

The city has witnessed a continuous drop in the night temperatures over the last few days. The night temperature in Srinagar was more than four degrees below the normal for the season, they said. According to officials, several weather stations across the valley recorded their lowest night temperatures in November since 2007. Srinagar had recorded a minimum temperature of -4.8°C on November 28, 2007, while the all-time low November temperature in the city was -7.8°C, recorded in 1934. Officials said Konibal, in south Kashmir's Pulwama district, was the coldest recorded place in the valley last night, recording a minimum temperature of -6°C. The mercury in Qazigund, the gateway town to the valley, settled at -4.4°C, and in north Kashmir's Kupwara, the minimum temperature was -4.8°C.

Financial strain mounts for Indian families seeking postgraduate medical seats



As November ends, families and students in India aspiring for a seat in the postgraduate medical education system are recuperating with the financial strain. This year's NEET-PG exam earlier scheduled for June 15, 2025, was postponed by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) to August 3, 2025. After this delay, counselling backlogs have stretched for months. Parents recount the immediate shock at discovering that if they miss out on a government seat, institutes can demand anywhere from ₹20 lakh to over ₹2.5 crore annually for a management or NRI seat, with top specialties costing even more. The fee structure leaves families drowning in debt, with some postponing essential needs just to keep aspiring doctors in the race. Worse, there is no guaranteed return on this investment: job security remains elusive, recoveries can take a decade or longer, and students who enter the system already as MBBS doctors are forced into making heartbreaking sacrifices. Not uniform

The NEET-PG fees are regulated by the Supreme Court, which mandates pre-counseling fee disclosure, and the National Medical Commission (NMC), which is establishing a centralised fee regulation framework. Regulations, however, are not uniform across States. Each State has its own fee structures, reservation policies, and regulations for their State-quota seats, though the Supreme Court is pushing for more transparency and accountability overall. Apart from State-to-State differences in fees, the costs soar up significantly with private and deemed universities. There are different seat categories ranging from subsidised government seats to 'queue' and open seats. The highly subsidised seat starts from ₹2.5 lakh to ₹3 lakh, NRI seats starts from ₹2.5 crore and this goes up to ₹7 crore in some states. Costs beyond fees For students within government institutions, the struggle takes a different form. A 32-year-old Orthopedic doctor from a government medical college in Kolkata explained that attempts, gap years, and counselling delays have become a routine burden. Doctors from semi-government colleges of Hazaribagh talk about the drastic lifestyle changes families make after investing the largest chunk of their money for fees and other student expenses. A PG student who paid for a private seat said the tuition fee of ₹2.5 lakh per year was only the beginning. Hostel charges, deposits, exam fees, and miscellaneous add-ons pushed the cost far higher. "My parents cut down

every expense possible. Even medical treatments were postponed," she recalled. Counselling delays pushed her into multiple attempts, and each year added more financial and emotional strain. "PG education today feels less like a right and more like a race with unequal starting points", she said.

Recovery of investment A surgeon who completed a high-fee PG program five years ago described the aftermath as "an ongoing process of recovery." Despite finishing his MS in Surgery, he has not been able to recover the investment. His first job paid just ₹25,000 a month, forcing him to take multiple shifts across districts. "I travelled to Bardhaman to do surgeries just to survive," he said. His family mortgaged their house, and the emotional toll persists. "Some days, I regret choosing this field, it's thankless, high-risk, and one mistake can destroy your life." Experts say the strain is structural, not personal. Radiologist Dr. Ankush Bansal observed that recovering the investment depends on the field and on practicing ethically, which slows earnings even further. He acknowledges that PG degrees open doors and builds long-term credibility but warns that the current system overburdens families. As someone who trained in a subsidised government institution 15 years ago, he considers today's costs "unimaginable." The biggest crisis, Dr. Bansal argues lies in the mismatch between MBBS and PG seat expansion and the inability of rural hospitals to utilise PG-trained doctors meaningfully. For example, in many States in southern India, the number of UG seats is comparatively on a higher side in comparison to PG seats, creating a bottleneck. "Unless PG capacity and infrastructure improve, students will continue to feel trapped", he said.

In Goa, the picture is somewhat different. Dr. Sandeep Sardesai of Goa Medical College explains that the State benefits from a favorable 140 PG seats for 100 UG seats, ensuring relatively smoother admissions. He stresses the need for ethical training and warns that as long as private players dominate, fees will remain steep. Government colleges, he says, maintain rational fee structures, but many States do not share this advantage. A senior official from Goa's State counselling authority said the delays in NEET-PG counselling were entirely dependent on schedules released by the National Medical Commission in New Delhi. The official pointed out that Goa's lack of private colleges shields students from the high-priced NRI seats and management quotas seen in other states. However, they declined to comment on national bottlenecks or infrastructure gaps, citing protocol. A practicing doctor on the condition of anonymity said that to change things for better the government facilitates increase in PG seat capacity to match MBBS passouts and also sets benchmarks by offering remunerative pay. He says it helps cap pricing in private institutions, like in the case of Kerala which has a more moderate pricing system. He says the government allows corporates to leverage huge but underinvested Government district level hospitals to put up more seats for UG/ PG. "It also ensures that good stipends are paid, though they are in the tens of thousands while fees are in lakhs or crores", he says.

All you need to know about: tongue ties

Is your baby unable to latch on deep enough during breast feeding, does she spit out milk often, or does she seem to choke on it, is she not putting on weight though feeding frequently? It might be just a thick fold of tissue in the baby's mouth. Maybe, it is time to check if your baby has a tongue tie, or a lip tie.

What are tongue, lip ties?

Both conditions, also referred to as Ankyloglossia, have a similar cause. A fold of tissue, called the frenulum, which is attached to the gums, is thicker than normal and thus restricts lip movement. In the mouth, there are two types of frenula - the fold connecting the tongue to the floor of the mouth, called lingual frenulum, and the fold connecting the lips to the gums, also known as labial frenulum. The function of these folds is to provide support to the tongue and lips, allowing for normal movement of the mouth, but sometimes, the fold can become thick, or unnaturally short, restricting free movement. An abnormal lingual frenulum causes tongue ties and a problem with the labial frenulum and buccal frenulum can cause a lip tie and cheek tie, respectively.

Why does this happen?

What exactly causes the thickening of the frenulum is not clear, but dentists have advanced the argument that it could be genetic, and is passed down generations. The Wright Parkway Dental Clinic in Florida, U.S., in a social media post, had listed statistics which show that about 10% of babies are born with a lip tie and nearly 8% of babies have a tongue tie. Authors of a paper in the International Journal of Paediatric Otorhinolaryngology mention that while tongue tie is the most well-known of these conditions, lip tie and cheek tie have gained increasing attention in recent years due to their potential impact on breastfeeding, speech, and dental health. Interestingly, they also record: Reports of abnormal frenulums date back centuries, as one report from the 18th century states Midwives at the time would keep one of their fingernails long so they could clip an abnormal frenulum immediately following childbirth. What are the signs that you can look out for in your baby? Is the baby latching on deep for effective feeding, demonstrating poor weight gain, seeking feeds at frequent intervals sometimes, besides making a clicking sound during breastfeeding, spitting milk or choking regularly while feeding? Even the development of jaundice may be a sign, where it will be possible to see the skin turn slightly yellow. If you notice these signs, the ideal thing would be to take the child to a neona-



tologist or paediatrician to check for a lip tie, but a lactation consultant also can help at this stage. There are, of course, various grades of severity, depending on the thickness or the length of the frenulum, and its location, and how exactly it is attached. The most severe is level 4, papillar penetration, where the frenulum extends into the papilla, the gum tissue between the teeth. Later life issues Later in life, as a child grows, problems might continue, if the lip tie is not corrected. If the baby has not breastfed properly, it might lead to poor absorption or nutritional status and may affect the dental health of a child, causing tooth decay as well. The gums may also recede because bacterial build up is likely if the mouth is not cleaned well, hampered by the abnormal frenulum. Parents should focus on cleaning the mouth of the child well, or ensuring it has been cleaned thoroughly after a meal. Dentists say, a severe lip tie can also cause huge gaps between teeth, which, apart from ruining aesthetics, can also cause long-standing dental issues, including the child not being able to consume some types of foods. Speech can also be affected with a severe lip tie. However, there are others who believe that there is insufficient evidence to show that lip ties can cause dental issues.

How is it treated?

The solution, experts say is a frenectomy, if the restriction is severe for the child. The procedure is simple, a dentist will use a laser to cut the piece of skin connecting the tongue to the gums. After this procedure, a parent must take charge of the procedure of stretching the baby's mouth and gently massaging the area in order to prevent the fold from growing back in the same place.

Apple announces fifth India store, set to open in Noida next week

New Delhi: Apple on Friday announced that it will open its first retail store in Noida on December 11, marking the launch of its fifth own store in India. The new outlet, Apple Noida, will be located inside DLF Mall of India and will offer customers a dedicated space to explore Apple products, get expert support, and experience the brand's services in person.

The company revealed the store barricade earlier today, showcasing a colourful design inspired by peacock feathers — a symbol of India's pride and creativity. This theme was also used during the recent openings of Apple Hebbal in Bengaluru and Apple Koregaon Park in Pune, reflecting Apple's effort to celebrate modern India through its retail experience. Apple said Noida represents design, ambition, and innovation, and the new store will become a

place where people can discover, create, and grow with Apple products. The store will feature Apple's latest devices, including the iPhone 17 lineup and the M5-powered iPad Pro and MacBook Pro 14". "Customers will also have access to Apple Specialists, Creatives, Geniuses, and Business teams for personalised assistance," the company said. Visitors can participate in Today at Apple sessions, which are free daily workshops on photography, music, art, and coding conducted by Apple Creatives. With Apple Store Online, Shop with a Specialist Over Video, and the Apple Store app, the company said its retail network in India continues to offer customers more personalised and seamless ways to connect with Apple. Ahead of the opening, customers can download exclusive Apple Noida wallpapers, enjoy a curated Apple Music Noida playlist, and learn more about the store on Apple's website.

Interest rates to remain at low level for long period of time: RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra



Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday (February 6, 2026) said the key policy rates will remain at low levels for a long period and may go down even further. The statement comes soon after the central bank decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% at its bi-monthly monetary policy, and kept the stance neutral. "The policy rates will continue to be at low levels for a long period of time (and) they will go down even further," Mr. Malhotra said in a post-monetary press conference. He, however,

added that the decision on rates will be taken by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). Since February last year, the RBI has reduced the repo rate by 125 basis points. The governor said policy transmission on the deposit side has been slower and interest rate on fixed deposits will be going down. Replying to a question on the impact of recent trade deals signed by India, the governor said this, along with other factors, could add up to 20 basis points to the country's GDP growth. Earlier, the RBI upwardly revised GDP forecast for the first and second quarters of the next fiscal year. At the press conference, Deputy Governor T. Rabi Sankar said the RBI will be able to manage government borrowing programme comfortably. The government's gross borrowing has been pegged at Rs 17.2 lakh crore during the next fiscal year, while net borrowing was ₹11.73 lakh crore. Mr. Malhotra added that T-bills will help manage yield curve and the government would be able to raise net borrowing of Rs 11.73 lakh crore at a reasonable rate. On the Budget announcement regarding data centres, he said it will bring in a lot of foreign investments. To a question, Mr. Malhotra said currency in circulation has increased quite a lot in the last one year.

India well placed amid global uncertainty, growth strong and inflation benign: RBI Governor

Despite rising geopolitical tensions and increasing trade-related uncertainties across the world, the Indian economy remains on a strong footing with robust growth and subdued inflation, Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra said on Friday. Presenting the first monetary policy of calendar year 2026, Governor said India has weathered global headwinds better than many peer economies and continues to benefit from strong domestic demand, resilient services activity and improving manufacturing performance. "Amid heightened geopolitical tensions and elevated uncertainty, the Indian economy is in a good spot with strong growth and low inflation," he said, adding that inflation remains below the tolerance band and its outlook continues to be benign. The Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI on Friday kept the main policy rate – Repo rate – unchanged at 5.25 per cent and raised the GDP growth forecast by 10 basis points to 7.4 per cent for FY2026. Growth momentum

The Governor noted that high-frequency indicators point to a continuation of strong growth momentum in the third quarter of 2025-26 and beyond. Recent trade developments, including the signing of a landmark free trade agreement with the European Union and a trade deal with the US, are likely to sustain growth momentum over a longer period by supporting exports and investment. He said recovery in urban consumption should further strengthen with continued support from GST rationalisation and monetary easing among others. High capacity utilisation, accelerating bank credit, conducive financial conditions and government's continued emphasis on infrastructure should give an impetus to investment activity. Moreover, several measures announced in the Budget should be conducive for growth, he said.

At the global level, the Governor observed that growth is expected to be marginally stronger in 2026 than earlier projected, aided by technology-led investments, accommodative financial conditions and large-scale fiscal stimulus. However, he cautioned that escalating geopolitical frictions and rising trade tensions are beginning to unravel the existing world economic order. Inflation trends remain uneven across countries, staying above targets in most advanced economies, which has led to divergence in monetary policy actions as central banks approach the end of their easing cycles. External headwind

Turning to the domestic outlook, the Governor said real GDP growth is expected to remain resilient. As per the First Advance Estimates, India's economy is projected to

grow by 7.4 per cent in 2025-26, significantly higher than the previous year. Growth has been driven largely by private consumption and fixed investment, even as net external demand remained a drag due to imports growing faster than exports. The MPC also marginally increased the growth forecast to 7.4 per cent from 7.3 per cent for FY2026. On the supply side, growth in gross value added has been supported by a strong performance of the services sector and a revival in manufacturing activity, he said. Looking ahead to 2026-27, the Governor said economic activity is expected to hold up well, supported by healthy agricultural prospects, firm construction activity and resilient services demand. High reservoir levels, robust rabi sowing and improved crop conditions are expected to support rural incomes, while improving corporate profitability and sustained momentum in the informal sector should boost manufacturing, he said. He said private consumption is expected to remain steady, with rural demand supported by improving agricultural activity and favourable labour market conditions. The recovery in urban consumption is also likely to strengthen further with continued policy support and easing financial conditions. Investment activity is expected to gain traction on the back of high capacity utilisation, accelerating bank credit, conducive financial conditions and continued emphasis on public infrastructure spending.

Inflation outlook On inflation, the Governor said headline consumer price inflation remained low in November and December, even though it firmed up marginally due to a moderation in food price deflation. Core inflation, excluding the impact of gold prices, has remained stable and subdued. The near-term inflation outlook remains favourable, supported by healthy food supply conditions, adequate buffer stocks and favourable crop prospects. However, he flagged risks from geopolitical uncertainty, volatile energy prices and adverse weather events. The MPC marginally raised the inflation forecast to 2.1 per cent from 2 per cent for FY2026. The MPC revised CPI inflation projections for the first half of 2026-27 to 4.0 per cent in the first quarter and 4.2 per cent in the second quarter, close to the inflation target. The Governor emphasised that underlying inflation pressures remain muted and risks are evenly balanced. Malhotra said the Indian economy continues to register high growth despite a challenging global environment. Benign inflation provides policy space to remain supportive of growth while safeguarding financial stability. "We remain committed to meeting the productive requirements of the economy and sustaining the growth momentum," he said.

RBI moves to shield customers from small fraud, caps compensation at Rs 25,000

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed introducing a comprehensive framework to compensate bank customers for losses arising from small-value fraudulent transactions, with compensation capped at Rs 25,000 per case. The move is aimed at strengthening consumer protection in an increasingly digital banking ecosystem. As part of customer-centric measures, the RBI on Friday announced that it will issue three separate draft guidelines for public consultation. The first will address mis-selling of financial products, seeking to ensure greater transparency and accountability on the part of banks and financial institutions.

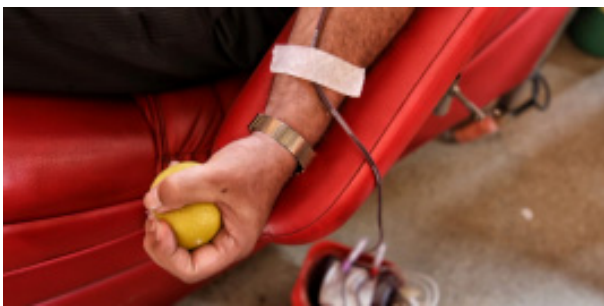
According to RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, the second set of guidelines will focus on loan recovery practices, including the conduct and engagement of recovery agents, to prevent harassment and unfair treatment of borrowers. The third will deal with limiting customer liability in cases of unauthorised electronic banking transactions, providing greater clarity and protection for users affected by fraud, the RBI said. In addition, the central bank will release a discussion paper outlining possible steps to enhance the safety and security of digital payments. These measures could include mechanisms such as lagged credits—where funds are credited after a brief delay to allow verification—and additional authentication requirements for certain categories of users, including senior citizens, who may be more vulnerable to digital fraud. Together, these initiatives by the RBI are expected to bolster trust in the financial system



and ensure safer, more responsible banking practices. * To further promote financing to real estate sector, it has proposed to allow banks to lend to REITs with certain prudential safeguards. * NBFCs having no public funds and customer interface, with asset size not exceeding Rs 1000 crore, are proposed to be exempted from the requirement of registration. * The RBI has proposed to dispense with the requirement for certain NBFCs to obtain prior approval to open more than 1000 branches. * The central bank has proposed to remove the limit of Rs 2.5 lakh crore for investments under the Voluntary Retention Route (VRR). * As proposed in the Union Budget 2026-27, it has proposed to issue the regulatory framework for derivatives on corporate bond indices and total return swaps on corporate bonds.

LIC. Pursuant to inviting EoIs in October 2022, the DIPAM, in January 2023, had said it had received multiple EoIs for IDBI Bank. The prospective buyer of IDBI Bank has already been granted security clearance by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and cleared fit and proper evaluation by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The next stage in the strategic disinvestment process would be that a 'Reserve Price', based on valuations by the Transaction Adviser (TA) and the Asset Valuer (AV), will be fixed using respective methodologies as per the established process. After the independent fixation of the reserve price, the already received sealed financial bids would be opened in the presence of the bidders.

This is what actually happens inside the body 24 hours after you donate blood



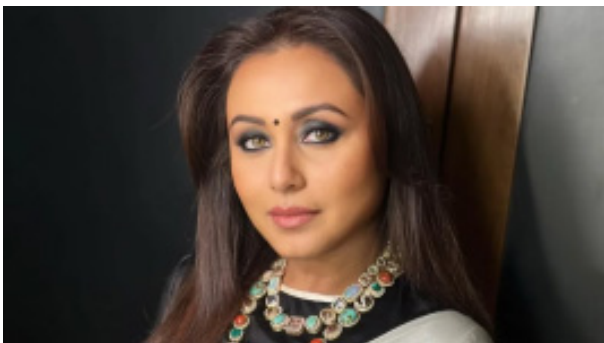
Blood donation is a noble cause, saving millions of lives each year. It is a non-negotiable during surgeries, accidents, or for medical conditions requiring specific blood components. However, there are many lingering doubts about the subject, with many first-time donors feeling anxious. The process, however, is safe, and the body begins adapting almost immediately. To understand precisely what occurs in the body during the first 24 hours after blood donation, we consulted Dr Rajat Kant Jain, Senior Consultant at Kailash Deepak Hospital. "Blood donation is a remarkable example of how quickly the body can adjust," says the physician, while adding that "Within hours, your body begins replacing lost fluids and cells, and most healthy donors feel back to normal within a day." Although many donors experience mild fatigue or lightheadedness initially, these effects usually resolve quickly with adequate hydration, nutrition, and rest.

Plasma, the liquid component of blood, is restored most quickly—usually within 24 hours. "Fluids from surrounding tissues shift into the bloodstream to restore blood volume and maintain circulation and blood pressure," explains Dr

Jain. The lymphatic system also returns stored fluids and proteins to the blood. Hormonal mechanisms support this process: kidneys conserve water, and the brain stimulates thirst, encouraging fluid intake. The liver gradually replenishes plasma proteins, such as albumin, which take slightly longer than 24 hours to fully restore, thereby maintaining vascular volume. While plasma recovers quickly, red blood cells take several weeks to rebuild. Platelets and white blood cells respond faster—the bone marrow begins producing new cells immediately, with most returning to baseline within days to a week. "This is why donors can safely resume normal activities shortly after donation," notes Dr Jain.

Temporary fatigue and dizziness Some donors may experience lightheadedness or dizziness, partly due to a temporary reduction in blood volume and vasovagal reflexes. "During a vasovagal reaction, the vagus nerve can slow the heart rate and widen blood vessels, reducing blood flow to the brain temporarily," explains Dr Jain. Young adults, first-time donors, or those with a smaller body size are more susceptible. Other contributing factors include dehydration, skipped meals, lack of sleep, and naturally low blood pressure. Simple measures—drinking water, eating a light meal, and resting—usually prevent significant symptoms. Within the first 24 hours, the body orchestrates a complex recovery: plasma volume is restored, platelets and white blood cells begin normalising, and hormonal mechanisms maintain circulation and fluid balance. Over the following days and weeks, red blood cells gradually rebuild, aided by iron-rich foods and proper nutrition. This coordinated effort between the heart, kidneys, liver, bone marrow, nervous system, and lymphatic system ensures donors recover safely while supporting life-saving treatments for patients.

From 'girl math' to 'doomscrolling', Rani Mukerji decodes Gen Z slang



Before the release of Mardaani 3, Rani Mukerji interacted with students at her former college. During the conversation, she decoded Gen Z slang, and honestly, she nailed it. When asked what main character energy means, she answered with lead, spill the tea as sharing gossip, and doomscrolling, she said what "scrolling on the phone for no rhyme or reason", and girl math, she answered with "things only girls know". Moving on to some Bengali words during the interaction with India Today, she answered "heavy lagche" as "looking really, really good," "dhur baba" as "hatt," and "scene achhe" as "it looks like it's going to be interesting." Must know Gen Z lingo

People born between 1997 and 2012 are part of 'generation Z' or Gen Z. They come just after millennials, born

between 1981 and 1996. Here's a list of the top six words from the Gen Z lingo you absolutely need to know right now. Delulu: Short for delusional, often used playfully when someone has unrealistic expectations or fantasies. "Thinking he'll text first?" Delulu. "Iykyk": Short for "If you know, you know." Used for inside jokes or niche references. "Best spot for fries, iykyk." "Situationship": A relationship that's more than friendship but not officially defined, the modern in between. "It's complicated... we're in a situationship." "Rizz": Meaning charm or charisma, especially when impressing or flirting with someone. "He's got serious rizz." gen z lingo Gen Z are born between 1997 and 2012. (Source: Freepik) Many other colloquial terms or slang have also been incorporated into the Urban Dictionary. Here are some of them: -Chef's kiss: Originating from a traditional Italian gesture which indicates a kiss with a sense of excellence, formally defined as "A movement in which you put your fingers and thumb together, kiss them, then pull your hand away from your lips as a way of showing that you think that something or someone is perfect or excellent". -Face journey: Defined as "A series of expressions that appear on someone's face showing different emotions that they are experiencing as a reaction to something". -This baby: Defined as "Something such as a device, vehicle, or product, especially one that you approve of or find impressive in some way". Even terms popularised by gaming and science fiction have made their way into the dictionary. These are:

The ultimate caffeine trail: Six Indian cities every coffee lover must visit

Coffee is not just a beverage. For many it's a mood, a vibe, a ritual, a pause away from life's chaos. While every coffee lover has their own signature coffee order, some Indian cities are the ultimate destinations for high-quality coffee. From heritage coffee houses to modern specialty cafés, these places serve brews worth planning a trip around. So coffee lovers, update your next travel list with these Indian cities! Often called the coffee capital of India, Bengaluru is where tradition meets the Instagram coffee culture. The city is close to major coffee-growing regions such as Coorg and Chikmagalur, so freshness is a key priority here. You'll find everything from old-school filter coffee joints to chic cafés serving single-origin pour-overs and cold brews. If you love strong South Indian filter coffee and experimental brews, this is your paradise.

Chennai takes its filter coffee seriously—and emotionally. Served in the iconic steel tumbler and dabarah, the frothy, strong brew is part of daily life here. Many legendary cafés and small eateries have been serving the same comforting coffee for decades. It's less about fancy beans and more about tradition, flavour, and that unmistakable aroma. 3. Hyderabad Hyderabad's café scene is booming. Alongside its famous Irani chai spots, the city now has a growing number of specialty coffee cafés focusing on artisanal brewing methods. From cosy study cafés to stylish hangout spots, Hyderabad blends heritage with modern coffee culture beautifully. This is what happens to the body when you have 5 cups of coffee vs tea every day for a month. 4. Mumbai Ask Bollywood, and it'll tell you that Mumbai never sleeps. Well,



it's probably because the city runs on caffeine! From heritage cafés in South Mumbai to trendy specialty coffee roasters in Bandra and Versova, the city offers a wide range of options. You can start your day with a classic café breakfast and end it with a late-night cold brew. Fast-paced city, fast-paced coffee culture. 5. Delhi Delhi's coffee scene has exploded exponentially over the past few years. The city is packed with aesthetic cafés, in-house roasteries, and experimental menus. Whether you want a quiet place to work, a brunch spot, or a serious coffee-tasting experience, Delhi has a café for every vibe. Recently, even matcha telas are stealing the show. 6. Coorg Not a city, but no coffee lover's list is complete without Coorg. This hill region in Karnataka is one of India's leading coffee-producing regions. Visiting plantations, learning how beans are grown and processed, and sipping ultra-fresh coffee surrounded by greenery is an experience every coffee fan should have at least once.

Bharti Airtel Q3 revenues rise 19.6% YoY to Rs 53,982 cr

Hyderabad: Bharti Airtel reported revenues of Rs 53,982 crore, an increase of 19.6% year-over-year and 3.5% rise compared to the previous quarter, driven by continued growth in India and solid performance from Africa. India business reported quarterly revenues of Rs 39,226 crore, growing 13.2% YoY and 1.4% QoQ. This growth was backed by continued premiumisation in the Mobile segment, strong momentum in the Homes segment, and steady performance from Airtel Business.

India Mobile revenue increased 9.1% YoY, driven by ARPU improvement and strong growth in smartphone data customers. Homes business delivered yet another quarter of solid performance with revenues growing by 32.6% YoY. Net customer additions were record high at 1,159 K in Q3 '26, driven by deeper coverage and market expansion. Airtel Business reported steady growth of 1.5% sequentially. Adjacencies continued to deliver sustained growth trajectory. Digital TV revenues increased marginally by 0.3% sequentially. Passive Infrastructure Services revenues declined marginally by 0.5% QoQ.



Bharti Airtel reported consolidated revenues of Rs 53,982 crore in Q3 FY26, marking a 19.6% year-on-year rise and 3.5% sequential growth. Digital TV revenues increased slightly, while Passive Infrastructure Services saw a marginal decline.

Romario Shepherd becomes first West Indian to take a T20 World Cup hat-trick, claims four wickets in an over vs Scotland



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

All-rounder Romario Shepherd became the first West Indies player to register a hat-trick in the T20 World Cup during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup Match No. 3 against Scotland at Kolkata's Eden Gardens on Saturday. Shepherd dismissed Matthew Cross, Michael

Leask, and Oliver Davidson off three consecutive deliveries in the 17th over to complete his hat-trick. He picked up four wickets in that over, also removing Safyaan Shariff off the final delivery to complete a five-wicket haul. His figures of 5-for helped West Indies bundle out Scotland for 147, securing a 35-run win in the Group C game and starting their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign with a victory.

Shepherd is the 10th player to complete a hat-trick in T20 World Cups. Australian pace great Brett Lee was the first player to register a hat-trick in the multinational event. The last edition of the T20 World Cup in 2024 saw three hat-tricks being taken, two from Australian skipper Pat Cummins while one from England fast bowler Chris Jordan. Earlier, after being asked to bat first, the West Indies managed to get to a competitive score of 182/5 in 20 overs. Shimron Hetmyer unleashed a brutal mid-innings assault with a 22-ball half-century as West Indies overcame a sedate start. Chasing 183, Scotland were in a fighting position at 114/3 by the 13th over before Shepherd's burst triggered the collapse that saw them get all out for 147 in 18.5 overs

Faheem Ashraf on Netherlands' dropped catch that helped Pakistan win: 'It wasn't only my tongue that was praying...'

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

With 23 runs needed off 11 balls, Faheem Ashraf mishit a low full toss high into the Colombo sky. It wasn't just the ball, but Pakistan's hopes of winning their opening match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, that was up in the air. The Netherlands, those Europeans who love to cause a flutter or two at World Cups, were on the brink of another famous win... in fact, it was theirs to lose at that point. But, alas, Max O'Dowd couldn't hold on to the high-pressure, yet easily grabbable, skier. Ashraf, who had hit the first ball of the Logan van Beek over for a six already, picked up two runs off that ball, and then went on to smash two more sixes and gobble up a streaky four. The match decisively swung in Pakistan's favour after their middle and lower-middle order had almost contrived to pull defeat from the jaws of victory.

In those moments, Ashraf would say later, it wasn't just his 'zubaan' that was uttering prayers. "The feeling in those moments—I just said this outside before coming here — at that time, it wasn't only my tongue that was praying, but every part of my body was praying for that catch to be dropped," the allrounder chuckled at the end of the press conference after rescuing Pakistan out of suffering some serious embarrassment.

After appearing to be cruising during most of the run-chase, Pakistan somehow managed to make the Netherlands favourites with some bizarre batting, slipping from 98/2 to 114/7. Dot balls piled up, wickets tumbled and the Dutch were one good over away from stunning the Asian giants. But Ashraf said he and Shaheen Shah Afridi, who remained unbeaten at the end of a 3-wicket win with 3 balls to spare in a chase of 148, kept the belief and knew one good over was enough to seal the deal.

Faheem Ashraf holds nerve as Pakistan survive Netherlands scare by 3 Wickets in tournament opener

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

There were no exuberant celebrations when Faheem Ashraf sealed a win that calmed Pakistan's dugout with three deliveries remaining in the final over. A routine stroll had taken an unexpected tumble that not many expected Pakistan to get back on the feet the way they did. But Ashraf single-handedly pulled them back and like his teammates in the dugout, he breathed a sigh of relief after pulling off a rescue act against the Netherlands as the T20 World Cup got off to a dramatic start at the Sinhalese Sports Club. With the stands thrown open for free, fans turned up in numbers to create an atmosphere that was fitting of the contest, as Pakistan appeared to do the unthinkable, which would have pushed them to the brink had they had fallen short.

Having not been in the contest for a majority of the match, hope fluttered among the Dutch and their supporters at the stands, who were emptying the beer cans as Pakistan crumbled spectacularly in what was a routine chase of 148. At 98/2 after 11 overs, the result appeared a foregone conclusion before Pakistan chose to self-destruct in ways only they seem to find more often than not. Off the next 10 deliveries, the game turned on its head beginning with the double-wicket maiden delivered by seamer Paul van Meekeren. Off the first ball of his over, the heavily built 41-year-old Roelof van der Merwe took a low, diving catch at long-on to send back opener Sahibzada Farhan. Usman Khan followed soon in the same over before Van der Merwe outfoxed Babar Azam. And by the time Mohammad Nawaz and Shadab Khan left, it was the Netherlands match to lose. In space of 37 deliveries, Pakistan lost five wickets for 17 runs with no boundaries. It was in this juncture that Ashraf came in with Shaheen Shah Afridi for company.

The asking rate, which was 5.55 before the collapse began, had now climbed to 14.50 when Ashraf took the game into his own hands, with a bit of luck. Had Max O'Dowd pouched the skier offered by the left-hander off the second ball of the 19th over, like van Meekeren said, it may have been curtains for Pakistan. For the Netherlands it was the moment that changed it all. Seamer Logan van Beek, then delivered a series of deliveries that needed to be punished and Ashraf obliged it by picking his spots on the leg-side which included a 89m six. The 19th over cost the Dutch 24 runs as Ashraf hit three sixes and a boundary.

Earlier, Pakistan showed they have a template to fall back on in the tournament. In these slow conditions of Sri Lanka, Pakistan have a spin attack that could play a pivotal role in their march with the pace pack around to provide the support cast. Sterner tests await, but there is reason to be optimistic for them. With their match against India still not certain to go ahead, the three fixtures against the Associates — the Netherlands, USA and Namibia — are nothing but a must-win for Pakistan. All three teams on a given day are all capable of causing an upset, and Pakistan suffered a stinging defeat at the hands of the USA in the previous edition. So ahead of the game, Agha had repeatedly mentioned



"After hitting the winning runs, and that too while representing Pakistan, you feel a sense of peace," Ashraf, who remained not out with a 11-ball 29 and proved his worth in the lower order, said. "You feel that the team was in such a bad situation, but you still won. The most peaceful feeling is that you have won the first match of the World Cup and you scored the winning runs. There is nothing more satisfying than that." "As for the collapse, in cricket there are ups and downs. Sometimes your top order doesn't score, sometimes your middle order doesn't score, and sometimes your lower order doesn't score. It is very rare that all eleven players perform in a match. Not everyone performs in every game. Those who didn't perform today, God willing, will perform in the next match." Ashraf did, however, concede that the team shouldn't have gotten themselves in such a position. "I think because we lost back-to-back wickets, it became a little difficult for us. When wickets fall in quick succession, especially at that stage, you need a partnership. We lacked a partnership there. If we had even a 15–20 run partnership at that time, the match wouldn't have come to such a situation."



the need to bring their A-game straightaway. Unlike the previous couple of ICC tournaments where Pakistan appeared far off the chasing pack, in the months leading up to the T20 World Cup under head coach Mike Hesson and Agha, they have been quietly building a foundation. For a change, they had the long-sightedness to build a team that would suit these conditions. Players, mostly on reputation, were let go, with Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf all deemed surplus. Over a few bilateral series and the Asia Cup, they went about finding a core. Still, doubts had remained. And this win, even it was a nervy one, will give their think-tank the stimulus that is needed in big-ticket tournaments.

Faheem Pakistan's Salman Mirza bowls a delivery during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Netherlands and Pakistan in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Saturday,

Setting up the win were the spin trio of Mohammad Nawaz, Abrar Ahmed and Saim Ayub, whose variety was too good for the Netherlands to overcome. In what seemed to be a tactic to keep for later stages and not expose his mystery early in the tournament, Pakistan benched their new spin sensation, Usman Tariq and instead brought in leg-spinner Shadab Khan, but still had an economical return in his four overs. And once the spinners made the inroads, the 32-year-old left-arm pacer Salman Mirza provided the finishing touches after making the first blow. Choosing to bowl first, Pakistan seamers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Mirza were wayward at the start, prompting Agha to summon left-arm spinner Nawaz in the powerplay. But despite losing both their openers in the powerplay, the Dutch were motoring along at a run-rate of 8 as a total in excess of 160 looked in sight. It even caused a bit of flutter in Pakistan ranks with Agha, Afridi and Shadab involved in an animated discussion when Michael Levitt brought out a disdainful sweep off Nawaz to send the ball out of the park. But every time the Netherlands appeared to get a grip on the game, Pakistan spinners hit back with timely strikes. Between their top five, four of the Netherlands batsmen got starts, but the 37 by skipper Scott Edwards remained their best score. And it was his dismissal that led to a collapse. Choosing to attack Abrar, another mystery spinner in their ranks, who bowled Colin Ackerman off a carrom ball earlier, Edwards went for an expansive sweep, but picked the fielder at deep square-leg.

Brief Scores: Neth 147 all out in 19.5 overs

Novak Djokovic leaves door open for Serbia Davis Cup return, stays based in Greece



GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Novak Djokovic has suggested he still wants to play for Serbia in the Davis Cup, even though he is currently not part of the team's qualifiers due to injury and his family's move to Greece. The 24-time Grand Slam champion withdrew from Serbia's Davis Cup qualifying tie against Denmark early in 2025 because of a hamstring injury. After that, Djokovic has been spending much of his time in Athens with his family, where he has been living and playing events

on the ATP Tour. Serbia's Davis Cup captain, Viktor Troicki, said Djokovic remains a major figure for the team and hinted that he could be part of future ties once fit. Troicki stressed that Djokovic's presence gives Serbia a huge boost and suggested the team still hopes to have him available for important matches. "Novak thinks that Serbia can continue to progress in the Davis Cup, and he would like to play and keep representing his country," Troicki was quoted as saying by the Tennis Head.

"In recent years, it hasn't been easy for him to play on different surfaces, and it's hard for him not to be with the team. But he wants to play when he is available, and he still gives us his support," he said. Although his immediate participation in the Davis Cup was ruled out due to the injury, Djokovic continues to train and compete in other tournaments while based in Greece. His relocation has attracted attention because he has spent significant time in Athens with his wife and children, making it something like a new home base. For now, Serbia will compete without him in the qualifiers, but both Djokovic and Troicki have made it clear that when he is fit and available, the tennis great would be welcomed back into the squad.

Jasprit Bumrah likely to miss India's opening T20 World Cup game against USA, Ishan Kishan to open

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah is likely to miss India's opening T20 World Cup game against United States of America (USA) due to viral fever. The Indian Express understands that Bumrah will be given rest by the Indian team management and will not rushed into playing the opener at the Wankhede Stadium on Saturday. This means the Indian team will have just have 13 fit players for the game as injured all-rounder Washington Sundar is yet to join the Indian side. He is present at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, awaiting final fitness clearance.

On the match eve, Bumrah did turn up at the ground but didn't train. This means Mohd Siraj is most likely to get a game. Siraj was included in the Indian team at the last moment after the Indian pacer Harshit Rana was ruled out because of a knee injury during the warm-up match against South Africa in Navi Mumbai on February 4. "Following consultations with a specialist and subsequent scans, the BCCI medical team deemed him unfit to participate in the tournament. The team management wishes him a speedy recovery."



ery. Mohd. Siraj will join the team as Harshit's replacement in the squad," BCCI had stated in its press release. Ishan Kishan will open the innings alongwith Abhishek Sharma. Ishan scored 53 during the warm up game against South Africa as an opener. He has scored 103 as one drop against New Zealand in their last T20 game against Trivandrum. With Sanju Samson out of form, the Indian team is bank on looks Kishan up the order.

Virat Kohli, Gautam Gambhir lead tributes as India clinch record sixth U-19 World Cup

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

India's record-extending sixth U-19 World Cup triumph on Friday drew glowing tributes from across the cricketing fraternity with batting stalwart Virat Kohli and senior men's team head coach Gautam Gambhir praising the dominant show in Harare. The title-winning campaign was capped by 14-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's breathtaking innings of 175 off 80 balls in the final, as India outclassed England by 100 runs after posting a daunting 411 for nine. Congratulating the team, Kohli, who led India to the U19 title in 2008, lauded the country's continued dominance at the age-group level.

"Congratulations to the U-19 Indian team for lifting the World Cup once again. Our domination in the age group cricket and beyond continues. Well done to the whole squad and the support staff," Kohli posted on X. Congratulations to the U-19 Indian team for lifting the World Cup once again. Our domination in the age group cricket and beyond continues. Well done to the whole squad and the support staff. ??????" A flawless campaign powered by talent, fearlessness and audacity. The white ball game keeps on moving rapidly and this batch of under – 19's have shown us how much more they are willing to push with bat. "Incredible confidence and skill to be able to do what this @BCCI under 19 team did throughout this campaign. Well done boys. Scary to think of what par scores are going to look like in the future," Ashwin said. Another former India spinner Harbhajan Singh termed the victory a dominating performance. "UNDER-19 WORLD CUP CHAMPION. Waht a dominating performance . Congratulations Team India," Harbhajan posted. India T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav reserved special praise for Sooryavanshi's "incred-



ible" innings that was studied with a record 15 sixes and as many fours. "Absolutely incredible. @vaibhavsoorya09 What a special mentality you have, to do this in a final CLASS Knock" Suryakumar wrote.

South African pace great Dale Steyn also joined in the praise, saying, "Everyone's tweeting about him, I may as well too... This kid, wonder boy, he's gonna win an IPL before he finishes school." Former West Indies fast bowler turned commentator Ian Bishop wrote, "India's U19 team didn't just turn up with a galaxy of stars to rest in their laurels. They turned up and turned on the power and flex. They worked hard and played smart and deserve this win. congratulations." India batter Mayank Agarwal hailed the team's fearless approach. "Fearless cricket on the biggest stage! An absolutely electric performance by the India U-19 boys! A World Cup win powered by intent, skill, and a record-breaking knock by Vaibhav Sooryavanshi in the final.

Rudranksh Patil copes with pressure, wins Asian Championship gold in 10m air rifle

GNS News Agency, Feb 9

There aren't many medals that Rudranksh Patil hasn't won but an Asian Championship gold was one of them. On Friday, the shooter from Thane put in a good shift at the Dr Karni Singh Range and picked up a gold medal while teammate and Olympian Arjun Babuta took a silver to complete an Indian one-two at the men's 10m Air Rifle. Patil continues to be framed by his first true international success. Not many Indians can say that they won a World Championship gold at the age of 18 — certainly no shooter from the country. But it has also meant that he has had to experience the last four years from a baseline of being a World Champion.

There is a cost to feeling that you owe excellence and for Patil it came in the form of how his body responded to stress — especially being the World No.1 for three years from 2022. There were times when his hands would start shaking uncontrollably. He would start to panic in certain situations. A step outside of sport was needed and it took him three months but last May, Patil finally started to feel like he could work his way back into becoming the shooter he always thought he was.

"In pressure situations, I am able to fetch something out of it. Today, it was like that. This is something which is my strong point," said Patil outside the range on Friday. It was a sign that he was getting back to being his old self. A few minutes later to another question, he replied, "The goal is to be India's youngest two-time World Champion." And then immediately admits, "Main easily bol raha hun, but itna easy nahi hai." (It is easier said than done). This has been the dichotomy of one of India's most prodigious talents in

recent years. A desire to become a great in a sport which captured the country's imagination when Abhinav Bindra won an Olympic gold medal at the Beijing Games in 2008, but also feeling the trappings of it on his body.

For a long time, he didn't even admit to himself that the stress being felt was real, or was something that was tangible to his sport. Then a conversation with the Indian high-performance director changed things. "If you ask our high performance director, he will tell you the lowest ever recovery score recorded was mine. He had never seen one so low in any sport," Patil had said to The Indian Express ahead of the World Championship last year. "The difficult part was relating to the sport as stress free. I think it took me three months just to start loving shooting again."

For Patil, the path to being great goes through having to manage the stress he feels. One of the solutions that the Maharashtra shooter's team came up with was to limit his competitions. If one World Cup's scores are enough to keep him in line for selection trials, there is no need to go to another World Cup. The other solution was to spread out his competitions. Since the pressure of being great was divided over two events, Patil started to compete in 50m 3P competitions last year. Within months, he had picked it up enough that he was eighth in Indian rankings. At these Asian Championships, he will be part of the mixed team event next and then take part in his first-ever international 50m 3P event. Taking the pressure of winning a gold out of the way by participating in another competition and giving yourself another chance, has been the call to action. There are still areas that he needs to focus on, the chief of them being his qualification scores. Patil has started to pick a habit of either scoring in the high 103s or low 104s,

Ghooskhor Pandat title row: FWICE issues warning to producers of Manoj Bajpayee film, protestors burn effigies of actor



Manoj Bajpayee's upcoming film *Ghooskhor Pandat* has been making headlines even before its release—and for all the wrong reasons. The film has been facing backlash for allegedly disrespecting a particular community through its title. Following widespread criticism, the promotional material was taken down from the internet, with Netflix reportedly removing the teaser after receiving directions from central authorities. Now, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak has also weighed in, strongly criticising the film. Speaking to the press on Friday, the UP Deputy CM said, "The way people from the film industry are targeting Indian culture, and especially the Brahmin community, is highly reprehensible. Such films should not be released to the public, and I strongly condemn them."

Meanwhile, the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) has also raised serious objections to the film's title, warning that it could hurt community sentiments and disturb social harmony. FWICE addressed a letter to several industry bodies, including the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association (IMPPA), Producers Guild of India (PGI), Indian Film and Television Producers Council (IFTPC), Western India Film and TV Producers' Association (WIFPA), as well as OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Zee5 and Sony Liv. In its letter, FWICE stated: "The Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), representing 36 affiliated associations and scores of members comprising workers, technicians, and artists of the media and entertainment industry, writes to you with serious concern regarding a controversial film being produced under the title *Ghuskhor Pandat* by Mr Neeraj Pandey under his banner Friday Filmworks."

It further read, "FWICE and all its affiliated associations strongly object to the use of this title, as it appears to single out and target a particular community and its traditional means of livelihood in a derogatory and offensive manner. Such a title has the potential to hurt sentiments, provoke misunderstanding, and disturb social

harmony." Emphasising its stance, the body added, "FWICE firmly believes that there should be no division in society on the grounds of caste, creed, religion, or profession. All professions are equally dignified and deserving of respect. The film industry, being a powerful medium of expression, carries a moral and social responsibility to ensure that its content and titles do not promote hatred, disrespect, or unrest among citizens." FWICE also appealed to producers to refrain from registering or continuing with film titles that are provocative in nature and capable of creating unrest among Indians, while condemning the title of Neeraj Pandey's film. The letter concluded with a warning: "Please note that if the needful is not done forthwith, FWICE shall be compelled to advise all its affiliated associations and its scores of members to distance themselves from any project of the said producer." Protestors burn effigies of Neeraj Pandey-Manoj Bajpayee. Adding to the unrest, members of the Brahmin community staged protests across several cities, demanding a change in the film's title. In Bhopal, Akhil Bhartiya Brahmin Samaj protesters were seen holding placards that read: "Iss film ka nirmata Neeraj Pandey murdabad," "Digital platform Netflix ko bandh karo, FIR karo," and "Iss film ka kalakaar Manoj Bajpayee murdabad," among others. Similarly, in Prayagraj, members of the Rashtriya Parshuram Sena protested by burning effigies of Neeraj Pandey and Manoj Bajpayee at Subhash Chowk in Civil Lines. The protesters were seen beating the effigies with slippers, kicking them, and eventually setting them on fire, with hundreds in attendance. Soon after the makers released the teaser titled *Ghooskhor Pandat*, an FIR was registered at Hazratganj Police Station in Lucknow against the film-makers, alleging that the title hurt religious and caste sentiments. The complaint names Neeraj Pandey and members of his team. Separately, Mahender Chaturvedi filed a writ petition before the Delhi High Court seeking a stay on the release of the Netflix film, alleging that the title is communally offensive. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also issued a notice to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting after receiving a complaint claiming that the title "promotes negative stereotypes" and "vilifies a recognised social group."

The makers have also been accused of not obtaining mandatory permission for the film's title. Film Makers Combine (FMC), a Mumbai-based organisation, raised objections and issued a notice to the production house. Responding to the backlash, Neeraj Pandey released a statement saying, "We understand that the title has caused hurt to some viewers, and we genuinely acknowledge those feelings." Manoj Bajpayee, meanwhile, took to his official X handle and wrote, "I respect the emotions and concerns people have shared, and I take them seriously. When something you are part of causes hurt to some people, it makes you pause and listen." Defending the filmmaker, the actor added, "In my experience of working with Neeraj Pandey, there has been a consistent seriousness and care in how he approaches his films."

Imran Khan recalls looking 'seriously ill' during last years of 'unhealthy' marriage with Avantika Malik: 'Not good for daughter'

Bollywood actor Imran Khan is currently in a stable and healthy relationship with girlfriend Lekha Washington, but in the past, the actor went through a divorce with his wife Avantika Malik. In a recent interaction, Imran described his dynamic with Avantika as "unhealthy" during their marriage and also admitted that he looked visibly sick during the last few years before their marriage ended in divorce. The *Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na* actor spoke about how it was important for him to separate from his wife for the health of their daughter. "It is painful, but however, painful the separation is... And it is painful for both the partners, child and the families involved... It is still better than perpetuating an unhealthy dynamic. However, unpleasant divorce is, ultimately, it is healthy to separate than to remain in an unhealthy situation and then to teach your child that, because then, you are teaching your child an unhealthy pattern and unhealthy dynamic, you yourself are not your healthiest best version."

He added, "So for me actually understanding, and recognising that was a major factor in my decision to end my marriage. The fact that I saw this is not healthy. We are not in a healthy pattern and if I continue in that unhealthy pattern, it is not good for me. It is not good for her, and it is not good for our child." Talking about the last years of his marriage, Imran said, "This choice that I made has been validated resoundingly. In the past seven years since we separated, my own personal health, emotional health, men-



tal health have gone tremendously well. I look back at the pictures of myself in the last few years of my marriage and I look like a person with a serious illness. So it is ultimately for the good." Imran Khan and Avantika Malik married on January 10, 2011. They were friends since their college days. Imran was just 19 years old when he started dating Avantika, eventually leading to their marriage. They welcomed daughter Imara on June 9, 2014. However, the couple developed differences in their relationship and separated in 2019.

who readily agreed to be a part of the film. The actor is currently recovering from an injury and will join the film's shooting once he recovers. Meghanad is one of the key characters in the epic *Ramayana*. He plays a pivotal role in the battle between Ravana and Ram and is known to be a formidable warrior. He is also known for possessing the supernatural power to fight from the sky while concealing himself within the clouds. Meghanad defeated both Ram and Lakshman twice before he was eventually killed by Lakshman.

Other actors in the film include Sai Pallavi, who plays the role of Goddess Sita, KGF star Yash as Ravana, Ravi Dubey as Lakshman, and Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman. The film also stars Lara Dutta (as Kaikeyi), Rakul Preet Singh (as Surpanakha), Arun Govil (as King Dashrath), Indira Krishnan (as Queen Kaushalya), Sheeba Chaddha (as Manthara), Adinath Kothare (as Bharat), and Kunal Kapoor (as Lord Indra), among others. The film is directed by Nitesh Tiwari and is bankrolled by Namit Malhotra's Prime Focus Studios in association with Yash's Monster Mind Creations. The first part of the film is slated to hit theatres during the Diwali weekend this year.

Sudha Chandran says she drank 4 litres of water in 6 minutes during her trance-like state during mata ki chowki: 'People said I was drunk'



Actor Sudha Chandran is a veteran of Indian television and is one of the most successful stars of that space. But recently, a video of hers was widely shared on social media as she attended a *mata ki chowki*. Sudha was hosting the event at her home, and in a video from the event she could be seen in a trance-like state, and had to be helped by her family members. In a recent interview, the actor broke silence on the matter and shared her experi-

ence.

The actor told *Hindi Rush* that she isn't very clear on the details of the incident and only remembers what her family members told her afterwards. She said, "I don't remember what I was when I was in that zone. I won't even say that the goddess herself entered me, because if that happens, your body will explode. No human can endure that energy. Some percentage of her might have entered me as a blessing; that's it. Maybe it was her presence, maybe not. But I do know that I am blessed. I believe in these things, and it has happened with me."

Commenting on whether this is a constant occurrence, Sudha mentioned that she reaches that state "most of the time". She added, "This time it was a little 'high energy'. I get very tired after it, and my family told me that in about 6-7 minutes, I drank around 4 litres of water. I mean, is that even humanly possible? My husband told me that I was begging for water. People made several comments, like someone said I am still drunk from the New Year's party. I can only laugh at things like this because I think, 'To each his own.'" She responded to the people who were questioning her intentions behind doing something like that, as many believed that it was staged. Sudha asked, "What would I get out of that?" and said, "Now if people don't believe, I am not standing here to give them some kind of validation. Because if I keep justifying my every single action, then I can't trust myself, because then I am cheating myself. I won't question your upbringing, beliefs or tradition, and that is why no one has the right to question my belief. If you don't want to believe, don't; I don't have a problem with it, but don't question my belief. If you still want to do it and achieve happiness out of it, good, all the better."

'Third rate actor from third rate country': Amitabh Bachchan celebrates India's U19 World Cup win with message to old critics

Amitabh Bachchan's legacy in the Hindi film industry is unmatched, which is why he is often called the *Shehenshah of Bollywood*. However, there was a time when the actor was called a "3rd rate actor" by a foreign senior journalist. While the remark about him personally did not insult Big B, it was the journalist calling India a "3rd world country" that truly enraged him. The actor recalled the insult as a defiant message to India's critics after the country clinched the win in the U19 World Cup. Recently, Amitabh shared this personal incident as he congratulated the young Indian cricket team for winning the U19 Cricket World Cup for the sixth time. The actor recalled an episode from the past when he was felicitated in a foreign country and followed by a sea of fans everywhere he went.

He wrote, "I was invited to a Country (I will not disclose name) for a Film Festival they were having ... and I accepted to go ... in the plane I saw their news paper, which had a picture of one of my films ... not understanding the language I asked the air hostess, what is written ... she said it is a poster of an Indian film and the paper says that its actor is coming to the country." Amitabh shared that fans began gathering at the airport just to catch a glimpse of him, and the crowd swelled to such an extent that his immigration had to be done at the hotel. "Surprised how and why this foreign country could be so enamoured by our films, on landing I found out why ... people started gathering ... had a problem getting from plane to immigration desk ... but the crowd kept gathering around, making it difficult for me to even walk ... the situation became so chaotic that the Police came, pulled me out from the crowd, took me out from the Airport, put me in a car and escorted me to my Hotel. In my



entire life, for the first time, my Immigration was done inside a Hotel," he said.

However, Amitabh's fan following did not sit well with a senior journalist from that country, who went on to insult the actor in an article. While the comment about him did not bother Big B as much, the insult directed at India deeply hurt him. He shared, "Subsequently, each moment I stepped out to an event or a sightseeing trip, massive crowds would gather. Police, escorts and cop cars would follow in protection. This was apparently not very acceptable to a Senior elder Journalist of the Country, and he brought out a headline in the newspaper the next day ... which read : WHY IS SO MUCH ATTENTION BEING GIVEN TO THIS 3RD RATE ACTOR FROM A 3RD WORLD COUNTRY ... !"

Rang De Basanti team reunites for special screening as film celebrates 20 years; Soha Ali Khan says 'few were missed' as R Madhavan gives it a miss



Without a doubt, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's *Rang De Basanti* is one of the most loved films to come out of Bollywood. Led by an ensemble cast, the story of a group of college students leading a revolution for change really struck a chord with the audiences. The film recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, and a special screening was organised to honour the people involved. Most of the cast attended the screening, including Aamir Khan, Sharman Joshi, Siddharth, Kunal Kapoor, Atul Kulkarni, Soha Ali Khan. R Madhavan, Waheeda Rehman and Kirron Kher were not present at the event.

The entire group wore matching hoodies that had been made just for the screening, and they posed together outside the theatre. Producers Ronnie Screwvala and Sidharth Roy Kapur were also present, along with director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra. Soha Ali Khan took to Instagram and posted a video of the cast cutting cake along with the director and producers. She also posted two pictures side by side, where one was from during the filming of *Rang De Basanti*, and the other from the event. She wrote in the caption, "20 years later – we showed up! A few were missed but the spirit was still..." Fans of the film flooded social media with throwback clips and stills from the film. Many even reposted the pictures from the 10-year reunion of the film, where Aamir could be seen addressing the crowd inside the theatre. Some fans compiled the messages posted by some of the cast members during the CAA protests. This included posts from Soha, Kunal, Siddharth, and Atul, who all wrote lengthy paragraphs during the protests. In the vid-

eos that were posted online, Aamir could be seen posing alone for the photographs with Ronnie, and the cast of the film surprised them from behind, as they had all already arrived. Sharman arrived with his wife, Prerana Chopra, while Mehra arrived with his two children, Bhairavi and Vedant.

Naga Chaitanya marks one year of Thandel, thanks team and fans

Hyderabad: Actor Naga Chaitanya on Saturday chose to pen a note of gratitude on the occasion of his superhit film *'Thandel'* completing one year of its release.

Taking to his X timeline to pen the post, Naga Chaitanya wrote, "1 year for #Thandel thank you all for making this special, sending out love to the entire team ?? #Dhullakottayala."

Geetha Arts, the popular production house, for its part wrote, "1 Year of the Epic Win of Raju's Freedom, Satya's Struggle, and Their Incredible Love Story. ?????? ?????? ?????? #Thandel. Celebrating Love, Life, and Blockbuster Success, with Gratitude to Everyone. #1YearForBBThandel."

Well known producer Bunny Vas too penned a note on the occasion. He wrote, "Dhullakottesam! It's been 1 year since our #ThandelRaju and Buiji Thalli #Satya received your love. This is a truly special film, and as promised, we delivered a BLOCKBUSTER for our Yuvasamrat @chay_akkineni garu. Thanks to our director @chandoomondeti, @Sai_Pallavi92, @ThisIsDSP."

For the unaware, *'Thandel'* was a film that was directed by Chandoo Mondeti and which featured actors Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi in the lead. The film was based on a true story in which Indian fishermen from Andhra Pradesh were taken prisoners by Pakistan authorities and imprisoned for 22 years.