

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

On Tamil Nadu and cash benefits

When welfare measures to uplift underprivileged sections are deployed as a political tool in an election year it raises the question whether it is an instance of affirmative action or merely a cynical device that plays out as a poll-eve incentive. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's surgical action of crediting ₹5,000 each in the bank accounts of over 1.31 crore women beneficiaries of the Kalaigiar Magalir Urimai Thittam (KMUT), triggers exactly this uncomfortable thought. The KMUT, in operation since September 2023, envisages a monthly direct transfer of ₹1,000 "rights grant" recognising the dignity and contribution of women heads of families. Notably 32% of its beneficiaries are SC/STs. Citing political and legal apprehensions that the scheme, which is being projected as a rights-based social entitlement and not as a populist freebie, could be suspended prior to the Assembly election, Mr. Stalin chose to give it the force of a political multiplier by disbursing ₹3,000 each for February, March and April in one go. He also introduced a novel "summer assistance" of ₹2,000. Mr. Stalin's concerns about the possibility of the scheme being stopped after the announcement of the election schedule are not unwarranted. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has not been consistent in its interpretation of what constitutes a violation of the Model Code of Conduct. A recent precedent for voter incentivisation emerged during the 2025 Bihar elections, when the JD(U)-BJP coalition deposited ₹10,000 each to one crore women under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana. The ECI turned a blind eye to what was widely seen as an attempt to buy votes for the ruling coalition with funds from the exchequer. Previously, in Tamil Nadu, the ECI had suspended a cash support scheme for farmers (2004) and distribution of free colour television sets (2011).

Shiva-Parvati Kalyanam Celebrated Grandly at Ram Shankar Nagar Temple



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, Feb 16 (Indian Chronicle): "As part of the Maha Shivaratri celebrations, the Shiva-Parvati Kalyanam was performed with great devotion and grandeur at the Shiva temple in Ram Shankar Nagar, Ramanthapur. The celestial wedding ceremony was conducted in a spiritually vibrant atmosphere, drawing large numbers of devotees. On the auspicious occasion, Lingodbhava Puja was performed at midnight (12:00 AM) with great reverence. Devotees gathered in large numbers to witness the sacred moment and performed abhishekams to Lord Shiva. The Kalyanam ceremony that followed was visually splendid and spiritually uplifting. Senior BJP leader Vallapu Jagan Yadav and his spouse participated in the ceremony and took part in the rituals. Devotees continued the night-long vigil (Jagaran) with deep devotion. Temple committee members made comprehensive arrangements to ensure that devotees faced no inconvenience during the celebrations. Residents from Ram Shankar Nagar and nearby colonies attended the festivities in large numbers and witnessed the grand Kalyanam Mahotsavam.

Medchal-Malkajgiri District: Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons Elected in Three Municipalities



NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 16, (INDIAN CHRONICLE): "As part of the 2026 general elections to municipalities and municipal corporations, the election of Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons was conducted on Monday in three municipalities of Medchal-Malkajgiri district — Mooduchintalapalli, Aliabad, and Yellampet. In Aliabad Municipality, Kantam Sirisha alias Kantam Swetha (Congress) was elected as Chairperson, while Kan Reddy Malathi (BJP) was elected as Vice-Chairperson. The oath of office was administered by Special Officer and District Groundwater Officer Harish Babu. In Mooduchintalapalli Municipality, Jamuravi (BRS) was elected as Chairperson and Morugubai Shashirekha (BRS) as Vice-Chairperson. The oath was administered by Special Officer and District Cooperative Officer Nagalinga Chari. In Yellampet Municipality, Lavudya Sridevi (BRS) was elected as Chairperson, while Mekala Rajitha (BJP) was elected as Vice-Chairperson. The oath of office was administered by Special Officer and District Panchayat Raj Engineer Chandrasekhar. The elections were conducted smoothly under the supervision of the respective special officers.

Samindla Vani elected as Jagtial Municipal Chairparson



"Jinath Parveen elected as Vice Chairmen" "Vemula Nagalakshmi elected as Dharmapuri Chairperson" "Jagtial District Correspondent (Enam Kishan Reddy), February 16,

Indian Chronicle: "Samindla Vani Srinivas, Congress Councilor of 43rd Ward, was elected as Jagtial Municipal Chairperson. Vani received support from 39 councilors, while Konda Aruna (BJP) received support from 5 BJP councilors. The officials declared Samindla Vani as the Jagtial Municipal Chairperson. "MLA Sanjay Kumar's faction got the Jagtial municipality chair, while former minister Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy's faction got the Vice Chairman post with Jinath Parveen. "The Congress party's high command decided in favor of MLA Sanjay Kumar's faction, and the councilors supported Vani. The drama ended on Monday. "Notably, former Chairperson Aduvala Jyothi, who had aspired for the post, didn't support any party. "In Dharmapuri, Vemula Nagalakshmi (Congress) was elected as Chairperson, and Indarapu Ramanna (Congress) was elected as Vice Chairman. "The BRS party won the Rayikal municipality with the support of 7 independent councilors. Katakam Ravinder was elected as Municipal Chairman, and Turaga Saujanya Sridhar Reddy as Vice Chairman. "The elections were held peacefully in all three municipalities.

Uppal Congress In-charge Parameshwar Reddy Inaugurates Star Force Cricket Tournament



"KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 16 (Indian Chronicle): "Mandamula Parameshwar Reddy, Congress Party in-charge of Uppal constituency, inaugurated the Star Force Cricket Tournament by tossing the coin on Sunday night at Adarshanagar in Chiluka Nagar Division. The cricket tournament was organized by Rebel Youth on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri celebrations in Chiluka Nagar Division. Parameshwar Reddy attended the event as the chief



guest. "Speaking on the occasion, Parameshwar Reddy emphasized that youth organizations should encourage young people to participate in sports. He said tournaments conducted from time to time help promote sports and motivate those interested in games. Organizers Uday Bhaskar and K. Raghu, Chiluka Nagar Division in-charge Akiti Agam Reddy, Division President Rajesh Mudiraj, Mahender Mudiraj, Moynuddin, Manchala Raghu, Sriramulu, Navakanth Reddy, Teja, Kiran, and others were present at the event.

Mobile Phone Donated to Differently-Abled Girl in Jawahar Nagar



"NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 16, (INDIAN CHRONICLE): "A mobile phone was distributed to Nikita, a differently-abled girl from CPI Colony in Jawahar Nagar, under the initiative of the Telangana Disabled Rights Pro-

tection Committee. The program was organized under the leadership of State President Kiran Guttikonda and State General Secretary Merugu Shivakrishna. The mobile phone was provided by Veera Krishna Teja, Chairman of NC Group of Companies, along with Lakshmi, in response to Nikita's financial difficulties. The assistance was extended on the occasion of Lakshmi's grandson Dathvik Chari's birthday. Lakshmi has been actively involved in social service activities for several years, supporting underprivileged individuals, elderly citizens, differently-abled persons, and families in distress across various sectors. Speaking on the occasion, Lakshmi stated that it is everyone's responsibility to stand by economically disadvantaged differently-abled individuals in society. She added that such service initiatives would continue in the future. Members of NC Group of Companies including Jagan, Prashanth, Srinivas, and Venkateshwarlu participated in the program. Senior local journalists Balagam CEO Chintala Vijay, Durgam Swamy, Raghu, and Akhil were also present. On behalf of the differently-abled community, Merugu Shivakrishna expressed gratitude for the support extended to Nikita.

Gaddam Ananya Elected Unanimously as Vikarabad Municipal Chairperson Takes Oath & Assumes Office

"Indian Chronicle, Vikarabad, Babar (February, 16) "Gaddam Ananya, Councillor from Ward 17, was unanimously elected as the Chairperson of Vikarabad Municipality. She took the oath of office and officially assumed her duties today. "On this occasion, Sudheer, District Additional Collector and In-charge Election Officer, first administered the oath to all 34 newly elected Ward Councillors. "Since only Gaddam Ananya filed nomination for the post of Chairperson, officials declared her elected unopposed. "Following this, Election Officer Sudheer administered the oath to Gaddam Ananya, formally appointing her as the Chairperson of Vikarabad Municipality. The newly elected Councillors convened and unanimously chose Ardha Sudhakar Reddy, Councillor from Ward 10, as Vice-Chairman. "Gaddam Prasad Kumar, MLA of Vikarabad Constituency and Speaker of the Telangana State Legislative Assembly, attended the meeting as an Ex-Officio Member. "On the occasion, he congratulated: "Chairperson Gaddam Ananya"- Vice-Chairman Ardha Sudhakar Reddy"- All Ward Council-



lors" "Gaddam Ananya's unanimous election as Vikarabad Municipal Chairperson marks the beginning of new development initiatives," said Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar. "Ananya's Unopposed Victory Signals Fresh Momentum for Vikarabad's Progress! Getting elected as Municipal Chairperson at such a young age is truly her good fortune.

Colony Development Will Be Prioritized - MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy



strengthening basic infrastructure and that there would be no compromise in ensuring essential civic amenities for the colony's development. BRS Party leader Baiy Naveen Goud, along with officials and colony representatives including President Satish Babu, Gilbert, General Secretary Yoganand, Vice President Shankar, Ramesh, Treasurer Anjaneyulu, Joint Secretary Mahesh, Vamsi.

Municipal Chairperson performs prayers at Dharmashala



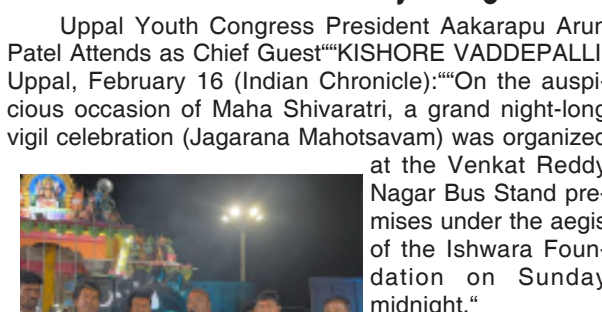
"Jagtial District Correspondent (Ennam Kishan Reddy, February 16 (Indian Chronicle): "The newly elected first citizen of Jagtial town, Municipal Chairperson Samindla Vani, performed special prayers at the Shiva temple on Monday. The priest performed the rituals with gotra namadhu. "At the temple in Vaninagar Dharmashala, Municipal Chairperson Samindla Vani and Srinivas couple performed special prayers and prayed for good governance for the next five years. The temple priest honored Chairperson Vani and her husband and blessed them.

Councilor Arav Laxmi honors Municipal Chairperson Vani



"Jagtial District Correspondent (Ennam Kishan Reddy) February 16, (Indian Chronicle): "Samindla Vani Srinivas took charge as the Municipal Chairperson of Jagtial Municipality on Monday. Councilor Arav Laxmi congratulated the newly elected Chairperson Samindla Vani Srinivas and fed her sweets. "On this occasion, Councilor Arav Laxmi said that the governing body should work in coordination to develop Jagtial town, provide basic amenities, and resolve public issues. She assured that the new governing body will cooperate to take Jagtial town forward on the path of development in all fields.

Grand Maha Shivaratri Night Vigil Celebrations Held at Venkat Reddy Nagar



Uppal Youth Congress President Aakarapu Arun Patel Attends as Chief Guest "KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 16 (Indian Chronicle): "On the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivaratri, a grand night-long vigil celebration (Jagarana Mahotsavam) was organized at the Venkat Reddy Nagar Bus Stand premises under the aegis of the Ishwara Foundation on Sunday midnight."

Uppal Constituency Youth Congress President Aakarapu Arun Patel attended the event as the chief guest. Upon the invitation of organizers Pachimattla Anil Goud, Sudagani Mallesh Goud, Pesari Shankar, and Sudagani Srisailem Goud, Arun Patel participated in the program and performed special prayers to Lord Shiva. "Speaking on the occasion, he prayed that the divine blessings of Lord Shiva, the cosmic dissolver, be upon everyone. He stated that spending the sacred night in devotion and chanting the name of Lord Shiva brings immense spiritual merit and inner peace. The celebration

witnessed devotees gathering in large numbers and observing the holy night with deep faith and devotion.

Government of Telangana Revenue (LA) Department FORM-6 (See Sub-rule (1) of Rule -19 and Section-11(1) of the Act-30/2013)									
PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION G1/517/2025 No.G/463/2025 Whereas it appears to the Government of Telangana / Collector, Nalgonda that a total of Ac. 0.04 gts of land is required in the Thirumalagiri Village of Thirumalagiri Sagar Mandal in Nalgonda District for Public purpose, namely, acquisition of land for Construction of pumping station on foreshore of Nagarjuna Sagar Reservoir near Nellikai village with vertical turbine pumps with motors, including supply, erection, testing and commissioning of electro-mechanical works and allied civil works viz., approach channel, pressure main, delivery cistern and gravity canals etc., including O&M works in Thirumalagiri Sagar Mandal of Nalgonda District. Hence, below mentioned lands are notified under Section 11(1) of the Act 30/2013 RFCT LA RR Act 2013.									
The Government of Telangana & C&AD, Department have issued G.O. No. 08, I&CAD Dept., Dated: 17.03.2023 exempting the for Construction of pumping station on foreshore of Nagarjuna Sagar Reservoir near Nellikai village with vertical turbine pumps with motors, including supply, erection, testing and commissioning of electro-mechanical works and allied civil works viz., approach channel, pressure main, delivery cistern and gravity canals etc., including O&M works in Thirumalagiri Sagar Mandal of Nalgonda District project from the applications of the Provisions of chapter II and chapter III of the RFCT in L.A.R.R. Act, 2013 to this project.									
There it is notified that for the above said project in the Thirumalagiri Village of Thirumalagiri Sagar Mandal in Nalgonda District land measuring, more or less Ac. 0.04 gts of standard measurement, whose detailed description is as mentioned below, is under acquisition:									
Schedule									
Sl. No.	Sur. No.	Sub. Div. No.	Type of Land	Area of Acquisition (Ac.gts)	Name of the Proprietor/ Employer and S/o or W/o	Details of the land, if any, on the filed	Remarks		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	330	2	Patta	00-04	Ramulu Naik S/o				
Grand Total				00-04					
This notification is made under the provisions of Section-11 (1) of The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (Central Act No. 30 of 2013), as amended by the Right to Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Telangana Amendment) Act, 2015 (Act No. 21 of 2017) to all whom it may concern.									
A plan of the land may be inspected in the office of the District Collector, Nalgonda and Sub-Collector, Miryalguda on any working day during the working hours. The Government of Telangana / Collector-cum-Appropriate Government is pleased to authorize officer and his staff to enter upon and survey land, take levels of any land, dig or bore into the sub-soil & do all other acts required for the proper execution of their work as provided and specified in section-12 of the said Act.									
Under Section 11 (4) of the Act, no person shall make any transaction or cause any transaction of land i.e., sale, purchase, etc., or create any encumbrances on such land from the date of publication of such notification without prior approval of the District Collector, Nalgonda.									
Objections to the acquisition if any, and claims from all the persons interested / affected for settlement by negotiation of the compensation, may be filed by the person interested in the land within 60 (sixty days) from the date of publication of this notification as provided under section 15 of Act before District Collector, Nalgonda / Sub-Collector, Miryalguda.									
Sd/- Land Acquisition Officer, Additional Collector, District Collector, Sub-Collector, Nalgonda District, Nalgonda. DIPR Ro.No.1178/LA/PP/Adv/Pub/2025-26									

Illegal Constructions Surge in Kapra Circle; Public Anger Grows Over Official Inaction - Staff Claim Notices Issued, Residents Demand Strict Enforcement



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 16, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Illegal constructions are rapidly increasing within Kapra Circle, triggering strong resentment among local residents over what they describe as official negligence. Unauthorized buildings are reportedly coming up in

residential zones and along main roads without proper approvals. Encroachments on vacant plots, construction of compound walls, and addition of extra floors beyond permitted limits are continuing openly. Residents allege that many structures are being built without maintaining mandatory setbacks, which could obstruct future road widening projects. In several areas, parking spaces are being converted into commercial establishments, worsening traffic congestion and creating safety hazards. The rise of unauthorized commercial buildings has led to increased vehicle movement on already narrow roads, raising the risk of accidents. Experts warn that violations of building norms may pose serious safety risks in the long term. Poor adherence to structural and regulatory standards could result in hazardous living and working conditions. According to locals, Town Planning officials respond to complaints by stating that notices have been issued, but no concrete follow-up action is taken. Construction activity often continues even after notices are served, leading to allegations of weak enforcement. There are also claims that certain influential individuals may be backing some of these unauthorized projects. Residents are demanding immediate and strict action against violators, including filing cases and halting illegal construction works. They have called for a comprehensive survey across Kapra Circle to identify violations and ensure transparent enforcement. Citizens insist that authorities must intensify monitoring and take decisive steps to curb illegal constructions before the situation worsens further.

Power Supply Interruption in Chiluka Nagar Section Today: AE Vinay Kumar Reddy



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 17 (Indian Chronicle):“Due to departmental maintenance works, power supply will be temporarily interrupted on Tuesday,

the 17th of this month, within the Surya Hills feeder limits from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM, according to a statement issued by Electricity Department Chiluka Nagar Assistant Engineer Vinay Kumar Reddy. “During this period, electricity supply will remain suspended in Surya Hills, Edaya Nagar, New Hemanagar Colony, Rajasekhar Colony, and surrounding areas.” Additionally, under the RNS feeder limits, power supply will be stopped from 2:30 PM to 5:30 PM. Areas affected during this time include Sai Nagar, RNS Royal Meadows, RNS Dream Homes, RNS Colony, Anjaiah Extension, Rajalingam Colony Phase-3, Amma Sani Venkat Reddy Colony, Telephone Colony, and nearby localities. AE Vinay Kumar Reddy requested electricity consumers and business establishments to cooperate with the department staff during the maintenance works.

Attack on BJP District President's house““Own party councillors vandalise furniture““

Jagtial District Correspondent, Ennam Kishan Reddy, February 16, (Indian Chronicle): ““It is reported that some people, including councillors from the same party, attacked the house of BJP district president Rachakonda Yadagiri, alleging that his negligence led to the party not issuing a whip in the Metpalli Municipal Chairman elections.““The councillors, who were unhappy with the party's decision, vandalised the furniture in Yadagiri's house. Despite winning the majority of seats in Metpalli, the party failed to secure the chairman post, leading to protests from BJP leaders and councillors.““The councillors blamed Yadagiri for not issuing a whip, which led to BJP councillor Chetlapalli Meena voting for Congress, resulting in the loss of the chairman post. The incident led to police intervention, with CI, SI, and police personnel visiting the scene and enquiring



with Yadagiri. The BJP district president condemned the attack.

Patlolla Neeraja sits on Tandur Municipal Chairperson's seat



“Abdul Razak as Vice-Chairman ““Congress retained full control of Tandur Municipality after winning a clear majority. Out of 36 wards:- Congress: 19 wards - BRS: 12 wards- BJP: 3 wards- AIMIM: 1 ward- Independent: 1 ward“With this majority, Patlolla Neeraja (Congress candidate from Ward 12) was elected as Municipal Chairperson, and Abdul Razak (Congress candidate from Ward 29) was elected as Vice-Chairperson, both chosen “unanimously in a special council meeting held on Monday. Election Spe-

cial Officer & District Revenue Officer Mangilal administered the oath and handed over official certificates to both Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. Neeraja was proposed by Councillor Abdul Razak and seconded by Councillor Manapuram Ramakrishna (Ward 22).“ Abdul Razak was proposed by Councillor Venu Gopal and seconded by Councillor Juntipalli Venkatesh.“Attendees:- MLA & Ex-Officio Member: B. Manohar Reddy- Municipal Commissioner: Madhu Sudhan Reddy- Manager: Narendra Reddy- Other officials & dignitaries“Congress continues its dominance Tandur's new leadership set to drive development!

Bhadrachalam Public School Shines in National Hindi Olympiad



d“Kranthikumar Dasari | Pinapaka Constituency | February 16 | Indian Chronicle : Students of Bhadrachalam Public School, located in Sarapaka village of Burgampadu mandal, delivered an impressive performance in the na-

tional-level Hindi Olympiad examination conducted by the Hindi Olympiad Foundation. Principal Prashant U. Kitukule informed that a total of 227 students from the school appeared for the nationwide examination held on October 16 last year. Out of them, 36 students secured merit medals, bringing laurels to the institution. The medal tally includes 10 Gold, 10 Silver, and 16 Bronze medals. At a ceremony held on the school premises on Monday, the meritorious students were presented with medals and certificates of appreciation. The school management and faculty expressed pride and happiness over the students' remarkable achievement. The event was attended by Academic Coordinator Suma Bindu and senior teachers Ilahi Bhakshi, Padmanabha Rao, Ramaraju, Raja Reddy, K. V. Ramesh, Sireesh Raja, Suchi Smitha, and others.

Fruit Distribution to Devotees under the Leadership of Kandi Shravan Kumar Reddy

“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 16 (Indian Chronicle):““On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, fruits were distributed to devotees observing fasting at the Velugutta Sri Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple under the leadership of former Medchal-Malkajgiri District Youth Congress President Kandi Shravan Kumar Reddy.Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy attended as the chief guest and personally distributed fruits to the devotees.Former temple committee member Srikanth Reddy, senior Congress leaders Sudhakar Reddy, Gorige Malleshham, Krishna Reddy, Habsiguda Division Congress Party General Secretary and Endowments Department Director Dharmendra Nayak (Dharma), Temple EO Peddigari Srikanth, ST Cell leaders Ganesh Nayak and Raju Nayak, Division Indiramma Committee member Gundurajanna, Division Youth Congress President Vasu Nayak, along with Kishan Nayak, Pawan Vanjari, Suman



Nayak, Kalyan Nayak, Shiva, Vinod, Siddu and others participated in the programme.“The fruit distribution was organized to support devotees observing fasting during the sacred festival.

Has the MLA Sanjay been given power of attorney over Jagtial Congress?



““As long as Sanjay is MLA, I'll face harassment“““I'm considering continuing in Congress...?““Former Minister Jeevan Reddy's sensational comments““Jagtial District Correspondent, Ennam Kishan Reddy, February 16, (Indian Chronicle):““Former Minister and Congress senior leader Tatiparthi Jeevan Reddy expressed disappointment, stating that despite being in Congress for over 40 years and working for the Jagtial constituency, he has been facing harassment from MLA Sanjay, who won as a BRS candidate.““At a press conference with Congress leaders and councillors at Indira Bhavan, Jagtial, Jeevan Reddy said that the future is uncertain and questioned how long he should tolerate the humiliation. He alleged that Sanjay has been given power of attorney over Jagtial Congress and that the Speaker's statement that Sanjay hasn't changed parties contradicts his actions, which are aligned with Congress.““Jeevan Reddy appealed to the party leadership to respect the sentiments of Congress workers and expressed concern about the party's situation in Jagtial and other areas where leaders have switched parties.

Uppal MLA Meets Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation Commissioner

““NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 16, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):““Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy paid a courtesy visit to Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation (MMC) Commissioner Vinay Krishna Reddy on Monday. During the meeting, several civic and developmental issues concerning the Uppal constituency and surrounding areas were discussed. The MLA is understood to have highlighted the need for expediting ongoing infrastructure works, improving sanitation, strengthening drainage systems, and ensuring better delivery of basic amenities to residents. He also sought the Commissioner's support in prioritizing pending development proposals and addressing public grievances at the earliest. Former corporator Kotha Ramarao, along with Kumara Swamy, S.A. Rahim, Murali Panthulu, Vanjari Praveen, Shankar Babu, Sai Reddy, Venkat Raju and G.V. Narayana, were present during the meeting. The interaction focused on coordinated efforts between elected repre-



sentatives and municipal officials to accelerate development works and enhance civic services across the region.

Grand Maha Shivaratri Celebrations in Chilakalaguda

“Indian Chronicle, Secunderabad, February 16:“Maha Shivaratri celebrations were held grandly in Chilakalaguda, Secunderabad. At the Sri Saibaba Sametha Sri Bala Anjaneya Swamy Temple, special rituals including Eka Rudrabhishekam and other special poojas were performed under the leadership of Temple Chairman Naguluri Sai Baba.“The temple premises echoed with chants of Lord Shiva's name from early morning. A large number of devotees participated in the rituals, performed abhishekams and archana, and had darshan of the deity.“The temple committee members coordinated the arrangements smoothly, and theertha prasadam was distributed to the devotees. The celebrations concluded successfully in a devotional and peaceful atmosphere.



BRS wins Raikal municipal chairman post with seven votes

Jagtial: The BRS captured one more municipality in the erstwhile Karimnagar district. The Raikal municipal chairman post was captured by the BRS with seven votes. Second ward councillor Katakam Ravinder was elected as chairman and fourth ward councillor Turuga Soujanya was elected as vice-chairman. Though the party has no majority, it managed to get both chairman and vice-chairman posts with the support of the Congress and an independent.Out of 12 wards, the BJP won 5, followed by

the BRS 3, the Congress 3 and an independent 1. Though no party got the majority to form the council, the BRS managed to win the chairman and vice-chairman posts with the support of the Congress and an independent.



Maha Shivaratri Celebrations Held Grandly at Vasavi Shivanagar



“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 16, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“Maha Shivaratri was celebrated with religious fervor and devotion at Sri Kanyaka Parameshwari Temple in Vasavi Shivanagar under Kushaiguda Division. Devotees gathered at the temple from the early hours of the morning to offer special prayers and perform abhishekam to the Shiva Lingam with milk, curd, honey, ghee, and sugar. On the occasion, Kushaiguda Circle Inspector Bhaskar Reddy performed Rudrabhishekam and offered special prayers. He later joined devotees in chanting hymns dedicated to Lord Shiva and highlighted the spiritual significance of Maha Shivaratri. Prayers were offered for peace, harmony, and the welfare of society. Bhajans and recitations of sacred hymns continued throughout the day, creating a spiritually vibrant atmosphere in the temple premises. Prasadam and food were distributed to devotees. In the evening, a special Deeparadhana ceremony was conducted, drawing a large number of participants. Temple authorities made necessary arrangements to manage the heavy turnout of devotees and ensured smooth conduct of the celebrations. Among those present were Medchal–Malkajgiri Market Committee Director Nagilla Bal Reddy, Temple Chairman Dacha Ashok Gupta, Santosh Gupta, Balakrishna, Ravi, Chowry, devotees, and local residents.

How shots fired to scare woman blew deceptive cover to obtain gun license

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

On the cold night of January 22, Lonavala Police Station responded to a call received through the 112 Emergency Response helpline where a caller said that around 1.20 am, a suspect who threatened and thrashed a woman, had fired two rounds in the air on the premises of Lonavala Bus Stand.As police teams checked CCTV cameras, they zeroed in on a car that had come to the location from a road towards Valvan village. The footage showed a woman being assaulted by a suspect. Investigation revealed the woman had travelled to the location in the car with the suspect. At a spot next to the bus stand, the two got down while having an argument. During the argument, the suspect attacked the woman and also fired two shots in the air to scare her. The two then got into the car and drove off. As police tracked the movement of the car, it was spotted passing through the Urse Toll Plaza at 1.43 am and then moved towards Pune.

The investigation further traced the car to an address in Pune and also identified the suspect as a resident of Sahakarnagar. Investigation revealed that the suspect had a criminal record. Police found out that the gun he had allegedly used to open fire was a licensed firearm. It also came to light that he had obtained a firearm license from the Pune City Police — which he had applied for in November 2022 — by changing his address and concealing key details.

“Investigation revealed that when the suspect applied for a weapons license, he listed his address as a rented apartment from Swapnasheel Society in Loni Kalbhor. For this he submitted a rent agreement and affidavit of his stay



at the said apartment for a period of one year. He also submitted on affidavit that there was no case pending against him in either criminal or civil jurisdiction,” said an officer from Pune Rural police.Pune Rural police subsequently informed Pune City police about suspected illegality in procuring the weapons license.An officer from Loni Kalbhor police station said, “After receiving information that the suspect had submitted fake documents to obtain the firearm license, our team visited the residence he had listed as his address in Loni Kalbhor.It soon became clear that he had not lived at the address and submitted a fake rent agreement. By changing his address and by using an alias, he had also tried to conceal his criminal records. It came to light that four cases were registered against him between 2000 and 2011 and included charges of physical assault, robbery and assault on a public servant. Based on findings, an FIR has been registered against the suspect on charges of cheating and forgery. The suspect is at large and has moved court to quash the FIR through his lawyer.”

Maharashtra launches country’s first AI ‘Living Lab’ to support MSMEs; Germany partners in skill push

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Maharashtra government’s skill development department Monday launched what it described as the country’s first “AI Living Lab” aimed at helping small and medium industries adopt new technology to solve day-to-day operational problems. The facility has been set up at the Ratan Tata Maharashtra State Skills University (RT-MSSU) in Mumbai, with support from Germany.The lab was inaugurated by Skill Development Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha in the presence of German Parliamentary State Secretary Dr Bärbel Kofler and senior state officials. Several memoranda of understanding were signed on the occasion by the university, German institutions and participating companies.

According to officials, the “Living Lab” will function as a platform where students, faculty members and industry representatives can work together to address specific problems faced by manufacturing and industrial units.Lodha said the idea was to connect indigenous industries with modern tools so they can improve productivity and remain competitive. Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s emphasis on self-reliance, he said the Centre had demonstrated the country’s capabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic by supplying vaccines to more than 75 countries.“The next step is to ensure that our domestic industries are strengthened through access to advanced technology,” he said, adding that such initiatives would help position India as a global leader.

He also credited Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis for backing skill development programmes in the state and said the department was working to create more employment and self-employment opportunities for young people.Dr Kofler said cooperation between India and Germany in skill development and technology was expanding steadily. She noted that new technologies are reshaping manufacturing, healthcare, education and other sectors, and stressed the importance of ensuring that these tools are used responsibly and for public benefit. She said collaboration between universities and industry would be key to preparing young professionals for changing job markets.



Chief Secretary Rajesh Agrawal described the shift brought about by digital technologies as comparable to an industrial transformation. He said businesses were being forced to rethink how they function, and that younger professionals were quicker to adapt to these changes.RT-MSSU Vice-Chancellor Dr Apoorva Palkar outlined how the Living Lab would operate. She said the concept is built around real industrial challenges rather than classroom simulations. Companies will present specific operational issues. Teams comprising students, professors and industry experts will study the problems, analyse data and suggest practical, implementable solutions.The project is being implemented jointly with Germany’s Leipzig University and Step Kompetenz, with support from German development agencies. Five German companies are expected to be associated with the initiative in its initial phase, facilitating the exchange of technical know-how.On the Maharashtra side, companies including Accurate Industrial Controls Limited, Lytex Electrical, Ashwini Magnets and PMT Machines have signed agreements with the university. Officials said the focus would be on manufacturing processes, quality control, energy efficiency and production planning.State officials said the lab is expected to serve as a pilot model. The broader aim, they said, is to ensure that smaller industries are not left behind as technology becomes central to industrial growth.

Wandering tiger returns to reserve forest after scaring villagers in Siddipet

Hyderabad: The wandering tiger that moved towards Vithalapur village in Chinnakodur mandal of Siddipet returned to the reserve forest spread over nearly 1200 hectares between Gundaram and Chowdharam villages on Sunday.“Fresh images of the tiger were captured by the camera traps set up in the forest. It is wandering in the reserve forest. Our teams are monitoring its movement closely,” said a forest official.

The tiger, after staying in the reserve forest since Thursday night for two days, had later moved westwards towards the Vithalapur village. Its pugmarks were found in the village outskirts by farmers. creating panic in several

villages on Sunday. On being alerted by the forest officials, the teams throughout the day checked the surroundings of the village for the presence of a tiger and alerted the people in nearby villages. However, there was no trace of the tiger. On Sunday night, villagers complained that they heard the tiger growl.The forest officials, along with the veterinarians, are camping in the reserve forest and monitoring the movement of the tiger. “We are on standby to assist the forest teams in case of human-animal conflict. In an emergency, we cannot rush to the spot immediately, so we are accompanying them,” said a veterinarian who is camping in the reserve forest.

Adopt Centre’s GeM portal for purchases at BMC schools, Gender Budget materials: Mumbai BJP president Ameet Satam



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Mumbai BJP president Ameet Satam Monday demanded a complete overhaul of the civic body’s procurement system, urging the immediate adoption of the Centre’s e-Marketplace (GeM) portal for all school-related purchases and Gender Budget distributions.The move is aimed at making the system more transparent and accountable and checking corruption and contract-driven decision-making. It is being seen as the first significant attempt to dismantle the long-standing corruption within the Brihanmumbai Mu-

nicipal Corporation (BMC).

In his letter to Mumbai Mayor Ritu Tawde and BMC chief Bhushan Gagrani, Satam stated that for several years, the BMC has been distributing 27 different items, ranging from uniforms to stationery, free of cost to lakhs of students studying in municipal schools.“At present, these items are purchased through contractors. It has often been observed that these contractors procure goods from manufacturers and then sell them to the BMC at inflated prices,” said MLA Satam.He demanded that the civic body adopt direct procurement of these 27 items from the Union government’s GeM portal. “BMC can also consider opting for direct benefit transfer (DBT) instead of distributing school supplies. The equivalent amount should be deposited directly into the bank accounts of students or their parents via DBT,” added Satam.Satam further insisted that going forward, all procurement—including the 27 school items and materials distributed to women under the Gender Budget—should be made exclusively through the GeM portal.“This move will lead to significant savings of public money, ensure transparency in procurement, and help curb corruption. Adopting this method of procurement will prevent the supply of goods to the BMC at inflated prices,” said Satam.

3 youths sentenced to death for 2025 Hampi gang-rape and murder of tourists

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

A district court in Karnataka’s Koppal Monday sentenced to death three local youths in their 20s who murdered an Indian tourist, gang-raped a tourist from Israel and an Indian home stay owner, and assaulted and robbed an American tourist in the heritage tourism region of Hampi last year.

The court had earlier sought reports on the social background, jail conduct and psychological mindset of the three youth: Mallesh alias Handi Malla alias Mallayya, 22, Sai alias Chaitanya Sai alias Saikumar, 21, and Sharanappa alias Sharanabasavaraj, 27, before deciding on a sentence for the crimes which entail a maximum punishment of death.A police officer familiar with the investigations said the youths, who have a history of crime, behaved in an inhuman manner while committing the crime after pouncing on the unsuspecting victims on the night of March 6, 2025.The brutal attack on tourists along the banks of the Tungabhadra River in the scenic Sanapur region of Hampi, which is popular among backpackers, sent shockwaves through the area. This incident led to a decline in foreign tourism in the region.The crime forced the Karnataka government to take serious action to ensure a speedy trial and to introduce safety measures for tourists. The March 2025 attack on foreign and Indian tourists occurred when the tourists were stargazing and playing music in the open at night.The Sanapur region, dotted with several low-cost resorts, is loved by backpackers from across the world for its old-world charm and for recreating a slow life amid natural beauty.

The crime occurred when a group of five, including two foreigners from Israel and the US, a woman guide from the resort where the tourists were staying, a youth from Odisha, and a youth from Maharashtra, were relaxing near the Tungabhadra canal — across the river from the heritage site of Hampi.The local police station registered a case of rape and assault based on a complaint filed by a 29-year-old Indian woman who was the guide for the tourists and also ran a homestay in the region.The three youths from Koppal, who were subsequently arrested by the local police, chanced upon the group of tourists and their guide, and attacked, raped and robbed them, according to the police. Three male tourists—Daniel Pitas, 23, from the United States; Pankaj Patil, 42, from Nasik, Maharashtra; and Bhibash Kumar Nayak, 26, from Odisha—were pushed into a canal. The two women—a tourist from Israel and an Indian guide were gang-raped by the youths. Nayak died as a result of the attack, and his body was found the following day in the canal.

The local police registered a case under section 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 for murder, under section 109 (attempt to murder), 309(6) (robbery and voluntarily causing hurt), 311 (dacoity), 64(L) (grievous bodily



harm or endangering the life of a woman), and 70 (1) (gang rape).

On February 6, the Koppal district court in Gangavathi convicted Mallesh alias Handi Malla alias Mallayya, 22, Sai alias Chaitanya Sai, 21, and Sharanappa alias Sharanabasavaraj, 27, who work as labourers in Koppal for murder of Bhibash Kumar under Section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), of attempting to murder Daniel Pitas and Pankaj Patil under Section 109, for robbing the Indian woman guide of the group under section 309(6).In addition, Mallesh and Chaitanya Sai were convicted for the gang rape and rape of the Indian guide, while Chaitanya Sai and Sharanappa were convicted for the gang rape and rape of the Israeli tourist under section 70(1) and section 64 (1) of the BNS.

The youths were also convicted of causing grievous bodily harm and endangering the life of the two women, as well as robbing the Indian woman and a US tourist, and committing a dacoity against the US citizen and the Maharashtra man.The crime of murder entails a death penalty, while the crime of gang rape entails up to 20 years of imprisonment, and heinous crimes entail 10 years of imprisonment.Based on a submission by the public prosecutor that the crimes “fall under rarest of rare case” on account of “connected offences of two gang rape, two attempt to commit murder with hurt, robbery by causing hurt, grievous bodily harm while committing rape, robbery by attempt to cause death” the court called for reports to decide on the nature of punishment.The court called for a social investigation report on the “family circumstances, economic condition, education, and community standing of convicts,” a jail conduct report “indicating discipline, behaviour, and attitude of the convicts,” and a psychiatric and psychological report “examining mental stability, emotional control, and scope for reformation of convicts”.During the pronouncement of the conviction order, the Koppal district court also noted that Dr Ram L Arasiddi, Koppal Superintendent of Police, had submitted “that after the untoward incident at Sanapur, they have increased the number of vehicles for patrolling duty and that Sanapur region North Hampi, is absolutely safe for Indian and foreign visitors”.

‘You can get bail from courts, but what about God’s court?’: CM Mann hits out at Majithia as he mimics Akali leader’s moustache twirl



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Hours after being discharged from hospital following “high blood pressure and exhaustion”, Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday hit out at former minister and senior Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikram Singh Majithia, saying, “You might get bail from courts here, but what about the court of God? How will you answer there?”Addressing the “Yuddh Nasheyana Viruddh” (War Against Drugs) 2.0 state-level programme of the Punjab government at Killi Chahlan village in Moga, Mann mimicked Majithia’s “moustache twirl” gesture and, without naming the SAD leader, said: “Some people are not relenting even now. You might get bail from courts here, but what about the court of God? How and what will you answer there? You will certainly be punished one day; justice will prevail...”

Mann addressed the gathering along with AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, as the ruling party sounded the poll bugle for the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections.Mann

said that previous governments in Punjab before 2022, led by the SAD, BJP and Congress, were “responsible for pushing Punjab into drugs.”“Our Punjab was once known for bhangra, giddha and excellent performances in sports. The entire Indian national hockey team used to be from Punjab, but they (previous governments) made us famous for chitta (heroin), teekay (injections) and syringes. This is the reward they gave us for voting them to power for consecutive years. Such was the state of affairs under the previous governments that ‘saaman’ (drugs) used to be supplied in government vehicles, and the police were given the registration numbers of those vehicles to let them pass without checking. And some people are not relenting even now,” Mann said, while targeting Majithia and mimicking his moustache-twirl gesture.

Recently, Majithia was released from Nabha Jail after securing bail from the Supreme Court in an alleged disproportionate assets case registered against him by the Punjab Police’s Vigilance Bureau. The case stems from investigations linked to a 2021 drugs case registered against him under the NDPS Act.

After coming out of jail, Majithia twirled his moustaches, a gesture seen as a challenge to the ruling AAP in Punjab. Speaking to the media after spending seven months in prison, Majithia had taken a jibe at the AAP government, saying, “Muchhan karke taan main 7 mahine laake aayan jail vich. Asal vich parcha taan chahaeda si muchhan wala, vigilance wala taan aiven hi karta (It is actually because of my moustaches that I spent seven months in jail. In fact, the FIR should have been registered for [twirling moustaches]; they unnecessarily registered the Vigilance Bureau case [of disproportionate assets]).”

Bomb threat at Kolkata airport: IndiGo flight to Shillong moved to isolation bay after note found



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The aircraft was moved to an isolation bay and evacuated as security teams conducted thorough checks. A bomb threat note was found aboard an IndiGo flight to Shillong just before departure from Kolkata. A handwritten bomb threat note was found aboard an IndiGo flight headed to Shillong, just before its scheduled departure, triggering a security

emergency at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport in Kolkata on Saturday.

A crew member found a note in the lavatory of IndiGo flight 6E-7304, suggesting a potential explosive on board, said sources. The aircraft was immediately diverted to an isolation bay, away from the main terminal and other active taxiways, and passengers were disembarked from the aircraft.

"All passengers and crew have been safely evacuated. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are currently being followed, which include a thorough sweep of the cabin and a re-screening of all checked and carry-on baggage," an airport official said. The incident led to a significant deployment of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), with security personnel being stationed around the isolation zone. Specialised airport vehicles, including a fire tender and ground staff in high-visibility vests, were also seen coordinating the operation. The luggage has been offloaded onto the tarmac for specialised screening by dog squads and bomb disposal units.

Bengaluru realtor murder case: Arrested BJP MLA Byrathi Basavaraj gets medical reprieve

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Karnataka MLA Byrathi Basavaraj, 64, who was arrested by the CID unit of the Karnataka Police on Thursday in connection with the murder of realtor V G Shivaprakash alias Bikla Shiva, was sent for an additional medical check-up on Friday after the agency produced him before a special magistrate's court. Although the CID sought nine days of police custody to question the BJP MLA about his links with a gang that executed Shiva's murder on July 15, 2025, over a land dispute with an associate of the MLA, the special court referred Basavaraj for a cardiac reevaluation on the basis of a Bowring Hospital report. The court has asked the CID to subject Basavaraj to a cardiac check at the Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research on Saturday and to produce him at the judge's home office to answer the question of police custody as sought by the CID. Basavaraj was arrested in Bengaluru on Thursday on his arrival from Ahmedabad after the Supreme Court rejected his anticipatory bail plea. He spent Thursday night in a prison cell and was produced in court on Friday afternoon after a medical check-up.

After he was produced in court, Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Ashok Naik told the court that his custodial interrogation was essential as the Karnataka High Court had ordered the same in a ruling on February 10. He further said that Basavaraj had previously lied to the police about his involvement in the murder. "It was revealed from the evidence obtained during the investigation that the truth was concealed in statements (by the MLA). The accused should be interrogated thoroughly, and the further statement should be recorded," the CID told the court. The court was also informed that Shiva had filed complaints with the police about four to five months before the murder about allegedly receiving threats from the MLA and his associates over real estate disputes in east Bengaluru.

"During the investigation, it was learnt that the accused (MLA) was supporting accused A-1 (Jagadish P alias Jaga)



and A-20 (Ajeeth Kumar) in their real estate business. An investigation should be conducted after obtaining information from the accused," the court was informed. Meanwhile, the special court remanded Basavaraj's close associate, businessman-advocate A G Ajeeth Kumar, to six days of police custody. Kumar, who has a criminal history in Bengaluru and was known in criminal records as 'Malayali Ajeeth', was also arrested on Thursday after a special court cancelled the interim bail granted on November 10 last year. Shiva was hacked to death outside his home in east Bengaluru on the evening of July 15, 2025, by a gang of assailants over a real estate dispute with members of a criminal gang associated with Basavaraj. Basavaraj was named in the FIR after Shiva's mother lodged a complaint alleging that he had been receiving threats from the MLA and his associates over a 12-gunta property in Kithaganur. The CID earlier filed a chargesheet against 18 of the 20 accused in the murder case in December, except Basavaraj and Kumar. The police have informed the courts that the murder had its origins in a dispute dating back to February 2025, when a claimant to a property identified as Ravi contacted accused No.2 Kiran K, stating that Shiva had illegally built a compound wall for four 30 x 40 sites on 12 guntas of land belonging to the claimant in Kithaganur.

Sahney seeks Rs 5 crore AIF cap, release of Punjab's RDF



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Vikramjit Singh Sahney Friday urged the Centre to enhance the project limit under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) from Rs 2 crore to Rs 5 crore, and to immediately release Punjab's long-pending Rural Development Fund (RDF). The Rajya Sabha MP raised the matter during a parliamentary discussion. Regarding the AIF, Sahney said the current Rs 2-crore interest-subvention project limit is inadequate for establishing modern cold storage facilities, grading units, and warehouses. He cited NABARD's estimates that India incurs post-harvest losses worth nearly Rs 1.5 lakh crore annually, largely due to insufficient storage and supply chain infrastructure.

According to Sahney, increasing the AIF cap to Rs 5

crore would enable Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), cooperatives and agri-entrepreneurs. Responding to the AIF proposal, Union Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan reiterated the Centre's commitment to strengthening agri-infrastructure under the AIF scheme and said the reforms will prioritise reducing post-harvest losses. Sahney also highlighted the financial strain on Punjab due to the reduction and non-release of RDF and Market Development Fund (MDF) allocations. He said the levy linked to MSP procurement was reduced from six per cent to two per cent in 2022, significantly impacting the state's rural infrastructure funding. The AAP MP noted that Punjab handles approximately 18 million tonnes of paddy and 12 million tonnes of wheat procurement annually — a volume substantially higher than that of other states. Despite this, the state's financial support through RDF/MDF has been curtailed. He stressed that nearly 64,724 kilometres of rural link roads and 1,936 grain mandis in Punjab rely heavily on RDF and MDF resources for maintenance and development. He also urged urgent Centre-state coordination to resolve the impasse. Responding to the concerns, Chouhan acknowledged the importance of Punjab's role in national food security and assured the House that the RDF's release would be examined. Chouhan said the Centre is committed to supporting states in strengthening agricultural infrastructure. He also said discussions would be held to address procedural and financial concerns linked to the RDF mechanism.

'Aap utho phir yahan se': Vij to woman IPS after dispute over ASI's suspension order

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Haryana's energy minister on Friday told the Kaithal SP to "get up from the meeting if you have no power" during a district grievance redressal meeting, following a clash over a junior officer's suspension order. Vij, who also holds the transport and labour portfolios, was chairing the meeting. The minister, Anil Vij, directed SP Upasna to suspend an Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) in a land-related case. The SP said the ASI was posted in Kurukshetra, a neighbouring district, and she lacked the jurisdiction to carry out such an order. Only the Kurukshetra SP or the DGP has the powers to suspend the junior police officer, she said. "Aap utho phir yahan se, agar aapki koi power nahi hai (Get up from here if you have no power)," Vij said. "Mera order sare Haryana mein chalta hai (my order is applicable in entire Haryana)," Vij was heard saying according to a video of the meeting. A Kaithal resident had levelled allegations against the ASI regarding improper transfer as well as cancellation of a land case without consent. This prompted Vij to order the junior police officer's suspension. Despite the minister's remarks, the IPS officer continued explaining her position and said, "I can't exercise powers that are not mine." Vij then



said: "I have the powers... You should obey my orders. Write to the DGP that I have given the suspension order. Then I will see who doesn't implement it." This was not the first time Vij clashed with police officers during a grievance meeting. Just three months earlier in Kaithal, he had accused an officer of ignoring his instruction to register a Zero FIR in a fraud case. In 2015, a similar confrontation occurred in Fatehabad when then-SP Sangeeta Kalia refused to leave a meeting after Vij told her to "get out" over her response on illicit liquor trade.

National Network of Sex Workers allege violation of children's rights during police raid in red light area



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The National Network of Sex Workers (India) has alleged violation of children's rights during a police raid on February 11 in Budhwar Peth, the city's red-light area. The Pune police conducted a massive raid and senior police officers, including the DCP, along with a large police force

were present during the operation. In a letter to Maharashtra State Women's Commission (MSCW) president Rupali Chakankar, the National Network of Sex Workers alleged the entire police operation raises serious concerns over violation of human rights and child protection norms, including breach of confidentiality and exposure of minors' identities, a serious violation of privacy.

"We have observed that such insensitive procedures often lead to school dropouts and severely impact the future of children of sex workers," Renuka Kale, president, National Network of Sex Workers, said. The organisation alleged right from the outset of the raid, police did not follow rules or respect the rights guaranteed to children under the Constitution. A statement alleged the police took children out of their homes around 2 am in front of residents, customers of sex workers, local shopowners, and sex workers. "They questioned them publicly without maintaining confidentiality and handled the situation with appalling insensitivity," the statement alleged and further claimed the police did not cover the children's faces during the raid.

EC slams Bengal election officials over flawed document uploads, warns of action

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Election Commission of India held a video conference with all District Electoral Officers (DEOs) on Friday. Top ECI officials, the Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal, and Special Roll Observers attended the meeting, said the sources. The ECI directed the DEOs to ensure accurate verification of uploaded documents for the ongoing SIR process, emphasising zero tolerance for mistakes. Specific mention was made for DEOs of Cooch Behar, North and South 24 Parganas to work with full sincerity. "Many cases have come to surface where documents such as newspaper cuttings, blank pages, illegible images etc (were uploaded). How were they uploaded? Who uploaded them? And why did the DMs verify them?" the ECI asked the DEOs.

"Why are documents being uploaded now? Is it to ensure uploading of manufactured documents? DMs have to personally ensure that only documents specified by the ECI and those ordered by the Hon'ble Supreme Court may be considered by the EROs (Electoral Registration Officers)/ AEROs (Assistant Electoral Registration Officer)," the ECI said. ECI stated "By February 16 (Monday), all the DEOs to personally verify that all documents that have been uploaded are as per the approved list". The IT team was instructed "to check if such documents were uploaded in the system after that time limit. Even if a single document is discovered after the deadline, the DM shall be held personally responsible," the ECI stated. ECI warned the officials: "DEOs, EROs/AEROs should note that every document and deci-



sion should be stored in the system for years and even if a foreigner is detected after 1 year, 2 years or 5 years, the concerned officers will have to face prosecution. It is a risky gamble for the IAS officers who have long careers left." During the meeting, the ECI pulled up the DMs of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, South and North 24-Paraganas, and Purba Medinipur "for negligence". Purba Bardhaman DM was advised "not to give political statements". Cooch Behar DM was upbraided for delayed "uploading of documents" and South 24-Paraganas DM was asked under "what authority were ERMOS being called by EROs and AEROs." The EC stated: "The CEO has been instructed to send all cases which have been verified by DEOs on inadmissible and illegible documents for direct action against such officers by the ECI, henceforth." Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Secretary Nandini Chakraborty on Friday went to Delhi to meet with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

Mayor presents Rs 111 crore deficit budget for Kolkata Municipal Corporation, targets property tax collection to offset gap

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Kolkata mayor firhad hakim The Mayor also said that the corporation has allocated funds for water supply and drainage, road development and maintenance, slum services, commercial projects, solid waste management, and general income and expenditure. (Express Photo by Partha Paul) Mayor Firhad Hakim presented the budget for the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) on Friday, revealing a deficit of Rs 111 crore for the financial year 2026-27. With an estimated expenditure of Rs 5902.43 crore against an income of Rs 5791.43 crore, the budget outlined a roadmap centred on urban infrastructure and public health.

While the civic body continues to manage a significant cumulative deficit, which is expected to reach Rs 1,279.45 crore by March 2026, the administration remains optimistic about internal revenue growth, with property tax being the primary engine of this growth, with an estimated collection of Rs 1,533 crore, supported by additional Rs 275 crore expected from Building Department fees. In the previous financial year, the budget deficit stood at Rs 112 crore.

"In a nutshell, in spite of limited financial resources, the civic body has been rendering constant services to the inhabitants round the clock. The employees of KMC have rendered sincere and significant services to the West Bengal government in addition to their normal duties. In the 2026-27 budget, it has to be ensured that funds from the government are utilised to the maximum extent to reduce burden on KMC along with a focus on minimising non-plan expen-



diture. In this budget, KMC has to prioritise the necessities and there is a need to address the gap between receipts and expenses," said Hakim. "Property tax is the main source of revenue for KMC. Keeping that in mind, the departmental staff worked with great diligence to increase the property tax rate. As a result of their initiatives, our property tax has continued to grow in the current financial year as well. The total property tax collection in the financial year 2024-25 was Rs 1,260 crore. Up to December 31, 2025, property tax of Rs 1,042 crore has already been collected, which is over 82 percent of last year's collection," he said. The Mayor also said that the corporation has allocated funds for water supply and drainage, road development and maintenance, slum services, commercial projects, solid waste management, and general income and expenditure.

Himachal earns Rs 171.48 crore from 11 toll barriers' auction in 11 months: RTI

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Himachal Pradesh government has earned Rs 171.48 crore through the auction of 11 state toll barriers located in seven of the 15 revenue districts up to February 10 in the Financial Year (FY) 2025-2026. The 11 toll barriers are situated in Sirmaur, Solan, Shimla, Baddi-Barotiwala-Nalagarh (BBN), Una, Bilaspur and Nurpur. These state toll barriers charge entry tax to outstation vehicles, including heavy load vehicles with 20 to 250 quintals even bearing Himachal registration number.

The toll barrier at Mehatur & Gagret in Una district fetched the highest bid of Rs 34.51 crore (Rs 34,51,50,000) and a total of Rs 26.63 had been deposited up to February 10. The Baddi toll barrier received the highest auction bid of Rs 26.04 crore and a total of Rs 20.83 had been deposited up to February 10. The Garamaura toll barrier in Bilaspur district fetched the third-highest bid with Rs 24.13 crore and the total fee deposited up to February 10 was at Rs 18.47. The Parwanoo barrier in Solan district was auctioned for Rs 21.13 crore with Rs 16.90 as the total fee deposited up to February 10. The lowest amount — Rs 23.98 lakh — was received from the Minus toll barrier in Sirmaur district. The total amount deposited up to February 10 was at Rs 19.19 lakh.

The information was procured by Una-based advocate Uttansh Bains under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, and was provided by the Department of State Taxes and

Excise. According to the RTI reply, "Although total bids amounting to Rs 173.89 crore were received, contractors have deposited Rs 171.48 crore of the bid amount so far. The pending amount of Rs 2.40 is expected to be received by March 15."

Meanwhile, the state's tax department expressed its inability to provide information regarding the earnings made by the contractors who secured the bids, citing "third-party information". In one such reply, the office of the Deputy Commissioner (Excise) Vinod Dogra, BBN-Baddi, said, "In this context, it is intimated that the information pertains to a third party. They were asked to disclose the information under Section 11 of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, but the third party denied disclosure. Therefore, the information cannot be provided." RTI applicant Uttansh Bains said, "The Department of State Taxes and Excise declined to provide information on how much the contractors earned through these 11 toll barriers, citing third-party information. Some of these toll barriers are situated on National Highways where the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) also collects toll. One such state-governed toll is the Parwanoo barrier, where vehicles from other states have to deposit entry tax." A senior officer, requesting anonymity, told The Indian Express, "We furnished all relevant information to the applicant. Regarding contractors' earnings, most of them submitted written requests that the information should not be disclosed."

A lifeline for 1,600 neonates: Over 1,700 mothers donated surplus breast milk to PGI’s Human Milk Bank in 4 years



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

More than 1,700 mothers donated over 1,000 litres of excess breast milk in four years to the Human Milk Bank of the Neonatal Unit at the Advanced Paediatric Centre at Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh, according to a PGI statement. Also, more than 1,600 neonates received donor milk, and over 900 litres of milk were disbursed for infants in the neonatal unit, it said. Since its inception in 2022, the human milk bank has seen overwhelming community support and clinical success, providing safe, pasteurised human milk to sick and tiny neonates whose mothers are temporarily unable to provide their own. On the fourth anniversary of the milk bank, Dr Kanya Mukhopadhyay, Professor of Neonatology and a pioneer of the project, said, “This milestone is a testament to the unwavering spirit of donor mothers and the dedicated medical team at PGI.” Noting “human milk is more than just nutrition”, Dr Mukhopadhyay said,

“For a premature or sick baby, it is medicine. Unlike formula, human milk is perfectly suited to an infant’s immature digestive system, ensuring better nutrient absorption. It contains antibodies and live cells that protect fragile infants from life-threatening infections and sepsis. It significantly reduces the risk of Necrotising Enterocolitis (NEC), a severe and often fatal intestinal disease common in premature babies. The unique fats and proteins in human milk are specifically designed for human brain growth and long-term cognitive health.”

According to doctors, though breastfeeding is natural, many medical and situational hurdles can prevent a mother from providing milk immediately. Mothers of preterm babies may be stressed and can have insufficient milk in the first few days. Similarly, mothers of babies born very early may face a delay in their milk coming in due to the sudden nature of the birth. Also, mothers recovering from surgery, severe infections or complications may be too ill to nurse. Besides these, certain life-saving medications required by the mother may not be safe for the baby. The physical and emotional stress of having a baby in the NICU can sometimes temporarily suppress milk production. According to doctors, any healthy lactating mother with a surplus of milk can become a donor. The potential donors undergo a rigorous screening process, including health history and blood tests (like blood donation) to ensure the milk is safe from infections like HIV or hepatitis. “Mothers donate because they have ‘liquid gold’ to spare. By donating, they provide a bridge of survival for infants who would otherwise have to rely on bovine-based formulas, which carry higher risks for the very sickest babies,” they added.

1.71L Indians deported in 5 yrs; Centre says no state-wise data



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Rajya Sabha Chairman C. P. Radhakrishnan leaves after adjourning the house during the ongoing Budget Session of the Parliament, in New Delhi on Tuesday. The Centre told Parliament it does not maintain verified state-wise data — including for Punjab — on Indians who travelled abroad illegally via routes like the ‘Dunki Route’ or were later deported. In a significant revelation in the Rajya Sabha, the Centre has admitted that it does not maintain verified state-wise data — including for Punjab — on Indians who have travelled abroad illegally through routes such as the ‘Dunki Route’ or were later deported from foreign countries.

The disclosure came in response to a question raised by Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal. Replying on behalf of the government, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh stated that detailed state-level information is not centrally maintained, primarily because many foreign governments share data only during deportation or nationality verification processes. He further clarified that in several cases, deportations are carried out directly by the concerned foreign

authorities, and complete information does not always reach Indian embassies or consulates. Despite the absence of state-wise figures, data compiled from various Indian missions abroad reveals that approximately 1,71,000 Indian nationals were deported between 2021 and 2025, underscoring the alarming magnitude of illegal migration networks operating across the country. According to official figures the highest number of deportations occurred from Saudi Arabia, accounting for nearly 1.21 lakh cases. Close to 22,000 Indians were deported from Dubai. Deportations were also reported from the United States, Malaysia, Qatar, and Myanmar, among other countries. These numbers highlight the scale at which Indians are attempting to migrate through unauthorized and often dangerous routes. The government also acknowledged that it does not possess clear information on Indians who may have travelled abroad via the so-called ‘Dunki Route’ — an informal term referring to irregular and hazardous migration pathways used to enter foreign countries illegally.

The lack of structured data, particularly for migration-prone states like Punjab and Haryana, has raised serious concerns about monitoring and policy enforcement. Speaking to the media, Rajya Sabha MP Balbir Singh Seechewal termed the absence of state-level tracking a serious lapse. “When over 1.71 lakh Indians have been deported in just five years and there is no separate data even for a migration-prone state like Punjab, it reflects not merely a data gap but a major policy failure,” he said. He pointed out that in Punjab, Haryana and several other regions, illegal travel agents continue to lure unemployed youth with false promises of overseas jobs and permanent residency. Many families reportedly sell land or incur heavy debts to finance these risky journeys, only to face detention, deportation, and financial ruin.

Red Fort blast case: Body parts found at site belong to only 2 persons, shows DNA analysis, rules out additional deaths



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Forensic DNA analysis of human remains recovered from the site of the November 10 blast near Red Fort has established that the body parts belong to only two individuals, ruling out the possibility of additional unidentified victims, sources in the Delhi Police told. The Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) has conducted DNA analysis of three sets of body parts — lower limbs with part of a torso, a jaw with a partial head, and an upper torso with a hand. In addition, 10 to 15 smaller and mangled body parts collected from the blast site have also been analysed, a source said.

“All the samples have been profiled into only two DNA types. This confirms that the remains belong to only two persons,” the source added. The source further said that one of the DNA profiles is believed to be that of Umar Nabi, who allegedly drove the vehicle that exploded near the Red Fort. “The second profile is suspected to belong to one of the deceased, whose body was not recovered intact.” According to sources, among the victims was an erickshaw puller, half of whose body was found at the blast site, mostly in parts. “The second DNA profile is likely to match his remains,” said a source, adding that final confirmation will come after DNA samples are matched with the man’s family members.

The samples were sent for forensic examination to determine whether the blast had led to more deaths than what has been reported or if any person, who was present at the site, was still missing, sources said. “DNA profiling was carried out specifically to ascertain whether there were any additional deaths. With all the samples narrowing down to two DNA profiles, there is no indication of any additional deaths,” the source said. Following the blast, scattered human remains had been recovered from different points in

and around the site, raising concerns that the death toll could be higher. The National Investigation Agency, which is probing the blast, did not respond to queries. It was granted an extension of 45 days to complete the probe by a Delhi court on Friday.

Former aide of slain gangster Mukhtar Ansari shot dead in Barabanki

GNS News Agency, Feb 16A former aide of slain gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari was allegedly shot dead by unidentified motorcycle-borne assailants on the Ayodhya highway in Barabanki in Uttar Pradesh on Friday, police said.

According to Barabanki Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya, 51-year-old Shoaib Kidwai alias Bobby was returning from Lucknow in his car when the assailants allegedly intercepted his car and opened multiple rounds of fire at him. Hearing the gunshots, local residents rushed to the spot, but the attackers had already fled on a motorcycle, police added.

Upon receiving information, police teams reached the spot and took Shoaib to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared him dead. The police have since launched a search operation in the area and are scanning CCTV footage from nearby locations in an effort to identify and trace the assailants.

The motive behind the murder is yet to be ascertained but preliminary information suggests the possibility of internal rivalry or a gang war behind the killing, officials said, adding that this angle is being probed.

Shoaib Kidwai alias Bobby had around 12 criminal cases registered against him, including two cases of murder and two under the Gangsters Act. Among the most prominent cases was the 1998 murder of Lucknow jail superintendent R.K. Tiwari. However, he was later acquitted in that case. Shoaib, who hailed from a well-off family, was also engaged in the property business in addition to his other activities, officials added.

Djinns, occult rituals to treat kidney stones: Cops gather proof against ‘godman’ arrested over Peeragarhi car deaths



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

A piece of paper containing a mantra to summon djinns as well as occult rituals to treat kidney stones and impotency, pictures of women holding placards declaring their ‘virginity’ status: these are part of the evidence that the Delhi Police has gathered against self-styled godman Kamruddin, who was arrested on Wednesday for killing three persons in Outer Delhi after promising them quick money. Kamruddin was arrested after the bodies of Randhir Singh (76), Shiv Naresh Singh (47) and Laxmi Devi (40) were found dead inside a car on Peeragarhi flyover on Sunday. He allegedly fed the trio sweets laced with poison and fled with their cash amounting to Rs 2 lakh.

Police said that after his death, a piece of paper was found on Naresh in which a 100-word mantra was written, allegedly to summon a djinn. The phrase started with a line ‘husn ki Pari’, and mentioned the word ‘djinn’ more than three times, they added.

“A diary was also recovered from Laxmi, which had details of multiple women: from measurements of the body parts to a history of the surgeries they have undergone and the medications they took,” said a senior officer. “Multiple pictures of these women were recovered from Laxmi’s

phone. They were holding placards containing their personal details. Based on these details, Kamruddin would choose a ‘perfect’ woman: someone who is ‘untouched’ before marriage and has never been bitten by an animal,” the officer added. “Kamruddin would then tell the victims that if they pay him Rs 2 lakh, a djinn would make ‘physical’ contact with one of the ‘selected’ women, and they would experience dhanvarsha,” the officer further said. Police said Kamruddin claimed to treat medical problems as well via occult practices. He allegedly charged between Rs 5,000 and Rs 7,000 to treat kidney stones. “He would put a cloth around the stomach of the patient. He would then clench his fist, hiding a stone and wet sindoor, and move the same under the cloth. He would then take out his hand and open it. People would see his red-coloured hand and a stone, and assume that it’s blood from the kidney,” the officer said.

Kamruddin allegedly operated a ‘tantric’ centre in Loni in Ghaziabad and Firozabad. Police said that over the years, Kamruddin had amassed enough money to open a restaurant in Loni and a marriage hall in Firozabad for two of his sons. He was also very well aware of his surroundings, often asking his victims to drop him off in deserted areas with no CCTV cameras. “He was tracked after we found Laxmi’s phone...” She had sent Kamruddin’s location to Naresh on the day of their meeting. When our team reached Loni, he tried to jump off a 15-foot wall to escape,” the officer said. Maintaining that several unsaved contacts have been found from Kamruddin’s analogue cell phone, the officer added, “He didn’t save any number to avoid being traced. He would memorise important ones.” Last May, he had allegedly killed two men using the same modus operandi at Makkhanpur in Firozabad. Police said in that case too he had taken Rs 5 lakh from the victims. The officer said that though he has so far confessed to his involvement in six murders — spanning across three cases — there could be more victims.

Worked for 12 hrs daily, had no time for children: Surat Dy Municipal Commissioner resigns



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The first ever female Deputy Municipal Commissioner of Surat, Swati Desai submitted her resignation to Surat Municipal Commissioner M. Nagarajan on Thursday. The decision on her resignation will be taken up in the Standing Committee and the General Board meeting of SMC. Explaining her resignation, Desai said that she had two 11-year-old children and no one to take care of them.

She added that her in-laws are presently staying in a Surat village while her husband is presently employed in a private firm in Surat.

Speaking to the Indian Express, Desai said, “I am responsible for my twins. I have been working for 12 hours everyday, including Saturdays and Sundays, so I did not have time to take care of them, which affected their education. During my working hours in the office, I used to monitor the activities of my children at home through my mobile phone.” Desai clarified that she was not under any external pressure to resign and that she had yet to decide on what her future course of action would be with the resignation yet to be approved. Desai joined SMC as a clerk in the accounts department in 2007. She was appointed as Municipal secretary in 2017 at the age of 32, becoming the first female to do so. Later in 2021, she was promoted to Deputy Municipal Corporation Commissioner. She was also the head of the Udhna zone. Swati, who has completed 20 years of service with SMC, has 15 years of service left in her tenure.

UP man kills infant son over paternity suspicion; arrested

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

A 30-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing his seven-month-old son near his Bareilly home over suspicion over the infant’s paternity, police said. According to police, Sompal, the accused, a labourer in Rajasthan, had come home five days back. The incident came to light when his wife Rajvati approached the police alleging Sompal had taken their two children out and one of them was missing when he returned. Based on her complaint on Thursday, police registered a case and launched a search operation to trace Sompal who was absconding. “We arrested Sompal, a native of Athana village in Bareilly and during questioning, he admitted to have strangled their infant son Varun to death and hidden the body near a pond. He claimed that he committed the act in a fit of rage as the baby did not resemble him and he suspected the child was born from an extramarital relationship of his wife,” Circle officer, Faridpur, Sandeep Singh said. Sompal alleged that Varun’s facial features did not resemble his and that his wife was having an illicit relationship with a man from her paternal village, police said, adding they have recovered the body from a wooded area near a pond at the outskirts of the village. During interrogation, Sompal alleged that his wife had been living at her parental home in Boni village in neighbouring Pilibhit



district for the past two months and frequently stayed there for extended periods, police said. Sompal said that he had returned from Rajasthan about five days back and gone to his wife’s village to bring her back. However, despite repeated requests, Rajvati allegedly refused to accompany him, police added. He further alleged that on February 11, he forcibly brought Varun and their five-year-old son Arun from his wife’s parental home to Athana. Later that evening, he took Varun to a pond situated about 700 to 800 metres from the village and killed him, police said.

Deadline missed, Govt warns officials: File reports on excavation sites in 3 days, or face action

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Submit detailed reports of all excavation sites in the Capital where development work is ongoing, along with photographs, or face strict action — this is what Chief Minister Rekha Gupta told civic agencies and officials concerned on Friday, said sources, after several departments and agencies missed the deadline to do the same earlier this week. “The chief minister has asked the chief secretary to direct all heads of departments and executing agencies to submit comprehensive, work-wise reports within three days without fail,” an official privy to the matter told The Indian Express. Last week, after a biker fell to death in West Delhi’s Janakpuri in a pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board, Chief Secretary Rajeev Verma — following the CM’s directions — had issued an ‘eight-point’ directive to be implemented whenever any construction, repair or maintenance work, involving digging or excavation, is being carried out by departments. On February 7, the government had also asked all departments to undertake an immediate review of all excavation sites — where work is ongoing and where digging work was recently completed — and submit a report. The report, officials were told, had to be submitted with the location of such sites, safety measures put in place, and corrective measures undertaken wherever lapses were noticed, within three days. However, sources said several

departments failed to submit the details, while some did not give the complete information. Following the CM’s latest directions, the chief secretary held a meeting with all heads of department and agencies on Friday and expressed displeasure over the delay. “The CS directed all department heads to furnish information within three days without fail. The reports must cover all major and minor digging/excavation works and comprise geo-tagged photographs of all locations, detailing the safety arrangements at each site and the corrective measures taken where deficiencies were noticed,” read the minutes of the meeting. Departments were directed to submit the reports to the Divisional Commissioner, with a copy to the chief secretary’s office. “These reports must also include the name, designation and contact details of the nodal officer for each site,” it read. “The chief secretary directed the divisional commissioner to ensure that upon receipt of the reports from all departments, all DMs (district magistrates) and revenue/disaster management officials under their control conduct inspections to cross-check the field situation and safety measures at such sites,” the minutes of the meeting read. The DMs and disaster management officials have been asked to immediately report any additional lapses found during inspections or through feedback received from the public. “

Widespread arrests roil Iran weeks after security forces crushed protests



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Iranian security agents came at 2 a.m., pulling up in a half-dozen cars outside the home of the Nakhii family. They woke up the sleeping sisters, Nyusha and Mona, and forced them to give the passwords for their phones. Then they took the two away. The women were accused of participating in the nationwide protests that shook Iran a week earlier, a friend of the pair told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity for her security as she described the Jan. 16 arrests.Such arrests have been happening for weeks following the government crackdown last month that crushed the protests calling for the end of the country's theocratic rule. Reports of raids on homes and workplaces have come from major cities and rural towns alike, revealing a dragnet that has touched large swaths of Iranian society. University students, doctors, lawyers, teachers, actors, business owners, athletes and filmmakers have been swept up, as well as reformist figures close to President Masoud Pezeshkian.

They are often held incommunicado for days or weeks and prevented from contacting family members or lawyers, according to activists monitoring the arrests. That has left desperate relatives searching for their loved ones.The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency has put the number of arrests at more than 50,000. The AP has been unable to verify the figure. Tracking the detainees has been difficult since Iranian authorities imposed an internet black-out, and reports leak out only with difficulty.

Other activist groups outside Iran have also been working to document the sweeps. "Authorities continue to identify people and detain them," said Shiva Nazarahari, an organizer with one of those groups, the Committee for Monitoring the Status of Detained Protesters.So far, the committee has verified the names of more than 2,200 people who were arrested, using direct reports from families and a network of contacts on the ground. The arrestees include 107 university students, 82 children as young as 13, as well as 19 lawyers and 106 doctors.Mr. Nazarahari said authorities have been reviewing municipal street cameras, store surveillance cameras and drone footage to track people who participated in the protests to their homes or places of work, where they are arrested.The protests began in late December, triggered by anger over spiraling prices, and quickly spread across the country. They peaked on Jan. 8 and 9, when hundreds of thousands of people in more than 190 cities and towns across the country took to the streets.Security forces responded by unleashing unprecedented violence. The Human Rights Activists News Agency has so far counted more than 7,000 dead and says the true number is far higher. Iran's government offered its only death toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed. The theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from past unrest.Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, a hard-line cleric who heads Iran's judiciary, became the face of the crackdown, labeling protesters "terrorists" and calling for fast-tracked punishments.Since then, "detentions have been very widespread because it's like a whole suffocation of society," said one protester, reached by the AP in Gohardasht, a middle-class area outside the Iranian capital. He said two of his relatives and three of his brother's friends were killed in the first days of the crackdown, as

well as several neighbors. The protester spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of being targeted by authorities.The Nakhii sisters, 37-year-old Nyusha and 25-year-old Mona, were first taken to Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where they were allowed to contact their parents, their friend said. Later, she said, they were moved to Qarchak, a women's prison on the outskirts of Tehran, where rights groups reported conditions that included overcrowding and lack of hygiene even before the crackdown.Other people whose arrests were documented by the detainees committee have disappeared into the prisons. The family of Abolfazl Jazbi has not heard from him since his Jan. 15 arrest at a factory in the southern city of Isfahan. Jazbi suffers from a severe blood disorder that requires medication, according to the committee.

Atila Sultanpour, 45, has not been heard from since he was taken from his home in Tehran on Jan. 29 by security agents who beat him severely, according to Dadban, a group of Iranian lawyers based abroad who are also documenting detentions.Authorities have also moved to suspend bank accounts, block SIM cards and confiscate the property of protesters' relatives or people who publicly express support for them, said Musa Barzin, an attorney with Dadban, citing reports from families.In past crackdowns on protests, authorities sometimes adhered to a veneer of due process and rule of law, but not this time, Barzin said. Authorities are increasingly denying detainees access to legal counsel and often holding them for days or weeks before allowing any phone calls to family. Lawyers representing arrested protesters also have faced court summons and detention, according to Dadban.

"The following of the law is in the worst situation it has ever been," Mr. Barzin said.Despite the crackdown, many civic groups continue to issue defiant statements.The Writers' Association of Iran, an independent group with a long tradition of dissent, issued a statement describing the protests as an uprising against "47 years of systemic corruption and discrimination."It also announced that two of its members had been detained, including a member of its secretariat.A national council representing schoolteachers urged families to speak out about detained children and students. "Do not fear the threats of security forces. Refer to independent counsel. Make your children's names public," it said in a statement.A spokesman for the council said Sunday that it has documented the deaths of at least 200 minors who were killed in the crackdown. That figure is up several dozen from the count just days before."Every day we tell ourselves this is the last list," Mohammad Habibi wrote on X. "But the next morning, new names arrive again."Bar associations and medical groups have also spoken out, including Iran's state-sanctioned doctors council, which called on authorities to stop harassing medical staff.Anger over the bloodshed now adds to the bitterness over the economy, which has been hollowed out by decades of sanctions, corruption and mismanagement. The value of the currency has plunged, and inflation has climbed to record levels.The Iranian government has announced gestures such as launching a new coupon program for essential goods. Labor and trade groups, including a national retirees syndicate, have issued statements condemning the economic and political crisis.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump has moved an aircraft carrier and other military assets to the Persian Gulf and suggested the U.S. could attack Iran over the killing of peaceful demonstrators or if Tehran launches mass executions over the protests. A second American aircraft carrier is on its way to the Mideast.Iran's theocracy has faced down protests and U.S. threats in the past, and the crackdown showed the iron grip it holds over the country. This week, authorities organized pro-government rallies with hundreds of thousands of people to mark the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.Still, Mr. Barzin said, he sees the ferocity of the crackdown as a sign that Iran's leadership "for the first time is afraid of being overthrown."

Iran announces enquiry team to investigate deadly protests

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Iranian government announced on Friday (February 13, 2026) the establishment of a commission of enquiry to look into protests against the high cost of living that turned into anti-government rallies that left thousands dead."A fact-finding committee has been formed with representatives from relevant institutions and is collecting documents and hearing statements," Iranian government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani told the local news agency ISNA.

The spokesperson did not specify whether the commission would only focus on the economic demands that triggered the protests or whether it would also investigate deaths during the protests."The final report will be published for public information and further legal action after the process is completed," she stated.On Thursday (February 12, 2026), the government website published comments by President Masoud Pezeshkian saying, "We have assigned teams to investigate the causes (of the unrest), without providing further details.

The protests, which began in late December before escalating on January 8, left more than 3,000 dead, according to the official count. Iranian authorities claim that the



vast majority of victims were security forces or bystanders killed by "terrorists" working for Israel and the United States.Human rights advocacy groups based outside Iran, however, accuse the security forces of targeting protesters. The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) reports that at least 7,005 people were killed during the peak of the protests."We are ashamed that such unfortunate events have occurred," Mr. Pezeshkian said, according to the report published on the government website.

Bangladesh EC publishes gazette of newly elected MPs, clearing path for swearing-in



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Bangladesh's Election Commission has published a gazette of newly elected members of Parliament from the 13th general election, paving the way for their swearing-in, media reports said on Saturday (February 14, 2026).The gazette was published for 297 out of the 300 parliamentary constituencies late on Friday (February 13), state-run BSS

‘Quadrupled’ seats in Parliament, will be ‘vigilant’ Opposition in Bangladesh: Ameer Shafiqur Rahman



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Jamaat-e-Islami will serve as a 'vigilant' opposition and hold the government of Bangladesh to account, said the leader of the party in a statement to the media on Saturday (February 14, 2026). The remarks of Ameer Shafiqur Rahman came a day after the largest Islamist party of Bangladesh alleged that the election process had "inconsistencies and fabrications" after the eleven-party alliance led by it won seventy-seven seats in the national parliament.

"I know many of you are feeling hurt and deeply disappointed. That is natural. When you invest your heart into a

cause, you feel its outcome deeply. But let me say this clearly: your efforts were not in vain. With 77 seats, we have nearly quadrupled our parliamentary presence and become one of the strongest opposition blocs in modern Bangladeshi politics," said Mr. Rahman describing the electoral outcome was "not a setback." "That is a foundation," he further said.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's electoral gains are in stark contrast to its past performances in the elections in Bangladesh as its highest score before this was in 1991 when it won 18 seats in the 1991 election largely because of the support that it received from the BNP. However, the 77 seats that the Islamist alliance won in February 12 election was below the expectation of the party and according to sources in the party, the Jel was hoping to cross the tally of hundred.On Saturday, Mr. Rahman complained that the election was riddled with "inconsistencies" alleging that there was a lack of transparency from the Election Commission.Mr. Rahman reminded that politics in Bangladesh is not static and that "political fortunes change" adding"In 2008, BNP was reduced to 30 seats before returning to form government in 2026, a journey that took 18 years."Mr. Rahman expressed commitment to the democratic process of Bangladesh and said, "We will serve as a vigilant, principled, and peaceful opposition, holding the government to account while contributing constructively to national progress."

Women, minority representation at two-decade low in Bangladesh

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

As the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secured a landslide victory, the 13th national polls have recorded the lowest representation of women and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh in over two decades. Only seven women have been directly elected to Parliament, while representation from religious and ethnic minority communities has also fallen, with just four candidates elected.Bangladesh election results LIVE: 'Yes' vote for national referendum wins clear majority, says Election Commission; BNP pushes for Sheikh Hasina's extraditionOf the seven women elected, six are BNP nominees. The seventh is an independent candidate who was expelled from the BNP ahead of the polls.

This election marks a significant decline in women's representation in the national Parliament compared to recent polls. In the 12th national election in 2024, 19 women won general seats. The numbers were higher in the two preceding parliaments, with 22 women elected in 2018 and 18 in 2014. The highest figure in the past two decades was recorded in 2008, when 19 women were elected. The latest polls have produced the lowest number since 2001.According to Election Commission data, only 84 women contested the election accounting for barely 4.08% of the total candidate pool. Among party nominees, the BNP fielded 10 women, the National Citizen Party (NCP) three, the Jatiya Party six, and Gono Odhikar Parishad three. Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Andolan Bangladesh did not nominate any woman candidates.The four candidates from religious and ethnic minority communities who won the election are from the BNP. They are Goyeshwar Chandra Roy (Dhaka-3), Nitai Roy Chowdhury (Magura-2), Saching Pru (Bandarban), and Dipen Dewan (Rangamati).

In both the 2014 and 2018 parliaments, 18 minority members were directly elected. In the 2024 parliament, 14 minority candidates won, including 12 from the now-banned



Awami League. In the latest polls, the BNP nominated six minority candidates, but two — Kapil Krishna Mandal in Bagerhat-1 and Somnath Dey in Bagerhat-4 — were defeated. At least 79 minority candidates contested the election, with 22 of the country's 60 registered political parties nominating 67 minority candidates and 12 others running as independents.M. Zakaria, an author and political analyst, told The Hindu that comparisons with previous regimes or elections are not entirely appropriate. He said the last three elections were neither participatory nor competitive, and that women's representation during those polls was largely the result of selection by the ruling government rather than electoral competition. However, he acknowledged that representation of women and minorities remains low."As the electoral process gradually improves, this is a critical area that needs attention going forward," he said. "Women and minorities themselves need to adapt to the changing political landscape and push these issues to the forefront so that political parties are compelled to ensure greater representation within their internal structures. That, in turn, will gradually empower them and allow for a larger share of representation."

Bangladesh elections: BNP returns to power in Bangladesh after two decades

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), after 20-years, is set to stake claim to form government in Bangladesh by winning over 200 seats in Bangladesh general elections. Tarique Rahman, son of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, is poised to become Bangladesh's prime minister, revealed senior politicians in BNP.The BNP was formed in 1978 by Ziaur Rahman, the voice that declared Bangladesh's independence over radio on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the Pakistani military launched Operation Searchlight.

After the 1971 War of Independence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the Prime Minister and in the coming years, brought in a constitutional amendment making him the "unimpeachable" President. The Bangabandhu and most of his family members were brutally gunned down on August 15, 1975 after a military coup. Army chief Brigadier Khalid Musharaf took over the regime and Ziaur Rahman was his deputy.Ziaur Rahman's role as a Deputy Army Chief marked turbulent period in Bangladesh. He gradually consolidated power and became President in 1977. Shortly after assuming presidency, he held a national referendum to support his role.

On September 1, 1978, Ziaur Rahman launched BNP as a party of "freedom fighters from the battlefield", keen to promote a blend unique Bangladeshi identity and Bengali nationalism. He inducted politicians from Muslim league and leaders which were opposed to Awami League.In 1979, BNP marked its first election victory, winning 207 of 300 seats. However, this was short-lived. On May 30, 1981, in a military coup, Ziaur Rahman was assassinated in Chittagong. Later, military ruler Hussain Muhammad Ershad seized power in 1982, sidelining BNP and other parties.Rise of Khaleda ZiaFollowing Ziaur Rahman's death, his wife Khaleda Zia became an identity of resistance against the military ruler and President Ershad. Her role from a widow to an unifying figure of BNP, soon resonated with the masses in Bangladesh. This mass uprising against Ershad marked a phase of hope for democratic rule in Bangladesh. The massive protests, fuelled by anger of students and communities across the country, forced Ershad to resign.Eventually, BNP contested and won 1991 general elections, registering a victory in 140 of 300 seats. Khaleda Zia became Bangladesh's first woman Prime Minister with the support of allies. Continuing her winning streak, BNP won 2001 elections by clinching victory in 193 of 300 seats.Khaleda Zia went on serve as Prime Minister of Bangladesh for 10 years from 1991 to 1996 and 2001 to 2006.After the five-year term of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came to an end in October 2006, the party was expected to transfer power to a non-party caretaker government. The caretaker government would have seen conduct of elections within 90 days.After an exhaustive pro-



cess, President Iajuddin Ahmed took up the role of Chief Adviser. The opposition Awami League accused him of favouring the BNP. This went bitter with Awami League Party, led by Sheikh Hasina - daughter of Mujibur Rahman - and its allies accusing the BNP of manipulating the voter rolls with millions of fake namesand rigging the 2007 elections. This escalated into a full-scale mayhem into the streets. Hundreds of political supporters engaged in a violent scuffle, leading to imposition of curfew in few areas.

Following a political deadlock, a state of emergency was declared and President Iajuddin banned the elections.After nearly two years under emergency rule, the Awami League Party swept the December 2008 elections, and abolished the system of caretaker government.Turbulent times for BNAfter Ms. Hasina's take over as the Prime Minister, BNP's top leadership faced arrests and the party's activities were restricted. This hampered BNP's prospects to contest elections. In spite of such, the biggest setback to the party was restriction to hold political rallies and publicise anything in media.Zia was jailed for corruption and her son Mr. Tarique Rahman went into exile. The BNP, however, continued to be a major opposition party of the country. It managed to win 7 seats in the 2018 elections when Zia was still in jail.The BNP boycotted the 2024 elections since the Awami League government refused to hand over governance to a caretaker government. Ms. Hasina formed the government again, which was ousted in a few months in a mass uprising also supported by the BNP. Zia was out of jail after the uprising giving fresh lease of life to the party. Eventually Tarique Rahman too returned days before his mother passed away.Who are BNP's allies in Bangladesh?For 2026 Bangladesh General Elections, BNP contested for 292 seats out of the 300, leaving the remaining seats for its coalition partners. Unlike Jammata-e-Islami, the BNP didn't enter into a pact with its allies, but its front included a group of seven smaller political parties.BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman, in an interview with Times, said guarding the interests of Bangladeshi people comes first. "Later, we will try to take relations further", he added.

The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker



The implementation of India's labour codes marks a decisive shift towards greater financial inclusion of the workforce by embedding social security, income protection, and long-term financial safeguards into the employment relationship. By consolidating multiple fragmented labour laws, the codes aim not only to modernise labour governance but also to ensure that the gains of economic growth are shared more equitably with workers. While some trade unions have responded with nationwide strike calls, a closer examination of the labour codes reveals that these reforms are fundamentally designed to correct long-standing exclusions and integrate millions of workers into formal systems of financial and social security.

The reform of a definitionOne of the most significant financial inclusion outcomes is the reform of the 'wage' definition. Establishments which used to pay lower wages (basic pay, dearness allowance and retaining allowance) of just 30%-35% of the total remuneration to reduce social security contributions, will now be required to ensure that wages constitute at least 50% of the remuneration. This will increase social security contribution and benefits, which will lead to higher provident fund (PF) accumulation, pension, and gratuity, thus enhancing long-term social security.

Moreover, fixed-term employees are now entitled to gratuity after completing one year of service. This change recognises the realities of modern labour markets and ensures gratuity payments for fixed-term employment. For decades, workers engaged on fixed-term contracts contributed productively to enterprises but exited employment without any terminal financial benefit. By extending gratuity coverage, the labour codes convert short-term employment into a mechanism for asset creation and income security. PF, pension and gratuity thus function not merely as a retirement benefit, but as a tool for financial inclusion, enabling workers to build savings, manage life-cycle risks and reduce vulnerability during job transitions. This change has naturally increased the financial liability of large corporations, including well-known companies such as TCS, Infosys, HCLTech, and L&T, where workforce size and reliance on fixed-term employment are significantly high.

Reports suggesting that companies have been "hit by crores" due to gratuity provisions must be viewed in proper perspective. The financial outgo arising from the new labour codes translates directly into enhanced income security for workers, strengthening their financial capacity and purchasing power. This, in turn, has positive multiplier effects on the economy through increased consumption, savings and social security coverage. The increased social security

benefits also signify a more equitable redistribution of value towards labour rather than any erosion of employer interests. This also underscores the success of the labour codes in advancing fairness, dignity, and long-term stability in employment relations. The macroeconomic impactFinancial inclusion under the labour codes extends well beyond social security benefits for organised sector workers. The expansion of social security coverage to gig, platform and unorganised workers is a landmark reform. For the first time, these workers have been formally recognised within India's labour law framework, enabling access to insurance, PF mechanisms, and welfare schemes. Portability of benefits across States and employment is particularly significant for migrant and informal workers, who have historically remained excluded from stable financial systems. The Code on Wages further strengthens income security by introducing a universal wage definition, ensuring statutory minimum wages across sectors, limiting arbitrary deductions, and mandating timely payment. Collectively, these measures stabilise incomes and enhance workers' ability to participate meaningfully in the formal economy.

The redistribution of income towards workers has important macroeconomic implications. Enhanced income security increases workers' purchasing power, leading to higher consumption, improved savings behaviour and greater engagement with formal financial institutions. Unlike shareholder income, which may be invested in financial markets or external assets, worker income largely circulates within the domestic economy, generating demand-led growth. From this perspective, the labour codes function as instruments of inclusive growth. By strengthening the financial base of the workforce, they reduce vulnerability to economic shocks and contribute to social stability.

Earlier labour laws were outdatedDespite these advances, sections of trade unions continue to oppose the labour codes, often portraying them as anti-worker reforms. While apprehensions about proper implementation and enforcement are legitimate, blanket opposition overlooks the tangible gains embedded in the legislation. In several instances, strike calls appear to be driven by sheer opposition to reforms than by the substantive provisions of the codes themselves. This risks diluting public understanding of reforms that are, in many respects, pro-worker and welfare oriented. It is also important to acknowledge that labour law reform in a country as large and diverse as India cannot be static. The earlier labour laws had become fragmented, outdated and ill-suited to a rapidly changing labour market. Consolidation into four labour codes simplifies compliance, improves transparency and creates a more predictable regulatory environment which benefits workers and employers. India's labour codes should be understood not merely as regulatory restructuring but as a structural intervention aimed at greater financial inclusion. By extending gratuity, expanding social security coverage and closing long-standing legal exclusions, the codes facilitate a gradual but meaningful redistribution of economic value from capital to labour. This shift strengthens income security, enhances financial dignity, and aligns economic growth with social justice. The true success of the labour codes will lie not in resistance or rhetoric, but in ensuring their effective implementation so that every worker becomes an active participant in India's growth story.

MEA refuses to deny U.S. claims on India's Russian oil imports



The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has once again refused to directly deny claims by the United States government on Russian oil imports on Thursday (February 12, 2026). This comes after a senior U.S. official said that India had reduced its purchases of Russian crude, as the U.S. "wanted [India] to."

The government expressed satisfaction at the amendments made by the U.S. administration to its "fact sheet" on the India-U.S. trade deal. The fact sheet, available on the White House website, has now dropped contentious references to pulses and agriculture, saying it reflects the "shared understanding" between India and the U.S. on trade. However, it continues to state that India has committed to stop buying Russian oil. "The Joint Statement is the framework and remains the basis of our mutual understanding in the matter. Both sides will now work towards implementing this framework and finalising the Interim Agreement," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "The amendments in the U.S. fact sheet reflect the shared understandings contained in the Joint Statement." The joint statement does not contain any mention of Russian oil purchases.

As the Opposition continued to raise questions about the agreement in Parliament, U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor met with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Thursday (February 12, 2026). So many opportunities ahead now that the trade deal has been finalized," Mr. Gor wrote in a post on social media. Mr. Jaiswal refused to comment further on the U.S.'s contentions about Russian oil, a thorny issue that has also been discussed in Parliament and was raised repeatedly by members of the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs who were briefed by Mr. Misri.

At other briefings, both Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Energy Minister Hardeep Puri have refused to answer questions on India's response to the U.S. claims, directing them to the MEA. In a public statement, Mr. Misri said earlier this week that India's energy sourcing is guided by pricing, availability, and risks, but did not respond to questions about the sharp month-on-month decline in India's imports of Russian oil. On Wednesday (February 11, 2026), at a hearing of the U.S. House Sub-Committee on Foreign Affairs on U.S. ties with South Asia, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State S. Paul Kapur repeated statements by U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer asserting that India's actions had been part of the larger trade deal with the U.S.

"The Indians have been reducing their purchases of Russian oil and diversifying away [from it], which is what we [the U.S.] wanted them [India] to do," Mr. Kapur told the

committee. "They've actually been buying more U.S. energy and that's, I think, a promising possibility is to substitute some U.S. energy for the Russian energy and buying from other parts of the world," he added. When asked about the repeated statements, Mr. Jaiswal said that Mr. Misri had responded to the "kind of commentary and conversations" being heard, including in the US. "Exactly to clarify matters, our Foreign Secretary has made a detailed statement... highlighting the various aspects of where [India's] approach to energy sourcing remains," he said. However, he refused to answer a question from The Hindu on whether the government's response to the persistent U.S. claims was a "yes or no." According to the White House fact sheet still available online, Mr. Trump had discussed the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during their call on February 2, and had "agreed to remove the additional 25% tariff on imports from India in recognition of India's commitment to stop purchasing Russian Federation oil."

Anthropic clinches \$380 billion valuation after \$30 billion funding round

The company ?has differentiated itself by focusing its model training on ?coding, with Claude Code gaining strong traction among developers and helping the company gain an edge over rivals in the enterprise AI market. Anthropic's recently ?launched series of plugins for its Cowork agent had sparked a brutal selloff in global software stocks as ?investors debated the disruptive potential to the sector from sophisticated ?AI ?models.

The funding round, announced on Thursday (February 12, 2026), was co-led ?by investors including D. E. Shaw Ventures, ICONIQ and MGX. It also included a portion of previously announced investments from Microsoft and Nvidia. Anthropic, backed by Google and ?Amazon, had raised \$13 billion in ?a Series F round that valued the company at \$183 billion, the company said in early September.

Meanwhile, OpenAI could be valued at about \$830 billion as part of talks with SoftBank Group ?to invest as much as an additional \$30 billion in ?the ChatGPT maker, Reuters reported in January. Revenue surges Anthropic has rapidly built its revenue base — the company said its ?current run-rate revenue is \$14 billion. For Claude Code alone, the run-rate revenue has grown to over \$2.5 billion, more than doubling since the ?beginning of 2026. Business subscriptions to Claude Code have quadrupled since the start of the year, with enterprise use now representing over half of all Claude Code revenue, the company said.

Anthropic has further deepened its push for business deals with products like Claude Cowork AI agent, which executes computer tasks for white-collar workers.

The ?company has also taken a different approach to AI regulation. While tech ?companies have pushed for less regulation, Anthropic has drawn up plans to donate \$20 million to back U.S. political ?candidates who support regulating the AI industry.

Major opportunities for AI in jobs and governance, says MeitY Secretary S. Krishnan



Ahead of the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi, the Secretary for the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in a wide-ranging conversation at The Hindu MIND event moderated by Aroon Deep discussed artificial intelligence (AI), India's semiconductor ambitions, and MeitY's role in digital governance. We are less than a week away from the India AI Impact Summit, which will witness participation of representatives from dozens of countries. Could you give us a quick rundown on where we are on AI from an Indian perspective?

We've taken an approach where we will try to provide the three aspects of infrastructure that AI needs: compute, datasets, and models. With government support, access to these is made a little easier. Then the focus is on seeing what we can do with the applications and solutions that people are able to develop using these resources.

Ultimately, there are two things that are important. One, that firms' revenues will depend on how they deploy AI. Deployment is important and that's what also delivers impact. In the Indian context, there are many areas where you can use AI to enhance productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. Our start-ups can do well and these are things that we can offer also as products to the rest of the world. We necessarily have to do it a little frugally given the kind of resources we have, which is again a reason why this model that we have adopted appeals to many countries in the poorer parts [of the world]. In a number of indicators relating to AI, which institutions like Stanford University and others measure, we seem to be doing relatively well. On the Vibrancy Index, we ranked third, on skill penetration and use of AI for enterprise solutions, we ranked second overall.

So, if you look at this kind of penetration and the kind of skilling, clearly we seem to have some advantage there that we need to build on. NITI Aayog has done a study that shows that yes, undoubtedly we lose, or some jobs in the regular coding programming side of IT/ITeS (Information Technology-enabled Services) will go away, but we can create many more jobs in terms of what else can happen. What I see really as the big other opportunity is that there are many areas, including governance, where all of us would like to see substantial enhancement in quality and that probably is something that AI can offer. At the same time, we are aware of risks, dangers, and possible harms, which is why I think that when there is a need to regulate, we stand ready to regulate.

What does regulation look like practically?

If you have seen the report chaired by the Principal Scientific Adviser on AI Governance Guidelines, what it also states is try and use existing laws as much as possible. If you take, for example, what we can do with the existing Information Technology Act, that's one aspect of it. The other part is what we need to do in the copyright space. So, that is being dealt with in a particular way. Another part is how other data, including personal data, get used. So, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 sort of fits in there.

Some of this regulation is already in place. Some of it requires tweaking, tightening, and that is what we keep attempting to do, including the new set of rules we put out [amending the IT Rules, 2021 to require labelling of synthetically generated content]. Those rules introduce labelling for AI-generated content and reduce takedown timelines for all content from 24-36 hours to two to three hours.

Labelling is in terms of a right to know. We all have a right to know if what we're seeing is artificially generated. It's a very minor requirement and technologically fairly easy to solve. There were certain issues that I think in the course of consultation [from October 2025 onwards, when the draft of these rules was published] they [stakeholders] did raise with us and we have addressed them. For instance, we exempted smartphone camera auto-enhancements. Likewise for special effects in films. The change in time limits is fundamentally based on our understanding that there are two factors involved. When initially these time frames were imposed, they were much longer because the nature and kind of intermediaries we were dealing with those days were different and they had more time to respond. The possible virality of a lot of these things is very quick. All the damage is done within a matter of 24 or 36 hours. Practically, our own experience has been that whenever any such takedowns have been required, most companies did not need more than an hour or two to comply.

On electronics manufacturing, how prepared are we in an era of weaponised supply chains?

Some of the story lies in the past, some of it in the future. We did produce electronics even up to the late 1990s. A lot of it went out after the Information Technology-I agreement of 1997 [which allowed IT hardware to be imported at minimum duties]. I am not for a moment saying that that was necessarily bad. I think the IT revolution may not have taken place if you did not have access to computers and laptops and various other tools on the scale that we did, thanks to opening up. Now, you have reached a stage where I think it is important to also have that capacity at home domestically. We recognise that it is a global value chain, so it is not as if every part of it will be in India, but you have to have a reasonably substantial part of it to make sure that the value chain deepens.

So, we start in a sense at the end of the finished product [such as smartphones] because that gives you scale and employment. Value addition in the country is just about 18-20% because companies mostly import components. However, this is changing with schemes like the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme encouraging technology transfer similar to how China learned from the Apple ecosystem. This scheme is expected to significantly increase value addition to 35-40%, which is comparable to China's 40-50%. Semiconductors are more strategic and less about value; it is about what we are capable of doing. There is a Tamil saying, "Veralukketha veekam [Don't bite off more than you can chew]". So, the question is, 'How do you chew what you can bite off and manage?' The India Semiconductor Mission is designed on the basis of what we can actually chew. We are not at the leading edge. But we are in those segments where there is still considerable volume of consumption and will be there for the foreseeable future. The support has to be extended over at least a decade or so, which is why the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 was also announced in the Union Budget. So, we

should move forward and organically, then grow sort of into the more leading edges.

There are reports of the compliance timeline for the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 reducing from 18 to 12 months. Why?

We have not shortened it. We have initiated a consultation with the industry. We received feedback that the 18-month period is a little too long and that there are various elements that firms are already ready to comply with. So, can we actually talk to the industry and see if we can reduce that time frame? So, that is a context in which we are speaking to the industry. Varghese K. George: An international commentator likened the situation on AI now to what our awareness of COVID-19 was in February 2020. So, everybody was seeing some distant virus in China and then three weeks later everything in the world turned on its head. So, the comment being that that moment in terms of AI has already arrived. So, what is our understanding of where global AI research stands?

While much is said about agentic AI taking over, our view is that its practical utility remains uncertain. We believe that focusing on smaller, specialised AI tools — like sector-specific, vision, quantitative models, and smaller language models — offers more immediate, practical relevance and greater benefit to society and humanity. The agentic vision may transpire, but it is still far off. Jacob Koshy: How are IT firms discussing the AI wave? Their business model is built on a labour arbitrage that is now being threatened by this technology.

We have had conversations with many of the people in the IT industry. They say many of the coding and programming jobs are difficult to sustain because those can be done by an AI bot. But when you have to create an application, or create a solution, then you need to have better domain expertise, like in agriculture or manufacturing. The deployment of the application takes human resources. You have to understand which are the data sets you have to bring in, how you tailor those to suit a particular situation, how you adjust the way that the orchestration levels work, and multiple deployment-related tasks that need to be done. Their understanding is that they would still have multiple job opportunities. But that would require many of their present employees to get retrained and understand this differently. We have this programme called Future Skills Prime, which is primarily designed around reskilling and retraining people. In colleges, the emphasis has been to teach this as a horizontal technology; we need to teach it across every course.

Suhasini Haidar: Two questions — are we looking to create an international body for AI ethics and safety? And on MeitY's cyber law division: it is meant to stop unlawful speech and yet we see again and again people who are in government putting out AI videos inciting violence. Where do you think MeitY's responsibility really lies?

This is the first time a country in the Global South is hosting the AI summit. So, in a sense, yes, India could possibly be a natural leader in some of the aspects of AI, not necessarily in AI governance or regulation — that is one part of it — but more in terms of even offering more affordable technologies and more affordable deployments. Hopefully, in the final declaration, something will come out. Now, whether there will be another international body like the Solar Alliance, I don't really know. We may not do it as a regular body — we are also part of the Global Digital Compact of the UN and so on. So, we will work with the international community to see how this progresses. The number of cases where the government blocks information online is actually a fraction — it's less than 0.1% of the total number of cases that social media entities actually take down as part of their community guidelines and so on. So, it is very small, but we have to act when things come up through this channel and we act on what material is brought before us.

G. Sampath: AI is a power-intensive sector with water and electricity needs. How are we looking at this from our climate commitments?

India has one of the largest grids in the world with high levels of renewable energy and load capacity. One of the issues with renewable power is often there is no consumption at the time when it gets generated because the loads are inadequate and a lot of it just gets back down. So, there is an understanding that there could be surplus power that could be used for this purpose. There are both air-cooled servers and water-cooled servers, and there are ways in which this can also be economised. But we are fairly clear that there is nothing in terms of a relaxation that is given from any of the environmental norms or any of the other norms for a data centre. The only set of norms that have been relaxed are building norms; data centres don't need much parking, etc. To that limited extent, it is a relaxation. But in terms of water and electricity consumption, they will have to meet all the relevant norms, subject to availability, subject to what needs to be done. Many of these decisions ultimately are taken at the State government level. There has not been very open encouragement of data centres in all locations.

Experts discuss ways to bridge gap between academia and industry

"What you read in books and how the industry operates are two different things. Internships alone cannot solve the problems, but rather, faculty too should come during the summer break and work in the industry, becoming a force multiplier. They should take the knowledge back into the classroom and convert it into an industry-experience centre. This could be a scalable solution," Mr. Thiagarajan said. He also pointed out that resilience was a measure of the capability of people, not of systems. "We are living in a digitally connected world. We use so many apps, be it for communications, networking, socialising or financial transactions. This gives a notion that systems are resilient... that systems offer availability, reliability as well as stability. But people offer biological intelligence," Mr. Thiagarajan said.

Industry's responsibility Talking about where universities fall short in preparing students for resilient roles, Shankar Venugopal, vice-president, Technology Innovation and Intellectual Property, Mahindra & Mahindra, pointed out that it was the responsibility of the industry as well to bridge the gap. "At the end of the day, we want students who are ready to take up challenging problems and come up with innovative solutions. Key gaps lie in knowing versus doing. They may get to learn a lot from good teachers about concepts. But when it comes to real-world problems, there is a lot of hesitation because they haven't done it in the past. What they need is more opportunities to practise [dealing] with real-world problems, possibly through internships," Mr. Venugopal said.

‘Ma’am... may I share something?’: Growing up online and alone, why Delhi’s teens are reaching out



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

One morning a couple of months ago, a 15-year-old walked into the counselling room of a well-known school in South Delhi. The counsellor noticed that the child was wearing long sleeves; her eyes were trained to register oddities immediately. It was too warm for a full-sleeve shirt buttoned at the wrists.What the counsellor heard next was not surprising or unexpected – it was a story that is increasingly familiar to counsellors in schools across Delhi. “Children are resorting to self-harm to curb unstoppable thoughts, or when they feel worthless,” the counsellor told The Indian Express. “It had taken this child months to gather the courage to open up to an adult.” Cases such as the 15-year-old’s were fewer until a few years ago, the counsellor said – things are different now, and more children are talking. “There is growing awareness... It is encouraging students to reach out, they know confidentiality will be respected,” she said.A board outside the counsellor’s room says, “What you say here stays here unless someone is hurting you... You want to hurt someone... You want to hurt yourself.”Counsellors describe a generation that walks into their rooms unfiltered and unmasked, using mental-health vocabulary that teens from some years ago discovered only in adulthood.

They will barge in saying, “Ma’am, I’m having a panic attack; my exam is next period,” or collapse into chairs unable to accept that a close friend had chosen to sit with someone else during break.Many of them carry smartphones loaded with adult content, have vocabularies from OTT shows, and anxieties sharpened by their parents’ inability to set proper boundaries for them, say counsellors.In the days after a Class 10 student of St Columba’s School died by suicide last month, The Indian Express reached out to counsellors in several of the capital’s top schools. From that series of conversations emerged the portrait of a city full of teenagers grappling with significant emotional stress – the result of lingering pandemic scars; of life on the Internet that is simultaneously intimate and remote, understanding and impersonal; and of trying to cope in the adult physical world whose pulls and pressures they cannot yet understand.Names of students, counsellors, and schools have been withheld to protect identities.A veteran counsellor at a major school in West Delhi said she has never seen parents being as careful with their children as now. This counsellor has spent 18 years at her current job, which she took up after working at two of South Delhi’s most prestigious schools.

She remembered a father who was a teacher himself, telling her: “Ma’am, if we say anything to him, he locks himself in his room. What if he harms himself? Please tell us what to do.”Student counselling Parents protest outside St Columba’s after a Class X student died by suicide last month. ArchiveThis powerlessness that many parents feel is the outcome of “overly pampering” their children through their growing-up years, the counsellor said. “In the nuclear family set-up, parents fulfil all irrational demands to show their love, rather than teach the right life skills and values to make their children worthy citizens of the country,” she said.

In despair, these parents sometimes reach out to schools, the counsellor said. They will request teachers to confiscate their teens’ phones because they are unable to do it themselves, or call to maybe say their child is refusing to get out of bed for school.The general irreverence of today’s children seems to be devoid of an awareness of gradation, she said – many do not seem to understand the difference between teasing and bullying, and they will casually call their teachers and parents names that previous generations would not even imagine.Some of this behaviour can be traced to the pandemic, the counsellor said. “In the two years of isolation, the student-adult relationship flattened. Adults can no longer claim an automatic authority to im-

pose decisions or enforce obedience.”A young counsellor at a school in south-central Delhi recalled an occasion when a 14-year-old had googled every symptom that she thought she had. The counsellor who had prepared to gently help children identify and name their feelings was instead faced with a young teen who was able to articulate emotional nuance with a sophistication not many adults have.“I was stunned,” the counsellor said. She realised that in some cases at least, the children’s problem was not ignorance, it was saturation.

“These children consume complex narratives on OTT platforms before they have had a chance to understand their own real worlds. The Internet has offered them a language, maybe even support of some kind. But it has also created children who come for counselling because they are struggling with too many answers,” said the counsellor.Third and fourth graders can startle you with talk about “consent”, “dignity”, and “boundaries”, she said. She recalled one especially “boundaryed” eight-year-old who knew exactly what she liked and disliked, what she would and would not accept; another who could describe internal emotional states with a clarity not seen even in middle-school children five years ago.

The counsellor from the South Delhi school who had spoken to the student in long sleeves at the top of this report recalled the time she had spent with a child who had thrown a sexually explicit phrase at a classmate, seemingly innocently. After stonewalling her for an hour, the student confessed he had picked up the expression from content that some older boys had shown him on their phones.“Age-appropriate information and careful adult supervision are essential,” said the counsellor. She said she frequently discovers the secret late-night digital lives that many children have. “Long hours spent online, switching between [computer games such as] Roblox and Minecraft and social media, frequently contribute to increased impulsivity.”Issues of body image, seen in teens or older children until recently, seem to be now appearing in primary school. A counsellor recalled a little girl with a perfectly proportionate body for her age wanting to lose 10 kilograms because she wanted “praise from everyone”.Then there are issues of interpersonal behaviour. Many students refuse to take responsibility for their actions, react sharply to peers, and find it difficult to repair bruised friendships, counsellors said. In several schools, counsellors have sessions on resolving conflict and disputes, and on reflection and accountability.A counsellor at another South Delhi school identified clear pre- and post-Covid phases in her decade of working with children. The post-Covid generation, she said, returned to school sans entire layers of developmental scaffolding.

Many could not sit through a full school day; they would request “half-days” because a long time spent with peers overwhelmed them, she said. Conflicts over the smallest matters escalated because children had lost the muscle memory that guides face-to-face relationships.Many children lost a parent to the virus, some lost both parents. The counsellor said she also started to notice a tendency towards self-harm, “a Blue Whale Challenge [online ‘suicide game’]-like behaviour” in which children snapped rubber bands on wrists, or punched walls until their knuckles bled. “They don’t know how to express what they feel,” she said. “So they copy what they see.”Once, caught with a vape, a student told the counsellor, “What’s the big deal? I found this in my father’s drawer.” Another excitedly announced in school that her parents had promised to celebrate her 16th birthday with wine. “It took me a while to comprehend. I did not know how to respond,” the counsellor said.And yet, in the majority of cases, the core of childhood remains unchanged, agreed all counsellors. Children still seek a place where they are not identified by their failures, where their anger is not punished, and where they can articulate heart-break aloud. This is why counselling rooms often feel like the heart of a school – “despite all that has changed, children still crave security,” one of the counsellors quoted above said.For parents, the counsellors have a prescription: reclaim your authority, but not through fear; encourage boundaries to the extent your children can lean on them; build environments for exploration, not perfection; privilege emotional grounding over emotional vocabularies; rebuild communication; teach children to navigate conflict instead of fleeing from it.In the end, all counsellors agree on the critical need for collaboration – with parents and other stakeholders – to make things easier for a generation in school that is growing up too fast and yet not fast enough.

‘Why Parth Pawar being let off?’: Opp to raise Mundhwa land deal issue

mahesh tapase latest news todayNCP (S-P) spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said while the issue of farmers not getting the desired price for their produce and distressed farmers dying by suicide will figure in the Winter Session, the Mundhwa land is one of the prominent issues the Opposition will take up. With the Winter Session of the Maharashtra Legislature set to begin in Nagpur on Monday, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which boycotted the Mahayuti government’s customary tea party held on the eve of the session, has decided to rake up Pune’s Mundhwa land deal involving Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar’s son Parth Pawar.Atul Londhe, chief spokesperson of the Maharashtra Congress, told The Indian Express on Sunday, “The government will have to answer the way it has gone all out to protect Parth Pawar, who is Deputy CM Ajit Pawar’s son.”

Londhe said no FIR has been filed against Parth Pawar, despite the fact that he held 99 per cent of the stakes in the company, which bought the government land. “While the one partner who has one per cent stake is facing the FIR, the one who has the maximum stake has been allowed to walk free. What kind of justice system does the Fadnavis government have? Open violations of rules and regulations are happening but the government seems to be hand in glove with the perpetrators. We are going to grill the government on this issue,” he said.NCP (S-P) spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said while the issue of farmers not getting the desired price for their produce and distressed farmers dying by suicide will figure in the Winter Session, the Mundhwa land is one of the prominent issues the Opposition will take up. “There has been blatant stamp duty evasion in the Mundhwa land deal. It has now emerged that instead of paying Rs 21 crore stamp duty, the purchasers had paid only Rs 500. What happened to the so-called notice issued to the party by the government department? What happened to the announcement made by Ajit Pawar

that the deal has been cancelled? If the deal is cancelled, Parth Pawar’s firm will have to pay Rs 42 crore stamp duty. There is complete silence on this aspect from the government. We will seeking to know the full update of the land deal,” said Tapase.Maharashtra vice-president of AAP Vijay Kumbhar said, “Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar has already conveyed to me that the Mundhwa land deal issue will be taken up. The Opposition is going to demand filing of an FIR against Parth Pawar. Is he being let off because he is the son of the Deputy Chief Minister? Are there different laws for different people in Maharashtra? I have also written to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis that all those involved in the land deal should face action. So far, only Sheetal Tejwani, the power of attorney holder, has been arrested. Why have others not been arrested? Are they getting protection from the state? The Chief Minister will have to clarify it in the house...,” he said.Congress leader Gopal Tiwari said, “It is surprising that despite the fact that the IGR committee has submitted its report highlighting the blatant evasion of stamp duty to the tune of crores, all those guilty have still not been arrested. The Congress will continue to raise the issue in the Legislature as well outside.”In the Mundhwa land deal, two FIRs have been filed so far—one with Bavdhan police, which comes under Pimpri-Chinchwad police, and another with Khadak police, which comes under Pune police commissionerate. The Pune police city transferred the case from Khadak police to the Economic Offences Wing. In the Mundhwa land case, FIRs have been filed against Sheetal Tejwani, Digvijay Patil, who is Parth Pawar’s partner in the firm and tehsildar Suryakant Yewale, who has secured anticipatory bail from the Bombay High Court. Tejwani was arrested earlier this week.Meanwhile, Parth Pawar refused to speak on the issue and has remained out of bounds. His father Ajit Pawar has firmly stood by him, arguing that Parth did not know that the land he was purchasing belonged to the government.

Thailand launches air strikes against Cambodian military: Army



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Thailand launched air strikes on its neighbour Cambodia on Monday (December 8, 2025), the Thai Army said, with both sides trading blame for the latest eruption of fighting on their disputed border which killed a Thai soldier.After Cambodian troops fired on Thai forces early on Monday morning in Ubol Ratchathani province, “the Army received reports that Thai soldiers were attacked with supporting fire weapons, resulting in one soldier killed and four wounded”, Thai Army spokesman Winthai Suvaree said in a statement.

Mr. Winthai also said Thailand had begun “using aircraft to strike military targets in several areas” to suppress attacks by Cambodian forces.Cambodia’s Defence Ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata said Thai forces launched

Lure of Bollywood, easy forex deal: How a Kolkata man conned people with a promise of making film deals



The Delhi Police Sunday arrested an alleged interstate fraudster accused of running a pan-India foreign currency exchange cheating racket, who was wanted in multiple cases in the national capital, Mumbai, and Kolkata.According to Crime Branch officers, Krishna Kumar Sharma, 31, was tracked down and arrested in Kiran Garden, Uttam Nagar. They said Sharma is the mastermind of a gang that duped victims by offering favourable foreign currency exchange deals, and posing as film industry professionals.His associate, Saurabh, has already been arrested by the Kolkata police.“SI Anuj Chhikara received a tip-off on December 6 that Sharma would visit Kiran Garden to meet an associate. A team was formed... After placing Sharma under technical surveillance, and pinpointing his location, officers laid a trap and apprehended him the same day,” said Harsh Indora, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime Branch.Cases in multiple citiesSharma, who belongs to Rishra in West Bengal’s Hooghly district, had been on the run after a case was registered against him at the Shakespeare Sarani Police Station in Kolkata. A warrant of arrest was issued against him by the chief judicial magistrate in Kolkata on December 6.

Sharma is wanted in an FIR registered on November 14 under sections 318(4), 319(2) and 61(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The complainant alleged that Sharma induced him to part with \$15,000 and 1,000 euros, valued at approximately Rs 14.5 lakh, on the pretext of a forex

A black Friday for aviation safety in India

In the aftermath of the crisis in India’s aviation after private airline Indigo cancelled flights, the Minister of Civil Aviation posted on X, the following: “The FDTL [Flight Duty Time Limitations] orders issued by [the] DGCA have been placed under abeyance with immediate effect for now to stabilize operations and prioritise relief for affected passengers.” Prior to this, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had issued an appeal to pilots’ associations and pilots to cooperate and ensure that flights were back without delays, with a subtle direction to dilute the FDTL (a Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) to comply with a High Court order). These acts, by the Minister and the DGCA, make a mockery of flight safety and make India the laughing stock as far as aviation safety is concerned. The commercial interests of Indigo have taken priority over crew fatigue and the safety of passengers. CARs have been modified to suit commercial aviation’s requirements. Safety be damned.The dilution of a good safety measure

In 2007, the DGCA issued a very good CAR, addressing the issue of fatigue and the rest period of operating crew. But airline owners complained to the Minister, who issued orders to the DGCA to keep the CAR in abeyance In an order dated May 29, 2008, the DGCA wrote: “The competent authority in the Ministry of Civil Aviation has decided to keep CAR Section 7, Flight Crew Standards, Series J, Part III dated 27th July, 2007 in abeyance”. In 18 years, the mindset continues to favour the commercial interests of airlines and ignoring the dangers of fatigue and inadequate rest periods of crew.

The pilots association filed a writ in the Bombay High Court (Writ petition 1687 of 2008) against this order. The High Court granted interim relief and slammed the aviation authority for putting the lives of pilots and passengers at risk. The Court pulled up the Aviation Ministry and the DGCA for arbitrarily and irrationally playing with the duty hours (flying hours) of pilots. “To overcome the acute shortage of pilots, the authorities and airlines should decrease the number of flights and not increase the pilots’ duty hours,” the High Court observed. It said, “It is apparent that [the] safety of flights has been overlooked for protecting the financial interests of a few airline operators. The ministry in charge is duty-bound to protect the safety of pilots and passengers.” Strangely, it was the same High Court that reversed the order and upheld the action of the Civil Aviation Ministry.The owner of Indigo knew, for more than a year, that the new regulations would kick in from November 1, 2025. The DGCA was also aware of this deadline. Yet, both were in deep slumber that resulted in chaos across India with thousands of passengers stranded. They may get refunds for cancelled flights but who will compensate them

an attack on Cambodian troops in the border provinces of Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey early Monday morning, accusing Thailand of “firing multiple shots with tanks at Tamone Thom temple” and other areas near Preah Vihear temple.

Met Measpheakdey, a Cambodian spokesman for the Oddar Meanchey provincial administration, said gunfire was reported in the areas of the centuries-old Tamone Thom and Ta Krabei temples, and a “number of villagers who live near the border are fleeing to safety”.Thailand’s Second Army Region said in a statement that around 35,000 people in Thailand have been evacuated from areas along the border with Cambodia since the renewed fighting.Both sides reported a brief skirmish on Sunday, which Thailand’s military had said left two soldiers wounded.At least 48 people were killed and an estimated 3,00,000 temporarily displaced during the July clashes, which saw the exchange of rocket fire, heavy artillery and airstrikes.The border dispute had erupted into a five-day war in July, before a ceasefire deal brokered by U.S. President Donald Trump and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Trump witnessed the signing of an expanded ceasefire deal between the two countries in Kuala Lumpur in October.The Southeast Asian neighbours have contested sovereignty for more than a century over undermarked points along their 817-km (508-mile) land border, first mapped in 1907 by France when it ruled Cambodia as a colony.

deal.Crime Branch officers said Sharma has been previously involved in at least four other cases, in Amboli and Vakola in Mumbai, and one at Connaught Place in Delhi. In 2023, he allegedly cheated a woman of Rs 45 lakh by promising to arrange the signing of a Bollywood actor.

The police said Sharma was booked in a case last year at the Connaught Place Police Station, Delhi, where the complainant, Shivam Pandey, alleged that while collecting money from Sharma, he was given a glass of water after which he lost consciousness. When he recovered, a bag that had \$25,000 was missing.The police said the group operated from luxury hotels, travelled frequently by air, and paid for flights and hotel rooms in cash. Members used multiple mobile phones and SIM cards, as well as internet-based calling apps such as Zangi. Officers also recovered information indicating the use of items like chilli spray and chloroform during operations.“Sharma pretended to be involved in the film industry and falsely represented himself as a film businessman to gain the trust of professionals.

He convinced the victims that he could arrange meetings with film actors for upcoming film projects, thereby gaining their confidence and cheating them out of large sums of money. In this gang, Krishna’s nephew Mayank and several others, such as bouncers, makeup men, and others, participated in the crime,” said DCP Indora.To win the confidence of businessmen and forex traders, the gang allegedly booked rooms in five-star hotels, and created elaborate setups with accomplices posing as bouncers, makeup artists, and staff. Victims were asked to hand over dollars or euros, after which gang members would enter a bedroom on the pretext of verifying the currency with a manager, only to flee through another exit, said the police.According to the police, Sharma was born in Kolkata in 1994. He completed his schooling and later graduated with a BCom (Hons) from Calcutta University in 2016.A year later, he founded an event management company, Ace Entertainment, and is said to have produced a music video with a major label in 2019. Officers said that after suffering heavy losses during the pandemic, he turned to large-scale forex fraud, travelling across metro cities to target traders and business owners.



for the losses incurred on expenses such as hotels and transportation arrangements?The malaise can be directly connected with the DGCA’s CAR Series ‘C’ Part II Section 3 Air Transport dated April 19, 2022. It says: “The applicant shall have on his regular employment sufficient number of flight crew and cabin crew but not less than three sets of crew per aircraft. The flight crew should hold current licences issued by [the] DGCA with appropriate endorsements of the type of aircraft operated. The cabin crew should have appropriate authorization/endorsements as per the requirements of [the] DGCA”.Even with the existing, but unsafe, FDTL and rest period rules that were in existence, one needs a minimum of six sets of pilots an aircraft for domestic operation and not less than 12 sets of pilots an aircraft for widebody, long haul operations. Airlines appear to have taken advantage of the CAR and, deliberately, underemployed qualified sets of crew. Indigo appears to be a major player in this misuse. The judiciary has shown a total disregard for aviation safety and has been playing second fiddle to the government for more than 20 years.In 2006, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) had identified in its audit report the need for India to have an independent civil aviation authority and not a puppet regime under the control of the government. Almost 20 years later, this has been proved right with the complete lack of safety oversight by the DGCA over the past few years and the arrogance of airline owners to flout safety norms, knowing well that the government and the DGCA will look the other way. On December 5, 2025, there was graphic proof of this. As referred to earlier, the DGCA issued an appeal for “... full cooperation of all pilot bodies, associations and pilots across India.” A few hours later, the Aviation Ministry issues an order keeping in abeyance the CAR on FDTL and rest period, mandated by the High Court. Even third world countries would not dilute safety norms to this extent. The order even mentions February 10, 2026 as the outer limit. Indigo has not complied with even one clause of the earlier CAR enforced by the High Court, for more than a year.

From gold, silver to core inflation and back-series: Key themes of new CPI

India finally has a brand-new Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket that not only uses a fairly recent year as the base for prices – 2024 – but also considers the prices of goods and services households buy now instead of a-decade-and-a-half ago when it comes to calculating the overall change in price levels. Thursday, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the new CPI series, which showed retail inflation stood at 2.75% in January. But has it risen or fallen compared to the previous month or the same month of 2025 – this is one of the key themes data watchers are discussing.

As per the old CPI series, headline retail inflation stood at 1.33% in December. So, in comparison, inflation more than doubled in January. But this comparison is not valid for several reasons. For one, new goods and services which previously weren't a part of the CPI now are, while others have been excluded. And how the prices of these items change affect the overall inflation rate.

Consider this: CPI inflation for December as per the old series was based on prices of CDs, DVDs, audio and video cassettes being 0.29% lower compared to the same month the previous year. These items were not part of the basket of goods and services used to calculate inflation for January under the new series. Instead, it contained items like headphones, earphones, ear pods, airpods, and bluetooth devices, whose prices were down 0.99%. So, comparing the two inflation numbers would be like comparing two different fruit baskets: you might like one more than the other, but that's about as far as you can go. The back-series question

In such situations, statisticians and economists like to have what is called a 'back-series': old data presented in the context of the new. Although MoSPI has provided a 'back-series' of the headline index numbers – whose year-on-year percentage changes are the inflation rates – of the CPI going back to 2013, it is only a mechanical exercise. For instance, using the back-series provided and the so-called 'linking factor' used to connect the old and new series, it can be found that CPI inflation in December 2025 was 1.17% in the new series versus 1.33% in the old. Over 2025, the average inflation rate is little changed at 2.2% under both the series. The fact that headline inflation is largely same in the new and old series despite a much lower weight of food in new series is a sign that core inflation is softer in newly rebased CPI," economists from ICICI Securities Primary Dealership said in a report.

Making such a comparison is a rather simplistic way to understand what inflation may have been like in 2025 as per the new series because the old CPI basket has not undergone any change or been reconstructed to mirror the new one: one must compare apples and apples to see which is smaller or larger. Given the numerous changes in the new CPI in terms of data sources, items, markets from where prices are to be collected, methodologies, "construction of a detailed back series may need more deliberations and time too", the Expert Group Report on Comprehensive Updation of Consumer Price Index noted last month. The immediate priority of the expert group was to release the new series. Gold and silver It is well known that food items



have become less prominent in the new CPI. Another key weight change is that of gold and silver. In the old CPI basket, gold had a weight of 1.08% and silver 0.11%. Now, gold/diamond/platinum jewellery together account for 0.62% of the new CPI, while silver jewellery makes up 0.31%.

If not for the eye-watering rise in global gold and silver prices, India's inflation would have been even lower in 2025 – according to The Indian Express' calculations. CPI inflation in December 2025 would have been 0.26% and not 1.33% if gold (69% inflation) and silver (97% inflation) are excluded. Bullion prices have continued to rise in 2026, with silver jewellery inflation hitting 160% in January under the new CPI series, while gold/diamond/platinum jewellery inflation was 47%. But this is jewellery price inflation, and not changes in commodity prices. This, according to Gaura Sen Gupta, IDFC First Bank's Chief Economist, will capture inflation better at a consumer level.

What counts as core While the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has a 4% target in terms of headline inflation, it keeps a close eye on underlying price pressures which respond to demand changes – something it can control through interest rate hikes or cuts. This is called core inflation and can be broadly defined as inflation excluding food and fuel items, which are things you would buy irrespective of their prices because they are needed to live (food) and make a living (fuel to travel to work). With no universal definition of core inflation, it is up to the RBI and economists to decide what items should be excluded to measure underlying price pressures. All food and fuel items, yes. What about certain fuel items like lubricants that can end up in non-fuel categories? And what about precious metals like gold and silver?

If one uses the broadest definition the RBI has referred to in the past – no food or fuel product groups – then core inflation fell to around 3.4% or so in January from 4.6% in December 2025. As Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran noted on Thursday, with the weight of food falling in the new CPI, headline inflation may be driven more by core inflation. This, he said, should make the RBI's monetary policy response "more focused" on demand pressures. The problem is: what core inflation will the RBI monitor? A direct comparison of core inflation definition across old and new series, especially when using broader category indices, may not be entirely appropriate. Clarification on how the RBI intends to define core inflation will be essential moving forward," ANZ economists Dhiraj Nim and Sanjay Mathur said in a note on Friday.

Pothole-related road fatalities increase by 53% in 5 years

Pothole-related road fatalities jumped 53% in 5 yrs According to the latest data tabled by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, deaths due to potholes increased by over 53% since 2020. Pothole-related road accident fatalities have seen a significant upward trend over the last five years (2020-2024), except a slight dip in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Uttar Pradesh accounts for most road deaths due to potholes. According to the latest data tabled by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, deaths due to potholes increased by over 53% since 2020.

A total of 1,555 persons died in 2020 in pothole-related road accidents, which increased to 2,385 fatalities in 2024. This translates into over six road deaths due to potholes daily. Except for the minor decrease of about 4.7% between 2020 and 2021, the numbers rose sharply in the subsequent years. A total of 9,438 people died in pothole-related accidents in the last five years. The number of road accidents due to potholes also increased in the same proportion. The data shows that a total of 3,713 such accidents were recorded in 2020, which increased to 5,432 accidents in 2024. In total, 23,056 accidents caused by potholes were reported over the five-year period. The data includes accidents caused due to potholes on all roads, including national highways, state highways and urban roads. Pothole-related road fatalities increase by 53% in 5 years Last week, a 25-year-old biker died in Delhi's Janakpuri after falling into an excavation pit.

Pothole-related injuries also increased – from 3,167 in 2020 to 4,643 in 2024 – over the last five years. While there was a slight decrease in 2021 to 3,103, total injuries peaked significantly in 2023 at 5,309. The data shows grievous injuries rose by approximately 34% during this period,



from 1,672 in 2020 to 2,238 in 2024. Minor injuries saw a higher increase of 61%, rising from 1,495 to 2,405. Overall, a total of 9,670 people suffered grievous injuries and 10,286 persons minor injury in these accidents.

The state-wise analysis of the data shows Uttar Pradesh alone contributed more than half of the national total of pothole deaths. The state consistently reported the highest number of fatalities in the country – from 759 deaths in 2020 to 1,369 in 2024. Madhya Pradesh saw a notable increase in fatalities from 96 in 2020 to 277 in 2024. This was followed by Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Assam. The top five states put together account for over 82% of the total road accident fatalities due to potholes. In terms of number of annual road accident fatalities, India tops globally, followed by China, which accounts for just 36% of India's total, and the US at 25%. India has the second-largest road network in the world – about 63.45 lakh km, including 1.46 lakh km of NHs and 1.80 lakh km of state highways. A total of 1.77 lakh people died in road accidents in 2024, an increase of 2.31% from 2023, when 1.73 lakh fatalities were recorded in 4.8 lakh road accidents.

was set last month. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 1.3 per cent, or 669.42, to 49,451.98. The Nasdaq composite lost 2 per cent, or 469.32, to 22,597.15. American technology giant Cisco Systems sank 12.3 per cent even though it reported better-than-expected quarterly results, as investors were concerned about its ongoing profitability.

Shares of technology company AppLovin plunged 19.7 per cent despite better-than-expected quarterly profits as worries over AI undercutting its business weighed on its stock price. Fears of AI disruptions across industries in recent days have hit investor confidence in companies, especially in software stocks. Some analysts say uncertainties surrounding the AI disruption risk are likely to go on for a while. Many remained concerned about whether massive AI investments by companies will eventually pay off. But other analysts are more optimistic. Economists at Capital Economics, for example, argue that they still believe in the AI rally, and that this year will be a "good year" for the S&P 500, building on the technology-led gains. "Our sense remains that a sustained reversal of tech outperformance would require a big slide in tech itself,"

Air India fined Rs 1 crore by DGCA for operating aircraft on expired airworthiness review certificate in November

Tata group airline Air India has been fined Rs 1 crore by aviation safety regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for operating an aircraft with an expired airworthiness certificate in November, according to sources. The aircraft—an Airbus A320 bearing registration VT-TQN—operated eight commercial flights on an expired Airworthiness Review Certificate (ARC), before Air India voluntarily informed the DGCA about the gaffe on November 26. Operating an aircraft on a lapsed airworthiness license is typically categorised as a serious safety lapse.

Early December, Air India expressed regret over the incident, saying that it suspended all personnel involved in the decision to operate the aircraft while its ARC was not valid. In addition to the DGCA probe into the matter, the airline also conducted an internal investigation into the matter on the regulator's instructions. Following the tragic crash of Air India flight AI 171 in Ahmedabad on June 12, the carrier has been at the receiving end of a number of regulatory actions by the DGCA, many of which were a result of voluntary disclosures by the airline. On Friday, the airline said that all identified gaps have been addressed "satisfactorily". "Air India acknowledges the receipt of a DGCA order in relation to an incident that was voluntarily reported back in 2025. All identified gaps have since been satisfactorily addressed and shared with the authority. Air India remains unwavering in its commitment to maintaining the highest standards of operational integrity and safety," an Air India spokesperson said.

According to flight tracking data, the three-year-old aircraft—which earlier flew with Vistara—operated its last flight of November on November 25, which suggests that it was grounded immediately following Air India's disclosure to the regulator. The data also shows that the aircraft operated eight flights on November 24-25. Before that, it was under maintenance for a month, having operated its last flight on a valid ARC on October 24. The aircraft re-entered service on December 10, after its ARC was duly renewed. The ARC is issued annually after a comprehensive review of the aircraft's maintenance records, physical condition, and verification of compliance with all airworthiness standards. It acts as a validation of the aircraft's main Certificate of Airworthiness.

Hardik Pandya gets inked for Valentine Mahieka Sharma; tattoo artist says it 'captures their chemistry'

As far as Valentine's Day gifts go, Hardik Pandya has upped the game for partners far and wide. The Indian cricketer got a deeply personal tattoo inked in tribute to his fiancée Mahieka, and the internet cannot keep calm. Conceptualised by lead artist Tushar Marane and executed by Sunny Bhanushali of Aliens Tattoo, the piece unfurls a tale of love, identity and partnership. The idea was simple. Pandya wanted to gift his lady love something she would cherish forever. The initial of her name, 'M', was the starting point, but the artwork was designed after the studio artists came together and brainstormed. Finally, the initial evolved into an elaborate symbolic design after an emotional creative process between the couple and the artists, during a late-night session.

About the tattoo During an exclusive conversation with indianexpress.com, Bhanushali shared that the tattoo reflected the couple's love for big cats, especially leopards. "The tattoo captures the essence of the couple, how passionate and success-oriented they are, their chemistry, and the fact that they are stronger and better together," he told us. Hardik Pandya tattoo for Valentine Mahieka Sharma The initial of her name, 'M', was the starting point. (PR Handout)

The tattoo displays a masculine leopard, which appears bold and realistic, symbolising visible strength, drive and ambition. The second leopard is feminine, formed through flowing linework, moving like a shadow around the



Usually, Air India issues ARCs for the aircraft it operates under delegated authority. These are issued by Air India's in-house Continuing Airworthiness Management Organization (CAMO). But in view of Vistara's merger into Air India in November 2024, it was decided that the DGCA, and not Air India, will do the first ARC renewal for all 70 aircraft that were in Vistara's fleet. "Till date ARC for all the sixty-nine aircraft has been issued by the DGCA after satisfactory compliance by operator (Air India). In respect of the seventieth aircraft, the operator filed application with the DGCA and subsequently the aircraft was grounded for the engine change. During this period the ARC expired, however the aircraft was released for service after engine change," the DGCA had said on December 2. "On 26.11.2025 operator informed DGCA about the flying of the aircraft on the expired ARC for eight revenue sectors. DGCA has instituted investigation and instructed the operator to ground the aircraft. ARC process is in progress. Concerned personnel have been de-rostered with immediate effect pending investigation. Air India on the instructions of DGCA is carrying out internal investigation to identify deficiencies in their system and put corrective measures in place to prevent such failures from occurring in future," the DGCA had said at the time. In September, Air India CEO said in a message to staff that in the aftermath of the AI 171 crash, the airline was being "more transparent than usual" when it came to reporting incidents and events—no matter how small—with its aircraft, which has resulted



first, and within its curves subtly forms the letter "M", Mahieka's initial. The design reflects two strong individuals moving together in alignment rather than losing individuality within a relationship, Bhanushali said. Pandya's choice of placing the tattoo on the nape was mindful and intentional—subtle when hidden yet powerful when revealed, which further added to the intimacy of the piece, according to Bhanushali. This is the third time Pandya has worked with Bhanushali. Talking about his experience working with the cricketer, Bhanushali shared how sweet, warm and welcoming Pandya is as a person, contrary to how the world sees him on the cricket field. "A man with a beautiful heart. Every time I meet him, I get the feeling I am with a relative. Family wali feeling aati hai bilkul," he concluded.

The 'one-night stand' that lasted 38 years: Archana Puran Singh and Parmeet Sethi's unlikely love story



Archana Puran Singh and Parmeet Sethi have been married for 38 years, and in a recent upload to her YouTube channel, she shared vivid details about the early days of their relationship. Recalling the day they first met, she said it was at a friend's place in 1988, but they actually started talking at a club that night with the same friends. The next day, Archana expected him to call, which he did, and from then on, they started talking quite regularly. "This was meant to be a fling, a one-night stand," Sethi recalled, while Singh added, "Very casual."

"I had just broken up with my ex, and he had broken up with his ex, and both of us were in a rebound phase. People say rebound relationships don't last, but we are proof that they can. Something that was supposed to be a one-night stand, a fling, a casual affair... We told each other very clearly that this won't be serious," the Mohabbatein actor said, and Parmeet reminded her, "Har roz bolte the, this is not serious haa." (They would tell each other every day that this wasn't a serious relationship). Archana Parmeet relationship

Archana and Parmeet had a casual fling. (Source: Instagram / @archanapuransingh)

Why do people prefer casual relationships?

According to psychologist Rasshi Gurnani, whether someone prefers long-term relationships or casual flings depends on their personality, emotional experiences, and attachment style. "People who grew up with stable, nurturing bonds often look for committed relationships, seeing intimacy as emotionally meaningful. On the other hand, those with a more avoidant attachment style

may lean toward casual encounters, valuing independence over emotional closeness," she told indianexpress.com.

Personal values also play a significant role — some individuals naturally seek deeper connections, while others enjoy the excitement of fleeting experiences. The psychologist added that hormones like oxytocin, which promote bonding, can draw some individuals toward lasting relationships. While people with healthy self-esteem often view intimacy as something meaningful, tied to trust and connection, rather than just physical gratification, those with lower self-worth may sometimes seek casual encounters for temporary validation, she explained, adding that body autonomy also plays a big role. When people feel in control of their physical and emotional boundaries, they make more thoughtful and authentic choices about intimacy. Gurnani highlighted that seeing the body as more than just physical but as part of one's emotional and spiritual self often leads to a more intentional and mindful approach to relationships. "

Oman elects to bowl against Ireland in do-or-die T20 World Cup clash



Colombo: Oman won the toss and elected to bowl against Ireland in their third match of the 2026 T20 World Cup here at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) on Saturday. This Group B encounter is a do or die for both Ireland and Oman. Whoever loses will be out of contention for Super 8 stage. After winning the toss, Oman Captain Jatinder Singh said, "Yeah, we're gonna bowl first since it's a new pitch, so we just wanna bowl first. Yeah, true. We just want to focus on small, small things. What we have done, I mean, the last two games, the batting didn't click, so we're just focusing to bat in the right way."

"Just try to be in the present and try not to make mis-

takes. Yeah, absolutely. We never expected that SSC have got a bounce that way. But yeah, in a power play, if you lose about four wickets, almost the team's height is gone, so it is difficult to come back in the game. There are two changes. We have Shakeel and Ashish coming to the side," he added. Spinner Joshua Little is back in the Ireland playing XI after missing the previous match.

While Ireland captain Lorcan Tucker said, "Yeah, I think in these situations, you really have to think positively. We see this as a good opportunity to get our club in and really get some momentum in the last game against Zimbabwe." Speaking about Paul Stirling being ruled out of the tournament due to injury, Tucker said, "Obviously a massive shame and such a big figure in our team, but I think it's just something that's happened. It's unfortunate. We have to try to move on and compete otherwise. No, I think we talked so much about the character, about our reserve. I think it's important as part of being a professional to come back and really perform when you haven't got it so well. So I think we'll be looking to do that tonight." Ireland: Ross Adair, Tim Tector, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker (wk/c), Curtis Campher, George Dockrell, Gareth Delany, Mark Adair, Barry McCarthy, Matthew Humphreys, Joshua Little. Oman: Aamir Kaleem, Jatinder Singh (c), Hammad Mirza, Ashish Odedara, Mohammad Nadeem, Jiten Ramanandi, Vinayak Shukla (wk), Nadeem Khan, Sufyan Mehmood, Shah Faisal, Shakeel Ahmed

England to bowl first against Scotland in Group C T20 World Cup 2026 clash

Kolkata: England won the toss and elected to bowl against Scotland in the Group C game of the T20 World Cup 2026 here at the Eden Gardens on Saturday. Both the teams have named an unchanged playing eleven for the match.

England captain Harry Brook said, "We are going to have a bowl. We fancy chasing over here, as it's a quick outfield and it's also a pretty good wicket. I am not a curator, but it looks like a decent wicket. So, hopefully we can restrict them to as few as possible and then chase it down. On announcing the playing XI early, Brook said, "We just want to give the team a bit more clarity. I want them to come prepared for the game, knowing the team a day before. I think we were a little bit too careful with the bat. We should have been a bit more aggressive. Hopefully we do that today."

Praising the Scottish side, he said, "They are a really good side. They have played here before and we will certainly not take them lightly." Scotland captain Richie Berrington said, "We were probably going to have a bat first. But I think the toss here shouldn't make too much difference. Looks pretty similar (to the last game), to be honest. It's obviously been really good for us to get a feel of conditions here, playing the last couple of games. So I think, in general, it has been quite a good batting track. I think the pitch is probably going to be how we play spinning that middle period."

"Look, we're obviously up against a very good team. I think they're used to travelling and having to adapt to differ-



ent conditions. But it's going to be key for us too. It's a new day, a new wicket. But yeah, it's been a good experience for us to get used to conditions here and hopefully we can take some of the positives from the last couple of performances into today's game." Scotland: Richard Berrington (c), Tom Bruce, Matthew Henry Cross (wk), Oliver Davidson, Michael Alexander Jones, Michael Alexander Leask, George Munsey, Mark Watt, Bradley Wheel, Brandon McMullen, Bradley James Currie. England: Philip Salt, Jos Buttler (wk), Jacob Bethell, Tom Banton, Harry Brook (c), Sam Curran, Will Jacks, Liam Dawson, Jamie Overton, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid

February 15 again: When Virat Kohli became India's first World Cup centurion vs Pakistan in 2015



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

When India take on Pakistan in their T20 World Cup clash in Colombo on February 15, the date will carry a quiet sense of déjà vu. Eleven years ago, on the very same day, the two rivals met in an ODI World Cup game at the Adelaide Oval – a contest that produced one of Virat Kohli's most significant early statements on the global stage.

The format on Sunday will be shorter, the venue different, and the squads largely reshaped by time. But February 15 remains a marker in the history of this rivalry. Back in 2015, India, batting first, posted 300/7 – a total built around Kohli's composed and authoritative 107. It was an innings that blended control with intensity, setting the tone for India's campaign. It was also the first time an Indian batter had scored a hundred in a World Cup game against Pakistan. "Probably one of the biggest in my career so far. Amazing way to begin our World Cup. Big game against Pakistan, amazing fight from them," Kohli had said after the match. "I just look to stand up to them because I hate to lose and play passionately. I like the expectations."

Kohli's partnership with Shikhar Dhawan (73 off 76 balls) steadied India after early pressure, and Suresh Raina's late surge (74 off 56 balls) ensured the total touched the 300 mark – a score that, in World Cup history between the sides, carried enormous psychological weight.

MS Dhoni, leading the side then, emphasised the importance of building that platform. "It was a very good performance. I was very happy with our batting. When you are batting first, it is not easy over here. It doesn't come on that nicely. It has a bit of a variable pace initially. It was important we stayed in the middle. The big partnership between Virat and Shikhar. And then Raina capitalised as well." The atmosphere in Adelaide was electric, with fans filling hotels and stands days before the contest. Asked how he managed emotions in such moments, Dhoni offered a glimpse into his famously restrained demeanour: "I don't control my emotions. They are there. Just that I don't like to be over-expressive."

Pakistan, under Misbah-ul-Haq, conceded that key

moments had slipped away. "They played really well. They posted a big total, and bowled really well. We lost our way with three wickets in the middle," Misbah reflected. "With the quality of their batting, 300 was a pretty good effort... Now we have to just look forward." India won that match by 76 runs, extending their unbeaten World Cup record against Pakistan to 6-0, a statistic that would continue to loom over future encounters. As the teams gather in Colombo for a T20 World Cup fixture on the same date, the tempo will be quicker and margins thinner. Yet the essence remains unchanged: expectation, pressure, and the weight of history. February 15 has already delivered one defining India-Pakistan chapter. Whether Colombo adds another will unfold over 40 overs – but the echoes of Adelaide may not be far away.

Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, Shantha Rangaswamy to have stands named after them at M Chinnaswamy Stadium

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) has renamed two stands of the M Chinnaswamy Stadium after India greats Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble and Shantha Rangaswamy. The trio, who have all captained India, played their home matches in domestic cricket for Karnataka over the course of their illustrious careers and were present on the occasion.

"I know this would mean a lot to my family," said Dravid at the ceremony. "My father loved the game and he was instrumental in creating the love for the sport that I have. He brought me here, to so many games. Not just the Test matches but for Ranji Trophy games as well."

Dravid said that the fact that he is sharing this occasion with Kumble and Rangaswamy is special. "To be honoured along side Shantha Rangaswamy today, someone who has made a huge contribution to women's cricket. I think the way we see how women's sport in all fields has progressed today, I think a huge credit should go to pioneers like Shantha Rangaswamy for what they did when it was very difficult to play sport and play cricket in this country."

Kumble is India's highest wicket-taker in both Tests and ODIs while Dravid remains second highest Test run-getter after Sachin Tendulkar. Rangaswamy was the Indian women's team's first captain, leading the Test team from 1976 to 1984.

Usman Tariq will be our trump card, says Pakistan captain Salman Agha ahead of India match in T20 World Cup



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Although questions rage over Pakistan spinner Usman Tariq's bowling action, captain Salman Ali Agha has said the 30-year-old will be their trump card going into their match against India. Throwing his support behind Usman, whose action has been under debate, in particularly in India, Agha said he is unfazed about all the talk. "Every player is important to us. Usman of course has been bowling well for a while in T20 leagues and he will be our trump card. All these talks around his action doesn't make any difference when it comes to how we see him. The guy has been cleared twice. I don't know why people keep questioning. Also knowing him (Usman), he doesn't care," Agha said on the eve of the match against India.

At the Premadasa, where the slow and big outfield has

been challenging for batsmen to score, this match is expected to be one dominated by the spinners but Agha felt even the pacers can't be left behind. "It could be a game where spinners dominate. But fast bowlers will have a big role to play as well. We have to be judicious in how we use them," Agha said. The lead up to India vs Pakistan fixture had seen a cloud of uncertainty hang around the match. Until Monday, there was no confirmation that this match would go ahead and Agha said the team was prepared for all sorts of eventualities. "The magnitude of this game is always big. It is the same tomorrow as well. We were prepared for all sorts of possibilities."

And I can tell, we are fully prepared for the game tomorrow," Agha said. The Pakistan captain also wished India's opener Abhishek Sharma, who missed their previous match against Namibia in New Delhi because of stomach illness recovers and plays on Sunday. "Really hope Abhishek plays because we want to play the best team. Hope he recovers and plays tomorrow," Agha said. Unlike India, which arrived in Colombo only late on Friday evening, Pakistan have been here for nearly two weeks now. Although this would be their first fixture at the Premadasa, they are a team that has been clearly acclimatised to the conditions. But Agha said it won't give them any added advantage. "Of course, we have been based in Colombo, but we have not played here. Just because we are here it doesn't mean we will go on to win. You got to play good cricket in the middle and we have a strong 15-member squad which can do that," Agha said.

Harmanpreet Kaur pushes for more Tests as confident India face Sophie Molineux's Australia

GNS News Agency, Feb 16

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur has reiterated her desire to see more Test cricket in the women's game, saying the longer format offers a unique challenge that players are eager to embrace. "It's good to see that everybody is in good touch, because we all know before the (upcoming) T20 World Cup, every series is very important for us. Multi-format series are always very exciting."

"We're really looking forward for that because playing T20 and ODI is always great, but Tests are something we always want to play, and a pink-ball Test match is always going to be very exciting. It gives you a different kind of challenge, and as cricketers we want that opportunity more often," Harmanpreet said ahead of India's multi-format tour of Australia, which includes a one-off Test.

Her comments come at a time when India's women's team are riding unprecedented momentum. They whitewashed Sri Lanka 5-0 in a T20I series at home at the end of 2025, which was preceded by the historic ODI World Cup triumph – a campaign that included a landmark semi-final win over Australia – and arrive in Sydney with belief at an all-time high. That victory over the tournament favourites was widely viewed as a psychological breakthrough for India, a team that had often found Australia an insurmountable hurdle on the biggest stages. Now, with the World Cup secured and confidence flowing, Harmanpreet insists the team are focused on sustaining success rather than resting on achievement. "We are really working hard to achieve all our targets," she said. "Winning the World Cup was one of them, so we are on the right track. Whenever you go with a great mindset and a positive approach, you can always bring your best." Australia, however, remains the benchmark in



women's cricket despite the semi-final exit at the World Cup. Under Sophie Molineux's leadership in the T20 format, the hosts are intent on regaining control at home.

"It's a massive tour," Molineux said ahead of the series opener at the SCG. "India is coming out here with a lot of confidence, and we know they're going to throw challenges at us throughout the series." Molineux acknowledged that the semi-final defeat to India at the 2025 ODI World Cup had been difficult to digest but said the group had reflected and moved forward with clarity. "There's definitely some learnings to have been had from those (losses) ... but we're in a really lucky and fortunate (place), we've got generational talent at both ends of their careers in Phoebe Lichfield and Annabel Sutherland, then Ellyse Perry and Megan Schutt as well at the other end and everything in between. It's about bringing that all together and fine-tuning the way we want to play," she said. For Australia, the series is about reasserting its long-standing dominance. For India, it is about proving that their World Cup success was not a one-off but the beginning of a sustained era.

'Make us work more, but at least increase prize money': Stefanos Tsitsipas slams ATP over extended Masters 1000s schedule



GNS News Agency, Feb 16

Greek tennis player Stefanos Tsitsipas has criticised the ATP over the extended format of the Masters 1000s, saying that while he was okay with the association's decision to make the players play more, it had to come with an increase in prize money. "The most frustrating part about this is, okay, you're making us work more, which is fine. Make us work more, but at least increase prize money. I got promised back in the day when I had an interview with the chairman of the ATP. He shared with me the 'one vision' thing, and it all seemed alright when he was presenting it and sharing it with me."

"But there hasn't been a significant change with prize money and compensation for players for getting to play more," Tsitsipas said on the 'What's the Call' podcast. "I understand the reason they're doing it is for streaming, selling more tickets, and obviously, there are so many reasons why this is happening. But it also creates much more fatigue and injury for players, and I don't think it's accidental that 2025 was the year with the most retirements on the ATP Tour." "I'm not saying those Masters 1000s should go down to seven days, but at least they've got to find a sweet balance where we can still go over the normal amount but go within reason. Because the way they did it, they really extended it way too far ahead," he added.

Tsitsipas also recalled his first drinking experience with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal during the Laver Cup, admitting that it was the first time he was having alcohol and he did not know what drink to order. The 27-year-old said that he was persuaded by the 20-time Grand Slam champion to order a drink, and it was only then that he went forward and ordered something for himself. "I got drunk for the first time with Rafa and Roger [at the Laver Cup]. That was the very first time I ever drank alcohol in my life. I had no

idea what to order. I had never tried anything in my life. Roger is like, 'Come on, you've got to have a drink,' and I am like, 'Ok, if Roger says I have got to have a drink, I have got to have a drink,'" Tsitsipas said. Providing further insight into the two tennis greats, Tsitsipas noted that Nadal was as introverted as a person, while Federer had a childlike demeanour about him. "Rafa is a bit of an introvert; he is not going to talk like Roger does. Roger is a very confident guy. He will come to you, talk to you, ask you silly questions. He is a kid, Roger is a kid, in a good way. I like Roger being this way," he added.

USA beat Netherlands for first-ever T20I win in World Cup

Chennai: Saiteja Mukkamalla's attractive 79 and a four-wicket haul by former India U-19 star Harmeet Singh powered the United States to a comfortable 93-run victory over the Netherlands in a group league fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Friday. This was USA's first-ever T20I victory over the Netherlands. Mukkamalla's 51-ball knock formed the cornerstone of USA's competitive total of 196 for 6, while all-rounder Shubham Ranjane once again proved his prowess with an invaluable 24-ball 48 not out. Left-arm spinner Harmeet Singh (4/21) did not bowl too many wicket-taking deliveries, yet Netherlands batters were left in a tangle as they were bowled out for 103 in 15.5 overs. Harmeet's figures were the best by a USA bowler in a T20 World Cup match.

Two of his wickets — opener Max O'Dowd (13) and all-rounder Bas de Leede (23) — came off half-trackers, while the other two were well-directed deliveries that dismissed Scott Edwards and Roelof van der Merwe.

Another left-arm spinner, Nosthush Kenjige, got one that kept low, forcing opener Michael Levitt to play all over it. The Netherlands were never really in the chase on a track that slowed down with time. Earlier, Mukkamalla provided the impetus with a 51-ball 79 before Ranjane's late surge ensured a competitive 196 for 6. Mukkamalla added 55 for the second wicket with skipper Monank Patel (36) and another 54 for the fourth wicket with Ranjane. Mukkamalla, a former student of the cricket academy run by VVS Laxman in Hyderabad, hit five fours and four sixes, with his off-side hitting standing out. Ranjane punished the short-ball tactic of the Netherlands bowlers, scoring freely.

Decades before cancel culture, Madhubala survived an orchestrated smear campaign with a loaded gun and armed guards



In the last few years, the Indian film going audience has become increasingly privy to the mechanics of the PR-run activities that are often used to put a star on a pedestal, and sometimes such shenanigans are blatantly obvious when the target is to malign a star’s image. Amitabh Bachchan, Deepika Padukone, Varun Dhawan, Ranveer Singh, Shah Rukh Khan, and many others have been on the receiving end of such campaigns, and while the audience might think that this is a new form of marketing, these kinds of campaigns, in one form or another, have been a part of the film industry since the 1940s. And one of the first stars who suffered because of this was Madhubala.

Celebrated as one of the most beautiful female actors of her time, Madhubala started working in the movies as a child actor. At 14, she starred in her first film, Neel Kamal, as a leading heroine, opposite a 24-year-old Raj Kapoor. She went on to star in 66 films as a leading lady and mesmerised the viewers with her performance in films like Mughal-E-Azam, Mahal, Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi, Mr and Mrs 55, among many others. But in her case, the conversation about her beauty always took precedence over her craft. When they ran out of synonyms to describe her beauty, her personal life became fodder for the tabloids.

Director Kidar Sharma, who cast her in Neel Kamal was thoroughly impressed by her “intelligence and diligence” and even said that as far as her acting was concerned, she was “far superior” than Raj Kapoor, who later came to be known as the ‘Showman of Indian cinema’. “She worked like a machine, missed a meal, travelled daily in the overcrowded third-class compartments from Malad to Dadar and was never late or absent from work,” Kidar told Khatija Akbar for the book ‘I Want to Live: The Story of Madhubala’. Madhubala was deeply aware that she had to care for her family, and with her tyrant father, Attaullah Khan, she knew that there was no room to relax. In the next couple of years, Madhubala starred in almost a dozen films but her big break was Kamal Amrohi’s 1949 film Mahal, which also starred Ashok Kumar. But he, too, was deeply aware that it was Madhubala who carried the film on her young shoulders. She was just 16 then. Madhubala had announced her arrival in the movies. She was a bankable star who had the ability to draw in the audience just by her presence. Yet, when she had a few flops, she was downgraded to being called ‘box office poison.’

Madhubala had to ban press from sets after orchestrated attacks began. This first happened when she appeared in a film titled on her own name. Madhubala (the film), released in 1950, was produced by Ranjit Studios’ Chandulal Shah. She agreed to star in this film out of a sense of debt that she owed to Shah as he had once financially helped her ailing mother when she was in dire need of medical assistance. She agreed to do the film without taking a penny since Shah needed her help, and now, she was in a posi-

tion to do so. “It meant turning down a couple of starring roles, even returning the advance paid to me by one of them. It was my turn to stretch out a helping hand and I did so with my work in a film to which I even gave my name – Madhubala,” she said, as per Akbar. The film turned out to be a massive flop, and for some unexplained reason, this became the trigger point of a phase that eventually led to Madhubala carrying a revolver on her, for self defence.

Soon after this film’s release, which was Madhubala’s first massive flop since Mahal, the tabloid film press of the time, got wind of the fact that she had refused to shoot for a particular sequence of PL Santoshi’s film Nirala. Madhubala was very strict about the water and food she consumed and always carried everything from her home. So when during the shoot, she was asked to step inside a pool for a scene, she refused to do so for hygiene reasons. As soon as this factoid got out, an orchestrated attack on the actor commenced.

The tabloids which were, until then, singing praises of her beauty and her unmatched talent, suddenly started asking unsavoury questions about her background and her family. With each passing day, the insinuations became more bitter and ultimately, Madhubala decided to respond. Upon her father’s recommendation, she banned the press from her film shoots and declared that if any member of the press visited the studio while she was shooting, she would walk out. Her producers supported her, but the tabloids did not take it kindly. Even after all these years, it is hard to pinpoint who laid the groundwork for this, but it would be safe to say that someone had been rubbed the wrong way, and they had a vendetta against her.

Stories about her father begging on the streets, her introduction to Bombay Talkies’ Devika Rani were being spun in a fashion to imply that Madhubala was concealing a huge part of her life, and while no one had any evidence, the seed of speculation was sown repeatedly. The vicious commentary did not stop and it eventually started to take a toll on Madhubala’s health. She was living with a heart condition, and such mental pressure forced her to take measures that were unheard of in those days. It was at this point that Madhubala, who genuinely felt scared for her life, was issued a licensed revolver by the state government that she was supposed to carry on her at all times. In the book Madhubala: Her Life, Her Films, Khatija Akbar shared that Morarji Desai, who later went on to become the Prime Minister of India, and was then serving as the Home Minister of the state, provided armed security to the actor. Actors walking with a huge group of bouncers might be a norm now, but it was an unusual sight in those days. For three months, Madhubala was escorted by armed guards, while she endured regular attacks on her character in the tabloids.

This went on for the next year and it was at that point that film journalist BK Karanjia stepped in to resolve the matter. He was one of the few film reporters of the era who still had friendly relations with Madhubala and her family and so, he asked them to arrange a meeting with a few prominent journalists of that era. Madhubala and her father Attaullah welcomed journalists into their home and it was at this meeting that everything was resolved. In the years after this, Madhubala continued to be a favourite of the media but no one made unnecessary, unsavoury remarks about her anymore. Through the next decade, she had a very public relationship, and break-up with Dilip Kumar. She even went through a legal case when BR Chopra decided to sue her for backing out of Naya Daur. It was understood that since she was one of the biggest stars of the country, her name was bound to end up in the papers, but the kind of character assassination that she was being subject to in 1950, stopped after she waved a white flag.



comfortable pace with lighthearted moments. The second half suddenly gets serious with family drama and relationship complications. It’s not that these scenes are bad, they’re just tonally different from what came before, and some viewers expecting consistent romantic vibes throughout might feel caught off guard. The director uses different aspect ratios to show different timelines, which is a creative choice but can be confusing at first. The editing mostly works, though a smoother emotional transition between the two halves would have helped.

If you’re looking for a film that takes young relationships seriously without being preachy about it, Couple Friendly delivers. It acknowledges that modern relationships are complicated, there are practical concerns, family pressures, individual dreams that don’t always align perfectly. The film doesn’t claim to have all the answers. It just presents two people trying to figure things out together, making mistakes, dealing with consequences, and attempting to be honest with each other and their families. That’s more realistic than most romantic dramas give us. Couple Friendly isn’t perfect. The second half could have been smoother, and the tonal shift might not work for everyone. But it has heart, strong performances (especially from Manasa Varanasi), and enough genuine moments to overcome its flaws. Santosh Sobhan has been waiting for a solid hit, and while this might not be the massive breakthrough he needs, it’s certainly a step in the right direction.

Priyanka Chopra calls Nick Jonas her ‘social media manager’, he recalls her last-minute wedding outfit changes



Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas remain one of the entertainment industry’s most admired couples, often setting relationship goals. Whether they are hyping each other up on the world stage or sharing playful reels, the duo never fails to charm their global fanbase. In her latest behind-the-scenes vlog, “What you didn’t see... @GoldenGlobes,” Priyanka revealed that her husband has officially added a new title to his resume – Priyanka’s ‘social media manager.’ The vlog provides an unfiltered and chaotic look at the madness behind Priyanka’s 2026 Golden Globes appearance. While Priyanka’s custom gown and diamonds drew attention, it was the couple’s candid equation that truly stole the show.

Eventful journeyThe journey started with a dose of travel anxiety. Priyanka revealed she and Nick had been traveling all day, including a three-hour delay on the tarmac in Miami. “We had to fill the tires back up, which is a bizarre thing to hear before you fly,” Nick said. Nick reminds Priyanka of their wedding

Despite being exhausted and “ready to go to bed,” the grind didn’t stop. The actress had to jump straight into a late-night fitting for her custom Dior gown. While Priyanka was feeling the pressure of not seeing the dress till a night before the event, Nick reminded her how these last minute adjustments are “par for the course” for her. Recalling their 2018 wedding, Nick reminded said, “I recall you changing three or four looks for our wedding... like the night of, or the night before!”

The Dior masterpiece & paper jewelsPriyanka described her custom Dior ensemble as having an “effortless but rich” vibe. The design featured a multi-layered skirt. In a surprising revelation of her “type A” preparation, Priyanka showed off paper-sized cutouts of her jewelry. “I print out paper versions of everything so I can see what it actually

looks like with the dress without needing the jewels,” she explained. Getting ready at the Peninsula Hotel brought back a flood of memories for the star, including a hilarious story from her early days in LA. Priyanka recalled one of her first dates with Nick where she left her territorial Chihuahua in the room. “The hotel called us... she had s***t everywhere. Like little small vengeful s***s. 25 little s***s,” she laughed, describing the dog’s protest at being left behind.

As the couple prepares to leave their hotel suite, Nick is seen not only directing the photography team to ensure they “clock” the perfect shots of his wife, but he also takes charge of the technicalities of her content creation. Pointing to her husband as he diligently captures her angles and coordinates the crew, Priyanka quips with a grin: “My social media manager!”. “I love doing these kind of events with Nick,” she admitted earlier in the vlog. “Doing it alone is a little overwhelming sometimes... I’m really looking forward to date night with my husband” Our grandmothers taught us well!

Priyanka and her “manager” Nick eventually made it to the red carpet. As Priyanka and Nick headed out for the ceremony, she turned to the camera while wiping her eyes. “My eye will not stop watering. But I think it’s going to be good,” she said. In a light-hearted moment, she pulled out a tissue from her outfit and laughed, “I’ve my trusted tissue. Humari daadiyon ne accha sikhaya hai (Our grandmother taught us well).” The night ended with Priyanka presenting alongside Lisa Koshy, delivering a football-themed joke that she revealed Nick actually helped write. “It was an exciting idea... you wrote it, I contributed,” Nick said as they headed to the after-parties. In a recent conversation with Variety, Priyanka opened up about the scrutiny surrounding their relationship. She said, “I don’t know what was it about us that rubbed people the wrong way. I think there was the intercultural nature of it – different countries, different religions, age gap.” Calling the constant attention hurtful, she added, “It was very hurtful. And we both, instead of looking out, just sort of looked at each other, and we were like, ‘It doesn’t matter.’ So it’s like water off a duck’s back now.”

When Nick saw Priyanka on a billboard Nick, too, recently spoke about how he was first introduced to Priyanka after spotting her on a billboard for his Hollywood show Quantico. Speaking to Jay Shetty on her podcast, he said, “I was first introduced to Priyanka by seeing her billboard of her show Quantico. I was like wow, she is stunning. That’s what I thought.” He also admitted that he knew he wanted to marry her from their very first date. “That night when I saw her walk in, she was wearing blue jeans and white top, black leather jacket, and I was just like I’m going to marry this woman. I knew it right away,” he said.

Don 3 row: No formal complaint placed before Producers Guild in Ranveer Singh and Farhan Akhtar’s dispute, might escalate to CINTAA

With tensions escalating between Farhan Akhtar and Ranveer Singh over the Don 3 debacle, the dispute is now set to be addressed informally by the Producers Guild of India at the end of February. The conflict began after Ranveer exited the project just months before filming was scheduled to begin, prompting Farhan to demand compensation reportedly as high as Rs 40 crores for the losses incurred. Now a new report by Mid-Day India quoted a senior Guild member: “No formal complaint has been placed before the general body. But both sides will be heard informally.” Another insider added that following the month-end informal meetings, both parties would be given a 10-day window to attempt a mutual resolution. “If talks fail, the body is likely to escalate the issue to the Cine & TV Artistes Association (CINTAA). CINTAA’s involvement would ensure that both producer and artiste’s interests are balanced,” the insider said.

The report further noted that, beyond resolving the immediate dispute, the case: where Excel Entertainment is seeking compensation for pre-production losses, scheduling disruptions, and inflated entourage expenses, could serve as a benchmark for future policy reforms aimed at curbing escalating production costs. A Guild insider commented: “Producers today are bearing disproportionate financial pressure due to expanding entourages. Seeing that stars’ entourages remain bloated, as evident from this case, it’s best to put guidelines in place.”

What has happened so farAfter facing many delays, Ranveer reportedly exited Don 3. Farhan sought compensation from Ranveer for sunk development costs and delays tied to scheduling and planning. According to reports, a letter from the production cited the need to release several departments, asking heads of departments (HODs) to seek work elsewhere. Farhan’s team believes Ranveer



should bear the resulting financial losses. The Producers Guild of India then stepped in to mediate and prevent further escalation. Ranveer’s side was also presented during a Guild-supervised meeting. He reportedly blamed Excel Entertainment for unprofessionalism and described Farhan as an “absentee director,” asserting that the filmmaker had other commitments and was not focused on taking Don 3 to the floors. Ranveer also claimed that the production house had explored approaching Hrithik Roshan for the role, but only returned to him after the success of Dhurandhar to capitalize on the actor’s momentum.

However, on Friday, Hrithik dismissed these claims, telling the media: “What started off as just a rumour has now taken an entire life of its own, and it’s important to set the record straight. I would like to categorically clarify that I was never approached for Don 3, at any given time. Requesting media to steer clear of any such unverified reports.”

Jason Momoa calls Shah Rukh Khan ‘a better actor and performer’, recalls his meeting with the actor

Jason Momoa has spoken warmly about Shah Rukh Khan describing the Bollywood superstar as “a better actor and better performer” than himself. The Aquaman star, who is currently promoting his upcoming film The Wrecking Crew alongside Dave Bautista, spoke about his interactions with Shah Rukh during a recent interview.

Jason Momoa praises Shah Rukh In a conversation with Pinkvilla, when asked about the King Khan, Momoa said, “Yes, he’s very handsome. He’s extremely handsome.” Opening up about their conversation, he added, “Just two mutual friends and fans of each other’s work. He is just a sweetheart. He was very much a gentleman. He’s a better actor and better performer than I am. So it was mutual respect.”

When Momoa and Shah Rukh Khan met Momoa and Shah Rukh first met at Saudi Arabia’s Joy Awards in 2019. A photograph of them alongside Jackie Chan and Jean-Claude Van Damme went viral. At the 2019 event, Shah Rukh appeared on stage as part of The Joy Makers of Films panel alongside Jackie Chan, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Jason Momoa, where they discussed the entertainment industry. He was also honoured with a tribute featur-



ing glimpses of his iconic performances and received an award recognising his contribution to the world of entertainment.

Momoa began his acting career in 1999 with Baywatch: Hawaii before appearing in Stargate Atlantis.