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No compromise on data privacy

The Supreme Court’s stern warning to social media giants against commercial exploitation of personal data of users is timely and appropriate. Privacy is an inviolable right of the citizens and needs to be protected at all costs. Several questions are being raised over the way these technology platforms have been handling the user data and integrating it across multiple apps. Instant messaging platform WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta, have particularly come under scanner for their practices with regard to the privacy policy. The apex court has rightly questioned the moral uprightness of the “take it or leave it” privacy policy of WhatsApp and categorically stated that it would not allow the messaging platform and its parent company to breach the right to privacy of millions of their “silent consumers” in India through sharing and commercial exploitation of personal data. The so-called updated privacy policy had imposed discriminatory conditions to strengthen its position in the market. On its part, the company has clarified that the new privacy policy was needed to make business accounts function better. Facebook-owned WhatsApp’s updated privacy policy guidelines will not be applicable in the European Region, thanks to the data protection law in place there. The company is legally bound not to share user data with Facebook in the European Region because it would be a contravention of the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The SC questioned the validity of consent, stating users were effectively forced to accept the privacy policy on a “take it or leave it” basis. The apex court’s candid talk came while hearing petitions filed by Meta and WhatsApp against a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) decision last year to uphold a Rs 213.14-crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India. The anti-competition regulator had found WhatsApp’s ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ approach in its 2021 privacy policy an abuse of its market dominance. It found the prior consent sought from users to share their data with Meta “manufactured”. The CCI had concluded that users were forced to share data for continued access to WhatsApp messaging services.

Imposing Eligibility Test on In-Service Teachers Is Unjust: Call for Delhi March

““““Bhukya RanjithNaik,Bhadradri kothagudem Bureau,February 4,Indian Chronicle:Demanding the withdrawal of the eligibility test for in-service teachers, a poster announcing the Delhi March scheduled on February 5, 2026 was unveiled at S.N.A.M. Zilla Parishad High School, Narsapur.”““The poster was released by PRTU State Associate President Karampudi Dasham Babu.”““Speaking on the occasion, the leaders stated that imposing an eligibility test on teachers who are already in service is un-



just and amounts to an insult to the teaching profession. They demanded that the government immediately withdraw the decision.”““The programme was attended by Dummugudem Mandal General Secretary B. Mallikarjuna Rao, N. Madhusudan Rao, G.V.V. Swamy, Ranji, Venkata Rao, Sai Kumari, In-charge Headmaster Krishna, Anil Kumar, Borraiah, Chukka Srinivasa Rao, P. Vijayababu, Ramesh Chandra Tirupati Rao, Chilakamarri Srinivasa Rao, Bakkalaiah, and others.”““The speakers asserted that teachers across the country are ready to unite and intensify their struggle until their legitimate demand is fulfilled.

Uppal Excise CI Omkar Felicitates Newly Formed Uppal Print & Electronic Media Committee

“““KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 4 (Indian Chronicle):“““Members of the newly formed Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club executive committee paid a courtesy visit to Uppal Excise Circle Inspector (CI) Omkar on Wednesday.On this occasion, CI Omkar congratulated the newly elected committee members and felicitated them. Speaking at the meeting, he said that the media plays a responsible and crucial role in informing



the public with factual and unbiased information.He expressed his hope that the members of the Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club’s new committee would work impartially to bring public issues to light. He emphasized that the media must play a key role in creating legal awareness and upholding social responsibility.CI Omkar further stated that the cooperation of the media is always essential in maintaining peace, law and order, and public welfare in the Uppal area. He assured that the Uppal Excise Police Station would extend full support and cooperation to the club and its committee at all times.The program was organized under the leadership of the President of the Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club and senior journalist, Vaddepalli Kishore.

BRS councillor candidate Padmavathi



250 TRS workers and leaders join Congress party



Yellandu, February 4 (Indian Chronicle)“In the second ward of the municipality, BRS council candidate Katakam Padmavathi conducted a door-to-door campaign. On Wednesday, along with the council candidate, leaders, activists and people went around and distributed pamphlets explaining the schemes introduced by former Ex Chief Minister KCR during the BRS regime.

He said that the upliftment of the poor people is linked to the BRS and urged the people to vote for the development that has taken place under which government.

He asked them to cast their valuable vote on the symbol of the car and win with a huge majority as a ward councillor.



Winning MLA campaign

““Yellandu, February 3 (Indian Chronicle):“Congress MLA Koram Kanakaiah said that CM Revanth Reddy is implementing many welfare schemes. As part of the municipal elections, the Congress is continuing its door-to-door campaign with the aim of winning the wards under the municipality on Wednesday. He appealed to the people to vote for the Congress candidates.”[2:49 PM, 2/4/2026] +91 91338 86639: End

Congress candidates campaigning

““Yellandu, February 4(Indian chronicle)“Congress leaders are campaigning for their party candidates. On



Wednesday, as per the directions of the MLA, the Congress councillor candidates and leaders conducted a door-to-door campaign. He appealed to the people to vote for the Congress government. Congress workers sought votes by explaining the welfare schemes of the Congress government that the poor people will get schemes only under the Congress government.

Rare Honour for a Bhadrachalam Native in Apex Court Judgments

Bhadrachalam Bar Association President Kota Devadanam Expresses Happiness

““““Bhukya RanjithNaik,Bhadradri kothagudem Bureau,February 4,Indian Chronicle:“The legal research carried out by Nageswara Rao, who is presently serving as a Senior Civil Judge at Metpally, has received recognition from the country’s apex judicial institutions, which is a rare honour for a native of Bhadrachalam, said Bhadrachalam Bar Association President Kota Devadanam.”““He stated that the recent judgments delivered by the Supreme Court of India and the Allahabad High Court, wherein the legal research of Nageswara Rao was cited as a reference, have brought pride to the



Bhadrachalam region.”““Kota Devadanam noted that the recognition given by the highest courts to the in-depth legal study conducted by Nageswara Rao on the statutory procedures to be followed during further police investigation is a significant development in the judicial system. He added that this clearly highlights the importance of legal research in strengthening the justice delivery mechanism.”““Speaking on the occasion, he recalled that during his tenure as a First Class Magistrate at Manthani, Nageswara Rao had undertaken extensive legal research on procedural safeguards and legal guidelines to be followed during police investigations. The citation of these research findings in the judgments of the Supreme Court and the Allahabad High Court, he said, is a matter of pride for the judiciary and serves as an inspiration to young judicial officers.”““He further stated that the national-level recognition received for the legal research of a Bhadrachalam native has enhanced the prestige of the district. Members of the Bhadrachalam legal fraternity expressed hope that Nageswara Rao would continue to contribute to the judicial system through further legal research in the future

Rs 38 lakh sanctioned for development of Reddy –Munnuru Kapu cremation ground



““— UPPAL CORPORATER RAJITHA PARAMESHWAR REDDY“““Kishore Vaddepalli, Uppal, February 4 (Indian Chronicle):“““Uppal Division Corporator Mandumula Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy stated that continuous efforts are being made for the development of cremation grounds within the Uppal Division. She said that priority is being given to providing all necessary basic amenities in every cremation ground.“She informed that development works worth ?1.50 crore have already been completed at the Reddy–Munnuru Kapu cremation ground in Uppal. Recently, an additional ?38 lakh has been sanctioned for the construction of an office room and other developmental works.“On this occasion, Cor-

porator Rajitha Parameshwar Reddy, along with Uppal Assembly Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy, handed over the fund sanction documents to the representatives of the Reddy–Munnuru Kapu Cremation Ground Committee.The programme was attended by Committee President Mekala Hanumanth Reddy, Gone Prabhakar Reddy, Giri Ramakrishna, Ainalla Venkatesh, D.R. Raju, Mekala Dayasagar Reddy, Poreddy Srinivas Reddy, Mandumula Anji Reddy, Gone Prem Sagar Reddy, Sala Prabhakar Reddy, Mekala Sharath Reddy, Mekala Samaved Reddy, Gone Krishna Reddy, Siddhu, Rokati Nursing, Ram and Lakshman, among others.

Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Lays Foundation Stone for New Sewerage Line in Kalyanapuri, Chilkanagar Division



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 4 (Indian Chronicle):“A foundation stone ceremony for the construction of a new sewerage pipeline was held on Wednesday at Kalyanapuri Colony in Chilkanagar Division. The works were inaugurated by Chilkanagar Division Corporator and former GHMC Standing Committee Member, Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj. Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Geetha Praveen stated that the residents of Kalyanapuri Colony had been facing severe difficulties for a long time due to the old and damaged sewerage pipeline. Responding promptly to the request made by the Colony Association members, arrangements

were made for the construction of a new sewerage line to resolve the long-standing problem.“She further assured the residents that a new CC road will also be laid immediately after the completion of the sewerage works, ensuring better infrastructure and improved living conditions in the colony. She reiterated her commitment to fulfilling the promises made to the people.“The program was attended by BRS State Leader Bannala Praveen Mudiraj, former councillor Palle Raj Kumar Goud, senior leaders Eddula Kondal Reddy, Kokonda Jagan, Muddham Srinivas Yadav, Balakrishna Shyam, Balu, and local residents Ramulu, Naresh Goud, Lakshmi Rajyam Goud, Hameed, along with several others.

Development and Welfare Are the Main Objectives

Uppal Corporator Rajita Parameshwar Reddy -Rs 2 Crore Development Works in New Bharat Nagar and South Swaroop Nagar



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 4 (Indian Chronicle):“Uppal Corporator Mandumula Rajita Parameshwar Reddy stated that Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy is working with development and welfare as his primary objectives. She said that continuous efforts are being made to ensure the overall development of all colonies in the Uppal Division. She added that Uppal Division is being developed as a model division within the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). As part of the development initiatives, approval documents for various works were distributed to residents along with Uppal Constituency Congress Party In-charge Mandumula Parameshwar Reddy. These include: Construction of CC roads in New Bharat Nagar at a cost of ₹80 lakh Construction of box drains in New Bharat Nagar at a cost of ₹68 lakh Reconstruction of



damaged CC roads in South Swaroop Nagar at a cost of ₹43 lakh Overall, development works worth ₹2 crore have been sanctioned for New Bharat Nagar and South Swaroop Nagar.“The programme was attended by New Bharat Nagar Colony President Jajula Nagesh, Kappari Ellesham Kumar, Salla Prabhakar Reddy, Poosa Mallesh, Annappa Reddy Venkat Reddy, Gandham Sampath Goud, Panga Narasimha Reddy, Uppala Jagan Chalapathi Rao Mohan, Nari Yellaiah, Domakonda Narasimulu, Mishti Lal, Gond Prabhakar, Bala Chari Narasimha Chari, Kaila Krishna Reddy, Shravan Kumar, and South Swaroop Nagar residents Gajjala Venkat Reddy, Narsi Reddy, Pratap Reddy, Basireddy, Bhasha, Ramachander, Barla Krishna, Jagannath Patel, Subrahmanyam, Rajeshwari, Narayana Rao, Chapala Sheenu, Vinod, Jala Venkatesh, Naresh, along with residents of Yadagiri Colony.

674 Child Labourers Rescued Under Operation Smile-XII in Malkajgiri Commissionerate

“NARRA SRINIVAS REDDY (NSR), Medchal - Malkajgiri Staff Reporter, February 04, (INDIAN CHRONICLE):“The Malkajgiri Police Commissionerate conducted Operation Smile-XII, a special drive aimed at tracing missing children and identifying child labour and adolescents engaged in hazardous occupations across the Commissionerate limits. As part of the operation, seven divisional teams were formed, each consisting of one Sub-Inspector and four Police Constables, including one Woman Police Constable. These teams operated along with the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) and line departments. The operation was carried out from January 1 to January 31, 2026. During the drive, the teams conducted inspections in hazardous industries, companies, business establishments, and other workplaces. The rescued children were produced before the concerned Child Welfare Committees (CWC). In total, 674 children were rescued within the limits of the Malkajgiri Police Commissionerate during the operation. Police registered 186 FIRs and made 443 General Diary (GD) entries under the relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and the Juvenile Justice Act against managements and employers who engaged minor children in labour. In these cases, 189 accused were arrested. Investigations revealed that several employers engaged children for more than nine hours a day, paid



informal wages, and violated minimum wage norms. It was also found that some establishments brought child labourers from other states and exploited them, which is in violation of labour laws and considered inhuman. As part of rehabilitation efforts, the Begumpet Divisional Smile Team facilitated the admission of three rescued children into government schools with the assistance of the Education Department.

Among the rescued children, 376 were from Telangana, 102 from Andhra Pradesh, 189 from other states including Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand, and seven children were from Nepal. The operation was conducted under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Women Safety Wing, Malkajgiri, by the Inspector of Police, AHTU, along with

divisional Operation Smile-XII teams. The drive was supported by the Child Welfare Committee members, District Child Protection Unit, Labour Department, Association for Voluntary Action (AVA), and Childline representatives. Police stated that child labour is a punishable offence and urged the public to report any information related to child labour by dialing 100, 112, or 1098.

Suvidya School Students Excel at National-Level Olympiad



“P. S. ASHOKAN “KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. “Students of Suvidya School, Vidyanagar, Karimnagar, from Classes VI to IX, achieved outstanding success in the 33rd C. V. Raman National Young Genius Awards, a prestigious national-level Olympiad Talent Test conducted by SuchirIndia on 16 December 2025.“In this highly competitive examination, K. Rishika, a Grade IX student, secured District First Place, while B. Manswi, a Grade VII student, achieved District Second Place in their respective categories, bringing immense pride and distinction to the institution.“The award ceremony was held at Kalabharathi, Lakdi Ka Pool, Hyderabad, where winners from both Telugu states were felicitated. The awards were presented by renowned cine

actor Sri Srikanth.“Addressing the gathering, School Correspondent Sri Mattathil Babu reaffirmed the institution's unwavering commitment to identifying, nurturing, and empowering young talent. He remarked that such accolades serve as a strong source of motivation for students to pursue academic excellence and excel in competitive arenas. He further emphasized that Suvidya School offers IIT and NEET Foundation coaching free of cost for students from Classes VI to IX, as part of its comprehensive and student-centric academic support system.“The school management, faculty, and parents expressed profound joy over the students' remarkable achievement and extended their heartfelt congratulations, wishing them continued success in all future endeavors.

Strict Action Against Objectionable Social Media Posts During Municipal Elections: SP Nitika Pant,IPS



““Indian Chronicle” kumram bheem, Asifabad District Reporte,Jade Srinivas. February, 04.”“Asifabad:In view of the upcoming Municipal Elections in Asifabad and Kagaznagar towns, the District Police Department has intensified surveillance on social media platforms, said District Superintendent of Police Nitika Pant, IPS, in a press release issued on Wednesday.The SP stated that special monitoring has been arranged on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter,and Instagram to prevent misuse during the election period. She warned that strict legal action will be taken against individuals who post obscene content, derogatory comments, personal attacks, abusive language, or content that promotes hatred between communities or hurts public sentiments.”She further emphasized that spreading false news, rumors, or misleading information with the intention of influencing the election process is a punishable offense. If such activities disturb public peace and law & order, cases will be registered against the offenders as per law, and stringent action including arrests may be initiated.The District SP appealed to the public to remain vigilant and immediately inform the police if they come across fake news, objectionable posts, videos, or messages on social media. For this purpose, citizens can contact the Special Branch Inspector at 8712670505 or dial 551.Emphasizing the importance of peaceful and fair elections, SP Nitika Pant, IPS, urged everyone to act responsibly on social media and extend full cooperation to the police department to ensure a smooth and incident-free election process.

Invitation to Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy for Kalyana Mahotsavam at Maisamma Temple



under the leadership of Uppal Division BRS senior leaders Anya Balakrishna and Kavitha.On this occasion, Uppal MLA Bandari Lakshma Reddy was felicitated and formally invited by presenting him with the invitation card, requesting him to attend the Kalyana Mahotsavam as the chief guest. Responding positively, the MLA assured the organizers that he would definitely attend the Kalyana Mahotsavam at the Maisamma Temple.”Medipally Naveen Chary, Roshayya, Madhu, and others participated in the program.

““KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 4 (Indian Chronicle):““The Ashwasta Nimba Vruksha Kalyana Mahotsavam is scheduled to be held on Thursday, the 12th of this month, at the Maisamma Temple located in New Bharat Nagar Colony, Uppal. The event is being organized



Think Development, Choose Progress Hoist the Pink Flag in Manthani. Former MLA Putta Madhukar Appeals for Support to BRS Candidates



““P. S. ASHOKAN “KARIMNAGAR BUREAU. ““Former Manthani MLA Putta Madhukar called upon the people to seriously introspect on the state of Manthani’s development, stating that the town has fallen behind during the last two years of Congress governance.”“Participating in the municipal election campaign, he met morning walkers at the Manthani Sports Ground on Wednesday, interacted with them briefly, introduced the BRS candidates, and sought their support.”“He urged voters to ensure the victory of the BRS and the hoisting of the pink flag over the Manthani Mu-

nicipality in the forthcoming municipal elections. Warning the public against being misled, he said that wrong choices would ultimately result in disappointment.”“Mr. Madhukar advised citizens to objectively evaluate the developmental progress achieved during the BRS tenure and to make development the primary criterion while casting their vote.”“He appealed to the electorate to bless and elect the BRS candidates contesting in various wards, asserting that their success alone would open new avenues for development and ensure a stronger future for Manthani.

Chiluka Nagar Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj Felicitates Uppal Print & Electronic Media New Committee



““KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, February 4 (Indian Chronicle):““Members of the newly formed executive committee of the Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club paid a courtesy visit to Chiluka Nagar Division Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj. On this occasion, the corporator felicitated the new committee members and extended her heartfelt congratulations.Speaking during the event, Corporator Bannala Geetha Praveen Mudiraj emphasized the crucial role of the media in delivering accurate and truthful information to the public. She stated that the media bears a great responsibility to highlight public issues impartially and act as the voice of the people.She expressed her desire that the members

of the Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club’s new committee work with strong social responsibility and dedication toward public welfare. Highlighting the importance of media support in creating awareness about welfare schemes and developmental activities, she urged media representatives to cooperateconstructively for the overall development of the Uppal region.The corporator assured her full support to all constructive and socially beneficial initiatives undertaken by the Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club.The program was organized under the leadership of Vaddepalli Kishore, President of the Uppal Print & Electronic Media Club and Senior Journalist.

District Collector Inspects MGNREGS Works at Ganeshpur Emphasis on Quality

Transparency,and Timely Wages



Asifabad District Collector Haritha, along with IFS Officer Bhargav Kumar, inspected the ongoing works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) at Ganeshpur village, under Sonapur Gram Panchayat in Wankidi Mandal, on Wednesday.”During the visit, the Collector reviewed the progress and quality of the works and enquired about the attendance recording system being followed at the worksite. She directed the officials to ensure that wages are credited to the workers’ accounts on time without any delay.”The Collector instructed the officials to maintain complete transparency in the execution of works

and to ensure that there are no compromises in quality. She emphasized that government welfare schemes must be implemented efficiently and responsibly, safeguarding the rights and livelihoods of the laborers.”District Rural Development Officer (DRDO) Dattarao, MPDO Patil Jyothsna, Sonapur Gram Panchayat Sarpanch Pandram Suresh, MGNREGS APO Sravan Kumar, EC Mosin, TA Prabhakar, Panchayat Secretary Vidyasri, and other concerned officials and staff were present during the inspection.”If you want, I can also shorten this for press notes, add a strong headline, or convert it into a social media news post.

Leaders raise questions over Pawar aircraft crash, demand probe



GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Raut also questioned reports claiming that certain documents found near Ajit Pawar's seat remained intact despite a fire that allegedly destroyed most of the aircraft and the bodies. Raut also questioned reports claiming that certain documents found near Ajit Pawar's seat remained intact despite a fire that allegedly destroyed most of the aircraft and the bodies. Days after an aircraft crash at Baramati that claimed the life of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, opposition leaders on Monday raised a series of questions over the circumstances surrounding the incident and demanded an investigation.

Shiv Sena UBT MP Sanjay Raut said Pawar had publicly stated on January 15 that he was in possession of files allegedly related to corruption involving leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and that he would make them public. Raut described it as "mysterious" that Pawar died in a plane crash within about 10 to 13 days of making the statement. Raut also questioned reports claiming that certain documents found near Ajit Pawar's seat remained intact despite a fire that allegedly destroyed most of the aircraft and the bodies. He said the documents could have been significant and raised doubts over how they survived the crash.

Further, Raut questioned whether the aircraft had valid maintenance clearance and why, according to him, standard security and safety protocols were not followed

for a leader of Ajit Pawar's stature. Referring to questions earlier raised by NCP MLC Amol Mitkari, Raut said these reflected public doubts that needed to be addressed. I am certain that this was not an accident, and that Ajit Dada was 100% betrayed. For that reason, I will continue this fight as long as I am alive. Following Dada's passing, I have decided to dedicate my personal life to the loyalty of his family," Mitkari had said on Sunday.

Raut said he was not directly accusing anyone but drew parallels with the death of Justice B H Loya, stating that the circumstances surrounding the incident warranted closer scrutiny. He announced that he would raise the matter in Parliament, including in the Rajya Sabha, and press for accountability until all questions were answered. Meanwhile, Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar also expressed suspicion over what he termed Ajit Pawar's accidental death. Raising doubts about the incident, Wadettiwar said, "Something is fishy," while backing the concerns flagged by Mitkari. Wadettiwar specifically questioned the replacement of the aircraft's pilot at the last moment. "The question remains as to why the pilot was changed at the eleventh hour," he said. He further claimed, "The pilot whose name was originally listed is still alive because he either couldn't arrive on time or was replaced by another pilot named Kapoor."

Wadettiwar too demanded an investigation to uncover what he described as the mystery behind the incident. The Union Civil Aviation Ministry has initiated a formal investigation into the aircraft accident near Baramati and assured the Maharashtra government that the probe will be conducted in a thorough, transparent and time-bound manner. In a letter to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis dated January 29, Union Civil Aviation Minister Ramnathan Naidu Kinjarapu had informed that investigation into the incident had commenced. According to the letter, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) has begun a formal probe under the Aircraft Accident and Incident Rules. Teams from the AAIB and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) reached the crash site soon after the incident, and the aircraft's black box has been recovered and secured for detailed examination.

Police file chargesheet against Sheetal Tejwani

The economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Pune City Police, which is investigating alleged irregularities in the Mundhwa land deal, has filed a 1,886 page chargesheet against key accused Sheetal Tejwani, who held the power of attorney for 272 watandars of Maharwatan land in Mundhwa for its sale to Amadea Enterprises LLP, a firm in which late Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's son, Parth, is a partner.

A senior police officer with Pune City police said that the chargesheet against Tejwani was filed on January 27. The Pune land deal has been embroiled in a controversy as the land in Mundhwa, which fell under the category of Mahar Watan land and was leased to the Botanical Survey of India, was sold to Amadea Enterprises LLP without the mandatory approval of the state government. Probe against Digvijay Patil, Parth Pawar's partner in Amadea, and suspended tehsildar Suryakant Yewale, is currently on, an officer from Pune city police said. Tejwani (44), who is currently in judicial custody, was first arrested by the EOW on December 3 last year as part of the probe into the First Information Report (FIR) registered at Khadak police station on November 7. She was subsequently arrested by the Pimpri Chinchwad police in connection with the probe about stamp duty waiver in the case registered at Bavdhan police station.

The land parcel in Mundhwa, which was earlier a Mahar Watan — a hereditary land grant — was in possession of the government and was leased to the Botanical Survey of India. A separate FIR has been registered in connection with the Mundhwa land parcel at Bavdhan police station under the Pimpri Chinchwad police. Digvijay Patil, partner of Parth Pawar in the Amadea Enterprises LLP, has been named as an accused in both cases investigated by the Pune police and the Pimpri Chinchwad police. Following the complaint filed by the office of the Inspector General of Registration (IGR) in connection with allegations of graft and irregularities in a multi-crore land



deal involving Amadea Enterprises LLP, an FIR was filed at Bavdhan police station on November 6. The FIR under provisions of cheating and criminal breach of trust was filed against Patil, Tejwani and Ravindra Taru, the now-suspended sub-registrar who registered the deal. Pune City Police have earlier clarified that the FIR registered at Khadak police station, which was subsequently transferred to the EOW, pertains to alleged irregularities involving two separate land parcels in Bopodi and Mundhwa, linked by a common factor: suspended tehsildar Suryakant Yewale, who is accused of issuing wrongful orders in both cases.

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Siddaramaiah also listed out the stampedes that took place in the country in the recent past—including the stampedes at Prayagraj and Delhi earlier this year—in BJP-ruled states and asked whether the BJP had blamed the government for such accidents. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

The rationalisation of GST rates in the middle of the financial year caused unforeseen consequences for the state budget, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said Monday. He was commenting on the GST reforms introduced in September last year when GST slabs were reduced from four to two. "The GST rationalisation measure will cost the state Rs 12,000 crore to Rs 15,000 crore annually," he told the Legislative Assembly while responding to the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's address. The measure introduced in the middle of the year had repercussions on the estimates Karnataka made on GST revenue collection for the 2025-26 fiscal, as it caused losses in revenue. "This loss is a loss to the state, a loss to the people of the state," the CM said. The remarks were challenged by the Opposition benches, with BJP MLA Araga Jnanendra arguing that rationalisation only helped people. Siddaramaiah countered, asking whether the four slabs in existence previously were meant to harm the public. "What about the state budget (estimates) if rationalisation is announced in the middle of the year?" he asked, accusing the Union government of reducing GST slabs in view of the Bihar elections. Such aspects were highlighted in the Governor's speech, "which he did not read," the CM said. By not reading the speech prepared by the government during the joint session, the Governor has violated established Constitutional norms, he added. On the 16th Finance Commission, he stated that the Commission, too, failed to provide justice to Karnataka's aspirations. The state could have got some justice if the allocation under the 16th Commission was higher than the 4.7 per cent allotted under the 14th Finance Commission. "But the allocation under 16th FC is only 4.131 per cent (of the divisible pool of taxes)," he

At Budget Session, Governor Arif Khan lists Nitish govt's priorities—from doubling employment, to focus on health, education



GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Creating one crore jobs, women's empowerment, a focus on health and education, and better ease of living—these are the Bihar government's major agenda for 2026-27, outlined by Bihar Governor Arif Mohammed Khan Monday. Addressing a joint session of the Bihar Legislative Assembly and Council, Khan listed government priorities outlined in seven resolutions, covering areas from doubling employment opportunities and strengthening industrial growth to pushing agricultural initiatives. The speech came amid mild interruptions from the Opposition over the death of a medical aspirant found dead in her hostel room last month. The state has been receiving complete support from the central government for its development projects, Khan said. "Our state is continuously progressing. Development work is being carried forward at a rapid pace. More work will be done in the next five years, which will significantly advance Bihar, making it one of the most developed states in the country and making a significant contribution to the nation's

progress," he said. The police, he said, were taking action in cases of communal incidents in the state.

"Since 2006, the state government has initiated a plan to fence Muslim graveyards, including those in mixed-population areas and other sensitive areas. A large number of graveyards have been fenced. An atmosphere of peace and harmony now prevails in society," he said, adding that since 2016, Hindu temples older than 60 years had also been fenced to prevent thefts.

The government resolutions outline its policy on various aspects of governance for the next five years. The first, titled 'Double Employment and Double Income', covers the plan to generate employment. The second, 'Prosperous Industry Strong Bihar', lays special emphasis on establishing industries in the state over the next five years. The third focuses on agriculture. The fourth, 'Advanced Education-Bright Future', outlines plans to open model schools and degree colleges in every block of the state. The fifth, 'Easy Health, Safe Life', covers plans to open new healthcare facilities—from block-level community health centres to specialised district hospitals. The sixth resolution, 'Strong Foundation – Modern Expansion', focuses on planned urban development, from pushing infrastructure projects such as expressways to special attention on tourism. The seventh, 'Sabka Samman-Jeevan Aasan', is an action plan to "make the lives of all citizens simple, safe and convenient through modern technology and sensitive administration".

The session comes amid growing student protests over the death of the medical aspirant last month. The case has been handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation. The Opposition also held protests in the House at the start of the Assembly session. Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, who has hurt his legs, came to the Legislature in a wheelchair to attend the session.

Maj Gen Sanil Mohan takes charge as Commandant at Command Hospital (SC)

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Maj Gen Sanil Mohan takes charge as Commandant at Command Hospital (SC) Major General Sanil Mohan is a highly respected Professor of Anaesthesiology as well as an accomplished Instructor in Trauma Care. Major General Sanil Mohan assumed the appointment of Commandant, Command Hospital (Southern Command), Pune on February 1, marking the commencement of a new chapter in the leadership of one of the Indian Army's premier tertiary care institutions.

An alumnus of the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Pune, the General Officer completed his graduation and post-graduation from AFMC, and is a highly respected Professor of Anaesthesiology as well as an accomplished Instructor in Trauma Care. Before assuming his present appointment in the rank of Major General, he served as Brigadier Medical at the strategically significant Sudarshan Chakra Corps, where he played a pivotal role in strengthening medical preparedness and trauma response capabilities.

During his address to all ranks of Command Hospital (Southern Command), Pune, on assumption of command, Major General Sanil Mohan exhorted all ranks to remain steadfast in upholding the noblest traditions of military medicine, emphasising compassion, ethical con-



duct, professional excellence, and patient-centric care. He underscored the hospital's enduring commitment to delivering world-class medical services to serving personnel, veterans, and their families, while fostering a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and teamwork. With his distinguished service record, visionary outlook, and deep commitment to clinical excellence, Major General Sanil Mohan's leadership is expected to further enhance the operational readiness, academic stature, and humanitarian ethos of Command Hospital (Southern Command), Pune, an official statement issued on Monday said.

Maharashtra gets highest disaster grant under 16th Finance Commission

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Amid a sharp rise in climate-driven disasters across country, Maharashtra has emerged as the largest recipient of disaster-related grants under the Sixteenth Finance Commission, with an allocation of Rs 39,492 crore spread over the next five financial years. The scale of the grant reflects the state's high Disaster Risk Index or DRI, a composite measure used by the commission to estimate the potential loss and damage to people, livelihoods and property during calamities ranging from floods and droughts to heatwaves and lightning. The allocation accounts for nearly 19 per cent of the total disaster response corpus of Rs 2.04 lakh crore recommended for all states between 2026-27 and 2030-31. Of this overall corpus, Rs 1.55 lakh crore will be contributed by the Union government, with the remainder to be borne by states. What the Disaster Risk Index measures

The Disaster Risk Index is designed to capture how severely a state is likely to be affected when disasters strike. It is calculated as a function of three variables, the hazard posed by different types of disasters, the exposure of populations to these hazards, and the vulnerability of people and assets, assessed largely through per capita income. A higher DRI, therefore, signals a greater risk of loss and damage during extreme events. Maharashtra's DRI stands at 182.2, placing it third nationally, after Bihar at 224.2 and Uttar Pradesh, which has the country's highest DRI score of 413.2. Within Maharashtra's DRI, the hazard component is estimated at 11.91, exposure at 14, and vulnerability at 1.093, reflecting the scale of population and assets at risk despite relatively higher income levels. Why Maharashtra received the largest allocation

Even though Uttar Pradesh has a substantially higher DRI, Maharashtra has drawn the highest disaster grant due to the allocation formula adopted by the Sixteenth Finance Commission. The commission weighed 70 per cent of the allocation on a state's average disaster-related expenditure between 2011-12 and 2023-24, excluding the two Covid years, while 30 per cent was linked to the Disaster Risk Index. Maharashtra's consistently high spending on disaster response and relief over the years, driven by recurrent floods, droughts and urban climate events, played a decisive role in pushing its allocation to the top. After Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh has been allocated Rs 20,428 crore, followed by Bihar with Rs 18,153 crore, Madhya Pradesh with Rs 15,596 crore, Rajasthan with Rs 12,281 crore and Odisha with Rs 11,866 crore.

How the funds will be distributed in Maharashtra Of Maharashtra's total allocation, Rs 31,597 crore, or 80 per cent, will flow into the State Disaster Response Fund, while the remaining Rs 7,895 crore, or 20 per cent, will be credited to the State Disaster Mitigation Fund. The



annual allocation is set to increase by five per cent each year, beginning with Rs 7,147 crore in 2026-27 and rising to Rs 8,689 crore by 2030-31. Once released, the SDRF funds can be used flexibly by the state for immediate response and relief during disasters, as well as for recovery and reconstruction.

Wider definition of disaster risk The Sixteenth Finance Commission has also significantly expanded the scope of hazards considered while calculating the Disaster Risk Index. While the Fifteenth Finance Commission limited its assessment to four calamities, floods, droughts, cyclones and earthquakes, the current commission has widened the hazard basket to ten types of disasters, including landslides, hailstorms, cold waves and cloudbursts. Importantly, it has also factored in state specific disasters such as heatwaves and lightning, and has recommended that both be included in the national list of notified disasters under the SDRF framework.

How disaster funds have been spent in the past In assessing allocations, the commission examined how states utilised disaster funds during the previous finance commission cycle. Data from the National Disaster Management System shows that between 2019-20 and 2023-24, the largest share of disaster-related expenditure across states was directed towards floods, followed by droughts, state-specific disasters such as heatwaves and lightning, and cyclones. In Maharashtra, official data shows that Rs 4,176.80 crore was utilised under the SDRF in 2025-26, while Rs 3,978 crore was released in 2024-25. Rising climate stress in Maharashtra The high Disaster Risk Index and corresponding allocation come at a time when extreme weather events are intensifying across Maharashtra, particularly in urban centres. In Mumbai, episodes of high intensity rainfall leading to urban flooding, along with prolonged heatwaves, have emerged as major challenges in recent years. Data from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation shows that over the past six years, the average intensity of heavy rainfall increased to 182 mm, compared to 131 mm in the preceding five-year period. Pointing to escalating heat stress, the Mumbai Climate Action Plan released in 2022 notes a clear warming trend in the city over the past 47 years, from 1973 to 2020. Projections by NOAA and Climate

Ethiopian wolves' taste for nectar! Is Africa's most endangered carnivore a pollinator?



GNS News Agency, Feb 4

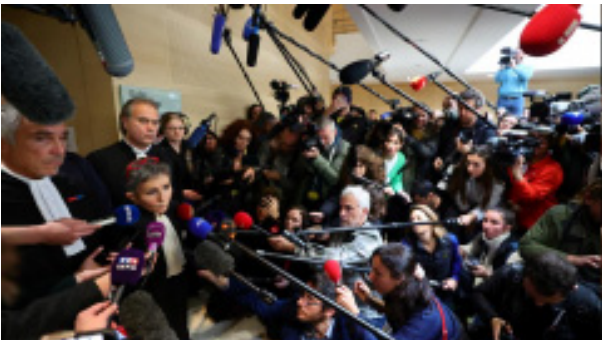
Oxford: Every year in the highlands of Ethiopia, when the rain returns after a parched dry season, a dazzling sight unfolds. Vast fields of a plant known as the Ethiopian red hot poker revive from their crinkled, withered state and bloom into fiery torch-like flowers. From June to November, these bright blossoms offer a precious resource: a profusion of sweet nectar.Among the humming flash of sunbirds and insects drawn to the flowers, an unusual visitor appears: the Ethiopian wolf. Approaching a cone-shaped flower head, it licks the bottom, lapping up nectar and looking quite visibly pleased. As it moves from flower to flower, its muzzle becomes dusted with pollen. Can a wolf actually be a pollinator?The Ethiopian wolf is a slender canid about the size of a large dog, with a reddish coat, white markings on its throat and chest, and a black bushy tail. It lives only in Ethiopia, in a few areas of high-altitude “sky islands” that emerge above the tropical forests below. With fewer than 500 alive today, it is Africa’s most endangered carnivore.I’m part of a team of scientists, working under the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme, who have detailed this surprising nectar-feeding and the wolf’s potential role in pollination. We recently published our findings in the journal Ecology.

The conservation programme, a joint initiative between the University of Oxford and Ethiopian colleagues, has worked to protect Ethiopian wolves for more than 30 years. While these findings were only published recently, Claudio Sillero, founder and director of the programme, first observed wolves feeding on flowers years ago.“As I sat in a rocky shelter, I trained my binoculars on a wolf zigzagging through a stand of red hot pokers, pausing to lick a vivid red and yellow inflorescence, and moving on to the next,” he recalls. “Having tasted them myself, I knew they were heavy with sweet nectar. But I wasn’t quite expecting the wolves also had a sweet tooth!” Other colleagues were also familiar with the plant. “It is considered a medicinal plant in Ethiopia and its nectar is traditionally used to sweeten coffee, or on kita, our flatbread,”

explained Abdi Samune, one of our wolf monitors.Capturing the evidence

The publication emerged from a series of serendipitous events. A few years ago, Adrien Lesaffre, a wildlife photographer, became a close collaborator of ours. After hearing about the nectar-feeding behaviour, he made it his mission to get good pictures of the wolves foraging among flowers. At the time, except occasional sightings, nothing much was known.“It took me two years, several trips to the mountains, tons of patience and great efforts to get my first pictures of a wolf licking the flowers,” said Adrien. The close-up pictures captured the amount of pollen deposited on the wolves’ muzzles. This was striking evidence of their potential role in transferring pollen between flowers.As we investigated further, it became clear it was not an exceptional occurrence. On the contrary, the wolves really were seeking out the nectar and could spend a substantial amount of time foraging for it. For instance, we noted one female wolf spent 1.5 hours in a flower field and visited 30 different flower heads. Dissecting the flowers confirmed that pollen could be deposited by a mammal. Armed with all the new evidence, we shared our findings in a scientific journal.Redefining the role of carnivoresOur work challenges conventional thinking about plant-pollinator interactions, especially regarding the role that predators can play.There are a few nectar-eating pollinator mammals, mostly species of bats. Nectar feeding is uncommon in carnivores and typically only small species do it, such as civets or mongooses. Omnivorous bears, such as sun bears, may eat nectar too, although it is poorly documented. That’s why the Ethiopian wolf’s behaviour is groundbreaking. Normally a specialised rodent hunter, it is the first large carnivorous predator documented consuming nectar.While nectar is unlikely to provide enough nutrition to sustain the wolves’ daily needs, it can provide a small energy boost. A tasty treat to start the day or as dessert, to top up a rodent meal.Whether the wolves can be effective pollinators remains to be confirmed, but it’s worth exploring what this means for the red hot poker flower. And perhaps the Ethiopian wolf is not the only nectar-loving large predator. Greater awareness of such atypical interactions might lead to new examples being discovered in other systems.Conserving unique species interactionsPollination is a crucial process sustaining biodiversity. A nectarivorous wolf potentially involved in pollination highlights the complex interactions that can appear in these unique “Afroalpine” ecosystems. In this fragile environment, where both the wolves and the flowers are vulnerable, understanding these relationships is vital for conservation efforts.The Ethiopian highlands are a biodiversity hotspot, yet their apex predator faces increasing threats from habitat loss, disease transmission, and climate change.Although our programme’s mission is to save the wolves, there is crucial value in conserving not just a species, but also the ecological processes they help support. Preserving the Afroalpine ecosystem, in which the wolves, the flowers, and the people and communities relying on them will continue to thrive. — The Conversation

France rape case: Dominique Pelicot found guilty of rapes, sentenced to 20 years in prison



A court in France on Thursday (December 19, 2024) sentenced Dominique Pelicot to 20 years of imprisonment for drugging and raping his wife and allowing other men to rape her while she was unconscious, in abuse that lasted nearly a decade.The sentence against Dominique Pelicot was the maximum possible under French law. He was declared guilty of all charges against him. At age 72, it could mean that he spends the rest of his life in prison.Roger Arata, the lead judge of the court in the southern French city Avignon, told Pelicot to stand for the sentencing. After it was delivered, he sat back down and cried.Arata read out verdicts one after the other against Pelicot and the 50 other men tried in the shocking case that stunned France and spurred a national reckoning about the blight of rape culture.“You are therefore declared guilty of aggravated rape...,” the judge said as he worked his way through names on the list.

The victim was seated on one side of the courtroom, facing the defendants and sometimes nodding her head as verdicts were announced. Delivering the guilty verdicts and sentences took Arata just over an hour.Of the 50 accused of rape, just one was acquitted but was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault. Another man was also found guilty on the sexual assault charge that he was tried for — meaning all 51 of the defendants were found guilty in one way or another.In a side room where family members of the defendants watched the proceedings on television screens, some burst into tears and gasped as the sentences were revealed.Protesters gathered outside the courthouse followed the proceedings on their phones. Some read out the verdicts and applauded as they were announced inside. Some were carrying oranges as symbolic gifts for the defendants heading to prison.Dominique Pelicot admitted that for years he drugged his then wife of 50 years so that he and strangers he recruited online could abuse her while he filmed the assaults.The appalling ordeal inflicted over nearly a decade on the victim, in what she thought was a loving marriage and her courage during the bruising trial have transformed the retired power company worker into a feminist hero of the nation.Stretching over more than

three months, the trial galvanized campaigners against sexual violence and spurred calls for tougher measures to stamp out rape culture.Prosecutors had asked that Dominique Pelicot get the maximum penalty of 20 years and for sentences of 10 to 18 years for the others tried for rape.But the court was mostly more lenient than prosecutors had hoped, with many sentenced to less than a decade in prison.

The defendants were all accused of having taken part in Dominique Pelicot’s sordid rape and abuse fantasies that were acted out in the couple’s retirement home in the small Provence town of Mazan and elsewhere.Dominique Pelicot testified that he hid tranquilizers in food and drink that he gave his then wife, knocking her out so profoundly that he could do what he wanted to her for hours.One of the men was found guilty, not for assaulting the victim in this case but for drugging and raping his own wife — with help and drugs from Dominique Pelicot, who was also found guilty of raping that man’s wife, too.The five judges voted by secret ballot in their rulings, with majority votes for the convictions and sentences.Campaigners against sexual violence were hoping for exemplary prison terms and view the trial as a possible turning point in the fight against rape culture and the use of drugs to subdue victims.“Men are starting to talk to women — their girlfriends, mothers and friends — in ways they hadn’t before,” said Fanny Foures, 48, who joined other women from the feminist group Les Amazones in gluing messages of support for the victim on walls around Avignon before the verdict.“It was awkward at first, but now real dialogues are happening,” she said.“Some women are realizing, maybe for the first time, that their ex-husbands violated them, or that someone close to them committed abuse,” Ms. Foures added. “And men are starting to reckon with their own behavior or complicity — things they’ve ignored or failed to act on. It’s heavy, but it’s creating change.”Dominique Pelicot first came to the attention of police in September 2020, when a supermarket security guard caught him surreptitiously filming up women’s skirts.Police subsequently found his library of homemade images documenting years of abuse inflicted on his wife — more than 20,000 photos and videos in all, stored on computer drives and catalogued in folders marked “abuse,” “her rapists,” “night alone” and other titles.The abundance of evidence led police to the other defendants. In the videos, investigators counted 72 different abusers, but weren’t able to identify them all.Although some of the accused — including Dominique Pelicot — acknowledged that they were guilty of rape, many didn’t, even in the face of video evidence. The hearings sparked wider debate in France about whether the country’s legal definition of rape should be expanded to include specific mention of consent.Some defendants argued that Dominique Pelicot’s consent covered his wife, too. Some sought to excuse their behaviour by insisting that they hadn’t intended to rape anyone when they responded to the husband’s invitation to come to the home where he had married his wife, saying he misled them into thinking they were taking part in consensual sex.

Putin denies Russian defeat in Syria, says he plans to meet Assad

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia had not been defeated in Syria and that Moscow had made proposals to the new rulers in Damascus to maintain Russia’s military bases there.In his first public comments on the subject, Mr. Putin said he had not yet met former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad since was overthrown and forced to flee to Moscow earlier this month, but that he planned to do so.In response to a question on the subject from a U.S. journalist, Mr. Putin said he would ask Assad about the fate of U.S. reporter Austin Tice, who is missing in Syria, and was ready to ask Syria’s new rulers about Tice’s whereabouts too.“I will tell you frankly, I have not yet seen President Assad since he came to Moscow. But I plan to do so. I will definitely talk to him,” said Mr. Putin.He said most people in Syria with whom Russia had been in contact about the future of its two main military bases in Syria were supportive of them staying, but that talks were ongoing.

Russia, which intervened in Syria in 2015 and turned the tide of the civil war there in Assad’s favour, had also told other countries that they could use its airbase and



naval base to bring in humanitarian aid for Syria, he said.“You want to portray everything that is happening in Syria as some kind of failure, a defeat for Russia. I assure you, it is not. And I’ll tell you why. We came to Syria 10 years ago to prevent a terrorist enclave from being created there,” said Mr. Putin.“On the whole, we have achieved our goal. It is not for nothing that today many European countries and the United States want to establish relations with them [Syria’s new rulers]. If they are terrorist organisations, why are you [the West] going there? So that means they have changed.”

Mumbai terror attack case: U.S. govt urges Supreme Court to dismiss Rana’s petition for writ of certiorari



GNS News Agency, Feb 4

The United States government has urged the Supreme Court to dismiss “the petition for a writ of certiorari” filed by Mumbai-attack convict Tahawwur Rana, a Canadian national of Pakistani origin, against his extradition to India.India is seeking the extradition of Rana as he is wanted in the Mumbai terror attack case. Having lost the legal battle in lower courts and several federal courts, including the U.S. Court of Appeals for the North Circuit in San Francisco, Rana on November 13 filed a “petition for a writ of certiorari” before the U.S. Supreme Court.In a long battle, this is Rana’s last legal chance to not be extradited to India.“The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied,” U.S. Solicitor General Elizabeth B. Prelogar said in its filing before the Supreme Court on December 16, 2024.“Rana is not entitled to relief from extradition to India in this case,” she argued in a 20-page submission.In his “petition for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit”, Rana has argued that he was tried and acquitted in the federal court in the Northern District of Illinois (Chicago) on charges relating to the 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai. “India now seeks to extradite him for trial on charges based on the identical conduct at issue in the Chicago case,” the plea has said.“The government does not concede that all of the conduct on which India seeks

extradition was covered by the government’s prosecution in this case. For example, India’s forgery charges are based in part on conduct that was not charged in the United States: petitioner’s use of false information in an application to formally open a branch office of the Immigration Law Centre submitted to the Reserve Bank of India,” the U.S. Solicitor General said.“It is not clear that the jury’s verdict in this case — which involves conspiracy charges and was somewhat difficult to parse — means that he has been “convicted or acquitted” on all of the specific conduct that India has charged,” Ms. Prelogar said.

Indian markets slump in early trade as US Fed indicates fewer rate cuts next year

Mumbai: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slumped in early trade on Thursday following weak global market trends after the US Federal Reserve indicated fewer rate cuts next year.The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,162.12 points to 79,020.08 in early trade. The NSE Nifty tumbled 328.55 points to 23,870.30.All 30 blue-chip stocks were trading lower. Infosys, State Bank of India, Tata Steel, Asian Paints, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance and Mahindra & Mahindra were the biggest laggards.In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong were trading lower. Wall Street ended sharply lower “When valuations are high, the market needs only a trigger to correct sharply. This trigger was provided by the Fed guidance of fewer rate cuts in 2025, which went against market expectations. Even though the rate cut of 25 bps was in tune with the market’s expectation, the indication of only two cuts of 25 bps each in 2025 against market expectation of three or even four cuts spooked the market resulting in a sharp sell-off in Wall Street. The Fed chief’s comments regarding the economy and the labour market are, in fact, positive, suggesting a resilient US economy.

Pakistan denounces U.S. sanctions on its missile program as biased and putting regional peace at risk

Pakistan on Thursday (December 19, 2024) denounced new U.S. sanctions on the country’s ballistic missile program as “discriminatory” that put the region’s peace and security at risk.Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry warned in a statement that the sanctions “have dangerous implications for strategic stability of our region and beyond.” It also cast doubt on U.S. allegations that targeted businesses were involved in weapons proliferation because previous sanctions “were based on mere doubts and suspicion without any evidence whatsoever.”It also accused the U.S. of “double standards” for waiving licensing requirements for advanced military technology to other countries.

The sanctions freeze any U.S. property belonging to the targeted businesses and bar Americans from doing business with them. The U.S. State Department said one such sanctioned entity, the Islamabad-based National Development Complex worked to acquire items for developing Pakistan’s long range ballistic missile program that includes the SHAHEEN series of ballistic missiles.The other sanctioned entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise.State Department spokesman Matthew Miller posted on X platform on Wednesday that the U.S. had been “been clear and consistent about our concerns” over such weapons proliferation and that it would “con-



tinue to engage constructively with Pakistan on these issues.”Analysts say Pakistan’s nuclear and missile program is primarily aimed at countering threats from neighboring India.Security expert Syed Muhammad Ali called the sanctions “short sighted, destabilizing and divorced for South Asian regional strategic realities.”Pakistan became a declared nuclear power in 1998, when it conducted underground nuclear tests in response to those carried out by its rival and neighbor India. The two sides regularly test-fired their short, medium and long-range missiles.The two South Asian rivals have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since gaining independence from Britain in 1947. The disputed Himalayan region is split between them and claimed by both in its entirety.

Russian President Putin opens his Annual news conference, an event he uses to reinforce his authority

Russian President Vladimir Putin held his marathon news conference and call-in show, an annual event he has used to reinforce his authority and demonstrate sweeping control of the country’s political scene.Mr. Putin began by boasting about Russia’s economic performance, saying that it’s on track to grow by nearly 4% this year. He acknowledged that consumer inflation is high at 9.3%, but noted Central Bank’s efforts to bring it down and insisted that the situation in the economy remains “stable”.The tightly choreographed session, which is broadcast live by state-controlled TV stations across Russia’s 11 time zones, has been heavily dominated by domestic issues in the past years. Most journalists and ordinary people calling the studio ask about road repairs, utility prices, house maintenance, medical services, government subsidies for families, and other economic and social issues.

Journalists from the country’s over 80 regions wave colourful signs and placards in the hall near the Kremlin as they try desperately to attract Mr. Putin’s attention.Russian state media reported that ordinary citizens submitted more than 2 million questions ahead of the show. Questions about Russia’s Military action in Ukraine and soaring tensions with the West are expected to be an important part of the show.

Mr. Putin, who has held power for nearly a quarter-century, has vowed to bring what he describes as the “special Military operation” to a victorious end and boasted about Russia’s battlefield gains this year. But just two days before Mr. Putin’s news conference, a senior Russian general was killed by a bomb outside his apartment building in Moscow. The brazen killing of Lieutenant General Igor Anatolyevich Kirillov, claimed by Ukraine, brought the nearly 3-year-old conflict once again to the streets of the Russian capital.Mr. Putin has declared that last month’s strike on Ukraine with a new hypersonic in-



termediate-range ballistic missile was a response to Western allies’ permission for Kyiv to use their longer-range weapons for strikes on Russia. He threatened that Moscow could launch more strikes on Ukraine with the new Oreshnik missile and warned it could also be used to target Military facilities of the countries that allowed Ukraine to use their missiles for attacks deep into Russia.Mr. Putin has said that Moscow stands ready for talks on a peaceful settlement to the conflict but reaffirmed his demand that Ukraine must renounce its bid to join The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and recognise Russia’s gains. Ukraine and the West have rejected those demands.

The Russian leader’s comments on Thursday (Dec. 19) will be closely watched for any signs of a shift in his bargaining position ahead of the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to negotiate a deal to end the hostilities.Mr. Putin could also comment on the downfall of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who he has offered political asylum. Assad’s demise has dealt a painful blow to Russia, which launched a military intervention in Syria nine years ago to prop up Assad’s Government amid a Civil War.Moscow has quickly sought to establish contacts with the victorious rebels to secure its diplomatic and Military personnel in

‘Jana Nayagan’ censor row: Can’t reveal anything, says CBFC Regional Officer



Even as actor-turned-politician Vijay’s fans are more than anxious to know whether his much-awaited last movie Jana Nayagan would get released before the upcoming Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry or not, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has refused to reveal any information. When contacted to know the authenticity of information floating around in film circles that the production house KVN Productions LLP had agreed for a reference to the review committee, CBFC Chennai Regional Officer D. Balamurali said, the law prohibits sharing of any information related to the certification process.

“I don’t have any information. Even if I do have, I cannot reveal it at this stage. All our examination process is confidential. We cannot reveal anything until a certificate is issued. The law prohibits sharing of any such information. Public will get to know only when the film is certified. At that time, we will communicate through our portal,” he said.

Censor certificate row: a backgroundJana Nayagan, which was originally slated to be released on January 9, 2026, had been watched by the CBFC’s five-member examination committee on December 19, 2025 and the production house claimed to have received a communication on December 22, 2025 stating that the board had come to the conclusion that the film was suitable for U/A 16+ certificate if certain excisions were carried out.

The production house had accepted the recommendation instead of appealing to the nine-member revising committee for a ‘U’ certificate and carried out all the suggested excisions. The edited movie was resubmitted to the board on December 24, 2025. However, in the meantime, one of the members of the monitoring committee sent a complaint to the CBFC Chairman Praseon Joshi in Mumbai. The complaint read: “Dear Sir, I came to know that Tamil film Jana Nayagan which is going to be re-

leased across India has been approved by the Examination Committee at Chennai without following due procedure. The film has shown visuals and dialogues in which foreign powers creating religious conflict at large scale in India which may disturb religious harmony of this great country.”

It went on to state: “There are many Army related references in the film but no defence expert has been included in the Examining Committee to address these issues. There are procedural lapses during examination of the film which is gross violation of the Cinematograph Act and Rules. I am an APM (Advisory Panel Member) member and I have watched the film on December 19, 2025 but my objections were not considered during examination of the film. So, we humbly request you to intervene in the procedure and direct the competent authority to re-examine the film.”

After the receipt of this complaint, the CBFC on December 29, 2025 instructed its Regional Office in Chennai to put the certification process of ‘Jana Nayagan’ on hold and on January 5, 2026 the production house was informed that the chairman had decided to refer the movie to the revising committee. The chairman’s decision was uploaded on the e-cinepramaan portal on January 6.

The legal battleHours before the decision was uploaded on the portal, KVN Productions rushed to the Madras High Court with a writ petition seeking a direction to CBFC to issue U/A 16+ certificate within 24 hours and obtained a lunch motion for an urgent hearing of its case on the same day afternoon.

Justice P.T. Asha heard the matter and directed CBFC to produce all relevant records related to the certification of Jana Nayagan on January 7. After perusing the records and hearing the arguments advanced by Additional Solicitor General AR.L. Sundaresan for the CBFC and senior counsel Satish Parasaran, assisted by advocate Vijayan Subramanian, for the producer, the judge reserved her orders on January 7. She allowed the writ petition on January 9 and directed the CBFC to issue the U/A 16+ certificate forthwith. Within a few hours on the same day, the board moved an urgent writ appeal before the first Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Justice G. Arul Murugan of the Madras High Court and obtained an interim stay of the single judge’s order. Though the production house went on appeal, the Supreme Court refused to interfere with the interim order. Thereafter, the writ appeal was taken up for final hearing and argued at length before the first Division Bench of the Madras High Court on January 20 when the judges reserved their orders. The Bench delivered its judgment on January 27 setting aside the single judge’s order on the ground that she had not granted an opportunity to the CBFC to file its counter affidavit. The Division Bench remanded the matter back to the single judge for a fresh hearing and granted liberty to the production house to amend its prayer by challenging the decision taken by the CBFC chairman on January 6. However, so far, the production house had neither filed a petition in the High Court to amend its prayer nor approached the Supreme Court challenging the Division Bench’s order. This had led to speculation in the film industry of the production house having agreed upon the reference to the revising committee. While the production house had not publicly commented on the interim stay, the CBFC too refused to comment on the issue citing the confidentiality clause.

Injustice to Telangana in budgetary allocations despite its potential, says Finance Minister Bhatti

The Telangana Government has expressed its thorough dissatisfaction over the Central Government ignoring Telangana’s repeated requests seeking its assistance for the State’s growth in Union Budget 2026-27 allocations. The total outlay of the Central Government’s budget presented in the Parliament on Sunday (February 1, 2026) is to the tune of ₹45.48 lakh crore, but Telangana was meted out injustice as its name did not figure in allocations made for key sectors. “Given the massive outlay, we have expected announcements in favour of Telangana. But the State’s interests were cold shouldered despite repeated representations submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Ministers,” Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said.

The State expected allocations for Musi Rejuvenation project, development proposed in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) area and Metro rail, but nothing had come about. The Centre had announced Biopharma Shakti scheme with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore and Telangana’s name was not considered in spite of its ecosystem in the form of Genome Valley and its contributions in vaccine manufacturing. The same was the case with electronic component manufacturing wherein the State did not receive any support from the Centre. The State did not find mention in the projects proposed like chemical parks, affordable spots goods manufacturing and orange economy as well as promotion of regional medical value hubs. Besides being ignored in inland waterways project, the project for exploration of rare earth minerals did not make a mention of the State in spite of traces of rare earths identified in the Singareni coal belt. “It is a sort of embarrassment to note that Telangana’s name did not figure in the initiatives proposed for semi-conductor development,” he said.

The development came at a time when the State



competed at the global level to become a \$3 trillion economy and contribute a significant share in the Viksit Bharat vision of the Centre. The Government had also not considered the State’s request to allow fiscal deficit at 4% so as to enable the State to carry out its developmental agenda. “The Central Government has however kept the limit of fiscal deficit at 4.3% for itself,” he said. Mr. Bhatti Vikramarka asked the MPs from Telangana, cutting across political lines, to meet Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and represent to them the need to undo the injustice meted out to the State. “We are requesting out MPs to meet the Prime Minister and Finance Minister irrespective of political affiliations and seek our due,” he said.

What is waste-to-energy technology?

A: Waste-to-energy (WtE) is a technology to convert non-recyclable waste materials into usable fuel, typically heat or electricity. A common method is incineration in which trash is burned at a high temperature to boil the water off, creating steam that turns a turbine to generate power. Other methods include gasification, which uses a large quantity of heat with little oxygen to turn waste into gas, and anaerobic digestion, where bacteria break down organic waste to produce biogas. The impact of WtE on the environment involves both benefits and drawbacks and is a subject of ongoing debate.

Waste reduction facilities can reduce the volume of waste by around 90%, significantly extending the life of existing landfills and reducing the need for new ones. By diverting organic waste from landfills, WtE can also prevent the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere.

On the flip side, burning waste releases carbon dioxide and — especially in poorly controlled environments — pollutants like dioxins, furans, and heavy metals. Some contemporary facilities use advanced scrubbing and filtration systems to trap these toxins. Critics have also ar-



gued that WtE may discourage more sustainable practices like recycling and composting by creating a constant demand for trash. India currently has at least 21 WtE plants in operation and 133 biogas facilities.

The plants come under the purview of the Solid Waste Management Rules 2026, which mandate waste segregation and encourage refuse-derived fuel (RDF) in order to reduce the burden on landfills.

Why we need to take measles seriously again



Measles, that ghost from a distant past, is making an unwelcome return, in many countries around the world, including in developed nations. And it’s impossible to ignore. We could soon be staring at a ‘Measles Map’ indicating regions where the protection of herd immunity has now fallen apart.

How we got hereFor many years, the MMR vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella) has kept a sentinel watch on these dangerous viruses, offering protection not just with a 95% effectiveness for the vaccinated but also through “herd immunity” for those unable to be vaccinated. That wall of immunity has now begun to slowly break down. In the post-COVID years, many regions across countries saw reduced access to routine childhood vaccinations such as MMR, even critically low levels, due to increased strain on over-extended public health facilities overwhelmed by the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, due to lockdowns, a large number of parents couldn’t access hospitals for timely vaccinations for their children. India also reported over 32,000 suspected and confirmed measles cases in late 2022, with Maharashtra, Kerala, Jharkhand, and Gujarat being the hardest hit. Mumbai became the epicentre with its numerous clusters in high-density areas. Overall, the pandemic and its after-effects caused approximately 3 million children in the country to miss their routine measles vaccine doses.

Spartanburg’s shadowTo grasp the sobering truth of what the Measles Map of 2026 entails, one needs look no further than Spartanburg County in South Carolina, United States. What began with a small number of sporadic cases quickly mushroomed into a full-blown outbreak, with more than 550 reported cases as of January 2026. Schools were closed, hospitals prepared for overflowing paediatric wards, and people were caught unaware of the alarming rate of virus transmission. The situation in Spartanburg County is not unique: measles has reared its head in other countries too, including 14,000 reported cases in Indonesia, as well as in Yemen and Pakistan. A worrying aspect is the fact that in 2025, Canada lost its measles elimination status and the USA and Mexico face the same reality in 2026, undoing decades of public health progress.

Measles is far more than just a rash and a fever. Its true danger lies in what scientists are calling “immunological amnesia”, which often gets lost in public discourse. When the measles virus infects a child, it doesn’t just cause acute illness; it systematically targets and destroys the very cells that form the backbone of the immune system’s memory. These are the cells that remember how

to fight off other diseases—influenza, pneumonia, even chickenpox. Measles affects the immune system in such a way that sometimes, even years after recovery, a child is left with a compromised immune system, essentially reverting to an infant-like state of vulnerability. This means children who survive measles in 2026 will likely face a significantly higher risk of succumbing to other common infections for the next two or three years, creating a “secondary health crisis” that public health systems may be ill-equipped to handle.

Recognising measlesMeasles doesn’t start with a visible rash; rather, it begins as a cold, which is often mistaken for the common flu. This cold could also be accompanied by cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (red, watery, and light-sensitive eyes). After two or three days of these symptoms starting, tiny white spots may appear inside the mouth along with a fever. About 3–5 days from the onset of the first symptoms, a rash will appear, usually starting at the hairline or behind the ears, and it then spreads downward to the neck, trunk, and finally the hands and feet. For most people, two doses of the MMR vaccine provide permanent, lifelong immunity. You do not need booster shots as an adult, if you have completed the two-dose series.

With major outbreaks expected in 2026 across Europe, Southeast Asia, and parts of the U.S., here are some things to take care of before planning international journeys: Ensure you have documentation of two doses of the MMR vaccine. If you are unsure, you can either get a “catch-up” dose (it is safe even if you’ve had one before) or take a blood test to check for antibodies. If traveling with an infant (six–11 months old), they should receive an early dose of the vaccine before leaving. Get vaccinated at least two weeks before departure to allow the body to build immunity. Measles has a long incubation period. Monitor your health for 21 days after returning from an affected country. If you develop a fever and rash while travelling, wear a mask immediately and alert airline staff. Measles is airborne and can stay in the air for up to two hours after an infected person has left a room or plane. People who are pregnant or have severely weakened immune systems should consult a doctor before travel, as they cannot receive the live MMR vaccine and are at high risk for complications if exposed.

More shots, less protection? There is an interesting shift in policy regarding vaccinations. An advisory board recently generated controversy in recommending an adjustment to the usage of the four-in-one MMRV vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella/chickenpox). There have been concerns about a small increase in the risk of febrile seizures in a few children. Recommendations are to have the MMR and Varicella vaccines separately. On the surface, this might seem like a cautious, patient-centric approach. But in the real world of childhood immunisations where parental compliance is paramount, it’s a dangerous gamble. More shots could mean lower compliance as parents, already juggling busy schedules, are significantly less likely to return for two or three separate appointments in place of one convenient combination shot. The Measles Map of 2026 is an important reminder of broader community responsibility. The struggle against this invisible enemy is not just to protect ourselves; it is also to preserve the vulnerable immunological memory of our children, the resilience of our communities, and to reclaim our health.

What does the Budget offer urban India?

As the Union Budget 2026 was placed before Parliament, the Finance Minister once again invoked the familiar triad of capital investment, growth momentum and the long-held vision of ‘Viksit Bharat’. Cities were spoken of as engines of development, enablers of productivity and sites of future opportunity. Yet when one moves from rhetoric to arithmetic, urban India emerges not as a priority but as a sector quietly absorbing fiscal contraction. The headline fact is stark: the total central outlay for urban development has fallen from ₹96,777 crore in the previous year to ₹85,522 crore in 2026-27. This is a reduction of ₹11,255 crore, amounting to a shrinkage of about 11.6%. When inflation is factored in, the real cut is even sharper. In effect, urban India is being asked to do more with less, at precisely the moment when cities face mounting pressures of migration, climate stress, infrastructure fatigue and job creation.

This contraction also signals a deeper problem: while the government continues to foreground capital expenditure at the macro level, urban development is no longer seen as a growth-critical investment space, but rather as a residual category to be adjusted once larger fiscal priorities are met.

The centrality of the metro railWithin this shrinking envelope, the structure of spending remains deeply skewed. Metro rail projects continue to dominate urban allocations, even as overall urban spending contracts. The allocation for metro and mass rapid transit projects has declined from ₹31,239.28 crore to ₹28,740 crore, a reduction of ₹2,499.28 crore. In percentage terms, this is a cut of roughly 8%. While this appears as moderate, the larger picture tells a different story. Out of the total urban outlay of ₹85,522 crore, metro rail alone accounts for ₹28,740 crore, which translates to approximately 33.6% of all central urban spending. In other words, one-third of India’s urban budget continues to be absorbed by a single transport mode.

This is not a neutral policy choice. Metro systems are capital-intensive, spatially limited and socially selective. They primarily serve dense corridors in large cities and cater disproportionately to formal, middle-class commuters. They are important, but they are neither the most inclusive nor the most scalable solution for India’s urban mobility crisis. What is missing is proportional investment in bus-based public transport, non-motorised transport, suburban rail, and last-mile connectivity — modes that actually carry the urban majority. By continuing to privilege metros even within a shrinking budget, the state reinforces an urban imagination that prioritises visibility over universality. The persistence in metro-centric planning reveals a deeper policy blind spot. Public transport is being equated with rail projects, while buses, walking and cycling — the modes that actually move most urban Indians — remain peripheral. Metros cannot be the sole answer in a country where a majority of urban trips are short, income-constrained and highly sensitive to fare increases. A fraction of metro spending redirected towards city bus systems or non-motorised infrastructure would yield far higher social returns. Yet the Budget does not reflect such a rebalancing. Urban mobility, in this fiscal design, is treated as an engineering problem rather than a social one.

The retreat of flagship urban schemesIf the metro rail represents continuity, the treatment of flagship urban welfare and service schemes represents retreat. Every

major centrally sponsored urban programme has seen a reduction in allocation. The allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) (PMAY-U) has declined from ₹19,794 crore to ₹18,625 crore, a reduction of ₹1,169 crore — nearly a 5.9% cut. This comes at a time when urban housing shortage remains acute, affordability is worsening, and informal settlements continue to expand at the peripheries of cities. A cut in housing support is not fiscally neutral — it directly translates into prolonged informality, overcrowding and exclusion from basic services.

The sharpest cut has been reserved for sanitation. The allocation for the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) (SBM-U) has been halved from ₹5,000 crore to ₹2,500 crore, a 50% reduction. This is not a marginal adjustment; it is a fundamental rollback. Urban sanitation is not a one-time achievement but a continuous service requiring sustained investment — particularly for waste processing, sewage treatment, faecal sludge management and worker safety. Cutting sanitation funding by half signals that urban cleanliness and public health are no longer seen as urgent policy domains. Additionally, the allocation for the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) scheme has also fallen from ₹10,000 crore to ₹8,000 crore, a 20% cut. This reduction is especially troubling in an era of acute urban water stress. Cities across India are grappling with ground-water depletion, inequitable access, ageing pipelines and climate-induced variability. AMRUT was meant to be the backbone of universal water and sewerage access. A fifth of its budget disappearing weakens the very foundations of urban sustainability.

Shrinking commitmentsTaken together, the picture is unambiguous. Centrally sponsored urban schemes have received major cuts, reinforcing the 11.6% nominal contraction in central support for cities. This contraction is not offset by any new institutional architecture, fiscal devolution or empowered municipal financing frameworks. Urban local bodies remain fiscally weak, dependent on tied transfers, and constrained in their ability to plan long-term infrastructure or service delivery. What makes this particularly consequential is the timing. Urban India is currently absorbing large-scale migration and demographic churn; rising urban unemployment and informalisation of the workspace; climate shocks such as heat waves, floods, and water scarcity; and infrastructure backlogs in transport, housing and sanitation. Against this backdrop, reducing real urban spending is not fiscal prudence; it is strategic short-sightedness.

The empty promise of developmentThe government’s vision of Viksit Bharat rests on growth, productivity and global competitiveness. But no country has achieved high-income status without strong, well-funded, inclusive cities. Urban India generates the bulk of GDP, absorbs labour, and anchors innovation ecosystems. Weakening its fiscal base undermines the very ambition the Budget claims to advance. What this Budget ultimately reflects is a contradiction: cities are celebrated rhetorically but constrained fiscally. The emphasis remains on select capital-heavy projects rather than everyday systems that determine whether cities are liveable, equitable and resilient. The Union Budget 2026 does not abandon urban India — but it unmistakably pulls back. With an 11.6% cut in total urban allocations, steep reductions in sanitation, water and housing, and one-third of remaining funds locked in metro projects, the Budget signals caution where urgency is required. Urban India is expected to carry the weight of future growth, climate ad-

Healthcare in Tamil Nadu: where less meets more



Between 2021-2022 and 2024-2025, the average daily outpatient (OP) numbers in Tamil Nadu’s public tertiary health facilities increased by 49%. The bed capacity grew by 37%. As patient volumes swell and infrastructure expands, human resources become central to sustaining services. This raises a crucial question: has the State’s health workforce grown proportionately to meet this rising demand? In other words, do government hospitals have enough doctors, nurses, and other health staff to sustain the system’s expansion?Over the years, the State’s health infrastructure has grown substantially. It now has over 11,000 government health facilities, including 2,336 primary health centres (PHC), 8,713 health sub-centres (HSC), 372 government hospitals, and 36 government medical college hospitals. The addition of new multi-and super-speciality hospitals, upgrades to existing government hospitals, and the rollout of numerous health schemes have improved public access to healthcare. However, while the State government has spent heavily on infrastructure, investment in human resources is lacking. The Medical Services Recruitment Board (MRB), which started functioning in 2012, has so far recruited 42,151 candidates for 49 categories of posts, including 18,144 assistant surgeons, 13,287 nurses, and 10,720 paramedical staff till March 31, 2025Since 2022, two batches of assistant surgeons — 1,021 and 2,553 — were recruited through the MRB. A few additional vacancies identified during the process were also filled

In a recent press meet, Health Minister Ma. Subramanian listed the various recruitments in progress — 1,100 doctors, 2,100 health inspectors, and 2,145 village health nursesHealth administrators insist they are working toward “zero vacancy” in the Health department, but many in the workforce argue that this overlooks the bigger picture. There are simply not enough personnel, especially doctors and staff nurses, not only due to long-standing unfilled vacancies, but also because no new positions have been created in proportion to the rising patient load and newer facilities/schemes.At the same time, certain “flawed” policy decisions proved both expensive and damaging. One such decision was a restructuring exercise introduced through a Government Order by the previous government, which resulted in the reduction of nearly 500 doctor posts. Critics argue that this led to reduced manpower, a decline in the quality of services, and increased workload for doctors in government medical colleges. Now, a similar “misstep” is being repeated through the redeployment of doctors, with 572 junior resident (JR) posts already reduced — a move that, they warn, could affect the workforce in more than one way. Contractual appointments, instead of permanent appointments, have also become very common in the health sector.Instead of evaluating on-the-ground realities, the department has lately been diverting, redeploying, or re-distributing staff, and creating new posts by surrendering existing posts, justifying these moves using the National Medical Commission’s (NMC) minimum standards meant for medical education, not patient care. A. Ramalingam, secretary, Service Doctors and Post Graduates Association (SDPGA), said.

This approach is evident in a series of recent Government Orders. New facilities and services have been approved without a corresponding increase in sanctioned manpower, relying instead on redeployment or surrendering of posts from existing institutions.In a Government Order dated November 3, approval was granted to create 59 new posts to strengthen cancer care across 16 tertiary care hospitals by surrendering an equal number of posts from various medical institutions. Earlier this year, the State government approved the establishment of 617 new HSCs in rural areas and 25 in urban areas, specifying that no new posts would be sanctioned; instead, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives from existing PHCs were redeployed to staff the new HSCs. Similarly, 78 medical officers were redeployed from existing upgraded PHCs to 50 new PHCs.Likewise, no posts were sanctioned for the newly opened Government Pentland Multi Super Speciality Hospital, Vellore, and peripheral hospitals in Sholinganallur, Salem, and Tirunelveli. These hospitals are made functional by redeployment or diversions from nearby medical college hospitals, doctors said.Some of the demands of the health workforce and representing associationsNew hospitals should be constructed after sanctioning postsDisplay statistics of sanctioned posts and vacancy details at every hospital and on the Health and Family Welfare Department websiteGive in-principle approval to make new appointments to implement new schemes so routine patient care will not be affected Doctors and nurses should be appointed based on the outpatient and in-patient strength of hospitalsExisting posts should not be diverted to other hospitals, rather new posts should be createdParamedical workforce should be strengthened Some of the Government Orders specifically state that new or upgraded facilities should be operated with existing workforce and no additional manpower has been granted. “There have been so many new health-oriented schemes and programmes, such as Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam and Innuyir Kappom-Nammai Kaakum 48, and upgrading of hospitals but no consequent increase in workforce. In fact, for the Kalaingar Centenary Super Speciality Hospital (KCSSH) in Guindy, many posts were diverted from existing medical college hospitals rather than creating new posts. Wouldn’t this affect the quality of work in both places?” a government doctor asked.

At the core of the staffing issue lies the State’s growing insistence on adhering to the minimum standards prescribed by the NMC — a move that many government doctors view as reflecting a “narrow, convenient interpretation of the regulatory framework”. “NMC’s minimum standards apply only to teaching requirements. For instance, institutions with 250 MBBS seats such as Madras Medical College, Stanley Medical College, and Madurai Medical College are required to have an outpatient inflow of 2,000. In reality, these colleges handle nearly three times that number. NMC standards do include a provision allowing manpower to be increased proportionately in line with the patient load,” K. Senthil, president of Tamil Nadu Government Doctors Association, contended.The State, he added,

has nearly 22,000 sanctioned doctor posts, including about 800 service postgraduates. However, roughly twice this number is required to meet the demand, he said.A physician at a hospital in Chennai paints a familiar picture: for years, government hospitals have been bustling with activity, often overcrowded, with patients waiting in long queues. “One major reason for this is that the staffing patterns for doctors and nurses have remained the same for the past several years. No new posts have been created. Doctors and nurses are not recruited on the basis of the number of outpatients,” he said.

The paramedical workforce is almost entirely absent in Tamil Nadu healthcare. “The role of physician assistants for documentation, nursing assistants, research assistants, insurance managers, public relations, health educators, data entry operators are donned by doctors, postgraduates, and nurses. This frustrates many, resulting in poor concentration on the actual work of clinical care,” he added.While Dr. Senthil describes the current scenario as among the best in the past two decades, with most doctor vacancies filled and only about 1,000 to 1,200 remaining vacant, he makes a key observation: “This addresses only vacancies. The doctor-patient ratio has remained inadequate for decades. The government should stop focusing solely on new hospitals and buildings, and instead proportionately increase manpower. This is not only for doctors but also paramedical staff, especially nurses. Older medical college hospitals are severely understaffed with nurses,” he stressed.

Shortage of nursing staffThe shortage is not limited to doctors and is acute among the nursing staff. In a communication dated December 12, the Directorate of Medical Education and Research requested heads of medical college hospitals at Karur, Nagapattinam, and Pudukottai to depute the prescribed number of staff nurses — 20, 10, and five respectively — to Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Government Hospital, Tiruchi, on rotation basis. This was to address shortage of staff nurses at the hospital.When the Government Peripheral Hospital, Periyar Nagar, was upgraded as a 300-bed hospital, the creation of 375 posts of various categories (109 regular and 266 contract) was approved. What irked a section of nursing staff is that 20 staff nurses were redeployed from the Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super Speciality Hospital, Omandurar Estate, and Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Egmore, and 156 nursing posts were taken on contract pay. This, when some 8,000-odd nurses recruited through the Medical Services Recruitment Board on consolidated pay are demanding regularisation of their services.Both doctors and nurses frequently stress the need to have manpower in line with the Indian Public Health Standards recommendations. For example, it recommends one staff nurse for every six beds in a general ward and a one-to-one nurse-to-bed ratio in the Intensive Care Unit. However, these recommendations are far from being implemented.N. Subin, general secretary, Tamil Nadu Nurses Empowerment Association, highlighted the shortage of nurses. “In a city hospital, a single staff nurse handles a 12-hour shift in the ICU. In some hospitals, it is common for one nurse to manage two wards, each with 30 patients, during a shift. At times, they even manage an entire floor,” he said. In fact, a senior surgeon added that there have been situations when one staff nurse had to manage three floors.“A minimum of 10,000 regular nursing posts should be created immediately, and the 8,000-odd nurses recruited through MRB on consolidated pay should be regularised for these posts,” Mr. Subin said.Secondary care institutions worst-hitDoctors agree that the many institutions under the Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services are the worst-hit. One of them noted that a number of district headquarters hospitals, taluk, and non-taluk hospitals run with skeletal staff.P. Saminathan, SDPGA’s president, said that the previous AIADMK government upgraded 11 district headquarters hospitals into medical colleges and the nearby taluk hospitals were re-designated as district headquarters hospitals without a corresponding increase in doctors, staff nurses, and paramedics posts. Going back a little further, during 2004-2005, the Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (CEmONC) centres, a significant milestone in improving maternal and child healthcare, came up with no extra posts for doctors. It remains the same to date.CEmONC centres in certain GHs, which were conducting around 80 deliveries per month in 2005, account for nearly 300 deliveries now but run with the same number of sanctioned posts of doctors — four obstetrician-gynaecologists, four paediatricians and two anaesthetists, said Dr. Saminathan.“A number of GHs are inadequately staffed. The Valluvar District Headquarters Hospital in Tirunelveli district has five doctors. The non-taluk GH at Pulicat has four sanctioned doctor posts and is run 24x7 by diverting doctors from nearby hospitals at Avadi and Ponneri three days a week,” he said.Dr. Saminathan added that GHs are upgraded on paper with no increase in human resources, resulting in an exploited and overworked manpower. This impacts patients as they are made to believe that these are new facilities and speciality services will be available.He said that hospital administrations have no options but to employ paramedical staff, including nurses, on an outsourcing basis using funds generated through the Chief Minister’s Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme.Another doctor who worked at a DMS hospital said that most facilities largely manage because of Non Service Post Graduates posted there during their bond period. “Once their tenure ends, the hospitals face severe understaffing until the next batch arrives,” he said.“No new posts were created for the recently-opened District Headquarters Hospital in Tambaram. Those from other hospitals were redeployed. There are some 30 doctor posts at the facility, while at least 80 are required,” he added.Strain on healthcare deliveryA doctor in a newly-established hospital in Chennai said the patient footfall was huge. “In fact, people from middle income groups are seeking services here. Patients expect that all speciality services will be available on a full-fledged basis. But on the ground, departments such as general medicine and general surgery are inadequately staffed. Ophthalmology and pulmonology departments have only one doctor each,” he said.Patients receiving treatment at the nephrology ward at Stanely Hospital, ChennaiPatients receiving treatment at the nephrology ward at Stanely Hospital, Chennai | Photo Credit: S.R. RaghunathanThere are doctors who have completed postgraduation and have entered government service through MRB and there are NSPGs on bond period, another doctor said, adding: “What is the point of posting an obstetrician-gynaecologist in a PHC, a plastic surgeon in a GH with no equipment, a nephrologist in a GH with no dialysis facility, and a neurosurgeon where there is no CT scan? In many places, qualified manpower is being wasted. This has to be rationalised,” another doctor added.“When the government is willing to invest ₹200 crore in new buildings and ₹50 crore in equipment, why is it reluctant to create new doctor posts?” an assistant professor asked. “These deputations and redeployment are essentially cost-cutting measures,” he added.A senior

Creating suicide-safe campuses



Entering the gates of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) is a remarkable achievement. But every year, there are disturbing headlines about the young lives lost on these campuses. Between 2005 and 2024, 115 IIT students were reported to have died by suicide. Surveys indicate that over 60% of students identify academic pressure as the primary source of stress, alongside employment insecurity, family issues, and harassment.While these numbers are troubling, the IITs are making proactive efforts such as introducing and enhancing counselling services, peer support networks, and specialised wellness programmes to assist the students get treatment early, prevent them from feeling alone, and create an environment where they feel safe asking for help.

The IITs are now laying emphasis on mental health and peer support. Some have trained teachers, administrators, wardens, and student volunteers to recognise warning signals and help students. Others have introduced the Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) method, which educates people on what to do when they think someone might be in trouble. Counselling services, peer support, suicide awareness, accessible support are all various measures that various institutions are taking to ensure

IMA flags threats to nation’s affordable, accessible health system



India’s healthcare system, which is unique because of its high accessibility and affordability, driven largely by neighbourhood clinics and small to medium hospitals, is under serious threat because of chronic under-investment in public health by the government, insurance-driven price controls and unregulated foreign investment in health sector, according to the Indian Medical Association (IMA).In the document, “IMA’s blueprint for a healthier India”, which was recently released as a policy document, IMA points out that the minimum government allocation for health sector alone should be 2.5% of the GDP and that separate provision should be made for the provision of drinking water, sanitation and such social determinants of healthThe document is a summation of the concerns IMA has regarding the nation’s health sector, as well as policies that the organisation thinks that the nation should embrace for an equitable and accessible healthcare system, says V.R. Asokan, former national president of IMA. The document is being circulated by IMA amongst the Members of Parliament.India’s overall health spending (public and private) is currently estimated to be 3.8% of its GDP, much lower than the average health spending by low-and-middle income nations, which is 5.2% .

Sustained underfunding of public sector facilities and the rapid growth of the private sector has contributed to rising out of pocket (OOP) costs on health care for households. Of this, a significant share, almost two-thirds of OOP expenses, are for purchasing Outpatient care, especially medicines.Because households bear the burden of the high OOP health expenses in India, more than 55 million people are impoverished each year on account of expenses for ill health, says IMA.In 2024, the government (Union and States) expenditure on health was ₹4.95 lakh

Managing pain, not just eliminating it, is also important: US-based interventional pain management specialist

Pain medicine has moved ahead from its early origins in trying to manage pain by prescribing pills. Instead, it has evolved into a fine art and science of understanding the human experience in the context of pain, and multi-pronged efforts are deployed to remove pain, but also, equally so to manage it, says Vasanth Kattalai Kailasam, a Pain Medicine and Interventional Pain Management specialist at Mercy Health, Illinois, U.S., and faculty member at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Speaking to The Hindu, during a recent trip to India, Dr. Kailasam explained that pain remains one of medicine’s most complex phenomena because it hinges on multiple factors and perceptions, besides the pain score that doctors administer. The International Association for Study of Pain defines pain as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with an underlying tissue damage or a potential damage that’s been going on, he explains. Pain can be broadly split into two categories -“Acute pain, such as that from surgery or injury, can often be measured and managed with standard tools,” and “chronic pain—lasting beyond three months—has biological, psychological, and social components.” He further adds: Even a good day or a bad day can change how a patient feels pain.

In chronic cases, specialists recommend a “biopsychosocial assessment,” to understand the full impact and intensity. This approach looks beyond symptoms to consider emotional health, life circumstances, and functional ability. Interestingly, he narrates the path taken by John Joseph Bonica an anesthesiologist, known as

that help is available. Some IITs have also restructured academic demands to reduce stress. IIT-Bombay, for example, allows first-year students to drop one topic each semester. Other IITs have established programmes and orientation sessions to help students deal with their emotions.But there are not many resources for counselling and not enough people to help. Finding out depends on students speaking up. The pressure to do well in school has not gone away. People still do not receive help because of stigma. Researchers have found that being alone raises the chance of suicide. Students who face stressful family relationships, high expectations, or exposure to peers who are also struggling are more vulnerable. Addressing this issue needs a combination of strategies such as such counselling, peer networks, early discovery, and family engagement. Digital tools, like anonymous check-ins, give students a safe way to reach out when they are struggling but not ready to talk openly. Workshops, mentoring, and initiatives to raise awareness need to happen periodically.

To make campuses safer, we need to modify policies and the way people think. Educational institutes that make mental health a part of everyday life, make support easy to acquire, and teach people how to help when someone is in trouble offer intervention and a chance to prevent problems from getting worse.Families play a part too, as parents need to know about mental health and what their children are going through. There are also government programmes like Manodarpan, but they can only succeed if institutions ensure their policies are implemented properly.While counselling and wellness programmes, family and community engagement, peer and faculty training for early intervention interventions and continuous monitoring and research have begun, the challenge is to make sure these initiatives are consistent. Monitoring and collecting data will show if progress is still being made. Student suicide exposes cultural and systemic flaws, which can be reversed only if families, educational institutions, and policymakers work collectively to ensure mental health gets the effort, and consistent attention.

crore, while the private health expenditure was ₹9.3 lakh crore, of which OOP expenditure was ₹8 lakh crore, while health insurance provided for Rs. 1.32 lakh crore.In order to achieve the goals of Viksit Bharat 2047, allocation to the health sector should go up to at least 5% of the GDP by 2030, the document says.

Unregulated inflowsIMA points out that FDI has brought capital and technology into Indian healthcare, but unregulated inflows could undermine medical autonomy and alter the character of the Indian health system. It says that unregulated FDI and cross holdings across hospitals, diagnostics, insurance, pharma sector and medical equipment could lead to a situation where business interests could begin to influence clinical decisions, commercial exploitation of patients happen, pushing up healthcare costs.Apart from tighter government controls over FDI and strengthening domestic capital mobilisation, IMA urges the Union government to set up a National Healthcare Fund, akin to other government funds for specific purposes, so that it could support healthcare entrepreneurs and enable hospital expansion. This would ensure that Indians retain strategic ownership and governance of the healthcare ecosystem and that clinical decision making will always remain with doctors, independent of commercial influence.IMA also seeks to distinguish between Universal Health Care, which is all about equitable access to quality health care for all and Universal Health Coverage, which ensures that everyone has financial protection against healthcare costs.It holds that the Government should be primarily responsible for guaranteeing universal health care. IMA advocates a tax-based system of health financing. The public sector should be the primary provider, supplemented by strategic purchase from private hospitals. Intermediaries such as insurance companies and TPAs should not control healthcare delivery, it says.IMA warns that insurance-led models risk pushing India toward the US healthcare model of high cost, inequity, and exclusion.It assesses AB-PMJAY to be a scheme which was well-intentioned, but which has serious flaws. Inadequate funding and unscientific package rates have made the scheme totally unviable for small and medium private hospitals, which are being forced to deliver services at sub-par costs.IMA suggests that government hospitals should be funded directly by the Government and PMJAY should be exclusively used for strategic purchase from private sector with pricing of services based on a scientific system. It points out that the current allocation for PMJAY – ₹9,406 crore – is grossly inadequate.

the founding father of the discipline of pain medicine. He pioneered the world’s first multidisciplinary pain clinic at the University of Washington in the 1950s. His basic multidisciplinary model, bringing together specialists in neurology, psychology, physical therapy, and rehabilitation to work with patients, was born out of his experience of working with war veterans. This remains the backbone of comprehensive pain care today, Dr. Kailasam explains.

The world of pain management, and particularly, interventional pain management, he says, involves using image-guided procedures such as epidural injections, nerve blocks, and radiofrequency ablations. The more recent advances that have revolutionised pain management include neuromodulation therapies such as spinal cord and peripheral nerve stimulation, which basically work with the electrical currents that pass through the nerves to interrupt pain signals and restore function. Data from these implantable devices now allow physicians to remotely monitor patients’ activity and outcomes over time.On the burgeoning fentanyl, or opiod analgesics, crisis in the United States, Dr. Kailasam underscores that accessibility and overprescription in the 1990s led to widespread addiction and illegal fentanyl use. “We tried to manage one problem and created another.” He stresses that opiods play a limited role outside of acute or cancer pain.“For chronic, non-cancer pain, we rarely recommend opiods—they don’t improve long-term functioning and can be counterproductive,” he says. Instead, again he summons multimodal care strategies—combining non-opioid drugs, physiotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and lifestyle interventions—forms the current evidence-based standard. He also warns against the unregulated use of over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen: “Every time you use a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug (NSAID), you’re actually trading your

World looking at us as \$30 trillion economy, trusted partner: Piyush Goyal



The deal had nothing to do with the visit. It was a happy coincidence we could conclude it. In principle, both sides had decided not to work with a deadline or pressure on us... it had to be a win-win deal for both. There were a few issues pending towards the last few weeks. I went to Brussels on January 6-8 or thereabouts. We had a hiatus during the (Lok Sabha) election; they also had a change. This had changed by the time Maros Sefcovic (the current European Union Trade Commissioner) came in December 2024. Since then, we've been relentlessly on it. And while appointing Sefcovic, they actually told us we had put our best man on the job who can get you over the finishing line. In this deal, how much was geopolitics a factor since the EU probably felt being pushed to a corner because of what had happened with the US. And India too, given how things unfolded for it.

We had launched the talks in 2021, started discussions in 2022... They brought in Sefcovic in December 2024 and told us he was their best man on the job to conclude fast. That time there was no geopolitical impact. So this has nothing to do with geopolitics... They are all seeing a \$30 trillion economy. Look at the delta of opportunity... from \$4 trillion to \$30 trillion in 23 years. Who would like to miss out on it? Also, we are a trusted geography, a trusted partner... They (also) desperately want us to take their technologies, convert them into scale of manufacturing, and they say, we are looking at India as a base for Africa, for Asia, maybe even Latin America, they are very clear about it.

One issue that was of concern to New Delhi was the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. How has it been tackled?

In the spirit of being practical, pragmatic, and ensuring we are protected from any discrimination, we have a forward-MFN (Most Favoured Nation) i.e., any concessions they give to anybody, we get that. There's already a simplification process which they presented to me when I was in Brussels before the January 6-8 trip. Valdis Dombrovskis, the former (EU) trade commissioner, is now in charge of simplifying all these regulations. He promised when we met in Paris to make a presentation during my visit to Brussels, which he did four months ago. There's a huge demand from their industry also to deregulate and simplify. In fact, you might have heard about the (Mario) Draghi report... We get the benefit of all that. They've agreed that any carbon taxes paid here will be recognised. They've agreed to have verifiers in India, so people don't have to get foreigners all the way spending money to verify their carbon footprint. They've also agreed on a rapid response mechanism, where if anybody has any difficulty, then our team will help resolve those

FPIs withdraw Rs 36,000 crore in January amid global worries

New Delhi: Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) remained in a selling mode in January, withdrawing nearly Rs 36,000 crore (about USD 3.97 billion) as global uncertainties persisted. Meanwhile, a higher securities transaction tax (STT) proposed in the Union Budget may weigh on overseas investor participation in the near future.

The recent flight of foreign capital followed the worst outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh crore (USD 18.9 billion) recorded in 2025, triggered by volatile currency movements, global trade tensions and concerns over potential US tariffs and stretched market valuations. Going ahead, the sharp increase in STT on futures and options is likely to act as a marginal negative for FPI flows in the near term, particularly for high-frequency and derivative-focused global funds, said Aakash Shah, Technical Research Analyst at Choice Equity Broking.

"While the STT hike may help boost tax collections, it risks dampening trading volumes and could slow tactical FPI participation. To meaningfully revive sustained FPI inflows, investors will be looking more closely at macro stability, the rupee movement, and consistency in tax policy rather than just growth optics," he added.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech for 2026-27, announced a proposal to raise the STT on futures to 0.05 per cent from the present 0.02 per cent and STT on options premium and exercise of options to 0.15 per cent from the present rate of 0.1 per cent and 0.125 per cent, respectively. According to data from NSDL, FPIs pulled out Rs 35,962 crore from Indian equities in January. This continued selling pressure by FPIs reflects a combination of global and domestic drivers impacting foreign investor sentiment.

The key reasons for the FPI sell-off include US tariff

Duty exemption to boost microwave manufacturing in India

New Delhi: Prices of microwave ovens will have a minor impact after the proposed exemption of customs duty in the FY27 budget, but the move will encourage domestic manufacturing of the product, industry players said.

Currently, the microwave oven market in India is estimated to be around 2.2 million units and is projected to grow with a CAGR of over 8 per cent for the next five years, led by factors such as growing urbanisation and expansion of nuclear families. A handful of companies, such as LG Electronics and Haier, manufacture or assemble some models, while others import components from China, Taiwan, Thailand and other markets. The exemption of basic customs duty on these imports will boost component sourcing, strengthen the domestic manufacturing ecosystem and make India-made microwave ovens globally competitive. Furthermore, localisation will happen," Haier India President N S Satish told PTI. "This will help manufacturers in component sourcing," he said.

difficulties... Plus, the European Union is very appreciative of the good work India has done. Amongst the G20, we are in the top three in terms of fulfilling our contributions. For example, in renewable energy, we have fulfilled it eight years ahead of schedule. And now the PM has set a target of 500 GW... far beyond anybody's imagination. So they have announced their commitment to support our decarbonisation efforts in a big way through a joint fund. 500 million euros they've already announced. That is just the beginning.

What about some of the other contentious issues such as GI (Geographical Indication) products or Intellectual Property Rights, etc, for the Europeans?

There is no contention on IPR. I have not had one meeting on IPR. At the official level, they settled it. I have not had one conversation on IPR, because we've done it with Switzerland and the UK. They are the ones who are more difficult. The EU had nothing in IPR that they had a problem with. GI is pending. GI is not covered in the present IPR chapter, there'd be a separate agreement... We'll do it afterwards. GI, etc, these are operational issues, and not (really) contentious. The reason why we're asking you is, in 2013, when the (India-EU FTA) talks got stalled, GI and IPR were perhaps contentious issues alongside car and car parts...

EU does not have any issue with IPR. We settled IPR issues with Switzerland and the UK. They are the difficult ones. In fact, the previous government didn't want to open up spirits. Now, what's the harm to India from spirits coming from the EU? Guess how many farmers make grapes for wines? 6,000, that's all. What is the production of wine in India, in terms of value? About Rs 1,000 crore. More than that, I've got duty free access in Europe for table grapes. I've got 85,000 tonnes of table grapes, duty free access in the FTA, which is worth more than Rs 1,000 crore. And by the way, our wines are liked internationally. So there is a great export potential, which has opened up for us — duty free. We are bigger exporters than importers. And even if they come, consumers will have choice, our quality will improve. And here too, we've kept a benchmark, nothing below \$3 will get a concession.

And this is the first deal where the EU has agreed to a quota... Yes... it is the first deal they've done without dairy... Australia did without dairy, New Zealand did without dairy, Switzerland also... All sensitive items are out. No cereals, no GM products, no dairy, no rice, wheat, no soya, no corn.

How did you manage to keep government procurement out? Because (with) the UK, you did allow it.

See, with the UK, there is significant government procurement. I told the EU that, look, you want government procurement, you get me a commitment from all the 27 (member) states that they'll allow government procurement. They said, Oh! That's the competence of the European states. I said, why do I give you my government procurement. (Reciprocity), that's a principle of this government. See, the export of motor vehicles is \$9 billion, import is just \$921 million. In other words, we export 10 times as compared to (what we) import. Should this country be scared of auto sector imports?

China is still a large percentage of European imports, say 10-12%, India is only about 2%. You see a growing market, this gap? We'll have to see what they do, but it's quite a sizeable gap. We have to see how quickly our industry ramps up. Our industry has to create capacities, ramp up production, and ramp up quality. The Prime Minister has been saying how



threats on Europe amid the Greenland dispute, which sparked global risk-off sentiment, alongside a stronger US dollar, elevated bond yields, rupee weakness to Rs 90-92 levels, and stretched valuations, Vaqarjaved Khan, Senior Fundamental Analyst, Angel One Ltd, said. Himanshu Srivastava, Principal, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said, "Globally, persistent risk aversion, still elevated interest rates in developed markets, and a strengthening US dollar have encouraged capital to remain on the sidelines or rotate into other markets perceived to offer better risk-adjusted returns." At the same time, geopolitical uncertainties and ongoing tariff and trade tensions have weighed on emerging market risk appetite, further dampening overseas interest in Indian equities. On the domestic front, mixed corporate earnings momentum and looming macro events such as the upcoming federal budget have prompted caution among foreign funds. The weakening rupee has also magnified the impact of outflows in dollar terms, reinforcing short-term risk aversion, he added.

When asked whether it will have any downward impact on prices, Satish said, "Not much. It will have a minuscule impact on pricing." According to a report from Marketsandata, a market intelligence and business consulting company, the India microwave oven market is projected to witness a CAGR of 8.52 per cent during FY2026-FY2033. LG Electronics India, one of the leaders in the segment, appreciated the move and said the government has considered its request to waive BCD on key imported components used exclusively for microwave ovens. "This is a welcome move that will strongly benefit LG Electronics India and the Indian microwave manufacturing industry by boosting local manufacturing and further building on the government's Make in India scheme," said LG Electronics India Factory Head, Greater Noida, Gaganjeet Singh. He said the initiative will further strengthen the domestic consumer electronics sector and also improve viability for the microwave export business. According to some reports, India primarily sources components for its microwave ovens from China, with additional supplies from countries like South Korea, Malaysia and Japan. Terminating the budget proposal a "timely move",

Expert reflects on Ameesha Patel's choice to prioritise career over marriage: 'I had one serious relationship, and it was before I joined films'



Actor Ameesha Patel recently reflected on her journey of love, marriage, and long-term companionship and why she chose to remain single despite receiving countless proposals. Marriage, she explained, was never her ultimate goal. "I never used to chase boys in school; they used to do that. I have got a lot of proposals since then, and they continue to come till now. But a lot of the people I met wanted me to stay at home and not work after marriage, and that didn't sit right with me. I wanted to become Ameesha Patel first, because I had already spent so much of my life being someone's daughter, and I didn't want to spend my adulthood as just someone's wife," she said during her appearance on Ranveer Allahbadia's podcast.

Patel also shared that her career and personal life often pulled her in opposite directions. "People who love you will let your career prosper. I have lost a lot for my career, and I have also lost a lot for love. I have given up both things for the other, and I think that I have learnt from both. For example, I had one serious relationship, and it was before I joined films. He belonged to a very big industrial family from South Bombay, like mine. Had the same background and education, and the family setup was the same. It ticked all the boxes, but when I decided to go into film, my partner did not want a person in the

Hard vs. soft belly: Why the texture of your stomach fat is a major health 'red flag'

Gastroenterologist Dr Shubham Vatsya recently shed light on the different types of protruding belly fat. "If you have a protruding belly and it feels soft, then the concern is usually less, but if you have a protruding belly and it feels hard, then it's a red flag," he noted on Instagram. According to him, a hard belly is a sign of visceral fat, which leads to metabolic issues. "Soft belly is mostly subcutaneous fat, which gets stored under the skin, and is easily pinchable, and has a relatively less metabolic impact. Hard belly, or visceral fat, accumulates in the liver, pancreas, and intestines. This releases inflammatory chemicals and stress hormones, which cause insulin resistance, leading to high BP and heart disease risk. So, don't just go by weight or BMI. More protein, daily movement, and proper sleep are your saviours here," he added.

So, we verified these insights with Dr Rituja Ugalmugle, consultant in internal medicine at Wockhardt Hospitals, Mumbai Central, who said that a firm or tight belly is often linked to visceral fat, which sits deep inside the abdomen around vital organs such as the liver, pancreas, and intestines. "This type of fat is active in the body and is more harmful. A softer belly usually indicates subcutaneous fat, which lies just under the skin and poses far fewer health risks," said Dr Ugalmugle. Visceral fat behaves differently from surface fat. Dr Ugalmugle noted that it releases inflammatory substances and stress hormones, which affect how the body processes sugar and fats and regulates blood pressure. "Over time, this raises the risk of type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, high blood pressure, and heart disease, even in people who do not seem overweight," said Dr Ugalmugle.

Absolutely, exclaimed Dr Ugalmugle. "This is why weight and BMI do not provide the whole picture. A person can be at a 'normal weight' but still have excess

Why elephants' feet, not the ears, are their most powerful sensory tool



According to wildlife researchers, when an elephant makes a low-frequency call, the sound not only moves through the air but also travels as seismic vibrations through the earth. Elephants sense these vibrations using special sensory cells in their feet, especially in the fat pads on their soles.

When we think about hearing, we usually picture ears. But for elephants, the largest land animals on Earth, listening involves their whole bodies. Besides using their big ears, elephants can pick up sound vibrations through their feet. This helps them notice distant calls, oncoming storms, and even threats from far away. This unique skill is important for their survival, communication, and social life.

How elephants hear without ears Elephants make and respond to low-frequency sounds called infrasound, which humans cannot hear. These deep rumbles can travel several kilometres through the air and even farther underground.

public eye, and that is how I chose my career over love." Despite those choices, she hasn't closed the door on companionship. In her own words: "I am all up for marriage, as long as I find someone worthy. They say that 'Where there is a will, there is a way,' so the person who finds me through everything and mauke par chauka maarlege (takes advantage of the situation) will be my person. I still get all kinds of proposals from a lot of well-to-do families. People half my age want to take me out on a date, and I am open to it because a man has to be mentally mature. I have met a lot of people older than me who have the IQ of a fly."

How common is it for individuals to prioritise self-identity or career before marriage, and what impact does this have on long-term happiness?

Psychologist Rasshi Gurnani tells indianexpress.com, "Many individuals, especially women, increasingly choose to establish a strong sense of self and independence before marriage. From a psychological perspective, this fosters autonomy, self-efficacy, and higher self-esteem, which are vital for long-term well-being."

Prioritising identity or career helps create a secure base, she adds, making relationships healthier because they stem from choice rather than dependency. Research shows that when people feel fulfilled in themselves, they tend to form more stable and satisfying partnerships later in life.

Trade-offs between relationships and professional aspirations Trade-offs between career and relationships often create cognitive dissonance—conflicting values pulling in different directions. Gurnani states, "Psychology suggests that balance is less about dividing time equally and more about aligning decisions with core values. When individuals sacrifice one domain entirely for the other, it can lead to regret or burnout. A mindful approach involves recognising personal needs, setting boundaries, and adopting flexibility, allowing both love and ambition to coexist without one erasing the other."



visceral fat, a condition often referred to as metabolically obese normal weight. Waist size, belly firmness, and lifestyle habits are often better indicators than the number on the scale."

Is a soft belly completely harmless, then?

Not completely, contended Dr Ugalmugle. "While subcutaneous fat is less harmful, too much of it can still lead to joint strain and overall weight gain. However, from a metabolic view, visceral fat is the bigger concern and needs immediate attention."

What lifestyle changes specifically help reduce visceral fat?

According to Dr Ugalmugle, visceral fat responds well to consistent lifestyle changes, not quick fixes. Focusing on protein-rich meals, cutting back on refined carbohydrates, moving daily (even brisk walking helps), managing stress, and getting quality sleep all contribute. Crash dieting often fails, while steady habit changes show lasting results. Your belly is more than just a cosmetic issue; it's a health indicator. Instead of focusing on weight loss, pay attention to how your body feels and functions. Better food choices, daily activity, and proper rest can significantly improve metabolic health, regardless of your body size.

According to wildlife researchers, when an elephant makes a low-frequency call, the sound not only moves through the air but also travels as seismic vibrations through the earth. Elephants sense these vibrations using special sensory cells in their feet, especially in the fat pads on their soles. An elephant's foot is specially built for this job. Under the thick skin is a layer of fatty tissue that acts as a shock absorber and amplifies vibrations. Inside this tissue are Pacinian corpuscles, sensory receptors highly sensitive to pressure and vibration. After the vibrations are picked up, they travel through bones and nerves to the inner ear, where the elephant's brain processes them as sound. So, elephants do not just listen with their ears; they also feel sound through the ground.

How do they make use of this unique ability?

This ability to sense vibrations gives elephants a strong advantage for survival: Long-distance communication: Herds can stay connected across vast landscapes, even when visual contact is impossible. Early warning system: Elephants can detect approaching predators, humans or rival herds long before they appear.

Environmental awareness: Vibrations from distant thunderstorms or rain help elephants locate water, which is crucial in arid regions. Studies show that elephants respond to seismic signals by freezing, gathering, or moving toward or away from the source of the vibrations. Feet, ears, and the elephant social network Elephants use information from their feet along with signals from their large, dish-shaped ears, which are also very sensitive to low-frequency sounds. This two-part system helps them figure out not only that something is happening, but also where it is happening. This supports elephants' famously complex social structures. Matriarchs, in particular, rely on these cues to guide herds safely, avoid danger, and reunite with distant family members. When human noise interferes Modern threats are beginning to disrupt this ancient sensory system. Heavy machinery, mining, road traffic, and construction generate ground vibrations that can confuse or overwhelm elephants' seismic communication. Researchers believe that this may contribute to

2026 Badminton Asia Team C'ships: Women's team set to defend title in Sindhu's absence; Lakshya leads men's team- Schedule,



GNS News Agency, Feb 4

In absence of double Olympic medalist PV Sindhu, the Indian women's team will have a tough task on their hand to defend the title at the Badminton Asia Team Championships starting tomorrow in Qingdao, China while the men's team will be banking on a strong core led by Lakshya Sen to pose a challenge for the podium.

Sindhu, who started her season with a good outing at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament, withdraw from the event due to medical concern. Badminton Association of India confirmed that due to the late withdrawal, there won't be any replacement in the team. India had scripted history by clinching their maiden women's team gold in the last edition in Malaysia, but Sindhu's withdrawal due to a niggle has dealt a significant blow to their medal hopes. With Sindhu not there, the younger crop of Tanvi Sharma, Unnati Hooda, and Malvika Bansod along with experienced doubles duo of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand will lead the Indian challenge. The eyeballs will be on Unnati Hooda and teenager Tanvi Sharma. Unnati, 18, is coming on the back of a brilliant 2025 season where she achieved a career-high world ranking of No. 23 and defeated Sindhu at the China Open. The youngest Indian ever to win a BWF Super 100 title, Unnati ended 2025 with a title at the Odisha Masters. Tanvi impressed everyone at the start of 2026 with her impressive shows at the India Open Super 750 and Indonesia Masters Super 500. While she lost to higher-ranked shuttlers Wang Zhi Yi and Tomoka Miyazaki in both tournaments, her performance showed promise. Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly, who defended their Syed Modi International crown in December, will spearhead the doubles challenge

alongside Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra and Tanisha Crasto. India open their women's campaign against Myanmar on Wednesday before facing Thailand in Group Y.

Lakshya leads strong core World number 13 Lakshya Sen will lead the Indian men's team that also features veteran pros Kidambi Srikanth and HS Prannoy- both former World championship medallists. Lakshya had a good 2025 where he won the Australian Open and made it to the final of Hong Kong Open. Srikanth also reached finals at Malaysia Masters and Syed Modi International. While Prannoy is not in his best form but can beat anyone on his day when he is 100 percent fit. Upcoming youngster Ayush Shetty will be India's number two after winning the US Open Super 300 last year. Led by World No. 13 Lakshya Sen, the squad also features former World No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth and seasoned campaigner HS Prannoy — three world championship medallists. The doubles unit will once again revolve around two-time world championships bronze medallists Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who had a subdued start to the season with a quarterfinal and round of 16 finish at Malaysia Open and India Open. The former world No. 1 will be hungry to taste success. Sai Pratheek K, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Hariharan Amsakarunan are the other doubles players. Clubbed in group C, the men will begin their campaign against Singapore on Wednesday before a tougher group tie against Japan. The top two teams from each group will progress to the quarterfinals in the biennial continental event.

Draw for Indian teams at Badminton Asia Championships India Women: Group Y – India, Myanmar, Thailand India Men: Group C – India, Singapore, Japan Indian Squads for 2026 Badminton Asia Team Championships Men: Lakshya Sen, Ayush Shetty, Kidambi Srikanth, Prannoy HS, Tharun Mannepalili, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy, Sai Pratheek K, Hariharan Amsakarunan Women: Unnati Hooda: Tanvi Sharma, Rakshittha Sree Santhosh Ramraj, Malvika Bansod, Surya Charisma Tamiri, Treasa Jolly, Gayatri Gopichand, Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra, Tanisha Crasto Schedule at 2026 Badminton Asia Team Championships (All IST Timings): 4th February- 8:30 AM – India Women Vs Myanmar, 2:30 PM – India Men Vs Singapore Men 5th February- 8:30 AM – India Women Vs Thailand Women, 2:30 PM – Indian Men Vs Japan Men The Badminton Asia Team Championships 2026 will be live-streamed on the Sony Sports Network. The action will also be available on the Badminton Asia official YouTube channel.

Is Pakistan spinner's bent-arm, zig-zag action with long pause legal?

The round-arm flings of Usman Tariq would tax batsmen's eye, just as it would overwork the doubters' fingers, furiously alternating between rewind and pause buttons. Australia all-rounder Cameron Green was left unamused when the Pakistan off-spinner ejected him in a recent T20i; he angrily mimicked the action, as if suggesting that Usman had exceeded the 15-degree bent-elbow limit permissible to bowlers. But after watching the replays, he promptly apologised to the bowler. Green, though, would not be the last batsman to trudge back wondering about the legality of Usman's action.

The action has confounded umpires. Twice he was reported during the Pakistan Super League (PSL), but cleared both times. He is tired explaining the genesis of his unusual action. "I have two elbows in my arm. My arm bends naturally. I have got this tested and cleared. Everyone feels I bend my arms and all that. My bent arm is a biological issue," Usman explained to MYK channel.

In medical lexicon, he has double-jointed elbows, which means he cannot fully straighten his arms. The great Muttiah Muralitharan too had a congenital deformity and was unable to straighten his bowling arm. Few bowlers have undergone such unremitting scrutiny as the highest wicket-taker in Test cricket. Similarly, Shoab Akhtar had 'noodle arms', whereby his shoulder, elbow and wrists hyper-extended. His joints were unfathomably loose and flexible. Jasprit Bumrah too has a hyper-extended elbow, which means he's releasing the ball closer to the other end. It is a natural advantage, like some bowlers are hauntingly tall or some have wondrously malleable wrists.

The mechanics of Usman's action are more fascinating. The 28-year-old's run-up, more a stagger, is ridiculously short and slow. He tosses the ball from his left to right arm once, like Shane Warne. He zigzags in his strides, from just behind the umpire, holding the ball waist-high, treading dangerously close to cutting the crease, and pauses for an eternity. The ball is somewhere close to his chest, before his right-arm extends like the hand of a wind turbine, almost blocking the umpire's vision, the arm and lower body stoops, as though he mistook the pitch for a tenpin bowling lane and tenderly releases the ball, careful not to hurt the pitch or the ball.

The action bears uncanny resemblance to the king of round-arm slings, Lasith Malinga, albeit light years slower. The pace ranges between 75-80 kph. Fast to slow. His dream, though, was always to bowl fast. He has the frame, the luxuriant hair girdled by a thick ribbon than a headband, and the aggression. But he got injured mid-



match during a tennis-ball game in Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Short of bowlers, he continued to bowl, but off-breaks. He got a heap of wickets and the coach encouraged him to bowl spin. Whether he bowled pace with the same action is not known. His action takes some getting used to. The slowness of his action, in a format in rampaging haste, turns batsmen fidgety. He then tests the peripheral vision, as the batsman has to shift his gaze to almost the line of the umpire to watch his wrists and decipher the variation. The angle of release takes the ball away from the right-hander. He exaggerates the effect with away-drift. Upon landing, the ball spins away subtly. Stumpings have been a recurrent theme in his high-light reels. He employs both the arm-ball and carrom ball. To retain his mystery quotient, Pakistan have used him sparingly. Just three games, which brought eight wickets at an average of 7.50 and an economy rate of 5.62.

The change-up is the one that slithers into the right-handed batsman. It's a more devastating delivery because of the sumptuous away-drift Usman purchases. Sometimes, he employs a back-of-the-hand wrong'un like a leg-spinner. To change up the change-up, he uses a conventional off-break method, though the rip is not as pronounced as that of a classical off-spinner. The trajectory is not as low as Kedar Jadhav. Usman is considerably taller, six feet or thereabouts, while Jadhav is 5'5". The variations, the rare gift of bowling similar balls differently, accentuate the uniqueness of his action. Add clever shuffling of speeds, lengths and release points, and he becomes a daunting bowler. But his was almost a career that didn't happen. When livelihood realities seized him, he quit cricket and shifted to Dubai. But the movie MS Dhoni: The Untold Story revived his cricketering dreams. He quit his job as a purchase coordinator in a real estate firm, returned home and started playing cricket again. In 2023, PSL scouts discovered him and parachuted him into the league. The rest is round-arm fling history.

players and support staff, including India captain Sandesh Jhingan, had agreed to take a pay cut for the ISL. In a statement posted on X, the Goan club said it held "honest and difficult conversations" with the squad and staff amid the ongoing turmoil in Indian football and the uncertainty surrounding the league.

"In a moment of real uncertainty for Indian football, our club had honest and difficult conversations about the challenges we are facing. What followed was something that made us incredibly proud," the club said. "Our First Team players and Technical Staff stepped forward, stood together, and chose to support the club by agreeing to reduce their remuneration during this period. This was not an easy decision. It was a selfless one." The AIFF Super Cup champions said they were "deeply humbled" by the gesture and expressed gratitude for the unity and commitment shown by the group. "These moments remind us that this club is more than results on the pitch. It is about people, belief, and standing together when it

Moment for ICC to prove it is impartial, says Shahid Afridi after Pakistan's decision to boycott T20 World Cup match vs India



GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Former Pakistan player Shahid Afridi on Monday said that while it's regrettable that Pakistan will not play the T20 World Cup match against India on February 15, he stands by the decision taken by his country. He also said that it was the moment for the International Cricket Council (ICC) to prove its impartiality. Pakistan's stunning decision to not play the February 15 match is being seen as an act of support for Bangladesh, who were shown the door after refusing to play in India citing security concerns.

"I've always believed cricket can open doors when

politics closes them. It's regrettable that Pakistan won't play India at the #T20WorldCup, but I stand behind my government's decision. This is the moment for @ICC to lead and prove through decisions, not statements, that it is impartial, independent and fair to every member," Afridi posted on X. On Sunday, hours after the Pakistan government announced that the cricket team of the country will not play against India in Colombo, the ICC has warned to reconsider the stance, making the board aware of the long-term implications they might face as a result of boycotting the high-profile fixture.

"The ICC hopes that the PCB will consider the significant and long-term implications for cricket in its own country as this is likely to impact the global cricket ecosystem, which it is itself a member and beneficiary of," read an ICC press release. "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan grants approval to the Pakistan Cricket Team to participate in the ICC World T20 2026; however, the Pakistan Cricket Team shall not take the field in the match scheduled on 15th February against India," said a post on X (Formerly Twitter) on Sunday. However, ICC has started there has been no official confirmation with them on the matter: "This position of selective participation is difficult to reconcile with the fundamental premise of a global sporting event where all qualified teams are expected to compete on equal terms per the event schedule," a statement from ICC read.

Usman Khawaja supports Pakistan spinner after teammate Cameron Green mocks bowler's action

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Recently retired Australian cricketer Usman Khawaja has defended Pakistan spinner Usman Tariq after countryman and former teammate Cameron Green mocked the bowler for his action. Green, who was dismissed by Tariq in the second T20i international between Pakistan and Australia, was caught on cameras mimicking the action of Tariq. Tariq, who was playing in only his third ever T20i, has a unique action. Green, after being dismissed, was seen on cameras mimicking a baseball throw, similar to how Tariq's action is. The Pakistani bowler has been accused of 'chucking' the ball in the past and has been cleared twice. In an Instagram post, Khawaja defended him and said, "There aren't many things worse than being called a chucker in cricket," he said in the post. "The stigma is real. The man is just doing his best and has been cleared twice." Let's have some perspective and understanding and stop jumping to conclusions," he wrote.

In the past, Tariq has tried to explain his action and said that a biological issue is the reason behind his side-arm bowling style. "There are two corners on my (elbow) which makes it hard for me to straighten," he said to the National. "That makes confusion for the spectators. I have



given two tests at labs in Pakistan. My action was cleared. As you can see from before, in history, when any spinner had allegations (of chucking) against them, they went to the lab. They tried to change their actions and develop the right degrees. When I went for the test, within one week, it was cleared. I didn't get the answer that you have to change your action, or improve the degrees. I was confident about my action because I know that I am not throwing," said Tariq. Pakistan defeated a depleted Australian team in the second T20i on Sunday to take an unassailable lead. The defeat, a 90-run drubbing, was Australia's biggest loss in the format in 21 years.

Government explores return of Formula 1 to India, Sports Minister inspects Buddh circuit

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Thirteen years after the last race in India, the government is considering bringing Formula 1 back to the Buddh International Circuit in Greater Noida. It is learnt that Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya recently inspected the venue, inaugurated in 2011. The Indian Grand Prix was held thrice between 2011 and 2013, but F1 never returned to the country, primarily due to taxation disputes between the race organisers and the government.

The ministry is now planning to revive the racing circuit and has begun laying the groundwork to move the process forward. During his visit to the Buddh International Circuit, Mandaviya assessed the track's long-term usage, sources told The Indian Express. He also held discussions with officials from the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA), the state-run body that took control of the facility from the now-bankrupt Jaypee Group. "Yes, the minister and other officials visited the track last week for an inspection. The idea was to assess the condition of the circuit and estimate the maintenance required," a source confirmed. "We are looking to restart the unused facility. The taxation issues that plagued the event will be resolved," the source added. The three editions of the Indian Grand Prix drew significant public interest, with legendary German driver Sebastian Vettel winning all three races. "We have asked officials to start leasing out the venue to event organisers. The minister has instructed the track owners to hand over the circuit to a sports management company for two to three years, which will work towards bringing motorsport back to India," the source said.



The circuit was last used for a major international event in September 2023, when Bharat MotoGP was held as one of the new races on the MotoGP calendar. However, the event faced multiple challenges and was later scrapped due to operational issues. Among the problems were visa delays, a 45-minute delay to the practice session due to a shortage of marshals, and extreme heat and humidity. As a result, the 24-lap race was shortened to 21 laps. Marco Bezzecchi won the reduced race, finishing ahead of Jorge Martin and Fabio Quartararo. If plans to revive Formula 1 materialise, several challenges remain. Hosting an F1 race involves enormous costs, and with an increasing number of countries vying for a spot on the calendar, the sport has no shortage of options—particularly in the oil-rich Middle East, where governments often bear the full expense. However, the Buddh International Circuit's world-class infrastructure, coupled with government backing, could present an attractive proposition for Formula 1 organisers looking to tap into the subcontinent market.

'Form isn't the issue with Sanju Samson': Former India player compares situation to Suryakumar Yadav

GNS News Agency, Feb 4

Uthappa said that a 'sword' has always been hanging on Sanju Samson's head and that there has never been a time when he has had the opportunity to bat unencumbered. (AP Photo) Uthappa said that a 'sword' has always been hanging on Sanju Samson's head and that there has never been a time when he has had the opportunity to bat unencumbered.

Former Indian batter Robin Uthappa believes that until Tilak Varma is fully fit, Sanju Samson should continue to be given opportunities to be India's opener. Samson, who has been plagued by a set of poor scores, especially with five misfires against New Zealand in the recently-concluded T20 series, could possibly find himself out of the playing XI, especially with the hot run that Ishan Kishan is on. But Uthappa believes that just like it was in the case of captain Suryakumar Yadav, Samson too deserves time. The former player also said that form isn't the issue with the wicket-keeping opener.

"Form will always be temporary, be it Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, or Rohit Sharma. When you are a cricketer of that calibre, I don't think the form of Sanju Samson is an issue. Even Suryakumar Yadav wasn't out of form. It's just that he didn't play in one position long enough. The

kind of player Samson is, when he comes off in tandem with Abhishek Sharma, they look like a million bucks. That energy is insane." Uthappa then said that a 'sword' has always been hanging on Samson's head and that there has never been a time when he has had the opportunity to bat unencumbered.

Yes, he has got the opportunities and not performed in them. But there has also always been a sword over his head that if he doesn't perform, there is someone waiting for his spot. There has never been a time where he just goes and bats. When they've given him that chance to just go and bat and do your thing, he has done well." Uthappa then cited the example of Surya and said that India should have carried on with Surya even if he wasn't able to be among the runs in the New Zealand series. "He has got the opportunities, but as I said about Surya, in any World Cup, you will carry one player. I was saying Carry Surya if that's required because when he comes off, he'll win you matches like he's winning now in the New Zealand series. The same applies for Sanju Samson. Carry him and stick with him. Keep Ishan Kishan at No. 3. But if Tilak gets ready, then play your best 11," said Uthappa. India play their first game of the ICC T20 World Cup on February 7 when they face the USA at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

Bengaluru FC first team players agree to take pay cuts for truncated ISL, says owner Parth Jindal

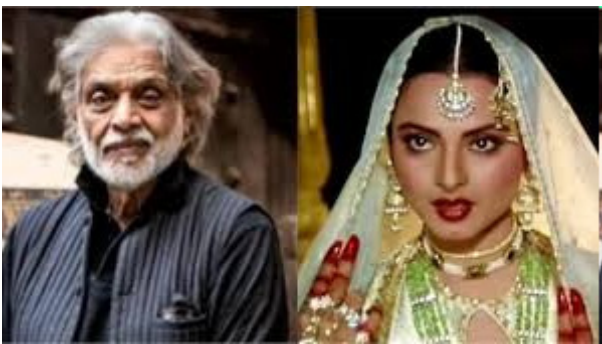
Bengaluru FC owner Parth Jindal said on Sunday that the first team players, including the legendary Sunil Chhetri had agreed to take pay cuts for the truncated Indian Super League (ISL) season which is set to begin on February 14.

"Everyone is well aware of the challenging phase Indian Football is going through. For me, as BFC team owner and someone who is deeply passionate about the sport and the club, this has been one of the toughest periods ever," Jindal wrote on 'X'. "I am grateful to all the first team players who have agreed to reduce their remuneration during this phase. Without a doubt, this was one of the toughest decisions we have had to make as a club, and I truly appreciate that the players have made this sacrifice in the best interests of the club and the sport," he added.

Last month, another ISL club FC Goa had stated its



‘Not all horses run in a race; some are worshipped’: Muzaffar Ali on why Bollywood can’t make films like Umrao Jaan anymore



In today’s Bollywood where, films and songs often feel like fleeting content, designed for quick hits and fast returns, Muzaffar Ali’s work is a reminder of a cinema that breathed poetry, music, and soul. The legendary filmmaker, painter, and author, whose Umrao Jaan, Gaman, and Anjuman are etched in cinematic history, believes the deeply immersive songs and films of his era can hardly be recreated today. At the 11th edition of Expresso, Ali reflected on why why modern Bollywood struggles to capture that blend of narrative, music, and cultural harmony and why the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb remains alive in spirit even as it struggles to find a place on screen today.

Bollywood, hypernationalism, and the othering of communities During the session, Muzaffar Ali was asked about his recreation of Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb in his films and the stark contrast to today’s cinema, which often projects hyper-nationalism and community divides. He said, “This is the future everyone is facing, and there needs to be a collective solution. We cannot do it alone unless every individual delves into its depth. The fakir, the ascetic, saw beauty in everything, he saw love in all things. If the heart recognises Krishna in everything, he becomes a devotee of Krishna. It is essential to seek beauty, recognise it, and bring it before the world, forgetting where it comes from. Think of beauty as an abstract human attribute, name it, assign it a religion—it doesn’t matter. Music itself is a confluence of everything; you cannot erase any element from it because people have poured their heart and soul into it.”

‘Sooraj Dooba Hai earned Rs 70 cr, I got nothing’: Amaal Mallik on music industry battles, losing 45 films in 5 years for ‘speaking up’

Music composer and singer Amaal Mallik has once again opened up about the deep-rooted flaws in the Hindi film music industry, ranging from work culture and crediting practices to artist rights and compensation. In a recent interview with Pinkvilla, Amaal shared on how “Sooraj Dooba Hai” song from the film Roy, made on a budget of Rs 8–9 lakh, went on to earn an estimated Rs 60–70 crore for music labels, while he saw no share of that success.

“It earned Rs 60–70 crore for the label, and I got nothing except for the publishing rights which are negligible, not even close to Rs 1 crore,” he said in the interview. For Amaal, the fight for rights is not just about personal wealth. “I want to make that kind of money to help people. I do it in my own way, I don’t want to talk about it, but I want money to help people. That can only come if I have rights or equal rights or some kind of rights jo film music mein nahi milta hai.”

‘South Indian music composers take huge fees’ He contrasted the situation in Hindi cinema with the South Indian film industry. “There have been people like Rahman sir (AR Rahman) and many others from the South who have stood their ground,” he said, pointing out the massive disparity in fees. “There is this massive fees of like Rs 10–15 crore that South composers are getting, compared to Hindi music composers who are getting Rs 2–3 crore and giving up all the rights. It is not about crying for money, but money is something that facilitates someone with a heart like me, intentions like me to help people.” “We do not want money to buy ourselves home or something. 16 years later, I just bought a car for myself. Never did anything for myself, it was always people around me,” he said. How the music industry functions Describing how the industry functions, Amaal pointed to a culture that discourages questioning. “Everyone works in one straight line. People don’t ask why things can’t be done differently or why credits can’t be structured in another way,” he said.

On the issue of credits, Amaal was firm that fairness has always guided his work. “No one can ever say that I denied them credit on my songs,” he said. He explained that Indian crediting systems lag behind global standards. “In the Western world, crediting works very differently. On platforms like Spotify, you often don’t even see the names of everyone involved in a song here.” He recalled moments when even senior lyricists were forced to fight for

He added, “The Ganga-Jamuni culture you are talking about cannot die because it has traditions, people, and examples. Wajid Ali Shah was maligned by the British, but no one said he was a devotee of Krishna. Kathak flourished in his time, thumri flourished in his time. Such patronage is vital for art—it could come from a Muslim patron or a Hindu ruler. Bollywood must learn this if it seeks global recognition. India has a much bigger place and positioning; getting lost in petty things will only maintain business, not achieve global acknowledgment.” Ali stressed the importance of trusting India’s unique artistic heritage, “What can be created in India, born here, cannot happen in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, or anywhere else. If we lose faith in our heritage, in our human resources, what will remain of us? Life has to be viewed in a larger artistic atmosphere.”

Muzaffar Ali on unforgettable songs in his films When asked about his iconic films and their unforgettable songs, like “Seene Mein Jalan” or “Aapki Yaad Aati Rahi”, Muzaffar Ali revealed the careful, immersive process behind them, “I dream of the character first. I look at their soul, their dynamic trajectory through life, and then immerse them into a poetic concept. My kind of characters—no one in commercial Bollywood has time to write for them. Fortunately, I had Shahryar, who would immerse himself in my house, moving from one ghazal to another, working with Khayyam sahab or Jaidev ji. All beauty comes from deep, immersive experiences of yourself and your team. You submerge yourself and bring others along, without them realizing it. Music must be treated this way; otherwise, it doesn’t live. Today, songs come one after the other, each waiting to be knocked out by the next. But the songs of Umrao Jaan, no one can erase them.”

4K restorations of Muzaffar Ali’s films Muzaffar Ali also shared his excitement over the 4K restoration of his films, “Fortunately, all my films are being restored. Umrao Jaan, Gaman, Anjuman—they have all been done. It is a very special feeling.” When asked whether audiences would still connect with Umrao Jaan if it were released today, he responded with a metaphor, “Not all horses run in a race; some are worshipped, adorned. What is the use of forcing everyone to run? Beauty must remain in the heart.”



recognition. “There were times when they had to fight because the lyricist’s name wasn’t even showing up. Writers as senior as Amitabh Bhattacharya, Kausar Munir and Manoj Muntashir had to make a video just to demand proper credit,” he said. According to Amaal, many musicians who received credit alongside him later pushed other labels to follow suit. “They questioned why a composer could be credited on one label but not another.” Amaal also noted that prominently crediting composers wasn’t always the norm. “Today you see composer credits on every big YouTube channel, but I was the first one to insist on this back in 2004,” he said.

Speaking about the professional cost of taking such stands, Amaal admitted it often leads to conflict. “There was a time when I was working with someone on a film, and by the evening we were fighting a court case. I won’t name anyone, but that’s how it works,” he said. He also credited his audience for sustaining him through professional setbacks. “I’ve spoken out strongly, but the audience has stood by me,” he said.

Amaal revealed that he was removed from several projects over the years. “In the last five years, I was dropped from 40 to 45 films,” he said, adding that listeners continued to engage with his music regardless. “Even when I wasn’t visible, my music kept living on.” Amaal also opened up about the risks of speaking out early in his career. “People tell me, ‘If you do this, you’ll get less work.’ I understand that, but I don’t know any other way,” he said. He added that the backlash often affects his family, including his brother



listeners. I am happy to announce that I am not gonna be taking any new assignments as a playback vocalist from now on. I am calling it off. It was a wonderful journey.” The singer also expressed gratitude to his admirers for giving him unconditional love and support for so many years.

Dalai Lama wins first Grammy Award for audiobook recording



Dharmasala: Globally acclaimed spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, 90, has won his first Grammy Award for Best Audio Book, Narration, and Storytelling Recording. The Nobel Peace Laureate competed against Milli Vanilli’s Fab Morvan, US Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, show host Trevor Noah, and actress Kathy Garver. Rufus Wainwright accepted the award on the Dalai Lama’s behalf during the ceremony streamed on YouTube.

“Meditations: The Reflections Of His Holiness The Dalai Lama” is the entry from the world’s foremost Tibetan Buddhist, an album of innovative collaborations with Hindustani classical influences. Atop the music are collages of his remarks on themes like mindfulness, harmony, and health, captured over the last few years. Responding to the award, His Holiness said, “I receive this recognition with gratitude and humility. I don’t see it as something personal, but as a recognition of our shared universal responsibility. I truly believe that peace, compassion, care for our environment, and an understanding of the oneness of humanity are essential for the collective well-being of all eight billion human beings.” “I’m

Move over Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan — it’s Rani Mukerji, Shefali Shah, Kajol taking over Bollywood’s cop universe

For decades, we have seen Bollywood actors depend heavily on characters such as a cop, a spy, or an Army officer to resurrect a dying career, and when thrill and gravity-defying action sequences are added to this mix, it makes for a perfect potboiler. One of the earliest and most iconic examples of this is Amitabh Bachchan, whose career was revived with Zanjeer in 1975. The film transformed Big B’s career from that of a “failed new-comer” to the phenomenon of the ‘Angry Young Man’. Even superstars who came after him, including Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan, followed the same formula. When Salman faced a series of commercial failures between 2006 and 2008, he decided to return to the screen as the morally ambiguous cop Chulbul Pandey. He was not virtuous like Big B’s Vijay Khanna, but he had his own ways of holding up the law. Similarly, when Shah Rukh Khan saw back-to-back flops with Jab Harry Met Sejal and Zero, he went on a five-year-long hiatus, only to return as a spy in Pathaan. In the same vein, Hrithik Roshan and Ajay Devgn also found ways of staying relevant through their spy and cop franchises like War and Singham, respectively.

‘Why only men play larger-than-life cops in mainstream cinema?’

Slowly, this pattern has caught up with Bollywood’s leading ladies, particularly relatively senior actresses who are seeking a sure-shot way to make a strong impact on screen instead of being reduced to side characters in films led by the current crop of actors. For them, stepping into the uniform of a cop becomes a way of taking back control. The latest example of this shift is Rani Mukerji, whose third instalment of her hit franchise Mardaani, in which she reprises her role as Senior Inspector Shivani Shivaji Roy, recently hit theatres. The first film in the franchise, Mardaani, was released in 2014 — the same year Rani tied the knot with Aditya Chopra, who has also bankrolled the films under Yash Raj Films. Post marriage, Rani has been selective about her projects. During this period, she appeared in only a handful of films — Hickki, Bunty Aur Babli 2 and Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway — but none emerged as major box office successes. Since 2014, however, it is the Mardaani franchise that has consistently delivered commercially, cementing her cop avatar and also keeping her relevant. In an old PTL interview, Rani Mukerji explained how Mardaani was designed to break the mould of mainstream narratives. “Why are we never told about how courageous female cops are? Why is it always about men? That’s because in mainstream cinema, we’ve always seen those larger-than-life cops. So somewhere I think it is, at least, breaking that mould,” she said.

Rani Mukerji’s contemporary Raveena Tandon has remained active in films and starred in multiple projects in recent years, but it was her hard-hitting performance in her OTT debut — Netflix’s whodunit Aranyak — that truly stood out and received heaps of praise from audiences and critics alike. In the show, she plays the role of an honest cop struggling to balance her personal and professional life. The series was among Netflix’s most-watched titles post-pandemic and emerged as a major hit. In an old interaction with Filmfare, Raveena admitted that it was the strong writing and her bold character that made her sign Aranyak. “The character that I play is strong, fierce and talented. And this has always been my secret wish... if you read my interviews even from the ‘90s, I’ve always wanted to be a cop,” she said.

Actor Shefali Shah, who played Akshay Kumar’s mother in 2005’s Waqt despite being three years younger to him, has often spoken about how she did not get her due in the film industry. Despite being part of iconic projects like Monsoon Wedding, Rangeela, Satya and Gandhi: My Father, she struggled for years to establish herself as a leading force. That changed when the Emmy Award-winning web series Delhi Crime came her way, in which she played DCP Vartika Chaturvedi. The role even earned Shah an International Emmy Award Best Actress nomination and has since been renewed for three seasons. Shefali told SCREEN, “Delhi Crime changed everything for me. It changed the way people looked at me and the way people valued me. With Delhi Crime, they (filmmakers) realised they can put an entire show or a film on my shoulders or I can be the parallel lead. It

grateful that this Grammy recognition can help spread these messages more widely,” he said.

Sixty-six years ago, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, disguised as a soldier, left Norbulingka Palace in Tibet, a Third Pole, and escaped into exile in India after his challenging 14-day journey. Since then, the longest, most respectable staying guest of the Indian government, who often says he’s enjoying every possible liberty, has been toying a path of promoting human values, religious harmony, besides preserving Tibetan language and culture, the heritage received from the masters of India’s Nalanda University.

Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama, with a retinue of soldiers and cabinet ministers, escaped into exile on March 17, 1959, after China crushed an uprising in Tibet. Globetrotting the Dalai Lama, who’s considered a living Buddha of compassion, in his latest book, ‘In Voice for the Voiceless’, offers insights into his decades-long dealings with China. In the book, the Dalai Lama, a reincarnation of past Dalai Lamas, reminds the world of Tibet’s unresolved struggle for freedom and the hardship his people continue to face in their homeland. The book captures his extraordinary life, uncovering what it means to lose your home to a repressive invader and build a life in exile; dealing with the existential crisis of a nation, its people, and its culture and religion; and envisioning the path forward. He was 16 years old when Communist China invaded Tibet in 1950, only 19 when he had his first meeting with Chairman Mao in Beijing, and 25 when he was forced to escape to India and became a leader in exile. On reaching India after a treacherous journey, the Dalai Lama first took up residence for about a year in Mussoorie in Uttarakhand. On March 10, 1960, just before moving to Dharamsala, a town perched on the upper reaches of north India’s Kangra Valley, the Dalai Lama had said: “For those of us in exile, I said that our priority must be resettlement and the continuity of our cultural traditions.



really changed stuff.” Kajol joined the ranks of Rani Mukerji and Raveena Tandon when she played a cop for the first time in Do Patti. The actor has featured in several projects in recent years — Tribhanga, Salaam Venky, Maa and Sarzameen — but it was her role as a stern cop in Kriti Sanon’s Do Patti that truly stood out. Speaking about the experience, Kajol admitted she loved playing a cop on screen. “When you wear a uniform onscreen, there’s a certain stature and kadakness that comes in your posture even though you know that you’re actor giving a shot and that the uniform isn’t actually yours. I loved playing a cop and I would love playing it again,” she said.

When asked who the real Singham was between her and husband Ajay Devgn, she quipped, “Maine pehle bhi kahaan hai aur har stage pe kahaan hai ki asli Singham main hoon (I have said this before, I am the real Singham).” Nice to play powerful woman who can call the shots: Tabu Tabu played the role of a cold-blooded cop in Drishyam. Known for making every character her own, Tabu portrayed both a relentless officer and a desperate mother with equal conviction in the film. In an old interview, Tabu admitted that she is mostly averse to violence but went along with it for the film. However, it was playing a strong woman cop that she truly enjoyed. “To play a cop is always exciting for any actor, because that uniform has something to it. It is always nice to play powerful people who can call the shots. Being a woman you can call the shots, get people picked up and beaten up and extract truth out of them, put them to task, get them behind bars,” she said, while lauding the ‘fearlessness’ of female cops.

Kayadu Lohar's first look from Tovino Thomas' Pallichattambi unveiled

Chennai: The makers of director Dijo Jose Antony’s upcoming big budget Malayalam action entertainer, ‘Pallichattambi’, featuring actor Tovino Thomas in the lead, on Monday released the first look poster of actress Kayadu Lohar in the film, much to the delight of fans and film buffs.

For the unaware, Kayadu Lohar, who shot to fame with her fine performance in the Tamil blockbuster film ‘Dragon’, plays the female lead in this film along with Tovino Thomas. Actor Tovino Thomas, who took to his Instagram page to share the first look poster of Kayadu Lohar in the film, wrote, “And then, there was love... Love for a character, for a world, and for the soul of Pallichattambi! Worldwide release on April 9, 2026. #